

VIRGINIA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS' EXPERIENCES WITH THE
UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF IMPLEMENTING INCLUSION OF
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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ABSTRACT

In order to meet the instructional, accountability, and staffing requirements of No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB, 2001) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, elementary school principals are being challenged to include all students with disabilities into general education settings. The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze a sample of elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Data were collected through a qualitative design, using focus group methodology and document analysis. Three focus groups were conducted consisting of elementary school principals from Virginia. Participants were asked to provide school and/or division level documents stating the philosophy or procedures regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. The researcher also reviewed information and documents on the school and division websites of participants prior to focus group sessions. These documents were analyzed in regards to the role of the principal in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Research questions and data collected were framed and analyzed using an educational system capacity framework developed by Florian, Hange, and Copeland (2000). The researcher interpreted and described how elementary school principals experience inclusion as affecting the role of the principal through the lens of human, organizational, structural, and resource capacities.

Major findings that emerged included the following challenges that elementary school principals experience: (a) the inclusion/LRE debate; (b) their own lack of knowledge of special education and inclusion as well as the lack of knowledge of other key players; (c) limited staffing and scheduling options that offer the continuum of special education services in order to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities; (d) co-teaching conflicts; and (e) discipline concerns related to including students with disabilities in the general education setting.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“The hottest issue in special education during the 1980s and 1990s was where, not how, students with disabilities should be taught, the schools and classrooms they should attend not the instruction they should receive” (Crockett & Kauffman, 1999, p. 1). The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment is the usually accepted goal for educating students with disabilities in public schools today. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2005), 96% of students with disabilities are educated in their neighborhood schools. Approximately 48% of those students spend 79% or more of their day in the general education setting.

Most educators, including elementary school principals, have embraced the concept of inclusive education as the most appropriate delivery service for students with disabilities. This is especially true at the elementary school level since the majority of inclusion is implemented at the elementary level. Inclusive education has developed into a school-wide improvement approach for instructing students with disabilities in general education settings. “A full continuum of services, the blueprint for special education during the past thirty years, is being replaced by a philosophy of full inclusion” (Cheney & Muscott, 1996, p.109). The intent of implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting was to overcome the unnecessary removal of these students from general education; however there have been many unintended consequences that are challenging school leaders, specifically elementary school principals.

There is intense debate over the increasing numbers of students with disabilities being served within inclusive settings. Scholars promote (e.g., Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Dunn, 1968; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Villa & Thousand, 2005) inclusion as a philosophy of educating students with disabilities, and some caution (Kauffman, McGee, & Brigham, 2004) that special education is to be a continuum of services to meet the unique needs of students (Tankersley, Niesz, Cook, & Woods, 2007). According to Moore and Fine (1998), summaries of research on inclusion suggests that inclusive education helps students with disabilities develop better communication and social skills as well as behave better when they are educated in inclusive settings. However research has indicated that inclusive placements are frequently not associated with improved outcomes for students with mild disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 1995). Kauffman, Gerber, and Semmel (1988) recommended being careful with the inclusion of students with disabilities due to lack of support from those responsible for the implementation of the inclusion of these students as well as other reasons. Kauffman et al. (2004) warned educators of the unintended side-effect that “any good thing can be overdone and ruined by the pursuit of extremes, we see special education suffering from the extremes of inclusion and accommodations” (p. 613).

Elementary school principals across the country are being challenged to include all students with disabilities into the general education classroom for the majority of the school day. The principal is the key to creating effective special education services (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004). When the school principal is supportive and knowledgeable of special education, the inclusion of students with disabilities can be more effective. The support and leadership of principals have been documented as integral for successful school reform, effective schools, and the responsible inclusion of students with disabilities. Therefore hearing the voices of elementary

school principals on the challenges they are facing and their needs will assist all stakeholders in the inclusion of students with disabilities in understanding the positive and negative intended effects as well as the unintended consequences of inclusion.

Statement of the Problem

Elementary school principals are facing leadership challenges as schools become more inclusive and as expectations for the achievement of all students increase. There was a 95% increase in general education placements for students with disabilities from 1987-1992 (Lerner, 1997). Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation require the participation of students with disabilities in all assessments. In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act mandated that students with disabilities must participate in all state assessments with necessary accommodations. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) must be calculated for each subgroup, one being students with disabilities, on the same proficiency goal. Only one percent of students with disabilities may be assessed using an alternate assessment. Finally, special education teachers must meet the standard for highly qualified teachers.

In order to meet the instructional requirements of NCLB, school officials are restructuring service delivery models so that special education teachers can support content area instruction in general education classrooms for most students with disabilities. In doing so, they could be compromising the programming and placement requirements of IDEA. (Crockett, Myers, Griffin, & Hollandsworth, 2007, p. 155)

With the emphasis and expectations for the inclusion of students with disabilities, the mandates of NCLB, and the compliance of Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) through the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and a Free and Appropriate Education

(FAPE), educating students with disabilities becomes challenging for elementary school principals. The question for the principal is “how to bring the requirements to provide an appropriate education within the most inclusive setting that will lead to higher levels of achievement for every student” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 17). Elementary school principals face the difficulty of providing FAPE, an individual specialized program for students with disabilities, and meeting the instructional requirements of NCLB and the assessment as well as accountability mandates of IDEA.

Need for the Study

“With the recent litigation and legislation which supports inclusion and increasing advocates of inclusion, the trend toward including students with disabilities will continue” (Danne, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000, p. 331). The elementary school principal has been required to assume additional duties, paperwork, and personnel. Principals are expected to design, lead, manage, and implement programs for all students, including students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003). The importance of the school leader in establishing and sustaining an on-going focus of school improvement, such as implementing inclusion of students with disabilities, and support for change are established in theory and practice (Elmore, 1996). When principals find instructional practices that have a proven track record and are validated by sound research; use systematic processes for making decisions; and promote data-based decision making throughout the school, the inclusion of students with disabilities can be successful.

Despite the key role of the principal in school improvement initiatives, including the inclusion of students with disabilities, few researchers have reported the attitudes, experiences, and reactions of elementary school principals on the climate and context of inclusive schools. In the age of accountability, leading the change is probably the most critical role of today's

principal. Principals who promote the success of all students, including those with disabilities, by facilitating the development and implementation of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community, become change agents within their schools. Principals can ensure that special education students, special education teachers, and services are integrated into the vision and the ongoing operations of the school. When school improvement plans address the unique needs of students with disabilities and families based on data, principals create a unified school in which special and general education teachers and other specialist work together to meet shared goals.

According to McLaughlin and Nolet (2004), an effective principal follows five key guidelines: understands core special education legal foundation of entitlement; matches effective special education instruction to the learning characteristics of students with disabilities; understands special education is not a place or program; includes students with disabilities meaningfully in assessment and new accountability systems; and knows how to create school wide conditions that support effective special education. Comprehensive and effective special education services are more likely to exist in schools with caring, knowledgeable, and strong leaders.

After 25 years of IDEA, the goal of widespread implementation of inclusion has been unmet (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001b). This research provides insight on the challenges faced by elementary school principals in implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. There is little research examining the implementation of inclusion of students with disabilities through the voice of school administrators (Brotherson et al.). The voice of the elementary school principal was selected due to the fact that inclusive settings are more accepted and more likely to be found at the elementary school level.

In addition, this study can be helpful for elementary school principals due to the mounting pressures of accountability and the need to improve special education services for students with and without disabilities. It also provides valuable insight from elementary school principals across Virginia on some of the unintended consequences, both positive and negative, of the inclusion of students with disabilities.

Under the provisions of the NCLB, *school principals* are held accountable for providing instruction ensuring that their students, despite disability or disadvantage, make annual yearly progress (AYP) toward national achievement goals. Administrators can now be reassigned or lose their jobs when their students with disabilities fail to make AYP, exposing them to an unfamiliar degree of vulnerability. (Crockett et al., 2007, p. 155-156)

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. Tankersley et al. (2007) defined unintended consequences or "side-effects" of inclusion as "affecting teachers in ways that we or they had never considered." (p. 132).

The phenomenon of side effects in the fields of medicine and pharmacology provides a useful metaphor for thinking about the unintended impact of inclusion. Side effects from medicine are ubiquitous (e.g., Julien, 2005). That is, virtually every medication powerful enough to meaningfully impact one's physiological and/or psychological functioning also affects other aspects of the body's functioning in unintended ways....Like drugs introduced to the body, inclusion is not a trivial change for schools....Comparable to side effects caused by medication, a significant change to one aspect of the functioning of an

educational system, inclusion for example, is bound to have unexpected effects throughout the system. (Cook & Tankersley, 2007b, p. 217)

The research describes how elementary school principals experience and view inclusion in ways in which they had never considered in terms of human, organizational, structural, and material capacities (Florian, Hange, & Copeland, 2000). Following a qualitative tradition, the results of this study provides themes and narratives that describe the leadership experiences of principals in elementary schools implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities. Inclusion of students with disabilities is defined as providing instruction for students with disabilities in the general education setting. The themes and narratives are related to the capacity framework developed by Florian et al. (2000).

Research Question

The overarching research question explored through focus group interviews with elementary school principals and document analysis was: How do elementary school principals describe their experiences with and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools as it relates to the role of the elementary school principal? Supporting questions viewed through the theoretical framework developed by Florian et al. (2000) of human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity according to elementary school principals included: (a) How are the lives of students and school personnel affected? (b) How are organizational and structural practices within the school affected? (c) How are fiscal and material resources affected? (d) How do these experiences affect the elementary school principal?

Theoretical Framework

The findings of this study are categorized using the theoretical framework of four types of capacity in educational systems developed by Florian et al. (2000). Capacity is defined as “the optimal amount of production that can be obtained from a given set of resources and organizational arrangement” (Corcoran & Goertz, 1995, p. 27). Florian et al. developed a typology of capacities to use as a lens to analyze data collected in their research of district reform. Human capacity defines “the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and self perceptions of people within the school system” (p. 5). Organizational capacity defines “the relationships among individuals both within the district and with individuals outside of the district” (p.5). Structural capacity defines “the elements of the system that are independent of people such as procedures and policies, professional development programs, and curriculum frameworks” (p.5). Resource capacity defines “the fiscal and material resources available to the system” (p. 5). The Florian et al. capacity framework was used to organize the interview questions of this study.

Methodology

The qualitative methodologies used in this study and described in Chapter 3 are focus groups and document analysis. Padilla (1993) stated that “dialogical research relies on specially structured dialog in small groups as the chief method for revealing to the investigator and to the subjects themselves the overt and hidden aspects of problematic experiences in everyday life” (p. 155). Morgan (1993) found that “interaction in focus groups often creates a cuing phenomenon that has the potential for extracting more information than other methods” (p. 17). Policy studies researchers have found group interviews effective in finding the reactions and perceptions of populations to changes in policy (Frey & Fontana, 1993).

Data collection procedures consisted of three focus groups of elementary school principals, composed of five or six participants. A purposeful sampling of elementary school principals was randomly selected from Virginia. Participants were diverse in representing elementary schools of varying demographics. Florian's et al. (2000) framework of the four types of capacity guided the questions asked of participants during the focus groups. Themes and narratives were developed and compared to the four types of capacity. Each focus group participant was asked to provide school and/or division level documents that stated the philosophy or procedures for the inclusion of students with disabilities. These documents were examined for the role of the principal in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Prior to each focus group session, the researcher reviewed the school and division websites of each participant for information or documents related to inclusion to help guide focus group discussions.

Limitations

The data gathered for this study resulted from focus groups and documents related to elementary school principal experiences and perspectives on the inclusion of students with disabilities. Although diverse participants from Virginia participated in the study, the self-reported nature of the data was limiting.

Delimitations

Delimitations of the study are that the study focused on a sample of elementary school principals from Virginia and that there were only two techniques of gathering data. Readers will judge the transferability of this study to other settings. Triangulation of the data occurred through conducting three focus groups, the document analysis, member checks, and the use of an assistant moderator in data analysis and as a critical friend.

Definitions

Disability- As defined by IDEA, the term "child with a disability" means a child: "with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities; and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services" (20 U.S.C. §1401(a)(15)).

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) - This is the “basic entitlement of each child with a disability who is determined to be eligible to receive special education”. The term appropriate is interpreted to mean that “each child with a disability must have an individual education plan designed by a team of individuals including the child’s special and general education teacher and parents” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 99).

Inclusion or Inclusive Education- “the practice of educating all children in neighborhood classrooms and schools; it implies an end to labeling and providing special education in separate classes” (Rothstein, 2000, p. 328). Inclusion is also referred to as mainstreaming.

Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) - federal law, PL 94-142, mandates how special education is to be defined and implemented within public schools.

Intended Consequences- positive and/or negative outcomes from including students with disabilities in the general education environment that were expected outcomes according to educators, specifically to elementary principals.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)- A requirement of IDEA that, “to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...are educated with children who are not disabled; and...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 the regular classes

with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (§612(a)(5(A))).

Mainstreaming- placement of students with disabilities into the general education environment (Rothstein, 2000).

Special Education- “specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 103).

Students with Disabilities- under IDEA this includes students with “mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities” and who need special education and related services (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 103).

Unintended Consequences- positive and/or negative outcomes from including students with disabilities in the general education environment that were not the expected outcomes according to educators, specifically elementary school principals (Cook & Tankersley, 2007a).

Significance of the Study

Cook and Tankersley (2007b) emphasized the importance of educators in determining the common side effects of educational reforms such as inclusion and weighing the risk against the benefits of the reform. Exploring the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion for students with disabilities from the perspective of elementary school principals will be significant for all administrators due to the accountability system in states and in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation which mandates that 100% of students pass standardized tests by 2013-2014. With a qualitative design using focus groups, the perspectives of elementary school principals were examined. This type of research augments current research on the inclusion of students with disabilities. This information benefits elementary school principals who may be

experiencing the same challenges or want advice from others on how to implement the inclusion of students with disabilities. Policy makers as well as all special education stakeholders may benefit from the findings of this study. “Building administrators and teachers are responsible for inclusion in their schools, it is imperative that their perceptions be recognized by policy makers” (Danne et al., 2000, p. 333).

Organization of the Document

This researcher describes elementary school principals’ perceptions in relation to the role of the principal on the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities with respect to the four types of capacity building as defined by Florian et al. (2000). In Chapter 2, the review of literature provides the history and philosophy for inclusion and focuses on the professional commentary and research studies that address the intentions and the unintended consequences of implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities. Chapter 3 includes the methodology, used to complete this study, beginning with a description of the setting, participant identification, data collection procedures, and the analysis of the data. Chapter 4 is a report of the results. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for practice and future research.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Students with disabilities are being included in general education settings at a rapidly increasing rate. In most cases, advocates of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting have the best intentions for students with disabilities. They believe that students with disabilities will benefit socially and academically from inclusion.

However, elementary school principals as well as other educators are dealing with the challenges of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools. The focus of this chapter is to examine the literature related to the outcomes, both intended and unintended, of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in elementary schools. The framework of this chapter is based on the premise that elementary school principals are facing challenges due to the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion with students with disabilities (Crockett et al., 2007).

This review of the literature is an exploration of the current status and historical background of the inclusion of students with disabilities. Current research studies, as well as theoretical and commentary literature, on the inclusion debate; the principal and inclusion; and challenges of inclusion for principals are examined, analyzed, and synthesized in this chapter. The chapter also concludes with a description of the theoretical framework that provides a foundation for this study.

Literature Search and Review Process

The search process for this literature review included the use of the university electronic article search databases, primarily ERIC, World Cat, and PyschInfo. From the database and book searches, further book references were located. Primary sources were obtained from

referred journals or literature in the field. Terms used in searches were inclusion, elementary school principals, attitude, challenges, and capacity building. The selection of articles, books, and book chapters were based on the following criteria: (1) research that described the intentions or challenges of inclusion of students with disabilities, (2) research that explained the history and philosophy of inclusion, and (3) research on capacity building in education. The search revealed few studies that focused on the elementary school principal perspective on the unintended consequences of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting.

Exploring the Current and Historical Background of Inclusive Education

American public schools are serving a more heterogeneous population than ever. Olson (2002) reported that 35% of Americans are minority, 20% live in poverty, and 20% are in households headed by an immigrant. Students with disabilities represent 10% of the school population (USDOE, 2005). Initially special education was developed to provide a specialized program outside of the general education environment. Advantages of this type of program were the provision of smaller class sizes, specially trained teachers, individualized instruction, homogeneous classrooms, and a greater emphasis on social and vocational goals (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

In the late 1800s, students with disabilities were moved to separate, special classes with the intention of relieving stress on the general education teacher and children (Rothstein, 2000). This practice continued on the basis of avoiding stress on the child with disabilities. Many students with disabilities were never sent to school.

Prior to 1970, there were more than eight million students with disabilities in the United States; most were not provided with specialized educational opportunities (Gordon, 2006). Seventy-five percent of the educated students with disabilities were taught in separate classrooms

or buildings. By 1975, hundreds of thousands of students with disabilities were restricted from attending public schools; over 200,000 students with disabilities were housed in institutions; and other children were considered uneducable and kept at home (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004). Approximately four million students with disabilities did not receive necessary support in school with one million receiving no schooling at all (Friend & Cook, 2007). Those students with disabilities that were permitted to attend public schools were taught in separate classrooms or buildings. Students with disabilities could also be removed from educational settings without informing parents or obtaining parent permission.

Ironically, it was the monumental court case, *Brown v. Board of Education*, in 1954 that started the philosophy of full integration. The decision was based on the fourteenth amendment which provides that states may not deprive anyone of “life, liberty, or property, without due process of law” nor deny anyone “equal protection of the laws” (Rothstein, 2000). The *Brown* decision recognized that Black children could not be educated separately. Disability advocates claimed that “separate but equal” was also unequal for students with disabilities. The concept of mainstreaming students with disabilities paralleled this movement.

According to Kavale and Forness (2000), it was Dunn’s (1968) famous article, *Special Education for the Mildly Retarded- Is Much of It Justifiable?*, that brought the discussion of whether separate and special classes were justified. Although Dunn’s article was noted as lacking scholarly rigor and was without empirical evidence, it was the beginning of the call for the abandonment of special classes for students with disabilities. MacMillan, Semmel, and Gerber (1994) found that the article had created a culture in special education that eschewed empirical evidence in favor of ideology to produce change. In 1970, the Education of the Handicapped (EHA) was established which provided grants to states to implement special education services.

By 1975, three million children with disabilities were not receiving appropriate programming in public schools. In addition, another one million were excluded totally from public education. The principles set forth in *Brown v. Board of Education* to children with disabilities established the legal theory of the landmark decisions achieved in 1971 and 1972. In *Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania* and *Mills v. Board of Education*, district courts prohibited states from denying education to children who were mentally retarded and children with other disabilities without due process. The basic framework set out in *Mills* was incorporated into the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), an amendment to EHA in 1975, which became effective in 1977. This amendment provided the important elements of procedural safeguards, integration, and nondiscriminatory testing and evaluation of materials and procedures.

The Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) mandate with the emphasis on access to the general education curriculum, and not on how to teach students with disabilities, made the resource room model and the “pull-out” approach the primary option for placement. Academic instruction for specific amounts of time in separate classes for part of the school day was established while the student with a disability belonged to a general education environment for the remaining part of the day. By spending at least half of the day in the general education setting, the student was considered to be mainstreamed.

In 1986, the Regular Education Initiative (REI) was introduced at a keynote address by Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Madeline Will (1986), to attempt to improve instructional methodologies and practices. Will based this initiative on research that indicated that “pull-out programs” were failing to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Will called for an elimination of dual systems of general and special

education. “The goal was to merge general and special education to create a more unified system of education” (Kavale & Forness, 2000). The REI was based on the assumptions that instructional specialization is not needed because students are more similar than different; good teachers have the ability to teach all students; quality instruction can occur without special education categories; segregation of students with disabilities is not needed; and separate education for students with disabilities is discriminatory and inequitable (Kavale & Forness). Will and supporters (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997; Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1984) claimed that the merging of the two systems would “ensure that all students not only receive an appropriate education, but that they receive it as an inherent right and not as a ‘special’ program” (p. 104).

The REI was greeted with ideological debate. Opponents of the REI were cast as segregationist (Baker, Wang & Walberg, 1994) and the special education system current with the time as slavery (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). This was followed by the REI proponents becoming divided on which categories of students with disabilities should be integrated into the general education environment.

In 1990, the EAHCA was amended and the title was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1992, the National Association State Board of Education (NASBE) published a report on special education that stated that special education classrooms were not being successful and were failing students with disabilities (Cole, 2006a). The research indicated that 43% of students with disabilities did not graduate; students with disabilities had a significantly higher likelihood of being arrested; and only 13% of students with disabilities lived independently after leaving high school for two years. NASBE concluded that full inclusion was most appropriate for students with disabilities and rarely should students with disabilities be educated outside of the general education program. In 1997, the IDEA went through another

major amendment. Areas of access to the general education curriculum, discipline, attorneys' fees, provision of special education services to students in private schools, and the funding formula were all changed.

Basically, IDEA is a combination of civil right statutes and education laws. The law has three main requirements: (1) All children with disabilities who need special education must be provided a free appropriate education or FAPE; (2) Each child's special education must be designed on an individual basis to meet his or her unique needs and must be provided in the least restrictive environment or LRE; (3) The rights of every child with disabilities and family must be ensured and protected through procedural safeguards (Huefner, 2000).

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation mandated that students with disabilities participate in all state assessments with necessary accommodations. Assessment results must be disaggregated and reported separately. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) must be calculated for each subgroup and based on the same proficiency goal. Only one percent of students with disabilities may be assessed using an alternate assessment. Finally, special education teachers must meet the highly qualified teacher standards (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004).

Thurlow, Elliott, and Ysseldyke (1998) report that one of the greatest anticipated benefits of the No Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB) is that schools will have access to state representation of student performance. These data will better inform school improvement initiatives and help educators critically evaluate whether all populations of students are benefiting from current instructional practices and school improvement initiatives. According to a recent national survey on Education Policy in Washington DC (2005), the greatest NCLB

implementation challenge for educators was the accountability requirements for students with disabilities and English Language Learners (Cole, 2006a).

In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) which reinforced “the historical tensions between access and process, and outcomes and accountability” (Gordon, 2006, p. 190). The 2004 Reauthorization specifically requires that IDEA regulations work in conjunction with NCLB in the standards-based testing and highly qualified staffing. Stemming from NCLB, IDEA puts a greater emphasis on accountability for students with disabilities.

With the mandates of IDEA and NCLB and the support of inclusion and mainstreaming proponents, more students with disabilities are educated in the general education setting than ever. Lerner (1997) noted that nationwide general education placements for students with specific learning disabilities increased 95% in the five year span from 1978-1992. The U.S. Department of Education (2005) reported that approximately 96% of students with disabilities are educated in their neighborhood public school and 48% of those students spend 79% or more time in the general education setting. As inclusion becomes the most popular placement, the debate continues between proponents and opponents of inclusion of all students with disabilities into the general education population.

Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion

One of the primary principles of IDEA is the concept of educating children with disabilities with children who are not disabled to the maximum extent appropriate or in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). The concept of educating students with disabilities in the LRE is based on the belief that people with even the most significant disabilities should be fully

integrated into communities, schools, and workplaces and should experience all the typical routines of daily living.

Although no references to the following are mentioned in IDEA, terms associated with LRE are integration, mainstreaming, and inclusion. LRE has been joined with mainstreaming and inclusion all of which are used sometimes interchangeably with respect to placement preferences. Treating these terms as synonymous represents a misunderstanding of the legal meaning of LRE (Huefner, 2000). Mainstreaming is when students with disabilities are integrated into the general education setting for part of the school day, typically during non-academic times, for social skills (Gordon, 2006). Inclusion is defined as when a student with a disability attends the regular education classroom for general education curriculum for most of the day. Full inclusion is when a student with a disability is educated in the general education environment for the entire school day. Cheney (1996) defined Responsible Inclusion as basing a placement for a student with a disability on the individual needs of the students with the assumption that the placement is a means to an end.

The intention of the LRE is not that all students with disabilities be fully integrated in general education settings, but that a continuum of services be available to address the unique needs of each student. LRE decisions should be made on a case-by-case basis. The intent of IDEA was to first determine the individual needs and services of the student and then to match the services to a placement. However, both NCLB and the Reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 have resulted in a push for full inclusion by focusing more on standard accountability than individual instruction for students with disabilities.

Concepts of inclusion started in the late 1980s. Inclusion began with the assumption that a student belongs in a general education classroom and should be educated within that class with

same age peers. Today, inclusion is the generally accepted goal for educating students with disabilities and inclusion has replaced mainstreaming for most purposes related to public schooling. Currently 96% of students with disabilities are educated in the regular schools. Fewer than 35,000 attend state residential schools. Nationally, one half of students with disabilities spend 80% or more of the day in the regular education setting (USDOE, 2005). Moore and Fine (1998) reported that one-fifth of special education is offered in separate classes and 4% of students with disabilities are educated in separate schools or facilities. Types of inclusive delivery models include cooperative teaching, teacher assistant teams, and collaborative consultation (Friend & Cook, 2007; Jenkins & Sileo, 1994). Despite the popularity and politically correctness of inclusion, some parents and professionals remain concerned about the level of support offered in the general education classroom.

Inclusion Debate

Inclusion Advocates

Inclusion advocates have suggested that the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms is so imperative that it does not require or cannot wait for, empirical justification (Baker & Zigmond, 1995). This philosophical, ethical, and moral stand for rights, freedom, and equality for students with disabilities has coincided with a considerable increase in inclusive placements for students with disabilities. Some supporters elevate “inclusion as a right” from an educational policy to a constitutional mandate. Gordon (2006) stated that “Inclusion advocates emphasize the value of diversity within society and the importance of providing all children with a sense of belonging to a diverse community” (p. 211).

Intentions of Inclusion

According to a 1997 Senate Report, the intentions of IDEA were to ensure that students with disabilities become independent, productive individuals who will be socially included in their communities. The purpose of the LRE mandate was to prevent the segregation of students with disabilities. In 1997, intentions of IDEA became not only about physical access but cognitive access with challenging curriculum and high expectations for students with disabilities (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). The design of an educational program that is in the best interest of the student came to the forefront of IDEA. Yell (2005) noted that “the emphasis in participation in the general education curriculum was to draw more attention to the accommodations and adjustments that are needed in order for students with disabilities to successfully participate in general education curriculum” (p.103). The tenets of NCLB and the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA are to include students with disabilities in general education curriculum, classrooms, and accountability systems.

Benefits of Inclusion

Scholars report that the inclusion of students with disabilities has social (Burstein et al., 2004; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003) and cost benefits; challenges ableism (Connor & Ferri, 2007); and improves academic achievement, and behavior (Cole, 2006a). Social benefits include observing and emulating the behavior of others and an increase in self-esteem for students with disabilities. Renzaglia et al. (2003) reported that there is an increase in understanding of disability among non-disabled peers. Inclusion advocates conclude that separating students with disabilities starts the cycle of segregation at an early age and stigma associated with having a disability decreases in inclusive settings. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) stated that “Supporters believe that inclusion will develop a more inclusive

society which emphasizes social cognition, increased tolerance and acceptance of diversity, a development of personal values, friendships, and social acceptance and self concepts” (p. 21). In a study by York, Vandercook, Macdonald, Hiese-Neff, and Caughey (1992), both special education and general education teachers noted several benefits for nondisabled students, including increased acceptance, understanding, and the acknowledgement of similarities with students with disabilities. York et al. (1992) noted that students with disabilities were more visible in the school community and experience growth as a result of inclusion. Renzaglia et al. reported that social and emotional benefits include more durable peer networking and improved social skills for students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

Educational benefits included improved academic achievement for students with disabilities and non-disabled students, improved behavior, and increased educational attainment (Cole, 2006b). IEP goals and objectives also become more age appropriate when students with disabilities are integrated into the general education setting (Alper & Ryndak, 1992).

Some reported that inclusion is more cost effective than educating students with disabilities separately. Cole (2006a) found that other economic benefits of inclusion include increased employment and job skill levels for students with disabilities. According to Cole, special education directors reported more positive consequences of inclusive standards, assessments, and accountability than negative consequences.

Opponents of Inclusion

Opponents of inclusion argue that the philosophy of inclusion threatens the services students with disabilities need to meet their unique needs, limits placement options, and decreases individual programming (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Espin, Deno, & Albayrak-Kaymak, 1990). Espin et al. (1990) stated that “special education in inclusive programs is, by design, no

longer special” (p. 24). Opponents argue that the continuum of placement for the LRE must be maintained. With the emphasis of inclusion, there appears to be fewer program options and fewer intensive services (Kauffman, 1995). Cole (2006a) reported that the Council of Children with Behavioral Disorders feared that the loss of placement options will keep students who need intense and therapeutic services from getting them.

Opponents are concerned about the individual needs rather than that the student with disability has a right to be in the general education classroom. Kauffman (1999) stated that full inclusion for all students with disabilities rejects the basic foundation of special education. He argued that all students are different and need special education services to meet their unique needs by specially trained staff. Kauffman noted that the general education classroom is not necessarily the best placement for all students. The “one-size-fits-all” standard runs counter with the individual principle of IDEA (Gordon, 2006; Zera & Seitsinger, 2000). Gordon reported that full inclusion puts little emphasis on the IEP. Mamlin (1999) found that students with disabilities are being moved from separate special education settings to general education settings by a single administrative mandate and not by the IEP. In a study conducted by Connor & Ferri (2007), a teacher viewed inclusion as that “...sharing the air in a building, but not really having anything to do with the educational value for special education children. This is not an educational plan but a space plan” (Saslow, 1999, p. 3). Crockett (2002) stated that the “emphasis on inclusion over individualism has threatened at times to overshadow the central mandate of the Act: the provision of FAPE” (p. 544).

Kauffman, McGee, and Brigham (2004) argued that the goal of full inclusion appears to have become the “appearance of normalization without expectations of competency. The movement has had some unintended negative consequences. One of these is the outright denial

of disability...”(p. 614). They argued that a disability had become something that makes no difference and is seen as a negative. According to Kauffman, proponents of inclusion appeared to conclude that the only place where fair and equal treatment can occur is in the general education environment.

Other unintended negative consequences of inclusion are lack of academic progress for students with disabilities (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Klingner, Arguelles, Hughes, & Vaughn, 2001; Simpson, de Boer-Ott, Smith-Myles, 2003; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995), limited or no accommodations or adjustments to the general education curriculum (Schumm & Vaughn, 1992), lack of training for special and general education staff and administration (Baker & Zigmond; Causton-Theoharis & Malmgren, 2005; Scheuermann, Webber, Boutot, & Goodwin, 2003), students with disabilities not feeling accepted, a decrease in self-esteem for students with disabilities (Bear, Clever, & Proctor, 1991; Gordon, 2006), and lack of cost effectiveness (Villa & Thousand, 1996). Baker and Zigmond found that students with learning disabilities have not been successful in general education classrooms. Teachers indicated that they were more concerned with maintaining routines than meeting individual differences. Students who do not conform will not be successful. Often for the student with disabilities to be successful in the general education setting, the accommodations and modifications were so radical and challenging that they could not be implemented. Baker and Zigmond also reported that students with disabilities did not get a special education in the general education setting and concluded that this was due to lack of training in providing diverse instructional methods and the increased demands of general education teachers. Vaughn and Schumm concluded that it is unlikely that accommodations and adjustments are made for students with disabilities in the general education classroom and stress that outside support services are necessary. Individual planning for students

with disabilities may not occur in general education. Bacon and Schulz (2001) found that teachers wanted inclusion to be successful but unless the accommodations or adjustments were easy to implement, little change to the routine, or little assistance needed, then the accommodations or adjustments were not implemented. Crockett and Kauffman (1999) reported that students with disabilities in inclusion settings were not reaching their full academic potential and developing the skills to become independent and productive.

McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, and Lee (1994) found that students with disabilities felt they were being treated equally, but felt they did not receive individual instruction within the general education setting. Gordon (2006) reported that self-esteem of students with disabilities does not increase in full inclusion. Students were not receiving individualized instruction; therefore struggled academically leading to lower self-esteem. Gordon also found that students with disabilities in inclusive settings had limited self-confidence, poor self-perceptions, and inadequate social skills. Students with disabilities were less often accepted and more often rejected. According to Howard and Tyron (2002), students with learning disabilities in general education classrooms reported having more symptoms of depression than students with learning disabilities that were self-contained. Research has indicated that students with disabilities prefer pull-out programs over inclusion (Bateman, 1994; Jenkins & Heinenn, 1989; Vaughn & Schumm, 1995).

As far as cost effectiveness, Villa and Thousand (1996) reported that estimates in including students with disabilities in general education costs approximately twice as much. Although some view inclusion as a cost cutting practice, it may in fact prove to be more costly depending on how it is implemented.

According to the study by Connor and Ferri (2007), a parent was quoted as stating, “[Inclusion] tosses the disabled child into an environment in which the child cannot possibly develop, and in fact, may regress, while simultaneously depriving the remainder of the class of critical instructional time” (p. 15). Mastropieri and Scruggs (2006) found that inclusion limits individualization, achievement gains, student emotional well-being, positive students behavior, and could create more parent, teacher, and student concerns.

The Elementary School Principal

Whether one is an advocate or opponent of inclusion, the increased emphasis on general education access and high-stakes testing accountability from NCLB and the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA is forcing schools to implement inclusive settings. Elementary school principals must prepare for inclusive school-wide reform. In order for schools to become more successful in including students with disabilities, attitudinal, organizational, and instructional changes must take place (Block & Haring, 1992; Morgan & Whorton, 2000). The principal is the key to success in any school-wide reform initiative (Hipp & Huffman, 2000; Servatus, Fellows, & Kelly, 1992).

Mamline (1999) emphasized the importance of a strong leader who provides collaboration among staff; who is well informed of proposed changes and their implementation; and is a good facilitator and guide for the staff. Huffman, Hipp, Moller, and Pankake (2000) reported that principals need to be proactive and purposeful decision makers. In order for collaboration to occur, principals must stress support, care, trust, participation, facilitation, and the building of consensus with staff (Giles, Johnson, Brooks, & Jacobson, 2005).

Elementary school principals are expected to be the instructional leader within the school. Administrative attitudes toward students with disabilities are important for inclusion to

be successful due to the leadership role in developing and operating educational programs in the school (Ayers & Myers, 1992). Teachers believe that guidance and support from the principal are critical in implementing inclusion (Phillips, Alfred, Brulle, & Shank, 1990). Bang (1993) reported that support from building administration was positively related to the use of instructional strategies that resulted in successful inclusion. Goodlad and Lovitt (1993) reported that the success of an inclusive school depends on the values and beliefs of the principal.

The principal influences “resource allocation, staffing, structures, information flow, and operational processes that determine what shall and shall not be done by the organization” (Nanus, 1992, p. 142). As the instructional and school-wide reform leader, the elementary school principal needs to build capacity in the four areas that Florian, Hange, and Copeland (2000) have developed for building capacity in school-wide reform: human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity. The elementary school principal needs to: develop a shared vision for inclusion with the staff; commit time, resources, materials, staff development, and personnel to inclusion; and develop school-wide structures and supports for collaboration. Principals influence reform, implementation decisions, control resource allocations, and exert a supervisory role relative to school personnel as school-site administrators and policy leaders.

Morrissey and Cowan (2000) found that in order for principals to develop and promote personalized learning communities within their schools, they needed to be: action oriented; hold positive perceptions of teachers’ capabilities; develop shared values and vision; support shared decision making; and promote continuous learning. They further explained that principals needed to encourage collaboration and engage all staff in collaborative reflection, inquiry, problem solving, learning, and teaching.

Blase (2004) found that successful instructional supervision had positive impacts on teaching and learning. The opposite was found to be true as well. Ineffective, nonexistent instructional supervision had negative impacts on teaching and learning. As indicated by Hallinger (2007), “Given the passage of formal government standards for educators throughout the world, principals who ignore their role in monitoring and improving school improvement, do so at their own risk” (p. 2). The expanding role of the principal points to the importance of building capacity and promoting “shared leadership”. Lambert (2002) captured this stating, “The days of the lone instructional leader are over. We no longer believe that one administrator can serve as the instructional leader for the entire school without the sustained participation of other educators” (p. 37).

Challenges of Inclusion for the Elementary School Principal

Schools need to build capacity to serve students with disabilities before students with disabilities are placed into inclusive environments (Cheney & Muscott, 1996; Morgan & Whorton, 2000). Florian, et al. (2000) developed a framework of four types of capacity in educational systems. The framework includes human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity. Elementary school principals face many challenges when implementing inclusion in their schools. The challenges have been described as related to Florian’s et al. framework.

Human Capacity

Human capacity deals with the dispositions, knowledge, skills, and self-perceptions of the people within the educational system. In order for elementary school principals to build human capacity to successfully implement inclusion of students with disabilities, they must face the following human capacity challenges: their own perceptions, knowledge, skills, and ownership of inclusion; special and general teachers perceptions, knowledge, skills, and ownership;

working with students with more severe and challenging disabilities; finding highly qualified staff; parent perceptions and knowledge; meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities; and student achievement.

The biggest challenge principals face is their own perception of inclusion and lack of knowledge (Cline, 1981). Principals have increasingly accepted more responsibility for instructional leadership regardless of whether they felt competent to perform the duties (Hallinger, 2007). Crockett and Kauffman (1999) stated that “Administrative skills, knowledge, and understanding are challenged as they attempt to accommodate increasing numbers of students with disabilities in general education classes” (p. 68).

A study conducted by Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, and Schertz (2001a) indicated that the principal blamed everything and everyone else and did not take ownership of inclusion. Several studies indicate that principals perceive little chance of success in general education if a student is mentally retarded (Bain & Dolbel, 1991; Davis & Maheady, 1991). Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) found that principals indicated that pull-out programs were most effective and that full inclusion showed greater social gains than academic. They also found that support services were not likely provided in the general education setting. However, administrators have been found to be more positive concerning inclusion than teachers (Davis & Maheady). Both administrators and teachers reported that some pull-out services are needed for certain students (Connor & Ferri, 2007).

Regular and special education teacher perceptions, attitudes, knowledge and skills are also challenges for principals. According to Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996), two-thirds of general education teachers supported the concept of inclusion; however, only a small number expressed the willingness to include students with disabilities in their own classrooms. One-third

said general education was an optimal placement and would produce greater benefits than other placements. At a fundamental skill level, general education teachers reported not being well prepared for the inclusion of students with disabilities (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2005; Klingner et al., 2001; Scheuermann et al., 2003). Dedrick, Marfo, and Harris (2007) found that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are affected by the severity of the disability. According to Downing, Eichinger, and Williams (1997), teachers are concerned over the perceived loss of control, modified job responsibilities, and limited resources and support. In a 1994 national survey by the American Federation of Teachers, the country's second largest teachers' union, only 11% of teachers said they were trained adequately and overwhelmingly, teachers believed inclusion is not appropriate for every child-particularly those with severe and disruptive behavior problems (Evans, Bird, Ford, Green, & Bischoff, 1992). There were concerns of the increased demand and instructional load placed on general education teachers and the lack of responsibility that general education teachers share for students with disabilities (Deno, Foegen, Robinson, & Espin, 1996).

Elementary school principals are confronted with the challenge of parent attitudes and perceptions. Some parents feel inclusion is an entitlement for students with disabilities while others doubt whether inclusion would be appropriate for their child due to the loss of special education services (Carr, 1999). Due to a critical special education teacher shortage, hiring highly qualified staff mandated by NCLB and the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA is another challenge. Principals and teachers express their concerns about trying to meet the needs of students with a greater range and severity of disabilities with challenging behaviors and significant health care needs. Schools are serving more children with autism, severe cerebral palsy, and multiple disabilities.

Principals face the challenges of meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers with the general education environment and ensuring that all students with disabilities are provided FAPE and access to the general education curriculum, shifting from a focus of placement to academic outcomes (Nolet & McLaughlin, 2000). Evans et al. (1992) investigated attitudes of administrators toward inclusion. The overriding concern expressed by principals was their perception that they would be unable to do an adequate job due to lack of expertise and unfamiliarity with the students.

Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity of an educational system deals with the relationships of the people within and outside of the organization. Elementary school principals face challenges with building organizational capacity from collaboration within school and community agencies; lack of time for planning and follow-up; addressing family needs; and the roles and responsibilities of collaborative teams. Inclusion is a collaborative relationship that is difficult for many teachers because “in regular education, the system dictates the curriculum; in special education, the child dictates the curriculum” (Lieberman, 2002, p. 514). Collaborative relationship challenges include the inability to communicate, failure to resolve teachers’ learning differences; and inability to integrate students with disabilities and teaching (Phillips, Sapona & Lubic, 1995). Special and general education teachers lack the skills in teaming and collaboration (Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon, & Rothlein, 1992). Teachers reported that they were collaborative, but were not comfortable with collaborating because of lack of planning, conflict of personalities, and limited time in class by special education teachers. All stated more collaborative planning time was needed (Danne et al., 2000).

Structural Capacity

Structural capacity within the educational system deals with the procedures, policies, staff development, and curriculum. Elementary school principals face the challenge of how to raise the standards for students with disabilities while continuing to meet the unique needs of special education students. Policy mandates such as NCLB and the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA require testing mandates, a greater emphasis on outcomes, and highly qualified teachers. On a daily basis, principals meet the challenge of the gap between the research supporting inclusion, legal mandates, and the reality of implementing inclusion (Brotherson et al., 2001a). Other structural capacity challenges are the lack of relevant preparation and training of administrators and teachers; fewer placement options; lack of knowledge of evaluating quality inclusion programs; scheduling; meeting the need of students with a wide range of disabilities; and curriculum pacing.

Blase (2004) reported the need for principals to conduct instructional conferences, provide staff development, and develop teacher reflection. He also found that there needed to be an integration of supervision with staff development, curriculum development, and school improvement systems. Relevant training is needed for general education teachers who are expected to provide differentiated and individual instruction with the use of a variety of instructional strategies. This is a challenge due to the special adaptations needed to meet the needs of diverse cognitive abilities, learning styles, and behaviors. Scruggs and Mastroperrri (1996) supported this with findings that inadequate instructional approaches were being implemented in the inclusive settings. Teachers reported not making “specialized instruction” within the general education setting (Danne et al., 2000). General education teachers felt that they lacked support for inclusion and the adoption of new instructional methods for students with

disabilities (Klingner et al., 2001; Simpson et al., 2003). School-wide social and discipline training are also needed.

There are fewer placement options for students with disabilities and pull-out services are still needed (Danne et al.). Scheduling inclusion, ensuring students' accommodations are met within the general education classes, and providing a continuum of services continues to be a challenge for elementary school principals. Curriculum pacing for students with disabilities is a challenge due to state standards and testing. Vaughn & Schumm (1995) found that teachers felt that they needed to move on even if students with disabilities did not master the concept and do not specifically meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. Also the way in which the inclusion concept is implemented can be a structural capacity challenge for principals. Sometimes inclusion is attained through "rapid, unsystematic adoption of models that may abuse as much as they include" (Deno et al., 1996).

School-wide reform takes two to five years to adopt and requires leadership, planning, and continued support (Danne et al.). Many school divisions are not offering continued in-services and staff development. Scheuermann et al. (2003) found that there are problems in personnel preparation for working with students with disabilities, specifically when working with students with autism.

Resource Capacity

Challenges elementary school principals face within the resource capacity were lack of materials; lack of funding and space; and limited staffing which affected scheduling and collaborative teaching. Accessibility of their buildings was a concern, as well as how the new students would be accepted. There was also concern that teachers would have to spend an inordinate amount of time with the new students, reducing effectiveness with the majority of the

students. Davis and Maheady (1991) suggested that successful mainstreaming programs were unlikely to be available in schools where principals did not have expectations of success. Cline (1981) concluded that in order to enhance successful mainstreaming efforts training and in-service were needed for principals. This is still the case today. In order to meet the instructional requirements of NCLB, school officials are restructuring service delivery models so that special education teachers can support content area instruction in general education classrooms for most students with disabilities (Crockett et al., 2007). According to Causton-Theoharis et al. (2005), the support of a paraprofessional in the classroom is crucial to the success of inclusion. Extra staffing, including teachers and paraprofessionals, to promote the successful implementation of the inclusion of students with disabilities however is not the “norm” nor the reality in most schools.

Chapter Summary

Crockett et al. (2007) conducted focus group studies with administrators on their perceptions on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment. Unintended side effects for the administrators’ professional lives included intensified accountability for student achievement, increased demands for administrative support, and expanded responsibilities for administering special education. According to the administrators, unexpected changes to the lives of students with disabilities included opportunities to learn and lost opportunities to learn. Some perceived academic success while others perceived students “falling by the wayside” or “doing time” in the general education classroom. Administrators reported that students without disabilities lives were affected by performance anxiety, parental objections to students being in class, and enhancing performance due to learning to ask for help.

The research on the success of inclusion continues to be controversial and diverse. With the increased concern and push for accountability and inclusive settings through IDEA and NCLB, it is imperative to know and understand from a leadership perspective how the unintended consequences on inclusion affect the role of the elementary school principal.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter begins with an overview of methodologies used in this study including the purpose, the theoretical framework, and the significance of the study. Data collection procedures including the assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design are explained followed by detailed procedures for data collection through the focus groups and document analysis. The role of the researcher and the assistant moderator are described in data collection, analysis, and management. Quality and trustworthiness of the study are addressed through detailed attention given to credibility, triangulation, transferability, and dependability. The chapter concludes by defining the long-table approach that was used for data management and analysis. Themes were identified and categorized based on the responses to the focus groups, on document analysis, and, when possible, on human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity. Findings of the study were based on the themes and narratives noted in the descriptive summaries.

Overview of the Study

Due to the mandates and the interpretation of IDEA and NCLB, there is an increase in the number of students with disabilities being included in the general education setting. Elementary school principals are facing intended outcomes of inclusion, as well as numerous unintended outcomes and consequences. Currently there are few studies that examine elementary school principals' perspectives on the unintended consequences of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. The perspectives of elementary school principals were examined through the

framework of human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity. According to Florian, Hange, and Copeland (2000), there are four types of capacity in educational systems: human, organizational, structural, and resource. This theoretical framework provided a lens to analyze data collected in research. This research is applied by informing and enhancing action and decision making. The findings may help policymakers, school administrators, and the participants to make decisions regarding including students with disabilities in the general education environment as well as improving special education services for students.

The data collected through focus groups and document analysis provide educators and policy makers with descriptive details of the challenges and issues elementary school principals are experiencing. The overall research question explored was: How do elementary school principals describe their experiences with and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools as it relates to the role of the elementary school principal? Supporting questions included: (a) How are the lives of students and school personnel affected? (b) How are organizational and structural practices within the school affected? (c) How are fiscal and material resources affected? (d) How do these experiences affect the elementary school principal?

Procedures

This section includes the assumptions and rationale for a qualitative design. The procedures used for obtaining permission from the participants, the setting selection, and the participant selection are explained in detail. An explanation of the data collection and analysis procedures used to conduct this study is also provided.

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Design

The unintended consequences of implementing inclusion in the elementary school as they relate to the role of principal was investigated by conducting a descriptive study through a qualitative research design. According to Rossman and Rallis (2003), qualitative research is an active learning process that “transforms the data, through analysis and interpretation, into information” (p. 5). The goals were to seek answers and real world experiences while enhancing some social circumstance with a new understanding. The researcher examined the experiences of a sample of elementary school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia to make new meaning of the intended and unintended consequences of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting as it relates to the role of principal. The findings hopefully will assist policymakers when reauthorizing IDEA and NCLB, as well as school administrators in implementing inclusive environments.

Type of Design

Focus groups and document analysis were the methodologies used for this study. These forms of data collection were selected because they best matched the purpose of the study: to describe and analyze elementary school principals’ experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. Frey and Fontana (1993) found that, “...researchers will find group interviews especially helpful in determining the reaction and perceptions of an affected population to a policy change” (p.21). Focus groups provided information rich material taking advantage of group dynamics through elaboration and expression that produced new and additional data. Through the group interview, the moderator and assistant moderator were instructed to listen to the interaction and observe the body language of the group members. The nonverbal action and reactions of the participants were observed and

recorded. Each focus group was audio recorded, transcribed, and then analyzed by the research team. After thematic analysis using constant comparative and content analysis, the research team interpreted the data by organizing and bringing meaning to the data.

The questions and responses were conceptualized when possible by Florian's et al. (2000) four types of capacity: human, organizational, structural, and resource. The analysis focused on the individual and group responses of a sample of elementary school principals in Virginia.

Three focus groups were conducted with groups composed of five to six elementary school principals. The interviewer hosted a preset, formal setting. The role of the interviewer was directive and the question format structured. Focus groups were selected so the interviewer could establish an open environment encouraging discussion and communication of differing opinions and points of view. As Rossman and Rallis (2003) indicated, "the interaction among the participants is the crucial characteristic of this type of interviewing. This technique assumes that an individual's attitudes and beliefs do not form in a vacuum: People often need to listen to others' opinions and understanding to clarify their own" (p. 193). Jourand (1964) found that participants communicate more openly with people who resemble them than to those who differ. Focus groups allow a concentrated amount of data on a topic of interest through group interaction providing data and insight that would not be obtainable without the group interaction (Morgan, 1997).

Each focus group participant was asked to provide school and/or division level documentation that stated the philosophy or procedures concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities. These documents were analyzed in regards to the role of the principal in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities within the school and division. In addition, the

researcher also reviewed school and division websites for documents and/or information to help guide questions regarding documentation during the focus group sessions. The content of the documents were analyzed along with the focus group results and the theoretical framework.

Researcher's Role

The researcher was the instrument of analysis for the study, constructing understanding through the questions asked; context studied, and personal biography (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The researcher served as the moderator, listener, observer, and analyst. The researcher continuously reflected on reactions to the participants' words, actions, and interpretation of the data. The study was interpretive with the data being filtered through the lens of the researcher. The moderator of the focus groups was the researcher; therefore the researcher's background and experiences played a role in the investigation.

The researcher is currently the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction in a small rural division after holding the positions of special education director, elementary school principal, and general education elementary school teacher. These roles created an excellent background for viewing this study. Several strategies were implemented within the data collection procedures and analysis that allowed the voices of the participants to remain the central focus. An assistant moderator helped with the focus groups, taking field notes during the focus group sessions, and identifying key points of the discussion as well as documenting nonverbal communication, with the participants and between groups. The researcher kept a log of the details about the research design and implementation, including the process of gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data. The study meets standards for acceptable and competent practice, and all efforts were made to ensure that the study was credible, systematic, and useful (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The research emerged from the views of the participants and the researcher used reflectivity

throughout the study. The study procedures were designed to be systematic and rigorous with formal focus groups in a structured interview environment. Member checks and a critical friend were used to keep the integrity of the data and interpretation of the data. Triangulation of the data occurred through the three focus groups, document analysis, member checks, and the use of a critical friend.

Gaining Access and Entry

Approval from the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained before conducting this study (see Appendix L). Following permission from the IRB, the researcher obtained a list of all elementary school principals in Virginia from the Virginia Department of Education website. From this list of 1,228 elementary school principals, the researcher randomly selected elementary school principals by selecting every twentieth name on the list. A letter detailing the rationale for the study, the purpose of the study, and a description of the methodology was mailed to the randomly selected elementary school principals (see Appendix A). The elementary school principals who gave informed consent to participate in this study received communication on the date, time, and location of the focus group (see Appendix C).

Setting Selection

The sample was a purposeful random selection of elementary school principals in Virginia. Three focus groups were conducted, with five or six elementary school principals participating per focus group. This nonprobability sampling method was chosen in order to collect information rich data from elementary school principals on their perspectives on the research topic (Patton, 2002). To help minimize selection bias, a pool of potential participants was assembled and then participants were randomly selected from the pool of qualified individuals. The researcher over-recruited by 100% to ensure that there were an adequate number

of participants in each focus group. Elementary school principals' views were crucial to this topic due to their expertise. The intent of this study was to achieve theoretical saturation. After three focus groups were conducted, the researching team determined that saturation of the data had occurred. If saturation had not occurred, additional focus groups would have been conducted.

Participant Selection

Participants of each focus group were randomly selected from the list of elementary school principals provided on the Virginia Department of Education website. Twenty participants for each focus group were randomly selected with the hope that at least six to ten elementary school principals would agree to participate. Selected participants then received a letter (Appendix A) describing the purpose, need, and relevance of the study. The researcher, used the Phone Conference Script (Appendix B), to call potential participants to determine their willingness to participate in the study. When six participants did not respond to participate in a group, additional names were selected to participate. Selected participants who agreed to participate in the study were sent a confirmation letter (Appendix C) and e-mail with the specific dates, time, and location of the focus group. A reminder call and e-mail were made to participants two days prior to the focus group session.

Assurance of Confidentiality

Participants gave "informed consent" through being fully informed on the purpose and details of this study, as well as what providing consent to participate in the study entailed (see Appendix D). Each participant who consented to participate was allowed to withdraw at any time. Selected participants were assured participant, individual school, and school division confidentiality in order to avoid identification. Names of individuals, schools, and school

divisions are not included in the written report. The participants, assistant moderator, and transcriber all signed Confidentiality Agreements (see Appendices E, F, and G).

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected in the form of homogenous focus groups and document analysis. Data collection involved three focus groups consisting of five to six participants for each group. The series of questions asked of focus group participants were guided by the review of literature and theoretical framework of this study. Using the focus group protocol in Appendix H, questions were framed using the four types of capacity within an educational system developed by Florian et al. (2000): human, organizational, structural, and resources.

Interview Procedures and Protocols

Three separate focus groups were conducted at convenient times and locations for participants. Focus groups were conducted using the recommended protocol suggested by Kruegar and Casey (2000) and Kruegar (1998): the welcome; the overview of the topic; the ground rules; and the first question. A structured approach was used with high moderator involvement through the use of the research questions with all three groups. Focus groups lasted approximately 90 minutes. Focus group protocol, interview guide, and questions can be found in Appendix H. Interview questions were designed to prompt without leading participants in discussion concerning how inclusion affects them in ways they had not anticipated. As listed in Appendix H, each prompting question corresponds with the educational theoretical framework. Field notes (Appendix J) were taken by the assistant moderator. To uphold the integrity of the study, the assistant moderator understood the responsibilities of the role. A training session and protocol were provided to the assistant moderator (see Appendix I). The assistant moderator, “takes comprehensive notes, operates the tape recorder, handles the environmental conditions

and logistics (refreshments, lighting, seating, etc.), and responds to unexpected interruptions” (Krueger & Casey, 2000, p. 101). During focus group discussions the assistant moderator documented the discussion and the nonverbal communication between participants. Focus group discussions were audio-recorded with a audio recorder and then transcribed. At the end of each focus group, key points based on topics and when possible the types of capacity were identified by the moderator and assistant moderator using the field notes taken during the session.

Document Data Collection

Data collection was documented through the transcribed interviews, field notes taken by the assistant moderator, the researcher’s logs from the focus groups sessions and document comparisons, and a document review form. The moderator kept a researcher’s log of information obtained from the debriefing sessions held by the moderator and assistant moderator immediately following each focus group session. Information included observations of individual and group behaviors during focus group discussions. The moderator and assistant moderator also documented information based on intergroup data comparison. Member checks were conducted by sending an electronic copy of the transcripts from the group interview to participants for validation of the information and to provide the opportunity for changes or comments.

The researcher collected information on documents provided by the focus group participants regarding division and school level philosophy and/or procedures in relation to the role of the elementary school principal and the inclusion of students with disabilities. The documents were reviewed following the focus group session. The researcher compared the origins and contents of the documents to the theoretical conceptual framework and the results from the focus group transcripts (see Appendix K). When participants were unable to produce a document from the school or division level, this was noted on the form. Using the Document

Review Form (Appendix K), the researcher also reviewed the school and division websites of participants prior to the focus group session. This review was completed in order to guide interview questions regarding documentation in relation to inclusion during the focus group sessions. A follow-up phone call was made to the participants to see if any clarification was needed regarding the transcripts and documents provided.

Data Analysis Procedures

“Data analysis consists of examining, categorizing, tabulating, or otherwise recombining the evidence to address the initial purpose of the study” (Yin, 1994, p.99). The analysis was practical, systematic, and verifiable. Data analysis began after each focus group meeting with mechanical and interpretive analyzation (Seidel & Clark, 1984). The first step was data immersion of the transcripts and field notes, followed by analyzing the text through chunking and coding the data including Florian et al’s. (2000) four types of capacity and other codes that emerged from the data. Data from each group was analyzed and then the research team conducted intergroup comparisons between focus groups from the transcripts, audio-recording, field notes, and memory. The documents provided by the focus group participants were analyzed using the Document Review Form (Appendix K). The research team examined the documents in regards to the role of the principal in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities.

The long-table approach was used for the analysis of the data (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The long-table approach is a time-tested, systematic method which is recommended for beginner analysts. It is a low-technology method that breaks down the process in manageable chunks. Focus group interview transcripts and information obtained from the document review were numbered and cut apart to be sorted by themes. Themes were identified and categorized based on

the responses to the focus groups and then when possible on human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity. During this process, the researcher determined the weight given to comments based on frequency, specificity, emotion, and extensiveness. After the data from the transcripts had been sorted, themes were identified. A descriptive summary was written based on the data collected. Findings of the study were based on the themes and narratives noted in the descriptive summaries.

Data Quality Procedures

A researcher establishes quality through the trustworthiness of the project (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This study meets the standards for acceptable and competent practice and ethical conduct. The study is credible; systematic and rigorous; and useful. The quality of focus groups lies in the perception of the user of the study, therefore rich, thick description is critical (Krueger & Casey, 2000). According to Morgan (1993), there are ten quality factors in focus group research: clarity of purpose; appropriate environment; sufficient resources; appropriate participants; skillful moderator; effective questions; careful data handling; systematic and verifiable analysis; appropriate presentation; and honoring the participant, client, and method. According to Krueger and Casey (2000), "Focus group research is scientific research because it is a process of disciplined inquiry, that is systematic and verifiable. It is the type that seeks to provide understanding and insight" (p. 198).

Credibility

According to Morgan (1997), a study is credible if the findings are derived from the views of the participants, the researcher continuously reflects; and the reader can interpret and relate to the study. The credibility of this study was addressed in several ways. Focus groups

were conducted with the researcher as the moderator. An assistant moderator assisted in the focus groups and data analysis. During focus groups, the assistant moderator took field notes, paraphrasing what participants said; writing down important quotes that supported the data, and noting body language and expressions of the participants involved. Focus groups were audio-recorded, allowing the researcher to refer back for clarity. During the focus group, the moderator was able to follow up with responses for clarification or expand responses. Then at the conclusion of the focus group, participants were asked to identify the key points of the focus group discussion with the assistant moderator. Member checks through providing the transcripts to participants for validation took place after the focus group. The assistant moderator served as a critical friend in reviewing the data analysis and interpretation.

Triangulation

The use of multiple sources of data, also known as triangulation, enhances the credibility and rigor of a qualitative study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In this study, triangulation of the data occurred through conducting three focus groups, member checks, document analysis, and the use of a research team in the role of critical friends. The intent was to achieve theoretical saturation.

Transferability

It is the reader who decides whether the results can be applied to their situation by examining the setting selection, participation selection, procedures, and analysis strategies. A rich description of the context of this study is provided to allow the readers to compare it to their situations. The goal of the study was to provide an in-depth description and interpretation of elementary school principals' views on how the inclusion of students with disabilities is affecting them in ways that they did not expect or anticipate.

Dependability

Dependability of a qualitative study requires the study to be considered systematic and rigorous. Morgan (1993) noted that “Focus groups provide rigor through the cross referenced multiple opinions stemming from its group nature (p. 24).” The interaction of the participants cue new thoughts and ideas and requires participants to be realistic. Focus group methodology has a degree of transferability because groups are “grounded in the human tendency to discuss issues and ideas in groups” (Sink, 1991, p. 197). The researcher documented the entire process of the study through a log. A comfortable, permissive environment was provided along with a skilled moderator.

Data Management

The data management and analysis strategies occurred in several steps. Key points identified by the focus group participants with the assistant moderator based on the topics that are discussed and the four types of capacity, along with supporting details and direct quotations of participants were summarized. The documents that participants provided were reviewed using the Document Review Form (Appendix K) and compared to the focus group transcript summaries through constant comparative and content analyzation. Member checks were then conducted by sending the transcripts electronically to participants for validation, additions, and corrections. A follow-up call was made to the participants for transcript and document review clarification. The long-table approach, described on page 43, was then used to manage all the transcripts, tapes, document review forms, and notes. This was done through numbering each line of the transcripts and notes from the document review and then color coding by topics and the four types of capacity based on frequency, specificity, emotion, and extensiveness. Results

are represented by themes that emerged across all the data with narratives used to describe the themes.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to describe and analyze elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. Cook and Tankersley (2007a) emphasized the importance of educators in determining the common side effects of educational reforms such as inclusion and weighing the risks against the benefits of the reform.

The methodologies used in this study were focus groups and document analysis. Three focus groups of elementary school principals from Virginia were conducted. Participants were asked to provide a document stating the philosophy or procedures regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities from the school or division level. The document was analyzed in regards to the role of the principal in relation to the inclusion of students with disabilities. In addition, the researcher reviewed school and division websites of the participants for information and documents related to inclusion. Interview questions and data collected were framed and analyzed using an educational system capacity framework developed by Florian et al. (2000). The researcher interpreted and described how elementary school principals view inclusion as affecting them in ways they have never considered through the lens of human, organizational, structural, and material capacities. The findings may help policy makers, school administrators, and the participants make decisions regarding including students with disabilities in the general education setting as well as improving special education services for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The research in this study provides a description of elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This chapter summarizes the overall findings from three focus group sessions with a sample of elementary school principals in the Commonwealth of Virginia and the review of documents provided by the participants and/or reviewed by the researcher on the Internet regarding the philosophy of inclusion in their school and/or school divisions.

This chapter begins with a description of the demographic information collected from all participants. The description specifically provides information on the educational background and experiences of the elementary school principals. Following this profile and description of the focus group findings, a description of the document analysis is shared.

Data from the focus group interviews are organized by common content themes that emerged throughout the sessions. The themes are explained on three levels as suggested by Merriam (1998). Beginning with the theme, a general description of the theme is provided by identifying particular patterns seen in the data. Next, supporting quotations from participants illustrate the patterns of each theme. Finally, group dynamics and participant behavior will be discussed based on information gathered between the moderator and assistant moderator through conversations and field notes at the end of each focus group.

A code has been developed throughout the findings of this study so that quotes can be attributed to the different focus groups. Each focus group will be identified by the sequence in which the sessions were held. The first focus group will be identified as Group 1, the second

session as Group 2, and the third as Group 3. This code will be used to reference the source of quotations by the focus group number and the corresponding page number from the transcripts of the identified focus group session.

Profile of the Participants

Demographic information was verbally collected from participants at the beginning of each focus group session, including information on their educational background and experience. Table 1 provides a comparison of the three focus groups of elementary school principals based on demographic characteristics.

Table 1
Demographic Information on Elementary School Principal Focus Groups

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3
Total No. Participants	6	6	5
Race			
Black	2	1	0
White	4	5	5
Gender			
Females	4	4	5
Males	2	2	0
Years Principal Experience			
0-3	5	3	1
4-7	1	2	0
8-12	0	1	1
13-15	0	0	1
>15	0	0	2

Special Education Experience

Special Education Endorsed	3	1	2
Not Special Education Endorsed	3	5	3

Virginia School Division Regions

Region 1	0	0	3
Region 2	1	0	0
Region 3	1	1	0
Region 4	0	0	1
Region 5	0	1	0
Region 6	1	0	0
Region 7	0	0	0
Region 8	3	4	1

Inclusion Model

Co-teaching	6	3	5
Mainstreamed	0	3	0

Note: 16 out of 17 of the schools made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and met the Annual Measure Objective (AMO) in the students with disabilities subgroup.

The three focus groups consisted of a similar number of participants. The first two sessions had 6 participants each and the third session had 5 participants. Participants were elementary school principals, all from different elementary schools, representing 15 different school divisions and 7 out of the 8 school division regions in Virginia.

As indicated in Table 1, although the focus groups consisted of elementary school principals, each differed in demographics varying in racial, gender, and experience representation. Of the 17 participants, a majority of the principals were white (82%) and female

(76%). Approximately one half (53%) of the participants had under four years of elementary school principal experience. All of the participants were endorsed in administration and supervision. In addition, 35% percent of the principals were also endorsed in special education having been a special education teacher before becoming an administrator. From the eight school division regions in Virginia, approximately one half (47%) of the participants were from Region 8; 18% from Region 1; 12% from Region 3; and 6% each from Regions 2, 4, 5, and 6. There were no participants from Region 7. More elementary school principals participated from Region 8 due to the familiarity of the locality in which the researcher is employed. Elementary school principals that would not consent to participate may have been uncomfortable or not interested in assisting in a research study with someone with whom they were not familiar. The timing of the study may have also affected participation.

All of the participants in Groups 1 and 3 had co-teaching models for the inclusion of students with disabilities while only 50% of the participants in Group 2 had a co-teaching model. In these particular schools, students with disabilities were included in the general education setting with limited support from special education staff. The special education teacher provided more consultation than services. Therefore, the general education teacher did more accommodating and modifying of the curriculum and providing services for students with disabilities.

Overview of the Findings

Six major themes emerged during the three focus group interview sessions with elementary school principals in relation to their experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities. They consisted of the inclusion/Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) debate; the pressures of accountability; the lack

of knowledge of special education and inclusion; staffing and scheduling; co-teaching conflicts; and discipline.

Elementary school principals repeatedly emphasized their belief in including students with disabilities into the general education setting. They repeatedly stated that it was the right thing to do for most of their students but expressed concern that inclusion was not the LRE for all students with disabilities. However, with the pressures of accountability from the federal, state, and local levels, principals were increasingly forced to include students with disabilities into the general education setting whether or not it was the LRE for the student.

Another major theme that surfaced was the lack of knowledge in regards to special education law and inclusion. Principals reported that administrative preparation programs and coursework were lacking in the area of special education resulting in principals feeling unprepared to lead their schools in special education or programming. They remarked that parents, general education teachers, and special education teachers also could use more training in these areas.

All participants discussed concerns with not having adequate staff in order to implement the continuum of special education services and inclusive education for students with disabilities. Funding for special education staff at the federal, state, and local levels is minimal; therefore elementary schools are not adequately staffed to support including students with disabilities successfully in the general education environment as well as maintaining resource and self-contained settings where appropriate. According to participants, scheduling balanced and inclusive settings were a challenge that related directly back to staffing.

The fifth theme discovered from the focus group discussions were co-teaching conflicts that sometimes existed with the co-teaching model environments. Whether personality conflicts,

lack of planning/planning time, or lack of understanding the roles and responsibilities of co-teaching, principals voiced their frustration with the relationships between the general education and special education teacher.

Finally, the last theme that surfaced was dealing with the discipline issues of students with disabilities in the general education setting. Without the support that some resource and self-contained settings can provide as well as the need for additional staff in the general education environment for support, principals reported that they found that certain students with disabilities did not have the needed behavioral supports in the general education setting. They also reported that often non-disabled peers did not understand why some students with disabilities had different disciplinary consequences for similar actions.

The above description represents a brief overview of the findings that emerged from the data collected in focus group discussions with elementary school principals. The next section provides a more in depth look at each theme, and a discussion of responses of the participants during focus groups.

Description of the Findings

Florin et al. (2000) developed a typology of capacities to use as a lens to analyze data collected in their research of district reform. The framework consists of human, organizational, structural, and resource capacities. Data from the focus groups naturally fell into these categories since this framework guided the development of the research and interview questions asked of focus group participants.

As displayed in Table 2, overall themes were consistent among focus groups; however identified patterns within these themes are where perspectives sometimes differed.

Table 2
Comparison of Focus Group Thematic Patterns

Themes	Patterns	Focus Groups		
		1	2	3
Inclusion/LRE Debate	Belief in Inclusion	X	X	X
	Inclusion Equals High Expectations	X	X	X
	LRE Concerns: Self-Contained and Resource Classes Still Needed	X	X	X
	Improved Student Social Skills	X	X	X
	Improved Academic Performance	X	X	X
	Teachers Become Better Teachers	X	X	
Pressures of Accountability	SWD Achievement Tied to Evaluation	X	X	X
	SWD Taking SOLs	X	X	X
	Collecting VGLA Evidence		X	
Lack of Knowledge of SPED and Inclusion	Lack Own Knowledge	X	X	X
	Lack of SPED Teacher Knowledge	X	X	X
	Lack of Gen. Ed Teacher Knowledge	X	X	X
	Lack of Parent Knowledge	X	X	X

Staffing and Scheduling	Lack of SPED Staff for Continuum of SPED Services	X	X	X
	Balancing Class Composition	X		
	Lack of Staff for Support in Gen. Ed	X	X	X
	Lack of Planning Time	X	X	X
Co-teaching Conflicts	Personality Conflicts	X	X	X
	Roles and Responsibilities	X	X	X
	Teacher Ownership	X	X	X
	Teachers Being Territorial over Content or Students	X	X	X
	Lack of Planning Together	X	X	X
	SPED Teacher Acts as an Aide Instead of Teacher	X	X	X
Discipline	No Behavioral Supports in Gen. Ed.	X	X	
	Improved Discipline and Social Skills in Gen. Ed/Role Models	X	X	X
	Different Consequences for SWD		X	

Note: LRE = Least Restrictive Environment; SWD = Students with Disabilities; SOL = Standards of Learning; VGLA = Virginia Grade Level Alternative; SPED = Special Education; Gen. Ed = General Education

Inclusion/LRE Debate

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment is the generally accepted goal for educating students with disabilities in public schools today. In order to meet the instructional, accountability, and staffing requirements of No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, elementary school principals are being challenged to include all students with disabilities into general education settings. Most of these elementary school principals have embraced the concept of inclusive education as the most appropriate delivery of service for students with disabilities. However, they also believed that special education is to be a continuum of services to meet the unique needs of students.

During the discussions on the topic of their own experiences and attitudes toward inclusion that were unexpected, several patterns emerged within and among the focus groups. First, all of the principals believed that most students with disabilities should be included in the general education setting. They believed that there are higher expectations for students with disabilities when included in the general education curriculum. However, all principals also agreed that it is not appropriate for all students with disabilities to be placed in inclusive settings. Some students need more support in a resource or self-contained setting. Three other patterns that surfaced were improved social skills for both disabled and non-disabled students; improved academic achievement for students with disabilities; and teachers, both general education and special education, becoming better educators in inclusive settings.

Belief in Inclusion

When asked about their own experiences and attitudes regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities that had been unexpected, all the elementary school principals interviewed

stated that they believed that including students with disabilities in the general education setting was important for academic and social growth for most students with disabilities. One principal shared the following experience:

In 1980, I taught in the first inclusion classroom in my school division, and probably one of the first in the state. It was a K-1 classroom and I had typically developing students, students with functional delays, and one student with an emotional disability. We had a wonderful year! That experience, and the fact that I have an exceptional ed. background, has framed my subsequent experiences with inclusion from a little bit different vantage point than most of my peers. As a teacher and as a principal, I've always looked at children's needs being on a continuum, with each individual having unique strengths and needs for support and modification. Whether they have a special education identification is secondary to the fact that all children are unique and all have these needs and areas of strength. As a principal, I think that I have helped cultivate that culture in my school. We have an expectation that the regular classroom is a place where all children can participate in various ways in varying degrees and a place where everyone feels valued, challenged, and successful. (Group 3, p. 1)

Another participant and former special education teacher expressed her belief in inclusion:

I believe 100% in inclusion! What that means to me as a principal is that I need to provide support for this instructional practice. This has taken as many different roles as we have inclusion students. I have to be available to put resources in place so inclusion works in classrooms across my building. Attitudes are positive, that is a blessing. (Group 3, p.3)

The same principal further stated, “I expect all students to be included. I do not expect all children to be included for all academics areas. This attitude is also practiced by our staff” (Group 3, p. 3).

In all three focus groups, principals had positive experiences and attitudes in regards to inclusion for most students with disabilities. They all felt that it was important for students with disabilities to be exposed to the general education curriculum especially since the students were expected to participate and pass state assessments. All also believed that the necessary training, support, and resources needed to be available in order to accommodate and modify the general education curriculum for students. As one principal summed up the first focus group session, “The inclusion setting is positive for the school and students. The pros outweigh the cons. It is better for the students to be exposed to the curriculum” (Group 1, p. 13). The fact that the principal sets the tone for successful inclusion in their building was expressed in all three focus groups.

Inclusion Equals High Expectations

Elementary school principals in all three groups shared that they believed that there were higher expectations for students with disabilities when included in the general education setting. Group members expressed that being in the general education setting also motivated students with disabilities to do better socially and academically. Principals in all three sessions mentioned that it was their role as the principal to set the tone of high expectations for all students. One principal stated that the expectation for the success of the students and inclusion made a world of difference whether inclusion was successful or not. Two of the principals went further to explain that there were lower expectations and watered down material in resource and self-contained settings. One participant remarked, “If you are pulled out, things are watered down, or you get

bits and pieces of it. If you aren't exposed to it, the general education curriculum, how are you expected to get it" (Group 2, p. 1)?

A principal in the third focus group reported that when her division introduced the concept of inclusion, only special education teachers were told of the concept while general education teachers were left out of the loop. She found that, "Special education teachers had lower expectations of their students than general education teachers" (Group 3, p. 14).

LRE Concerns

Overall, participants agreed that the inclusion of students with disabilities provided higher expectations for students, was appropriate for most students with disabilities, and showed improved academic and social skills for both disabled and non-disabled students. However, on the other hand, most maintained that inclusive settings were not appropriate for all students. All principals remarked that there needed to be a continuum of services to meet the unique needs of students. One principal and former special education teacher indicated that she had mixed feelings about inclusion. She described her emotions:

I think I've always had mixed feelings about inclusion. For some it worked well, and for others, of course it didn't. I always felt like there wasn't enough research done. I just felt like all of the sudden it sounds great, let's do it. There's some models that it's full inclusion and you don't have any options for some students who may be struggling a little bit more who unfortunately can't keep up with everyone else, even with the support in place and sometimes those student really are to me, I feel like they are left behind.

(Group 1, p. 2)

Principals discussed the challenges of providing the least restrictive environment for students and meeting the expectations of NCLB and IDEA which requires all students participate and achieve on standards based testing. Another principal stressed that, “inclusion is not right for all students” (Group 3, p. 5). She reiterated further by explaining that the needs of individual children should be considered before placements are determined. However, with staffing and scheduling restraints, providing both inclusion and other services on the spectrum was difficult.

Improved Social Skills

All of the principals emphasized the improved social skills for both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers when inclusion is implemented. They agreed that non-disabled peers learned leadership, acceptance, and tolerance by having students with disabilities included in their classrooms. Group members found that non-disabled peers benefited from inclusion by learning about differences and becoming leaders within the classroom through peer tutoring. Principals found that most non-disabled students were accepting and protective of the students with disabilities and building relationships with each other was positive. One principal shared her success with inclusion when students with developmentally delays were found no longer eligible for special education services. She indicated that when included in the general education setting from the beginning, students transitioned more successfully to not having access to services.

One member felt that socially inclusion:

provides motivation for students who are in the inclusion setting. They have peers who obviously can provide them with extra help if needed in collaborative environments. It gives them a different perspective. They may have always at one point been included in a

self-contained classroom and now they are able to go out and see what's happening and how they can contribute. (Group 1, p. 1)

Thirteen of the principals noted that students with behavioral issues sometimes did better in the inclusive setting because they had fewer behaviors to “feed off” of than in a self-contained setting. They had experienced many instances of improved behaviors for students with disabilities. Principals identified improved self-esteem for students with disabilities with examples including students feeling like someone believed in them and providing more opportunities for students. With exposure to the different accommodations and modifications of the curriculum, both disabled and non-disabled students, learn the differences between fairness, equality, and equity. One participant explained an unexpected impact that inclusion had on her school:

While the culture of the school impacts how successfully inclusion can take place, inclusion can impact the culture of the school in unexpected ways. My current school serves a community that is very results and achievement oriented and, as a school, we are always cognizant of ways to reduce pressure on our students and to minimize competition. When the school staff views all students as individuals who have both strengths and challenges and classroom culture and instruction reflect this, it helps children and parents accept others in a more inclusive way, and helps them accept their own successes and difficulties within a healthier perspective. (Group 3, p. 1)

Improved Academic Performance

Group members in all three focus groups agreed that academic performance improved for most students with disabilities included in the general education setting. They contributed this

success to having high expectations and teachers becoming better educators for all students when teaching in an inclusive setting. Principals reported that all their students with disabilities had passed the state assessments, whether they took the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) tests or the Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) assessment. They believed that this would not have been possible if the students had not been exposed to the general education curriculum in an inclusive setting. Principals remarked that the team approach of the co-teaching model had especially proven successful for students with disabilities through teachers working together to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. One principal exclaimed:

The overall success of the school and the division is measured by your Virginia Alternate Assessment Program (VAAP), your VGLA, and scores on the SOL tests for students with disabilities. So what we are doing is working. There is collaboration. There is a focus on students. (Group 1, p.11)

Another participant shared that after including a student with a disability for the first time in reading last year, the student's reading level increased. This allowed the student to be successful in his other subjects as well.

Others expressed their surprise when non-disabled peers were achieving higher in inclusive settings. They concluded that hands-on and research based instructional practices being used for students with disabilities benefited all students. One principal also contributed inclusion and the use of better instructional practices to the decrease in students being identified for special education services. He reported that they were providing intervention earlier and getting students academically on track before resorting to evaluating for special education services. One group member proudly told the group,

The students with disabilities had always gotten the short end of the stick when it came to the test time and test results. They were always the one that caused you not to meet the mark. But this time all of the students with disabilities passed their assessments. (Group 2, p. 19)

A principal in the third focus group excitedly shared her success story with the group, “I have a dynamite teacher who for the past three years has had 100% of her students pass the SOLs and many of them have been advanced proficiency” (Group 3, p. 15).

Teachers Becoming Better Teachers

In two of the focus groups, principals reported that general education teachers became better educators after teaching students with disabilities. This was found whether inclusion was implemented with the co-teaching model or with limited support. The instructional practices not only improved academic achievement with disabled students, but for all students. One participant commented that in co-teaching situations, pairing a strong teacher with a weaker colleague sometimes improved the teaching practices of the weaker teacher. The same principal found that when students are included in the general education classroom, general education teachers become:

much more in the group and a lot more conversations about accommodations and what they can do for students are happening. They go out more knowledgeable about special education issues and things because of the exposure and the collaboration with that teacher. (Group 2, p. 3)

One principal also explained that in co-teaching situations, the special education teacher became stronger when given the chance to learn the content. She expressed her concern when

content teachers don't think that the special education should teach the content, "Special education teachers have to learn the content and they do learn the content and are able to teach it as well as the content teacher if given the chance" (Group 1, p. 8). Another in this group emphasized, "I think it pushes you to be a better teacher and find ways to meet the needs of the students and to develop more opportunities for social relationships to exist between other peers and the teacher" (Group 1, p. 6).

General Observations

While discussing their own unexpected experiences and attitudes regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities, the principals were very passionate in their belief that most students with disabilities should be included in the general education setting. They talked at length in each session about their beliefs and the positives regarding inclusion. They all appeared to understand their role as the principal in developing the culture for the success of inclusion within their building.

At the same time, most voiced their frustration with the lack of options for the continuum of special education services for students when inclusion is not appropriate. Discussions regarding their frustration with the LRE were brief but passionate. This was the beginning of the interview, so participants may have felt uncomfortable appearing negative or felt that it would not be appropriate to disagree with inclusion. Participants were shocked by the lack of co-teaching and support in the general education setting provided in some schools. However, whether or not a principal had the resources available to do the co-teaching model; this did not affect their beliefs or their reported success with inclusion.

When asked about their success stories, most of the principal beamed with pride while telling their stories. In all three groups, participants were positive and emotional while discussing their beliefs in inclusion. They all agreed that for most, but not all, inclusion resulted in higher expectations, improved social and academic performance, and better instruction overall for all students. Although the responses were passionate and from the heart, many of the responses were not unintended consequences of inclusion and directly related to the reason inclusion is promoted. Two responses that were clearly unintended consequences of inclusion are the lack of the continuum of services and LRE options due to limited staffing and the expanding role of the principal in changing the culture within the school building.

Pressures of Accountability

There are mounting pressures of accountability for elementary school principals to have all students, including students with disabilities, included in the general education setting and to pass high-stake, state assessments. Elementary school principals in all three focus groups felt the pressure of being reassigned or losing their jobs when students with disabilities fail to make AYP. Patterns that emerged from the focus group responses included academic achievement data of students with disabilities being tied to their evaluations, students with disabilities taking the Virginia Standard of Learning (SOL) assessments, and difficulties collecting Virginia Grade Level Alternative (VGLA) assessment evidence. Principals also emphasized that the pressures of accountability filtered down to the teacher level, affecting co-teaching relationships.

Students with Disabilities Achievement Tied to Evaluation

Elementary school principals in all three focus groups expressed the pressure they felt for students with disabilities to pass state testing whether it was the SOL or VGLA assessments. All wanted their schools to meet AYP and many had their own yearly evaluations tied to this

subgroup's achievement. One principal who had been a special education director before becoming a principal expressed the following, "It is more challenging as a principal than being at the school board office. Now these students are sitting in my testing grades and it is directly impacting me through my evaluation" (Group 2, p. 1). Although many of the participants explained their frustration, none indicated that students with disabilities could not achieve this expectation. Many of the principals reported that their students were achieving as noted earlier in this chapter. However one participant expressed her disappointment:

I wish I could tell you that we are making AYP in all special education areas, but we are not there yet...but working on it as hard as we can. We have seen much growth in our students with learning differences. (Group 3, p. 4)

One principal reported that there was pressure from central office to have more students with disabilities complete VGLA assessments in order to improve scores. Another principal shared that her central office wanted to see fewer VGLA assessments. Participants in Groups 1 and 2 indicated that they felt pressure from central office for the VGLA assessments to pass at advanced levels. One principal reported that more pressure was being put on schools in the division due to the Virginia Department of Education overturning many of their VGLA results. This resulted in one school losing its AYP status.

Elementary school principals commented that the pressures of accountability were filtering down to the teacher level. Some principals had to work hard cultivating general education teacher ownership for the scores of students with disabilities included in the general education setting. In other cases, principals had to remind general education teachers to co-teach and collaborate with their special education partner. With scores being tied to teacher

evaluations, reactions went from not wanting students with disabilities in the classroom and/or “attaching” the scores to the special education teacher to not wanting the special education teacher to teach the content out of fear he/she would not teach it correctly. One principal explained that in some cases, “The general education teacher doesn’t want the SPED teacher to deliver the instruction because my [the general education teacher] name is attached to the SOL scores” (Group 2, p. 4).

Students with Disabilities Taking the Standards of Learning (SOL) Assessments

During all three focus group sessions, elementary school principals discussed their feelings about students with disabilities participating in SOL assessments. As stated previously, most of the principals had experienced success with students with disabilities passing the SOL or VGLA assessments. Responses varied from believing all students included in the general education setting should participate in SOL assessments to challenges with students and their testing accommodations. One principal expressed her personal feelings about students with disabilities and SOL testing, “I have the philosophy if they [students with disabilities] can take the SOL test, I want them to take the test. I think that is more me” (Group 2, p. 11).

Four of the principals in Group 1 and Group 2 discussed concerns regarding students with disabilities, included in the general education setting, not wanting their accommodations listed on their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) provided, specifically on SOL assessments. Students did not want to be pulled out for small group testing or for the read aloud accommodations. According to one principal, many students with disabilities did not want to appear different from their peers. Dealing with the challenge of the student’s self-esteem versus needed accommodations was a difficult decision. Many of the principals had to reconvene IEP

meetings to deal with testing accommodations. These principals had developed different strategies to address this such as arranging small group testing for all of the students.

Collecting VGLA Evidence

The challenge of collecting VGLA evidence was only discussed in Group 2, but was discussed in great length with much frustration due to the fact that only half of the participants had co-teaching inclusion models within their schools. Therefore, the general education teacher alone, in many cases, was responsible for the collection of evidence. In co-teaching settings, both the special education and general education teacher work collaboratively to collect the evidence and construct the VGLA notebook. One elementary school principal went as far to say that she didn't hear as much about inclusion anymore, most of the conversation in her school and division revolved around the VGLA and the collection of evidence. She exclaimed, "You don't hear as much about inclusion. You hear more about VGLA evidence. And no matter how you get it...get it! Get it even if you have to pull them out of the class" (Group 2, p. 10)! Another principal in the group expressed the challenge with the constant monitoring of the evidence required by central office and repeated the fact that the VGLA scores were tied to her evaluation. "Last year when I came into my current school, the VGLA scores were not passing. I had to go through each notebook. They are a part of my evaluation. My name is associated with these failures or passes" (Group 2, p. 10).

Three principals in the group stated that since the Virginia Department of Education had overturned some of the division's VGLA scores, central office administration was becoming more controlling of the process. This was creating more accountability, deadlines, monitoring, and checklists at the division level for principals to implement. One principal remarked that she was experiencing, "a lot more division level monitoring using checklists to ensure VGLAs would

pass” (Group 2, p. 11). One principal commented that she had developed a VGLA team that reviewed and monitored the collection of evidence periodically.

General Observations

As the focus group sessions progressed, the participants became more comfortable with the focus group environment and the subject of inclusion. The participants began to speak more freely about their views and experiences. Elementary school principals were very vocal, but brief when it came to the theme of accountability, especially when discussing how they were held accountable. The theme of accountability was woven throughout the interview responses and not specifically related to one or two interview questions. Principals indicated that the pressure of high-stakes testing being tied to evaluation is difficult, but the pressure increases when the subgroup of students with disabilities is tied to your school accreditation, AYP status, and your own personal evaluation.

Participants in Group 2 laughed out of frustration when talking about the increasing division control over VGLA evidence. They could all relate to the increased monitoring of every aspect of their daily jobs. They spoke in great length about how to collect VGLA evidence. Two of the focus groups had lengthy discussions regarding testing accommodations and began problem solving how to implement different accommodations. It was surprising to hear one principal admit that in her division, they hear more about collecting VGLA evidence than the actual concept of inclusion. Other participants appeared surprised at this as well.

The age of accountability in schools appears to have the intended consequence of placing pressure on administrators and teachers. One unintended consequence of inclusion and accessing the general education setting is the difficulty in collecting VGLA evidence. The fact

that students with disabilities are being pulled out of the general education classroom to collect evidence appears to defeat the purpose and concept of inclusion.

Lack of Knowledge of Special Education and Inclusion

Throughout the research reported in Chapter 2, one finding was consistent. More training is needed for all stakeholders in the areas of special education law and inclusion. Relevant training is needed for principals, general education teachers, paraprofessionals, parents, and special education teachers. Teachers are expected to provide differentiated instruction and individual instruction within the general education setting. Special adaptations are needed to meet the needs of diverse cognitive abilities, learning styles, and behaviors. Principals are expected to support the philosophy of inclusion and create a culture of inclusion in their school buildings. At all levels, many educators feel the lack of support from their supervisors and lack of training when implementing inclusion. In all three focus groups, the following patterns surfaced in regards to inclusion and lack of knowledge: the lack of their own knowledge; the lack of knowledge of the special education teacher; the lack of knowledge of the general education teacher; and the lack of parent knowledge.

Lack Own Knowledge

Overwhelmingly, all participants reported inadequate preparation in the areas of special education law and inclusion in their administration graduate programs. Most elementary school principals reported that they had to “learn as they go” through different job experiences. Even those with special education degrees and special education teaching experiences did not think that they were well prepared for the role of the principal in special education. Principals reported only taking one special education law course in their administrative graduate programs and those

with special education degrees had only taken one course that dealt with inclusion and co-teaching/collaboration.

Two of the principals admitted to assigning the special education responsibilities to their assistant principals due to their own lack of knowledge. Two described hiring their current assistant principals based on their special education background.

When asked about principal preparation and training, one principal explained, “I had to get a SPED law book out and go through so I could refer to it. I would also ask ample individuals before stepping out on a limb to make sure my thoughts were appropriate” (Group 1, p. 8). She also stated that she learned through exposure on the job while reading, investigating, and teaching herself. Another principal agreeing with her replied:

Most of my experience was learned through the different roles and positions I have held before becoming principal. Through different relationships and working with the school psychologist on interpreting test scores, etc. However, I still don’t feel knowledgeable enough. (Group 1, p. 8)

Five of the principals indicated that their division offered staff development for administrators in regards to special education law and inclusion. Others reported that there was no staff development for administrators in their divisions.

Lack of Special Education Teacher Knowledge

All elementary school principals, even those with special education backgrounds, agreed that special education teachers needed more training and preparation in college programs for teaching in inclusive settings. They also indicated that special education teachers needed more training in special education law. One principal with a special education degree stated that in her

special education preparation program, there was one course on special education law and one course on co-teaching. She did not feel this was enough to prepare her as a teacher for reality in the classroom, IEP meetings, and peer relationships. Another principal noted that special education programs tended to prepare the teacher to teach students with varying disabilities, but little to educate on special education law or prepare a teacher for co-teaching relationships. She further explained, “I don’t think many people with a special education background know the law and what the state and federal regulations and law are. They may be able to teach students with disabilities, but don’t know the law” (Group 1, p. 8).

In addition, although special education teachers may have had one class in co-teaching, all the principals agreed that they were unprepared for the reality of co-teaching and inclusion. Most of the principals stated that their local school division conducted co-teaching and/or inclusion training for their special education teachers, and provided updates on special education law. Two principals indicated that their school divisions did not offer any training in special education law or inclusion.

Lack of General Education Knowledge

Elementary school principals unanimously agreed that general education teachers were lacking in knowledge regarding special education law, co-teaching, and inclusion. In looking at their college preparation coursework, it was mentioned by one principal that teachers generally have one course, *Introduction to Special Education*, where teachers learn about the different disabilities. They learn little about special education or inclusion. Principals noted that teachers knew how to teach their content, but were challenged in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all students. All but one principal indicated that general education teachers and special education teachers needed additional training in positive and successful co-teaching

relationships. Nine principals reported that their school divisions conducted inclusion and co-teaching staff development throughout the school year. Three principals from two different school divisions did not offer any training; however there were no co-teaching inclusive settings in these schools.

Lack of Parent Knowledge

When asked about their experiences with parents that were surprising, sixteen of the elementary school principals related the challenges faced with parents to the parents' lack of knowledge regarding inclusion. Principals wanted to provide training and awareness sessions for parents. One principal explained:

Parents must be taught about the difference in each education setting and how we strive to make an instructional match between instruction and learning for their child. Once this is in place the relationship moves forward, and we are able to find educational matches for each child. (Group 3, p. 3)

Another principal in this focus group explained that her biggest challenge was educating parents about the array of service options for students with disabilities. She described:

I find myself educating parents about the benefits of inclusion for children. Parents new to our school are requesting self-contained. They are under the assumption that the students receive more attention in a self-contained setting. I have to educate them that a self-contained classroom may have students from K through grade 5. It is a slow process. However, I am able to make them slow down and think about it. (Group 3, p. 14)

Overall, most principals reported that parents were very cooperative. Eleven of the principals indicated that when talking with parents about inclusion, some parents feared that their

child would not be successful without extra support outside of the classroom. In some cases, they felt this was due to the parents themselves having special education services in the past when students with disabilities were pulled out. One principal suggested, “We need to change the mindset of parents by training them on what special education is and that there are an array of service options for students. They don’t always have to be isolated to meet their needs” (Group 2, p. 7).

General Observations

When discussing training and preparation courses, principals noted their concerns but did not appear to be overly fervent about this topic. Responses were brief and to the point. They all agreed with each other and appeared to be more concerned over their own lack of knowledge than anything else within this theme. Most believed that their school and school divisions were providing enough support for staff members. Although two school divisions did not provide any training in special education, the principals did not appear concerned.

The nonchalant reaction to the training and preparation concerns may be due to the fact that principals are constantly finding areas in their jobs where stakeholders were not trained properly. They also struggle with the concept of the possibility that one could actually be prepared for the day to day experiences in education. In regards to their responses regarding parents and their lack of knowledge, these comments came more from problem solving amongst themselves regarding placements than actual day to day challenges.

Staffing and Scheduling

Two of the biggest structural challenges for elementary school principals that were unintended consequences of the inclusion of students with disabilities are staffing and

scheduling. Much of the challenges are due to the lack of federal, state, and local funding that support the necessary staffing and scheduling to meet the needs of all students. Scheduling inclusion, ensuring students' accommodations are met within the general education classes, and providing a continuum of services continues to be a challenge for elementary school principals. In order to meet the instructional requirements of NCLB, these elementary school principals are restructuring service delivery models so that special education teachers can support content and instruction in general education classrooms for most students with disabilities. Principals reported that extra staffing, including teachers and paraprofessionals, to promote the successful implementation of inclusion is not reality. Four patterns emerged from the staffing and scheduling theme: lack of special education staff for the continuum of special education services; balancing class composition; lack of staff for support in the general education setting; and lack of scheduled planning time.

Lack of Special Education Staff for the Continuum of Special Education Services

All elementary school principals interviewed agreed that one of the biggest unintended challenges facing principals in regards to special education is the lack of staff to support inclusion and the continuum of special education services. Federal and state funding does not provide adequate staffing to support inclusive settings, resource, and self-contained services. The funding formula is not based on types of services and models. Ten of the principals reported that they had a co-teaching model with a general education teacher and a special education teacher and limited options for resource and self-contained settings.

Principals of smaller elementary schools reported that they only had one or two special education teachers that serve five grade levels. In this case, inclusion settings did not have a special education teacher in the classroom. One principal reports, "Scheduling has been one of

the biggest challenges. It would really be great to have one special education teacher for each content area” (Group 2, p. 2). Another principal in the group agreed stating that he knew how difficult it was to “pull off” inclusion with personnel constraints since he had only one special education teacher in his entire building which serves six grade levels. He explained, “even if you want to do inclusion, you still have kids that have the whole spectrum of needs” (Group 2, p. 3). A third principal in the group also experienced the same issue stating:

When you have one special education teacher with students from kindergarten through fourth grade, it is nearly impossible to have her in every classroom. I don’t have enough aides either. With budget cuts, the aides have been the first to go. (Group 2, p. 3)

There was only principal that felt she had all the necessary supports and staffing for inclusion with a co-teaching model and had options for students needing resource or self-contained settings. She attributed this to the support provided by her division.

Balancing Class Composition

Principals in Group 1 voiced the difficulties faced in scheduling the correct balance of the students within an inclusive environment. The challenge is balancing the number of disabled students with the number of their non-disabled peers. Principals discussed the difficult decision on how to group the students. Some reported grouping the students by academic achievement, scheduling students with disabilities with the lower achievers or slow learners. Others felt that the students with disabilities need role models and therefore placed students with disabilities with above average and gifted learners. Different principals had differing opinions, some depending on size of their staff and school. One principal expressed her concern with what she called “stacking the deck”:

I think sometimes when we schedule kids in a co-taught class who don't have disabilities, we think, "Oh, he'll need extra help in there. We'll put Johnny in that class, because Johnny requires extra assistance or requires this or that." We end up with what I call "stacking the deck". So we don't end up having those typical developing age peers and those good role models in that co-taught class. (Group 1, p. 3)

Another principal agreed, "Sometimes when you put students in an inclusive setting where they really don't have a good role model, then I don't think they progress much" (Group 1, p. 3).

Participants in Groups 2 and 3 never brought up this concern; however members in Group 2 did discuss how they grouped their students with disabilities into inclusive settings. With three of the principals in Group 2 coming from very small schools, the options were very limited. One of the principals evenly distributed the students with disabilities throughout the grade level. Another principal, cluster grouped the students with the disabilities with the strongest general education teacher. While a third principal scheduled by ranges of academic achievement based on high/medium students and medium/low students whether they were students with disabilities or non-disabled. She supported this decision by limiting the wide range of achievement levels of the students within the classroom to support the teacher. All three of the previous examples were principals in small schools with only 1 to 3 students with disabilities per grade level.

Lack of Staff for Support in the General Education Setting

Special education staff and the use of the collaborative, co-teaching model continue to be a challenge for most elementary school principals. Three of the principals reported that due to the limited number of special education teachers within their buildings and dealing with budget cuts,

students with disabilities that are included in the general education setting are getting limited services from the general education teacher. As previously stated in the *Lack of Special Education Staff for Continuum of Special Education Services* section of this chapter, principals desperately need additional staff not only to meet the needs of students in resource and self-contained settings, but within the general education setting as well. Principals all agreed that in order for students with disabilities to successfully achieve, socially and academically, support within the general education setting is crucial. This was consistent across focus groups. One principal explained:

We are trying to really meet the needs of all the students and to make sure that you have, I guess, appropriate personnel in the room to actually meet the needs of the students. Accommodations and those types of things are needed. (Group 1, p. 1)

Lack of Planning Time

One common complaint from teachers and principals alike is that there is not enough planning time for teachers, especially when it comes to inclusive and co-teaching situations. Elementary school principals from all three focus groups expressed the difficulties in providing common planning time for the general education teacher(s) and the special education teacher(s) to plan ahead to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom. One principal reported that special education teachers often become burned-out from having to plan and collaborate with so many different general education teachers. Between planning and providing services to students on their caseloads, without support and careful planning by school administration, special education teachers can easily become stressed.

As one principal stated, “Planning is the answer. Planning is the key” (Group 1, p. 3). Another principal responded, “You mean planning together” (Group 1, p. 3). Principals report that without this common and ample planning time, special education teachers become much like paraprofessionals in the classroom. Therefore, elementary school principals are challenged to find daily common planning time for teachers on a daily basis.

General Observations

Principals across all three focus groups briefly expressed their frustration over limited staffing and scheduling options that were mostly out of their control. None of the participants belabored the points made; however, quickly stated their opinions and “wish lists” and moved on to the next topic. Although principals will voice their opinions on topics out of their control at the school level, they have learned to focus their time and attention on what they can control. All appeared to be in agreement with each other within focus groups and the same patterns surfaced throughout all three groups. This theme represents a negative unintended consequence of inclusion in elementary schools and without proper funding at the federal, state, and local levels will not improve.

Co-Teaching Conflicts

Co-teaching and collaborative relationship conflicts are the primary challenge facing elementary school principals on a daily basis. However, unlike staffing; this negative unintended consequence is within the control of the principal. Teachers have reported that they had worked in co-teaching settings, but were uncomfortable due to the lack of planning, conflict of personalities, and limited support for special education staff due to scheduling. Patterns that surfaced from the focus group discussions support these findings. Six patterns emerged from the responses: personality conflict, roles and responsibilities, teacher ownership, teachers being

territorial over content or students, lack of planning together, and the special education teacher acting as an aide instead of a teacher.

Personality Conflicts

Elementary school principals in all three groups reported that one of the biggest challenges in working with including students with disabilities in the general education setting is the personality conflicts between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher. One principal stated, “I’ve been in the middle of fighting partners and they have to learn to do their own problem solving and a lot of people are not good at conflict resolution and need a third party” (Group 1, p. 7). Another principal discussed the difficulty in pairing the right two people together and considered getting teacher input on co-teaching partners. She explained, “I think the selection of the co-teaching pairs gets really, really difficult. I have often wondered since I’ve never seen the teachers have any voice in selecting the teaching partner, this is always done administratively, if teacher input would help” (Group 1, p. 7). However, principals discussed the difficulty with this since principals are required to meet the standards for highly qualified teachers and have a limited number of staff. A principal in Group 2 reported that co-teacher pairs “definitely have to be a personality fit so they can work together. Because if you put two people together that don’t get along, it is not going to be effective for anybody” (Group 2, p. 3). Another principal in the group agreed:

It’s hard to be kind of creative with schedules and match up the right people; otherwise, that is exactly what you end up with. I mean, most people that teach have a pretty strong personality. If you don’t, you can’t teach! (Group 2, p. 3)

Another principal expressed her surprise at how difficult it appeared for two professionals to work closely together and get along. She and another principal from another focus group compared the relationship of co-teaching to a marriage. She further explained that when two people are married they don't always get along; however they learn to work things out by building on each other's strengths and weaknesses. She also reminded everyone that this partnership differed from a marriage in the fact that there was no divorcing each other. One principal believed that many of the conflicts stemmed from poor communication skills and once found success. She explained:

A general education teacher once came to me and said that she had some criticisms and complaints about the special education teacher. So I sat down and talked with the teacher about what she should do. I just kind of tried to guide her into the ways to sit the other teacher down and just have a frank discussion. I really did not think she was going to be able to do it and would need administration for mediation. She came back into my office and said, "I did it, I sat down and had a conversation and now we understand each other."

I find that many teachers fear sitting down with each other in conflict." (Group 1, p. 10)

Roles and Responsibilities

Elementary school principals across focus groups indicated that the roles and responsibilities of the special education teacher and the general education teacher in inclusive settings were not clearly defined. Without proper expectations, training, and planning time, the special education teacher often appears as the general education teacher's aide instead of a teacher and/or conflicts arise due to not knowing each other's roles and responsibilities. A principal in Group 1 reported:

The SPED teacher looks at inclusion as that she is the person involved in there that providing the services and that she's not really per se the teacher. Who's the one to one? Who's going to be delivering the instruction? Really they should be teaming enough and teaching together and working together, but what you find is that it sounds like the teacher goes in and she almost forgets how to teach. (Group 1, p. 4)

One principal reported the perceptions of co-teaching in her school were:

The perceptions were that the general education teacher would be the teacher and the special education teacher the back up. I had to set the expectations that both the teachers have shared responsibilities and the importance of both seen as teachers. (Group 3, p. 5)

Another principal in the group stated that she had experienced true co-teaching where one could not tell the special education teacher from the general education teacher. In one of her classroom observations, she experienced two teachers working so well together that they finished each other's sentences. There were only three principals within the three focus groups that could say that they had experienced a co-teaching situation such as this. The principal went further to state that as a principal her role in supporting effective co-teaching relationships was ensuring teachers "were planning together, teaching, and supporting all students" (Group 3, p. 12).

Teacher Ownership

Elementary school principals in all three groups expressed concerns and successes with teacher ownership, both general education and special education, of teaching all students within an inclusive setting. A principal in the first focus group stated that once general education teachers had students with disabilities in their classrooms, they began to forget who was disabled and became much more accepting than she thought they would. Another principal is this same

group took ownership herself for inclusion and stated, “That’s really going to have to come from the administration to make sure that we set the tone of this isn’t your classroom, it’s both teachers’ classroom” (Group 1, p. 3).

One principal in the third focus group told the following success story:

When I first became principal in my current school, there were definitely a few general education teachers who were not quite on board with the fact that their classroom needed to be an appropriate environment for all students. I was very clear that this was my expectation for everyone and provided support, encouragement, and training for those staff members who needed it. One teacher was especially adamant that she had made it clear to the former principal that her room would not be a placement for any of our students in our autism program. Much to her credit, she did a 180 degree turnaround. Students were not only placed in her classroom, but she saw it as her personal mission to be sure they participated in every way possible and to achieve their potential. She loved them and was committed to their success. (Group 3, p. 1)

Another principal in the group experienced the same type of resistance with her special education teachers, she explained:

I was perplexed with special education teachers who did not want to participate in inclusion, who did not see it as a benefit for children or themselves. I did grow to understand it and it was not about children. It was about teachers who had not kept up with the best teaching practices and who were assigning students paperwork activities all day. It was a very depressing circumstance. The general education teachers wanted the students. They felt that they could teach them and just wanted the special education

teacher to support the behavior. They loved teaching all children. I am so appreciative of my staff now for being a 99% inclusion school. Only one student is in a self-contained setting. (Group 3, p. 14)

A principal in the second focus group discussed that her general education teachers had been very receptive with inclusion and having to collect evidence for VGLA assessments. However, she did experience the challenge of trying to change the mindset of the general education teachers to have ownership of the students with disabilities in classrooms.

Trying to get the general education teacher to realize that these students are theirs even if they have a case manager or go out for certain services, they are still their student and need to include them in all activities and anything they do, providing modifications and accommodate for them. (Group 2, p. 1)

One of the most complex unintended consequences of inclusion in the area of teacher ownership that emerged in the second focus group discussion was that when inclusion is implemented, general education teachers could no longer “get rid of students” in their classroom by trying to have them identified as needing special education services. As one principal stated, “The special education students are going in the general education classroom, they are more everyone’s children rather than these are the ones that I can get rid of” (Group 2, p. 3).

Teachers Being Territorial

Many of the principals experienced both the general education teacher and the special education teacher being territorial over the learning of students with disabilities. As one participant indicated, “Teachers are very territorial folks because for years have worked alone in isolation” (Group 1, p. 2). A principal in another focus group reported:

You have the general education teacher not wanting to let the special education teacher give instruction because they say, “Well, my name is on this board; therefore, I am going to be the one that will deliver the instruction”. (Group 2, p. 4)

Although some found the general education teacher territorial over the content due to assessment results being identified by his/her name, most of the territorial issues stemmed from the inability of the special education teacher being able to “let go” of students on their caseloads. One principal noted explained:

Now the special education teacher on the other side has been very territorial with the mindset of, “those are my kids”. I think that has been the bigger problem in my dealing with special education and inclusion because those students have been their kids for so long and they want to work individually with them. (Group 2, p. 3)

Lack of Planning Together

This pattern was included under the themes of scheduling and co-teaching conflicts due to the lack of planning under different circumstances. Under scheduling, principals discussed the lack of planning due to scheduling conflicts or limited staffing. Under the co-teaching theme, the lack of planning together refers to the fact that there is a common planning time established, but teachers are not using the time effectively. One principal said in frustration, “I’ve just witnessed that it’s hard to get people to plan together and I don’t know why that is” (Group 1, p. 3).

In the first focus group, principals discussed the challenge of the special education and general education teacher not planning effectively. As one principal explained:

I think planning is the answer to effective co-teaching. Planning is key to know what teacher one does and to know what teacher two does. To plan that way you have to get

some kind of graphic organizer to lesson plan where each is so clear on who does what and that there is a constant balancing. (Group 1, p. 3)

Special Education Teacher As Aide

Principals in all three focus groups reported that they had experienced the special education teacher acting in the role of a teacher's aide instead of a teacher. They also reported many different reasons for this: lack of training; lack of planning; lack of knowledge regarding the roles and responsibilities of the teachers; lack of ownership of the special education teacher; general education teachers being territorial; and/or the special education teacher not being knowledgeable of the content. One participant reported, "I have experienced that some teachers do not want another teacher in the room teaching and have had some treat the special education teacher as an aide" (Group 3, p. 12).

Another principal explained that she hadn't had much success with co-teaching. While observing she has found, "It's mostly the teacher leading and the SPED teacher just sits in the back and comes in when she sees the child struggling" (Group 2, p. 4). A principal in the first focus group stated that she has seen "a lot of general education teachers and an aide. In a sense, I think it hurts the kids" (Group 1, p. 2). Another member of the group agreed stating that an unintended negative consequence for one reason or another was that the special educator, "ends up giving up his or her role as a teacher and becomes an accommodation provider" (Group 1, p. 2). A principal followed this with adding the special education teacher becomes either an "accommodation provider" or a "behavior manager".

General Observations

Overall, elementary school principals were most concerned and frustrated with the personality conflicts and lack of shared teaching in inclusive settings within their buildings. Although difficult to deal with on a day to day basis, the issues appear to be outcomes of the other patterns that surfaced under the theme of co-teaching conflicts coupled with the lack of knowledge of all stakeholders. Undefined roles and responsibilities, lack of teacher ownership and planning time, territorial teachers, and the lack of proper training lead to relationship conflicts and unbalanced co-teaching.

Elementary school principals in the first focus group were the most vocal and spent the most time discussing their concerns with co-teaching. This is due to the fact that they all had co-teaching models within their schools; therefore are experiencing this challenge more than participants in Group 2. Although all 5 of the participants in Group 3 had co-teaching models, most of their experiences were positive. Through listening to their statements, elementary principals in Group 3 appeared to have taken more ownership of building the culture of inclusion within their buildings. This may explain why they experienced more success stories stemming from their initial challenges within this theme.

With only half of the participants in Group 2 having co-teaching settings, most of the discussion focused on teacher ownership and teachers being territorial. Most were frustrated with establishing general education teacher ownership and having special education teachers “let go” of students with disabilities.

All of the challenges the participants discussed within the theme of co-teaching that are personnel related such as personality conflicts and teacher ownership are unintended

consequences of inclusion. Principals enter leadership roles assuming that professionals can work together, be amicable, communicate, and put student needs before their own. Quickly, principals find this is not necessarily true and have to be prepared to build a culture for inclusion through educating stakeholders, setting expectations, defining roles and responsibilities, and providing the necessary supports.

Discipline

One of the intended benefits of the inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education environment is improved social and behavioral outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Most of the elementary school principals reported social benefits including observing and emulating the behavior of others and an increase in self-esteem for students with disabilities. The theme of discipline and social skills emerged, although briefly in each group with different patterns, in all three focus groups. The patterns within this theme were: improved discipline and social skills; lack of behavioral supports; and differing behavioral consequences for students with disabilities.

Improved Discipline and Social Skills

Two of the three focus groups had discussions involving the improved discipline and social skills for students with disabilities within the general education setting. A principal in the third group told about her favorite success story:

One of our students who struggled with some very physical and difficult to manage behaviors made so much progress over the course of several years, partially spurred by his desire to be able to be with his “friends” in gen. ed., that he ended his fifth grade year

spending the vast majority of the day in his regular 5th grade classroom and meeting with great success. (Group 3, p. 2)

Five principals in the first session discussed improved social and behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities due to the fact that they had non-disabled peers as models in inclusive settings. One principal explained:

In the inclusion setting, students have a model and that model helps to encourage them to do better because they actually have someone to mimic. Sometimes when you put students in a setting where they don't have a model, they don't progress as much. (Group 1, p. 2)

Principals in the group agreed. One added, "It's better to have them in inclusive settings so they don't feed off of each other. In most cases the behavior improves for students with disabilities once included with their peers" (Group 1, p. 6). Although the second focus group discussed improved academic outcomes, the behavioral and social discussions were more negative than positive due to the lack of behavioral supports in the general education environment.

Lack of Behavioral Supports in General Education Setting

Participants in two of the three focus groups reported concerns with the lack of behavioral supports in the inclusive setting. Members from the third focus group did not discuss negative issues concerning behaviors in the general education setting, however, did indicate that inclusive settings were not appropriate for all students with disabilities for whatever reason; academic, behavioral, or social. One principal shared her concerns with the welfare of all students when dealing with the behavior issue of a particular student with an IEP. She explained that previously a student may have been used to having more behavioral support in a very small

group of students or even in an individualized setting. When included in the general education setting, the principal has to look out for the welfare of the other students in the class.

Another principal in the second focus group had the same concern. She explained, “I have had some challenges. It’s been a safety issue, having them in there and we have to pull them out until their behavior gets under control until we wean them back” (Group 2, p. 2). The same principal later reported that behavior was her biggest challenge in her role as principal in regards to inclusion:

The biggest challenge is the behavior. I have gotten used to it now. But in the beginning it was like, Wow! They just get so upset and I guess realizing how upset a child gets and how even little ones can get so upset. They can’t calm down. I mean they just have to play out. (Group 2, p. 16)

Differing Behavioral Consequences

Only participants in the second focus group discussed the difficulty in explaining the differing behavioral consequences for students with disabilities compared to their non-disabled peers to parents, students, and teachers. One principal told the group, “I’ve encountered issues of the discipline practices when a child with a disability does something and does not get the same punishment for it that a child without a disability may have gotten” (Group 2, p. 16). However, principals in the first focus group did have a discussion regarding teaching equity to students in the general education setting. One principal explained that not all students need the same accommodations, behavioral supports, or consequences in order to achieve the same outcome. Having students with disabilities included in the general education setting, teaches all students and staff within the classroom and school about equity in situations.

General Observations

There was very little discussion concerning discipline within the three focus groups. However, this theme and patterns were included because despite the briefness of the discussion, the two individuals who reported discipline as a concern did mention it as their biggest challenge. It appeared to be a daily challenge for these individual principals. No behavior supports in the general education setting and differing consequences have resulted in unintended consequences for them. The reports of improved behavioral and social skills, although positive, are intended consequences.

Document Review

Each focus group participant was asked to provide school and/or division level documentation, if possible, that stated the philosophy or procedures concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities. Each school and division website was also reviewed prior to each focus group session to guide questions relative to the document review during the focus group session. There were minimal documents provided by participants as well and limited information obtained from school and division websites regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities.

According to IDEA, each division has a local procedural annual plan that must be in compliance with IDEA federal law and the Virginia Special Education Regulations. This annual plan is approved by the local school board and then submitted and approved by the Virginia Department of Education. Each school must follow these structural laws, regulations, policies, and procedures. Therefore, all the participants had division level documents in regards to special education for structural capacity.

Eight out of the 15 school divisions had information regarding special education posted on their division websites. None of the school level websites had information regarding special education other than staff listings. Four of the 8 divisions had the division's philosophy, mission, or vision regarding special education posted. One of these division's philosophy included the statement of mainstreaming or including students with disabilities in the general education setting. Philosophical statements from the other three divisions consisted of a statement about offering the continuum of special education services and meeting the unique individualized needs of students. Two of the divisions had information on their websites regarding staff development for inclusion and the co-teaching model. One division had the number of staff by special education category listed on the special education department website.

Five of the elementary school principals provided documents at the focus group session. Ten of the participants stated that they were unable to provide any documents and two forgot to bring documents. Documents provided consisted of a staff development manual, special education department minutes, master schedules, and co-teaching lesson plan templates. Out of the provided documents, one document was at the division level, three were at the school level, and one at the special education department level.

The staff development manual provided referenced workshops held throughout the division for the school year. Workshops related to the inclusion of students with disabilities included two sessions of co-teaching. Other workshops related to special education and meeting the needs of diverse learners were also listed, but were not specific to inclusion and/or co-teaching. One participant provided special education department minutes completed at the school level. Co-teaching and inclusion had been discussed at the meeting. Two participants brought master schedules from their schools proving that there was common planning time scheduled in

the day for co-teachers as well as the schedule of co-taught classes. Co-teaching and inclusion lesson plan templates were also provided documenting that co-planning was taking place. One principal reported that these lesson plans were submitted to him weekly, reviewed, and returned in order to monitor the instruction and teaching model.

Participants were apologetic and appeared embarrassed not to be able to provide documents for the document review. One elementary school principal began verbally listing documents that she could develop in the future such as co-teaching expectations and procedures and co-teaching lesson plan formats. Several sounded exasperated when they observed the documents that a few of the principals provided stating that they could have brought similar documents. One principal became defensive about not bringing any documents and blamed the division. The moderator and assistant moderator assured each participant before each focus group session that it was okay and not uncommon if documents were not provided.

Although, the participants provided minimal amounts of documents and there was little information provided on school and division websites, this was not unexpected to the researcher. School administrators have to be very careful with documentation in regards to special education and must appear to offer a continuum of special education services. Although there is a push for inclusion through NCLB and IDEA, special education is defined as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability” (McLaughlin & Nolet, 2004, p. 103). Students with disabilities are to have individualized plans for their unique needs; therefore it would be rare for school administrators to put any procedures in place to generalize special education services.

Summary of the Findings

Similar themes emerged throughout the focus groups. Such themes surrounded the inclusion/LRE debate, the pressures of accountability, the lack of knowledge of special education and inclusion, staffing and scheduling, co-teaching conflicts; and discipline. Patterns within these themes portrayed how elementary school principals in the focus groups experienced much of the same challenges and successes in regards to inclusion despite the differences in demographics, experience, location or size of the division and/or school, inclusive model, or the number of special education staff within the building. Most appeared to have the same challenges and most reported both academic and social successes with the implementation of inclusion.

Differences only appeared in the level of concern within the patterns that surfaced based on the size of the school and the inclusion model. The document review provided little data to support the themes or patterns that emerged from the focus group data. However, it did confirm that due to the unique needs and individualized planning needed for educating students with disabilities that philosophies and procedures for implementing inclusion would not be in writing or institutionalized. The review did support the finding of needed training for stakeholders since only two divisions had documents related to staff development in the areas of inclusion and/or co-teaching.

Chapter Summary

A sample of elementary school principals in Virginia described their experiences with and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities as mostly positive for students with disabilities, sharing their individual success stories, and reporting their students' improved academic, social, and behavioral outcomes. Most

self-reported successes and positives are actually the intended outcomes of inclusion. Elementary school principals were surprised by their passionate responses concerning their beliefs in the inclusion of students with disabilities, this proving how much they had grown as educators.

These same elementary school principals also expressed their concerns and described their daily challenges with the unintended consequences of inclusion. In the area of human capacity, they faced co-teaching conflicts with personality conflicts, undefined roles and responsibilities, teachers being territorial, and lack of teacher knowledge and ownership. These principals battled with their own lack of knowledge as well as with parent perceptions and misconceptions. In the areas of organizational and structural capacity, principals reported that there were limited special education service options for students with disabilities. Principals also struggled with co-teaching conflicts, limited service options, difficulty in collecting VGLA evidence, lack of staff development, and scheduling difficulties including balancing the class composition of an inclusion class. In the area of resource capacity, the only unintended consequence and challenge with inclusion these elementary school principals dealt with is the need for additional special education staff. This would provide support for students with disabilities in the general education setting and offer other special education service options. This would also provide support and assist with scheduling issues. Finally, these elementary school principals testify that all of these challenges are expanding their roles and responsibilities as principal.

These elementary school principals have had to teach themselves about special education law and inclusion as well as develop staff development for teachers and trainings for parents. They have had to prepare co-teachers for collaborative teaching and learn how to become mediators in conflict resolution. These elementary school principals have also had to be creative

in scheduling inclusive settings with limited staff, collecting VGLA evidence, and determining how to best meet the needs of students with disabilities without, in most cases, service options.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to provide a description of elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. This study involved the collection of data through focus group discussions with a sample of elementary school principals in Virginia and document analysis. Focus group questions were guided by the review of literature and the theoretical framework of this study, which is based on the four types of educational capacity developed by Florian et al. (2000). Descriptions of the common themes and patterns were reported after data analysis.

This chapter begins by a discussion of results and a description of conclusions drawn from the data. Following this discussion, implications and recommendations for practitioners and policy makers are described. Next, recommendations for future research are discussed, and finally, personal reflections about this study are shared.

Discussion

The theoretical framework of this study was based on the four types of capacity in educational systems developed by Florian et al. (2000). The four types of capacity include human, organizational, structural, and resource. These four areas guided the development of the questions asked of the elementary school principals that participated in the focus groups as well as the document review. Data collected from these focus groups were then used to illustrate how elementary school principals describe their experiences with and views of the unintended consequences of implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities. More specifically, focus group and document review data were used to examine: (a) How are the lives of students

and school personnel affected? (b) How are organizational and structural practices within the school affected? (c) How are fiscal and material resources affected? (d) How do these experiences affect the elementary school principal?

Human Capacity

Human capacity deals with the dispositions, knowledge, skills, and self-perceptions of the people within the school division. According to elementary school principals in this study, challenges within the human capacity category consisted of their own perceptions, general and special educator perceptions, and parent perceptions. These principals were also concerned with their own lack of knowledge. It was found that these elementary school principals view inclusion of students with disabilities as the right things to do for most students. However, they also felt that inclusion was not the LRE for all disabled students indicating that some students need special education services in a resource or self-contained setting. These findings are in agreement with Davis and Maheady (1991) and Connor and Ferri (2007) who suggested that principals had positive attitudes concerning inclusion; however still reported that pull-out services were needed for certain students.

Elementary school principals in this study have experienced improved academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities when integrated into the general education environment. This is supported by scholars who also reported social benefits (Burstein et al., 2004; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Renzaglia et al., 2003). They have also found improved leadership and tolerance from non-disabled students in inclusive classrooms which is also supported by Renzaglia et al. These elementary school principals described staff as having higher expectations for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. They have also found that teachers, both general education and special education, become better educators in inclusive settings through

collaboration and using hands-on and researched based instruction to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom.

As supported by the findings of Cline (1981) and Crockett and Kauffman (1999), one of the biggest challenges elementary school principals in this study face is their own lack of knowledge of special education law and inclusion. This finding is also consistent with research conducted by Hallinger (2007). Hallinger found that principals have accepted more responsibility regardless of whether they felt competent to perform it. However, these results did not support the findings of the study conducted by Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, and Schertz (2001a) indicating that the principal did not take ownership of inclusion. The elementary school principals in this study reported their own knowledge was lacking and that they were not prepared through their college preparation programs for administration to deal with special education and inclusion. They described their experiences as “learning as they go” and learning from their colleagues. They also reported that other stakeholders were not prepared in special education law and inclusion including parents, special education teachers, and general education teachers. However, these principals did not blame or deny ownership of this lack of knowledge.

Elementary school principals in this study had initially experienced difficulties with general education teachers not wanting students with disabilities in their classrooms; however most of the principals had cultivated an inclusive school environment and had general education teachers taking ownership in inclusive classrooms. Difficulties did occur when the general education teacher or the special education teacher became territorial over the students whether it was due to accountability or the “those are my kids” syndrome.

These elementary school principals did experience challenges when working with parents in regards to including students with disabilities into the general education setting. However, they had learned strategies in how to deal with parents by explaining the array of service options. Principals in this study recommended additional awareness training for parents.

Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity of an educational system deals with the relationships of the people within and outside of the organization. Elementary school principals in this study faced organizational challenges with co-teaching relationships and the pressures of accountability. Co-teaching conflicts were a major daily concern for elementary school principals. These principals described personality conflicts, lack of planning time, and undefined roles and responsibilities in co-teaching relationships. These findings support a study conducted by Lieberman (2002) which found collaborative relationships difficult for teachers because the child dictates the curriculum for students with disabilities. According to Phillips, Sapona, and Lubic (1995), challenges include the inability to communicate, failure to resolve teachers learning differences, and the inability to integrate students with disabilities and teaching. Principals in this study reported that more collaborative planning time was needed. This finding is supported by a study conducted by Danne et al. (2000).

Elementary school principals in this study described their experiences with the increasing pressures of accountability due to high-stakes testing mandates from NCLB and the Reauthorization of IDEA. These findings are in agreement with a study conducted by Crockett et al. (2007) in which principal feared losing their jobs. They are being evaluated based on student test scores including the scores of students with disabilities. There is also growing pressure to do

more or less Virginia Grade Level Alternate (VGLA) assessments, depending on the division, with greater accuracy. This is resulting in more monitoring from the central office level.

Structural Capacity

Structural capacity within the educational system deals with the procedures, policies, staff development, and curriculum. Elementary school principals in this study reported structural challenges in the areas of scheduling, collecting VGLA evidence, balancing class composition, and staff development. The lack of relevant training for all stakeholders and fewer placement options in scheduling are findings congruent with studies conducted by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) and Danne et al. (2000). These studies found that relevant training was needed for teachers and administrators and that there were fewer placement options with the implementation of inclusion due to staffing needs. Blase (2004) also found that successful instructional supervision was needed for effective teaching and learning. He emphasized the need for continuous staff development and developing teacher reflection. Only three elementary school principals in this study reported having division or school level staff development on the topic of special education, inclusion, or co-teaching. These principals also reported difficulties with teachers collecting VGLA evidence within the general education classroom, finding that many teachers had to pull students out of the general education setting to get the evidence defeating the purpose of inclusion.

Elementary school principals in this study also faced challenges with scheduling inclusion classes and common planning time for co-teachers. This was mainly due to limited staffing. Three principals had only one or two special education teachers within their buildings to work with five or six grade levels. Principals found that with the push for inclusion, there were limited service options for resource and self-contained services. This is supported by findings

from studies conducted by Baker and Zigmond (1995) and Kauffman (1995). The class balance between the ratio of non-disabled students to the disabled students within a general education setting was another scheduling difficulty for principals. Decisions regarding the ratio of students varied depending on the number of staff and students with disabilities and the philosophy of the principal.

Resource Capacity

Elementary school principals in this study reported staffing and scheduling concerns due to the lack of funding. In order to have the array of special education service options as indicated in IDEA, principals need additional staff to schedule special education staff within the general education setting for support as well as offer resource and self-contained settings. This is congruent with findings from a study conducted by Causton-Theoharis et al. (2005) which reported that extra staff was needed to promote the successful implementation of the inclusion of students with disabilities. Principals in this study did not report needing more materials, space, or accessibility to their buildings.

Conclusions

In this study, data concerning the elementary school principals' experiences and views of the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion were obtained from three focus group sessions and document analysis. Each of the six major themes that emerged during the focus group discussions fit into one or more of the four types of capacity in educational reform: human, organizational, structural, and resources. The results of this study corroborate as well as add to the findings of research studies discussed in the literature review. In general, the conclusions revealed that according to these elementary school principals, the unintended consequences of implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities are: limited staffing and

limited service options for students with disabilities; co-teaching conflicts; and the expanding role of the principal. Other themes and patterns emerged from the data; however most were either intended consequences of inclusion or were factors contributing to the overall unintended consequences.

Limited Staffing and Service Options for Students

Due to the increasing number of students with disabilities being included in the general education setting, most of the elementary school principals in this study are funneling human resources into the general education setting. Without additional staffing, this leaves these schools without the continuum of services options for students needing resource and self-contained settings. On the opposite spectrum, in order to keep resource and self-contained settings, some of the principals are including students with disabilities in the general education classroom without support from a special educator. This leaves the general educator attempting to provide special education services.

According to elementary school principals in all three focus groups, both situations are prohibiting certain students with disabilities from getting the special education services that are individualized to meet their unique needs. Other consequences reported from limited staff include teacher burn-out, lack of planning; and the inability to collect VGLA evidence.

In most cases, elementary school principals reported that additional funding was the only way to improve this situation. They need adequate special education staff to provide services in inclusive, resource, and self-contained settings. Principals reported needing one special education teacher per grade level and additional teachers for resource and self-contained settings. Some elementary school principals were losing special education paraprofessionals due to recent budget constraints. These elementary principals described the need to be conscientious and

creative with staffing and scheduling in order to offer the continuum of special education services that provide individualized instruction to meet the unique needs of students.

Co-teaching Conflicts

One of most shocking unintended consequences of including students with disabilities in the general education setting is the amount of time elementary school principals have to spend on co-teaching conflicts. Many of the challenges principals discussed in the focus group sessions directly relate to the reason conflict exists between the regular education teacher and the special education teacher. For these elementary school principals, the foundation for many of the co-teaching issues was the lack of knowledge and understanding of special education and inclusion on the part of both the general education teacher and the special education teacher. According to the participants, with the addition of undefined roles, responsibilities, and expectations for co-teaching partners and the lack of planning time together, conflict surfaced.

Some of these elementary school principals were able to diminish co-teaching conflicts by cultivating a culture of high expectations for all students. Through building human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity within the school, these principals were able to provide proper training and on-going staff development for co-teachers, require planning together, and set the tone and expectations for co-teaching. Co-teacher partners had their roles and responsibilities defined and learned to build on one another's strengths and weaknesses.

The Expanding Role of the Elementary School Principal

The final conclusion drawn from the study is that the role of these elementary school principals was constantly evolving and expanding with increasing pressures of accountability. Principals in this study that were experiencing success with inclusion explained in detail how they cultivated a culture for inclusion, built capacity, and provided necessary supports to make

inclusion successful. As found in a study conducted by Crockett et al. (2007) and Hallinger (2007), these areas have affected elementary school principals by intensifying the pressures of accountability for student achievement, increased demands for administrative support, and expanding responsibilities for administering special education. Elementary school principals who described finding success with the inclusion of students with disabilities, understood their role as principal in building human, organizational, structural, and resource capacity within their schools.

Human Capacity

In order to improve the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting, these elementary school principals built upon the human capacity within the building which expanded their roles and responsibilities as principals. To improve perceptions and the lack of knowledge, these principals set the expectations and provided the necessary training for inclusion and co-teaching. They cultivated the culture of high expectations, inclusion, and co-teaching. Blase (2004) supported this finding and emphasized the importance of supporting and shared leadership; shared values and vision; and collaborative learning.

Organizational and Structural Capacity

The elementary school principals involved in this study attempted to build the organizational and structural capacity within their building in order to meet the needs of all students. These principals continued to struggle with providing job embedded and continuous staff development, defining co-teaching roles and responsibilities, and developing balanced schedules that include common planning time for co-teaching partners that are necessary for the success of inclusive education. Planning time was incorporated into the master schedule and monitored by some of the principals. These principals require additional staff so that the

schedule accommodates co-teaching inclusive classes, resource classes, and self-contained settings in order to offer the continuum of special education services.

Resources Capacity

The elementary school principals involved in this study had to be creative and frugal with limited staffing and staff development resources. They planned and prioritized the allocation of these limited resources by student needs and goals of the school. In order to provide the continuum of special education services, principals described needing additional special education staff and the need of a process and platform to advocate for their needs.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Several implications and recommendations for practice that may be valuable for school administrators, special education administrators, and policy makers are listed below. The implications are drawn from self-reported data, and the recommendations are qualified in that regard as well. They are as follows:

1. *Implication:* When school-wide beliefs, values, expectations, goals, and structures are clearly defined and monitored for inclusion and co-teaching models so that stakeholders understand their roles and responsibilities to all students, co-teaching conflicts and challenges will decrease for elementary school principals and student achievement for all students will increase.

Recommendations: By institutionalizing staff development and procedures for inclusion and co-teaching models at the state and/or division level, all stakeholders including teachers and principals would understand the expectations, roles, and responsibilities for successful inclusion. Through developing a comprehensive school reform plan for implementing inclusion and co-teaching models, elementary school principals can

cultivate a culture of inclusion. This plan includes building human capacity through establishing common beliefs, values, expectations and goals regarding inclusion and co-teaching; organizational capacity by clearly defining co-teaching roles and responsibilities and providing common planning time for teachers working in inclusive settings that is monitored by the principal; structural capacity through coordinated staff development for themselves, general education teachers, special education teachers, and parents; and resource capacity with adequate special education staffing in order to provide the continuum of special education services and provide the necessary resources to support inclusion and co-teaching. This comprehensive plan would also include a staff needs assessment, timeline, and persons responsible for different aspects of the plan. This is supported by Blase (2004) who found that principals needed to promote supportive and shared leadership and shared values and vision.

2. *Implication:* Individualized instruction in order to meet the unique needs of students with disabilities can be provided when a continuum of special education services is available.

Recommendation: Adequate staff can provide inclusive education, resource, and self-contained settings for students with disabilities. In most cases, additional funding is needed. Principals can advocate for their needs by providing a needs assessment and comprehensive school plan for documentation. Becoming involved in public hearings regarding special education, specifically regarding the funding formula is recommended to give elementary school principals the voice and platform equal to that of special education advocates.

3. *Implication:* Regular education teachers and special education teachers collaborate and work together as a team of professionals in order to meet the needs of all students within classrooms.

Recommendation: By focusing on the needs of co-teaching partners, staff development will be more practical, applicable, and job-embedded for staff. Attending the same training allows special education teachers and general education teachers to work and plan collaboratively. Institutionalizing this staff development at the state and local level would provide structural capacity for stakeholders. Blase (2004) emphasized that improved practices required a focus on group processes and collegial assistance among educators. He also promoted collective learning, application of learning, and sharing of personal practices for adult learning. Partners will learn how to collaboratively plan building on their strengths and weaknesses, when roles and responsibilities are defined and conflict resolution strategies are learned. Improved teaching will occur when co-teachers learn how to provide and accept reflective feedback. Allowing teacher input for co-teaching partnerships, when applicable, would decrease personality conflicts in co-teaching pairs. Central office administration and elementary school principals would still have to keep in mind highly qualified mandates of NCLB and IDEA.

4. *Implication:* When co-teachers and teachers working in inclusive settings plan together, co-teaching conflicts decrease and all students within the general education setting progress academically and socially.

Recommendation: Elementary school principals can find ways to provide the time needed for special and general education to plan together. Several suggestions for providing common planning time are through providing coverage in the classroom while

teachers plan by using paraprofessionals, student teachers/practicum students, and community volunteers. Through monitoring systems such as checking collaborative lesson plans, principals can assess whether collaborative planning has occurred.

5. *Implication:* When all key players including elementary school principals, special education teachers, general education teachers, and parents are well prepared for their positions and have on-going staff development and coaching in the areas of special education law, inclusion, and co-teaching, elementary school principals will have less human, organizational, and structural capacity challenges.

Recommendation: Applicable coursework in the areas of inclusion, special education law, and co-teaching through college and university preparation programs for administrators, general education teachers, and special education teachers would better prepare stakeholders. Including instruction in procedures and processes for co-teaching models, planning, relationships, and problem solving would assist principals in dealing with co-teaching conflicts. According to Blase (2004), administrators and teachers should be sensitive to the process of professional growth and continuous improvement and train on observing and reflective practice. He also reported that professional development should be job embedded. Principals can assist by developing and providing comprehensive and systematic staff development for teachers in regards to special education. This is congruent with findings from research conducted by Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) noting teacher supervision and evaluation, staff development, and quality control as being essential leadership responsibilities. Developing on-going awareness workshops and training opportunities for parents on special education law and the continuum of special education services would assist in the relationship between educators and parents

as well as provide parents with a foundation for decision making in regards to special education and their children.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings from this study are limited in their application because of the small number of participants and because of the self-reported nature of the data derived from the focus group interviews. However, future researchers are encouraged to replicate this study to see if similar results are described by other elementary school principals or by other levels of school administrators. Middle school, high school, or central office administrators may have different experiences and views of in the unintended consequences of implementing inclusion within their schools or division. Replicating this study with general or special education teachers would be beneficial.

The data in this study were self-reported by elementary school principals. In future studies, findings could be corroborated by observing elementary school principals involved in the activities of leading inclusive changes and leading special education in their schools. This would provide more detailed descriptions and verification of the reported data and success of inclusion.

Finally, future researchers could examine the backgrounds and experiences of administrators in greater depth. An organizational study such as this could facilitate discussion of educational leadership and special education so that school administrators could become prepared and empowered for their complex roles in supporting the academic and social needs of a wide range of students.

Personal Reflections on the Research Process

Reflecting on the process used to conduct this study, I can now identify some aspects that I think should be modified if future researchers were to replicate this study. First, I would not try to schedule focus group sessions with elementary school principals in August or September. In order to conduct focus group sessions at this time, contact had to be made with principals in July. This was difficult due to fact that many elementary school principals are not in their schools consistently during the summer. Trying to confirm focus group session dates was also difficult due to this timing. With the opening of schools differing from division to division, it was difficult scheduling a date and time that did not conflict with staff development, the pre-service week, or the first two weeks of school. Elementary school principals cannot afford to be away from their building during this time period. The best time period to try to schedule three focus groups with elementary school principals would have been during an elementary school principal state or national conference.

Second, during the focus group interviews, I would do a better job of keeping the conversation on the unintended consequences of inclusion. Much of the conversations revolved around the intended outcomes of inclusion. I did not stop the conversations in fear that I would offend participants. In addition, future researchers would want to do a better job defining unintended consequences.

Finally, I would not ask participants to bring documents that related to inclusion to the focus group session. Documents such as this rarely exist due to the nature of special education with the continuum of services and the fear of litigation. I also believe that this may have kept some participants from participating.

Concluding Statements

With the increasing numbers of students with disabilities being included in general education settings and the mounting pressures of accountability for students with disabilities through NCLB and IDEA, the role of the elementary school principal is expanding and becoming more challenging in regards to implementing the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education setting. The self-reported experiences and views of the unintended consequences of inclusion described by elementary school principals resulted in several negative unintended consequences such as limited special education services and co-teaching conflicts. Participants reported and shared many success and positive consequences in regards to inclusion; however, many of these positives were the foundation and intended outcomes of inclusion.

Each of the unintended consequences and challenges experienced by elementary school principals correlated with one of the educational reform capacity categories developed by Florian et al. (2000). In looking at the success stories of participating elementary school principals, the researcher concluded that the role of the elementary school principal plays a key role in school-wide reform with the successful implementation of inclusion.

My advice to elementary school principals is that although Hallinger (2007) reported that “principals occupy a middle management position in which their authority to command is severely limited” (p. 4); research does indicate that through supportive, shared leadership, elementary school principals can develop shared values and vision within their schools, improve professional practice, and promote collaborative work environments and classrooms (Morrissey & Cowan, 2000). As Morrissey and Cowan reported, principals need to learn to balance “the delicate interaction between support and pressure by letting go of traditional role expectations and also by encouraging teachers to take on new roles” (p. 20).

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APPENDIX A

ELEMENTARY PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT LETTER

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

Elementary Principal Participant Name: _____

Dear Elementary Principal,

You are invited to take part in a study which will engage elementary school principals across Virginia in discussion to describe and analyze your perspectives regarding how the inclusion of students with disabilities has affected you in your role of principals in which you have not anticipated. As a former elementary school principal and special education director, I want to learn more about the benefits and challenges of the expectation to include all students with disabilities into general education settings. I believe that educators, parents, and policy makers can benefit from hearing the voices of elementary school principals.

This qualitative study will consist of focus group interviews and document analysis. Each group will consist of six to ten elementary school principals and last approximately 90 minutes. An assistant moderator will help in the logistics of the session as well as intensive note taking and data analysis after each interview session. During each focus group session, all participants will be asked to discuss experiences about how the inclusion of students with disabilities has affected them in ways they had not expected or anticipated. In addition to answering interview questions, participants are asked to bring available documents stating the philosophy or procedures regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities from the school or division level.

The focus group session in which you are invited to participate will be conducted in a location within 50 miles from you. Participation is voluntary and you may opt out at any time. The session will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and reviewed for accuracy by each participant. After the audio-recording is transcribed, the transcripts will be electronically sent to you for review for accuracy. With your permission, I will do a follow-up call to see if any details need clarification. Only my advisor, the assistant moderator, a transcriber, and I will have access to the audio-recordings and the transcripts of the group interview. The transcriber and assistant moderator will be required to sign a confidentiality agreement.

I do not believe that you will encounter any identified risks during or upon completion of this study. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time under no penalty.

Thank you for your assistance. I will contact you within the next week to determine interest in participation in this study. Please contact me at 434-294-3503 or agriffin@vt.edu if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Griffin
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Students (0302)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-9730

Penny Burge, Ph.D., Professor
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Students (0302)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-9730

APPENDIX B

PHONE CONFERENCE SCRIPT FOR PARTICIPANT: ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

Participant Name: _____

1. Introduce self, refer to participant letter sent one week prior to phone call, and ask permission to inform participant about the study.
2. The text in the participant letter will be used for details during the phone conversation.
3. Explain research purpose and importance of the study.
4. Explain procedures of the study.
5. Ask if willing to participate in the study.
6. Explain to expect a confirmation letter, e-mail, and phone call providing information on date, time, and location of focus group session.
7. Ask to bring any documents that states the philosophy or procedures regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities within the school and/or division.
8. Explain that the participant may still participate even if there is no document to bring to the focus group session.
9. Thank the participant for their time and willingness to participate.

APPENDIX C

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL CONFIRMATION LETTER

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

Dear Elementary School Principal,

I would like to thank you for accepting my invitation to discuss your perspectives on how the inclusion of students with disabilities has affected you as an elementary school principal in ways you had not anticipated. As I have previously stated, I believe that educators, parents, and policy makers can benefit from hearing the voices of elementary school principals on this issue.

The focus group session will be held on _____, at _____. The meeting will be held in the _____ and last approximately 90 minutes. Refreshments will be served.

The focus group will consist of six to ten elementary school principals. We will discuss your personal experiences concerning how the inclusion of students with disabilities has affected you in ways you had not expected or anticipated. Please bring any documents you have that state the philosophy or procedures for the inclusion of students with disabilities from the school and/or division level. You may still participate if there are no documents of this nature.

Again, thank you for your time and participation. I look forward to meeting you. If you have any questions or are unable to attend for some reason, please call and let me know as soon as possible. I can be reached by phone at 434-294-3503 or e-mail at agriffin@vt.edu.

Sincerely,

Amy W. Griffin
Doctoral Candidate
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Students (0302)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-9730

APPENDIX D

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPANTS OF INVESTIGATIVE PROJECTS:

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL PARTICIPANT FORM

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigators: Amy W. Griffin, Penny Burge (faculty advisor)

Purpose of this Research/Project

Elementary principals are being challenged to include all students with disabilities into general education settings. This study is designed to engage elementary school principals in discussion to describe and analyze their perspectives regarding how inclusion has affected them in their roles as principals in ways they did not anticipate. I am asking you to participate in a focus group interview. Your participation is voluntary.

Procedures

You are asked to participate in a focus group interview. The group will consist of six to ten elementary principals from Virginia. A moderator will lead the discussion, which will last approximately 90 minutes. You will answer questions on how the inclusion of students with disabilities has affected you and your school in ways that you had not anticipated. The focus group will be audio-taped _____ (initial) and an assistant moderator will take notes. You are also asked to bring written copies of any documentation you have from the school or division level that states the philosophy or procedures regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities. If you would like the documents returned to you, please bring an addressed envelope.

Risks

There are no identified risks for participants who agree to participate in this study.

Benefits

There are no identified benefits for participants who agree to participate in this study. This study may help policy makers and school administrators make decisions regarding including students with disabilities in the general education setting as well as improving special education services for students with disabilities.

Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The discussion from the focus group will be audio-recorded and an assistant moderator will take notes during the questioning. Confidentiality regarding your answers will be protected by removing names and any other identifiers from the transcripts of the audio-recorded answers. The audio-recording, electronic copies, and hard copies of the focus group answers will be kept under lock and key. The key to the code of participants will be locked in a separate location than the other research materials.

Compensation

Participants will not be monetarily compensated for their contributions to this study.

Freedom to Withdraw

Participant involvement is voluntary. You are free to withdraw from this project at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any questions that are asked during the group discussion.

Approval of Research

This project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and by the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- To participate in a 90 minute focus group interview;
- To review the interview data for accuracy; and
- To provide any documents related to the philosophy or procedures for inclusion from the school or division level.

Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Signature

Date

Should I have any pertinent questions regarding this project or its conduct, I should contact:

<u>Amy W. Griffin, Investigator</u>	agriffin@vt.edu	434-294-3503
<u>Penny Burge, Faculty Advisor</u>	burge@vt.edu	540-231-9730
<u>David M. Moore, IRB Chair</u>	moored@vt.edu	540-231-4991

NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.

APPENDIX E

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT-ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

Title of Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

I, _____, understand that information pertaining to this research study is confidential. This confidentiality agreement serves to protect the privacy rights of study participants. All names of individuals and school divisions, conversations, or information gained about this study are not to be discussed with any individual or agency other than the researcher. Typed or handwritten data and information are also to be kept confidential. I agree to and accept the terms of this confidentiality agreement as verified by my signature.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX F

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT-ASSISTANT MODERATOR

Title of Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

I, _____, understand that information pertaining to this research study is confidential. This confidentiality agreement serves to protect the privacy rights of study participants. I agree to and accept the terms of this confidentiality agreement as verified by my signature.

All names of individuals and school systems, conversations, or written information gained about this study are not to be discussed with any individual or agency representative other than the researcher.

I understand that my role in this study is to take comprehensive notes, operate the audio-recorder, handle the environmental conditions and logistics, assist in analyzing data after each focus group and intergroup data, and act as a critical friend to the researcher.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX G

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT-TRANSCRIBER

Title of Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

I, _____, understand that information pertaining to this research study is confidential. This confidentiality agreement serves to protect the privacy rights of study participants. I agree to and accept the terms of this confidentiality agreement as verified by my signature.

All names of individuals and school systems, conversations, or written information gained about this study are not to be discussed with any individual or agency representative other than the researcher.

I understand that my role in this study is to transcribe, verbatim, the audio recordings of each focus group session. I understand that I am not to alter these recordings or add editorial comments to the written transcriptions. I understand that I am to transcribe the audio recording within an established timeframe and on a payment schedule as agreed upon by the researcher and myself.

Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX H

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

1. Confirmation Letter stating date, time, and location will be mailed two weeks prior to the focus group session. Followed by an e-mail and phone call.
2. A reminder phone call and e-mail will be given two days prior to focus group session.
3. The focus group interview will be conducted in a quiet room in a location within driving distance for participants.
4. Each member of the group will have a name tent to identify participants during the session.
5. The moderator will begin with introductions.
6. Guidelines for the interview will be reviewed prior to the start of the session:
 - a. The role of the moderator and assistant moderator will be explained.
 - b. Participants are asked to focus of the topic being discussed.
 - c. Participants are to remain respectful of others' responses but may express their opinions.
 - d. Participation is voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time.
 - e. The researcher will explain the session will be audio-recorded.
 - f. The researcher will explain how transcription will occur with names deleted.
 - g. Participants should ask the researcher questions to clear up any confusion.
 - h. Participants may choose not to answer some questions.
 - i. Participants may share their own experiences that come to mind when they hear another participants' response to a question.
 - j. The interview will take place in a relaxed atmosphere.

- k. The assistant moderator will collect the documents that participants were asked to bring.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Introduction:

Good afternoon and welcome to our focus group session. My name is Amy Griffin. I am the researcher in this study as well as the moderator for this session. Chip Jones is here with me as the assistant moderator for the group. He has been instrumental in preparing for today and will be taking notes during the session. He will also assist in data analysis. If you have brought any documents, please give those to Chip. Before we begin, I would like to thank you for your time and participation. I do know how busy principals are and how precious your time is during all times of the year.

There is a need to understand the challenges that elementary school principals are facing with the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting. In order to meet the instructional, accountability, and staff requirements of No Child Left Behind and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, elementary school principals are expected to include students with disabilities into general education settings. The purpose of this study is to engage you in discussion to describe your perspectives regarding how inclusion has affected you in your roles as principals in ways you had not anticipated, both positively and negatively. I believe it is imperative that educators, parents, and policy makers hear your voices in this matter.

You were invited to participate in this focus group because you are elementary principals with valuable insight. You have opinions that are important for us as educators to understand. Therefore, we encourage you to express yourselves. There are no right and wrong answers to the questions we will be discussing. Your feelings and perceptions may differ and that is okay. Please respectfully share your feelings even when they differ. We are just as interested in hearing positive comments as we are in negative.

We ask that only one person speak at a time. We are audio-taping the session. We will be on a first name basis, although names will not be reported in the findings. What you say in this session is and will remain confidential.

My role is to ask questions and listen. I will not be participating in the discussion and I want you to feel free to talk with one another. It is important that we hear from each of you because you all have different experiences. If at any time you need a break or have a questions, please feel free to tell us. Let's begin by going around the table and introducing ourselves. Please tell us your first name, what elementary school and division that you are principal, and something about yourself.

Primary Question:

- 1) Tell me how the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings has affected you in your role as principal in ways you had not anticipated.

Prompt Questions:

- a. Tell me about your experiences with your own attitude toward inclusion that may have surprised you. How has this affected your role as principal? (Human)
- b. Tell me about your experiences with the perceptions and attitudes of general and special education teachers toward inclusion that were unexpected. In what ways has this affected your role as principal? (Human, Organizational, Structural, Resource)
- c. Tell me about your experiences with parents concerning inclusion that were surprising to you. How has this affected your role as principal? (Human, Organizational, Resource)
- d. Tell me about your experiences with central office administration in regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities that you did not expect. How has this affected your role as principal? (Human, Organizational, Structural, Resource)
- e. What have been your experiences in regards to inclusion with students, both disabled and non-disabled, that were unanticipated? How has this affected you? (Human, Organizational, Structural, Resource)
- f. Tell me about your biggest challenge that was not anticipated in regards to the inclusion of students with disabilities and how this has affected your role as principal. (Human, Organizational, Structural, Resource)
- g. Tell me about your biggest success story with inclusion that was a surprise to you and how that has affected you as a principal. (Human, Organizational, Structural, Resource)

Conclusion: I have enjoyed meeting and listening to you today. Again, I appreciate your time and input. I will be providing you with the transcripts from this session and for you to review regarding the accuracy of the information. I will be following up with a phone call to you in case you have any details that need clarification. If you would like for me to return any of the documents, please print your name on one of these envelopes. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, comments, or concerns.

APPENDIX I

ASSISTANT MODERATOR PROTOCOL

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

1. Responsible for all equipment and supplies.
 - Audio Recorders (2)
 - Name Tents
 - Refreshments
2. Arrange the room and set up the equipment.
3. Welcome the participants as they arrive.
4. Sit outside the circle, opposite the moderator, and close to the door. If someone arrives late, greet and brief the person before showing them where to sit in the group.
5. Take detailed notes throughout the discussion. Capture well-said quotes word for word. Listen for sentences and phrases that are eloquent or enlightening. Place your opinions, thoughts, or ideas in parentheses. Write questions you may have down in a circle or box to ask at the end of the discussion. Note the nonverbal activity- head nods, excitement, eye contact between participants, etc. that support agreement, support, interest, or disagreement. Make a sketch of the seating arrangement.
6. Monitor the recording equipment.
7. Do not participate in the discussion.
8. Ask questions when invited.
9. Give an oral summary.
10. Debrief with the moderator concerning the focus group and debrief comparing focus group information.
11. Provide feedback on analysis.

APPENDIX J

FIELD NOTES FORM

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

Person Completing Notes: Researcher or Assistant Moderator (circle one)

Date:

Forum: Focus Group or Document Review (circle one)

Focus Group Location:

Notes:

APPENDIX K

DOCUMENT REVIEW FORM

Title of the Project: Virginia Elementary School Principals' Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities

Investigator: Amy W. Griffin

Participant's Name:

Document: Yes or No (circle one)

Document Title:

Origins of Document: (check all that apply and give explanations)

- ☐ Division Level:
- ☐ School Level:
- ☐ Principal (Personal) Level:
- ☐ SPED Department Level:
- ☐ Teacher Level:
- ☐ Other:

Contents of Document: (check all that apply and give explanations)

- ☐ Relates to the Role of the Principal:
- ☐ Philosophy of Inclusion:
- ☐ Federal, State, Local mandates/regulations:
- ☐ Procedures:
- ☐ Other:

Relationship to Theoretical Framework: (check all that apply and give explanations)

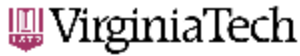
_____ Human Capacity:

_____ Organizational Capacity:

_____ Structural Capacity:

_____ Material Capacity:

APPENDIX L



Office of Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959
e-mail moored@vt.edu
www.irb.vt.edu

PIRG00000572 (expires 1/20/2010)
IRB # is IRB00000587

DATE: July 8, 2009

MEMORANDUM

TO: Penny L. Burge
Amy Griffin

FROM: David M. Moore

Approval date: 7/7/2009
Continuing Review Due Date: 6/22/2010
Expiration Date: 7/6/2010

SUBJECT: IRB Expedited Approval: "Three Groups of Virginia Elementary Principal's Experiences with the Unintended Consequences of Implementing Inclusion of Students with Disabilities", IRB # 09-585

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective July 7, 2009.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

Important:

If you are conducting federally funded non-exempt research, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB application.

cc: File

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