

**December 2021**

# **NASET Special Educator e-Journal**

*Exceptional Teachers Teaching Exceptional Children*

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## Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

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This month's update identifies a pair of recent court decisions that seem to differ from the traditional district-deferential approach in methodology disputes. For various related articles, special supplements, and earlier monthly updates, see [perryzirkel.com](http://perryzirkel.com).

In its September 29, 2021 decision in *Falmouth School Department v. Doe*, the federal district court in Maine addressed, in notable part, the issue of reading methodology. After evaluating the child, John, in grade 1 (2016–2017) as eligible under the classification of other health impairment (OHI), the district provided him with a January 2017 IEP that included 30 minutes daily of specially designed instruction in reading. His special education teacher used variants of the Orton-Gillingham (O-G) approach for this purpose. She continued these reading services in grade 2 resulting in slow progress, and the January 2018 IEP increased them to a limited extent. In December 2018, the parents obtained and shared an IEE that diagnosed John with “double deficit dyslexia,” assessed him as still at a nonreader level, and recommended Lindamood-Bell (LMB) programming. In response, the January 2019 IEP proposed increasing John’s reading services, including some LMB services. Rejecting this proposal as insufficient, John’s parents placed him in a private-school LMB program for the second half of each day. In March 2019 of grade 3, when the district refused their request to adjust the IEP for mainstreaming for the first half of the day, the parents revoked consent for special education services. However, at the end of grade 3, with another supporting IEE, they requested an IEP for grade 4 with a split-day arrangement. The September 2019 IEP proposed increased special education services with “multisensory synthetic phonics instruction” instead of LMB. In November the parents unilaterally placed John full-time in the private school. In January 2020, they filed for a due process hearing. The hearing

**officer ruled that the January 2018, January 2019, and September 2019 IEPs did not meet the substantive standard for FAPE. The hearing officer ordered reimbursement for (a) specified IEEs and (b) as compensatory education, the parents’ expenses for the part- and full-day placements at the private school from January 2019 through June 2020. The district filed an appeal with the federal court.**

First, the court affirmed that the January 2018 and January 2019 IEPs did not meet the <i>Endrew F.</i> standard for FAPE, concluding that during their coverage John started with pre-k literacy skills and ended with “literacy skills that remained at ‘pre-k to kindergarten literacy skills.’”	The court reasoned that in spite of John’s stagnated reading and writing skills, the first of these two IEPs addressed only the amount but not the type of literacy services, and the second was too little and too late with regard to LMB as compared to the IEE recommendations and the private school services.
Second, the court also affirmed that the September 2019’s “abrupt change” from LMB was unjustified in light of his improved progress with this approach compared to the district’s O-G variant.	The court explained that “flexibility in methodology does not mean that a district can ignore evidence that its preferred structured literacy program has not worked and that the unique needs of a student may require school officials to provide alternative, accepted methodologies.”
This case is already on its way to the First Circuit Court of Appeals, showing the likelihood that it may be part of either a revision or reinforcement of the traditional, pro-district view with regard to methodology disputes under the IDEA.	

In its October 12, 2021 decision in *Rogich v. Clark County School District*, the federal district court in Nevada addressed FAPE issues that centered on reading methodology. The child, who was born with hydrocephalus, had multiple diagnoses, including dyslexia and ADHD. Her parents enrolled her in private school programs starting in kindergarten but midway in grade 5 (2013–2014) requested the district to conduct an evaluation for an IEP. They provided the IEP team with IEEs from 2009 and 2013. The resulting proposed IEP for 2014–2015 classified her as OHI and included a “multisensory approach to instruction” throughout the school day. The parents rejected the IEP and sought reimbursement for their unilateral private placement. The parties repeated this process two years later for the 2016–2017 school year, after the parents provided an IEE in the interim. The resulting, rejected IEP included “multisensory instruction that will incorporate the simultaneous use of two or more sensory pathways.” The hearing officer ruled in favor of the parents, granting three years of reimbursement, but the review officer reversed the hearing officer’s decision. Next, the parents filed an appeal, with the federal district court.

First, the court ruled that the district denied FAPE procedurally “by refusing to discuss with [the parents] during development of the IEP the types of programming provided by the District that had the capacity to address [the child’s] unique needs” after the parents provided “compelling professional evidence that was unrefuted or challenged by the District which established that [she] required a teaching methodology with particular facets.”	Reversing the review officer’s conclusion that the district had duly considered the IEEs, the court reasoning included: (a) “[these] undisputed evaluations ... stress the importance of ‘methodology’”; (b) methodology is for both the type and the delivery mechanism for instruction; and (c) this case is one of the relatively few that requires the IEP to specify the methodology because it is necessary for this child to receive FAPE.
Second, the court ruled that the district denied FAPE substantively because this child “required a specific methodology in order to receive a FAPE” that was “a) research-based, b) system[ati]c, c) cumulative, and d)	By not having any multimodal program equivalent to O-G, its proposed IEPs’ references to a multisensory approach were, in the court’s view, “illusory.” Moreover, the court cited the hearing officer’s findings

rigorously implemented” even if not specifically Orton-Gillinghan (O-G).	that the district personnel lacked sufficient knowledge for providing the requisite consistent methodology.
Third, the court ruled that the district also violated Section 504 and the ADA by failing to offer O-G or an equivalent methodology upon having notice of this child’s need for it.	This ruling included conclusions that (a) the requisite training costs would be reasonable and (b) the proven notice of this child’s need helped establish the requisite deliberate indifference.
Finally, via a combination of the IDEA FAPE denial, the Section 504/ADA violation, and IDEA stay-put obligation, the court ruled that the parents were entitled to not only the original three years of tuition reimbursement but also their expenditures during the intervening summers and remaining three years of litigation.	The resulting award was to not only reinstate the hearing officer’s order for \$63K but also to add reimbursement of \$394K (including related services, travel costs, and assessments). Inferably, the court reserved for a subsequent proceeding an attorneys’ fees award for the parents if not resolved by the parties.
This decision seems to be an outlier in terms of methodology and the remedy, especially the stay-put interpretation. But, depending on whether it is appealed or relied upon in future IDEA cases nationally, this case—like the previous one in this month’s legal update—may signal a major change in the prevailing trend. In any event, this case is another in the many examples of the staggering transaction costs of litigation, including but not at all limited to the 4.3-year period from filing to decision at the district court’s level.	

## Buzz from the Hub

All articles below can be accessed through the following links:

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-oct2021-issue2/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-oct2021-issue1/>

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/buzz-sept2021-issue2/>

### **Development and Implementation of the IEP in the LRE**

In late September the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) released a 40-page **guidance** describing how many children with disabilities will have a range of new or additional needs resulting from the pandemic that schools and IEP teams must address as students return to school. In late October, CPIR hosted a webinar on the same subject, with OSEP taking Parent Centers through the salient points raised in its guidance. The link above will take you to the archive of the webinar, where you can connect with the video recording, the slides OSEP used, a transcript of what presenters said, and the written guidance that inspired the gathering.

### **Behavior Challenges: Conversation Starters to Use with Your Child's Teacher** *(good to share with families)*

*(Also available in Spanish: **Problemas de conducta: Cómo iniciar la conversación con el maestro de su hijo**)*

When a child has behavior challenges, it can be hard for parents to talk about them with teachers. Having these conversations can help parents get support for their child at school, even if learning is happening at home. Parents can use these sample conversation starters to help themselves plan what to say when they talk with their child's teacher.

### **Cutting and Other Self-Injury** *(good for sharing with families)*

*(Also available in Spanish: **Cortes y otro tipo de autolesiones: Cómo ayudar**)*

When kids intentionally hurt themselves, often by cutting or scratching their skin, it's often as a way to manage difficult emotions. This Child Mind offering discusses self-injurious behavior as

part of answering 3 questions: *Why do kids cut or hurt themselves? What are signs of self-injury?* and *How can parents help?*

### **Part C Finance Glossary**

Download this glossary of terms relevant to **finance** for IDEA Part C and Part B, Section 619 programs (e.g., blending and braiding funds, pass-through-funding, and supplant). Terms include references to IDEA and other related federal fiscal requirements and those specific to billing public and private insurance for IDEA services. The glossary was developed collaboratively by Infant Toddler Coordinators Association (ITCA), ECTA, the DaSy Center, and Center for IDEA Fiscal Reporting (CIFR).

### **Supporting and Protecting the Rights of Students at Risk of Self-Harm**

From the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the U.S. Department of Justice, this joint 3-page fact sheet can help support students with mental health disabilities, their families, and their schools in the era of COVID-19. OCR also released a **letter to educators** highlighting the civil rights obligations of schools and postsecondary institutions to students with mental health disabilities.

### **Connect to Care**

From the Child Mind Institute come several on-point mental health resources for families and professionals alike.

- Its new **Family Resource Center**, which features over 700 resources on kids’ mental health, learning disorders, and common parenting challenges — all in English and Spanish.
- Its **latest newsletter**, which connects you with stand-alone articles in English and Spanish, such as “*Should I get care for my child?*” and “*How to find a children’s mental health professional.*”
- The **2021 Children’s Mental Health Report** (also available in **Spanish**), which focuses on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on children’s mental health.



## **For Parents of Children Who Were Just Diagnosed With a Health Condition**

Having your child diagnosed with a health condition can be downright frightening. Here are 5 gentle reminders for anyone whose child was just diagnosed with a disability or chronic illness.

### **New to Disability?**

This, too, is an article meant for parents who've just found out that their child has a disability.

### **Autism | Have you seen what Sesame Street offers?**

(Available in *Spanish*) (Storybook "*We're Amazing, 1, 2, 3!*") is now available in Mandarin and Cantonese) Front-liners and families, you're in for a treat. Sesame Street offers Julia, a girl with autism spectrum disorder, and a website of stellar info including videos for kids, interactives for kids, parent videos, scads of info about autism itself, and a newsletter that will flow yet more info your way.

## **Return to School Roadmap: Development and Implementation of IEPs in the Least Restrictive Environment**

The title's a mouthful, but the content is right on time for the school year. This Q&A from OSERS at the U.S. Department of Education tackles topics covering such a wide range of key IEP elements that you have to see it for yourself!

### **Video on Supported Decision Making**

*Thanks to Lauren Agoratus for posting this resource in CentersConnect. Looks like a goodie.*

About the video: Jordan was just hours away from a court hearing that would have awarded his parents guardianship. In the video Jordan shares his supported decision-making story and how he almost lost his rights. Jordan and Ashley also talk about a new project they are working on for the Center of Youth Voice to train other self-advocates about alternatives to guardianship.

## **2 New Toolkits for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Agencies**

Child Trends has published 2 new toolkits that are designed to help child welfare agencies and juvenile justice agencies support children and youth during and in the aftermath of natural disasters and pandemics, using a trauma-informed, resilience-focused foundation for natural disaster response. (*Spanish versions of the toolkits:* for Child Welfare agencies; for Juvenile Justice agencies)

## **Brain Injury in Children**

Looking for info to share with families on brain injury in children? Here are two to pursue:

—**Infographic poster** from the CDC

—**Articles and guidance to share with families and educators** from Brainline

## **What is a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP)?**

*(Also available in Spanish: ¿**Qué es un plan de intervención del comportamiento?**?)* | A BIP is a plan to help children whose problem behavior in school is affecting their learning. This article from Child Mind answers 3 basic questions: What is a BIP? How is a BIP created? How can parents tell if the plan is working?

*Want to know even more?* Check out CPIR's **Resource Collection on Functional Behavioral Assessment and BIPs**! It includes videos, helpful websites, and lots of info in English and Spanish.

## **Engaging Special Education Teacher Candidates with Disability-Themed Novels During the Pandemic**

**Sadia Warsi, Ph.D.**

**Karen Fitzgerald, Ph.D., CCC-SLP/L**

### **Abstract**

Novels are used in almost all our courses, but during the pandemic we had to make a more intentional decision to help our candidates deconstruct the novels using specific criteria, analyze the social emotional aspects of the character's experiences in their classrooms and homes, extrapolate best practices in the teaching scenarios presented in the novels and most importantly provide a list of research based instructional accommodations and modifications that would serve as foundations for the candidate's own teaching of students with disabilities. We will provide our readers with a detailed template, which they can use to guide their teacher candidates in extrapolating methods of teaching students with disabilities.

### **Incorporating Novels as Case Studies in Teacher Preparation Methods Courses**

In March, 2020, our world shut down. We were all in survival mode, but we had to continue living and teaching in ways that required vigilance and intentionality. To ensure the safety of our student candidates, we were tasked to convert our face-to-face-classes to online. It was not only a challenge to adapt traditional courses that had previously been in person, but to keep our students engaged and motivated as they struggled to work, learn and live during the pandemic. The courses had to be rigorous and at the same focused on the helping our teacher candidates meet the needs of their students with disabilities. In our special education methods classes, we used discussion boards, instructional videos, documentaries on families of children with disabilities, invited guest speakers, and most importantly incorporated novels on both low and high incidence disabilities so our teacher candidates could extrapolate teaching methodologies from the novels.

One of the major requirements in our special education methods courses is engaging our teacher candidates in rich and diverse experiences to teach children with disabilities (Barrio, Kelley, &

Cardon, 2019). We expect them to complete their field observations in diverse settings with teachers who teach students with low and high incidence disabilities in general and special education environments. The pandemic did not allow for these observations and interactions. The two methods courses where we incorporated the novels were, *Differentiated and Individualized Curriculum and Instruction* and *Contemporary Literacy Methods for Students with Disabilities*.

### **Selecting Six Novels on a Range of Disabilities**

We selected six novels across two of our courses. These novels were used in the Spring and Summer 2021 sessions with almost 160 students. We selected the novels on disabilities that would lend themselves to not only rich conversations on the discussion boards, but also act as case studies that could be analyzed for instructional methodology. It was important for us as professors that our students could relate to the novels in multiple ways. While the general narrative and tone of the novels had to be inclusive, we also wanted the candidates to have opportunities to *observe* instructional strategies that they could deconstruct and model. And lastly, we wanted our candidates to fall in love with the novels and consider integrating them in their own classrooms while teaching remotely and in person. We required our candidates to focus on a guiding question for each of the above novels and also further engage with each other around themes of the novels in their synchronous discussions.

### **Synopsis, Guiding Prompts and Candidate's Analysis of the Novels**

In the following discussion, we will provide a brief synopsis of the novels, the discussion prompts assigned for each novel, the candidates' narratives based on their overall connection to the story, the main character with a disability and the instructional methodology that they extrapolated from the novel and lastly their final reflections on using the novels for their methods courses. We will also provide a template of themes that emerged from their narratives detailing their analysis of the novels.

The novels that we selected were, *Anything But Typical* (low incidence novel by Nora Raleigh Baskin), *Every Last Word* (low incidence mental health novel by Tamara Ireland Stone), *Out of My Mind* (low incidence novel by Sharon Draper), *Wonder* (low incidence novel by R. J. Palacio), *Fish in a Tree* (high incidence novel by Linda Mullaly Hunt), and *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key* (high incidence novel by Jack Gantos).

### **Anything But Typical by Nora Raleigh Baskin**

This novel introduces us to a gifted twelve-year old writer who has autism and is very self-aware of how he does not fit into a mainstream crowd. The author takes us on a journey with Jason, where we see from his perspective the world that he navigates. He is mainstreamed because he is considered high functioning, but the social emotional and academic challenges he faces provide valuable insight to parents and teachers in providing ways to teach and nurture young adults on the autism spectrum. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

In 3-4 paragraphs, discuss your personal impressions of the novel and then analyze *Anything but Typical* in terms of how your students might relate to the main character of the story and how can you create a safe and an inclusive environment for students on the autism spectrum.

### **Every Last Word by Tamara Ireland Stone**

*Every Last Word* focuses on Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and while the main character Samantha does not have a visible disability, the fact that she is unable to share her daily struggles with her high school friends and has to manage her intrusive thoughts in isolation and shame, impact her socialization and academic progress in school. The author has created a complex teenager in Samantha and we are all better for knowing her as she shares her intrusive thoughts and navigates her world with determination and bravery. The use of poetry as a creative outlet in dealing with the anxiety and depression Samantha experiences provide the readers with a deeper understanding and appreciation of the multidimensional aspects of OCD. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

Discuss your personal reactions to the novel and then analyze *Every Last Word* in terms of providing social emotional and academic supports for the main character of the story.

### **Out of My Mind by Sharon Draper**

In *Out of My Mind* we meet Melody, who is an eleven-year-old girl with cerebral palsy. While she is brilliant, she does not talk and she uses a wheel chair for mobility. Through her voice as the narrator, we enter her world of frustration and sadness of not being able to communicate with her peers when she has so much to say. When she finally receives her first communication

technology device, we see her emerge as a strong person wanting to participate with her general education peers. We are introduced to her friends and teachers, some of whom are not aware of her learning potential, while others who simply do not care. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

Discuss your personal reactions to the novel and then analyze *Out of My Mind* in terms of providing academic supports for the main character of the story and providing teacher training to create an inclusive environment for all the students.

### ***Wonder* by R. J. Palacio**

*Wonder* has been around for a few years and was also adopted into a motion picture. It is a profound piece of literature; in that it tackles facial differences from multiple voices in the novel. Auggie, the young homeschooled child, enters middle school for the first time and experiences many positive social experiences and also some significant bullying. One of our teacher candidates identified on a personal level with Auggie because he had facial differences from birth and had overcome tremendous challenges with the support of his parents. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

In 3-4 paragraphs discuss your overall impressions of *Wonder* and how can you provide academic and social emotional supports in your classroom for the main character of the story.

### ***Fish in a Tree* by Linda Mullaly Hunt**

The author of *Fish in a Tree* has called this novel “a love letter to a teacher who saved her.” The character of Ally is based in part on the experiences of the author as a struggling reader in sixth grade. Ally is a creative daydreamer whose dyslexia is not diagnosed or remediated until the arrival of a gifted Mr. Daniels. We are introduced to Ally’s life and her struggles in reading from the beginning of the novel. This novel can be classified as a story book on teaching methods on dyslexia. There are very specific strategies and interventions that are used by Mr. Daniels to help Ally learn to read. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

In 3-4 paragraphs discuss your overall impressions of *Fish in a Tree* and how can you provide academic and social emotional supports in your classroom for the main character of the story.

### **Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key by Jack Gantos**

In this novel we meet a lovable elementary school boy named Joey who has the best of intentions to be a focused learner in his classroom but instead he is in constant motion and in trouble. He has attention deficit hyper activity disorder and due to his chaotic home and school environments, he struggles to learn. Our teacher candidates were asked to share their insights on the novel, using the following prompt:

In 3-4 paragraphs, discuss your personal impressions of *Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key*. Discuss the implications of this book in terms of how your students might relate to Joey and what accommodations and modifications will you provide for Joey to be successful in your classroom?

### **Candidates' Extrapolation of Special Education Methodology From the Novels**

As we conducted a thematic analysis of our teacher candidates' discussions, it was evident that they were very engaged with the main characters in the novels and were empathetic towards their educational and social emotional needs. Many of these themes that emerged from our candidates' discussions of the novels are supported by previous research studies. The table below expands on the themes related to the explicit methodology present in the novels. We have also included direct quotes of the candidates' analysis of the needs of the characters in the novels.

### **Five Major Themes in the Candidates' Discussions**

1. Environmental and Instructional Accommodation in the Classroom Environment (Young, 2008).

*In regards to social emotional supports the first recommendation I would make is for Sam to have a designated area to take a break in when she feels necessary. The break area could be used for times when she feels nervous or anxious. Sam's teachers should be aware of the break area and allow her to utilize it when she needs it. Throughout the*

*story there were a few moments during the school day where Sam felt overwhelmed with anxiety and could have benefited from a calm and quiet space to work through this.*

*Melody also shows us that we truly need to take the time to get to know each student as an individual and provide them with school based, reasonable but appropriate accommodations. In addition, each student, regardless of their abilities wants to feel loved, connected and accepted. Melody's teachers would benefit from professional development training on how to get to know students, their strengths and their abilities.*

2. Creative Student Engagement Options (Rose, Meyer & Hitchcock, 2005; Ware, 2003; Mutua & Smith, 2006).

*I would recommend that Sam continue to use writing as a tool to work through her thoughts and feelings as a way to ease her nerves or fears. Throughout the book Sam developed a newly discovered passion for writing and I feel that this love for writing can be used to provide her social emotional support.*

*Jason pours himself into his writing, which helps him build meaningful online connections. You can tell a lot about a student based on the fiction they write, and you can watch as Jason captures his thoughts and feelings about his life into the stories he writes in a relatable and compelling way. Stories are meant to be powerful and universal enough that anyone can project their own lives onto the hero of the story. In Jason's case, he created his own hero. I think students who read this book will quickly realize that having an outlet like this is helpful; the good and bad thoughts come together and help in a truly positive way.*

3. Friendship Building (Hehir, 2005; Glick & Rose, 2011; Rossetti, 2012).

*In Joey Pigza Swallowed the Key I had a lot of mixed emotions about how he was treated in the general education classroom. I felt like the constant threat of being sent to the special education room also did not help with the stigma surrounding a special education program. I think the Peer Assisted Learning strategy would work well with Joey. Having prompts and ideas for him to help remind him how to interact with the*



*other students in group situations would be helpful. The book showed the kindness inside Joey and I think encouraging him to interact with other students around him will help with the changes and strong reactions he has when in a group setting.*

4. Inclusion and Family Partnerships (Grace, Blue-Banning, Haines, Turnbull & Gross 2016; Rauscher & McClintock, 1997).

*I thoroughly enjoyed the young adult novels that we read throughout the course because it helped put me into the position of children with various disabilities and helped me to understand that their struggles in first-person. This really helped me to think about how I can connect with my students individually to form an inclusive community. It also helped me consider the parent perspective and develop more empathy for parents by understanding that this is one academic year of many, which means there is a history of experiences for each parent.*

5. Student Self Awareness and Advocacy (Thomson, 1997; Linton, 1998).

*When I read Out of My Mind with my class, many of my students related what we were reading to their classmates with the same disability. I saw a definite change in their behavior after they got to see that they are just like them without the ability to walk and talk. I think our students will be positively impacted after reading any of these books, even if they don't have classmates with the same disability, because it allows them to see that everyone is different and they should be more accepting of others.*

*Our mainstream society of "Neurotypicals", or NTs as Jason called them, expect people with disabilities to adjust to the majority culture and norms. Jason himself even said he could find and produce the right words, but it would take time, and "most people don't wait long enough for the right words" (Baskin, 2009, p.25).*

## Candidates' Extrapolation of Special Education Methodology from the Novels

Candidates' Quotes Related to Methodology in the Novels	List of Methodologies that Can be Used for Teaching Students with Disabilities
<p><b>Environmental and Instructional Accommodation in the Classroom Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The introduction to <i>Every Last Word</i> was a dramatic, attention grabbing, and emotional read. All teachers who interact with Sam should be made aware of her condition (OCD) in order to provide appropriate support. In terms of UDL, a calming corner or safe area could be implemented into each classroom to provide Sam an arena to manage her anxiety. Secondly, a secret signal could be implemented to communicate that Sam needs to go to the school nurse or counselor to receive support.</li> <li>• Based on what I have read from <i>Anything But Typical</i>, I know one of the first things I can do is to maintain routine for my students with ASD. For starters, seating charts should stay permanent, or, if changes are made, they should be made on a</li> </ul>	<p><b>Environmental and Instructional Accommodation in the Classroom Environment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure the learning environment with clearly defined areas so that the students can work on activities in small groups.</li> <li>• Alert and inform student of any changes to the daily routines such as a roadmap for situations they may come across during the day, like their computer time of choice being cancelled or changed.</li> <li>• Provide visual schedules and have the student track the daily schedules.</li> <li>• Review schedules periodically.</li> <li>• Start the day with something s/he enjoys.</li> <li>• Provide choices for the student to sit in any particular area of the room when feeling agitated.</li> </ul>

<p>schedule that is consistent and predictable (provided that the students are ok with it). I can also create different ways to allow for communication that don't rely on eye contact, physical touch, or whatever other modes of communication make my students uncomfortable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Melody needs to use of communication device and continued communication with the family including siblings to support Melody and learn from the family and the strategies that work for Melody at home would be beneficial.</li> <li>• For Joey I would provide lots of movement breaks and never make him earn these breaks or take them away as a form of punishment. I would use flexible seating and seat Joey someplace where he would be comfortable as well as where he would not be distracted. For assignments I would break them up for Joey so that he wouldn't be expected to attend to one assignment for an extended period of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Designate enough time for student-directed activities.</li> <li>• Develop clear signal to show that student is paying attention.</li> <li>• Provide an array of opportunities for tactile needs (fidgets), autonomy and choice of reading materials.</li> <li>• Design bulletin board where each student's picture is a puzzle piece with strengths put together with the class group photo.</li> <li>• Identify stressors for the whole class and individuals as needed, such as monitor noise level in room and in the background and block out noises and distractions using headphones.</li> <li>• Provide optional and alternative seating for students who are easily distracted by creating a clutter-free classroom environment</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide private and alternative places to eat and have recess.</li> <li>• Provide alternative assignments based on interests and learning needs.</li> <li>• Provide various cooperative group learning opportunities and learning stations.</li> <li>• Offer student menus of choices and directions on how to complete assignments/projects/etc.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Creative Student Engagement Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When I think of Joey and strategies that would work well for him, I think Peer-Assisted learning would be ideal. He needs to learn how to work with others and he can find that positive collaboration in a group. Joey can be given a specific role and then gradually that can be released to him picking the role he would like. The feedback can be helpful for the entire group because they can learn from the teacher through modeling how to respond to one another in a group. This can help the entire class to build each other up and this is</li> </ul>	<p><b>Creative Student Engagement Options</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play classical and other music to in the classroom.</li> <li>• Offer students opportunities for journaling, creative writing, drawing or painting to demonstrate comprehension of subject matter.</li> <li>• Create a poetry club.</li> <li>• Encourage students to join athletic and debate teams regardless of disabilities by using assistive and instructional technologies.</li> </ul>

<p>essential to Joey who constantly feels like he is being torn down.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jason in <i>Anything But Typical</i> has an interest. He finds someone to connect with, via internet. He isn't afraid to share his stories, he isn't afraid to be himself. I wonder if writing in an online forum, like google classroom, would help Jason feel safe when he writes. Maybe he doesn't like his words displayed on bulletin boards in the hallway. Giving him the accessibility of a computer may help his anxiety and give him the courage he needs to continue to write in school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read stories on characters with people with disabilities.</li> <li>• Provide different methods to promote communication such as photo images, communication board, augmentative and assistive communication devices.</li> <li>• Display and utilize low tech devices such as visual emojis to express how the student is feeling.</li> <li>• Construct sentence starters to assist reluctant writers with their essays or conversations.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Friendship Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Auggie was me as a child, someone who went to a new school and had to endure the challenges he had in making friends and dealing with the school environment. It's weird to say but this was a book I laughed and cried, sometimes at the same time. It had such a profound effect on me because I could relate to a protective family member or a parent saying they thought Auggie was brave or not to</li> </ul>	<p><b>Friendship Building</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promote friendships with the classroom by giving strategies on how to interact with each other.</li> <li>• Use role play and age-appropriate stories and novels for teaching compassion.</li> <li>• Strengthen student bonds by modeling acceptance of all differences/uniqueness within the classroom.</li> </ul>

<p>think twice about people that didn't like him. In a way, it was like reading a book about the story of my life.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You know those books where you can't stop lesson-planning while you read it? That's how I feel about <i>Anything but Typical</i>. The emotions this little boy felt were typical but the issues he faced with being on the spectrum were not. This is a good book for kids to get an insight on their fellow classmate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schedule regular class meetings to build a classroom community and discuss the hidden curriculum in a transparent way.</li> <li>Create small structured peer groups that is representative of the classroom demographics.</li> <li>Provide icebreaker questions to help students to get to know each other.</li> <li>Feeling safe, valued and welcomed.</li> <li>Help students to learn about their similarities as members of the class, city and society at large.</li> <li>Allow students to work together on shared interests and hobbies.</li> <li>Remind students that working together Helps everyone succeed on their classwork.</li> <li>Utilize all student strengths and dispositions to help out each other.</li> </ul>
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Establish justice circles for discussion on social justice issue in society.</li><li>• Establish student relationships outside of school using a monitored use of social media.</li><li>• Showcase student voice and choice into the daily learning situations.</li><li>• Make a firm no-tolerance policy on bullying and derogatory behaviors.</li><li>• Maximize peer interactions during class discussions.</li><li>• Assign peer buddy when needed for academic and social development.</li></ul>
<b>Inclusion and Family Partnerships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Melody would have benefitted from an IEP that took into account a variety of perspectives and data, including her parents' input. All of the teachers in the school should have gotten professional development in order to identify their prejudices and misunderstandings regarding people with disabilities, to learn the correct language for talking</li></ul>	<b>Inclusion and Family Partnerships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Confront personal attitudes and institutional barriers that promote ableism.</li><li>• Model inclusivity through creating a classroom library of diverse children's literature.</li></ul>

<p>about and to people with disabilities, and how to differentiate or use universal design so that students with disabilities could be full participants in classes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In the book, Melody's inclusion classes seem to have no differentiation for students with disabilities. In her special education class, most of the teachers she had did not have high expectations for the students, did not take the time to understand them as individuals, and did not create individualized education opportunities. Only two of the teachers gave Melody the opportunity to learn on her own and at her developmental level when they let her listen to audiobooks and study for the competition.</li> <li>• I think my responses to people in wheelchairs and with physical disabilities has ranged from discomfort to disgust. My overall takeaway at this point, which I acknowledge may be a very basic one, is that people with physical disabilities want to be treated with care and dignity, they want to be pushed to be</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate regular meetings with special and general education teachers to address IEP goals.</li> <li>• Have daily discussion with faculty, staff and students of accepting differences and inclusion.</li> <li>• Build professional expertise in the areas of special education.</li> <li>• Develop specific knowledge on how to work with diverse learners.</li> <li>• Develop in depth expertise in IEPs and UDL lesson planning.</li> <li>• Gain information about student's interests and strengths outside of the schools from the student and parents.</li> <li>• Foster home and school connections by establishing regular opportunities to showcase student progress in the classroom and IEP goals.</li> <li>• Become culturally responsive in interacting with diverse families through professional development and family engagement.</li> </ul>
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<p>their best selves, and they want to feel connected to their family and friends.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communicate the student’s challenges and growth when interacting with parents in various meetings so the parents can be optimistic about their children’s educational and social emotional progress.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Student Self Awareness and Advocacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The book Wonder has huge implications for me personally. One of the biggest complaints I've had about plenty of books is they don't represent the disabled population. For the first time ever, I read about a character who looked like me. Having a multi craniofacial disorder means you never have any role models or characters who look like you. We are never seen as worthy of being the center of attention in a positive light. Yet, the book Wonder came along and changed that notion. It cannot be stated enough how empowering it is to read about a character like you who goes through similar experiences I went through as a child.</li> <li>• I particularly enjoyed the first two books, <i>Out of My Mind</i> and <i>Fish in a Tree</i>. The most important thing I</li> </ul>	<p><b>Student Self Awareness and Advocacy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure student-led IEPs when feasible.</li> <li>• Promote positive self-talk and daily affirmations with students who have low self-esteem.</li> <li>• Remove pressure students to be typical by cultivating pride in disability through children’s books.</li> <li>• Teach self-regulation strategies to students who are feeling overwhelmed by asking them find a staff member, a safe location in the classroom immediately and start focusing on their own breathing.</li> <li>• Consistently help students identify and describe intrusive thoughts and walk through strategies to process and work with them.</li> </ul>

<p>learned in the books was the importance of being an advocate for your students. In both books, a family member or teacher was an advocate for getting the services their child or students needed. I was particularly inspired by the strategies Mr. Daniels used in <i>Fish in a Tree</i> where he stayed after for the benefit of his students and went above and beyond. I want to be that type of teacher for my students, the one who goes above and beyond to help them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Fish in a Tree</i> was both heartbreaking and inspirational. It really made me think about students' behaviors and that they very well may be due to learning disabilities. Ally's teachers and principal just always assumed she was being the class clown, a trouble maker. I want to be the teacher who is observant, like Mr. Daniels, always advocating for my students and finding meaningful ways to instruct and assess. Teaching is not a "one size fits all" gig.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach students to use the strategies outlined in books with themes of “being brave and facing the world as yourself” and “caring for one another” when facing challenging situations in the classroom.</li> <li>• Use picture books to name and describe the range of emotions so that the students can describe their feelings.</li> <li>• Use prompts, cues and praise to help students advocates for themselves.</li> <li>• Role play difficult situations that occur in school.</li> <li>• Teach the student group entry skills to become part of a group.</li> <li>• Educate the students in the class about disabilities and other differences from an inclusive lens.</li> </ul>
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## **Conclusions and Future Directions**

Our teacher candidates expressed consistently in their final evaluation of the courses that they found the incorporation of the novels within our course to be of great value. It is evident in their reflections and their extrapolations of the teaching methodologies from the novels, that they were able to not only find the novels as valuable tools for building self-awareness and empathy, but also for honing in their teaching skills. Here are four reflections that reinforced for us the value of assigning novels as a tool for teaching pre-service and in-service teacher candidates.

1. I think that all of the novels we had to read had the greatest impact on me. Reading about students with different disabilities and their challenges/successes allowed me to really reflect on my own teaching and how I can better support these students in the classroom. I have thought a lot about how I can create a more accepting, comfortable, and safe learning environment for my students. I have reflected a lot on my teaching, social-emotional learning, supporting my students as individuals, and supporting families. This is really going to be my focus this year as we head into a school year of remote learning. I know there are going to be a lot of challenges not only we face as educators, but also that our students and families face. I want to be able to support my students and families during this time.
2. The assigned novels provided me with an opportunity to read something other than schedules and guidelines for our new way of educating our students. The novels provided me with an opportunity to reflect and dig deep within focusing on my ideology about education. We are often busy with doing and we forget about just being. This class afforded me the opportunity to reset and restructure my mindset. When we lead with the wellness of our students, we are able to make those hard decisions.
3. I really enjoyed reading different novels written from the perspective of a student with a disability. I thought this was a great way to think about what our students may be experiencing and reflect on how we can better support them in our classrooms. It allowed me to better understand and empathize with my students. I also think that I am

much more likely to read these books to my students now that I have read them. I think reading books like that help them understand their classmates better and realize that they aren't too different from themselves. When I read *Out of My Mind* with my class, many of my students related what we were reading to their classmates with the same disability. I saw a definite change in their behavior after they got to see that they are just like them without the ability to walk and talk. I think our students will be positively impacted after reading any of these books, even if they don't have classmates with the same disability, because it allows them to see that everyone is different and they should be more accepting of others. I can't wait to bring these books into my classroom and spark great class discussions.

4. I loved the novels that we read and connected to each one in more than one way. I've recommended them to other teachers and will continue doing so. At a time where I'd started getting accustomed to watching TV, online workshops, and Netflix, I'm very grateful that these novels led me back to my appreciation of reading for pleasure. I also saw disabilities from various perspectives that gave me more insight into the needs of diverse learners.

As we are emerging from the pandemic with caution, we are moving back to in-person and blended instruction at our university. We have had the time to reflect on the last eighteen months of remote instruction to realize that we have to continue with fostering student engagement in all of our teaching modalities. We will need to continue building our online teaching skills to stay abreast of the new technologies in education and more importantly, building an engaging curriculum for our special education teacher candidates. While textbooks and research articles provide invaluable information and data of best practices, the knowledge that is offered in stories, case studies, memoirs and novels on disabilities, provide the much-needed emotional connection that teachers need to understand the needs of their students and their families. Field observations, internships and student teaching experience are fundamental to becoming an effective and an advanced teacher while the novels can provide our teacher candidates venues to self-reflect and expand their knowledge of the field of special education before they enter their own classrooms. We are positive that our special education teacher candidates have upheld the integrity of our courses during the pandemic and have developed new insights related to teaching

students with disabilities through their analytical readings of the novels. The novels are here to stay!

### ***About the Authors***

Dr. Sadia Warsi is a tenured Associate Professor in the Special Education Program where she teaches graduate special education classes at National Louis University. Sadia's research focuses on the education of minoritized students with disabilities, refugee families and homeless children in the public-school system. She is also researching how children's books on the topics of social justice and diversity can be used with pre-service and in-service special education teachers in urban settings.

Dr. Karen Fitzgerald is a tenured Speech-Language Pathologist in the public-school system. She works with student from pre-kindergarten through 5<sup>th</sup> grade in this multicultural setting. In addition, she adjuncts in a Communication Sciences and Disorders department at the university level. She works with college students in internal and external practicums. She mentors speech-language pathologists during their clinical fellowship year and leads department meetings.

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# **Ready for Inclusion? A Phenomenology on Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment**

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## **Abstract**

Discussion and focus on past practices by school districts in implementing inclusion has been a topic in education for decades. Prior to today's views, the general belief was that children with special educational needs were different from their peers and, therefore, required separated education outside the mainstream school. However, there is a lack of research on focused efforts to properly implement inclusion programming in the least restrictive environment; this study addressed that gap. This qualitative study, using teachers' experiences in combination with the Strange and Banning Environmental Model, contributed to deepening current understanding of inclusion. Findings from this study indicated themes in the physical, aggregate, organizational, and construct environments. This manuscript concludes with a discussion of the expectations for inclusion programming and the implications of not properly implementing inclusivity for students with and without a disability.

*Keywords:* phenomenology, least restrictive, general education, inclusion, special education

**Ready for Inclusion? A Phenomenology on Elementary Teachers' Experiences with Inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment**

Today, students with and without disabilities are being integrated in general education environments. The general belief was that children with special educational needs were different from their peers and that their social and learning needs were so different to those of other children that they required separated education outside the mainstream school (Griffin & Shevlin, 2011, p. 38). So, for decades, special schools were the focus of the education of students with special needs (Pijl et al., 1997).

Before inclusion, the term “mainstreaming” was used along with the many interpretations of how mainstreaming was implemented. First, mainstreaming was considered “a form of educational programming that integrates special needs and non-special needs children in regular classrooms” (Meisels, 1978, p. 1). Then, mainstreaming was considered a “setting where all children share the *same resources and opportunities* for learning on a full-time basis” (Wang 1981, p. 196). Lastly, according to Rogers (1993), mainstreaming was defined as selective placement of special education students in *one or more* regular education classes. Today, the term mainstreaming is now viewed as providing the same educational opportunities for all children, regardless of a disability.

Implementation of inclusion has changed throughout the history of special education, along with the location of how the instruction is being delivered. The location students receive instruction was identified as belonging to three different types of educational classrooms in the public school systems: 1) general education classrooms, the primary classroom in which most students receive their education; 2) a special education classroom, often referred to as a self-contained classroom, which requires a special education certified teacher along with paraprofessionals/teacher’s aids as needed to meet the students’ needs; and 3) the resource room, where students receive specialized instruction for specific skills (mathematics, reading, speech, etc.) (Friend & Bursuck, 2009; Wang & Birch, 1984; Yell et al., 1998). In past practice and even today, the resource classroom involved a teacher with a specific certification who would work with the child for a designated amount of time, before the child returns to the general education classroom. However, the expectation today involves integrating students into the general education classroom to receive the same educational opportunities, no matter what their disability might be.

Defining the same educational opportunities for all students could be viewed differently based on the background of the teacher as well as their exposure and experiences in the

educational field. Unfortunately, many teachers are not taught different methods to deliver instruction to students with special needs, let alone include students with special needs in their general education classroom (Hyunjeong et al., 2014). For example, Cook (2002) states that “if pre-service teachers do not possess the knowledge and skills to implement inclusion appropriately, the included students with disabilities in their future classes will certainly have diminished opportunities to attain desired outcomes regardless of teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive reforms” (p. 263). Receiving inclusion education training, whether pre-service or after requiring licensure, is crucial in constructing the teacher’s ability to cope with individuals with special needs and ensuring the overall success for the fidelity of inclusion.

Qualitative research on inclusion in the least restrictive environment revealed that teachers experienced frustration, distress, resentment, and a lack of confidence in their ability to meet the needs of all their students (Avramidis et al., 2002; Barning et al., 2011; Chhabra et al., 2010; De Boer et al., 2011). Thus, in order for schools to become more successful in including students with disabilities, instructional changes were considered. However, altering student learning goals, finding activities that interest students, and arranging accommodations for students were challenging. Furthermore, class size created difficulties for the teacher to take care of all students, making the practice of inclusive education a challenge (Alhassan, 2014). Therefore, utilizing the Strange and Banning Environmental Model (2015) to examine the fidelity of inclusion in K–12 schools and classrooms allowed a deeper understanding on experiences of teachers implementing inclusive practices with students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. Strange and Banning (2015) developed a comprehensive model to create student-friendly and learning supportive environments. Strange and Banning (2001) stated that human environments all have the following key components that “serve to prod, bend, and shape behaviors” (p. 5):

- Physical condition, design, and layout
- Characteristics of the people who inhabit them
- Organizational structures related to their purposes and goals
- Inhabitants’ collective perceptions or constructions of the context and culture of the setting. (p. 5)

Strange and Banning divided these characteristics into four specific environments that they labeled the physical environment, the aggregate environment, the organization environment, and

the socially constructed environment. These four environments provided a conceptual framework for inclusion throughout this study.

## **Method**

Implementing a qualitative design approach, the study focused on the essence of the phenomenon – the experiences from teachers with fidelity of inclusion programming and practices. This approach focused on participants and discovered what they may have in common in their everyday teaching environment. Through a phenomenological approach, the study sought to understand these experiences of the fidelity of inclusion through the perception of the participant. In line with the qualitative research method, data was collected until no new information or no new insights occurred, i.e., until data saturation was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data collected from semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analyses were used for this qualitative phenomenological study, which assisted to triangulate its findings. A prepared interview guide was used to ensure that the same general areas of information were touched upon with each interviewee. The guide kept the interviews focused but still permitted a degree of freedom and adaptability to encourage interviewees to provide relevant information. Open-ended questions were used throughout the interview to allow participants to respond freely to questions.

## **Participants**

Participants for this study were recruited through purposeful sampling or, more specifically, social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, Messenger, and LinkedIn). This included those who were teaching fourth and fifth-grade general education and started their teaching career in the general education classroom no earlier than the 2013-2014 school year. The lead author of the study worked in a different school district and town than the participants and so, prior to the study, did not have a relationship with these individuals. Once the participants were selected, contact was made, participants were provided a full overview of the study along with documents regarding the study, and permission to participate in the study was obtained. For confidentiality purposes, all participants were given pseudonyms. The participants for this study were set in six different locations. All six elementary locations were examined to discover how inclusion programming took place during classroom instruction time. Of the six locations,

School #1 included grades preschool–5 and a student population of 300–400, School #2 included grades 3–5, with approximately 200–300 students, School #3 included grades 3–4 and a student population of approximately 200–300, School #4 included grades 3–5, with a student population of approximately 200–300, School #5 included grades preschool–6, with a student population of 556, and School #6 included grades preschool–6, with a student population of approximately 200–300. School #3 and #4 had a student-teacher ratio of 25:1, School #1, 15:1, School #5, 13:1, and School #6, 11:1.

### **Kelly**

At the time the study was being conducted, Kelly was completing her first full year teaching 5th grade at Tiger Elementary. Her highest degree at the time was a bachelor's. Kelly is originally from a small town with a population of about 5,000–7,000. She has a twin sister and a younger brother. Her mother is a nurse and her father is a farmer. Kelly is the only teacher in her immediate family. However, her aunt is a teacher.

Kelly noted that she had a nice childhood and, while growing up, both her parents taught her to have strong self-discipline and a positive work ethic on the farm. There was not a defining moment when she knew that she wanted to be a teacher. She remembered her mother purchasing practice math books for her and her sister. Kelly also remembered collecting together all her stuffed animals to teach them multiplication. However, during her sophomore year in college, while taking music education classes, she switched to the teaching program. Kelly loved the classes that she was taking, and her professors were really easy to connect with. So, from the beginning of her sophomore year, she knew she was in the right place. During her teaching practicum, Kelly was introduced to Tiger Elementary. After she completed the practicum, Kelly was hired as a half-time teacher, half-time sub, at Tiger Elementary.

### **Esparanza**

At the time the study was being conducted, Esparanza was completing her fourth year in the fourth grade. Education was very important for Esparanza's family. Growing up, she did not have the internet at home and, therefore, she spent her time at the library as there was only one television in her home. Esparanza was a trustworthy teenager. Her parents knew they could count on her to be doing one of three things: studying, working, or being with her friends. Even today, Esparanza volunteers at her local library.

Esparanza has always loved school. Her fourth-grade teacher was her favorite elementary teacher of all time, as she incorporated hands-on activities in her teaching to keep the students engaged. Esparanza loved being in her class and she enjoyed the many fun projects that she completed. These projects included reciting the names of the presidents in ascending order in 30 seconds and the study of the human skeleton as well as that of rocks.

Even as a child, Esparanza knew that she wanted to be a teacher. Also, during her school days – since the second grade – she had kept a log of all her teachers. In it, Esparanza would collect and write down all of her favorite things that her teachers did. She would write these ideas down so that she could use them in her own classroom one day. Now, it is her fourth year of teaching fourth grade. One of Esparanza's favorite memories is that of a student with impaired vision and helping her to find ways to access core subjects more efficiently. Esparanza was always trying to find ways to make tasks more accessible for this student.

### **Susan**

At the time of this study, Susan was currently in her fourth year of teaching fifth grade. Susan grew up in a small town with a population of approximately 5,000. She lived there until the fourth grade. When she was in fourth grade, her parents divorced and she remained with her mother. When her mother married again and the family relocated, she was in sixth grade. Susan's mother currently works for a government agency. Susan comes from a blended family. She has one brother who is five years younger, two stepsisters, and a half-brother, who was born when she was a freshman in high school. One stepsister was a senior when Susan was a freshman, and the other is three years younger. Her full brother is currently in college and studying to be a biology teacher.

In her early years, her character was influenced by her mother strongly believing in shouldering one's responsibility, having good character, being a good person, and working to get what one wants. At an early age, Susan and her siblings began taking on responsibilities that most kids wouldn't have at their age, such as purchasing clothes that her mother was unable to buy. If Susan thought she needed more than her mother was willing to give or pay for, then she took on the responsibility to earn what she needed. At 15, Susan began working at the local pool, and then at 16, she worked at their local grocery store. Susan continued to work at the grocery store throughout her college years. Today, Susan still continues to work at the pool in the

summer. Susan appreciates her mother and believes that the foundation her mother laid for her has helped her get to where she is now.

As a teacher, Susan enjoys watching the children make progress throughout the year. However, over the past four years that Susan has taught, the behavior of her students throughout the year and particularly during the last four weeks of the school year has been the hardest to bear. Susan recalled that “the level of disrespect, specifically from the gentlemen in this group,” was hard to bear. Also, according to Susan, two years ago, erratic behavior and violence impacted the morale of the staff in the building. Over the last four years, Susan has worked with three different administrators. Susan stated that, this year, “the whole morale and care towards the students and staff appear to have improved.” Although student behavior has been a concern, watching students’ academic success is something Susan takes pleasure in. According to Susan, “Seeing the growth that kids make is such a highlight of what we do.”<sup>[1]</sup>

### **Anna**

At the time of this study, Anna was completing her first year of education in the fifth grade. Early on, Anna loved school. When she was eight, her family moved to the state she where she is now a teacher. Her mother is an administrative assistant for a local agency and her father is a district sales manager for a local seed company. Cohesiveness was also important to Anna’s family. Anna mentioned her parents “worked family activities around friends and family” in such a way that Anna and her brother would not miss out on being with friends. However, Anna understood that family came first if she had to choose between her friends and family.

For Anna and her brother, academics came pretty easy. Being disciplined and respectful played an important role in Anna’s academic life. If Anna came home with a note from a teacher, her punishment was always worse at home than it was at school. Anna’s parents encouraged her to excel at school more than at anything else. If she was not doing well in school, she would not be allowed to participate in sports, which was extremely important to Anna and her brother. That positive experience of teachers’ concern for students has transferred over into Anna’s career.

Anna enjoys supporting her students. However, one of Anna’s most memorable experiences in high school was being the salutatorian for her senior class. Anna worked hard and

earned good grades in high school because she decided to challenge herself. According to Anna, “Being a teacher is in itself a reward that one cannot even describe.” Anna knew she wanted to be a teacher since middle school. To Anna, the monetary aspect of teaching is not important. Instead, she finds that teaching involves building respect in a relationship that you form with a student.

According to Anna, building such a respectful relationship with a student is an experience one really can’t have in any other profession. Anna mentioned, “Having 26 ten-year-old students coming to you for advice, talking to you about their personal life, or that they are so excited that you are there today is, in itself, rewarding.” To some students, Anna might be the only form of stability in their life. Anna has witnessed the effects of an unstable home life that her students carry to school every day. Some of Anna’s students have been through troubling events she has never experienced herself. She feels fortunate that her students trust her and that they are willing to talk to her about their troubles. Self-rewarding can be a positive attribute in life, but it also can be disheartening.

## **Carmen**

At the time of this study, Carmen was completing her third year of teaching in the fourth grade. Carmen was born and raised in an urban city. As a young child growing up in an urban environment, she spent her free time with her cousins. Carmen’s parents always had very high expectations from their children, and they placed the highest importance on family. Carmen mentioned that they have “managed to stick together through a lot of adversity.” Schooling, education, and knowledge are second in priority. When time allowed, Carmen’s mother read to the children, helped them complete math scenarios, and instilled in them an affinity for science. Success and financial stability was also probably a matter of high priority. Her parents worked hard since they were young to ensure an economic cushion that would give Carmen and her siblings stability during their formative years. The expectation of mutual respect was also highly prioritized to assure stability. As a result, Carmen has always respected adults and those in charge.

“In school,” Carmen stated, “I had a multitude of teachers who motivated me to want to be a teacher.” Carmen recalled that she admired the teachers that allowed her to “dive into the passion of that content knowledge.” However, Carmen mentioned that she always had a natural



and innate desire to teach. Even as a child and an adolescent, Carmen had always been guiding her siblings and teaching her cousins. Carmen remembers teaching her family how to swing, dress, socialize, and play. Carmen was inspired by her teachers. They were professionals who remained true to themselves while teaching and, in Carmen's perspective, that made them inspiring in their own way. Carmen admired those who inspired the youth because they believed students deserved to be inspired.

Based on her experience teaching, Carmen mentioned that students "deserve fresh starts." She further noted that students are capable of anything and everything and need to know that they are thus capable, "loved, can learn, be motivated, and disciplined." Part of Carmen's philosophy is that treating individuals as "humans" is the most important because they deserve the same level of respect as all individuals do. "Whether teaching socially, or academically, students simply need to be 'taught' how to manage in the environment around them." Due to her background, Carmen explained that students need to know "how to take care of the fight inside!"

## **Nora**

At the time of this study, Nora was completing her second year in the fifth grade. Nora's background included growing up in a small family. Nora was born when her mother was just 17 and her father was 18. Nora's father was a high school dropout and her mother went to William Penn, where she earned her associate degree in psychology. Having witnessed her parents verbally disagreeing often growing up, Nora does not have a relationship with her father's side of the family. However, Nora is close to her mother's siblings and their children and usually visits her grandmother and her mother's side of the family. Nora had a troubled childhood. In her elementary years, Nora witnessed violence and abuse in her household. Her father went to rehab during her fifth grade and was arrested several times throughout her childhood.

Coming from a small community, Nora felt isolated. Nora mentioned that she felt the pressure to get good grades, and at the age of 16, she wished to get a job. Nora was expected to pay for all of her needs, but with her earnings, she also helped the family pay the mortgage and bills. Nora assisted her parents for a few years because her father did not have a stable or legal job since she was five. In first grade, Nora lagged in her studies. She did not know letter sounds or any sight words. A paraeducator worked with Nora to help her catch up with the class. With

the paraeducators' guidance, Nora went from being a struggler to being a high-rankers in her class in the following year.

Nora shared some of her memories of elementary and secondary school. In elementary, she shared that she learned and built confidence through project-based learning. Now, as a teacher, Nora implements projects in school because she knows that students remember what they learn when they enjoy learning by themselves more as compared to learning by filling out worksheets and watching videos. In secondary school, certain times were unmemorable for Nora. She felt unchallenged and did not try very hard. Nora recalled that when she graduated from high school, she did not have a foundation in math. She compensated for this lack by memorizing the steps and the formulas without understanding the foundation of math in high school. The time she spent in school was unproductive. However, she was interested in clubs and sports.

The struggles Nora faced in her childhood helped her to develop a strong work ethic. Nora explained that she prefers to be busy and involved in helping others, be it mentoring, coaching, or teaching, rather than being passive. Nora always wanted to be a teacher. She recalled spending her time in the study halls in high school working with students and tutoring. Nora explained, "I just love working with children and making a difference in their lives." Her personal goal for that year was to make her class feel like a family and be able to work together.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Data for this study was collected from current and former teachers who took part in district initiatives that involve inclusion programming. Three interviews of 60–90 minutes each was completed for each participant. The semi-structured interview approach was presented in a uniform set of open-ended questions that involved (a) demographic information on each participant, and (b) participants' perceptions and experiences with implementing, collecting, analyzing, and using data for the purpose of teachers' fidelity of inclusion programming (Merriam, 2002). In addition, observations in participants' classrooms were conducted for each participant to observe teachers in the natural settings during instruction and classroom activities. Observations provided first-hand teacher practices that affected fidelity inclusion programming, which then assisted in triangulating the emerging findings. The narrative was used to record teacher-to-student and student-to-student interactions, comments to others, room and physical

proximity, and the lack of physical space in the learning environment. Document analysis for this study included newspapers, official memos given to teachers, notices sent home to parents, official district policy statements, and current and archived school board meeting minutes.

Data collected from the three semi-structured interviews were then transcribed using simple descriptive codes, which were later developed into interpretative codes, to finally identify connections and reveal relationships between factors that affect teachers' fidelity of inclusion. To avoid repetition and overlap, a code book was created to assist in identifying themes based on the conceptual framework and research questions to provide a detailed description of each case and the patterns, from which 12 primary themes emerged. These 12 themes are listed based on each of the four educational environments identified by Strange and Banning (2015). They were supported with exemplar quotes from the participants.

Data from the interviews with the teachers were used to triangulate and further substantiate their experiences with inclusion. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended triangulation of research study's findings, member checks, rich thick description, and peer feedback to ensure credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research. Member checks occurred when the researcher asked the participants to review both data collected by the researcher and the interpretation of the interview data. Participants were then given the opportunity to verify their statements and to fill in any missing information from earlier interviews (Creswell, 2013).

## **Findings**

### **Physical Environment of the Classroom Lessens Opportunities to Participate Fully**

Utilizing space according to students and the ways through which the students learned is a best practice. Participants in this study reported large class sizes as a major barrier in the implementation of inclusion programs in their schools. The combination of a large student population and furniture made it difficult for learners and the teacher to move freely in the classroom. Esperanza, Anna, Nora, and Susan discussed how class size has affected their instruction. Esperanza recalled how the classroom physical space affects instruction as follows:

Well, this year I had 28 kids with 31 desks because my visual impaired student had taken up three of those desks. I don't have a lot of space. I used to have a lot more room, where

we would be like, “Okay, come to the carpet, and we’re gonna work these problems out.” You know, having them move from their desks to the ground, having them work so that they’re not distracted by their desks, they’re focused on whatever it is that I’m teaching. But with having all of these desks and then having that table in the back because, you know, I needed the table for, you know, small group, all types of things. It just was hard. I guess it’s difficult because they don’t have as much freedom of movement as I would like.

In addition, participants talked about classrooms that offer a variety of choices in adjusting the physical environment, which are desirable for all educational programs and can help students with disabilities become successful learners.

Furthermore, while some students who use wheelchairs are capable of getting around a classroom, large class size is a barrier to their ability to navigate the environment. Many students can move their wheelchairs most of the time but may need help in some situations. Susan recalled, “We actually have a student in a wheelchair, so, with that large class size, there were times that it was maybe a little bit more difficult for her to get to certain parts of the building.”

### **Different Seating Arrangements Supports Inclusion**

The participants described areas where students can work independently or collaboratively with others as optimal for inclusion to be successful. For instance, Esparanza used traditional desks. Observations revealed that all the participants in her classroom, when possible, had maximized learning through flexible seating, tables, and desks. Additionally, participants incorporated station activities throughout the room versus fixed seatwork to assess learning outcomes. Kelly mentioned that she incorporates flexible seating in her classroom, “where students have their own choice of where they want to sit every school day.” As a result, she mentioned, “they attempt to sit next to other people who are going to help you work your best” and further to “motivate the kids to work hard due to being comfortable.”

Other participants also incorporated changing structures within their classroom. Nora mentioned the following:

I split up my week so it is part of the time whole group instruction and part of the time small group stations or group work. I use tables versus desks because we do a lot of pair sharing and group work. I assign students partners and groups for everything, which helps me push students as well as support students that need extra help.

In addition to tables, Carmen at Bluebird Elementary changes the structure of a classroom to increase student engagement. Carmen recalled using different types of seating, “My classroom has a couch, two rocking chairs, long connected tables in the back where students can work collaboratively, pillows for the students to sit on the floor and work, community resources and supplies that students share.”

### **Promoting a Sense of Belonging and Appropriate Atmosphere for Inclusion**

The participants’ definition of inclusion helped to provide a foundation for understanding their approach to implementing inclusive practices. Participants who approached inclusion from a supportive and positive perspective were more successful with implementation. Both Kelly and Susan shared similar feelings about their definition of inclusion. Kelly shared, “Inclusion means representing all students. Giving them what they need to be successful in their environment and in the classrooms. I also think it has to do with students who need special education services.”

Promoting a sense of belonging also includes removal of barriers while providing accommodations in shared environments. In order for inclusion to work successfully, more than just a supportive and positive atmosphere created by the teacher is necessary. In all the participant locations, the classrooms had success quotes along with their district mission of student success hung up on their classroom walls. Strange and Banning (2015) mention that an organization also serves as a supportive aggregate for those students and encourages their involvement. However, certain situations in an inclusive environment may not be conducive to all students. In a follow-up question inquiring whether students with a disability should be in the general education classroom, Carmen and Nora shared a similar perspective but a different viewpoints toward special education. Carmen explained, “Inclusion means including every student. Each student is a general education student first. They should be treated as such, meaning that what they NEED should be a PART of our classroom.” On the other hand, Nora described inclusion as follows:

Inclusion means that all students should get Tier 1 support and the core grade level education. No students should be pulled during their core instruction times and they should all get the same amount of time. Some students need Tier 2 supports throughout the year on certain standards and skills; they should get more time and focus on those skills in order to close the gaps.

They both agreed that including collaboration is essential for teachers to educate all students

effectively in the classroom. Carmen echoed how collaboration encouraged organizational commitment and shared accountability:

Working with the IEP, BIP, or other interventions for a student, along with the student's teachers, working together as a team to best provide for the student's needs. Adaptations to work expectations will vary based on student needs for ALL students. Not just those that have interventions and plans already put into place.

In past literature, Collaboration has been found to be a beneficial tool for helping teachers serve students with disabilities (Brownell et al., 2006). Collaboration also provides support to teachers when working with non-disabled and disabled students. All the participants mentioned that the level of support that teachers receive also influences their attitudes toward inclusion.

### **Successful Inclusion Begins with the Teacher in General Education First**

Strange and Banning (2015) state that relationships could promote or suppress students' motivation to learn. Further, general educators plan and implement the curriculum to support students with and without disabilities who need assistance. With the implementation of inclusion in schools, staff redefine their roles. All six participants shared that the intent of faculty and staff was to work together to further motivate students to learn. Since Kelly is in her first year of teaching, she mentioned that "the Special Ed Department would be the primary people that kind of determine when kids get pulled out and when they go back to class."

A primary source of support for the implementation of effective inclusion is the positive attitude of all involved, as the development of an appropriate belief system is considered necessary to inclusive education. Strange and Banning (2015) noted that, "commonly shared interests are also important features of most communities" (p. 220). An observation Kelly shared was that flexibility is crucial to inclusion programming, especially when interactions take place within each batch during small group activities:

I think the teacher needs to be flexible for one thing. Just recognizing that you have students all completely different from each other, plus the abilities and personalities and culture background and stuff. I think incorporating all of that into your classroom and into your instruction all together helps the teacher to be successful in building relationships. I think building relationships is the important part about teaching. If you don't have that relationship with students, I don't think that students are going to be motivated to want to learn from you or learn in the classroom.

Thus, flexibility is critical, especially during instruction. Esparanza mentioned, “Definitely having an open mind along with being creative on figuring out how the tasks can be accommodated for a student’s needs.” Susan also added,

Flexibility is huge. Let’s say a task in main idea and key details, and the student just had to be able to select through some of the information and those kids might not be able to access it like everybody else. Just saying to yourself, how can you be flexible with what you originally had planned to lead these students with it?

Anna also shared that “teachers who are not flexible and who don’t have a positive attitude will keep them [students] from being successful.” As such, creating a classroom community tends to result in positive relationships between the teacher and students and among the students themselves.

### **Inconsistent Support Leads to Various Inclusion Implementation by Staff**

All of the participants identified having full control in decision-making concerning inclusion programming. General education teachers bring their skills, trainings, and perspectives to strengthen teaching and learning opportunities, methods, and effectiveness for all students. Strange and Banning (2015) noted that “concerns about decision-making environments also lead to various design options” (p. 89). In order to successfully implement inclusion by herself, Nora does her best in accommodating and modifying. However, she felt she had inadequate training to meet the needs of students with disabilities and stated, “I have full control over how I implement inclusion. I focus on this every day, but I have seen multiple other teachers take this control and just ignore working with these students.” Participants in their fourth and fifth year were noticeably implementing modifications and accommodations with little to no support from special education teachers or instructional coaches.

Paraprofessionals are also important for successful inclusive practices, but training and policies are inconsistent. However, Anna mentioned frustrations with paraeducators. One para assisted her student when needed whereas another para worked with her student and other general education students nearby. Anna referenced the impact of respect between a para and student while in the classroom, as she stated,

I see both positive and negative interactions. It is all dependent on how the student treats the para and how the para treats the student. Mutual respect is a huge factor when working in a classroom. I see my paras getting frustrated with some students they work



with often because of lack of effort or attitude.

Susan, a fourth-year teacher, provided insights into the relationship among paras and students in addition to escalating student behavior:

It also depends. I just feel like within a system, we have done a disservice. Just their ability to sincerely work with the students. But in those times of escalation, are we escalating or are we de-escalating and poking the bear? I would say that we have some associates within our building who may more than help the situation. I think part of that is just due to lack of training.

### **Establishing a Positive Classroom Culture Supports and Meets Students' Needs**

The characteristics of a school affect student behavior and academic achievement (Kallestad, 2010). A supportive culture was evident in all the locations through displays of classroom expectations or rules on the walls and at entrances of the classroom. One noticeable gesture that was different from all the locations was the word “believe” written above the classroom door in small-sized font along with the school pledge. Strange and Banning (2015) stress the importance of the subjective views and experiences of individuals within the socially constructed environment. Training and implementation on how to support students' needs in social emotional and behavioral supports was noted from the participants. Kelly expressed the implementation of Positive Behavior Intervention of Supports (PBIS) as a system that helps their school culture and climate:

I think PBIS systems help with that as well. Like kids who have positive behavior get rewarded. So, the idea is that kids can see how easy positive behavior can be rewarded. They can see the other kids get rewarded; this actually impacts [their] behavior.

Susan also stated the following:<sup>[L]  
[SEP]</sup>

We really pride ourselves for having a very inclusive group of students. So, we really, in terms of like culture, our kids are very open to any student. This past year, we had – I mean – we have a very diverse group of different needs, whether it was someone in a wheelchair or someone who just began to speak when they were in third grade. Our kids are very welcoming to any of those students.

Espananza, a teacher in her fourth year, expressed how her school culture is affected by not being provided with skills addressing a student's emotional health. She further explained that school culture is affected when students are not educated in an inclusive setting. She noted their



discipline referrals increase while their social and emotional growth and development skills decrease:

Our social-emotional like skills that our students have and lack are incredible. And you know, you try to do as much as you can with your classroom, like, “This is why we don’t do this, this is how it–” You know, like you try to logically explain it but some kids, that doesn’t – that’s not how they work. That’s not how they’re emotionally set up. I think that’s one of the biggest things is that I don’t know how necessarily or I don’t have time to teach all of the–those skills that they need, on top of everything else that I need them to get done, because that’s the social-emotional skill, you know, [that] sets the tone for a lot of things.

Carmen also echoed concerns about social-emotional health and the lack of stable environments when students are not at school:

I believe that the adults affect the challenges in our school, as well as home influences. For students with disabilities, it is most difficult if home environment is not stable or parents/guardians are not on the same page with the team creating and implementing the plan. Students without disabilities do not struggle as much, as long as they have a positive influence in their life.

All the participants agreed that professional development emphasizing inclusion would be beneficial. Strange and Banning (2015) noted that interventions play an important role in encouraging individuals to become involved. However, the participants shared different interpretations of how training looks in inclusion efforts. Professional development at Susan’s school emphasizes curriculum as a way to educate and support inclusion in the classroom. She stated, “The more comfortable we get with that, the more we’re going to be able to help all students. So, I think the more professional development we have with that, I think that’ll help with everything.” Some of the other participants have not been privileged to inclusion training while employed. In essence, successful professional development regarding inclusion provides teachers with the opportunity of observing, offering, and receiving feedback and analyzing student data. Nonetheless, the change of rules concerning least restrictive environment does affect school culture.

## **Discussion and Implications for Successful Inclusion in the Schools**

Teachers play a significant role in inclusion. The successful inclusion of all students may, however, only be possible within school settings that provide the necessary support and resources (Borg et al., 2011). This environment is further impacted by the fact that organizations communicate nonverbal communication through human or social aspects of the settings and the physical aspects of the place (Strange & Banning, 2015). In this study, each participant reported large class sizes as a barrier to implementing inclusion programs in their schools. Large classes allowed students to be more disruptive, aiding participation avoidance and hampering student–faculty classroom interaction. One implication of this research proposes that smaller classes are encouraged and, on some level, pressured students to participate in learning activities. Keeping students engaged during the independent time was another concern for the participants. Improving accessibility in the learning environment for students with disabilities will allow participation in the same activities in a similar manner as students without disabilities.

Strange and Banning (2015) described the aggregate environment as communities being partly distinguished by the characteristics of the constituent individuals. In this research, students feeling welcomed by their school was the most preferred theme among participants. The participants noted that inclusive programs can meet the needs of students by ensuring that these students make sufficient academic progress to narrow the achievement gap with their peers and make progress toward meeting core expectations. They also shared that recognizing all the students’ uniqueness, personalities, and abilities and being flexible in incorporating all of this into the classroom helps a teacher successfully build relationships with students, so that students can learn and be successful in school and life. By learning new inclusive methods to support all learners, teachers can help create a climate that is responsive to addressing all students’ individual needs.

Collaboration also involves training together to support inclusion. The participants noted the need for professional development, acquisition, and continuance of skills as well as training from coaches. Prior research by Heibert (1999) mentioned that collaboration among teachers is important when implementing strategies resulting from professional development. So, students benefit from successful planning and implementation; however, both general and special education teachers will have a more rewarding school year if they share ideas and plan together

(Mejia, 2015). Findings of this study suggest that inclusive classrooms cannot be handled in the same way as a regular classroom. The importance of planning high-quality instruction in providing for academic success and quality instruction was observed in each teacher's classroom. Evidence of high-quality instruction was observed during small group activities. As Strange and Banning (2015) described the organizational environment as constructed and reconstructed to achieve specific organizational goals, implementing effective inclusion depends on the positive attitude of all involved. Thus, schools should consider a common matrix for the implementation of inclusion programming in general education classrooms.

The participants noted being sole decision makers in implementing inclusion and also being unprepared when educating students with a disability. Thus, schools should consider removing barriers around inclusion and focus on identifying a common matrix based on students' needs. Removing barriers to inclusion will make every program, policy, and practice available to all staff, through a clear and common vision that puts students first. Prior research by Leithwood et al. (1999) noted that teachers, acting as leaders, had greater commitment to change. This commitment in decision making also consists of guidance to increase student achievement, with the help of an instructional coach.

Strange and Banning (2015) described the construct environment as understanding the educational setting through the perceptions of users. The socially constructed environment recognizes the role of teachers in shaping their experience and the experience of others. Students with disabilities have a difficult time with social skills concepts and need instruction to help them understand how to appropriately implement what is expected (Battista, 1999). Participants in this study made conscious efforts to communicate the need for resources or curriculum to develop social-emotional skill for all students, which is crucial to ensuring inclusion.

Another implication of this research suggests providing specific professional development for both general and special education teachers. All study participants recognized and understood the need for additional professional development for inclusive teaching, which addresses instruction as well as training regarding understanding and implementing inclusion in the general education environment. In fact, each participant had a different interpretation of professional development and training in inclusion.

## **Limitations**

Although this study captured an insight of fidelity of inclusion in classrooms of teachers with varying experience, participants with less than five years in the classroom may be relying on training initiatives carried out pre-service as well as current district expectations in implementing inclusion programming. Furthermore, this researched to this time frame was important to frame the scope of the study, but may not provide a comprehensive picture on the fidelity of inclusion. As a result, this study included six participants with 0–5 years of experience who are teaching in either the fourth or fifth grade. Interviews with participants revealed insights into the challenges of implementing effective inclusion practices within an inclusive classroom.

Next, findings of this study may face some limitations with respect to its sampling method, as according to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), purposeful sampling is “based on the assumption that the researcher wants to discover, understand, gain insight, therefore, must select a sample from which most can be learned” (p. 9). In this study, the selection of participants provided the most information as they were currently teaching in fourth and fifth grades of general education and started their teaching career in the general education classroom no earlier than the 2013-2014 school year.

Finally, Creswell (1998) and Groenewald (2004) considered interviews with 6–10 participants as sufficient to reach saturation. Simply put, qualitative researchers continue to collect data until they no longer hear or see new information; therefore, as six individuals participated in this study, interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached.

## **Future Research**

Titone (2005) stated that a major obstacle to successful inclusion has been the lack of effective preparation for teachers. Additionally, few studies address the need for reorganization of the teaching and learning process as well as redefining of roles and relationships between all the individuals involved in providing effective inclusion in the general education environment. Future research can add to the available literature by replicating this current study with a larger sample size, looking specifically at teachers who have taught for 5–10 service years. Data from

this study suggests that teachers with more years of service were able to understand the teaching strategies imperative for a successful inclusion classroom. Furthermore, the study also revealed that the more experience teachers have better insights on the benefits and challenges of implementing inclusion practices.

The findings also suggest replicating this study with charter schools, parochial and private institutions, and high schools. The exploration of all of these schools through the lens of Strange and Banning's (2015) environmental model could potentially provide further insights into attitudes towards inclusion in private schools and secondary education.

Finally, this study should be replicated with a focus on the perceptions of students and parents with disabilities, while using the Strange and Banning's (2015) environmental model. Research from this current study suggests the findings of such future research could provide information on parent and student perceptions of the impact of inclusion and academic success. Such useful information may be gathered to further develop best practices and strengthen school and parent partnerships in developing effective and strategic communication.

### **Institutional Review Board**

The inclusion of human participants in research requires approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Drake University. The IRB also helps to protect the institution and the researchers against potential legal implications that can be considered unethical. This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Drake University. Training was provided by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, Social and Behavioral Research. Furthermore, all recommendations by the IRB were implemented throughout the entire study with the highest integrity, and no data were collected until IRB approval was obtained.

### Inclusion Matrix Example

		K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Levels	K–12 Inclusion Matrix													
		Level of support based on needs in the general education environment												
1	These students function successfully in the general education classroom with minimal support as long as the general education teacher uses differentiated instructional strategies.	Support to Independence												
2	These students may need to be accommodated in specific subjects; however, collaboration on accommodations needs to occur between the general education teacher and a solutions team.	Model and Support			Support and Student Application			Student Application to Independence						
3	The general education teacher may need to consult with instructional coaches, a solutions team, and the special education teacher regarding accommodations for specific lessons/skills.	Model and Support			Support and Student Application			Student Application to Independence						
4	These students should be able to be successful in general education settings with the benefit of a co-teacher or paraeducator as long as the general education teacher	Model and Support			Support and Student Application to Independence									

	collaborates on accommodations, modifications, and instructional strategies based on students' strengths.		
5	These students identified <b>with a plan</b> will need support from a paraeducator or possibly direct assistance from a special education teacher on specific subjects while in the general education classroom. When a special education teacher is not in the classroom, the general education teacher <b>will need</b> to consult with the special education teacher on a regular basis to assist in designing accommodations.	Model and Support	Support and Student Application to Independence
6	These students may benefit from specialized instruction delivered by a special education teacher <b>while</b> in the general education environment. Classroom schedules may need to be altered, and any removal for specialized instruction must be done on a very limited basis.	Model, Support, and Student Application	
7	These students need significant accommodations (and possibly modifications) in general education classes for the majority of subjects, if not all.	Model, Support, and Student Application	

8	These students need maximum accommodations, modifications, and support while in general education classes. A special education teacher needs to be assigned to help support students' needs and teacher's instructional delivery.	Model, Support, and Student Application
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**Model and Support:** Direct modeling and support of new skills acquired as well as retention of previous skills learned

**Student Application:** New skills acquired and retention of previous skills learned, which are then applied by students with support

**Support and Student Application to Independence:** Support of new skills acquired and retention of previous skills, which are then applied by students independently



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## **Inclusive University Experiences for Students with Disabilities**

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### **Abstract**

For many high school students, going to college has always been their expectation. Although students with disabilities have attended higher education institutions for many years, for one group of students, access to higher education has been a more recent occurrence. Students with cognitive disabilities have had more opportunities for post-secondary education since the Higher Education Act of 2008 removed previous barriers such as requiring a standard high school diploma. Yet, there still appears to be some resistance to allowing students with disabilities to participate in post-secondary opportunities. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of university faculty and typical college peers in regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities on a college campus. Participants were surveyed about their expectations, benefits, strengths, and limitations of a transition program on a university campus. Student and faculty participants found the program to be mutually beneficial and a great relationship producer.

*Key words:* Students with Disabilities, Secondary Transition, Inclusive College Experiences, Disability Studies in Higher Education

### **Inclusive University Experiences for Students with Disabilities**

Higher education opportunities have expanded significantly for students with disabilities (SWD) since 1975 when the first federal law requiring special education services for all elementary and secondary students with disabilities be provided in the least restrictive environment (Wright & Wright, 2007). As elementary and high schools became more inclusive

for persons with disabilities, colleges and universities became more integrated as well. However, fewer SWD graduate from high school when compared with their peers without disabilities. While 84% of high school students without disabilities graduate from high school, only 65.5% of SWD graduate (Connor et al., 2020).

In 1990, recognizing the need for more support for SWD as they prepare to transition from high school to college, employment, or other postsecondary opportunities, the federal special education laws included transition as a specific consideration for individualized education programs (IEP). These new regulations required that school districts start planning for transition when SWD turn 16, although these requirements could begin earlier if necessary and appropriate. These transition plans included specific requirements such as postsecondary goals for employment, education, and independent living. Additionally, these plans needed to include transition activities in high school to prepare for a successful transition for each SWD. As a result of these changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), numerous universities across the United States began collaborating with high schools to provide transition programs on university campuses. For students with disabilities who are still enrolled in high school, there are a couple of options for participating in college programs while still enrolled in high school. Students who have mild learning disabilities or other high incidence disabilities might be enrolled in dual credit courses where they can receive both high school and college credit at the same time for the same course. These students typically do not need additional support because they are academically capable of completing the work independently. Other students with disabilities, such as those in the Transition Learning Community (TLC) Program, have aged out of the secondary school system because although they have completed all of their coursework, they still have a need for significant support to be successful. These students more often have intellectual disabilities, autism, or significant learning disabilities.

Papay and Griffin (2013) reported that nearly 200 programs for students with intellectual disabilities existed at four-year colleges and universities, two-year colleges, and trade or technical schools in the United States. The goal of these transition programs was to ease the transition of high school students with disabilities to post-secondary education by providing the structure and scaffolding necessary to support all aspects of the lives of SWDs as they prepare to graduate from high school and enter some type of postsecondary experiences.

Due to the continuing high unemployment rates for persons with disabilities, the idea of preparing students with disabilities for successful transition was further strengthened under the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. According to the 2019 Report on U.S. Disability Employment rates by state, 37% of U.S. civilians with disabilities ages 18-64 living in the community had a job, compared to 77.2% for people without disabilities. According to Papay and Griffin (2013), people who have at least some postsecondary education earn more and have lower unemployment rates than those who do not. The reauthorization of IDEA (2004) amendments emphasized the importance of appropriate transition activities and services for high school students to ensure that all high school SWD have access to appropriate postsecondary environments. “In recent years, the importance of postsecondary education has been recognized even for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, a group of students that has traditionally been excluded due to typical college entrance criteria” (Papay & Griffin, 2013, p. 110). The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 removed many previous barriers for students with disabilities. “Specifically, the HEOA enables eligible students with intellectual disabilities and developmental disabilities to receive federal Pell Grants, Supplemental Education Opportunities Grants, and work-study funds” (Plotner & Marshall, 2014, p. 48). Yet Sanford and et al. (2011) reported that SWD participated in postsecondary education at a rate of 55%, while their peers without disabilities had a participation rate of 62%. Grigal et al (2011) found that of the students studied with intellectual disabilities, only 11% attended two or four-year colleges. Since many admissions and financial barriers have now been removed for students with intellectual disabilities, this study examined some of the organizational and attitudinal barriers that still may exist for SWD in higher education.

There are many significant considerations for SWD who attend college, such as if they will live in the residence halls and how they will participate in campus activities. The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of inclusive college experiences for faculty members and peers without disabilities.

## **Research Questions**

- Are there significant differences between university students and university faculty in the perception of the implementation of the Think College Benchmarks program in a transition program for high school SWD?
- What themes would be identified by university students without disabilities related to the expectations, limitations, and benefits of inclusive university experiences?
- What themes would be identified by university faculty related to the expectations, limitations, and benefits of inclusive university experiences?

## **Methods**

This research was conducted in full accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies, and the IRB Board determined that adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study were included. Participants provided consent to participate in the research. This research took place at a small, Midwestern university with a Transition Learning Community (TLC) program on campus. The instruments used for this study included a survey and interview questions developed and validated by special education faculty at the university. Although this particular program was not a Think College program, the researchers selected the Think College Standards as a basis for the survey tool due to the national recognition of the standards as best practices. The Think College Standards, Quality Indicators, and Benchmarks for Inclusive Higher Education were developed at the University of Massachusetts Boston. According to their website, the standards, "...are aligned with the definition of a comprehensive postsecondary and transition program for students with intellectual disabilities and reflect institutional and instructional practices that support a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework as outlined in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008." ([www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net)).

Previous studies by Grigal, Hart and Weir (2011), Benito (2012), and Tracy (2017), have validated the significance of the Think College Standards in the preparation and establishment of transition programs. The eight Think College standards include: academic access, career

development, campus membership, self-determination, alignment with college systems and practices, coordination and collaboration, sustainability, and ongoing evaluation.

The survey (See Appendix) consisted of three sections: demographics, the Likert scale items based on the Think College Standards, and open-ended questions. A Likert scale was used for the section of the survey related to perceptions. Respondents answered questions for each dimension by rating the items on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 indicating: not planning to implement, 2 indicating: no progress, 3 indicating: in progress, but not fully implemented, and 4 indicating: fully implemented. The survey link was sent directly to all participants via email. A reminder to complete the survey was sent a month later. Invitations to participate in interviews were sent out after the initial surveys were concluded. The interview questions were the same questions used as the open-ended questions of the survey, but provided additional prompts to garner more information. The interviews were conducted by one or both of the authors, and were recorded with a mobile device application, Otter.ai that provided simultaneous transcription service as the interviews were being recorded. Additional qualitative data were collected from the open-ended questions on the survey and follow-up interviews with some of the participants. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare the median values between the two groups for the quantitative items. Using qualitative methods identified by Creswell (2012), the researchers individually analyzed each of the survey and interview responses and coded the responses. The researchers read all of the qualitative responses a second and third time to identify tentative and then final themes that emerged.

## **Participants**

### ***Faculty***

The participants in this study were the faculty members and university students without disabilities who were involved with the inclusive program. The faculty members were selected to have TLC students in their classes based solely on the interest areas of the students in the TLC Program. For example, if one of the students with disabilities expressed an interest in geography, a geography professor was selected. The faculty members were provided some initial background information from the TLC teacher on the program, the student who would be enrolled in their course, and the support that would be provided by the special education teacher.

### ***Students***

The university students without disabilities were elementary and special education double majors or special education majors who were enrolled in a university course on secondary transition. These students had the opportunity to work with the students with disabilities from the TLC program on a weekly basis as they learned content related to secondary transition. As part of this course, the university students without disabilities completed transition assessments with the TLC students and worked on writing Individual Education Programs (IEPs) that would be appropriate for the students.

The SWD in the inclusive setting were the students from the Transition Learning Community (TLC), comprised of students from a local high school. There were twelve students in this program whose parents had completed an application and interview process for acceptance into the program. The students had their own classroom on campus and were supported by a special education teacher, a paraprofessional, and a graduate assistant throughout the day. The students had disabilities such as intellectual disabilities, autism, traumatic brain injury, vision impairments, and specific learning disabilities.

Some of the students were individuals who wanted a true college experience and intended to continue to seek a degree after TLC. They were encouraged to take the required courses that they needed such as English and math so that they could get assistance with the hardest of the courses. The students who did not plan to continue college after this program chose their courses based on interests. Three of the students were enrolled in remedial dual credit courses in English, writing, and math and received credit for their courses. The other students audited their courses. After an initial orientation to campus, the students attended all of their classes independently. TLC students also received assistance from the TLC teacher, paraprofessional, and Graduate Assistant in organization, study skills, time management, social skills, money management, healthy eating, physical education, as well as other independent living skills. All of the students were local and did not live in residence halls at the university but commuted back and forth from their homes each day. All of the students held jobs during this experience as well. Some worked on campus and some worked at various businesses throughout the community. The students with disabilities were not included in the survey because the researchers did not receive permission from the school district to include them in the study.

The plans for the TLC program to be on the university campus had been developed over a period of one year. Many years prior to this study, this TLC Program had been hosted on a different private college campus in this community. The Dean of the School of Education at the time of this study believed that the current university was a better fit due to the special education major offered at the university. Meetings were held with the following representatives of the university: the Dean of the School of Education, special education faculty, Director of Residence Life, and Director of Student Services and the local school district Director of Special Education, Assistant Superintendent and a high school special education teacher. A collaborative agreement was reached outlining which services and supports would be provided by the university and which would be provided by the local school district. Even though the TLC program only remained on campus the year in which this study was conducted, it should be noted that the program continued in the community and the university students without disabilities and faculty continued to work with the TLC Program the following year once the program moved off campus.

## **Procedures**

The survey items were developed through CampusLabs which allowed data to be gathered and stored securely. The survey links were sent directly to faculty members and university students who worked with the students from the TLC Program in their university classes. The survey comprised three demographics questions, 15 Likert scale items, and 14 open-ended questions. The Likert scale questions were all related to the Think College Standards, Quality Indicators, and Benchmarks for Inclusive Higher Education. Participants were asked to rate their perception of the level of implementation of each of the standards. The open-ended questions asked more specific information about the first-hand experience of the participants with the program on campus.

## **Demographics**

The initial survey was completed by four out of five possible faculty members for a response rate of 80%. Five out of twelve students completed the survey for a response rate of 42%. The demographic information provided by the respondents indicated that 22.22% were male, while 77.78% were female. In addition, 44.44% of the respondents were ages 18-24,

11.11% were ages 25-30, 22.22% were ages 31-40, 11.11% were ages 41-50, and 11.11% were ages 51-60.

After the initial survey information was gathered, all participants were invited to participate in individual interviews to gather more specific details. For the follow-up interviews, three of the five faculty members, and three of the 12 students participated. Responses for the interviews were gathered using a mobile device application, Otter.ai, which recorded and transcribed each interview. This application could only be accessed through a secure online system which required the passwords of the researchers' to gain access. The faculty and student responses were reported verbatim in the excerpts that provided the evidence to support these themes, although in some cases words were added in parentheses for clarification.

### **Data Analysis**

The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to compare the median values between the two groups for the quantitative items and determined to have no significant findings. The Mann-Whitney U Test is used for situations where one cannot assume the data is normally distributed and where the sample sizes are very small. This method compares the median value between the two groups, testing the null hypothesis that the medians are not different. For this data (with two samples of size 4 and 5), the critical value of U (the test statistic) is 0. Any value of U that is higher than 0 indicates that the null hypothesis cannot be rejected. Since there were no significant findings from the quantitative part of the study, the emphasis of this research became the qualitative findings. As a result, the researchers have chosen to focus discussion of the findings of this study only on the qualitative results.

Procedures documented by Creswell (2012) for qualitative research were utilized to identify themes that emerged from the responses. The survey and interview responses of the participants were analyzed independently by each researcher reading the responses initially and noting key terms to gain a general idea of possible themes. After identifying relevant themes, the researchers met to compare notes. Next, they reviewed all of the responses again to determine if any new themes emerged, and if any additional information needed to be gathered. At this point the researchers identified the final themes by using specific quotes from the respondents to validate those themes. The data were triangulated by comparing the survey results, open-ended question results, and interview results to establish the validity of the themes.



## **Results**

The findings of this study revealed that inclusive university experiences provided beneficial experiences for both university students and university faculty members. The following themes developed from considering the research questions and analyzing the responses to the survey, the open-ended questions, and the interviews with the university students without disabilities and faculty members: Building relationships, typical age-appropriate university experiences, independence, and mutually beneficial experience.

### **Building Relationships**

Building relationships was identified as a dominant theme by both the peers without disabilities and the faculty members. Some of the research questions that prompted the following responses from both students and faculty were: What expectations did you have for this experience and in what ways were those expectations met? Additionally, what do you think are the strengths and benefits of this program and what would be some characteristics for the ideal candidates? On both the surveys, and in the interviews, the peers identified the importance of social interactions in the building of actual relationships with the students with disabilities. The students without disabilities spent time with the students with disabilities outside of classes by having coffee and attending athletic events together. The peers without disabilities were pleasantly surprised to see other students across campus interacting with the students with disabilities as well. Some specific details from the student surveys are included in the following quotes:

I expected to collaborate with these students through social interactions and engage in a normal school environment. I was able to see and talk with students from the TLC program daily. I was able to mentor and help them understand appropriate social behavior. TLC also helped me watch other (university) students take them under their wing and help them navigate the campus, which is an experience that would be lost without TLC on campus (Student Interview Respondent 1, personal communication, January 15, 2020).

I had a great experience building relationships and learning about transition students. These students spent time with several university students outside of class as well. It's great for everyone to be able to spend time with these students, not just special education majors (Student Interview Respondent 2, personal communication, January 16, 2020).

I hoped to build relationships with these students so that I could practice learning how to implement the skills I was learning in college and apply them with real life students. The TLC class being on campus was a major success in our subject matter, as well as for their own personal developments amongst their peers as well (Student Survey Respondent 3).

“We had a ton of experience doing work with the students, learning about surveys and testing, and purely meeting and building relationships with the students” (Student Survey Respondent 5).

During the student interviews, students had the opportunity to further expand their thoughts on the building of these relationships with students with disabilities. Again, students explained how the in-class contact carried over into relationships outside of class. Some specific details are provided in the following student interview quotes:

It was really cool for me, mainly because I already knew some of the students, so it really helped that bond even more. But it was really cool to build on our relationships, and see them in different areas, not just like once a year type of deal, but learn who they are, how their disability affects them how they are in different areas. It was really cool looking at them as students, learning about their disabilities, and how one might work with them if you were their teacher or their service provider of some sort (Student Interview Respondent 1, Personal Communication, January 15, 2020).

Faculty members reported that they did not expect the SWD to participate as fully academically in classes as they did. The faculty members hadn't anticipated that the students would interact as much as their peers either.

“I did not expect her to contribute to class discussions. I did expect her to be a positive person in the classroom and to be friendly to other students. (Student) definitely saw herself as part of the college classroom and it was good for her to be surrounded by her

peers and also to be able to chime in with correct answers sometimes” (Faculty Survey Response).

These ideas were further substantiated in the faculty interviews as illustrated in the following quotes:

Well, I think its building friendships and for our students to interact with them (TLC students) and learn from them too. Because there’s learning going both ways, they’re learning from each other and so, I think it’s just great to mix them. Let them interact and share experiences. And I appreciated that our teacher candidates were so welcoming and included her even though she wasn’t able to the same things they were doing, I think that it was a good learning experience for them (Faculty Interview Respondent 1, Personal Communication, January 15, 2020).

I went to watch him at a basketball game, Special Olympics, and he gave me a big hug. It was awesome... So I’d like to have the opportunity to do that again, other faculty would too... I think for a lot of students appreciate them being here too (Faculty Interview Respondent 2, Personal Communication, January 24, 2020).

### **Typical University Experience**

Another theme identified was the importance of a typical university experience. Both peers without disabilities and faculty members emphasized the importance of SWD participating in similar events and life experiences appropriate for their ages. The university students without disabilities in this study had grown up in a time of inclusion of SWD in their K-12 classrooms, so it appeared logical to them for that the integration of SWD to continue into higher education. Some of the questions that prompted these responses were: What expectations did you have for this experience and in what ways were those expectations met? Additionally, what do you think are the strengths and benefits of this program and what would be some characteristics for the ideal candidates? The following quotes from the student surveys supported the idea of SWD having typical college experiences.

I think the TLC program is very beneficial. I have a good relationship with several of the students in this program and they are very appreciative of the experiences they have

gained. Students have been able to make several friends and enjoy normal college experiences (Student Survey Respondent).

Another student stated:

They benefit by gaining the interactions of typical college students. They are able to socialize and be independent throughout their experiences. I was able to interact with a few students by going to games with them or working out on campus. They always enjoyed making new friends and were happy to feel like typical college kids. The strengths of the program is that the TLC students get to experience life as they would normally. They get to be alongside their peers, and participate in activities and events that they deserve to be a part of (Student Survey Respondent).

The student interviews further substantiated these views on the importance of the typical college experience for SWD.

One of the benefits would be that they're with their age appropriate peers. And that's a huge thing that we look at in special education. We want students who are 18 to 21 with other students who are at the same age. We don't want them with 14 year olds or 40 year olds because that is just inappropriate regardless (Student Interview Respondent 3, Personal Communication, January 27, 2020).

I think it really helped to have students with their peers and other adults that are going through the same thing where they're transitioning from being at home to maybe being on their own or taking college classes to the high school classes. I think it showed them like the college experience, but it was guided enough... so to get with their normal age peers and just really help them kind of flourish (Student Interview Respondent 2, Personal Communication, January 16, 2020).

Faculty members stressed the importance of college as a time for exploration and growing independence for all students. Some expressed that they had no expectations for these SWD actually participating in class and interacting with other students. Some of the questions that prompted these responses were: What expectations did you have for this experience and in

what ways were those expectations met? Additionally, what do you think are the strengths and benefits of this program and what would be some characteristics for the ideal candidates?

I was wrong about contributing – [student] answered the very first question of the first class in world regional geography. I asked the class about what country has a lot of Hindus, and right away she said, “India!” The students all looked at her when I said, “Right, [student]!” Many other times, she had facts down and could contribute them. When it came to logic questions/discussions, she often answered incorrectly, but I used those opportunities to engage the class with why the answer was different from what [student] was thinking. She liked world regional geography... A strength is that the students had access to college life and some campus resources (Faculty Survey Respondent).

A faculty participant working with SWD stated, “The student attended every class and added to some of the class discussions”. Another faculty said, “The work done by students in this program has met my expectations... The opportunity to take classes with peers of the same age [was a benefit]”.

The faculty members who were interviewed further substantiated the thoughts expressed on the initial survey by elaborating on their experiences with the SWD interacting with the university students in their classes. The following interview responses expand on this theme of providing a typical university experience.

His behavior was terrific. He actually added a lot of real positive stuff to the class. I think it's good for university students to see as broad spectrum of the human condition as possible. For example, I don't mind if students leave my class, because I want them to see the face of failure. I want them to take a look and hear him [a student] snoring. I want my students to take a big bite of the college, travel, internships... get a girlfriend, go to a party and other games, just take a big bite, and so I think that the habit is kind of helping kids see more of the diversity that's out there is brilliant. So I think that's a real positive (Faculty Interview Respondent 2, Personal Communication, January 24, 2020).

I had no idea, and I didn't know that they were still in the high school setting. I honestly didn't. I mean, in fact, they were outperforming many of the college students. And so you know, my expectations, they're just the same for every student. I want them to learn and listen and be able to master some skills and be able to apply it to some science problems...It's [this class] basically designed to teach them some skills. Where this student excelled was at the repetition, follow directions, do it over and over and over again (Faculty Interview Respondent 3, Personal Communication, January 29, 2020).

## **Independence**

Another theme somewhat related to typical experiences is the idea of independence. Both peers without disabilities and faculty suggested that the idea of independence was an important aspect of this program. College is typically a time for young people to assert their independence and become less reliant on their parents or guardians. If SWD are going to be successful in life, independence is a critical foundation for that success. For both university students and faculty, the main question that prompted these responses was the one about the benefits of this program. The following survey and interview responses supported the theme of independence: "Strengths include giving the students independence and to feel like typical college kids." (Student Survey Respondent). "Students were able to be around peers and learn social interaction. They also learned life skills while being in classes, such as: time management, independence, decision making, and advocating for themselves" (Student Survey Respondent).

Students in the TLC program, in my opinion, are students who are fairly high achieving but just aren't quite ready to be done with high school and still require some support. [University Name] is a great place to ease them into the adult world. They can work on social skills, academics, and so many other life skills. They were always very friendly when I passed by them in the hallway (Student Survey Respondent).

I think a big one for them is they get a lot of experience with a variety of things. They get experiences going to college courses, experiences with building their social skills, not only with different classes coming into them, but just being on campus gives them independence and free time to do different activities, and to learn what it's kind of like, even though they might live at home, but kind of more of an independent look for their

free time and their days (Student Interview Respondent 1, personal communication, January 15, 2020).

### **Mutual Benefits of the Program**

The final theme identified by both university students and faculty, and likely the most important one, was that this program was mutually beneficial. The university students learned a great deal from their interactions with the SWD. They noticed other students on campus interacting with the SWD as well, not only in classes, but socially. The university faculty appeared pleasantly surprised at how beneficial this program was for themselves and the typical students in their classes. The following quotes supporting the theme of mutual benefit for this program were gleaned from the questions on the benefits and limitation of the program. “Great program for both sides. Should continue to be at (this college)!” (Student Interview Respondent 1, personal communication, January 15, 2020). “There are countless benefits. I did not see cons of this program. WIN-WIN for everyone” (Student Survey Respondent). “I enjoyed the interacting with the students in the TLC program immensely. The brought joy and laughter to my day! The students from TLC are so positive, caring, and happy” (Faculty Survey Respondent). “Diversity is important, and being different is a good thing. I loved having the students on campus” (Student Survey Respondent).

We were able to practice the skills we have been learning on real students. Not only is this important for our education, but it is important for the whole (university) community to be involved with people who are different than they are. That is something that I hear said all the time, and having the TLC program on campus was one way to do that. The students were very friendly and great to work with (Student Survey Respondent).

Strengths would be that NSU Teacher Candidates receive daily interaction and learning opportunities from TLC staff and students. For example, (our professor) asked the TLC students to help (college) student learn how to give transition based assessments to students of that age span. It was very helpful to determine information and how we would plan for their future (Student Survey Respondent).

I saw how cool the program was and like how much it benefited the (TLC) students and also our [University] students as well as much for expectations. I think it should stay

around. I think it was very beneficial for both sides. Anyone that does Special Olympics can get even better in touch with them, they can make lifelong friends from it. I still see people around town, like coming back to [city name] that still recognize me. And I think that's awesome. I overall think it's a great program for both sides of [University] and the TLC program (Student Interview Respondent 1, personal communication, January 15, 2020).

This was a remarkable program to have on the [University] Campus, and [University] should value that they were able to provide the TLC students with the enhancement of academics, social skills, personal skills, and independence. The [University] students benefited just as much as the TLC students did throughout the duration of the year (Student Survey Respondent 5).

Greatest strength is inclusion. It's good role-modeling for the students in class, too. Greatest limitation is that we faculty do not know if something is an issue unless a student tells us and our students don't always speak up. [Student] sat in one section of the classroom the first 1/3 of the semester, then she moved to sit by another young lady. That young lady came up to me after a week or so and said she already struggles in the class and having [Student] next to her asking how to spell things made it difficult for her to take notes and listen and help [Student]. [Student] likes to take notes, too, but likes to spell things correctly and needs help doing that. The next class, I encouraged (Student) to sit up front by me and next to an Honors student I know well who was taking the class, and that worked fine for the rest of the semester. Likewise, in Lab, [Student] was slowing other students' progress when working in groups. The lab instructor called it to my attention about 3 weeks in, and I called [teacher] and she sent her GA to lab with [Student] after that - it worked fine. But, the bummer was [Student] wasn't really part of lab. She was in a lab group alone with her GA (Faculty Survey Respondent).

TLC is a positive program and rewarding. I was lucky to have [Student] for two semesters. She greeted me every morning of every class and was happy to see me - it gave me a positive frame of mind to kick off class. Her attendance was nearly perfect,



and other students liked it when she answered questions or asked questions in class. She handled not being called on well - I did not always call on her when she raised her hand. She's a good soul and that kind of positive force will always make an environment better (Faculty Survey Respondent).

As Dr. [name] would instruct on some transitional items and then we will be able to actually put those items into play with the students right away that we were able to work with, so it was nice because we got to apply what we're learning, right away with the students in the transition class...I guess I didn't really see any limitations because I saw the whole class. And what came out of it, very positive and beneficial for the [university] students as well as the TLC students; so I can't think of any limitations (Student Interview Respondent 3, Personal Communication, January 27, 2020).

Some of the themes discovered in this research study have support in the literature as well. Dolyniuk et al., 2002, found that in a university based program for SWD who were mentored by typical college students, some of whom were education majors, the program yielded beneficial results for both parties. As one college student in that study explained, "While we learned a lot of book knowledge from the class, it was not until we had this field experience that the pieces started to come together..." (p. 240). In another study in a similarly rural state compared to this current study, SWD were matched with occupational therapy majors at a university. Tracy (2017), found that this transition program based on the Think College framework benefited both the SWD and the peers without disabilities. The SWD gained more self-confidence, as well as growth in academic, work, and social skills. The peers without disabilities assisted with coursework, but also ate with the SWD and participated in social events with them as well.

One significant finding of this study was the overwhelmingly positive outlook of the faculty members involved. Mostly all of the faculty members involved with the program eagerly responded to the survey and requests for interviews. Their responses indicated that they initially had no expectations for the program, except for maybe being concerned about potential behavior problems. The faculty members expressed that the program exceeded any preconceived notions that they held. The SWD not only participated well in class, but they interacted with other

students, and in some cases volunteered to answer questions more often than peers without disabilities.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One limitation of this research study was the lack of responses from university students without disabilities who were enrolled in the same university courses as the TLC students. The students who responded were mainly elementary and special education majors, who were unaware of the structure of the program, but who may have already had a positive view of SWD on a university campus. It would be helpful to examine the perceptions of students who were totally unaware of the structure and purpose of the TLC program. However, as noted by Papay and Griffin (2013), finding college students who can become involved and provide strong advocacy for the program is of utmost importance to the success of the program.

Another limitation of this study was the inability to interview the students with disabilities in the TLC program. Collecting their experiences with the program on the campus of the university would have been valuable input to this study.

### **Recommendations**

#### ***Considerations for Policy and Practice***

Universities are encouraged to continue to expand opportunities for SWD to have inclusive educational and social experiences. One of the structural items that was reported by participants in this study was the collaboration and commitment of the stakeholders involved in the establishment of the program. The President of the University and the Dean of the School of Education signed agreements with the local school district. In addition, the program was provided space on campus and the faculty members involved were informed about the SWD who would be attending their classes.

Another important factor related to the success of the program was the selection of the peers without disabilities who were involved. Using students who were mainly special education majors as participants appeared to be beneficial to the program due to the willingness to continue relationships with the SWD outside of class as well. Although this program was perceived as

very beneficial by both peers without disabilities and faculty members, the information gained from the surveys indicated that other structural items were not fully in place. According to the survey, the two areas that were perceived as being fully or partially implemented were: providing access to a wide array of college course types for students with disabilities and having a designated person to coordinate the program-specific services. In order for programs to be successful, it is important to have commitment and buy-in for all parties before implementing inclusive college programs.

Interested universities should have a planning and advisory team for the creation and management of the transition program. Interested universities should ensure that they have the proper facilities to support and maintain the transition program. In addition, the program should be positively presented and approved by all necessary parties on campus. All university faculty and staff should be informed of the mission and guidelines of the transition program. The structure and standards in place for inclusive programs should be evident to the participants to ensure sustainability.

Plotner and Marshall (2014) provided many topics worthy of consideration before implementing transition programs, such as non-matriculated students participating in university classes, housing these students on campus, liability issues, support services, healthcare needs, and personal versus parental guardianship. In relation to those concerns, the authors recommended the following approach to building support for transition programs: starting at the top with administration, preparing, using existing university frameworks, being flexible, and recognizing the novelty of the program and the need for education and support (Plotner and Marshall, 2014, p. 56).

Papay and Griffin (2013) provided helpful advice for developing inclusive college opportunities, specifically for students with intellectual disabilities. They suggested understanding and documenting the needs of students with intellectual disabilities working with a broad range of stakeholders, learning from model programs, developing a shared vision, making a pitch, and considering additional factors such as admissions criteria, marketing plans, recruiting and training peer mentors, and developing program guidelines, policies, and procedures (Papay and Griffin, 2013, p. 112). A university mentorship program at Ball State University in which college-aged SWD were paired with university faculty to mentor the

students during their first year at college provided positive results. Harris, Jo, Markle, and Wessel (2011) found that the faculty members who mentored first-year university SWD expressed that the partnership helped them understand SWD better and as a result, their teaching improved. Universities planning to implement transition programs for SWD would benefit by having strong peer and faculty mentors in place for the SWD.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the knowledge of support for and the perceptions of inclusion of high school SWD in a transition program based on a university campus. The research attempted to answer the following questions: 1) Are there significant differences between university students and university faculty in the perception of the implementation of the Think College Benchmarks in a transition program for high school SWD, and what themes would be identified by typical university students related to the expectations, limitations, and benefits of inclusive university experiences; 2) what themes would be identified by typical university faculty related to the expectations, limitations, and benefits of inclusive university experiences?

There were no significant differences in the perceptions of the implementation of the Think College Standards. The themes that emerged from both university students and faculty members were supported by the literature as well. One interesting finding that may be useful to institutions of higher education was the positive response of the university faculty to working with the SWD in their classes. A mentoring faculty/student program, such as the one at Ball State University, might be helpful for recruitment of prospective students. Since many universities now have high school students taking classes under dual enrollments in high school and universities, strengthening the bond between high school students and university faculty would appear to be mutually beneficial. Unfortunately, due to the turnover in administration at this university, the TLC program only remained on campus one year. In the two years after the study concluded, the university students and faculty have still continued to work with the students from the TLC Program even though the program is not on campus. The pandemic of 2020-21 made collaboration more challenging, but the work continued. There have been initial conversations about the program collaborating with the university again in a more formal manner.

The information gathered in the quantitative portion of this study, although not significant for the results of this study would be valuable in reestablishing the program on

campus. There were only two Think College Standards where both groups believed that the standard was fully implemented or in progress. In answering the question about providing access to a wide array of college course types for students with disabilities, 88.89% of participants believed that this was fully implemented, while 11.11% believed that this was in progress, but not fully implemented. This information could provide a good starting point for conversations on successful implementation. Forming an Advisory Committee of all stakeholders would be an important first step toward successful inclusion of the program on campus once again. It is the shared vision of all participants that the lessons learned from this study will lead to stronger preparation and training at the high school and university level to enable the program to return to campus successfully in the future.

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**Appendix:**  
**Survey and Interview Questions**

Please respond to the following demographic questions.

Please select one:

\_\_\_ (College) Faculty

\_\_\_ (College) Student

Please select one:

\_\_\_ Male

\_\_\_ Female

\_\_\_ Other

\_\_\_ Prefer not to respond

Please select the appropriate age group:

\_\_\_ 18-24

\_\_\_ 25-30

\_\_\_ 31-40

\_\_\_ 41-50

\_\_\_ 51-60

\_\_\_ 61-70

\_\_\_ 71-80

\_\_\_ Over 80

\_\_\_ Prefer not to respond

Instructions: Please respond to the following survey items by indication your perception of the level of implementation of each of these *Think College* benchmarks.

Fully implemented=4

In progress, but not fully implemented=3

No progress=2

Not planning to implement=1

1. Providing access to a wide array of college course types that are attended by students without disabilities

2. Address issues such as college policies transportation, disability services, educational coaches, peer mentors, and faculty training in Universal Design for Learning, that may impact college course participation
3. Provide access to and support for participation in existing social organizations, facilities, and technology
4. Ensure student involvement in and control of the establishment of personal goals
5. Ensure the development and promotion of self-determination skills for students with disabilities as evidenced by monitoring their own progress, directing choices of courses, being involved in employment, interacting with faculty, and managing schedules that include courses, employment, and social activities
6. Have a stated process for family involvement with clearly defined roles and adherence to FERPA Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
7. Identify outcomes or offer an educational credential established by the institution for students enrolled in the program
8. Provide access to academic advising
9. Provide access to college campus resources such as college identification cards, extracurricular activities, on-campus housing, and student orientation
10. Collaboration with faculty and staff including professional development on Universal Design for Learning and seeking advice from the TLC Director
11. Adhere to the college's schedules, policies, procedures, and public relations
12. Establish connections and relationships with key college/university departments such as disability services, academic advising, health services, and career services
13. Have a designated person to coordinate the program specific-services of the TLC Program
14. Have a planning and advisory team
15. Conduct evaluation on services and outcomes on a regular basis

Open-ended Questions:

University Students without disabilities:

What expectations did you have for working with students from the TLC Program in your classes?

In what ways were those expectations met?

What are the student benefits derived from collaborating with this program?

What are the strengths and limitations of this program?

Describe any differences in benefits and limitations related to student disabilities or limitations.

In your opinion, what are some of the characteristics of an ideal candidate for a successful experience in this program?

What else would you like to say about the program?

Faculty:

1. What expectations did you have about the students who would be enrolled in your program?
2. In what ways have your expectations been met?
3. What are the student benefits derived from enrollment in this program?
4. What are the strengths and limitations of this program?
5. Describe any differences in benefits and limitations related to student disabilities or limitations.
6. In your opinion, what are some of the characteristics of an ideal candidate for a successful experience in this program?
7. What else would you like to say about the program?

## **Book Review: The New One Minute Manager**

**Carolina Arcaya**

In the search for a special kind of manager, a bright young man traveled for many years. He was looking for someone who could lead and manage in today's ever-changing world, someone who encouraged people to balance their work and their life and make their job meaningful and enjoyable. It was a tough search; he went through many towns and cities; he talked to managers of different industries and heard them talking about their different management styles. After searching for a while, he started to get disappointed. It seemed there was no balance; he mostly found managers interested more in results than in people or managers who were more interested in people than results. Thinking there must be a middle ground, where managers manage themselves and the people they work for profit from their presence; he kept searching until he finally heard incredible stories about a special manager, whom people like to work with and together would produce great results.

The young man quickly called his office and made an appointment; surprisingly enough, the manager was available, offering him to come in at a convenient time. At first, he was curious and could not believe the manager could see him so fast. He was puzzled and wanted to know more about his management style, which people talked so much about. The visit to his office was the first step that made him realize that it is possible to find the manager he was looking for and that using the correct strategy can make all the difference when it comes to managing a team and leading them to be successful while enjoying their work; realizing that to successful managers must be both result-oriented and people-oriented.

This book gives a clear and easy-to-follow management style, called the "New One Minute Manager." It explains how by applying three basic principles, managers can get great results in very little time. One Minute Manager is a management style that inspires people and allows them to innovate using their knowledge and drawing on their talent. It is a collaborative system, where people and managers participate in making key points but where the individual makes the final decision, making them feel good about themselves and, as a consequence producing good results.

## **Main Themes**

After a long search for a different management style in today's ever-changing world, a bright young man finally finds what he is looking for; The New One Minute Manager. This new and innovative style combines people-oriented management with results-oriented management to get quality results quickly. It focuses on investing in people and drawing on their individual talents, facilitating and giving them the resources they need to make their own decisions. This innovative management style differs from the old way of thinking, which usually uses top-down management; it inspires people and promotes innovation. The One Minute Manager focuses on three main secrets; developing One Minute Goals; using One Minute Praising, and using One Minute Re-directs.

The first thing the young man noticed when he came into the manager's office, he had heard so much about, was how calm he was and how much time he seemed to have to be a manager, which made him immediately see something different about this management style. The One Minute Management insists on investing in people and leading with collaboration, where the manager facilitates individuals with the necessary information to make their own decisions and participates in the thinking process but encourages them to use their knowledge to solve problems. The philosophy behind the One Minute Management style is not just about the quantity but the quality of the job, and the best way to achieve successful results is with the people that work in the organization. "People who feel good about themselves produce good results" (Pg. 9). In the One Minute Management style, the manager believes that when people achieve goals and are able to resolve their own situations successfully, they feel good about themselves, and as a consequence, they put their best effort and produce quality work. Investing in people is essential for the organization; training them and giving them the resources to be successful is critical in order to produce great results. This was the beginning of the young man's research into this new management style and what specific steps managers should take in order for the strategy to work.

In his journey to find out each step, he interviewed Teresa Lee, a lady who was part of the management team. She revealed the first secret of this management style; The One Minute Goals. Setting One Minute Goals is the beginning of One Minute Management. As she described to the young man, setting goals is critical because it allows the manager and the employee to be

on the same page; people know what to do and what is expected of them. When setting goals, the manager and employee work together. The manager listens to what the employee has to say and what ideas they have, working side by side with them and letting them know their responsibilities, having clear what is expected from them. In the One Minute Management style, the goals must be written each on a separate paper and must not be more than a paragraph, setting three to five goals unless a particular project requires more. The employees need to look at the goals and review them frequently to see if what we are doing matches with their goals, that way, they do not lose focus. Having more people on the team acting on their own, confident and secure of their decisions, makes the organization work better and, consequently, be more efficient and produce quality results. These seemed like simple rules, but it was just the beginning, next the young man visited another member of the manager's team; Paul.

Paul was the second member of the manager's team, who gave the young man the second secret of the One Minute Management style; One Minute Praisings. This refers to how the manager should always let the employee know how he/she is doing in a very clear way. This is a crucial part of the process and even though it can be uncomfortable is necessary to learn. In One Minute Management is all about catching people doing something right. "Help people reach their full potential, catch them doing something right" (Pg. 28). In order to be a successful manager and produce quality work, it is necessary to emphasize the positive; this is why catching people doing something right, especially at the beginning of a new task, is so important. It allows the manager to give the individual a One Minute Praise, reinforcing they have done something right, making them feel good about themselves, and encouraging them to keep the good work. Instead of waiting for the performance review, it tells employees precisely what they did right. By giving One Minute Praisings, people gain confidence, which helps them deal with changes that happen on a daily basis. One Minute Praisings have two parts; in the first half-minute, the manager must praise people as soon as possible; letting them know what they did right, being very specific; then pause for a moment to let people feel good about what they have done and after in the second half-minute encourage them to do more, making it clear the organization has confidence in them and their success.

The last meeting the young man had was at Levy's office, another member of the manager's team. He gave him the third key secret of the One Minute Management style; the One Minute Re-direct. Praising people does not work unless the manager provides Re-direct to

correct the mistakes when they occur. Re-direct helps people get back on track and achieve their goals. A One Minute Re-direct helps people learn because they can see what they need to do differently next time. Before implementing the strategy, first, the manager makes sure the goals they have created are clear, and if they are not, the manager takes full responsibility for that and clarifies them; then the manager provides the One Minute Re-Direct in two parts. In the first half-minute managers should re-direct people as soon as possible; confirm the facts and review the mistakes together and express how he feels about the mistakes and its impact on results; after the manager, most do a pause for few seconds to allow people to feel concerned about what they have done; lastly on the second half-minute managers should remember to always let employees know they are better than their mistake; reminding them that he has confidence and trust in them and lastly realize that when the Re-Direct is over it's over.

The young man now could see the complete cycle of the One Minute Manager; goals clarify what to focus on, Praisings build confidence, and Re-Directs address the mistakes. All together make people feel good about themselves and produce good results.

After researching and talking to the managers' team, the young man returned to the manager's office, where he drew his final conclusions and realized the key for all of it to work is to keep adapting the three secrets in today's changing world. Besides the three secrets, to manage a team successfully, people must enjoy working in the company and collaborate with each other to get great results. "The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people. (Pg. 51), most companies spend more money and time maintaining their buildings and buying new equipment but invest very little in developing people, which is key for all of it to work. It is important to take the time to let people know what they are aiming for so they can be motivated to reach the goal and give them feedback on the results to keep them going. It is important as a manager to catch people doing something right, especially at the beginning, building their confidence and moving them towards the desired goal. People who are learning benefit from praise and encouragement, reason why One Minute Praising works so well. Rather than punishing someone if they make a mistake, using One Minute Re-direct helps them see what went wrong and learn from it. When using the One Minute Management style, feedback happens in small doses allowing people to transform as they go and deal with one issue at a time. Managers always want to eliminate the mistake but keep the good person and not make them feel attacked. " We are not just our behavior; we are the person managing our behavior" (Pg. 79), meaning the manager's job

is to show people how to manage themselves, enjoy it and succeed when the manager is not around, being independent while producing great results.

An incredible insight into being an effective manager is explained through the book in a straightforward and understandable way. It allows the readers to have an introspective on how a manager, as well as an employee, thinks and how the synergy between them creates great results. The One Minute Management gives managers three key secrets on how to improve their job and get the best results of people by getting them to stay motivated, know what their specific goals are, praising them when they do a good job, and re-directing them when mistakes happen.

### **Key Quotes**

*“ People who feel good about themselves, produce good results ”* (Pg.9). This quote entails that helping people feel good about themselves is key to productivity since when people are proud of themselves, they are more productive, which goes along with the quality of work they do.

*“Help people reach their full potential, catch them doing something right”* (Pg. 28). Putting the accent on the positive by catching people doing something right makes a big difference, especially at the beginning while they are learning. It allows people to know what they have done right without waiting for a performance review, helping them keep on track and achieve the desired goals.

*“ The best minute I spend is the one I invest in people ”* (Pg. 51). It is of utmost importance that managers invest in developing their people. Investing time in employees allows them to know exactly what they are supposed to do and what they are aiming at. It is people who get results, reason why investing in developing them makes such a big difference in the organization's results. Successful managers facilitate the information and resources people in their organization need to succeed but allows people to make their own decisions, drawing on their talents and collaborating as a group.

*"Everyone is a potential winner. Some people are disguised as losers. Do not let their appearance fool you"* (Pg. 59). It is not always necessary to hire winners, which are difficult to find and expensive; investing in people within the organization allows the manager to develop



their employees to become winners even if they did not seem like one at the beginning. Drawing from internal resources and investing in people encourages them to be better and further allows them to develop professionally and feel enthusiastic about moving forward within the organization.

*"Take a minute to look at your goals, then look at what you are doing, and see if it matches your goals"* (Pg. 62). It is crucial that after managers make goals with their employees, they encourage them to read them on a daily basis and look if what they are doing matches what they are supposed to be doing. This daily exercise allows the employee to focus and re-direct if needed, checking if their performance matches the desired goals.

*"Goals begin behaviors. Consequences influence behaviors"* (Pg. 84). This reminds us how goals and consequences are related; using this same frame, One Minute Goals, Praisings and Re-Directs work together. Every action has a consequence, and this shapes how we will act in the future when a similar situation arises.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

One Minute Manager is an easy-to-read but very effective management style that can be utilized in any organization. It has a very specific three-step powerful formula that managers can use as a guide to lead and review while in leadership positions in today's changing world. It makes the reader think not only about the manager's perspective but the employee's perspective making it very easy to understand why the formula works.

The biggest strength the book offers is that the three key secrets of the One Minute Management style, One Minute Goals, One Minute Praisings and, One Minute Re-Direct, are adaptable to today's changing world. It is important for the strategy to work to have everyone on board and create a culture where collaboration is key, and people are willing to work towards the same goal, producing great results.

The book's simple language makes it very easy to understand; readers can immediately take away every section's key points, put them to practice, and become a One Minute Manager themselves. To become a One Minute Manager, managers have to; keep things simple, set One Minute Goals, give One Minute Praising and provide One Minute Re-directs. Even though it is not as easy as it sounds, it is a great principle for managers to follow. Having concrete goals have been proven to produce the best results, even in our personal lives.

Another great strength of this management style is that it sparks people's creativity, encouraging them to use their own knowledge and develop their own solutions. It is always important to remember that in order for this to happen, managers need to create clear goals with their employees and work side by side with them, listening to their input and encouraging them to use their knowledge. Having clear goals has been proven to get better results when managing people. When goals are clear, employees know what they are aiming at, and their competitive nature makes the quality of their work better while they are inspired to do more while enjoying what they do, feeling they are a valuable piece of the organization.

The greatest strength of successful managers is to adapt to change and work collaboratively with their team to create great results. As mentioned in the book sharing this management style is a gift that can help many managers around the world apply simple strategies that can make a great difference in their organizations.

### **Comparison to Fullan**

One Minute Managers relates in many ways to Fullan's text "Leading in a Culture of Change," which primarily focuses on managers and staff working collaboratively towards the same goals and setting clear expectations of what the staff is being accountable for.

Starting in the first chapter, Fullan describes the complexity of an ever-changing world and how leaders need to adapt and change with it; One Minute Manager is an adaptable management style that can be used in any organization in today's changing world. The One Minute Manager principles relate to the ones expressed by Fullan in his book. Leaders need moral purpose to reach long-term success. This is done by acting to make a positive difference, where the employees are motivated and feel part of the organization, valued and respected. One Minute manager reflects Fullan's framework in each of its parts. It emphasizes a combination of understanding change, making meaningful relationships, and creating a positive work environment, developing coherence, and inspiring the people to find purpose in the organization and committing to achieving greater results.

As in One Minute Manager, Fullan also states in his textbook that in order for leaders to be successful, collaboration in relation to work is the key. In the One Minute Manager strategy, the manager works with the staff to create concise, clear goals. The manager, as the leader,

listens to what everyone has to say, and then the employees come up with the goals on their own. The manager facilitates the resources and information they need, but ultimately they create their own goals.

As stated by Fullan, effective leadership inspires more than empowers. It connects more than it controls; One Minute Manager principles align with all of these and empowers people to draw on their knowledge to solve situations that arise every day.

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## **Book Review: Leadership that Works: From Research to Results**

**Rebecca Martinez (Webster)**

It takes more than just the right personality to demonstrate effective leadership. Strong leadership is affiliated with intentional behaviors and actions that directly impact student achievement. Simultaneously, it is also about finding the balance between how things have always been done and what can be done differently. This balance is what the authors of *Leadership that Works: from Research to Results* describe throughout their book, as they make future recommendations for administrators and leaders based on their research-based methodology that is depicted in their findings.

The first part of the book discusses the Research Base, including the driving statistics of this plan. The myths and theories that have been derived regarding leadership and the impact on student achievement are also discussed. Lastly, this portion of the book discusses the results of all 69 studies that were conducted over the course of 23 years. The authors take a particularly in depth look at the meta-analysis, including the three factors that contributed to the results of the study and the correlation between successful leadership and student achievement.

The second part discusses the practical application of the information that was gathered throughout the study, as well as conclusions that can be derived based on the findings. The “21 Responsibilities of School Leadership”, are discussed, in addition to the two different kinds of changes that take place in education. Aside from the research, the authors also discuss the importance of doing the “right” work; in other words, ensuring that one is focusing on the work to be done based on the needs of the school, including how to implement a comprehensive school reform (CSR) model. Lastly, the authors take their findings and conclusions and organize them into an action plan, focusing on correlation between effective school leadership and enhanced student achievement.

## **Main Themes**

The basis of the book, *Leadership that Works*, is built on the notion that effective leadership and enhanced student outcomes coincide. While that might be obvious to fellow administrators, the authors look further in depth at the conspicuity, basically claiming that the notion is not that simple. It is not just about school leaders themselves, no matter how well-suited for the position, but the intentional, specific behaviors of administrators that directly impact student achievement.

The ‘21 Responsibilities of the School Leader’ is not an unfamiliar trend; most of the components have been previously identified as effective leadership attributes. However, the authors in this book are able to demonstrate the effectiveness of each of the components with a statistic. It is one thing for theorists to claim what makes a leader great, but it is another to prove the effectiveness of each identified responsibility as it relates to student achievement by analyzing the impact in numerical form; the ideology in this book is researched-based.

The authors emphasize change throughout the book, similar to the impact of change on education: ongoing and continuous. With change being a regular occurrence in education, it is the responsibility of the administrators to not just navigate change as it is happening, but also stimulate and challenge change in themselves, others, and the school culture in its entirety. The authors also explain the two factors that serve as a basis of the 21 responsibilities identified, which are first- and second-order change. The effectiveness of leadership will depend on what kind of change the school is engaged in. Although both types of changes will occur, one on a consistent basis and one during times of intense disruption, an effective school leader manages both while also considering their staff.

Lastly, an administrator’s ability to prioritize what they focus on and doing work that directly impacts the needs of the school is critical. While this theme was not necessarily derived in the findings of the meta-analysis, it is idealized throughout various aspects of the book. It is not so much to motivate staff to do the work in the first place, but rather to help them focus on the “right” work. To do so, authors describe the development of a school model that focuses on research-based teaching approaches, as well as designing a site-based approach to establishing interventions that focuses on the individual needs of the school.

## **Key Quotes**

*“Given the perceived importance of leadership in schools and the central role of the principal in that leadership, one might assume that suggestions regarding leadership practice in schools are based on clear, well-articulated body of research spanning for decades.”* - The authors are capitalizing on the assumptions made about leadership being the most important role in the success of a school to prove a point. Despite what others have always been told about administration and the vital role they play in the success of a school, there actually is not a substantial amount of previous evidence that directly correlates the effect leadership has on student achievement.

*“Our basic claim is that the research over the last 35 years provides strong guidance on specific leadership behaviors for school administrators and that those behaviors have well-documented effects on student achievement.”* - The authors wanted to state their claim in a way that was easy to understand, clearly and concisely, leaving little room for questions of confusion of any sort. This quote also serves as a precursor to the research discussion following.

*“In broad terms, our meta-analysis indicates that principals can have a profound effect on the achievement of students in their schools. We also found that the studies we included in our meta-analysis reported different size correlations between principal leadership and student achievement — some very large and positive, some low and negative.”* - Here the authors are summarizing their findings as it pertains to the effects of school leadership on student achievement. This quote was perfectly timed after reviewing the myths previously mentioned and deciphering the numerical data.

*“Although each has been addressed in the theoretical literature for decades, the fact that they have a statistically significant relationship with student achievement, as indicated by our metaanalysis, is an important new addition to the research and theoretical literature. Our findings indicate that all are important to the effective execution of leadership in schools.”* - The authors fully acknowledge that much of what they are claiming is not new information. However, it is one of the few studies that offer numerical evidence to support their claims. There is a sense of intrigue in this quote, as research-based practices are held to high regard. This quote exemplifies how credible the leadership plan discussed truly is.

*“The school leader’s ability to select the right work is a critical aspect of effective leadership. It might be the case that teachers and administrators in a low-performing school are working “ hard ” but not working “ smart ” in that they select interventions that have little chance of enhancing student academic achievement.”* - The authors clearly describe what they mean by doing the right work in this quote. Referencing, “work smarter, not harder” is relatable to the audience and invokes internal questions.

*“According to an old proverb, “ A vision without a plan is just a dream. A plan without a vision is just drudgery. But a vision with a plan can change the world.”* - This quote is found in the last chapter of the book; purposely placed to tie everything together. It offers an emotional sentiment, romanticizing the importance of making a plan and the change that can come from it.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

This book not only makes recommendations and suggestions for developing an effective leadership framework, but uses numbers to validate the point. There is endless literature available that discusses effective leadership practices, but very few are research-based. Having that validity makes the recommendations in this book more believable and more achievable. Also, those in education are more likely to give it a chance.

The thematic factors that are established early on create a foundational understanding that the authors continue to build on throughout the book. For example, the 21 Responsibilities of Leadership identified and discussed in chapter four consist of similar characteristics to those discussed in doing the right work. Simultaneously, all of these concepts come back full circle in the final chapter where a plan for effective leadership is developed. Writing it this way not only laid a solid framework to build on, but featured key points that continued to be highlighted throughout the book.

Including theories and assumptions that are made based on previous literature and shared information helps the readers question their own beliefs regarding leadership and education. Although most of what was discussed was not necessarily new information, it makes the readers question the “why” behind their belief system and challenge what exactly their beliefs are. This offers a growth-mindset perspective going forward and continues to be depicted throughout the book.

Despite the research, themes, or challenging information that were clearly strengths upon evaluation, the book in its entirety consists of a substantial amount of information. There is more than one framework that is discussed, and within each framework are independent factors to consider. In addition, there is the research to be reviewed and evaluated while considering how it applies to what is being discussed. An administrator using this book as a tool to develop a plan might want to consider creating a study guide, outline, or flowchart of some sort to ensure all of the information is easily accessible and understood.

### **Comparison to Fullan**

This book was very comparable to “Leading in a Culture of Change”, by Michael Fullan. Many of the same concepts are depicted in both. One of the most profound similarities Both authors identified very similar leadership responsibilities. For example, both books mention an educational leader’s responsibility to serving as a change agent, or someone who challenges or provokes change to help motivate and energize staff. They also both agree on the role that first- and second-order change have on the success of schools as a whole.

Another similarity between the two authors pertains to their views of the responsibilities of school leaders as it relates to student achievement. In addition, both authors emphasize the importance of being flexible, as an administrator should be able to adapt to the current situation without hesitation. Focus is another administrative responsibility as viewed by the authors. Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, as well as the importance of emotional intelligence and relationships are two other areas where the authors seem to have similar views.

The authors also shared very similar views in regard to developing a site-based plan, designed to meet the individual needs of the school. With very minor differences depicted, Fullan refers to ‘shared leadership’, while the collaborative authors in this book describe establishing ‘purposeful community’ when discussing how to effectively establish and maintain a school leadership team.



## References

- Marzano, R. (2021). *Robert J. Marzano: School Leadership That Works : From Research to Results (Paperback); 2005 Edition* (First Printing ed.). ASCD.
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