INCLUSIVE PRACTICES: A STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOL GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHER AND PARAEDUCATOR COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. First to my parents, Edward and Barbara Kearney, who are unable to celebrate this accomplishment with me, instilled in me the importance of education and taught me to work hard for things I aspire to achieve. To my children, son Jeffrey, daughter Courtney, daughter in-law Allyson, and son in-law Jeremy all of whom cheered me on and provided words of encouragement throughout the journey. Finally, to the love of my life, my husband Edward, who for 46 years, has been my best friend, confidant, and a constant source of support and encouragement. In the words of Paul McCartney, "Maybe I'm amazed at the way you love me all the time…maybe I'm amazed at the way I need you." Without your unending inspiration and love, none of this could have been possible.

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ABSTRACT

Inclusive high school general education classroom settings are comprised of students with varying needs. In order to support those needs, this study explored the collaborative partnerships among general education teachers and special education paraeducators in serving students with disabilities in inclusion general education classroom settings. As more students with disabilities receive their special education services in inclusive settings, this qualitative study documents the roles, routines, expectations, beliefs, and interactions of high school general education teacher and special education paraeducator teams in one suburban high school. Furthermore, this study investigated the perceptions, experiences, and beliefs of district and building leaders as well as special education teachers for the implementation of inclusive education and the collaborative partnerships between general education teachers and special education paraeducators. Data was collected through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews, classroom observations, and a review of documents.

Through the use of an Activity Theory framework, this study aimed to seek and understand what transformations may occur as general education teacher and special education paraeducator collaborative teams navigate and develop an understanding of inclusion practices and the implementation of such practices. The study emphasizes the need to for all members of school and classroom communities to recognize what rules and resources govern their practices, the social and cultural implications of their practice, and lastly, how they delineate what they do, why they do it, and how they do it.

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CHAPTER 1

Including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings is not a new concept. From its inception, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (1975) guaranteed students with disabilities a free appropriate public education (FAPE) and the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The LRE ensures students with disabilities have equal access to the general education curriculum with the intent they will achieve the educational outcomes set forth by their local school districts (Humphrey, Wigelsworth, Barlow, & Squires, 2013; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). As outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990), school districts were required to implement policies and practices allowing students with disabilities access to the general education classroom settings (Yell, Conroy, Katsiyannis, & Conroy, 2015). Additionally, the Every Student Succeeds Act (2015) stipulated local educational agencies, "provide assurances that the school will minimize the removal of children from the regular classroom during regular school hours for instruction" (p. 65). All of these regulations emphasized the importance of providing students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum as well as ensuring their inclusion in the general education classroom settings.

According to the U. S. Department of Education (2016), approximately 62% of the almost six million students with disabilities spend more than 80% of their school day being included in general classroom settings. General education settings ideally are environments where all students, "are integral members of classrooms, feel connection to their peers, have access to rigorous and meaningful general education curricula, and receive collaborative support to succeed" (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008, p. 26).

Inclusive practices can vary widely from state to state, district to district, and school to

school. In some instances only students with mild disabilities are provided their special education services in general education classrooms while in other instances all students, no matter the severity of their disability, are included (Worrell, 2008). Variations in inclusive practices occur between school levels as well. In her study, Idol (2006) found educators at both the elementary and secondary levels supported the concept of including students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. However, the elementary teachers were more willing to implement the practice of inclusion than the secondary teachers were. Elementary teachers found the addition of resources, material and human, positively benefitted all students. Only 20% of the elementary teachers interviewed preferred students with disabilities be educated part-time or all of their day in special education classrooms. In contrast, over 50% of secondary teachers who participated in the study indicated they still preferred students with disabilities spend part-time or all of their day in the special education classrooms in order to receive more direct instruction and assistance (Idol, 2006).

Often the academic content complexity and pace of instruction at the secondary level contributes to teachers' attitudes and willingness to support the needs of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Hunter-Johnson, Newton, & Cambridge-Johnson, 2014; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Given the demands and complexity, the degree to which high school general education teachers are willing and able to work with student with disabilities may be dependent on the supports provided to implement inclusive practices. Therefore, in response to the need to support students with disabilities, districts and schools have developed and implemented service delivery models to provide special education services in inclusion general education classroom settings.

One service delivery method high schools have used to provide for the needs of students

with a variety of disabilities in general education classrooms is to assign special education (SPED) paraeducators as the key mechanisms of support (Giangreco, 2010; Giangreco, Smith, & Pinckney, 2006). Assigning SPED paraeducators to support the needs of students with disabilities in general education settings requires commitment to the practice and an understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for both the general education teachers and the paraeducators. Ultimately, these factors will have an influence on whether implementation of such practices is successful.

Research Problem

Successful implementation of inclusive practices in a high school setting requires general education teachers and SPED paraeducators to seek responsive and collaborative relationships. Ideally, they would have a clear understanding of the rules governing their practices, the social and cultural implications of their collective work, the resources available and needed, and a clear description of their teaching roles and responsibilities. Research suggests for implementation of inclusive practices to be successful, teachers and paraeducators need adequate time for planning, preparation, and ongoing communication and support from administration (Pugach, 1995; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Wallace, Anderson, & Bartholomay, 2002).

However, the teaming of general education teachers and SPED paraeducators can be difficult. High school teachers are often trained to work independently in their planning and instruction (Wood, 1998). The presence of SPED paraeducators in general education settings, while of potential benefit for all students, may raise concerns for teachers (Douglas, Chapin, & Nolan, 2016; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). General education teachers may feel unprepared to support students with disabilities leading to a possible overreliance on the utilization of the SPED paraeducators assigned to their classrooms (Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2011; Giangreco

et al., 2006). The teachers may feel judged by the paraeducators and view their presence an intrusion, as they often do not select their paraeducator partner (Bauman, Silla, & Stufft, 2010). In addition, when paraeducators are significantly older than the teachers they work with teachers may feel reluctant or uncomfortable about directing the work of SPED paraeducators (Douglas et al., 2016; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995).

Supervising and guiding the work of the SPED paraeducators in high school classrooms is primarily the responsibility of special and general education teachers, yet historically, teacher education programs have not adequately prepared them for these responsibilities (Drecktrah, 2000; Irvin, Ingram, Huffman, Mason, & Willis, 2018; Lesar, Benner, Habel, & Coleman, 1997; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). In addition, teacher preparation programs and professional development after employment provide little, if any, guidance in the use and supervision of SPED paraeducators. The absence of appropriate and sufficient supervisory knowledge and practice, as well as confusion over differing perceptions of the special and general education teachers' supervisory roles and expectations regarding SPED paraeducators, raises concerns. The possible lack of sufficient knowledge to support the needs of SPED paraeducators may suggest the teachers responsible for the supervision of the paraeducators are also unprepared or lack sufficient understanding, knowledge, and skills to assume these tasks (Irvin et al., 2018; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Yet, the changing expectations for SPED paraeducators in inclusive settings make the general education teachers' supervision of paraeducators of even greater importance (Dover, 2002; Wallace et al., 2001).

SPED paraeducators frequently learn how to carry out their job responsibilities through trial and error and on-the-job learning experiences (Carroll, 2001; Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009). As SPED paraeducators receive little or no training to prepare them to assume

their duties in general education settings, several studies have indicated that persons in these roles may have inadequate preparation and training, insufficient planning time with teachers, and lack the guidance and supervision they need to appropriately and confidently perform their duties (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & MacFarland, 1997). In addition, SPED paraeducators are often hired with no formal job description and are typically excluded from in-service or orientation training provided to the licensed staff (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Gerber, Finn, Achilles, & Boyd-Zaharias, 2001).

Given these factors, it is apparent the teaming of high school general education teachers and SPED paraeducators in inclusion classroom settings can present challenges. General education teachers and SPED paraeducators may lack understanding of their purpose and expectations. The tension existing in the mutual understanding of the rules and resources may significantly interfere with the development and creation of successful general education teacher-SPED paraeducator teams working together in inclusion settings. Hence, conflict and confusion in the implementation of inclusive practices are likely to occur as general education teacher-SPED paraeducator teams attempt to delineate what they do, why they do it, and how they do it.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Activity Theory (AT) served as the theoretical framework. It provided the lens for studying, describing, and interpreting the high school general and special education teachers, the SPED paraeducators, and the administrators' perceptions and experiences in the implementation of inclusive practices. It also provided the impetus for describing and interpreting what teachers and paraeducators do, why they do it, and how they support the needs of students with disabilities in general education settings. The application of AT to this study was useful due to the complex nature of supporting students with disabilities in general education

settings and the different ways such practices are enacted in different contexts. Confusion or misunderstanding may exist, thus leading to challenges for high school general education teacher-SPED paraeducator teams as they attempt to engage in a collaborative partnership in order to support the needs of students with disabilities.

Activity Theory (AT) has its origin in the work of Vygotsky from his studies of cultural-historical psychology in the 1920s and later developed and expanded by Leont'ev and Engeström in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s (Roth & Lee, 2007). AT considers an entire work/activity system, including teams and organizations. According to Engeström (1999), activity theory includes individual workers, their colleagues, and co-workers, the tools and equipment they use in their work, the rules that govern how they work, and the purpose to which members of the workplace community direct their activity. AT takes into account the environment, history of the person or persons, culture, role of artifacts, motivations, and the complexity of real life activity (Morf & Weber, 2000). One of the strengths of AT is that it bridges the gap between the individual subject or subjects and social reality by studying both through a mediating activity. For this study, the mediating activity is the provision of special education services for students with disabilities in high school general education classrooms. Thus, it was be important to understand how the implementation of inclusive practices impacted the collaborative partnership among high school general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams as well as how their work together influenced the provision of inclusive practices.

Activity Theory assumes organizations such as schools are driven by tensions and/or contradictions surrounding change, understanding, and development. These are essential as the tensions and/or contradictions within an activity system are the forces that impel development and change within the system (Verdon, McLeod, & Wong, 2015). Although, "contradictions can

be an obstacle to the enactment of an activity, they also provide opportunities for the development of creative innovations, and new ways of structuring and engaging in the activity" (Verdon et al., 2015, p. 57). As it applies to this study, change refers to the evolving and ongoing development of the collaborative partnership among general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams and how their work together influences their ability to provide for the needs of students in general education classrooms. Important elements of collaborative partnerships are understanding, clarifying, and developing each participant's roles and expectations (Pugach, 1995; Wood, 1998). According to Morf and Weber (2000), "activity theory is a conceptual framework based on the idea that activity is primary, that doing precedes thinking, that goals, images, cognitive models, intentions, and abstract notions like 'definition' and 'determinant' grow out of people doing things" (p. 81). The outcome of the activity can be based on various motives and can be influenced by the fact that sometimes what people seem to be doing, what they say they are doing, and what they actually do can all be quite different.

The basic principles of AT are inherently dynamic and evolving. AT provides a model for analyzing activities into actions and outcomes (Worthen, 2011). As a theoretical lens, AT focuses on the accumulating factors that affect the subjective interpretations, the purpose, and the sense-making of individual or group actions and outcomes (Hashim & Jones, 2007). Every activity system is focused on achieving a certain outcome. This is the motivation for the activity to take place (Engeström, 2000), which for this study is the provision of special education services for high school students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings to ensure educational benefit. According to a recent Supreme Court decision educational benefit means an individualized education program (IEP) typically should be, "reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances and reasonably calculated

to enable the child to achieve passing marks and advance from grade to grade" (Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 2017, p. 12). Inclusive practices are rooted in the belief that students with disabilities benefit most when given the opportunity to learn alongside their non-disabled peers in age appropriate classrooms (Graziano & Navarrete, 2012). Therefore, successful implementation of inclusive practices may be linked to the participants' willingness to accept and support an inclusion model (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2011). As the outcome of an activity can be based on various motives, such as regulatory compliance, equally important are the perceptions, experiences, beliefs, and attitudes of those involved in the activity and how these elements may contribute to the successful implementation of inclusive practices (de Boer et al., 2011). All of these factors can shape the participants' motivations for the activity to take place.

Activity Theory uses the whole work activity as the unit of analysis, where activity is broken down into six micro-analytical components, which are *object, subject, community, division of labor, tools, and rules* (Hashim & Jones, 2007; Roth, 2009). The first component, *object,* refers to the intended activity system. Objects are the goals or outcomes of the subjects and system, and are influenced by perceptions, knowledge, and practice (Wilson, 2014). For this study, it was important to understand how the district and building administrators, special and general education teachers, and SPED paraeducators described the purpose of inclusive practices and what they were trying to accomplish. Additionally, it was important to identify any potential benefits and/or challenges that influenced such practices.

The second component, *subject,* refers to the person or persons being studied. The subject is the person or people undertaking the action, motivated by the attainment of the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2007). Inherent in the subject or subjects are their history and beliefs as well as their capacity and/or willingness to take action. In addition, this component of the activity

system includes the subject or subjects' awareness and interpretation of their ability to initiate, execute, and control their actions. All of these factors impact the subjects' view of the object and influences their engagement in the activity (Roth, 2009). Understanding the participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences about the implementation of inclusive practices was important to this study. How they described and interpreted these elements was the focus of the analysis.

The third component, *community,* refers to the social context in which each of the participants or subjects belong while engaging in an activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2007). The social context is made up of members of a learning community focused on a common object or outcome. It is the community of people in the activity system who share an interest in and involvement with the same object or outcome (Postholm, 2015). For this study, the community included district and school administrators, general and special education teachers, and SPED paraeducators. As each school and classroom community has its own history and each member of the community brings his or her own personal background experiences and beliefs, it was important to apprehend how these factors influenced their practices within the community.

The next component is *division of labor***.** The division of labor refers to the assignment of roles among those within the activity system. The division of labor may be both the horizontal division of tasks, or the vertical division of power based on social strata, level of qualification, and knowledge of the object or organizational hierarchy (Foot, 2001). It provides for the distribution of actions and operations among a community of workers and assists in determining who is responsible for doing what. In the practice of supporting students with disabilities in general education classrooms, it was important to interpret the working and professional responsibilities and relationships among all of the members of the community. This

assisted in understanding how decisions were made and what factors were considered when determining the roles, responsibilities, and expectations each participant assumed.

The fifth component is *tools.* Tools are the mediating devices or artifacts by which the action is executed. Tools are the cognitive or material resources used by the subject or subjects to mediate an activity and work toward the object or outcome (Engeström, 2001). Tools influence the participant-structure interactions and they change with accumulating experience. Tools are influenced by culture, and their use is a way for the accumulation and transmission of social knowledge (Hashim & Jones, 2007).

Tools are also influenced by the nature of external behavior and the mental capacities of the subject or subjects. They can take many forms including physical, such as material resources, or non-physical, such as knowledge. As a tool, "interactions provide humans with the capacity to develop new meanings of their world, and direct their thoughts and actions" (Pohio, 2016, p. 154). As it applied to this study, tools included the available material resources as well as the participants' knowledge and ability to communicate, plan, coordinate, and organize their collaborative partnership activities in supporting students with disabilities in general education classrooms. As a component of this framework, it was important to understand the tools and/or resources available and how they influenced the work of the general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams. A few examples of the tools used in this research were: job descriptions, procedure/resource guides, a paraeducator-teacher checklist, training opportunities, and observation data.

The final component is *rules***.** Rules are the conventions and guidelines regulating the activities in the system (Hashim & Jones, 2007). Rules may include policies, social conventions, or organizational procedures by which an activity is governed. They can be both formal and

informal, “constructs that in varying degrees constrain or allow activities to occur” (Yamagata-Lynch, 2007, p. 456). Hashim and Jones (2007) suggested rules are the set of conditions that help to determine how and why individuals may act, and are a result of social conditioning. The rules, as they apply to this study, may include any potential “tacit” rules as well as any established processes and procedures, policies, guidelines, regulations, and laws governing inclusion practices. It was important to ascertain what rules existed and to what extent the rules impacted inclusive practices for general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

As schools continue to support the needs of students with disabilities in high school general education classrooms, the possibility of contradictions and confusion are likely to exist as general education teacher-SPED paraeducator teams attempt to define their roles, responsibilities, expectations, and needs. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate how high school general and special education teachers, SPED paraeducators, and administrators describe the implementation, purpose, and outcomes of inclusive practices. Furthermore, the study investigated the teacher-paraeducator partnerships, the benefits and challenges of their work together, how their role delineation and expectations are determined, and what resources are available and/or needed to support inclusive practices in high school general education classroom settings. Based on the stated purpose of the study and to assist in understanding how general educators, special educators, and paraeducators in one high school work together, the following research questions guided the investigation:

1. What are the objectives of high school general education teachers and SPED paraeducators work together in general education classroom settings?
2. What are the outcomes of general education teachers and SPED paraeducators work

in general education classroom settings?

3. How do general education teachers and SPED paraeducators in one high school support the needs of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings?

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The literature review includes both empirical research and publications emphasizing the normative aspects of the issues surrounding the use and supervision of SPED paraeducators. This review also includes studies on the perceptions and experiences of special and general education teachers regarding their preparation and practices to appropriately guide and direct the work of SPED paraeducators. While much of the literature focuses on the normative, that is, what teachers and paraeducators should do to improve their practices, it also points to the need for establishing effective practices through systematic scholarly inquiry. First, a historical overview provides insight on the use of SPED paraeducators and their roles and responsibilities in the schools. Second, an exploration of the issues will address the topics surrounding the preparation and training of special and general education teachers in the supervision of SPED paraeducators. Third, the literature review delineates what it means to supervise, and what knowledge and skills teachers need to perform their duties as supervisors of SPED paraeducators. Finally, the literature review focuses on the administrative supports needed to facilitate the work of teacher-paraeducator teams in inclusive classroom settings.

The Evolution of Paraeducators in the Schools

Paraeducators support students in schools all across the United States. They were first introduced into the nation's schools to enable teachers to spend more time planning and implementing instructional activities (Pickett, 2002). Pickett (1999), Director of the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals defined a paraeducator as, "a school employee who works under the supervision of a certified or licensed staff member to support and assist in providing instruction and other services to children, youth, and their families" (p. 5). In most cases,

paraeducators are unlicensed personnel working under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher or teachers (French, 2003). Paraeducators are often hired with little or no experience and receive minimal training and preparation prior to starting their work with students (Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Radford, Bosanquet, Webster, & Blatchford, 2015).

The number of paraeducators working in the schools has increased significantly over the years. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), in 1969 there were 57,418 paraeducators in the United States. By the fall of 2008, NCES reported there were approximately 734,000 paraeducators and in 2014, it was estimated there were 830,000 paraeducators working in the schools (Finkel, 2014). Due to the significant increase, paraeducators are considered the fastest growing segment of all school employees (French, 2003).

Historical Context

The first formal use of teacher aides in education began in the 1950s (Brotherson & Johnson, 1971). Due to shortages of teachers following World War II, school boards needed to find alternate resources; thus, the position of teacher aide was created (Pickett, 1997). The Ford Foundation in Bay City, Michigan tried using college graduates without teaching licenses to assume administrative responsibilities in order to give teachers more time for direct instruction of students. During the same period, Cruickshank (1957) pursued a similar program at Syracuse University. Results from both projects indicated teacher aides proved helpful in allowing the classroom teachers to devote more time to instruction of students (Pickett, 1997).

Beginning in the 1960s, legislation helped to expand the role of teacher aides in the schools. The Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), Public Law 89-10 (PL 89-10), of 1965 guaranteed equal access to education for all children. A result of President Johnson's War on Poverty, this legislation took an important step to ensure, through education, every child's

ability to lead a productive life. Through a special source of funding, Title I, the law allocated federal resources to meet the needs of educationally disadvantaged children through compensatory programs for the poor.

Title I provided financial assistance to local education agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet rigorous academic standards. The financial assistance designated $75 million to employ aides, specifically in low-income areas. The ESEA did not include guidance in the hiring practices, education, or training requirements for teacher aides. At the time, the qualifications for teacher aides mainly included being a parent or individual who lived in the community (Chopra et al., 2004).

Legal Provisions for Special Education Paraeducators

The hiring and use of SPED paraeducators evolved through the implementation of Federal laws, which regulate how students with disabilities will receive their needed services and supports. In 1975, the passage of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act or Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) required all public schools accepting federal funds to provide equal access to education for children with physical and mental disabilities. PL 94-142 contained provisions that entitled students with disabilities to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) designed to meet their unique needs, protected the rights of children with disabilities and their parents, supported states and localities in the provision of the education of children with disabilities, and assessed and assured the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities. This legislation also required that students with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The provision of LRE means the educational placement in which, to the maximum extent appropriate, and based on the individual needs of the students, students with disabilities are educated with

non-disabled peers (Kansas State Department of Education, 2014). For students with disabilities, LRE meant being educated as close to home as possible, often the student's neighborhood school, as well as to the maximum extent possible in the general education classroom. Along with the ESEA of 1965, PL 94-142 propelled the use of SPED paraeducators in the schools. These programs allowed schools to expand their use of SPED paraeducators to support the needs of students with disabilities. Even with the increased use of SPED paraeducators in the schools, there were no provisions for their training and supervision.

It was not until the 1997 reauthorization of PL 94-142, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments (IDEA), that guidance was provided for the training of all personnel working with students with disabilities. The amendments specified, "high-quality, intensive professional development for all personnel who work with such children" (p. 5). In 2001, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) required SPED paraeducators work "under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher if they are providing instruction to students" (p. 6). The non-regulatory guidance for Title I of NCLB further detailed direct supervision occurred when the teachers prepared lessons and instructional activities carried out by SPED paraeducators. In addition, the act specified that teachers were responsible for evaluating the progress of students working with SPED paraeducators. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), clarified that SPED paraeducators who were appropriately trained and supervised in accordance with state law, regulations, or written policy, were recognized as personnel who may assist in the provision of special education and related services to students with disabilities. However, the act did not stipulate what constitutes direct supervision nor what skills supervision entails. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2015), stipulated local education agencies that receive targeted

assistance funds provide professional development to teachers, principals, and paraeducators on how to effectively work with and support at-risk students. Professional development for SPED paraeducators to effectively work with at-risk students should not only include the development of their skills to support the needs of the students, it should also provide guidance regarding their role expectations.

Special Education Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities

Special education paraeducator job titles vary and may be influenced by their assigned roles and responsibilities. There is little consensus or agreement on what roles and responsibilities SPED paraeducators should assume. Their roles and responsibilities are often dynamic and evolving and are dependent on the context and the needs of the students they serve.

Several research studies have provided insight into the specific tasks SPED paraeducators often assume within the school. Giangreco and Broer (2005) surveyed 153 SPED paraeducators about the extent to which they engaged in several common tasks. The results of their study indicated almost half of the paraeducators' time was spent delivering instruction, followed by providing behavior support, engaging in self-directed activities, and supervising students. French (2001) surveyed 321 special educators about the contribution SPED paraeducators make to 30 job related tasks. As reported by the teachers, the results of the study indicated that SPED paraeducators generally assumed primary responsibility for personal care tasks, shared responsibilities for activity preparation, and had limited responsibility for planning instruction and parent communication. Through their interviews, Marks, Schrader, and Levine (1999) found SPED paraeducators working in inclusion general education classroom settings believed their job responsibilities included keeping students with disabilities from "bothering" general education teachers, creating all modifications and adaptations for the students, and maintaining

responsibility for all aspects of the students' education.

In another study, SPED paraeducators working in secondary schools reported they were expected to perform a variety of complex and challenging tasks (Howard & Ford, 2007). The researchers found SPED paraeducators often had considerable autonomy and responsibility in providing academic, social, and behavioral support to the students they served. In addition, the SPED paraeducators were expected to provide adaptions and accommodations on a daily basis with little or no direction from teachers (Howard & Ford, 2007). Without guidance and support from teachers, instructional activities provided by the SPED paraeducators may potentially result in poor decision making on their part. Subsequently, this may lead to ineffective and inappropriate services and supports for students with disabilities.

In order to provide access to the general curriculum, students with disabilities require special education services and supports within the general education classrooms. In many instances, SPED paraeducators are the ones responsible for providing the needed services and supports (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). SPED paraeducators are expected to complete multiple tasks, yet they often receive little or no training before starting their positions (Capizzi & Da Fonte, 2012). Most SPED paraeducators are unprepared for the responsibility of working with students with disabilities. Their lack of training may lead them to question their ability to appropriately perform their roles and responsibilities (Downing et al., 2000). Limited supervision and feedback from the general or special education teachers, once they begin working in the schools, can lead SPED paraeducators to feel isolated and uncertain about their expectations (Marks et al., 1999).

Training of Special Education Paraeducators

Paraeducator attrition has been noted in several studies over the years (Ghere & York-

Barr, 2007; Tillery, Werts, Roark, & Harris, 2003). These studies found some of the primary reasons paraeducators leave the workforce are due to challenging relationships with teachers, low pay, and lack of training. High rates of turnover among the SPED paraeducator workforce and the fact they are often hired at the last minute or when the need for additional support for students arises throughout the school year, means there is often insufficient time to build relationships and little time for training before placing the paraeducators into the classrooms (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Fisher & Pleasants, 2012; French & Pickett, 1997; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007). As employment of SPED paraeducators has increased, concerns related to their training, assignment, and supervision have arisen (French, 1998; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). When paraeducators were first introduced into classrooms, their primary role was to support the teacher with administrative duties, but over time their responsibilities and training needs have evolved to focus on teaching and learning (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Blalock, 1991). Downing et al. (2000) interviewed 16 paraeducators and found the lack of training was a significant concern. All of the participants affirmed the need for training but reported minimal opportunities for it. In their study, Wallace et al. (2001) suggested teachers need to become better advocates for the training needs of the SPED paraeducators who work with their students.

SPED paraeducators have reported their training is little more than observing teachers and other paraeducators as they work with students, supplemented with a brief explanation before undertaking tasks (Carroll, 2001). Additionally, the quality of training and supervision provided varied significantly among teacher-paraeducator teams (Riggs & Mueller, 2001). In a study conducted by Breton (2010), 258 SPED paraeducators were surveyed regarding the adequacy of their training and training needs. The study findings showed that 46.3% of the respondents reported the adequacy of their initial training to instruct students with disabilties was

fair to very poor. When asked about training needs, 29.1% of the paraeducators indicated they were either uncertain or strongly disagreed they had received sufficient training to work with their current students. When asked what preparation would have been helpful prior to starting their first assignment, a study conducted by Liston, Nevin, and Malian (2009) revealed SPED paraeducators desired training specific to their job responsibilities. In their study, Giangreco and Doyle (2002) concluded schools and teachers need to do a better job at determining role expectations and role matching with the SPED paraeducators' skills, abilities, preparation, and supervision. They suggested, "when special education paraeducators remain inadequately supported in terms of training, planning, and supervision, the system is flawed" (p. 7). The inherent flaws may be due in part to the confusion that exists for teacher-paraeducator teams responsible for the implementation of services and supports for students with disabilities in general education settings.

In 2015, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) established paraeducator standards that aligned with the initial and advanced preparation standards for special education professionals (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015). The standards were developed to specifically target and ensure that paraeducators master the knowledge and skills necessary to perform their duties through ongoing, effective, pre-service and continuing professional development with licensed staff. The standards outline seven specialty preparation sets for SPED paraeducators, which include learner development and individual learning differences, the learning environment, curricular content knowledge, assessment, instructional planning and strategies, professional learning and ethical practice, and collaboration. Each of the specialty preparation sets provides guidance as to what knowledge and skills SPED paraeducators need to become more effective in their work with students with disabilities. The standards include the

development of effective communication and relationship building with other staff members.

In a study utilizing the CEC standards for assessing the knowledge base of paraeducators, Carter et al. (2009), found those with more years of experience and opportunities for training reported higher levels of knowledge as compared to those with fewer years of experience and training. In addition, the study emphasized the importance and need for meaningful training and supervision of paraeducators. To ensure the development of the SPED paraeducators' knowledge and skills, it is important for districts and schools to determine what information and strategies paraeducators need in order to effectively maximize educational outcomes for students with disabilities.

The success of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings may depend on the supports provided by the SPED paraeducators. Thus, student success may be contingent on how paraeducators develop the knowledge and skills neccessay to perform their duties, how they are trained, how their roles are determined and communicated, and how they are supported and supervised. Therefore, given the varied tasks SPED paraeducators are required to perform, it is preferable that the teachers responsible for their supervision and management have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to provide the appropriate supervision, guidance, and support.

Teacher Responsibility for Special Education Paraeducators

Teachers, given the responsibilities as supervisor and manager are in the best position to influence the skills, abilities, and practices of the SPED paraeducators assigned to their classrooms and ultimately meet the educational needs of all students (French, 2001). Teachers hold the position of leadership in the classroom, thus it is incumbent upon them to take responsibility for shaping the classroom environment to allow the SPED paraeducators to effectively carry out their job duties. Providing effective supervision and management of SPED

paraeducators is a complex activity that often requires special and general education teachers to serve as instructor, role model, manager, and counselor (Howard & Ford, 2007). However, teachers may be hesitant to provide supervision and guidance for SPED paraeducators because they themselves lack the requisite skills and knowledge necessary to appropriately carry out such responsibilities (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Pickett, 1999).

Lack of Preparation to Supervise Special Education Paraeducators

Although it is preferable for teachers to provide acknowledgement and feedback to the SPED paraeducators working in their classrooms, often there is confusion about who is responsible for supervising and managing their work. In their study, Bauman et al. (2010) found teachers' lack of knowledge about the role of paraeducators and their lack of experience collaborating with paraeducators influenced their ability to facilitate a successful teacher-paraeducator partnership. Neither preservice training nor professional development occuring after employment for both special and general education teachers in the supervision of SPED paraeducators have adequately prepared them for their responsibilities of supervisor or manager (Bauman et al., 2010; Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, & French, 2011; Wallace et al., 2001). Capizzi and Da Fonte (2012) stressed the teachers responsible for supervising SPED paraeducators are often unprepared or untrained to work with or provide SPED paraeducators the needed supervision, supports, and guidance once the paraeducators begin their work in the school setting. Special and general education teachers often lacked understanding of their duties as they related to the leadership, supervision, management, and evaluation of SPED paraeducators (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2012; Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). Even though some of the duties performed by the teachers and SPED paraeducators overlap, it is still the responsibility of the classroom teachers to assess student needs and progress, plan lessons, and modify and adapt

curriculum to meet the needs of the students (Pickett, 1999).

A number of studies in recent years have found teachers received little to no pre-service or in-service training about working with paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. For example, a study conducted by Rueda and Munzo (2002) reported many special and general education teachers received no information or training from the school related to the activities or tasks SPED paraeducators could or should be expected to do. In a study conducted with first and second year general and special education teachers, 80% of the teachers reported they received less than one clock hour in their preservice programs on learning how to work with paraeducators (Bauman et al., 2010). In her study, Drecktrah (2000) found some teacher licensure programs spend only one to two clock hours addressing the topic of working with paraeducators. She surveyed special education teachers about their level of supervision of paraeducators, the skills required for their supervision, as well as how their teacher licensure programs and school districts prepared them for these responsiblities. Results from the survey indicated special education teachers were expected to teach and train the paraeducators in their schools about behavior management, tutoring, communication, types of disabilities, observing and documenting behavior, computer skills, and data collection. Of the 212 teachers surveyed only 10% reported they received training in their teacher licensure programs on how to work with SPED paraeducators. Eighty eight percent reported they received no preparation from their school district to work with SPED paraeducators. Very few states include teacher credentialing standards covering competency in managing, training, and supporting SPED paraeducators (Wallace et al., 2001).

Each school year, special and general education teachers may find themselves supervising one or more paraeducators within their classrooms. As a growing and important

segment of school personnel, SPED paraedcuators provide support for students with disabilities in both self-contained special education classrooms and general education classroom settings. Unfortunately, poorly prepared teachers offer another challenge to training, guiding, and equipping SPED paraeducators with the tools they need to appropriately perform their duties in the schools. Therefore, it is preferable that teachers have the knowledge and skills necessary to adequately supervise, guide, and manage the SPED paraeducators working in their schools and classrooms. With this, there is a growing awareness of the need to train special and general education teachers in the supervision of SPED paraeducators. However, research indicates most teachers have not acquired such knowledge and skills, either through pre-service preparation or in-service professional development. The teachers' lack of appropriate supervision and support for SPED paraeducators, may result in lost instructional time, less success for students, and poor decision making on the part of paraeducators (Austin, 2014).

Teacher Supervision and Training of Special Education Paraeducators

As noted in the previous section, teachers are rarely taught how to instruct and supervise the work of SPED paraeductors. Often teachers assume the SPED paraeducators already know what to do, while the paraeducators often wait for direction and guidance (Blalock, 1991). In their study, Giangreco and Broer (2005) found on average teachers spend less than 2% of their time in training, supervision, or other professional direction in supporting SPED paraeducators. The training and supervision provided by teachers for SPED paraeducators is often too broad and based on building specific needs and does not address the essential skills needed by the majority of SPED paraeducators (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003; Trautman, 2004). French (1997) suggested teachers responsible for establishing and designing the roles and responsibilities of the SPED paraeducators should consider the experience, training, comfort level, and knowledge

levels of the paraeducators. Therefore, teachers who are responsible for the supervision of SPED paraeducators should be able to clarify and communicate the paraeducators' expectation, effectively monitor their work, and provide feedback.

Supervision means the teacher, not the SPED paraeducator, designs and develops all aspects of instruction, including social skills development, behavior management, implementing communication systems, and data collection methods. Supervision does not mean the teacher has to be able to see the SPED paraeducator at all times, but it does mean the teacher knows at all time what the paraeducator is doing to support instruction (Austin, 2014). Even when preservice teachers are trained and prepared to supervise paraeducators, they are often not prepared to address the challenges that may exist within the teacher-SPED paraeducator teams (Salzberg & Morgan, 1995).

Challenges for Teachers Who Supervise Special Education Paraeducators

While the growing use of SPED paraeducators in the general education classrooms may provide multiple benefits for all students, problems may arise for teachers (Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). In most cases, general education teachers do not select which paraeducator will be assigned to their classrooms, therefore the presence of another adult may seem awkward for some teachers. Douglas et al. (2016) found age differences presented challenges. The presence of SPED paraeducators in the general education classroom, who may be more mature and experienced, may be unsettling for some general education teachers. This may add to the teachers' discomfort and reluctance to lead, direct, supevise, and support the SPED paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. Howes (2003) also referred to the tensions between leadership, management, and partnership which teachers may experience. When attempting to develop a partnership with the paraeducators, teachers may struggle with establishing a

collaborative relationship while maintaining their leadership and management roles and responsibilities in the classroom.

Often student schedules, classroom schedules, and demanding responsibilites required to be performed by the special and general education teachers limits the time available for supervising and supporting SPED paraeducators. Hofmeister (1993) suggested teachers are doing SPED paraeducators and students a disservice if they do not provide proper supervision and support to enable the paraeducators to gain the knowledge and skills needed to appropriately perform their duties. Given that many special and general education teachers lack the knowledge and appropriate training in the supervision and management of SPED paraeducators, it is important they develop the necessary skills to perform these tasks. Moreover, when special and general education teachers are expected to direct, guide, and support the the work of SPED paraeducators in their classrooms, it is imperative that they have the knowledge, skills, and competencies to perform these duties.

Teacher Competencies Needed to Supervise Special Education Paraeducators

There are many functions related to the supervision of something or somebody. Some functions of effective supervision include listening, educating, advising, directing, enhancing motivation, and monitoring activities, results, and performance (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2007). As it relates to schools and classrooms, Glickman et al. (2007) defined supervision as "leadership for the improvement of instruction" (p. 9). Therefore, in order to supervise and develop the skills needed of the SPED paraeducators, teachers should possess skills in leadership, interpersonal relationships, and organization and management. They should also attain the knowledge and understanding of the role expectations of the paraeducators (Glickman et al., 2007; Trautman, 2004).

In order to clarify the knowledge and skills needed by teachers to effectively supervise the work of SPED paraeducators, Wallace et al. (2001) conducted a study that included paraeducators, administrators, and teachers. The participants were asked to indicate the importance of 16 supervisory competency statements. While all three groups reported the importance of demonstrating all 16 supervisory competencies, teachers and administrators reported their demonstration at higher levels than did the paraeducators. As a result of the findings, Wallace et al. (2001) recommended teachers be prepared to work with SPED paraeducators through training that focused on specific skills. They encouraged improved clarification of roles and expectations through increased communication between teachers and paraeducators. In addition, they posited teachers are responsible for creating a pleasant environment, educating new members of the work group, and communicating regularly with others in the system. These studies indicated if teachers develop skills in planning, assessment, instruction, collaboration, and supervison of SPED paraeducators, they may see more successful inclusion for their students. While studying the issues of teacher training in supervision, several researchers have discussed the importance for teachers to develop effective management skills (French, 1997; Pickett, 1999; Wallace et al., 2001).

As classrooms are complex and dynamic work environments, teachers are expected to demonstrate effective management skills. Effective management includes planning work, communicating goals, and regulating activities of the workplace. Teachers have essentially become an executive, with duties resembling those of executives in business and management (French & Chopra, 2006; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Boomer (1980) referred to the teacher as a program manager, a role that involved the development of student program goals and ensured the management of resources, which would include SPED paraeducators, to reach those goals.

Teachers who possess effective management skills are able to create an environment where collaboration is valued and paraeducators are able to develop the necessary skills to support the students they serve.

Similarly, French (1997, 2003) offered seven executive functions needed by teachers who supervise SPED paraeducators. They include the ability to provide orientation for new SPED paraeducators, plan, manage schedules, delegate, on-the-job training, evaluation, and managing the work environment.

Orientation. Orientation is critical to beginning supervision of any SPED paraeducator, as it establishes the relationship between the teacher and paraeducator, as well as the paraeducator and the school. As most paraeducators often lack the knowledge and skills to perform their duties, teachers should possess the ability to orient the paraeducator to the school and classroom. In their study, Wallace et al. (2001) found paraeducators were rarely oriented to the school and classroom communities prior to starting their job.

A proactive approach to orienting paraeducators to the school and classroom communities increases the liklihood of the paraeducator being well informed of the expectations of the job. Boomer (1980) suggested teachers and SPED paraeducators should meet prior to the paraeducators' first day on the job. Doing so will provide an opportunity to tour the school, introduce other staff members, discuss student confidentiality, and review job expectations. Giangreco (2003) contended teachers should orient SPED paraeducators to the school, classroom, and students, and provide initial and ongoing training that aligns with their roles and responsibilities. He also suggested teachers provide prepared plans to follow, direct the SPED paraeducators' roles through continued supportive supervision, and provide opportunities for the paraeducators to be a contributing team member. In addition, orienting the paraeducator prior to

starting their job, allows time for teachers, schools, and/or districts to explain written policies, procedures, and rules. Beyond the hiring, arrival, and job basics, the paraeducators' supervisors can use information from the orientation to consider how best to direct the paraeducator's work based on the SPED paraeducator's skills and abilities. Also, providing sufficient time for orientation allows the teachers and paraeducators time to discuss role expecations.

When clarifying the roles and responsibilities of SPED paraeducators, teachers must consider a number of parameters. These include what the paraeducators can legally do, the paraeducators' experience, and the paraeducators' skills and abilities. Pickett (1999) defined role clarification as the "ability to share information with paraprofessionals about their roles as a member of program planning teams if required by district/agency policies as well as the roles of other team members… in the development of learner goals" (p. 18). District and school administrators need to ensure that both teachers and paraeducators understand their respective roles (Vasa & Steckelberg, 1997).

In order to avoid role ambiguity, districts and individual schools should establish standards and guidelines for role clarification through formal job descriptions. Research has shown the lack of guidance related to supervisory practice leaves role clarification to be shaped by "intuitive belief systems of professionals" (French & Pickett, 1997, p. 66), a process that likely ill serves both teachers and paraeducators. Role clarification often begins with the teacher deciding what duties he or she wants and/or needs the paraeducator to assume (Blalock, 1991). Once role clarification is established, teachers and paraeducators are much more likely to work as a team. Therefore, teachers and paraeducators can avoid role clarification issues by employing collaborative and proactive approaches.

Planning. Having the skills and abilities to plan are important. Special and general

education teachers are responsible for planning, setting goals, and delegating tasks the SPED paraeducators will carry out. French (1997) suggested the objective of planning requires teachers to set goals, describe activities and methods, and set expectations for student outcomes. Plans, as tools, provide the framework for what needs to be accomplished, how and when it will be accomplished, and who is responsible for doing what.

If teachers do not effectively plan, paraeducators may be expected to assume tasks they were never taught to perform. In their study, Downing et al. (2000) found that regardless of training or years of experience, some SPED paraeducators were required to adapt and modify curriculum for the students they served. Several studies have indicated the lack of planning for paraeducators on the part of the teachers may lead paraeducators to question their expected roles and responsibilities as well as their effectiveness in providing the necessary services to students (French & Chopra, 2006; Riggs & Mueller, 2001). Therefore, in order to support and serve the needs of their students, teachers should take responsibility for planning the tasks and activities paraeducators are expected to do.

Both time management and organization are essential components to successful teacher planning for paraeducators. For teachers, the task of planning for student activities and lessons is complex in and of itself, but it can become even more arduous when doing so for paraeducators. According to French (2003), a good plan,

> Specifies how to do the task, the purposes of the task or lesson, the specific student needs to be addressed or strengths on which to capitalize, the materials to use, and the type of data needed to determine whether the student's achievement is satisfactory…or not satisfactory (p. 114).

Over time, planning can become less complicated as teachers learn to develop the most efficient

and effective manner to document and communicate their plans. In addition, French (1997) discussed the importance of scheduling and that it often takes place simultaneously with the development of lesson and work task plans.

Manage schedules. Schedules are necessary companions to plans. Schedules do not include the nature or goals of the activity nor the materials or resources needed in the lesson or classes. Those components are outlined in the plans.

Schedules can and should reflect the unique needs of the team and the circumstances under which activities and tasks are to occur. They can serve as a tool for managing the distribution for activities and tasks that need to be completed. Schedules should outline when tasks are to be completed, who will do them, and where the activities or tasks will occur (French, 1997). Moreover, schedules can serve as a resource for delineating the division of labor among team members. As teachers plan and manage schedules, they are often expected to then delegate some of the tasks and activities other team members are expected to perform.

Delegation. Delegation is one of the core concepts of management leadership. It is "the act of entrusting enough authority to another to get the task done without giving up the responsibility" (French, 1997, p. 104). Delegation not only allows teachers to take responsibilities for the tasks that only they can do, it also affords the opportunity for the SPED paraeducators to learn and practice new skills. Delegating is not an easy task as some teachers may find it difficult to relinquish control. As delegating requires teachers to take the time to train the paraeducators on how to perform given tasks, teachers may feel it easier to just do it themselves (French, 1997).

According to French (2003), "It takes time to delegate, to motivate paraeducators to do their jobs correctly, to communicate well, to organize instructional and managerial tasks, and to

plan and prepare for paraeducators" (p. 93). Delegation should provide guidance, define the expected outcomes, the timeframe, and the level of authority, but should not require that the SPED paraeducator perform the tasks in exactly the same manner as the teacher. When effectively done, delegation allows everyone to be more efficient and to make the most of their time.

Training. Training is a critical component to ensuring SPED paraeducators have the knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform their job duties. Teachers are often responsible for determining and providing the training. Training for paraeducators new to the profession should look different from those who have more experience. Although this makes sense, often schools and districts do not differentiate the training needs (Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Wallace et al., 2001). Teachers, schools, and districts should consider the group needs, what do all paraeducators need to know, and the individual needs, what do some paraeducators need to know, when determining the training needs of SPED paraeducators. Training needs may also be dependent on what responsibilities the paraeducators will be expected to perform as well as the contexts in which they will be working.

Training should be purposeful and according to Joyce and Showers (1980) focused on an explanation of why something works or happens the way it does, demonstration and/or modeling, practice, feedback, and coaching for use. An explanation of why something works or happens the way it does, means the skill or concept is clearly explained and described. Demonstration or modeling describes or shows how the skill or concept is applied. Practice means that the SPED paraeducator actually tries out the skill or concept under carefully controlled and safe conditions. Feedback is then given to the paraeducator regarding his or her performance. Feedback is most effective when it is descriptive, specific, directed, well-timed, and accurate (French, 1997). The

last element of training is coaching. Coaching occurs on-the-job and while the SPED paraeducator works with students. Coaching is the most significant of all training practices because it allows the SPED paraeducator to fine tune newly gained skills until the skills become engrained into their repertoire. When teachers take on the coaching role, they must be careful to separate the coaching functions from the evaluative functions of their job.

Evaluation. Monitoring the effectiveness of the supports the SPED paraeducators provide for students and then providing feedback to the paraeducators is important. The evaluation of paraeducators is a critical supervisory/management skill. Evaluations serve as tools for assessing and providing feedback to the paraeducators related to their job performance. "Feedback is a communication to a person that gives the person information about how he or she performs" (French, 1997, p. 121). In order to perform their duties, SPED paraeducators need to know what they do well and what they can improve upon. As an important element in the management and supervision of paraeducators, a study conducted by Riggs and Mueller (2001), revealed there is little consensus on who is responsible for evaluating the work of the paraeducators, when and how often paraeducators are evaluated, as well as how the information is utilized.

Evaluations include observing the SPED paraeducators' task performance and behavior. This means teachers need to find time to watch the paraeducators doing their work. French (2003) suggested both unfocused and focused observations be used when evaluating paraeducators. Unfocused observations occur when there are no preplanned skills or behaviors the teacher is targeting to assess. Focused observations are intentional and typically target a particular skill or task the SPED paraeducator is performing. To effectively evaluate the performance of the SPED paraeducators, teachers should employ both unfocused and focused

observations. The more frequently teachers observe and provide feedback it is much more likely the SPED paraeducators will have the information they need to maintain, change, and/or improve their practices.

Managing the work environment. When discussing the executive functions of paraeducator supervision, French (2003) suggested workplace management entailed communication with paraeducators, conflict management, and problem solving. Several resources have emphsized the importance of ongoing communication between teacher-paraeducator teams (Devlin, 2008; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Trautman, 2004). For example Daniels and McBride (2001) argued, "Successful interactions between the teacher and paraeducator will depend on the teacher's ability to delineate and articulate responsibilities and task assignments, the teacher's supervisory abilities and communication skills, and the teacher's effort in building trusting and collaborative partnerships" (p. 67). The success of a collaborative partnership may be dependent on the teacher's willingness to provide SPED paraeducators the information they need to appropriately support the needs of the students they are assigned to serve. For successful implementation of inclusion practices, ongoing communication is essential for teacher and paraeducator teams. In their study, Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) stated, "most teachers know often their most effective communication does not involve speech, but effective communication does mean conveying a message in such a way that the person you are communicating with understands it in the way you intended" (p. 24). Therefore, successful interactions between the teachers and SPED paraeducators may also be dependent on the teachers' ability and skills to define and clearly articulate the paraeducators' responsibilities and task assignments (Daniels & McBride, 2001; Douglas et al., 2016).

Ongoing communication provides teacher-paraeducator teams the opportunity to

collaboratie, problem solve, and manage conflict. In an effort to build a trusting and collaborative partnership, teacher-paraeducator teams need to establish ways to deal with issues or concerns that might arise. Teachers and paraeducators may need to find time to jointly problem solve when it has to do with students, schedules, materials, and instruction (French, 2003). As in any work setting, schools are not immune to conflict. The sources of conflict in schools can stem from relationships, data and information, values, structural issues, interests, and personal prefereneces and styles (French, 2003). Some conflicts are more easily resolved then other, particurlarly those surrounding structure, style, and interest. Relationships, values, and data conflicts are less easily resolved. As teacher-paraeducator teams may be faced with unresolved conflicts, their ability to manage their conflicts may be contingent on their ability to persevere through the unresolved conflicts and focus on the their work together in supporting the needs of students.

In addition, the success of the work of general education teacher and paraeducator teams in inclusion settings, may be dependent on their acceptance and willingness to support the concept of inclusive practices. Studies have shown the negative perceptions, biases, and attitudes about inclusion services can undermine the work of teacher-paraeducator teams (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). Often the negative perceptions and attitudes are brought about by a lack of training in special education and inclusive practices as well as a lack of resources (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). In her study, Idol (2006) found secondary teachers were not as receptive to the practices as their elementary counterparts. As a result of this, the effectiveness of teacher-paraeducator partnerships in secondary schools may be diminished given that inclusive practices requires the involvement of and collaboration between all educational professionals to be successful.

Effective teamwork is based on well-functioning workplaces. Many effective teams have team leaders who manage the work environment. Teachers as team leaders, should establish systems for communicating, solving problems, and managing or resolving problems. It is crucial that the best possible practices be used in the classroom. Therefore, it is important that the teachers as supervisors of students and other adults, master the skills that will support and ensure student success (French, 2003; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). When roles, expectations, and goals are clearly defined for all, teacher-paraeducator teams have the ability to be more efficient, productive, and effective in their practices together. Thus, when teachers and SPED paraeducators are clearly working as a team, a positive educational atmosphere exists which favorably supports student learning and achievement (Devlin, 2008).

Adults learn, retain, and use what they perceive is relevant to their needs (Pickett, 1999). As it relates to the collaborative partnership among teachers and SPED paraeducators, teachers may need to understand the relationship between what they themselves are learning and practicing and how it influences their day-to-day activities in their work with paraeducators. Weiner (2003) suggested to effectively change teaching practices within the inclusive general education classrooms, teachers need to demonstrate a high degree of initiative and responsibility in not only supporting the needs of students with disabilities but also in coordinating and guiding the work of the SPED paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. Equally important is the role others play in the development, facilitation, and support for the work of the teacher-SPED paraeducator teams in the inclusive classroom settings.

Supporting and Facilitating Inclusive Practices

It is well documented that building and district administrators play a key role in the successful implementation of inclusive practices (Riehl, 2000; Salisbury, 2006; Tobin, 2006).

Successful inclusive practices are often associated with administrative support at both the district and school building levels (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001; Villa & Thousand, 2005). Villa and Thousand (2005)**,** outlined several actions that secondary administrators can take to ensure success for their inclusive practices. Some of those actions included building consensus and a vision for inclusive practices, developing the knowledge and skills of those responsible for providing inclusive services, creating time to plan, communicate, and collaborate, and acknowledging and expanding human and teaching resources. As most schools attempt to provide some form of inclusion for students with disabilities, the administrators's knowldege and skills regarding inclusive practices and what is needed to support such practices are essential. For example, in their study, Soodak, Podell, and Lehman (1998) found that collaboration was an important factor in providing a supportive environment for inclusion. In addition, they found that teachers felt class size played a role in the implementation of successful inclusion. The administrator's ability to provide time for training, collaboration, and possibly reducing class size are factors to consider when determining the needed supports for inclusion.

Considering these factors, administrators are in the position to shape and influence the practices and environment to ensure successful implementation of inclusion support for students with disabilities. In her study, Salisbury (2006) found the schools that provided inclusion support for students with disabilities, had strong administrator support and commitment to the practices. She stated for successful implementation of inclusion the administrator often has, "do what it takes attitude, inclusive language, collaborative approach to decision making, and a philosophical commitment to inclusive education" (p. 79). Administrators play a critical role in transforming their schools to become more effective and inclusive.

Schools with successful inclusion programs have developed them because of strong and

active administrator support (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). In their study, McLeskey and Waldron emphasized for administrators this, “included demonstrating expertise at building a vision and setting direction, understanding and developing people, and redesigning the school to support teachers” (p. 73). Haller and Kleine (2001) stated, “when administrators create or help to create a structured set of mutable relationships in their schools, they do so in order to attain some educational objective” (p. 11). The development of the skills and supports needed by general education teachers and SPED paraeducators, working in the inclusive classrooms, may ultimately be dependent on how the administrator perceives his or her role and responsibility in helping to attain and facilitate successful and competent inclusive practices. According to Wood (1998), “Successful and competent inclusion takes patience, perseverance, and time. … Systems and people adapt to changes in developmental stages when sufficient support has been provided, independence has been nurtured, and collaborative relationships have been allowed to evolve” (p. 194). This may suggest those responsible for the oversight of inclusive practices, the ability to provide and support a culture of collaboration and learning will ultimately result in improved practices and services for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 3

Research Design and Methodology

A qualitative research design was used to describe, analyze, and interpret perceptions, beliefs and experiences of district and building administrators, special education teachers as well as general education teachers and SPED paraeducators regarding their work together in general education classrooms in a mid-size suburban high school (Lapan et al., 2012). Criteria for employing a qualitative research design identifies the use of open-ended questions, interviews, and observation data in search of common themes, patterns, and interpretations (Creswell, 2015).

Qualitative research design allows for flexibility as data are collected. As data are collected, emergent design provides flexibility in the number of interviews, observations, and participants. Emergent design, "indicates that the intent or purpose of a study and the questions asked by the researcher may change during the process of inquiry based on feedback or responses from participants" (Creswell, 2015, p. 129). As activity theory takes into account individuals, their colleagues, and co-workers who all bring different perspectives, experiences, beliefs, and possible motives to an activity system, I had the flexibility to follow leads as they emerged from the interview responses and observations.

Research Site

Lakeview Public Schools (LPS, a pseudonym) is a suburban school district located in south central Kansas. LPS is one of the 20 largest school districts in Kansas. The district operates 12 student attendance centers. They include six elementary schools, two middle schools, one alternative high school, one alternative special education center, one early childhood center, and one comprehensive high school.

During the 2016-17 school year, LPS had a total enrollment of approximately 5,670 students. Lakeview High School (LHS) is a comprehensive high school serving students in grades 9-12. At the time of the study, there were approximately 1,830 high school students attending LHS of which 242 (13.21%) were students with disabilities (Kansas State Department of Education, 2017). LHS employed five administrators, nine licensed support staff, 89 licensed teaching staff, and 47 classified staff members. Of the total number of staff assigned to LHS, 31 were general and special education paraeducators and 12 were special education teachers.

Given the percentage of students with disabilities attending LHS and the number of licensed staff members as well as paraeducators it was selected as the research site for this study. Furthermore, this afforded a greater opportunity in the selection of potential participants. As well as having a larger number of possible participants at this site, the teacher-paraeducator teams chosen for this study were responsible for supporting students with high incidence disabilities, such as learning disabilities, other health impairments, emotional/behavioral disabilities, and mild intellectual disabilities in core content general education classroom settings.

In addition, LHS was selected as the research site because LPS is not a member of a Special Education Cooperative or Interlocal. While Special Education Cooperatives and Interlocals are a common special education service delivery system in Kansas, they are less typical in other parts of the US where special education services are provided by the district. Cooperatives and Interlocals are comprised of several school districts accessing the special education resources provided by the Cooperative or Interlocal.

In Kansas, the work of a Cooperative is the responsibility of one of the member districts. The sponsoring district is responsible for the hiring and oversight of all special education services and the staff assigned to the districts that comprise the Cooperative. Cooperative staff

are governed by the same Board of Education as the sponsoring district. Interlocals on the other hand are separate entities and are governed by their own Board of Directors. Interlocals hire their own administrative staff, special education teachers, support staff, and classified staff, such as secretaries and paraeducators. Interlocals are also responsible for assigning all special education staff to the districts that comprise the Interlocal.

To eliminate any concerns or misunderstandings related to who was responsible for the employment and oversight of the teachers and paraeducators within the district and/or school, it was important to me that the district selected be solely responsible for the implementation of all general and special education services and the hiring of all general and special education personnel. Consequently, this eliminated an additional layer of bureaucracy within the district and/or school.

Participants

I utilized purposeful sampling in the selection of the study participants. Doing so allowed for information-rich insight and understanding into the unique perspectives regarding the circumstances under which the participants work (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). Given the complexity of the content taught and that most high school general education teachers are highly qualified to teach specific content (i.e. math, science, social studies, language arts), the selection of core content teachers was a priority for this study. This imparted an interesting viewpoint as to how teacher-SPED paraeducator teams perceived their roles, responsibilities, expectations, and needs in general education classroom settings through the lens of activity theory. This also provided insight into how they described their experiences and practices as they worked together in general education classroom settings. In order to address the phenomenon of the study, the

participants had the characteristics and experience necessary to answer the research questions and provide the most meaningful and robust data (Merriam, 2009).

I contacted district level leaders by email to determine their interest and agreement to participate in the study. Once agreement from the district was obtained and the Wichita State University Institutional Research Board (IRB) process was completed and approved, I contacted, by email, the district's director of special education and the high school principal. The district's director of special education agreed to participate in the study. The building principal declined to participate but did provide the names of three assistant principals at the school and asked that I contact them to request their participation. I emailed all three assistant principals, two of who agreed to participate. From my interview with one of the assistant principals, I obtained the names of the school's instructional coach and the special education department chairperson. I emailed the instructional coach and she agreed to participate in an individual interview.

Upon the completion of my interview with the instructional coach, she agreed to assist me in scheduling focus group interviews with the special education teachers and the SPED paraeducators. She also provided the names of 18 general education core content teachers who had one or more paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. I emailed all 18 general teachers, which yielded nine who agreed to participate. Three focus group interviews were scheduled with the nine general education teachers. With the assistance of the instructional coach and the special education department chairperson, a focus group interview was scheduled with nine special education teachers and another focus group interview was scheduled with 14 SPED paraeducators.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative data collection for this study consisted primarily of focus group discussions, individual interviews, observations, and a review of documents (Creswell, 2015; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Focus group discussions and individual interviews allowed me to collect information-rich data regarding perceptions, experiences, practices, and beliefs of general and special education teachers, district and building administrators, and SPED paraeducators as it related to the activity of supporting students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015).

Focus groups. Focus group interviews were conducted utilizing a semi-structured interview process. This allowed group participants to hear others' perspectives, and by listening to each other's responses, affirm, disaffirm, and/or make additional comments (Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) described focus group interviews as an opportunity to enhance data quality through the interactions of the participants. He stated, "participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other, which weeds out false or extreme views" (p. 478). Three focus group interviews were conducted with the general education teachers, one focus group interview was conducted with the SPED paraeducators, and one focus group interview was conducted with the special education teachers.

Each focus group interview with the general education teachers was to be comprised of three teachers each. Unfortunately, the day of the interviews two teachers contacted me stating they would not be able to participate due to a conflict in scheduling. As I had already committed to interviewing the other general education teacher participants, I decided to proceed. One focus group interview included three general education teachers. The other two interviews were

comprised of two general education teacher participants for each interview. The seven general education teachers who participated in the study had 1 year to 10 years experience at the school.

The focus group interviews with the SPED paraeducators and special education teachers were arranged and scheduled with support from the school's instructional coach and the special education department chairperson. There were 14 paraeducators and nine special education teacher participants. One focus group interview was held with all nine special education teachers. The focus group interview with all 14 paraeducators was held over two sessions; due to time restraints and given the fact that I was unable to complete the full interview in one session. All focus group participants were given the option to participate in an individual interview if they were unwilling or unable to participate in a focus group interview, none of which chose that option.

The nine special education teachers who participated in the study had 1 year to 23 years of experience at the school. The 14 SPED paraeducators who participated in the study had three weeks to 17 years of experience at the school. Of the 14 SPED paraeducators who participated, five where in their first year in that position, and five had 2 years to 4 years of experience. Of the remaining four paraeducators who participated in the study, one had 7 years of experience, one had 10 years of experience, one had 15 years of experience, and one had 17 years of experience at the school.

The interview protocol utilized open-ended questions. This format allowed for flexibility within the protocol questions to explore and probe topics that may be central to answering the study's research questions (Creswell, 2015). The semi-structured focus group interviews allowed for emerging views through the exploration of individual and collective perspectives regarding the activity of supporting students with disabilities and the work of general education

teacher and SPED paraeducators teams in general education classroom settings. The focus group interview protocols can be found in Appendix A.

Individual interviews. Invitations to participate in an individual interview were sent, by email, to the building principal, three assistant principals, the district's director of special education, and the school's instructional coach. Agreement to participate was obtained from two assistant principals, the district's director of special education, and the instructional coach. This provided an opportunity to gain insight into how administrators and the instructional coach described their experiences, beliefs, and practices as they related to the their work and the work of general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams in general education classroom settings. The district and building administrators who participated in the study had 3 years to12 years of experience in their positions with the district or school. The instructional coach was in her 5th year in that position.

Semi-structured interviews asking a set of open-ended pre-selected questions were employed (Merriam, 2009). As the interviews were semi-structured in nature, it allowed for follow-up questions or clarification, as needed (Merriam, 2009). The interview protocols can be found in Appendix A.

The focus group and individual interviews took approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I recorded all interviews using a digital voice recorder from which I transcribed verbatim each focus group and individual interview (Merriam, 2009). Once the transcriptions were complete, I emailed them to the participants. Participants were asked to review the transcriptions and provide feedback to ensure I had accurately captured what was stated during the interviews. Doing this also allowed me to ask several follow-up and clarifying questions from the participants' responses (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). In addition to the interviews, I conducted

observations in the general education classrooms where both the general education teachers and SPED paraeducators were assigned to work together.

Observations. As a source of data collection, I conducted five direct observations, in five different general education classroom settings of the general education teachers and SPED paraeducators who participated in the study. Each classroom was observed one time over a period of two days. The observations allowed me to document and observe the environmental context in which the general education teachers and SPED paraeducators work together.

To understand the complexity of the work of general education and SPED paraeducator teams in inclusion classroom settings, observations, as a method of data collection, assisted in identifying behaviors, interactions, and practices among the participants in a natural setting (Merriam, 2009). This further benefited in understanding the context of the general education teachers-SPED paraeducators team relationship, characteristics, and their work together within the general education classroom settings. In addition, conducting observations allowed me to compare how the participants described their practices during the interviews to what was actually occurring in the classrooms.

I collected observation data using field notes. The field notes included detailed written descriptions of the setting, participants, activities, and direct quotes of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009). An open-ended, non-participatory approach was utilized to ascertain any recurring dimensions of behaviors, actions, interactions, and relationships among the general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams (Lapan et al., 2012). The classrooms observed included two English-language arts classes, a math class, a social studies class, and a science class. Observation sessions lasted the length of the class period, which was approximately 80 minutes and allowed me to triangulate emerging data in combination with the

interviews and documents analysis (Merriam, 2009). In addition to the focus group interviews, individual interviews, and observations, I reviewed documents relevant to the study.

Documents. I reviewed and analyzed documents pertinent to the understanding of the context of the study. According to Merriam (2009), "documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem" (p. 163). I reviewed documents relevant to general and special education teacher and SPED paraeducator expectations, roles and responsibilities, and training in the classroom, school, and district. Additional documents for review included procedure guides for special education teachers and SPED paraeducators, a resource guide for SPED paraeducators, job descriptions for general and special education teachers and SPED paraeducators, and the district's salary schedule for paraeducators

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis is, "the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" (Merriam, 2009, pp. 175-176). It is a complex process that involves organizing the data to develop an overall understanding of the information (Creswell, 2015). As data analysis is an ongoing process, the multiple sources of data from this study were reviewed numerous times and systematically analyzed. This process assisted in revealing patterns, themes, meaningful categories, and new ideas leading to a better understanding of the phenomenon being investigated (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Furthermore, I utilized the components of my activity theory framework as the foundation for the initial organizing and analysis of the data collected.

I transcribed the data from the responses to the focus group/individual interview

questions and the observational notes into Word documents. From there, I organized the data into categories, patterns, and themes. This process assisted in gleaning any deviations, new patterns, codes, or themes that emerged through the data analysis. The observational notes provided a method to document, compare, and check what was reported during the interviews. As subsequent data were collected, I focused on the categories, patterns, or themes and utilized a constant comparative method to systematically locate any similarities and differences (Glaser, 1965; Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

As documents, "serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly" (Stake, 1995, p. 68), an analysis of documents, as mediating material resources or artifacts, provided insight into how the participants perceived, understood, and described their roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Documents were analyzed to determine their authenticity. In addition, content from the documents were analyzed, categorized, and coded to allow for a systematic retrieval of the data (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Content analysis of documents allowed me to interpret, identify, and extrapolate any words or statements that were relevant to the research study (Busch et al., 2005). Document review added to a rich description of the information, which will allow readers to evaluate how the data might be applicable or useful in other contexts.

Inductive analysis of the data assisted in discovering categories, patterns, or themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2015). This aided in organizing and understanding the meaning of the data as well as provided a system of retrieval of the data (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Thus, it was important to record what I felt was most meaningful, usable, and relevant (Merriam, 2009). When trying to discern what is meaningful and to reduce and transform the data, I continually referred back to my research questions and theoretical framework.

Research Quality

Research quality is essential when conducting a qualitative research study. The trustworthiness of the study is dependent on the quality of the research. Trustworthiness is established when the qualitative research techniques employed are valid, reliable, and credible (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Given the data presented, Merriam (2009) suggested trustworthiness means the findings accurately capture what was said and observed. The trustworthiness of qualitative research encompasses the concepts of credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study, its data, and the data collection methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2015).

Credibility

One of the most important criteria for evaluating a qualitative study is its credibility. Credibility is contingent on rigorous methods and elements such as triangulation, member checks, peer review, and an audit trail (Merriam, 2009). "Triangulation remains a principal strategy to ensure for validity and reliability" (Merriam, 2009, p. 216). To confirm the emerging findings of this study, the use of multiple sources and types of data allowed me to triangulate the data. The multiple types of data included focus group and individual interviews, observations, and a review of documents. This allowed me to compare and check what was said during the interviews to what was observed during the observations, as well as what was discovered in the documents. In order to determine that I accurately captured and interpreted what was said and observed during the interviews and observations, member checking was utilized by providing participants the opportunity to review and provide feedback of the transcribed interviews and observation notes (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2015) recommended the process of peer review to strengthen the accuracy and trustworthiness of the research study findings. This suggests including a peer to review the process of the study, to ask questions, and to provide opportunity to verify the findings. I collaborated with two colleagues throughout the research study to reflect, validate the findings, and discuss any concerns, biases, or oversights. In addition, credibility was established when the researcher, as an instrument in the study, was viewed as a reliable and credible (Merriam, 2009).

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which the findings are reliable and consistent with the data (Merriam, 2009). Dependability can be strengthened through the use of an audit trail or as Lapan et al. (2012) referred to it as a dependability audit. I utilized and maintained an audit trail, which allowed me to record and document how the study was conducted, the data collection and analysis, and any changes to the research process made during the study and the reasons for the changes. As stated earlier, the use of triangulation, member checking, and peer review also contributed to the dependability of this research study.

Transferability

Transferability refers to evidence supporting the generalization of the findings to similar contexts and people. According to Tracy (2010), transferability is achieved, "when readers feel as though the story of the research overlaps with their own situation and they intuitively transfer the research to their own action" (p. 845). This was established by providing a rich and robust description of the research sites, participants, and the context of the study (Lapan et al., 2012). Doing so will allow readers to deduct how my findings might relate and transfer to their own experiences and context (Lapan et al., 2012; Merriam, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this research proposal before any participants were contacted and any data were collected. To ensure the protection of human subjects, I provided participants with a written summary of the study, which included a description of the research procedures, their purposes, any foreseeable risks, and anticipated benefits (Stake, 1995). In addition, the summary included information on how and when the participants' information will be kept and destroyed once the study was complete.

Participation in the study was voluntary and I adhered to proper measures to ensure the confidentiality of the participants. Prior to participating in the interviews and observations, written consent was obtained from all participates. Anonymity was maintained for the participants, school, and school district through the use of pseudonyms (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995). Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions, not to answer a particular question, as well as to withdraw from the research study at any time (Kilbourn, 2006). I maintained confidentiality throughout and after the study was complete. I utilized a secure password-protected computer to store the encrypted data from the interviews and observations. Upon completion of the study, all data collected for the purpose of this study will be maintained in a secure location for a minimum of five years. The consent form can be found in Appendix B.

Positionality and Reflexivity

To ensure the trustworthiness, credibility, and dependability of a research study it is important to identify anything that could potentially influence the study design, its findings, or conclusions. Qualitative researchers incorporate the etic perspective (outsider-researcher) and an emic perspective (insider-participant) viewpoints when assimilating and interpreting the findings (Lapan et al., 2012). Therefore, in qualitative research it is important to acknowledge one's own

beliefs and values and how they can shape the research, interpretation of the findings, and conclusions (Haller & Kleine, 2001). According to Merriam (2009), "investigators need to explain their biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research to be undertaken" (p. 219). As research data transformation can be highly influenced by my own perspective, subjectivity, and experiences, it is important that I understand my relationship to the research study and the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This not only assisted in shaping and recognizing my understanding of myself but also assisted in understanding the experiences of the study participants.

As a special education service provider and administrator for over 40 years, I have experienced several transformations in the service delivery models for students with disabilities in the public schools. I entered the field of special education, in the public schools, as a speech-language pathologist. I worked in that capacity for 21 years. For the past 21 years, I have been a special education administrator. For 11 of those 21 years, I served as a special education program coordinator in an urban school district and for the past ten years, I have been an Assistant Director of Special Education of a Special Education Cooperative serving several suburban districts.

When I started my career in 1976, the implementation of PL 94-142 was just beginning in schools. In sorting out what this law meant for students with disabilities, the schools where I was assigned worked to define and implement the provisions of the law. PL 94-142 required, based on the individual needs of students, students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Looking back, it is unclear whether districts and schools truly understood the intent of LRE. I say this because, at that time, the majority of students with

disabilities, in the schools where I worked, were provided their special education services exclusively in a special education classroom.

When PL 94-142 was reauthorized in the early 1990s the true intent of LRE changed for most districts and schools. Districts and schools began developing special education programs and classrooms that supported students with a variety of disabilities, in particular for students with high incidence disabilities. During that same time, in the schools where I was assigned, more students with disabilities began receiving their special education services in the general education classrooms.

With the need to support students with disabilities in the general education classrooms, districts and schools began hiring more special education (SPED) paraeducators. The hiring of more SPED paraeducators allowed the schools to educate more students in the general education classrooms but also presented concerns surrounding the paraeducators' role, responsibilities, and expectations in the general education classrooms. From my experience, it was never quite clear whether it was the special or general education teachers' responsibility to guide and support the work of the SPED paraeducators.

Having had the opportunity to observe SPED paraeducators in many general education classrooms over the years, I would often see the paraeducators doing what I would call "their own thing." In most cases, paraeducators would either sit right next to a student or would be at the back of the room working with a student or a group of students. Whether this was appropriate or not, I am unsure. If direction and guidance was or was not provided by the special or general education teachers, I would assume the paraeducators were doing what they thought was best for the students they served. Given my experience and assumptions, I have a vision of

the potential effective teacher and SPED paraeducator teams have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusion general education classroom settings.

My experience and background in special education and because I act as the research and data collection instrument, I identified my positionality and worked to ensure it did not interfere with the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 2009). I made an effort to separate my personal subjectivity, beliefs, and values from the data collection and analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I utilized reflective journaling to document my experiences during the data collection and analysis processes. This included such things as how I developed my interview questions, how I presented myself to the participants, how the participants perceived me as the researcher, and documenting what I thought was socially significant related to the culture and context of the study (Chiseri-Strater, 1996). In order to minimize the influence of my personal subjectivity related to this study, it was important to ensure the results of the data collection only reflected the thoughts, perceptions, and experiences of the participants.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The purpose of this study was to investigate how the participants' perceptions, experiences, and beliefs influence the provision of services for high school students with disabilities in inclusion general education classroom settings. The 34 study participants included three administrators, seven general education teachers, one general education instructional coach teacher, nine special education teachers (also referred to as case managers), and 14 special education (SPED) paraeducators. This study focused primarily on the collaborative partnership among general education teachers and SPED paraeducators and how their work together influenced the provision of services and supports for students with disabilities in general education classroom environments. As others' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences can affect the work of the general education teacher and SPED paraeducator collaborative partnerships, it was important to understand how administrators and special education teachers also influenced the provision of inclusion services for students with disabilities.

This chapter presents the findings from three months of data collection during the winter of 2017-2018. The findings procured from the coding process converged on three major categories: (a) implementation and benefits of inclusion practices, (b) expectations for those involved in the implementation of inclusion practices, and (c) resources and barriers for the work of general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams.

Lakeview High School

Lakeview High School (LHS) is a comprehensive high school serving students in grades 9-12. It is located in the Lakeview Public Schools (LPS), which is a suburban school district in south central Kansas. LPS is one of the 20 largest school districts in Kansas. The district's

2016-2017 enrollment reported a total of 5,670 students attending LPS. During that same year, LHS's enrollment reported a total of 1,830 high school students attending the school of which 242 (13.21%) were students with disabilities (Kansas State Department of Education, 2017). Students with disabilities served at the school included both high incidence disabilities (i.e. specific learning disabilities, other health impairments, mild intellectual disabilities, emotional/behavioral disabilities) and low incidence disabilities (i.e. autism, multiple disabilities, hearing and vision impairments). LHS employs five administrators, nine licensed support staff (i.e. guidance counselors, school psychologists), 89 licensed teaching staff, and 47 classified staff members. Thirty-one of the classified staff are general and special education paraeducators and 12 of the licensed teaching staff are special education teachers.

The administrators who participated in the study had 3-12 years of experience in their current positions. The general education teacher participants had 1-10 years experience and the nine special education teachers who participated in the study had 1-23 years of experience at the school. The 14 SPED paraeducators who participated in the study had 3 weeks-17 years of experience at the school.

According to the LPS's *Special Education Certified Procedure Guide,* students with disabilities are to receive their education in a chronologically age appropriate, general education environment to the maximum extent appropriate unless a placement of this type is determined to be inappropriate even with supplemental aids and services. The determination of appropriate special education programs and services and the extent to which a student will participate in the general education programs shall be determined by the members of the Individual Education Program (IEP) Team and based on the student's individual needs.

Implementation of Inclusion Practices at LHS

When considering a continuum of service delivery models and potential placement options for students with disabilities, the general education classroom setting should be the first consideration. Although services and placement decisions are based on the individual needs of the student, IEP teams must consider with or without supplementary aids and services and/or modifications whether a student with disabilities can benefit and be successful in general education classroom environments (Marx et al., 2014; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). When students with disabilities are provided their special education services in the general education classroom, it is often referred to as inclusion. This section addresses how participants defined and described the implementation of inclusion practices as well as the benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities at LHS.

Defining and Implementing Inclusion Practices at LHS

In order to gain an understanding of inclusive practices at LHS, participants provided insight as to how they made meaning of inclusive practices, what those practices looked like, and how inclusion was implemented for students with disabilities at the school.

Meaning of inclusive practices at LHS. From the interviews, it was clear the participants' perceptions of what it meant to implement inclusive practices were similar. Administrators, general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraeducators all believed providing inclusive services meant supporting students with disabilities in the regular classroom. For example, a general education teacher shared his understanding of inclusive practices at LHS, "That would be a classroom setting in which students with IEP accommodations are included in the room with regular education students." Providing such support was primarily the responsibility of the paraeducator, as he went on to explain, "The

material is presented to the whole class and a paraeducator is present and ready to provide assistance to those students and any accommodations needed in accordance with their IEP." In similar fashion, a special education teacher described inclusion practices and how special education teachers and SPED paraeducators have implemented inclusion at LHS:

> For us, the way we do inclusion is our students [with disabilities] are put into classrooms with regular education students, taught by regular education teachers with support from our paraeducators. And then sometimes as special education teachers we consult with those [general education] teachers if there are hiccups with individual students. But our paras are pretty good so they usually are able to smooth things out on their own… That's pretty much how we do inclusion here, in the core [content] areas.

Among all interview participants, it was evident that SPED paraeducators played a key role in the implementation of inclusive services for students with disabilities at LHS.

Implementation of inclusion at LHS. Inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings has been in place at LHS for approximately 10 years. As one teacher conveyed, "It may have been 10, 11 years ago we started the inclusion program at Lakeview." Prior to the implementation of inclusion practices at LHS, it was believed the school had created a divide among students, which limited opportunities for students with disabilities to participate fully in school activities. Placing students with disabilities into general education classrooms was an effort to eliminate those distinctions between the two groups. One general education teacher explained:

> We had like two separate schools, one for special education and one for the rest of the students. It was pretty evident that the special education kids didn't feel like they were part of the school. Once we started putting them in regular classrooms, they became part

> of the school and felt like they could participate in sporting events, activities, and clubs. Before that they just didn't feel like they could.

Participants saw the importance of eliminating the divide. They believed doing so has allowed students with disabilities greater opportunity for participation with their non-disabled peers in all aspects of high school life.

Although SPED paraeducators at LHS are assigned to the general education classrooms to support the needs of students with disabilities, several participants appreciated the paraeducators availability to assist all students. A general education teacher offered, "I would say my paras support a lot of students that are not technically on their caseload. They are very available to any student who happens to be struggling." Several other participants expressed the benefits of having paraeducators available to assist all students, as another general education teacher shared, "Yeah, she will help all students…so nobody knows which ones or who the para is there to help because…she just kind of helps everybody, as they need it." SPED paraeducators' willingness to assist all students further reduced the distinctions between students with and without disabilities. An administrator further verified this view of how SPED paraeducators were used in regular education classrooms:

> Those teachers who do a really good job with inclusion practices use paraeducators to assist all students, not just special education students. But they're seen by the teacher and the students as an assistant to the educational process and they float around the room as students are working, helping with whatever project is at hand.

SPED paraeducators were viewed as the primary vehicle for the implementation of inclusion services at LHS and their efforts contributed to eliminating the divisions among students by providing support for all. This was further verified during my observations in general education

classrooms. Because both the teachers and paraeducators assisted and supported multiple students, I was unaware which students were students with disabilities. In addition to describing how inclusion practices at LHS were implemented, participants shared what they believed were the benefits of including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings.

Perceived Benefits of Inclusion Practices for Disabled Students at LHS

All participants spoke of the importance of including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings at LHS. Along with any supports they may need to be successful in those environments, administrators, teachers, and paraeducators believed services for students with disabilities in general education classroom settings provided them with numerous benefits. These included being educated to the least restrictive environment alongside their typically developing peers, access to the general education curriculum and the same instruction as their non-disabled peers, and an opportunity for increased social interactions with their typically developing peers. Ultimately for participants, inclusion practices led to more rigorous educational opportunities and outcomes, as well as increased acceptance for students with disabilities. Three themes emerged as the participants described the benefits of inclusion practices for student with disabilities at LHS. The themes were the opportunity to be educated in the least restrictive environment, access to rigorous curriculum taught by highly qualified content teachers, and a sense of belonging.

Least restrictive environment. Administrator, general and special education teachers, and SPED paraeducator participants believed providing special education services in regular education classroom settings afforded an opportunity for students with disabilities to learn alongside their typically developing peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE). An administrator explained, “We want to make sure that they [students with disabilities] are in the

least restrictive environment…and are able to experience those educational experiences that are most appropriate for them." In addition, exposure to those educational experiences was viewed as an opportunity for students with disabilities to reach their potential, as a SPED paraeducator shared, "I remember them talking about best practice, and the younger and the sooner kids are with their age peers, the better they do. So, it helps them to grow to their potential." For participants, inclusion as the preferred form of LRE provided an opportunity for students with disabilities to learn from their non-disabled peers, grow to their potential, and to observe what other students were doing and learning.

As noted previously, a main reason for implementing inclusion practices at LHS was to eliminate distinctions between groups of students and bring everyone together. Therefore, it was not surprising that participants did not want to see students with disabilities segregated from their non-disabled peers. They also believed inclusion resulted in higher quality of education and opportunities for modeling and mentoring. For example, a general education teacher offered, "I think when you segregate students, I don't know, I can't think of the word, but it seems like if they are included they get a different level of education." She went on to explain, "I also think that they get a lot from being with the regular students, in the sense that they can see how they [regular education students] learn…and participate with all different levels of students." Overall, participants thought segregating students with disabilities limited their access to their non-disabled peers as well as limited access to more rigorous educational opportunities and outcomes.

Access to rigorous curriculum. For administrator and teacher participants, providing educational rigor for students with disabilities at LHS was an important benefit of implementing inclusion practices. Challenging students, setting high expectations, and providing the same curriculum as their non-disabled peers have assisted in accomplishing more rigorous educational

opportunities for students with disabilities at LHS. The desire to expose students with disabilities to more rigorous educational opportunities evolved through the school's commitment to inclusive practices, as a special education teacher shared, "I feel like the push really came with our higher level kids, our high incidence kids, it came with wanting to really increase rigor." Thus, there was an expectation that students with disabilities at LHS will work to achieve the same academic standards as their regular education peers. To illustrate, an administrator stated:

> In general education settings students [with disabilities] can achieve right alongside other students… You think about expectations of students with disabilities, that they can do hard things and they're going to be required to do hard things in life and that's what we work towards at the high school.

Several participants agreed students with disabilities could achieve the same educational outcomes as their non-disabled peers when given the appropriate services and supports in the general education classroom settings. As a general education teacher described, "In my class the goal is…with accommodations they [students with disabilities] are at the same level as their classmates…and that we have things in place to support them." Some students with disabilities at LHS are included in higher-level honors classes. This led a special education teacher to explain the importance of having the appropriate services and supports in place for these students:

> For their own enrichment…I personally have students who are wanting to be honor's scholars, who are taking higher level classes that they might not be able to access if they did not have support either indirect from us [special education teachers] collaborating with the general education teachers or a paraeducator helping them access the content.

Without the appropriate inclusion services and supports provided at LHS, both the general education and special education teacher participants believed many of their students with disabilities would be unable to access the more rigorous and higher-level classes and coursework. In addition, including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings was perceived by participants as an opportunity for students with disabilities to experience more rigorous levels of teaching and learning. Another special education teacher explained:

> They [students with disabilities] get the benefits from the general education students, of the more rigorous questions that they ask, the more in-depth that they go in those classes…and the peer support from the general education students they don't get in the special education classroom.

Administrators and special and general education teacher participants agreed expectations for students with disabilities were no different than the expectations they have for the regular education students. As a general education teacher offered, "I definitely am not like, 'Oh, they're on an IEP and I'm going to have to lower expectations for them in my classroom.'" Expressing this same sentiment another general education teacher explained, "The expectations are the same, how they [students with disabilities] get there may be different." For administrator and teacher participants rigor was also accomplished by having highly qualified core content teachers teaching the subject matter.

Administrator and teacher participants believed having highly qualified core content teachers instructing students with disabilities was an important component in providing more rigorous educational opportunities for students. As a special education teacher explained:

> The belief from the top down in our building that if you want to teach math…that's where we need to have those [teachers] who are specialists in math to really be there to

> instruct those students [with disabilities] so that they get the instruction from the teachers who have the specialized training.

Participants agreed that in order to provide more rigorous opportunities and outcomes, students with disabilities should be given the opportunity to learn from those teachers who have the knowledge, training, and expertise in the content area being taught. In addition to providing access to the general education classrooms, curriculum, and rigor, participants expressed the need for students with disabilities to feel accepted, developing empathy in others, and an opportunity for increased social interactions with non-disabled peers.

Sense of belonging. For participants, developing a sense of belonging started with accepting individual differences and the positive contributions all students bring to the school and classroom. As an example, a general education teacher shared:

> First of all, I think, they need to feel like they're part of the school. I mean that's the most important thing. They belong. They're not outcast. I think that's so important that they have ownership to some part of the school and I think Lakeview does a pretty amazing job of including them in those things.

Participants agreed that having students with disabilities in the general education classroom settings provided a valuable perspective for all as to how differences can enhance the learning process. To illustrate an administrator offered how inclusion practices brought, "value to the regular education teachers and regular education students in understanding that there are variances in abilities and variances in skills and that those students [with disabilities] can provide some valuable perspective to the learning process." The administrator went on to acknowledge the consequences of sorting and classifying students according to perceived ability, "when we overly stratify we create homogeneous groups that lack those perspectives." Participants

conveyed the importance of students being accepted and creating a sense of belonging through valuing the different perspectives, abilities, and skills all students bring to the classroom.

The opportunity for increased social interactions was also perceived by participants as benefiting both general education students and students with disabilities. As an example a SPED paraeducator offered:

> I think that having them [students with disabilities] with general education in inclusion classes, it keeps them from being isolated and it is a peer thing where they have to interact with a bunch of different students…in resource classes [special education classrooms] they always have the same people and they never know or meet new friends.

In addition to having an opportunity for a variety of social interactions, a general education teacher noted, "Most classes have group work that they do together. They get to work with all different levels of students…in turn this helps regular education students have more empathy and understanding of other students." Overall participants not only believed students with disabilities benefited educationally and socially from being in inclusion general education classroom settings, they also saw the benefits it provided for all students and staff.

Role Expectations for the Implementation of Inclusion Practices

Successful implementation of inclusion is often rooted in how those responsible for such practices perceive and interpret their roles and responsibilities. Having a clear understanding of what those involved are expected to do is critical to providing for the needs of students with disabilities in inclusion settings. Participant groups, which included district and building administrators, special and general education teachers, and SPED paraeducators provided insight into what responsibilities they and others have in supporting inclusion practices at LHS.

Expectations for Administrators

Establishing a culture of inclusion often falls on the shoulders of district and school administrators. An administrator's ability to convey a vision for inclusion is important. Administrators are frequently expected to ensure systems are in place for successful inclusion practices as well as to oversee that policies, regulations, and guidelines are followed (Boscardin, 2005; Theoharis & Causton, 2014). From the interviews, three themes emerged as participants described what they believed were the expectations for LHS administrators in supporting students with disabilities in inclusion settings. Themes were oversight and support for special education services, having a vision for inclusive practices, and accountability.

Oversight and support for special education services. All administrator participants generally felt their roles and responsibilities were to provide support, oversight, and guidance for inclusive practices at LHS. As an administrator offered:

> It's our responsibility to make sure that the teachers are following the students' IEPs, that the paraeducators are being used appropriately, that we've trained both the teachers and the paraeducators on how inclusive education should look… Ultimately it's our responsibility to provide training, to create the system in which that can take place and then…to follow through to ensure that that's what's happening.

Several participants referenced the need for administrators to ensure staff are appropriately trained. To illustrate, a paraeducator explained, "It would be their responsibility to make sure that there is adequate training available for those who work directly with special education students." Although others are responsible for providing the direct inclusion services and supports, ultimately all participants believed the responsibility lies with administrators to ensure effective practices are in place.

“Incredibly supportive” is how special education teacher participants described the administrators at the school. Several participants described how LHS administrators supported inclusion. A special education teacher explained, “If you go talk to any of our administrators and you’re having an issue, they’re going to help you work with that person to figure out a solution.” Besides being accessible to staff when issues arose, participants described how administrators also assisted in the management of class size ratios so the inclusion classes were not a majority of students with disabilities with a few regular education students mixed in. For example, a special education teacher stated she depended on the administrators to make “sure that ratio in those inclusion classes meets what’s best for kids. Because I’ve sat in classrooms where three fourths of the kids were special education with the rest regular education and it didn’t make sense. That’s not really inclusion.” A general education teacher participant also spoke to the importance of maintaining an appropriate class size ratio, “I’ve worked in other districts where more than half the students in inclusion were students with disabilities. Here administration definitely works to keep that below 40%.” In order for students with disabilities to benefit from learning alongside their non-disabled peers, participants believed the administrators’ role in maintaining an appropriate class size ratio was an essential component to the success of students with disabilities in general classroom settings. Along with providing oversight and support for inclusive practices, the administrators’ ability to provide a vision for inclusion was seen as important.

Vision for inclusive practices. All participants recognized administrators play a key role in facilitating inclusion practices and without their support much of what was happening at LHS would not be possible. None of the general and special education teachers and paraeducators interviewed were aware of any specific formal or written expectations for administrators; several

did mention the importance of establishing a vision and culture for inclusion. To illustrate, a general education teacher shared, “I’m very impressed with the tone set in this building for accepting and including.” Another teacher explained how administrators at the school have established a culture of acceptance, “Everybody has a chance to learn. We accept who they are. We have to accept them and we treat them right.” Another teacher further verified this sentiment, “They expect everybody to be treated the same… That goes for all levels of education including special education.” Several of the other participants also expressed how the administrators’ ability to establish an inclusive culture has benefited both students and staff at the school.

Accountability. Administrators’ roles and responsibilities went beyond providing oversight for inclusive practices to being accountable for the implementation of inclusion services at LHS. General and special education teachers described the importance of the administrators’ presence at IEP meetings and the support they provide. A general education teacher offered, “I’ve never been to a meeting [IEP] where an administrator hasn’t been present.” General education teacher participants believed the administrators’ presence at IEP meetings not only allowed them to be part of the conversation and to provide input, it also conveyed a message that this process was important, that this student was important.

Accountability, which includes understanding and implementing the policies, regulations, and guidelines for the provision of special education services are important aspects of the administrators’ responsibilities. Although none of the administrators or teachers interviewed specifically mentioned the oversight of policies, regulations, and guidelines, a SPED paraeducator offered what she believed an accountability expectation for administrators should be, “making sure compliance or things along that nature are met.” While administrators held themselves accountable through ensuring compliance with policies, regulations, and guidelines,

several teachers expressed frustration regarding their administrators' lack of accountability for general education teachers charged with implementing inclusion.

General and special education teachers alike expressed frustration and concern that administrators were not holding all general education teachers accountable. They believed administrators needed to do more to ensure these teachers were supporting students with disabilities in their classrooms. As a general education teacher noted, "There's definitely not a high level of accountability." Another teacher expressed the same concern, "I don't think we're held accountable enough," when he referenced how some general education teachers were not supporting the needs of students with disabilities in their classrooms. In addition, these teachers were concerned about the poor attendance of some general education teachers at IEP meetings. For example, a general education teacher explained, "I think they [administrators] need to do more to tell teachers this is the law. Administrators don't miss those meetings and they know who comes to them and who doesn't." This same concern was further verified when an administrator shared, "We have those [general education teachers] that are conveniently busy with many other things. Can't make an IEP [meeting]. It varies from teacher to teacher, unfortunately." Special education regulations require at least one general education teacher attend an IEP meeting, and these participants and several others stressed the importance of being at those meetings. General education teachers expressed frustration with the lack of general education teacher attendance and participation at IEP meetings and felt administrators needed to do more to ensure their attendance and participation. They believed general education teachers needed to be involved as they oftentimes have information to share regarding how the student was doing in their classes, if accommodations were appropriate or not, and helping to determine what services were needed.

Expectations for General Education Teachers

The success of students with disabilities in inclusion general education classroom settings is often contingent on how general education teachers view their responsibilities in supporting the needs of students and guiding the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. According to the district's job description for high school general education teachers, a performance expectation is to, *plan a program of study that, as much as possible, meets the individual needs, interests, and abilities of the students.* Participants believed general education teachers are the experts in the content area they teach. Participants also believed general education teachers have a responsibility to differentiate instruction as well as to appropriately utilize paraeducators to support IEP needs. As an administrator explained, "We have some [general education] teachers who absolutely embrace their responsibility and do a phenomenal job with working with our special education students, paraeducators, and special education teachers and being part of the teams and attending IEPs." From the interviews, three themes emerged as participants described what they believed were the expectations for general education teachers in supporting students with disabilities and working with paraeducators. The themes were know the IEP, communication to facilitate collaboration, and connecting with students and paraeducators. In order to support the individual needs of students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings, all of the participant groups spoke to the importance of the Individual Education Program (IEP).

Know the IEP. When planning for the individual needs of students, IEPs were seen by all of the general education teacher participants as the primary mechanism by which they know and provide for the students with disabilities in their classrooms. As one general education teacher asserted, "Know the IEPs…that's the number one thing." Another general education

teacher also shared, "I think we have the responsibility to know what accommodations are needed, to have at least a little bit of background understanding of what their deficiencies might be and how we can help them overcome that in our setting." A general education teacher shared how he organizes the IEP information in order to manage what each of his students with disabilities requires. He explained, "When I get all of my IEPs, I have a spreadsheet where I mark all of the different exceptionalities and accommodations that are required." Because all general education teacher participants expressed the need to know the students' IEPs, they and others also referenced "snapshot" IEPs, which were provided to general education teachers and SPED paraeducators each semester. Participants found snapshot IEPs very helpful as they provided an IEP at a glance. Snapshot IEPs are not unique to LHS as many online/computerized IEP programs offer a snapshot or an at-a-glance component.

The snapshot IEP is a condensed version of the IEP. It highlights what each student with disabilities requires, what accommodations are needed, and whether a student needs to be taught in a different manner. Special education teachers at LHS are responsible for providing the snapshot IEP to general education teachers and paraeducators. A special education teacher shared a purpose of the snapshot IEP was to ensure general education teachers "follow what they legally have to do." Stressing the importance of knowing the needs of each individual student and how general education teachers access information, an administrator offered her thoughts on what the expectations are for general education teachers:

> Getting to know the students and what are their needs and being familiar with what is on the IEP. Being familiar with who is the case manager. Who do I go to with questions and then how do I support this kid the best?

The importance of general education teachers knowing the needs of the students with disabilities assigned to their classrooms was further verified when a paraeducator explained, "Their responsibility is to make sure they understand the needs, what each individual child needs and we help them do that." It was clear from all interviews a primary responsibility for general education teachers was to understand the individual needs for each student with disabilities assigned to their classrooms. At LHS this was accomplished by providing general education teachers access to the IEP. In addition, participants discussed the importance of communicating and collaborating with special education staff.

Communication to facilitate collaboration. In order for general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams to be successful, all participants agreed that ongoing communication and collaboration were essential. General education teacher participants believed they had a responsibility to ensure they communicated their expectations with the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. As an example, a general education teacher explained, "We have a responsibility to make sure our paraeducators are involved and understand what their role is." An administrator similarly conveyed, "communicating their expectation with paraeducators" was important for the success of general education teacher and paraeducator teams and their work together in supporting students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings.

At the beginning of each school year SPED paraeducators and general education teachers are given time to communicate and collaborate on classroom expectations. A paraeducator and teacher checklist is provided for this purpose. The checklist outlines points of discussion for teachers and paraeducators regarding personal/school related information, student information, and classroom schedules and procedures. Several participants referenced this document and the purpose of its use. For example, one special education teacher shared:

> At the beginning of the year…paras will walk around from teacher to teacher with the questions, what do you expect from me? Where do you want me to sit? It's a time and an opportunity for regular education teachers to say, okay, this is really important to me, please make sure you always do this or don't do this.

There was an expectation on the part of school administration and special education teachers that these discussions occur even if a general education teacher and paraeducator have worked together previously. Another special education teacher explained:

> Paras are to do this yearly… Because it's not every year they're going to be with the same teachers and who knows maybe that teacher [they worked with previously] over the summer had an epiphany and they change the way they do their teaching and so the paras need to check with them.

Paraeducator participants also saw the benefits of this process. As one paraeducator offered, "It's nice because those type of things help you know what your teacher's expectation is because they don't necessarily get a copy of that handbook [procedure guide] of what the district expects us to do." Other general education teacher participants mentioned this process as well and the benefits it provided in establishing a positive relationship with the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms and the opportunity it provided to discuss their expectations. In addition to ongoing communication, participants believed collaboration was an important component to supporting students with disabilities and the work of teacher and paraeducator teams.

For participants, effective collaboration occurred when general education teachers and paraeducators were given the opportunity to work as a team. To illustrate, a special education teacher related the importance of teamwork, "Team spirit. I think it's probably key. If it's always my way and my way is the only way then it's not going to work." She went on to explain the

importance of collaboration and having shared responsibility, "The more of us that have our thinking caps on for different activities the better it is." Several of the general education teacher participants discussed the value of having a paraeducator in their classroom and the opportunities they had to collaborate. For example, one general education teacher shared her experience in working with the paraeducator assigned to her classroom, "I'm pretty blessed because I have the same para for my English classes and she and I have a system that works." Another teacher also explained how he often collaborates with his paraeducator when he recognizes that some students are struggling.

> I know she's not a math teacher but I'll be like, "Have you seen this a different way in different classrooms and if so, then let's go ahead." And I've let her show the kids on the board because what I'm doing, they're not really catching on.

Even though participants recognized the value of ongoing communication and collaboration between general education teachers and paraeducators, lack of time was seen as a big obstacle. As one general education teacher described:

> What's difficult is the time for communication because the paras go from class to class. So, they don't get to hang around and visit with the teachers. So, there's not a lot of time during the school year itself for them to really talk about the students.

For participants, class schedules and paraeducator assignments oftentimes prohibited the general education teachers' and paraeducators' ability to communicate and collaborate on an ongoing basis throughout the school year. In addition to communicating and collaborating, building relationships with students and paraeducators was seen as an important expectation for general education teachers.

Connecting with students and paraeducators. Connecting and building relationships

with students was a primary focus at LHS. The school participates in a national program called *Capturing Kids Hearts*, which emphasizes the development of a positive school climate and culture. Components of the program include such things as connecting relationally, use of common language, common practices, and consistent behavior. According to the program's website, "Educators learn the process of connecting with kids by consistently treating each one as valuable" (Flippen Group, 2018).

In keeping with the spirit of Capturing Kids Hearts, participants conveyed the importance of building relationships with student with disabilities. For example, this general education teacher explained, "If you can get that relationship built, then you can push them past a lot of their walls or barriers… Once that relationship is established it's a lot easier." In an attempt to build positive relationships with students, all staff members have been trained in the use of common language for redirecting students as well as a routine for how they begin each class period.

When students are off task, the common language used at the school for redirecting students included, *What are you doing? What are you supposed to be doing? Are you doing it? What are you going to do now?* During the classroom observations the common language for redirecting students was posted in two of the five classrooms. Although there were multiple opportunities to utilize the common language during the classroom observations, none of the teachers or paraeducators were observed using it.

In addition, as part of the Capturing Kids Hearts program, during all classroom observations and prior to beginning the lesson for the day, each teacher asked the students if anyone had "good news" or "good things" they wanted to share. In each class there were approximately three to five students who had something positive to share. Although the

responses varied from “I made the track team” to “my uncle will be getting out of prison tomorrow,” this nonjudgmental practice further demonstrated the school’s and the participants efforts to connect relationally with all students.

Besides getting to know the students and their needs, equally important for general education teachers was building a positive relationship with the paraeducator/s assigned to their classrooms. As a general education teacher shared, “Relationship is important. Just like you get to know your kids, you’ve got to get to know your paras.” Another general education teacher also expressed the importance of building a relationship with the paraeducators and how that relationship can impact students:

> I’ve had some good ones [paraeducators] but I’ve had a few bad ones but it’s not the relationship with the students, it’s the relationship the teacher has with the para. And the students can feel if it’s not a good one [relationship].

All participants saw building a positive relationship and creating a positive work environment as key components for the work of teacher and paraeducator teams in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings.

Expectations for Special Education Teachers

“They’re the advocates for the students,” was how administrators, general education teachers, and paraeducators described one of the expectations of special education teachers at LHS. Most special education teachers at the school indirectly support the needs of students with disabilities in inclusion settings. Nonetheless, special education teachers were seen as the individuals with the most knowledge regarding the needs of those students. One general education teacher suggested, “They [special education teachers] are very aware of like nuances with the students.” In addition, for all participants an important expectation for special education

teachers was to ensure services and supports were in place to meet the needs of students. As an example, one paraeducator offered, "They're the ones that are going to make sure that they [students with disabilities] get the extra time…read alouds or graphic organizers, whatever that particular student needs." For participants, understanding the individual needs of the students on their caseloads and ensuring that the students' needs were being met in the inclusion setting, were viewed as essential expectations for special education teachers at LHS.

As case managers for students with disabilities, special education teachers at LHS were expected to monitor student progress, communicate and work collaboratively with other staff members, and ensure that services and support are provided appropriately. To illustrate, a special education teacher shared what she believed were some of their responsibilities as special education teachers, "Our responsibility is to make sure the IEP is being followed. To meet with teachers and if there are questions and help provide strategies…and to help paras with those strategies." An administrator further verified this when she offered, "Communication. That proactive information about the student is essential and problem solving whenever needs arise." The district's job description for special education teachers outlined their performance responsibilities. Although most of the responsibilities referenced expectations as to how special education teachers were to support students with disabilities in special education classrooms, some of the expectations included how they will work collaboratively with others. They included, *assist the administration in implementing policies and rules governing students; plans and supervises purposeful assignments for paraprofessionals; and works cooperatively with staff on various tasks and/or assignments.*

Working cooperatively with staff was seen as another important expectation for special education teachers. Administrators spoke to the importance of collaboration among special and

general education teachers. As one administrator shared, "They visit with each of the general education teachers and review the snapshot [IEP] and make sure if they have any questions, that the questions are answered." Another administrator remarked, "Their [special education teachers] responsibility is to work with the regular education teachers to come up with what's best for the students." Although it was the perception and belief that special and general education teachers worked cooperatively, several general education teacher participants mentioned that support provided by some of the special education teachers at LHS was sometimes inconsistent.

Inconsistent support from special education teachers. Lack of consistency from some of the special education teachers in monitoring the students on their caseloads as well as poor communication with the general education teachers were concerns expressed by general education teacher participants. As one general education teacher shared, "I've had some that weren't as diligent about checking on all their caseload." Another general education teacher offered, "There's a particular case manager that I have to hassle pretty regularly." All of the general education teachers understood the basic responsibilities special education teachers have and how demanding their jobs can be. Even with that, general education teacher participants felt not all of the special education teachers at the LHS were as responsive as they should be when issues arise.

Another expectation for special education teachers was to schedule IEP meetings. All of the general education teacher participants saw the importance of attending IEP meetings but some had concerns as to when the meetings were scheduled and the lack of attendance on the part of some the general education teachers at LHS. As one general education teacher related:

> There are some case managers who will reschedule IEPs a couple of different times to make sure it works for as many people as possible and there are some who will set it [IEP meeting] in the middle of the day when 90% of the teachers are unable to attend.

General education teacher participants saw their involvement at IEP meetings as important. A general education teacher conveyed why he thought it was important for them to be present at IEP meetings, "I just know personally, I want to go to the IEPs because I know the value of being there. For me a lot of times it's hearing what other teachers and case managers have to say about the student." Another teacher conveyed the same sentiment regarding participation in IEP meetings:

> First of all, I'm like one of the only teachers that show up to the IEP meetings. So, I feel like they [special education teachers] probably could be doing a better job of recruiting or telling teachers, "Hey, you need to be here, to be here for the full time."

Although all of the general education teacher participants desired to attend the IEP meetings for the students assigned to their classrooms, they did express concerns as to when those meetings were scheduled and their inability to be involved at times.

Expectations for SPED Paraeducators

The importance of paraeducators in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings was repeatedly mentioned throughout all interviews. Paraeducators play a key role in supporting inclusive practices, as a special education teacher conveyed, "We couldn't do what we do without them. They do the lion's share of the work." Paraeducators likewise felt they played an important role in supporting students with disabilities in general education classroom settings. To illustrate, one paraeducator related what some of the expectations are for them as SPED paraeducators.

> It's assisting them [students with disabilities] in learning where their weaknesses are and how to adapt to them in the general education situation… It's just that element of reassurance that they have somebody that they can ask clarifying questions to or can restate something in a different way.

This was further verified by a general education teacher who shared, "Paraeducators connect students with the classroom context in a way that builds a student's confidence to become a more achieving student." In order to connect students with the content being taught and to provide the necessary supports for students with disabilities in general classroom settings, all participants referenced the need for paraeducators to understand the individual needs of the students. "The way I see it, they're an extension of the special education teacher in that classroom and they are responsible for carrying out what the IEP explains," was how one administrator related an expectation for paraeducators in inclusion classroom settings. Another administrator also verified the importance of the paraeducator understanding the individual needs of students and being knowledgeable of the IEP. "Definitely understanding the IEP… including accommodations and modifications." A general education teacher explained, "The biggest responsibility they have is knowing what's in the IEP and being able to follow through on that" which conveyed this same essential function for paraeducators working in inclusion classroom settings. From the interviews, it was evident that all participants expected paraeducators to be responsible for knowing the individual needs of the students they served, understanding what accommodations and/or modifications were needed, and being able to provide the necessary services and supports.

During the interviews participants described other aspects of the paraeducators' roles and responsibilities that were not explicitly outlined in the paraeducators' job description. Three

themes emerged through those discussions. The themes included building positive relationships with students, encouraging independence, and dealing with curveballs.

Relationships with students. For paraeducators and general education teachers alike building positive relationships with students was seen as an important first step to ensuring students' success in inclusion settings. As one paraeducator shared:

> For some of these kids you can definitely tell that you're the only positive adult influence in and outside of school. They'll come to you with everything under the sun. And it's just because you're the one adult support they have consistently Monday through Friday.

As the primary and consistent school staff to interact with students with disabilities, the importance of a personal and trusting relationship cannot be underestimated. Another paraeducator reiterated the same sentiment:

> A lot of times we have the relationship with the kids that our special and general teachers don't because they have 200 kids. So, we usually have a relationship, where we trust each other, and they will tell us stuff that they wouldn't tell their teacher.

General education teacher participants also discussed the importance of building positive relationships with all students as a general education teacher described, "The best ones [paraeducators] work the room kind of like I work the room…and talking to every student and identifying how they can help them [students] and building relationships with all the kids."

In order to build positive relationships with students several of paraeducators suggested they provided other, non-academic supports. They mentioned providing snacks or food for students because some of the students they worked with were often hungry. One paraeducator remarked, "A lot of times they're hungry and I always have fruit." Paraeducators believed they were often expected to go above and beyond. To illustrate, another paraeducator shared:

> I can't tell you how many paras carry around food in our backpacks to make sure our kids are fed. We'll go on walks [with the student] if kids are bawling their eyes out. That's not in the rules but that's what we do to make sure our kids get the proper education because they don't learn until they feel comfortable.

While general education teachers and administrators described more job-specific expectations for paraeducators, paraeducators felt they were not only expected to support the students academically and socially but to also support the overall wellbeing of the students they served.

Encouraging independence. Although some SPED paraeducators feared they could become a crutch for students, several of them acknowledged the importance of instilling independence in the students they served. One paraeducator described how her role was teaching students to be independent learners:

> I think that a goal to have them [students with disabilities] in the classroom, have us in the classroom with them, is to train them to not need us…because at some point they're going to graduate and they're not going to have us…because at some point they are going to have to be completely independent.

Another paraeducator talked about how she has worked to develop independence when some of the students she supports were reluctant to ask the teacher for help:

> I have so many kids that I've had for two or three years who still come up to me and say, "Hey, can you ask the teacher?" And I'm like; "I will stand at the door while you do it." I think it's important to teach them that I can support you and not do it for you.

Even though the paraeducators saw the importance of instilling independence, several general education teacher participants expressed concerns regarding the amount of support some

paraeducators provided. They felt some paraeducators provided too much support, thus, leading to dependence rather than independence. For example, one general education teacher shared:

> Some paras think they have to do everything for the student… They feel bad for the kids and they want to be liked instead of teaching them. I don't want them [students with disabilities] to be spoon-fed but I want them to get the help they need. Some [paraeducators] come in here and do way too much.

Another general education teacher also expressed the same concern, citing her suspicion that some paraeducators even prompted students during testing:

> There are a couple paras, because how can they [students with disabilities] have a 55 or 60 [percent] going into the test and then all of a sudden they have a 98 [percent] on the test. Paras shouldn't allude to what the answer should be and I think that that's happened.

Paraeducator integrity has been questioned from time to time at the school. One administrator related, "I think we have had a couple of instances where that really was called into question. And we have had a concern with that and really there's probably been two significant concerns with that and one was validated." In order to help minimize this, the school provides test read aloud/integrity training for staff, including paraeducators. Although, there were concerns with some of the paraeducator practices, all participants saw the value and need for paraeducator support for students with disabilities in general education classroom settings.

Thrown a curveball. Although the district and school outlines essential job functions for SPED paraeducators, several of the paraeducators interviewed referenced times when they were asked to perform duties outside of those job expectations. One paraeducator explained he had been asked several times to step outside of his job description, "I think, four instances in the last school year, where I've had to step up…'Hey you're gonna teach geometry in about 10 minutes,

can you do it?' Coming in to be a para, I didn't expect to do that." Other paraeducators also suggested when teachers were absent; substitute teachers often asked them to lead the class. One paraeducator shared:

> I mean we all know that if the teacher is going to be gone…you know they'll ask, "Hey, do you mind leading the discussion?" Or they'll pretty much leave us in that place because we know the kids more than any sub.

Another paraeducator further verified this practice when she explained, "I have a problem with substitutes. Substitutes see you walk in and they're like 'well, she knows what she's doing' and they'll just sit there and they won't do anything." In these situations, the substitute teachers expected the paraeducator to lead the class.

General education teachers also shared their concerns regarding what some paraeducators were being asked to do in some classrooms. In one example, a general education teacher suggested paraeducators were sometimes asked to assume the leadership role in the classroom:

> Some teachers go beyond the scope of what they should be asking their para to do…I know teachers that leave the room to the para at times. I know this because I have paras who've told me this happens…and I told the paras, "Do not allow that because that's not your responsibility."

For general education teachers this raised concerns regarding the liability that these types of practices placed on paraeducators. Although it was a concern for teachers, none of the paraeducators interviewed indicated they felt uncomfortable assuming the leadership role in the classroom when they were asked to do so.

Resources and Barriers for the Work of Teacher and SPED Paraeducator Teams

This section presents an analysis of participants' views regarding the available resources the district and school provided to support the work of teacher and SPED paraeducator teams. They also shared their perceptions and beliefs about some of the barriers they believed impeded the collaborative work of teacher and paraeducator teams.

All participants spoke to the multiple resources provided by the district and school to potentially ensure the success of their inclusive practices. Some of those resources included documents such as job descriptions and procedure/resource guides for special education teachers and paraeducators as well as opportunities to communicate and collaborate. In addition, training and professional learning, orientation, and mentoring were discussed. As documents often serve as tools for guiding the work of teachers and paraeducators, for participants their availability was important.

Resources: Documents and Tools

Several documents are provided to teacher and paraeducator staff to assist them in supporting the needs of students with disabilities at LHS. An administrator explained some of the documents available for general education teachers and paraeducators, "We provide a paraeducator resource guide and they have several resource forms that we provide them [paraeducators] that help assist in those conversations with the general education teachers." A general education teacher also referenced the availability of these documents, "The documents that they give out now are super helpful. That say, 'Here's how you can use your para. Here's some things that they can do.'" Several years ago, the district's special education department developed a *Special Education Certified Procedure Guide* and a *LPS Para Procedure Guide* along with guiding documents that have assisted special and general education staff in

understanding such things as processes, procedures, and expectations. More recently, the instructional coach at LHS developed a *Paraeducator Resource Guide.* The *Paraeducator Resource Guide* was developed to provide an easy, handy reference for the paraeducators at the school. Paraeducators referenced the resource/procedure guides. One paraeducator shared the guides were, "Basic expectations because what we do is as individualized as our kids." Some of those basic expectations for paraeducators included in the guides were such things as dress code, confidentiality, school and district procedures, and how they will be evaluated. In addition, the guides provide information with regard to working in the general education classroom, training and feedback, ideas for possible reading and math strategies, and a list of potential accommodations and modifications. Additional documents available to support the work of teacher and paraeducator teams included job descriptions, a paraeducator and teacher expectation checklist, and as reported previously, IEPs.

Paraeducators also have a document for recording the students' accommodations as well as a document that outlines possible paraeducator functions during the lesson progression. This latter document provides guidance to paraeducators when certain activities are occurring in the classroom. As an example, *If the teacher is lecturing to the class, the paraeducator can model note taking on the board or overhead or complete a graphic organizer for student use.* Although none of the participants referenced the specific expectations outlined in the job descriptions, the district does provide job descriptions for high school teachers, special education teachers, and SPED paraeducators. The job description for general and special education teachers outlines performance responsibilities while the job description for SPED paraeducators outlines the essential functions of their job. All participants in this study viewed the collaborative work of the general education teacher and SPED paraeducator partnerships in inclusion settings at LHS

as positive and beneficial, during the discussions, multiple themes emerged that focused on some of the barriers that existed and limited the work of general education teacher and paraeducator teams.

Lack of Access to Technology and Curriculum

Paraeducator participants expressed concerns with the school's inability to provide consistent access to technology as well as sufficient access to curriculum. To illustrate, a paraeducator explained, "We're not even given laptops to use. So, if you want to do anything, you can do it on your own time at home. We don't have any time to do it here." For paraeducator participants, lack of consistent access to technology at the LHS was perceived as a barrier for them to appropriately perform their duties.

In addition, the paraeducators discussed the challenges they had when they were not given sufficient time and opportunity to learn curriculum. As one paraeducator described:

> We don't have a plan period. Almost every one of us here has had to learn content on their own time in order to help. Because when I came I didn't know, I was a science geek and that's where I was put. I do chemistry now and I learn along with the kids.

General education teachers also expressed concerns with some of the paraeducators' lack of content knowledge. As one general education teacher acknowledged, "Many of them [paraeducators] have issues with our content." In an effort to minimize the lack of content knowledge on the part of paraeducators, the school has attempted, when possible, to assign paraeducators to general education classrooms based on their strengths. To illustrate, a special education teacher explained, "I know if para B can't do math, I don't put her in any math classes." Another special education teacher further affirmed their efforts to assign paraeducators where they can be successful, "I think we really do care that they're happy and comfortable where

they're working." Although the school has made efforts to assign paraeducators to content areas they feel most comfortable with, it was not always possible.

Paraeducators also expressed frustration with the fact they received no training when there was a new curriculum adoption. For example, one expressed, "There's no training as far as if there's a new curriculum… All the teachers get to go, but we have nothing. We are essentially just another student in that classroom in that situation." For paraeducators, the lack of access and training related to the curriculum impeded their ability, at times, to appropriately support the needs of the student they served in the general education classroom settings.

Lack of Communication and Collaboration

All participants saw the value of ongoing communication and collaboration among general education teachers and paraeducators as critical elements for the success of their work together. An administrator shared the benefits of having a strong general education teacher and SPED paraeducator partnership, "The benefits are that those teachers have somebody that they can really rely on to help those students that struggle and when we have paras in those classrooms… that's a benefit for those teachers and they recognize that." For general education teacher and paraeducator participants, the success of their partnership was built on having open and ongoing communication and collaboration. Although all participants in this study understood the importance of strong teacher and paraeducator partnerships, they also identified a number of barriers related to communication and collaboration that have hindered those partnerships.

As previously reported, each school year paraeducators and teachers are required to document their discussions regarding expectations. Although this was required, it did not guarantee ongoing communication and collaboration between all general education teacher and

SPED paraeducator teams. Paraeducator participants shared the struggles they have had with some of the general education teachers they were assigned to work with, as one paraeducator noted, "In some of my classes the communication is basically nonexistent and so…it just makes my role in the class, kind of awkward." Another paraeducator described the unwelcoming atmosphere in one of the classrooms she was assigned to and her inability to effectively communicate and collaborate with the teacher:

> I have been in a classroom where I walked to the door and said, "Hi, I'm"…and the teacher looked me in the eye and said, "I don't know what you're doing here. You can sit in that corner over there and I'll tell you when I need you."

The lack of willingness on the part of some teachers to develop a collaborative partnership with paraeducators was further verified when a general education teacher offered:

> Some [general education] teachers don't even acknowledge paras. Don't want them in their room. I think it's important that you have a good relationship with your paras because there are some teachers here, they don't even want their paras to show up because they don't want them in their classroom.

This negative attitude some teachers had toward paraeducators was shared by several other paraeducator participants, which made it difficult in some instances to communicate and build a collaborative partnership with the general education teachers they were assigned to work with.

Paraeducators, however, felt these types of situations have improved over the past few years, even suggesting that younger teachers seem to be more accepting of students with disabilities and having a paraeducator assigned to their classrooms. For example, one paraeducator explained, "My older teachers really don't know what to do with a paraeducator. They put the special education kids as close to me as they can and they don't have anything to do

with them." She went on to explain why she thought some teachers were more willing to collaborate with the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms, "I think it's a lot in the age of the teachers. The younger teachers I think they work with them in school, in their courses, where they seem to interact better with me and with the special education students." Although this was the perception of several of the other paraeducator participants, the majority of the general education teacher participants in the study, regardless of age, indicated they had not received any preparation for working with paraeducators prior to beginning their teaching careers. In addition to the lack of communication and collaboration, lack of acceptance for students with disabilities and paraeducators as well as the lack of accountability on the part of some general education teachers were discussed.

Lack of Acceptance and Accountability

Participants believed successful inclusion classroom settings begin with recognizing individual differences as well as creating an environment of acceptance. Although all of the general education teacher participants understood they were responsible and accountable for supporting students with disabilities and guiding the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms, they believed not all teachers at LHS were as accepting. To illustrate, one general education teacher shared, "I don't know if it's a natural thing for most [general education] teachers to walk in and be excited about working in inclusion classrooms." All participant groups expressed the lack of comfort in supporting the needs of students with disabilities as a concern with some of the general education teachers at the school.

This lack of comfort led several general education teacher participants to express concerns with some of their colleagues regarding acceptance of students with disabilities and their accountability of them. One general education teacher explained:

> They [general education teachers] don't like it. I'm going to be honest. I think they see it as another thing they have to deal with… Here is 90% of my kids, then I have to spend most of my time with this kid. And that's where we get the negativism. But they shouldn't be teaching if they are that way.

That a number of LHS teachers did not accept responsibility for students with disabilities and who were merely going through the motions was further verified during an interview with an administrator.

> We have [general education teachers]…that I would even go as far as to say they're not comfortable making accommodations and modifications on assignments. And sometimes it may appear on the surface that they're doing the best that they can but they do a really good job of making it appear that they are doing the best that they can.

Paraeducators also shared their perceptions regarding the unwillingness of some to accept responsibility for students with disabilities. For example, one paraeducator asserted, "A lot of your general education teachers really don't want to have special education kids because they disrupt their class… But it's their responsibility to learn how to cope with that." All participants expressed the belief that some general education teachers at LHS made no effort to appropriately work with or support the students with disabilities and paraeducators assigned to their classrooms.

General education teacher and paraeducator participants expressed concerns regarding some LHS teachers' overreliance on the use of paraeducators. To illustrate, a general education teacher noted, "It's a little bit like, you [paraeducator] teach them. I have these [students] to worry about and you take care of them [students with disabilities]." Another general education teacher suggested, "I don't think we're held accountable…because they just turn it over to their

para," when he described how some general education teachers at LHS utilize the paraeducators at the school. A paraeducator conveyed this same sentiment related to teachers' overreliance on the use of paraeducators, "Some teachers over rely on the paraeducators and instead of communicating with the special education teachers, they [general education teachers] come to us." Participants believed all general education teachers should be willing and able to support the needs of students with disabilities and to guide the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. Furthermore, paraeducators also believed they were sometimes confronted with awkward situations that at times puts them "in the middle." A paraeducator explained:

> I don't want to be disrespectful but I have noticed that a lot of special education kids are scared to go to the teacher… It's almost like…the teacher is the God of the classroom and we're the Jesus of the classroom and they [students] have to go through Jesus to get to God… And then God will go to Jesus and then Jesus comes back to the student, because they [the teachers] don't always want to directly deal with the student and their issues.

Participants noted there were some general education teachers at the school who have developed systems for getting paraeducators involved in the daily lessons whereas others have not. For example, one paraeducator noted, "Some of them [general education teachers] are great and they have great ways of getting you involved in the lesson of the day and then some it's just like you're another body in the room." The lack of willingness to accept and be accountable for students with disabilities on the part of some general education teachers also led paraeducators to believe they were sometimes underutilized and/or misused. To illustrate, one paraeducator offered, "Some teachers treat us like aides, like teacher aides…run copies, type up tests, grade papers…stuff that is taking away from helping kids." Another paraeducator shared this same frustration when teachers asked her to do something that took her away from assisting students.

She explained, “I’ve had teachers, while I’m helping a student with homework…come up and ask me to type a test and go make 20 copies before next block. When it interferes with actually helping students, that bothers me.” Overwhelmingly, all participants expressed the need for all teachers at LHS to be accepting of students with disabilities as well as accountable for the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms.

Training, Orientation, and Mentoring

All participants referenced the need for appropriate training, orientation, and mentoring for both teachers and paraeducators. One administrator shared, “Training for paras…training for the general education teachers,” were keys to successful teacher and paraeducator teams in inclusion classroom settings.

Training and professional learning for teachers. The district and school offered multiple training opportunities for general education teachers. Over the past few years the district and school have provided trainings for teachers on how to work with paraeducators in inclusion settings. An administrated shared, “We’ve offered several in-service trainings for teachers on how to work with paraeducators.” Participants indicated this type of training was offered several times throughout the school year as well as during orientation for new licensed staff. An experienced general education teacher, new to the district, explained the training he received during new staff orientation.

> I went through the district’s new teacher training. And there were a couple of hours, at least, and maybe even a half a day devoted to how you treat and how you handle another adult in the room. It’s adequate. It’s important, especially for new teachers to know how to handle a para because as a new teacher you’re already nervous about how you’re going

to have your students but then you get another adult in the room and most of the time those adults are older and have more experience.

As this training has been in place for only a few years, the majority of the general education teachers who participated in the study indicated they had not received any training on how to work with paraeducators. To illustrate a general education offered:

> When I started in education, there wasn't such a thing. So, I've had to learn on my own. I think we've had some workshops with the special education department a little bit, but nothing really. I just had to find my own way and figure out how to use them [paraeducators]. And do I use them in the best ways all the time? No, because I really don't understand some of the things they can do.

"That would be pretty huge," was how another general teacher put it had he been provided an opportunity to take part in training on how to work with paraeducators. He went on to explain his experience when he was expected to work with a paraeducator for the first time.

> I was lucky that I had a veteran para who trained me! I did not know how to use a para and so she just started doing things and then I started recognizing, okay, I see the value… She took the initiative because she already knew what to do.

Several other general education teachers expressed having the same lack of preparation for working with paraeducators and being left to figure it out on their own. Another general education teacher noted:

> It was a surprise. Here's your schedule, half of the day is going to be spent with special education inclusion kids and you have a paraeducator. And oh, by the way, you should probably have some expectations for them [paraeducators]. But then very quickly I had

> fellow colleagues come to the rescue and say, "Hey, you know here's what I do with them." You just kind of figure it out.

Overwhelmingly, general education teacher participants believed they had not received sufficient training to work with paraeducators and that they were expected to learn on the job.

Training and professional learning for paraeducators. For approximately 45 minutes each Monday afternoon paraeducators met for training. Included in the training were such topics as reviewing "snapshot" IEPs, strategies for behavior management, collaborative problem solving, and test administration integrity. During the interviews, general education teachers and paraeducators indicated they were not given any opportunity to suggest possible training topics for the paraeducators. This led several paraeducators to believe the majority of the trainings were the same year after year. "Some of the trainings that we do are the same ones every time, the exact same presentation by the exact same people. I've seen it seven times." was how one paraeducator described her experience over the past seven years. Several of the other paraeducators expressed the same concern with the training topics and wished they were provided more specific strategies to meet the unique needs of the students they serve. As an example, a paraeducator offered:

> I feel like we should really go over what our duties are supposed to be. How best to help kids that you know don't respond well. I get thrown in with kids that are autistic and I'm like I have no training with this. I have no idea what to do. Even sometimes going and asking the case managers and they're like, "Oh, just do what you're doing." But I'm drowning. What am I supposed to be doing? How can I actually help?

The majority of the paraeducators who participated in the study felt the most beneficial training came from the support they provided each other. To illustrate another paraeducator related:

> I think the only training we get is from each one of us. We talk. It's breaking confidentiality to talk to another para about a student. We're not really supposed to but who else can we talk to? Because we can't go to the case manager, because they're busy. We can't interrupt their classes and sometimes the case managers don't know the kids.

Paraeducators seemed to think the formal training was not as helpful as sharing information with each other, even if doing so violated confidentiality.

Orientation and mentoring for paraeducators. At the beginning of each school year the district provides orientation for paraeducators. However, paraeducators hired mid-year did not benefit from this initial training, as one general education teacher shared:

> We have a very good orientation at the beginning of the year but we don't have anything in place for paraeducators that we hire in the middle of the year. It's shadow this person this day and then you're on your own.

Although the school provides some form of orientation, paraeducator participants believed much of the material provided during orientation was often not relevant or sufficient to meet their needs. "Thrown in with the sharks. That's the way I look at it," was how one paraeducator described the lack of sufficient orientation and mentoring and the challenges some paraeducators faced when attempting to delineate their expectations. Another paraeducator reiterated the same sentiment, "It's kind of like you're shoved off the cliff and it's either sink or swim. It's on the job training." Another paraeducator described her orientation experience, "I followed a para for exactly one class and then I was thrown in with a different teacher and a different class." Paraeducator participants believed most of their orientation and mentoring were lacking and came from the perspective of "learn as you go."

Insufficient Time, Lack of Respect, and Paraeducator Turnover

Participants discussed how insufficient time, lack of respect, and frequent paraeducator turnover have negatively impacted the general education teacher and paraeducator partnerships.

Insufficient time. As reported previously, insufficient time was perceived as a barrier that made communicating, collaborating, and planning between general education teacher and paraeducator teams difficult. "There's just no way to fix that because the paraeducators' time is very limited. They aren't able to stay after school. They [the district] won't pay them to stay and talk with teachers and teachers have other responsibilities too," was how one general education teacher described the challenges they faced. Paraeducator participants also expressed concerns with the lack of time for preparing them to perform their duties as well as working collaboratively with the general education teachers. One paraeducator explained:

> Coming from the … district, I was kind of spoiled in the fact that we actually got the time, the in-service time, before students came to the building, to sit through some of those trainings and the strategies and things of that nature as well as work with the case managers a little bit before the kids ever hit the building. Whereas here we have the welcome back meeting where everybody who's hourly meets in the auditorium with the superintendent. I know after interacting with some of the newer paras that they do not have the advantage because they don't have the background with some of the stuff. They're learning as they're going.

Overall, all participants agreed there was not sufficient time for general education teachers and paraeducators to communicate, plan, and collaborate on an ongoing basis.

Lack of respect. Although it has improved some in recent years, paraeducator participants believed they are sometimes undervalued. To illustrate a paraeducator explained:

> When I first came to the high school paras weren't really respected and valued by administration for what we did. That has slowly changed and they have seen the value in what we provide and the kids that we've reached, even non-IEP students because we're here.

For paraeducators, lack of respect was also conveyed by the fact the school does not provide a place where they can store their personal items or items they do not need all day long. "It would be nice if we had a place that we could call our para room and we had a locker to put some things in because we have nowhere. We have to haul all of our crap around all of the time," was how one paraeducator described the school's lack of understanding for paraeducators needing a place to store their items. Several paraeducator participants remarked on the fact that the school does not provide all paraeducators with a school mailbox because there are not enough mailboxes available for all staff members at LHS. As a paraeducator noted, "I don't even have a box. They just put it [mail] in whoever's class I'm going be in that day and then sometimes they give it to … [a teacher in the building] because we're neighbors [live next door to each other]." Even though not all paraeducators were provided a mailbox, other paraeducators did not realize they had been assigned a mailbox. Another paraeducator explained the responses she received from her peers when she told them to check their mailboxes for W-2 forms. She said, "We had this conversation earlier, when W-2s came in. I said something to the people I spend seminar with. I said, 'W-2s are in your box.' And I got, 'What box are you talking about?'" Undervaluing the needs of the paraeducators, led participants in this group to believe they were not considered viable members of the school community and worthy of respect.

Paraeducator turnover. Administrator and teacher participants spoke to the challenges they faced with frequent paraeducator turnover. As one general education teacher offered,

“We’ve had quite a bit of turnover.” Although paraeducator turnover was nothing new at LHS, general education teacher participants were particularly concerned because hiring a new paraeducator was like starting over again. They also felt the district and school needed to do more to retain paraeducators. “We’re not doing anything to really prevent turnover and this is kind of viewed as a dead end kind of vision,” was how one general education teacher described the district and school’s lack of foresight in trying to retain paraeducator staff.

Paraeducators were typically low paid employees who were provided little training while asked to do considerable amount of work, often with difficult students. This was further verified during an interview with an administrator, “It is unfortunate, but it’s also ingrained within the system that we pay the least, we’re training them [paraeducators] very little and we put them in some of the most challenging situations and then seem surprised when they don’t want to stick around.” Low pay was believed to be one of the barriers for recruiting, hiring, and retaining paraeducator staff at LHS. As one special education teacher related, “We lost a good one [paraeducator] this year because… her husband was injured and they just couldn’t live on the salary anymore. I’m not saying it has to be twenty dollars an hour but they need more money.” In an attempt to recruit and retain paraeducators, in the fall of 2017 the district revised their salary schedule for paraeducators. The base pay for paraeducator went from $8.25/hour, plus 10 cents/hour per years of experience to $10.30/hour, plus 20 cents/hour per years of experience. Although this was a start, for several paraeducator participants it was less about the money and more about the kids. To illustrate, a paraeducator who had worked in a neighboring district where she earned more money described her experience, “Here it’s about kids. The monetary decrease to me was far less of an issue then the physical stress that I was dealing with when I worked in [neighboring district].” Several other paraeducator participants were less concerned

about the hourly rate of pay than they were about benefits, in particular, the cost of health insurance. "This is the last year that I can be on my parent's [insurance]. So, I'm a little nervous about the insurance next year," was how one paraeducator shared her concerns about having to start paying for her insurance. Another paraeducator shared that the rising cost of health insurance would potentially mean she would be working just to pay for the insurance. "Honestly, I have five kids and my husband. I'm the only one covered on district insurance and to add any of my kids will take away more essentially than I earn." In order to offset low wages and the cost of insurance some paraeducators at LHS worked multiple jobs and depended on others for support. As one paraeducator offered, "I work two jobs and still live at home. I'm 25 and I still live at home." Another paraeducator described her efforts to take on additional summer work with the district to make ends meet, "I've been trying to get things done, like summer school and stuff like that. Just extra jobs, so I don't have to get a second job just for the summertime because those spots are hard to come by." Understanding the financial struggles that some of them faced led another paraeducator to assert, "I'm sitting here thinking, how do you make it? Because I have my husband and if I had to do it by myself, I'd have to get a different job."

In addition to low pay and the rising cost of health insurance, participants believed the paraeducators' lack of comfort with some of the job functions were barriers to recruiting and retaining paraeducator staff. One general education teacher offered, "I would say there's definitely a learning curve," when he referenced how some paraeducators were unaware of what their job entailed. Teacher and administrator participants believed some paraeducators not only lacked content knowledge but where also not prepared to work with some students in challenging situations.

For some paraeducator participants, another contributing factor to retention was the temporary nature of the job. As one paraeducator shared, "I'm not going to lie. I literally took this job because I spent a year out of college with nothing. Because I was like I need something and then I'll find something else." Although several paraeducators suggested they took the job while looking for something different, in the end and even though they did not plan to stay, ultimately they found the job rewarding as they felt they were making a difference for the students they served.

To summarize, all administrators, teachers, and paraeducators in this study believed they played an important role in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. A strong collaborative partnership among general education teachers and SPED paraeducators was viewed as an essential component for the success of inclusive education at LHS. In addition, all participants agreed paraeducators were vital to the implementation of inclusive practices and that they provided valuable resources and support for all students at the school. With many individuals involved, there was a desire for the collaborative partnership among teachers and paraeducators to occur and be successful. Even with that, challenges continued to exist in their efforts. These challenges included the lack of acceptance for students with disabilities and the paraeducators assigned to support them in inclusion general education classroom settings. Furthermore, there was confusion, contradictions, and tension centered on the roles, responsibilities, and expectations for those involved as well as the resources available to support their inclusive practices.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Implications

This study focused on the perceptions, beliefs, and practices of district and building administrators, general and special education teachers, and SPED paraeducators regarding the collaborative partnership between general education teachers and SPED paraeducators in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings in one suburban high school. This chapter presents conclusions drawn from the analysis of data and concludes with implications for practice and future study. The theoretical framework for this study was rooted in Activity Theory and its micro-components of *subject, object, community, tools, rules, and division of labor* were utilized in extrapolating the conclusions. It was helpful to view the processes of the general education teacher and paraeducator collaborative partnerships through the Activity Theory lens in order to determine how roles, routines, and interactions influence the partners' practices in an inclusive service delivery model. In addition, the use of Activity Theory allowed for an analysis of complex and changing forms of collaborative human activity. I begin by revisiting the theoretical framework.

Activity Theory (AT) considers an entire work/activity system, including teams and organizations. AT has its origin in the work of Vygotsky from his studies of cultural-historical psychology in the 1920s and later developed and expanded by Leont'ev and Engeström in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s (Roth & Lee, 2007). According to Engeström (1999), activity theory includes individual workers, their colleagues, and co-workers, the tools and equipment they use in their work, the rules that govern how they work, and the purpose to which members of the workplace community direct their activity. AT takes into account the environment, history of the person or persons, culture, role of artifacts, motivations, and the complexity of real life activity

(Morf & Weber, 2000). Researchers implementing an AT perspective view learning and practices as culturally and historically situated and dialogically based (Engeström, 1999).

Conclusions

Secondary schools are complex work environments with their own unique cultures. Collaborative partnerships in comprehensive high schools can be particularly challenging given the size of the school and the demarcation of disciplines (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001). In order for students with disabilities to succeed in inclusion classroom settings, the collaborative partnerships among general education teachers and SPED paraeducators should ideally supersede the demarcations that exist among staff and students. In addition, successful inclusion of students with disabilities is contingent on how schools as organizations and communities are able to support the inclusive practices of the adults involved (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). According to Devecchi and Rouse:

> Collaboration, as a process by which people work co-operatively together to accomplish a task, or series of tasks, of benefit to one or more people by reaching a mutual understanding of how to solve problems and resolve complex ethical and practical dilemmas, becomes a pivotal factor in determining the quality of the working relationship between the adults. (p. 91)

This collaborative effort in supporting the needs of students with disabilities engaged a variety of subjects (i.e. general and special education teachers, paraeducators, administrators), artifacts or tools (i.e. job descriptions, procedure guides, working documents, knowledge, training), rules (i.e. laws, regulations, guidelines), objectives, and motivations culminating in the sharing of ideas, practices, and outcomes. This study validates the importance of creating a school community and culture manifested in a collective sense of belonging and participation. For successful

implementation of inclusive practices to have occurred it was more than having clearing defined roles and responsibilities as well as formal rules and guidelines. The perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs of those involved in the implementation of such practices weighed heavily on how services were provided for students with disabilities and how the work of teacher and paraeducator teams were enacted. Although many resources and supports were and are currently implemented to ensure successful inclusive practices at LHS, there continue to be challenges.

Motivation, Purpose, and Tension within Teacher-Paraeducator Partnerships

Every activity is focused on achieving a certain objective and/or goal. This is the motivation and purpose for the activity to take place (Engeström, 2000). For this study, the objective and/or goals included the provision of special education services for students with disabilities in inclusion general education classroom settings. In addition, an important component to the success of an inclusive service delivery model is the development of teacher and paraeducator collaborative partnerships. This practice not only included the classroom community but the school community as well where administrators, teachers, and paraeducators, all played key roles in the implementation of inclusion for students with disabilities. According to Wilson (2014), objectives are the goals or outcomes of the subjects and system, and are influenced by perceptions, knowledge, and practice.

Motivation and purpose. The motivation and purpose for the implementation of inclusive education at LHS was administratively driven. They believed inclusion would afford more equitable opportunities for all students, particularly students with disabilities, resulting in a more unified system where all students were supported and valued. Furthermore, they believed the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms provided them access to more rigorous educational opportunities and curriculum, meaningful social interactions with

non-disabled peers, and the opportunity to be instructed by highly qualified content teachers. In order to implement this philosophy, students with disabilities required support from not only the general education teachers but from the special education paraeducators assigned to those classrooms as well. Although administrators at LHS had well intended motivation and purpose for inclusive education, there was a lack of understanding and support for inclusive practices on the part of some staff at the school. This situation lead to tension and misunderstanding for some of those charged with implementing inclusion services.

Tension and misunderstanding. Even though study participants appreciated and understood the importance of general education teacher and paraeducator collaborative partnerships in the implementation of inclusive practices, for some there was lack of clarity regarding what they were expected to do and how they were expected to perform. As a result of this, tension and misunderstanding existed within some collaborative partnerships. A lack of understanding as to the purpose of their inclusive practices, the needs of students, and the appropriate use of paraeducators overshadowed the work of some general education teacher and paraeducator teams. Furthermore, the lack of acceptance for students with disabilities and paraeducators on the part of some staff led to misunderstandings related to roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Although LHS provided job expectations and specified functions for teachers and paraeducators, those expectations and functions were interpreted and enacted differently. The role of paraeducators ranged from being a teacher's aide to teacher and for special education teachers and administrators the lines were blurred.

The truly collaborative partnerships went beyond having clearly defined roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Successful collaborative partnerships at LHS were rooted in cooperative relationships where teachers and paraeducators worked alongside each other in

supporting the needs of all students and were focused on what they were doing, why they were doing it, and how they were doing it. Research has emphasized the importance of cooperation and collaboration among all team members as they focus their activity in supporting students with disabilities in inclusion settings, yet this study demonstrates that genuine cooperation and collaboration cannot be forced or mandated, but is achieved through positive and supportive relationships where all are focused on providing for the needs of all students. Even when administrators express a commitment to inclusion, articulate a philosophy of wanting all students to feel included, the implementation of inclusion at LHS was not unproblematic. Merely assigning a teacher to an inclusion classroom and assigning a paraeducator did not always result in a functioning, collaborative team. When collaboration and cooperation worked well, the joint efforts of the general education teacher, paraeducator, and SPED teacher helped to promote positive relationships and the development of interdependence in their practices.

Division of Labor Between Teachers and Paraeducators: Hierarchical Relations

The division of labor provides for the distribution of actions and operations among the subjects within the community and assists in determining who is responsible for doing what (Foot, 2001). The roles of the general education teachers and paraeducators, in this research context, consisted of a variety of duties and responsibilities that were discovered through interviews, observations, and document reviews. Although the district and school had clearly delineated roles and responsibilities through job descriptions and other documents, they were enacted differently depending on the dispositions of the teachers and/or paraeducators.

Like most schools and other public bureaucracies, a hierarchy of power exists at LHS. General and special education teachers were on fairly equal footing, yet tension was evident between them. General education teachers felt they did not always receive the support they

needed from the special education teachers. They desired special education teachers to be more responsive to the needs of students in inclusive settings, provide support and guidance for the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms, and hold all general education teachers accountable for their practices. Whereas, special education teachers felt not all general education teachers were receptive to having students with disabilities and paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. In some instances, this led to ineffective supports for students and ineffective teacher and paraeducator partnerships. In addition, special education teachers also exercised their power when they scheduled IEP meetings at times when general education teachers could not attend and then complained about the general education teachers' lack of attendance at those meetings, thus creating another source of tension between general and special education teachers.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were the paraeducators. Some general education teachers at LHS were unsure of their roles and responsibilities in supporting students with disabilities as well as how to effectively utilize paraeducators. Other teachers simply refused to work with students with disabilities or paraeducators assigned to their classrooms. Some teachers treated the paraeducator as little more than a teacher's aide and others expected them to assume teaching responsibilities. Although paraeducators did not mind assuming the leadership role in the classroom when expected to do, they did not appreciate being treated as a teacher's aide, especially when it took them away from supporting the needs of students. Paraeducators were willing to rise to the challenge when given the opportunity, but resented being asked to perform tasks they felt were beneath them. Moreover, paraeducators had no workspace, no access to computers, were minimally provided with training, and most did not even have mailboxes for receiving school communications. Although participants spoke to the vital role paraeducators played in supporting all students at LHS, these slights marginalized paraeducators, thus leading

them to question their value and worth.

Ensuring meaningful educational opportunities for students with disabilities in inclusion general education classrooms often requires support from paraeducators. At LHS paraeducators played a critical role in supporting students in inclusive classroom settings and assisting teachers. Yet, when they did not receive appropriate guidance from general and special education teachers, their effectiveness was diminished. The findings indicated the teacher's leadership and organizational skills are important for developing an effective partnership. For those teachers who had processes and procedures in place to support their work with students with disabilities and the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms, the collaborative partnerships were enhanced. The paraeducators at LHS indicated when the teachers effectively communicated their expectations and provided opportunities for collaboration; a more positive work environment was created where they felt like an integral member of the classroom community. In addition, when general education teachers saw the potential benefits of having a paraeducator assigned to their classrooms, they found ways to include the paraeducators in the daily lessons and to utilize the paraeducators' skills to support all students. Conversely, when those processes and procedures were not in place there was uncertainty on the part of teachers and paraeducators as to the purpose of their partnership, what they were expected to do, and how they were expected to perform.

Moreover, the importance of administrators in supporting inclusive practices and the work of teacher and paraeducator collaborative partnerships cannot be over emphasized. The administrator's knowledge and skills regarding inclusive practices, what is needed to support such practices, and providing time to plan, communicate, and collaborate were essential for effective practices to occur. Even though district and building administrators have created a

vision for inclusive practices at LHS, have attempted to develop the knowledge, skills, and accountability for those responsible for the implementation of inclusion services, and provided multiple resources/tools, not all partnerships functioned effectively. Presumably, administrators had the most power in the hierarchy and although they did use their power to set inclusion in motion, they were unable to hold general education teachers accountable, which suggests the teachers had the power to resist and subvert inclusion at LHS. Consequently, the ineffective collaborative partnerships at LHS were due in part to some teachers' refusal to accept the philosophy of inclusive education and an unwillingness to develop a collaborative partnership with the paraeducators assigned to their classroom.

Resources and Tools: Availability and Needs

Tools and resources are the mediating devices by which the activity is executed. Tools can take many forms such as knowledge and/or material resources used by the subjects to mediate an activity and work toward a unified outcome (Engeström, 2001). The district and school provided numerous resources/tools for both teachers and paraeducators to support their inclusive practices. Some of the material resources available included well-developed job descriptions, handbooks, procedure guides, and working documents. Knowledge resources available included trainings and time for communication and collaboration. Although all of these resources were readily available, not all teachers and paraeducators accessed them and some were not even aware of what was available. This further contributed to misunderstandings surrounding the roles, responsibilities, and expectations on the part of teacher and paraeducator teams in supporting students with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings.

Lack of access to technology and training on curriculum were cited as resources/tools paraeducators felt they needed to support their work with students. General education teachers

also expressed concerns with some of the paraeducators' lack of content knowledge. Paraeducators' lack of content knowledge and opportunity to access curriculum further contributed to the general education teachers and paraeducators inability to build successful partnerships. Paraeducators also expressed a need for the availability of a space or a place for them to store their personal and/or other items as well as being provided a school mailbox. For paraeducators, the lack of these resources led them to believe they were "second-class" citizens who were undervalued members of the school community.

Limited time for communication and collaboration. The school has moved away from maintaining two separate systems, where participants believed there was a divide between students with and without disabilities. In eliminating the divide, there was a need for teachers and paraeducators to assimilate information and ideas as well as to communicate with each other in a variety of settings in which students participate. A barrier expressed in this study indicated time for ongoing communication and collaboration was one of the most significant problems interfering with teacher-paraeducator collaboration at LHS. All participants understood the restraints of time, yet they desired more time throughout the school year for teachers and paraeducators to communicate and collaborate, believing their practices would subsequently improve. As some time each school year was provided for teachers and paraeducators to communication and collaborate, not all teachers and paraeducators utilized this time effectively, adding to difficulties for some teacher and paraeducator teams.

Differentiation to support the needs of staff. All study participants understood there was a need for training, orientation, and mentoring for both teachers and paraeducators. As a result, the findings revealed the need to differentiate training, orientation, mentoring, and support for teachers and paraeducators. All teacher and paraeducator participants believed the training

was either insufficient or inappropriate. In addition, there was confusion and misunderstanding as to what training was available and being provided as well as who was responsible for the training. While training was provided for paraeducators every Monday afternoon, it did not match their needs and it did not help them with what they needed to do on a day-to-day basis.

Paraeducators desired more specific training in order to meet the unique needs of the students they served. Veteran paraeducators wanted more advanced training that allowed them to build their skills instead of being repeatedly subjected to the same training year after year. Moreover, they expressed the need to be included in some of the training licensed staff received, especially when it came to curriculum content. General education teacher participants also desired more training on how to support students with disabilities as well as how to effectively work with the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms.

Rules Governing Inclusive Practices: Explicit and Implied

Rules governing special education and inclusive practices can be both formal and informal. Rules are the conventions and guidelines regulating the activities in the system (Hashim & Jones, 2007). At LHS the rules included both formal federal mandates; which guided special education processes and procedures, policies, organization procedures; and the informal social conventions by which the activity of providing special education services and the work of teacher and paraeducator teams were governed. At LHS formal rules such as special education mandates, policies, and guidelines assisted in providing direction as to how services and supports for students with disabilities were provided. According to the district's policies regulating special education services, *"In accordance with the provisions of Federal and state law, it is the policy of this district to provide a free appropriate public education for every child (as defined by K.S. A. 72-962) who is a resident of the district. Special education services are provided for*

such children, including individual educational programs, offered in the least restrictive environment. These programs shall be outlined in the appropriate handbooks or other documents." As reported previously, the district provided a *Special Education Certified Procedure Guide* for special education teachers. In addition, LPS provided a *Para Procedure Guide* and LHS provided a *Paraeducator Resource Guide* for paraeducators. All of these guides explicitly provided guidance for the work of special education teachers and paraeducators. These guides were available to other staff as well, yet none of the general education teacher participants were aware of them. This led some general education teachers to rely on the implied or "tacit" rules, which gave them permission not to participate in inclusive practices as well as not to be held accountable. Although the school expects teachers to share information regarding students, an implied or "tacit" rule at LHS did not allow paraeducators to talk to each other about the students they worked with.

Even though they were intended to facilitate inclusive practices, many of the formal and informal rules hindered the implementation of such practices. Therefore, leading teachers and paraeducators to make assumptions about how they were to interact and perform. Moreover, the district's funding and budgetary rules also restricted paraeducators from participating in meetings and trainings that took place before or after school and on in-service days.

A Culture of Acceptance and Respect is Not Widespread

All participants believed respecting individuals began with accepting and valuing all. To ensure successful activity systems occur often requires the community of workers to have a shared interest in and involvement with the same outcome (Postholm, 2015). One of the primary roadblocks to successful implementation of inclusive practices and the work of teacher and paraeducator teams at LHS was the lack of interest and involvement of some of the school

community members. As referenced previously, the school participates in a national program, *Capturing Kids Hearts*, for connecting relationally with students. The program emphasizes the importance of establishing a culture and climate of acceptance and an appreciation for individual differences (Flippen Group, 2018). Although all study participants were able to articulate the importance of a culture of acceptance and the reasons and benefits of including all students, in reality there was still resistance on the part of some staff in supporting inclusive practices. Systemic issues such as insufficient training, insufficient time for communication, collaboration, and planning, inconsistent interpretation of the rules governing inclusion services, and the inconsistent use of resources fueled the lack of acceptance and support for inclusive practices at LHS. Although unintentional, the system created an environment resulting in an unwillingness on the part of some to embrace the notion of collaborative partnerships and an unwillingness to accept responsibility for the implementation of inclusion services, thus leading participants to believe not all students and staff at LHS were accepted, respected, and valued.

Implications for Practice

Organizations such as schools are driven by tensions and/or contradictions surrounding change, understanding, and development. As tensions and/or contradictions are often perceived as obstacles to the implementation of an activity, per Activity Theory, they also provide opportunities for growth and the development of new ways to structure and engage in an activity (Verdon et al., 2015). This study may serve to advance the training and induction needs of teachers and paraeducators, how resources are accessed and utilized, and how a collective sense of acceptance and respect can be cultivated within the school and classroom communities to better serve the needs of all students.

Training, Induction, and the Use of Resources

It takes time and resources to develop a successful collaborative partnership. The ability and willingness for teachers and paraeducators to collaborate is fundamental because they are the instructional providers (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). As instructional providers their skills and dispositions include providing instruction to students with and without disabilities and facilitating collaborative problem solving when difficulties arise. In addition, the teacher's leadership skills extend to the supervision and management of paraeducators and their utilization to appropriately meet the needs of all students in inclusive environments (Chopra et al., 2011; Dover, 2002; French & Chopra, 2006). Contributing factors to the success in the use of paraeducators includes what they are expected to do, the ways in which they are expected to function, and the complex nature of their supervision, management, and support.

Teachers need to commit themselves to teaching students with disabilities and working with the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms within inclusive and collaborate structures (Berry, 2010). Teachers and paraeducators alike need to communicate what supports and resources they need to be successful. Moreover, those providing oversight for inclusive practices, need to contemplate how training, resources in the form of information, time, and tools can be utilized effectively to support the needs of teacher and paraeducator teams. Historically, very little, if any, training on how to support students with disabilities and the work of the paraeducators assigned to their classrooms has been provided to teachers prior to starting their teaching careers. Programs for preparing teachers and in-service trainings once employed should emphasize practice and experience in collaborative planning, teaching, and problem solving. Similarly, as paraeducators receive minimal preparation prior to starting their jobs, expanded orientation and mentoring programs that allow paraeducators to observe, practice, and develop

their skills may result in higher levels of confidence as well as higher retention rates.

Districts and schools that structure systems which allow for differentiation based on the individual needs of the adults entrusted to provide inclusion services, may see more positive results with their inclusive practices. Perhaps further consideration should be given to how schools and districts might develop and expand the skills and abilities of their teacher and paraeducator partnerships by focusing on what collaboration means and how teachers and paraeducators can cultivate and enhance their collaborative skillset. In the long run, this could potentially result in the better use of time, resources, personnel, and outcomes for students.

Acceptance and Respect for All: A Precursor to the Success of an Activity System

A significant implication from this study revealed the need for a shared vision for acceptance of students, staff, and the collaborative work of teacher and paraeducator teams. Students with disabilities have had access to public school systems for over 40 years (Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, 1975), yet this study indicated there continue to be concerns regarding acceptance. Although legal mandates, rules, and policies are in place for the provision of special education services for students with disabilities, the implementation of inclusive practices can be influenced by perceptions, biases, and attitudes of those involved with such practices. Again, it is not enough to know what inclusion is and what it should look like. As this study indicated, even after more than 40 years of legislation, developing an appreciation of and commitment to inclusive practices continues to be a challenge.

This study revealed that even when a school makes a deliberate commitment to inclusion and creates a culture of acceptance, it is not necessarily enough to ensure effective inclusive practices. Schools with successful inclusion programs have a strong, active, and committed administrator (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; Salisbury, 2006). Successful collaborative

partnerships evolve through acceptance, trust, and respect. Therefore, the administrator's ability to develop and facilitate collaborative partnerships is dependent on their leadership skills and the vision they possess for inclusive education and collaborative practices (Boscardin, 2005).

Administrators must recognize that learning to collaborate is a developmental process that requires practice, ongoing training, and feedback. In order to positively influence the thinking and perceptions of school personnel regarding inclusion practices and the work of teacher and paraeducator teams, school administrators must provide time for appropriate training, instill a sense of partnership, and promote effective processes for communication, collaboration, and planning. In addition, administrators must find ways to structure expectations, how decisions are made, how goals are achieved, and how to hold members of the school community accountable for their collaborative work. Furthermore, as hierarchical structures are still the norm in most schools, administrators should find ways to model collaborative decision-making, establish processes for communicating, and seek opportunities that establish collaboration as an expected practice. This may result in promoting professional bonds among general and special education teachers and paraeducators, ultimately valuing everyone's perspective as they support the needs of students (Boscardin, 2005; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; Riehl, 2000).

Furthermore, for successful activity systems to occur there is a need for cohesion among all members of the school community. This requires all members to be open to inclusion services and supports and understanding the needs of all students. If the feelings and frustrations for those involved in the implementation of inclusive practices are not adequately addressed, barriers will continue to exist for teacher and paraeducator teams. Moreover, failure to provide opportunities for teachers and paraeducators to grow and develop their collaborative skills in supporting the needs of students with disabilities increases the likelihood a negative sense of

acceptance and respect of others will continue to overshadow the work of teacher and paraeducator teams.

Implications for Further Study

Successful general education teacher and paraeducator collaborative partnerships are important to meeting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive settings. It is an opportunity where collaborators define their identities through their knowledge, skills, and expertise (Pickett, 1999). In order to define identities, supportive and meaningful interactions must occur. Collaborating, therefore, requires people to support each other through the sharing of knowledge and expertise to facilitate and aid in the collaborative process as well as to effectively support the needs of the students. However, this can only be achieved if inclusion and the people who are directly in charge of it are an integral part of the process and school community.

Future research should continue to investigate the development of the collaborative partnerships among general education teachers and SPED paraeducators and their work together in supporting the needs of student with disabilities in inclusion classroom settings. This chapter included conclusions and implications drawn from individual and focus group interviews with three district and building administrators, 17 general and special education teachers, and 14 SPED paraeducators as well as a review of documents and classroom observations. The experiences and perceptions of these participants may provide valuable insight for other schools and school personnel who continue to work toward inclusive environments where both students and the adults who support them are valued. While extending this work on collaborative partnerships, future research might examine how do deeply held beliefs, attitudes, dispositions, and values impact inclusive practices for teachers and paraeducators as well as how can a

collective sense for inclusion of students with disabilities be effectively developed in all? In addition, as the roles and responsibilities for paraeducators vary and are interpreted differently, how can schools clearly delineate and communicate what are the expectations of paraeducators in inclusion settings and lastly, as a community of learners, how can schools focus their efforts on the needs of the adults charged with implementing inclusive practices?

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Focus Group/Individual Interview Protocols

Hello, my name is Karen Kuhn and I am a doctoral student at Wichita State University in the Educational Leadership program. I appreciate your willingness to take part in my research. The purpose of this study is to investigate the perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of the participants regarding the work of general education teacher-special education paraeducator teams in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings. You have been selected as a participant in this study because as a **general or special education teacher, special education paraeducator, or administrator** you have unique knowledge and experience, which will contribute to the research. Before we begin, I would like to share a few procedures for our conversation. Although we may be on a first name basis, no names or identifying information will be used when I report the results of this interview. With your permission, I would like to audio-record our conversation for response clarity and to assure the accurate transcription and analysis of data when reporting the findings of this study. Once I have completed the transcription, I will send you a copy of the transcription for review and ask that you let me know if the information you provided was accurately captured and transcribed. This session will last approximately 45-60 minutes. Do you have any questions? Again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study.

General/Special Education Teacher Interview Protocol:

Please state your name, your position, and how long you have been in this position.
What is your educational level?

1. Describe for me what inclusive practices for students with disabilities looks like at Lakeview High School.
    a. What are the purposes and/or goals of including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings?
2. What responsibilities do general education teachers have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    b. How comfortable do you think general education teachers are you when taking on these responsibilities?
    c. For special education teachers - Tell me what you expect from the special education teachers?
3. What responsibilities do special education teachers have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    b. How comfortable do you think special education teachers are you when taking on these responsibilities?
    c. For general education teachers – Tell me what you expect from the general education teachers?

4. What responsibilities do the school or district administrators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Tell me what you expect from school or district administrators?
5. What responsibilities do SPED paraeducators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    b. How comfortable do you think SPED paraeducators are when taking on these responsibilities?
    c. Tell me what you expect from the special education paraeducators and how do you communicate those expectations?
6. How are the SPED paraeducator assignments determined and do you have input in the process?
7. How would you describe your relationship with the SPED paraeducators you are assigned to work with?
    a. What have been the benefits?
    b. What have been the challenges?
8. In what ways were you prepared to work with SPED paraeducators?
9. What are the most important things general and special education teachers need to know and/or skills they need to have to effectively work with SPED paraeducators?
    a. What do you think would be the best way to prepare general or special education teachers for working with SPED paraeducators?
10. What resources do you feel are available and/or needed for you to effectively work with SPED paraeducators?
    a. What ongoing support or professional learning would help you to be more effective in working with SPED paraeducators?
    b. What training or support do you think SPED paraeducators need to effectively perform their responsibilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
11. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share with me?

Special Education Paraeducator Interview Protocol:

Please state your name, your position, and how long you have been in this position.
What is your educational level?

1. Describe for me what inclusive practices for students with disabilities looks like at Lakeview High School.
    a. What are the purposes and/or goals of including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings?
2. What responsibilities do school or district administrators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Tell me what you expect from school or district administrators?
3. What responsibilities do general education teachers have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?

b. How comfortable do you think the general education teachers are when taking on these responsibilities?
c. Tell me what you expect from general education teachers?

4. What responsibilities do special education teachers have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
   a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
   b. How comfortable do you think the special education teachers are when taking on these responsibilities?
   c. Tell me what you expect from special education teachers?
5. What responsibilities do SPED paraeducators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
   a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
   b. How comfortable and what degree of independence would you say you have when taking on these responsibilities?
6. How is your assignment determined and do you have input in the process?
7. How would you describe your relationship with the teachers you are assigned to work with?
   a. What have been the benefits?
   b. What have been the challenges?
8. In what ways were you prepared to work with students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
   a. What do you think would be the best way to prepare SPED paraeducators for working with students with disabilities?
   b. What do you think would be the best way to prepare SPED paraeducators to work with general and special education teachers?
9. What guidance, resources, and supports do you feel are available and/or needed for you to effectively meet the needs of the students you serve?
   a. What ongoing support or training would help you to be more effective in supporting the needs of the students you serve in inclusive classroom settings?
10. What are the most important things general and special education teachers need to know and/or skills they need to have to effectively work with SPED paraeducators?
11. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share with me?

Principal/Director of Special Education Interview Protocol:

Please state your name, your position, and how long you have been in this position.
What is your educational level?

1. Describe for me what inclusive practices for students with disabilities looks like at Lakeview High School.
   a. What are the purposes and/or goals of including students with disabilities in general education classroom settings?
2. What responsibilities do school or district administrators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
   a. How comfortable would you say you are when taking on these responsibilities?

3. What responsibilities do general education teachers have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    b. How comfortable do you think the general education teachers are when taking on these responsibilities?
    c. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    d. How comfortable do you think the special education teachers are when taking on these responsibilities?
4. What responsibilities do SPED paraeducators have in supporting the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. Does the school or district explicitly outline these responsibilities or are they inferred/assumed?
    b. How comfortable and to what degree of independence would you say paraeducators have when taking on these responsibilities?
5. How are the SPED paraeducator assignments determined and do you have input in the process?
6. Describe the guidance and support provided to teachers and paraeducators to fulfill their responsibilities in inclusive classroom settings.
7. What are the most important things teachers and SPED paraeducators need to know and/or skills they need to have to effectively support the needs of students with disabilities in inclusive general education classroom settings?
    a. What do you think would be the best way to prepare teachers and SPED paraeducators to work together?
8. What resources do you feel are available and/or needed to support the work of teacher-SPED paraeducator teams?
    a. What ongoing support or professional learning would help them be more effective when working with students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings?
9. What are the most important things teachers and SPED paraeducator teams need to know or skills they need to have to effectively together?
10. Is there anything I have not asked that you would like to share with me?

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Appendix B

Consent Form

Purpose: You are invited to participate in a research study intended to increase the understanding of the high school general education teacher and SPED paraeducator teams' relationship. I hope to learn how the participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences influence their work and support for inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classroom settings.

Participant Selection: You were purposefully selected as a possible participant in this study because as a general **or** special education teacher, special education paraeducator, **or** administrator for Lakeview Public School **or** Lakeview High School you have been identified for your involvement in the implementation of inclusive practices for the district or school. Approximately 5-7 high school general education teachers, 5-7 high school special education paraeducators will be invited to participate in observations, focus groups, and/or individual interviews. Approximately 4-6 special education teachers will be invited to participate in focus group and/or individual interviews. In addition, the school principal and/or assistant principal as well as the district's director of special education will be invited to participate in individual interviews. Approximately 16-23 individuals will be asked to participate in the study.

Explanation of Procedures: If you decide to participate, your participation could consist of a focus group interview or an individual interview, both will take approximately 45-60 minutes each. I also plan to conduct observations in inclusion classroom settings. The observations will take approximately 60 minutes or the length of the class period. With your permission and to assist with the analysis, I will audio-record the focus group interviews and the individual interviews. I will take notes during the observations. Sample focus group and/or individual questions include: 1) What responsibilities do you have in supervising and supporting the work of the SPED paraeducator/s? 2) Describe the guidance and support you have received from the general and/or special education teachers to perform your duties in the general education classroom setting; and 3) What are the most important things general education teachers and SPED paraeducators need to know and/or skills they need to have to effectively work together in inclusion classroom settings?

Discomfort/Risks: There are minimal anticipated risks with your participation in this study. However, if at any time you feel uneasy with a question, you may opt to pass. You are encouraged to be open in your responses. All of your responses will remain confidential and your participation is voluntary throughout the course of the study.

Benefits: The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the working relationship among high school general education teacher and high school SPED paraeducator teams and how their relationships influence their practices in inclusion classroom settings. The publications

resulting from this study will have potential benefit for other schools and/or districts experiencing the same issues.

<u>Confidentiality</u>: Any identifiable information acquired through your participation in this study will remain confidential. Participation in the study will remain strictly voluntary. I will maintain strict adherence to proper measures to ensure the confidentiality of participants. Pseudonyms will be used to conceal names in an effort to maintain the confidentiality of study-related information. However, to provide assurances the study is properly completed and with the utmost level of diminished risk to participants, there are instances where this information must be released. By signing this form, you are giving permission to share information about you with the following groups:

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies; and
- The Wichita State University Institutional Review Board

In addition, results of this study may be published. However, in such instances, any publication or presentation regarding the study will not include the names of participants.

If you are asked to participate in a focus group interview, the discussions that occur during those sessions are also confidential and you are asked to please not share what was discussed outside of the focus group.

Digital/audio copies will be kept for five years and then deleted from the password protected location. Any hard copies will be shredded.

<u>Refusal/Withdrawal</u>: Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will <u>not</u> affect your future relations with Wichita State University and/or Lakeview Public Schools.

<u>Contact</u>: If you have any questions about this research, you can contact Mrs. Karen Kuhn at 316-708-3519 or kakuhn@shockers.wichita.edu or contact my advisor Dr. Jean Patterson at 316-978-6392 or jean.patterson@wichita.edu, or at CLES Wichita State University Wichita, KS 67260-0142. Should you have questions pertaining to your rights as a research subject, or about research-related injury, you can contact the Office of Research and Technology Transfer at Wichita State University, 1845 Fairmount Street, Wichita, KS 67260-0007, telephone (316) 978-3285.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read (or someone has read to you) the information provided above;
- You are aware that this is a research study;
- You have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to your satisfaction; and
- You have voluntarily decided to participate.

You are not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

____
Printed Name of Subject

____ ________________
Signature of Subject Date

____
Printed Name of Witness

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Witness Signature Date