AN EXPLORATION OF INCLUSIONARY ENVIRONMENTS AS SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF THE SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

By

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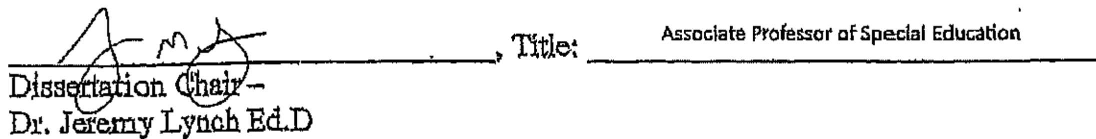

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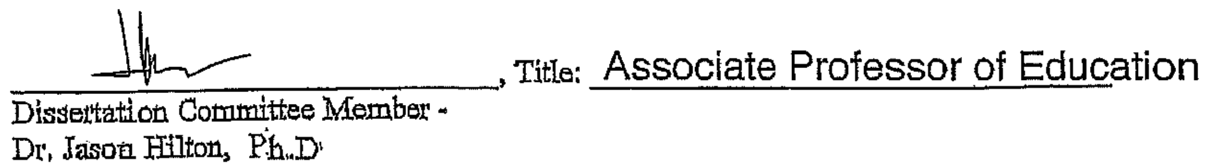

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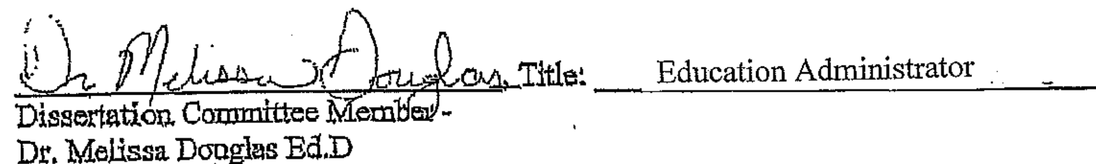

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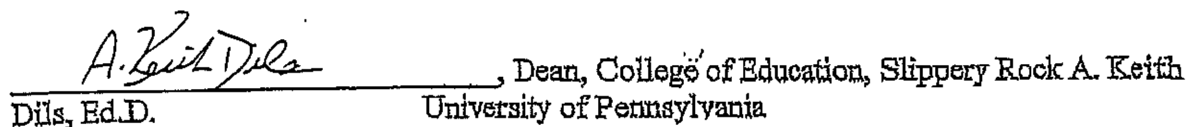

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ABSTRACT

The position of principal has evolved into one with many responsibilities ranging from managerial to visionary leader. Federal legislation has placed an added layer of responsibility through the implementation of Public Law 94-142 which supported social justice reforms that were meant to include students with disabilities and provide an education for them alongside their non-disabled peers. The changes brought about by this legislation and its iterations, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and No Child Left Behind Act, have supported inclusionary actions taken by schools and placed importance on effectiveness of the programs used to educate all students. Despite more students with disabilities being included in general education classrooms, schools still struggle with supporting effective inclusionary programs.

This study conducted an exploration of a principal's decision making processes by gathering descriptions of their background experiences, leadership, and structural management of inclusionary environments. It offers insight into what inclusionary environments look like through the eyes of the principal.

Research was conducted through a case study with three principals using phenomenological techniques. This study revealed four themes that provide a vibrant description of the inclusionary environments in these principal's buildings. The principals interviewed in this study discussed their background experiences as teachers, their professional certification coursework, leadership approaches and the structural management of inclusion. Their insight can help one to think about inclusion as they do on a daily basis.

Keywords: Least Restrictive Environment, Inclusion, Collaboration, Co-Teaching, MTSS, UDL

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

In its 35-year review of P.L. 94-142 and its upgrade, IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990), the federal government uses the tag line "We cannot afford to leave anyone out of our efforts" (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. ii). This tagline is a promise intended to place emphasis on providing quality education to all students including students with disabilities. Policies have been developed by the federal government to accomplish this goal by promoting inclusion and applying accountability on schools and school personnel (U.S. Department of Education, 2010, p. 11). The connection between implementing programs for students with special needs and verifying that schools are meeting these needs by demonstrating growth, most notably by supporting more inclusion, adds a new perspective and responsibility on school leadership (Causton & Theoharis, 2014).

More students with disabilities are being served in inclusion settings than ever before and there is an illusion that what we are doing to support inclusion is aligned with the most recent research (Mackey, 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; Pellicano, Bolte, & Stahmer, 2018). However, despite more students being included in general education classrooms, the promise of quality educational opportunities for them are not realized (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2017; Theobald, Goldhaber, Gratz, & Holden, 2017; Jimenez & Kamei, 2015; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006;). High achieving outcomes and progress for students with disabilities in inclusionary settings have remained challenging and the gap between students without disabilities and those with disabilities has not changed in a demonstrable way depending on the disability category (McLeskey, Waldron & Redd, 2014; Theobald, et al., 2017). Strong school leadership focused on outcomes is needed in order to meet this responsibility head on (Causton

& Theoharis, 2014; Zambrano, Mera, Mejia, Mendoza, & Martinez, 2020). Kitchen (2018) suggests that approaches to inclusion have not resulted in progress and that society needs to become focused on the outcomes and that the outcomes are what matters most, not the methods.

Since there has been a greater focus aimed at including a larger number of students with disabilities into regular education classrooms yet persistent difficulties in producing consistent positive outcomes, it is only natural for researchers and school change advocates to question the qualifications of school leaders and their ability to evaluate and manage special education personnel and programs (Lawson & Knollman, 2017; Glowacki & Hackman, 2016; Rinehart, 2017). It is also not unreasonable for researchers to question the processes that take place within inclusionary environments, the collaborative relationships that are needed to support effective practices and processes, and try to identify how these aspects can be strengthened in order to meet the requirements set for educators in federal legislation. School principals are the leaders at the single point of the decision-making processes regarding inclusion.

It is now 44 years since P.L. 94-142 was put into law and some of the same questions remain; What are the attitudes toward inclusion of the professionals managing inclusive environments and how does this affect their competence in this area? Are school leaders, and specifically school principals adequately prepared and fully understand how to meet the needs of students with disabilities by overseeing inclusion in an effective way? Does the school principal's teaching experience with inclusion impact their decision-making processes as a leader regarding inclusion? Are teachers provided adequate professional development or supported to effectively create an inclusionary environment that meets the needs of all students, and specifically those with special needs? How does a school principal approach cultural changes that value the differences in each student? This study attempts to answer those questions by

gaining insight into inclusionary environments as seen through the eyes of the school leader in charge of managing them, the principal.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of inclusionary environments through the eyes of the school leader, the principal. An exploration of the social structure of inclusion as perceived by the school principal may prove to be a window to understanding the phenomena known as inclusion today, which is truly special education supports in a regular classroom. Students with disabilities have been included in general education for over four decades and yet not much has changed in the approach used by school principals to manage inclusionary environments, primarily in how it is structured and the collaborative environment which inclusion takes place (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006; Zambrano et al., 2020). Many factors have been identified that impact a principal's ability to lead inclusive environments including educational background and leadership skills, vision or commitment for embracing inclusion as an accepted practice, and the structural supports given to the teachers working with students in inclusionary environments (Lyons, 2016; Jones, Zirkel, & Barrack, 2008; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006).

Research has identified a number of necessary components school leaders must demonstrate for successful inclusionary programs including a focused shared vision, cultural leadership that emphasizes acceptance, supportive structure that facilitates and emphasizes high levels of learning for every student, and ongoing professional development for every adult involved in the process (DeVroey, Struyf, & Petry, 2016; McLeskey, Billingley, & Waldron, 2016; McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner & Algozzine, 2014). Given the fact that we know the aspects impacting a principal and know what can aid them to have success in the inclusionary

programming in their buildings, what does the environment of inclusion look like through the eyes of the principal? This question is especially important since overall outcomes for students with disabilities continue to be disappointing and they continue to progress less than their peers (Theobald et al., 2019). It is also important because many educators, including leaders, view inclusion as simply a placement option that solves a social justice issue, and not a means to creating better outcomes for their students (Kitchin, 2018; Zambrano et al., 2020). Implementing a phenomenological research that explores the inclusionary environments through the eyes of the principal can help us to understand the factors related to this question.

Significance of the Study

No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) legislation was implemented with the idea that accountability measures would guarantee all students, including those with disabilities, would be 100% proficient on federally mandated assessments. Although reform has pushed some gains over time, supporting special needs and their access to a free and appropriate education (FAPE) through the structure of inclusion continues to be an area of ongoing struggle for school leadership (Bilingsley, McLeskey & Crockett, 2017; DiPaola, Tschannen, & Thomas, 2004; McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). In fact, even though the idea of inclusion was mandated through law for decades now and the higher expectations of achievement added to force districts into supporting students with special needs, few gains have been realized (Billingsley, McLeskey & Crockett, 2017; McLeskey & Waldron, 2006). Many school principals, teachers and even families themselves view inclusion as a place, and not an educational environment to support the students learning (Pellicano, Bolte, & Stahmer, 2018; Zambrano, Mera, Mejia, Mendoza, & Martinez, 2020). There also has been little research regarding inclusion in conjunction from the

perspective of the principal and how the principal manages the various aspects impacting his or her leadership (Irvine, Lupart, Loreman & McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the social setting within a school that interacts with and through the leadership and management of the principal through an exploration of the environment. This study also seeks to understand how the uniqueness of each principal, his/her prior experiences and how their education regarding inclusion, assists him/her to make decisions regarding inclusion. For example, if a principal does not have a background in special education and has had limited special education development in their certification area, what or whom do they rely to make decisions for supporting inclusionary environments? This study is significant because there is very little research, especially at the secondary level, and in smaller, rural schools that helps one to understand what current factors are impacting the day to day operations of school principals, how they create a vision of acceptance, and their ability to support effective inclusionary environments as well as what these environments look like (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001).

Theoretical Framework

In this research, exploring and describing the phenomenon of inclusionary environments through rich and descriptive language can provide one with valuable research data. Through the process of interviewing principals, we can get a glimpse into the lives of the person charged with ensuring inclusion. We get to investigate their experiences before they became a school leader, their background education, and the thought process as they have made decisions regarding inclusion. Tracy (2013) calls this kind of research as an emic approach where “behavior is described from the actor’s point of view and is context specific” (p. 21). The principal is the primary target for study in this research. Getting into the “head” of the principal and making

sense of the thoughts, motives, ideas, and the decision-making process is the key intention of this research. Qualitative research methodology, and specifically phenomenological approaches can provide us with the data necessary to meet our goals.

Phenomenological qualitative research is concerned with exploring and discovering meaning from the environment through rich and meaningful descriptions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Tracy, 2013). This study will explore the inclusionary environment by asking principals a set of questions that are focused on description in three topic areas: background, leadership, and structural management. These three areas are where the principal's spheres of influence are the greatest regarding inclusionary environments. The decision to use the qualitative approach is for the following reasons:

- "Qualitative researchers generate thickly descriptive analysis" (Warren & Karner, 2010, p.7). A linear approach to this research would be ineffectual because one needs to get beyond simple statements and gain a better sense of the factors that influence school leaders and how they act. In order to do this, a back and forth, reflective view of these factors must be taken in conjunction with current research and analyzed with a personal understanding.
- "Qualitative research is about immersing oneself in a scene and trying to make sense of it" (Tracy, 2013, p.3). Each school principal involved in this study work and live in different environments, environments in which they create based upon their individual leadership styles and vision. This study seeks to understand the differences as well as see likenesses between these environments and how they contribute to the management of inclusionary classrooms.

- "Design in qualitative research is an ongoing process that involves tacking back and forth between the different components of the design, assessing the implications of goals, theories, research questions, methods, and validity threats for one another" (Maxwell, 2005, p.3). Gaining a full understanding of the individual actions of each school principal will be an evolutionary process that analyzes, reflects, and reanalyzes these properties in a real setting.
- Qualitative research "is used as a broad explanation for behavior and attitudes" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.61). This research will attempt to gain an understanding of school principals and the inclusionary environments they manage. It will not seek to correlate cause and effect or identify factors that have definitive, corollary impact on inclusionary environments.

Research Questions

The following research questions will provide a guide for learning and understanding more thoroughly about inclusion through an examination of a school principal's background experience, vision and leadership, and approach to managing inclusive environments.

1. What role has a principal's background as a teacher, employment experience, and certification coursework played in the decisions regarding inclusionary environments?
2. How does a school principal implement a vision of acceptance and support for students with disabilities, especially in an inclusionary setting?
3. How does the principal develop an environment of collaborative inquiry for the professionals involved in inclusive classrooms to thrive?
4. In what ways do school principals approach and ensure inclusionary environments that are focused on progress, growth, and achievement as identified by current research?

Definition of Terms

Inclusion- "the educational placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms" (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p.80). "Ensuring students with disabilities are part of the school community" (McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2018).

Mainstreaming- The "education of students with disabilities alongside their typically developing peers – the presumptive placement for students with disabilities at the time not being the general education classroom" (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p. 88).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)- Educating students with disabilities "to the maximum extent appropriate, ….. with children who are not disabled" (Bateman & Bateman, 2014, p. 90).

Special Education- "The term ''special education'' means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including— (A) instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and (B) instruction in physical education." (USDOE, 2006)

Regular Education/ General Education- The classroom that is the starting point for all education. The classroom that is the expected placement for any student without a disability in which a free education is administered.

Co-teaching- The instructional program for students provided by a general education teacher and a special education teacher demonstrated by team teaching, station teaching, parallel teaching, or alternative teaching (Scruggs, Mastropieri & McDuffie, 2007). Cook and Friend (1995) define it as "two or more professionals delivering substantial instruction to a diverse, or blended, group of students in a single physical space" (p.2).

Summary

School principals have a tremendous amount of responsibility (Correa & Wagner, 2011). One aspect of those responsibilities includes ensuring full access to a quality education for students with disabilities through the process known as inclusion. Principals' background experience, knowledge and competency provide a foundation for the leadership and culture they nourish as well as the management of structure within the building and in the classroom that create an effective inclusionary environment. Brooks (2016) eloquently stated "Administration plays an important role in how students are taught and in the confidence the teachers and staff feel when making adaptations and curricular changes. If teachers feel supported and are given the time and resources to create quality teaching in inclusive settings, positive results will occur" (p.13). Causton and Theoharis (2014) emphasize this further by stating "The principal has an indirect impact on student learning but plays a direct role in setting and improving the conditions that maximize learning". It cannot be understated how much this impact applies to inclusionary environments. It is this environment, the environment of structure and support for inclusion that this researcher seeks to explore and understand. A descriptive, phenomenological research will be conducted on these inclusionary environments which will include one-on-one interviews and qualitative analysis of the data extrapolated from those interviews. It is the hope of the researcher to learn and understand the social structure of inclusion through the interactions of the people tasked with the responsibility of overseeing inclusionary environments: the principal.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Principals' Management of Inclusionary Environments

The position of "principal" as a leader in schools has had a long and valuable role in how education has been managed and delivered to children. The role the principal has played has been one of an evolutionary change that is reflective of American culture (Shen, 2005). Since 1975, principals have had an added responsibility, that of managing an ever-increasing influx of students with special needs and special supports (Damer, 2001). The inclusion of these students has provided a great promise of hope for a better education than this group has ever seen in times before 1975 but has presented great challenges for principals managing the new environment afforded to students with disabilities. A number of aspects have been identified as areas that have impact on the management of inclusion and they can be categorized in three categories: Background experience and knowledge, visionary leadership, and structural design (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hehir & Katzman, 2012; McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, & Algozzine, 2014). A review of literature can help understand how principals have come to be responsible for inclusion, how legislation has impacted the role of principals, and how principals approached the challenge of inclusion in their schools.

The Principalship: A Brief History

In its earliest iteration, the position of "principal" was not a construct of education; one room schools were managed by a single individual or a very small group, as if a principal did not exist (Kafka, 2009). Shen (2005) describes early principals as teachers with servant leadership roles taking on tasks such as getting the heat ready on cold days, keeping attendance records, delivering supplies and basic physical management of the building. As the industrial revolutions of the 1800s developed and caused migration into more populated and urban settings, the role

evolved into one that resulted in less teaching responsibilities and more management types of roles since the physical building held more students, multiple grades, and increased staff (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Kafka, 2009; Shen, 2005). Developments in American societal culture has led to “phases” of responsibility for school principals (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Portin, Shen, & Williams, 1998; Shen, 2005). One example provided by Shen (2005) is that of the 1920s “values broker” principal, a time after World War I when society was struggling with the beginnings of the prohibition movement, women's suffrage and other values driven ideas (p. 4). Shen (2005) describes the principal of this time as the one charged with leading and ensuring an education that reflected the values of the local community. School leaders in the 50’s and 60’s dealt with civil rights issues and equal access as noted by the landmark case of Brown vs. the Board of Education (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017).

Along with focus on civil rights issues, the financial aspects of special education came to light through attempts by advocacy groups supporting students with disabilities; “free and appropriate education” was emphasized for the first time (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). This evolution took a dramatic turn beginning in 1965. From this time forward, school leaders, and especially principals, would now begin to manage education that was specialized for diverse groups of students, although not yet in the public school (Hicks-Monroe, 2011). Furthermore, the 1960s demonstrated an effort by advocates for students with special needs to begin ensuring an education similar to those given to non-disabled peers was available to those with disabilities inside the public school (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Hicks-Monroe, 2011). The effect was a positive move for students but put further responsibility on school leadership and the principal managing the individual buildings (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003).

In 1975, the federal government took its most dramatic action ever toward protecting the educational rights of individuals with disabilities. Known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) or Public Law 94-142, students with disabilities were now going to be given the opportunity to be included with non-disabled peers for their education (Zigmond & Baker, 1996). This major piece of legislation stood on the foundational belief that all students with disabilities are guaranteed to receive a free and appropriate education (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Itkonen, 2007; Keogh, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

In the years before P.L. 94-142, education for the vast majority of students having disabilities was specialized in classrooms that kept integration with the general education to a minimum (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Itkonen, 2007). At this time, P.L. 94-142 was viewed as a civil rights legislation that reversed decades of discrimination against students with disabilities by keeping them in separate settings from those of students without disabilities; that process was now viewed in a different way, one which started with placement in the public school (Itkonen, 2007; Keogh, 2007). Deno (1970) created a chart that reflected a "cascade of services" (p. 234). This chart reflected the thinking that the majority of students with special needs should be met in the general education class and that specialized services could support any needs that could not be met in a general education classroom. Deno's (1970) work in this area was an impetus for EAHCA of 1975.

After 1975, school leaders now had the added task of managing the general educational environment that included all students, including those with disabilities (Aldridge, 2015). Today, more students than ever before are educated in general education classrooms through a process known as inclusion (Mackey, 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). The history and evolution of the role of school principal demonstrates a dramatic increase in responsibility; this requires

principals to demonstrate knowledge and skills far above those of the "principal teacher" of the 1800s. A thorough review of inclusion as a process can provide one with a basis for examining the knowledge and skills a principal would have to have to manage the environments that support students in those inclusionary environments.

Least Restrictive Environment and Inclusion

Surprisingly, Inclusion is not mentioned anywhere in educational legislation and is not a legal term (Carroll, Fulmer, Sobel, Wade, Aragon, & Coval, 2011). The term inclusion came from language in P.L. 94-142 that insisted on students with disabilities being educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; USDOE). Original thinking about including students with disabilities as a civil rights issue came from the landmark court case of Brown vs. Board of Education in which a young black girl was prevented from having access to education alongside her white peers in her neighborhood school (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). P.L. 94-142 was also about access. Without much guidance on the matter, districts, and especially school leadership like the principal, struggled to understand what LRE meant in real terms (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; O'Laughlin & Lindle, 2015). Causton and Thoharis (2014) suggests that inclusion as a process must be viewed similarly to special education as a whole "as a service, not a place" (p. 13). Inclusion is not a place inasmuch as it is a way of thinking for all students; all students should have equal access to a free and appropriate education (Abawi, Buffone, Baez, & Carter, 2018).

The language in P.L. 94-142 and its later iterations and upgrades, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1997), No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEIA, 2004) specifically state that students with disabilities should be educated "in the least restrictive environment" (LRE) and that it is the responsibility of the

district to demonstrate or provide reasons why placement in a more restrictive class is preferred (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Colson & Smothers, 2018; Conrad & Whitaker, 1997). Education in the least restrictive environment for a majority of students with disabilities is the regular classroom; the classroom with their non-disabled peers in what is known as inclusion (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Damer, 2001). Wolery, Werts, Lisowski, Caldwell, and Snyder (1995) provide researchers with a reasonable definition of inclusion by stating it means "all children, regardless of their disabilities or the severity of their disabilities, should have access to and participate in their natural communities – those in which they would have participated if they did not have disabilities" (p. 15). O'Laughlin and Lindle (2015) stated that LRE should be focused "on a continuum of supports" (p.141).

Since passage of P.L. 94-142, school districts across the nation have educated more and more students in inclusive settings (Mackey, 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015). McLeskey, Waldron, Spooner, and Algozzine (2014) support the notion that the number of students with disabilities serviced in the general education classroom at least 80% or more of the day has increased by reporting that in 1990, it was at 34% and has increased to 58% in 2008. According to the United States Department of Education Center for Education Statistics, as of the year 2015, 62.5% of all students with disabilities were served 80% of their time in a general education classroom (NCES.ed.gov, 2019). This data emphasizes that more students with disabilities are being served in inclusion settings than ever before and this has presented a challenge for principals and other school leaders (Mackey, 2014; McLeskey & Waldron, 2015).

Obviously, principals must have knowledge and understanding of how legislation regarding LRE affects programming in their school. However, the more imperative nature of LRE is in the details of the language of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act of 2004

(IDEA). IDEA specifically detailed that all students with disabilities would be guaranteed a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and supported in the LRE with supplementary aides and services (Aldridge, 2015; Causton, & Theoharis, 2014). Having knowledge about what supplementary aides and services are appropriate for specific students presents its own challenges, especially for principals who may not have had exposure or experience with special education in their careers. Furthermore, depending on the type and severity of the disability, meeting these needs requires in-depth knowledge of a wide range of supports for these students (Billingsley, McLeskey, & Crockett, 2017; Carroll et al., 2011; Brown, 2004).

Principals face a compounding challenge in supporting students with disabilities in inclusionary environments. The IDEA improvement of 2004 also added accountability for progress and proficiency for all students including those with disabilities placed in least restrictive environments (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2014; Colson et al., 2018; United States Department of Education). The accountability for performance on standardized test scores meant that principals had to ensure that instructional practices were effective and improved the outcomes for all students (Hehir, 2016; Lynch, 2012; Sugai & Horner, 2009). This has been a difficult responsibility for school principals, especially when they have to do more with much less than ever before (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Kinney, 2003).

The term “inclusion” has had a tremendous impact on school principals. For many with no background in special education at all, it has meant nightmare expectations of supporting a student with special needs in a classroom that has typically been designed for students without debilitating factors to their learning (Chattman, 2017; Cobb, 2015). For others, those that have some exposure to special education or inclusionary environments, it means attempting to

navigate a way to include, support and grow all students which has proven to be difficult for many principals. For the student with a disability, it means having the promise of an education that is specific to them and allows them to participate fully and appropriately with their fellow peers. That promise lies in the hand of the one person with the capability of fulfilling it, the principal (Cobb, 2015). This takes a level of competency is special education, leadership and effective structural management.

Principal Competency

Ball and Green (2014) stated that “school leaders were limited in their training and experience relative to special education and inclusive practices” (p. 57). This is a shame when considering it had been almost 40 years after P.L. 94-142 and the movement to include students with special needs when they wrote those words. When looking at the competency of a principal, two things must be discussed: experience and training or professional development. Both items have to do with their experience as a pre-service teacher, a teacher and their current status as a principal.

When discussing experience, we need to understand how obtaining a principalship occurs. Most states require that anyone attempting to acquire a principal certification must have some form of educational background. Retrieving the requirements for obtaining a principal certification in Pennsylvania, one can see the following (www.education.pa.gov):

- Holds a baccalaureate degree from a regionally or nationally accredited college/university.
- Satisfies the requirements set forth in section 24 P.S. § 12-1209 relating to good moral character.

- Provides verification of three years of relevant professional experience. For the purpose of this section, relevant professional experience is "professional experience in an educational setting that is related to the instructional process."
- Completes a Pennsylvania-approved, graduate-level principal certification program that includes an internship/practicum or an equivalent out-of-state program. A 3.0 program Grade Point Average (GPA) is required.
- Provides evidence of satisfactory achievement on the Pennsylvania required test.

As noted, one requirement is three years of "relevant professional experience". Notably, this is often teaching experience. Teaching experience can be very broad in nature regarding content focus however. For example, one could have been an English teacher, a math teacher, physical education, history, or even a special educator. Each experience may have also had vastly different experiences with inclusion. Inclusion in an English class would differ greatly from a physical education class. Other professional experiences may not have ever encountered or had to deal with issues regarding inclusion. This is important as we review the training and professional development of principals in regard to managing special education and raises questions in regard to decision-making and inclusion. If a principal had no background or experience with inclusion, had little training in special education as a whole, and now has to manage inclusion, what impacts the decision-making progress most? There is currently a gap in the research that considers the decision making of a principal and his/her direct experience with inclusion as a teacher. As indicated by a few researchers, principals may rely on special educators or seek other professionals for decision making on special education topics (Bateman, Gervais, Wysocki, & Cline, 2017; Hess & Kelly, 2005; Templeton, 2017).

Vast amounts of research have been put toward the competencies of principals, especially in relation to their background preparation programs. Many researchers focus on the preparatory programs for principals and see gaps in the information and education provided to these leaders (Bateman, Gervais, Wysocki & Cline, 2017; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Lynch, 2012; McHatton, Boyer, Shaunessy, & Farmer, 2010). Hess & Kelly (2005) state that "principal preparation programs have been left ill-equipped for the challenges and opportunities posed by an era of accountability (p. 40). Lynch (2012) stated that "a principal in West Virginia who completed a teacher education program in West Virginia prior to 2005 may have no special education training" (p. 46). Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2006) suggest that many states still do not require any special education instruction as part of their licensure programs and that more than half that do, get very little exposure. This is quite interesting since school principals have had students with special needs included in general classrooms for decades, but may have had no exposure or educational background working with students with disabilities.

Principals having a typical experience in preparatory programs often place high importance on knowing the procedures, guidelines, and the how to of special education, but often do not get specific information on topics such as inclusion. Bateman, Gervais, Wysocki, and Cline (2017) conducted a review on the competencies of school principals to manage and understand aspects of special education. In their review, they note that principals are often required to be highly involved in managing special education, including running IEP meetings, and becoming more effective leaders in dealing with special education, but also note that many leaders have not had substantive formal training in special education. Bateman et al. (2017) state that "In many cases, principals are forced to seek out learning opportunities related to special

education on their own or rely on others for support and guidance while working as a principal" (p. 51).

In writing his dissertation, Templeton (2012) stated that "Additional training that specifically targets special education is needed for administrators. By developing a knowledge base of key knowledge and skills, school level administrators will be enabled to improve upon their current knowledge base and skill levels" (p. 68). Rhinehart (2017), a Director of Special Education, goes so far as to say that "the delivery of specialized instruction does look different than that of general education" (p. 58). Rhinehart (2017) further notes that building level administrators need to collaborate closely with and alongside special education administrators in order to create effective programming for students with special needs. Clearly, depending on the educational background of the building leader, there may be a gap in knowledge that could lead one to be less effective in managing special education programming. This would appear to be even more important when you are looking at specific instructional programming like inclusion (Ball et al., 2014; McHatton, et al., 2010). In 2019, Howley, Howley, Yahn, VanHorn, and Telfer wrote an article on inclusive instructional leadership. They suggest that principals are not fully prepared for providing leadership in issues related to special education and specifically inclusion. Howley et al. (2019) recommend principal preparation programs that point leaders toward approaching instructional leadership through the lens of social justice noting that resulting cultural changes are the only way to make real headway toward increasing the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Some research has indicated that the principal relies upon the special education teachers to help inform them to make decisions regarding special education issues. Templeton (2017) conducted a study that examined, "principals who are knowledgeable and skilled in special

education and those who possess a knowledge base and skill set in special education that is typical for the average principal" (p. 19). Templeton (2017) reports that the principals that are knowledgeable and skilled tend to collaborate more with their special education teachers and lean on them to keep them up to date on current best practices. Hess and Kelly (2005) add that many principals are relying on collegial relationships to navigate the realm of what does not get taught in principal preservice programs. The question then becomes what is the decision-making process if those teachers the principal is relying on are not knowledgeable? Would the principal rely upon their own experiences as a teacher and how inclusion impacted them at that level?

Clearly experience and competence matter greatly and impact one's ability to support and manage inclusionary environments. However, a principal's abilities to demonstrate leadership can also provide us with a glimpse of what is done to support and manage inclusionary environments. The responsibility to demonstrate leadership for supporting inclusionary environments is a vital role for principals.

Leadership for Inclusionary Environments

Much research has identified the qualities necessary to support effective inclusionary environments. Causton and Theoharis (2014) identify "a bold and clear vision of inclusion" as one of the key leadership features that is supported by a number of other researchers (p. 4). Visionary leadership is often cited as a major factor in supporting successful inclusion programs (DiPaola, Moran, Walther-Thomas, 2004; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; McLeskey et al., 2014). Causton and Theoharis (2014) go further by stating "Principals successful at this do not articulate the current status of inclusion as the goal, nor do they talk in platitudes such as "all children can learn." They are specific in their vision and lofty in setting a high goal" (p. 4). AuCoin (2014) suggests that the leadership

values of the entire school are reflected in and from the school principal. Leithwood, Harris and Hopkins (2019) stated that “school leaders improve teaching and learning indirectly and most powerfully through their influence on staff motivation, commitment, and working conditions” (p. 6). Demonstrating leadership for inclusion is a key responsibility, and how principals approach that leadership role and their attitudes toward inclusion mean everything! Are principals supportive of inclusion as something that is best for all students?

The attitudes of principals and their perceptions of inclusion as a process vary greatly, especially depending on what disability group is included. Cook, Semmel & Gerber (1999) conducted research on the attitudes of principals and special education teachers regarding inclusion of students with mild disabilities. They found that principals generally had a positive view toward inclusion as a process but a less favorable view when it came time to allocate the necessary resources to support successful inclusion. Cook et al. (1999) also suggested a connection between the positive attitude of principals when it resulted in favorable outcomes on academic achievement measures, and less positive attitudes when results were less than stellar. Horrocks, White, and Roberts (2008) conducted a similar study but with a focus on students identified with autism. Horrocks, et al., (2008) provided some evidence of correlators between principals that believed in inclusion overall and principals with a favorable attitude toward including students with autism. They also suggest that principals that have experience or backgrounds in special education generally have a more favorable attitude toward inclusion of all students with disabilities.

Cindy Praisner (2003) conducted a survey of 408 elementary principals in Pennsylvania. She reported that the “attitude scores for 76.6% of the respondents were within the uncertain range” (p. 138). Two other findings from Praisner’s (2003) study was that “the more positive the

experiences with students with disabilities, the more likely the principal was to choose less restrictive settings" and "regular education settings were chosen less frequently for serious emotional disturbance and autism." (p. 139-140).

Ball and Green (2014) conducted an investigation of principal attitudes toward inclusion. Note that this is almost 40 years after P.L. 94-142. They conducted a correlational research design that included 170 elementary and secondary principals and assistant principals. They report that overall principals were slightly negative toward inclusion. In fact, they also reported that the more severe the disability was perceived, the more negative the view toward including them with the general education program. Also interesting in this study was that three quarters of the principals surveyed had little to no experience in special education and 60% of the respondents only received up to 16 hours of in-service training hours on inclusion. If the attitude of the building principal toward inclusion is negative, more than likely this will have a negative impact on building leadership capacity in others for supporting inclusionary environments. DiPaola et al. (2004) stated "principals who genuinely believe that their school mission is academic success for all communicate this value to their constituents" (p. 3). This is more easily said than done.

If negative attitudes from the leaders are not grim enough, a poor view of inclusion from the very teachers inside an inclusionary environment makes matters even worse and presents a huge barrier to change-agent principals. In order to change the cultural beliefs about inclusion in a school, a principal must change the cultural beliefs of his or her staff. This is not always easy. Teachers, under the direct supervision of school principals, are often confused, misunderstand inclusion, or are in outright opposition to inclusive policies and practices (Sanagi, 2016; Lupart, 1998). Bicehouse & Faieta, (2017) stated in regard to the changes brought about by IDEA that

"Student and parent advocacy groups, the National Education Association, the National Association of school Psychologists, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and at least 36 other organizations…. voiced opposition and concern about the change in special education mandates" (p. 42). Inclusionary environments often look very different and there are hot debates regarding full inclusion of all students with disabilities into some instructional programs (Zigmond & Baker, 1996). These are the ongoing feelings toward special education, and toward inclusion that school principals need to confront. This confrontation takes cultural leadership on the part of the principal.

Part of the difficulty for general education teachers' acceptance of inclusionary classrooms may be that they lack knowledge in providing supports to students with disabilities or that they do not feel that they are supported by the principal which then causes anxiety, stress, and insecurity. In researching general educator's pre-service programs and the teacher's perceptions of inclusion, McCray, and McHatton, (2011) report that even after getting a specific course on inclusion and working with diverse populations, educators still had reservations and hesitance. Hamill and Dever (1998) uncovered similar results when he summarized some teacher feelings as "expressions of fear, lack of control, and concern about how inclusion would affect them (p. 4). Wolery, et al. (1995) questioned k-6 teachers with some experience dealing with inclusionary environments regarding the amount of support, training and resources they are given to manage these environments. They reported that high percentages of respondents indicated that they needed more personal support, more training, and more resources. Principals can change perceptions of these educators by making support, training and resources for inclusion a priority.

Vaughn (1994) conducted a study with 74 teachers from various grade levels in an urban setting that can provide a more introspective view of teacher perceptions and their perceived needs regarding inclusion. The study utilized 10 focus groups with teachers broken into elementary, middle and high school groupings. The Vaughn (1994) research reported a mostly negative view toward inclusion with many teachers having great concern over the academic success of both the general education students as well as the students with special needs. The teachers were also highly concerned about the leadership of the principal to guide them to a successful inclusionary setting. This concern regarding leadership could be summed up as the administrator not having any ideas how to implement inclusion or how to support it (Vaughn, 1994). Finally, the study noted that teacher's perceptions of communication, family involvement, ongoing professional development and collaborative resourcing as things that could aide them in becoming more proficient at managing inclusionary environments. These are areas within the purview of the school principal to manage and provide cultural leadership (Conrad et al., 1997).

The Vaughn research was conducted and reported on in 1994. This was almost 20 years after P.L. 92-142 and yet perceptions of educators toward inclusion are still negative for the most part. Fast forwarding to 2009, Ross-Hill once again visited the topic of teacher perceptions of inclusion since the upgraded amendments of IDEA in 2004. Ross-Hill (2009) noted much research that reinforced the idea that teachers were still struggling with actually implementing inclusion because of time, resources, and administrative guidance on the subject. Her study consisted of 100 teachers, kindergarten through 12th grade, teaching in a rural school district and having inclusionary classrooms. Ross-Hill (2009) reported that the teachers in this study tended to feel more confident in their approach to inclusion due to their district's specialized training to enhance their professional capabilities, but that "more experienced teachers may not have been

willing or had the desire to change their approach to educating students with special needs in their particular classes" (p. 196). Both the specialized training highlighted in this study as well as the lingering negative feelings toward inclusion of older more experienced teachers seem to be typical in classrooms today. These are areas in which the school principal has leadership potential to either improve upon or maintain the status quo for inclusionary environments. It is also an area of continued frustration and struggle for the principal regarding the ability to manage inclusionary environments.

Collaboration for Inclusion

When discussing inclusion, the research on collaboration is extensive. In fact, one cannot really discuss inclusion without having a discussion about collaboration in some way. DiPaola, et al. (2003) summarizes this by stating "effective leaders are committed to the success of all students and collaborate with others to achieve this aim" (p. 10). Collaboration in this context is simply bringing a group of individuals together to achieve a goal or purpose (Aldridge, 2015; McLeskey, Rosenberg, & Westling, 2018). As noted by McLeskey, et al. (2018) "Two heads are better than one" (p.138). Collaboration that is effective though consists of many specific characteristics, all that must be initiated by the principal. In this particular manner, principals demonstrate their leadership and "lays down the basic melody line and encourages individual "band members" to improvise around the theme" (Portin, 2004, p. 16). McLeskey, et al., (2015) discussed effective leadership and stated "a commitment to a set of core values by teachers and administrators is part of what makes inclusive schools successful" (p. 69). DeVroey, Struyf, and Petry, (2016) agree with McLeskey, et al. (2015) by suggesting "supportive leadership promotes shared values" (p. 3). The attitudes and values brought to the table by the leader of the building, the principal, either creates an atmosphere for collaboration, or creates time for people to get

together with few end results that are positive. As noted earlier, if the school principal has a negative view of inclusion of students with disabilities, what is the expected attitude of the teachers that follow his/her leadership? The goals for effective collaboration must come from the principal.

Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) conducted a case study of leadership with a single principal, Tom Smith, in an elementary school, with regard to his ability to lead changes for building an inclusive environment. The results of this study identified "a central metaphor called "lubricating the human machinery" to improve the lives of teachers and students so that they can do their best work" (p. 253). Specifically, Hoppey et al. found that personal connections with teachers and investing in them by demonstrating care and concern was a key quality. McLeskey, Waldron, and Redd (2011) also conducted a study to examine features that contribute to success in inclusive schools that included conducting interviews with teachers and administrators in order to identify the successful traits from both perspectives. Both studies emphasize school leaders in a supportive role as they attempt to move toward an inclusive environment and being the driving personality leading the charge for inclusive education (McLeskey et al. 2011). Most importantly, Hoppey et al (2013) support the notion that collaboration is vitally important.

Hehir and Katzman (2014) go one step further by stating that simply collaborating is not enough, but that collaboration must engage teachers in problem solving. Problem solving with specific students in mind, guided by the principal that also engages with the parents can lead to success. Collaboration was also a major focus of a study done by Wallace, Anderson, and Bartholomay (2002). Wallace, et al. (2002) noted that inclusion is different in secondary classrooms because these classrooms are more content focused and more challenging to individualize for students with disabilities. In regard to collaboration, they state "The staff's

willingness to collaborate was often attributed to the whole schools' focus on serving all students. This focus was said to unify the staff around a "common vision and/or perspective" (p. 361). The common vision must be set by the principal and staff support provided so that collaboration can occur. The collaboration described resulted in teachers and paraprofessionals working together, planning together, attending professional development together, and having the time to do the work necessary to support inclusionary environments within their schools (Wallace, et al., 2002).

Principals must not only set the vision for a collaborative environment, they must facilitate what actually happens when teachers get together (Hines, 2008). Successful collaboration must be focused on results, improving the quality of education for all students and is in fact, is a critical component in providing inclusive education (Altieri, Colley, Daniel, & Dickenson, 2015; Morgan, 2016; Wallace, et al., 2002). Many educators are reticent about collaborating and often feel unprepared to have discussions regarding students with disabilities (Hines, 2008; Santoli, Sachs, Romey, & McClurg, 2008). However, results focused collaboration has been demonstrated to have positive impacts on all students and especially those students with disabilities included in the general classroom (Wallace, et al., 2008). Focused collaboration also contributes to the feeling of success among the teachers as demonstrated in the Altieri, et al. (2015) study. They suggest that when collaboration was focused on instruction and assessments, the teachers in their study reported improved performance and "significant improvement in classroom behavior and participation (p. 20). Results such as this create an inclusionary environment that supports all students. Finally, McLeskey, et al. (2018) suggests that sharing resources and expertise may be helpful in supporting teachers that do not feel equipped to craft supportive services in their classrooms. They discuss this role as "Collaborating with other

teachers as part of a professional learning community to improve instructional or classroom management skills to support student needs" (McLeskey, et al., 2018, p. 140). Growth of the collaborative professional group equates to growth and support for all students in an inclusionary environment.

Teachers attitudes toward collaboration are changing and many want to have time for collaboration (Da Fonte & Arwood, 2017). Unfortunately, many general education teachers may not know or understand the nature of how their classroom is impacted by the inclusion of students with disabilities and collaboration with a special educator is imperative (Aldridge, 2015). As Altieri, Colley, Daniel, and Dickenson (2015) noted, without a strong vision of inclusion and the collaborative efforts focused on success, inclusive environments devolve into an experiment. Only the principal has the ability to manage those factors that can affect the impact of collaboration on inclusive environments.

As previously noted, a principal's background teaching experience and exposure to professional development through coursework may have impact into the decision-making process for supporting students in inclusionary settings. A principal certainly must demonstrate leadership through their attitudes, intentions, and belief systems regarding inclusion, especially while building a collaborative support network. The final piece that can help inform us as to what a principal does is in how the support is actually structured or designed within the walls of the school

Structural Management

Hehir and Katzman, (2012) stated "A compelling personal narrative is not enough to provide effective leadership. Ultimately, it is what leaders do in leading their schools that makes the difference" (p. 31). When discussing inclusion in the frame of the structure or design for how

things are done, what the principal does matters greatly. The question is what are the structural aspects of support for inclusion as directed by the principal? Choosing the right service delivery model can put the emphasis on success; choosing the wrong model could lead to failure and frustration no matter the visionary leadership of the principal. The principal's budgetary constraints, personnel and resource choices are influencing factors that can shape a supportive structure for inclusion (McLeskey et al., 2018).

When attempting inclusionary reform that moves the school toward effectiveness for all students, Causton and Theoharis (2014) provide us with some guidance by suggesting that the principal starts by creating structured goals. This considers how we would want to arrange the professionals in relation to the needs of the students being met. McLeskey, et al. (2014) also support this notion and go further by pointing out that this is an area where the principal must really know and understand the staff, their strengths, their weaknesses and what they can bring to the collaborative table for supporting inclusion. This is a very important part of the process and may even involve redefining the roles of special educators, para-educators, and general educators (McLeskey, et al., 2014). Ultimately, any changes must be focused on the structure as a learning organization that provides educators with information or data on the success of the inclusionary process (Bryant-Davis, Dieker, Pearl, & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Hehir, et al., 2014; McLeskey, et al., 2014). Fortunately for principals, there are plenty of options.

The first key service delivery model for inclusion is the consultation partnership or collaborative model. In this model, the general educator and the special educator, most often the one charged with overseeing the student's individualized education Plan (IEP), work together to plan and implement services that will take place in the general classroom under the direct oversight of the general teacher (Elliot & McKenney, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2007). The

special educator fills the role of the expert on how the instruction can be modified to meet the needs of the student with an IEP, which supplementary aides are appropriate, and how the student can be supported in ways to accommodate the disability needs. Dettmer, Knackendoffel, and Thurston (2013) state that the benefit of this model is that it really gets the conversation going between the regular education teacher and the student's IEP supervisor, the special educator. Morgan (2016) stated "If inclusion is the goal of a school, then effective collaboration is a necessity" (p.42). Sharing knowledge among educators is key to the success of the individual student in this model. However, this model also requires more support for the regular education teacher since they are the ones that are delivering the instruction (Wlodarczyk, Somma, Bennet &Tiffany, 2015).

Principals need to ensure that the regular education teacher has every tool available to them in order to have strategies that differentiate for the individual needs of each student (Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Salend and Duhaney (1999) reviewed literature regarding the collaborative model and noted that studies have shown many positive aspects such as "higher levels of personal efficacy and higher self-ratings of competence and satisfaction in teaching students with disabilities than general educators who taught in traditional classroom arrangements" (p.122). Concerns noted by Salend & Duhaney (1999) were issues related to finding common planning time to collaborate and administrative support. The ability for teachers to be competent and confident in teaching students with disabilities plays an important role in the success of this model (Tzivinikou, 2015). This is where leadership from the principal can do much to support the collaborative arrangement by providing opportunities for all involved to develop themselves professionally.

Morgan (2016) conducted a qualitative study in which she suggests that collaboration should include shared responsibility toward the acquisition of specific goals and learning targets. When done effectively, she found that the inclusionary process was more satisfying to both educators and students (Morgan, 2016). Morgan (2016) listed time and the power dynamics between educators as potential barriers; barriers that could be addressed by the principal.

The second model is that of team-teaching or co-teaching. This is an area that has been thoroughly studied in the research (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). Co-teaching was initially defined by Cook and Friend (1995) as “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse or blended group of students in a single space” (p.2). The idea of co-teaching has expanded slightly to include the specifics of instruction that include planning or preparing instruction, delivering instruction, and assessing instruction by two professionals in the same room (Isherwood & Barger-Anderson, 2008; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). There are a number of styles of this model of inclusion but the most recognized include one teaching/one assisting, parallel teaching, station teaching, team teaching, and alternative teaching (Kilanowski, Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Rainforth & England, 1997; Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Volonino & Zigmond, 2007; Zigmond and Magiera, 2001). No matter the specific model supported by principals, co-teaching should be used to support all students but primarily used to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general classroom (Isherwood & Barger Anderson, 2008; Murwaski & Dieker, 2004; Rice & Zigmond, 2000).

Scruggs et al. (2007) conducted a metasynthesis of qualitative research regarding the use of co-teaching. They drew from 32 qualitative studies and summarized research that sought to understand the benefits and needs for successful co-teaching, the specific roles of the teachers

involved, and how instruction was delivered (Scruggs et al., 2007). Their findings indicate that a majority of co-teaching experiences are one teacher teaching, the other assisting (predominately done by the special educator). The study also revealed that benefits were mostly listed as increasing knowledge about content (by the special educator) and increasing behavior management skills (by the general education teacher). Two areas of concern or noted as needs in the Scruggs et al. (2007) study was administrative support and planning time. Finally, when it came to instructional delivery, one of the main ideas drawn from the meta-synthesis was that general education teachers tend to teach to whole groups of students, whereas the special educator tends to focus more on specific students and their classroom needs (Scruggs et al. 2007).

Bryant-Davis, Dieker, Pearl, and Kirkpatrick (2012) conducted a review of literature that included a meta-analysis on collaborative teaching. Bryant-Davis et al (2012) reported mixed findings, especially in terms of the effectiveness of the model. They noted one review that suggested "only four articles met the criteria in which the effectiveness of co-teaching was measured empirically and compared statistically with a control condition" (p. 210). Effectiveness of the model has been broached by other researchers as well (Dieker, 2001; Lingo, Barton-Arwood, Jolivette, 2011). Many researchers point out that the problem of effectiveness is connected to the emphasis on the biggest negative aspect of co-teaching: relationships (Brown, Howerter, & Morgan, 2013; Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010). Friend et al. (2010) specifically stated that "Most inquiry on co-teaching has emphasized co-teacher's roles and relationships or program logistics rather than demonstrating its impact on student achievement and other key outcomes" (p. 10). Making the point of how apprehensive teachers are with co-teaching, Altieri, Colley, Daniel, and Dickenson (2015) conducted a study regarding

collaboration between co-teachers and noted as a concern that "co-teaching is either not allowed or considered an experiment" and that the divide between special education and regular education is deeply entrenched (p.21). This further emphasizes that inclusion is still a difficult cultural bridge to cross with all educators and effectiveness is not part of the discussion as a whole. When it comes to co-teaching, principals have a multi-faceted set of challenges; the challenge of creating effective inclusionary environments focused on results and navigating the balance of relationships within the model they choose to support.

Finally, the third model, known as para-professional support, para-educator supports, or aide services, is one where an individual without a teaching certification is added into the classroom to support each student with an IEP and support the implementation of special services with those students (Elliot & McKenney, 1998). Para-educators typically play a role where non-instructional tasks are done to supplement the regular educator's teaching, although their role in the classroom continues to expand (Walker & Snell, 2017; Sharma & Salend, 2016; McLeskey et al., 2014). Many para-professionals even plan and implement classroom instruction under the guidance of the teacher (McLeskey et al., 2014).

Sharma and Salend (2016) conducted a review of the research and found that non-instructional roles included clerical tasks, personal care tasks, and progress monitoring of the student with an IEP. They also cite a number of researchers that report a confusion as to what the para-educator's role is and how they are managed (Sharma & Salend 2016). Douglas, Chapin, and Nolan (2016) emphasized this point regarding confusion by suggesting that teachers feel inadequately prepared to manage para-educators and the para-educators themselves feel insufficient when it comes to training and understanding their role.

Douglas et al. (2016) noted three themes, all under the purview of the principal, which could increase the effectiveness of para-professional goals for inclusionary environments. These themes included “creating effective teams, ensuring appropriate training and evaluation, and recommendations for the field” (p.63). The positive experiences noted by professionals in this study all revolved around consistent support from the school principal, specifically in navigating the multi-faceted relationships between the para-educator, the special education teacher, and the regular classroom teacher (Douglas et al., 2015). The necessity of defining specific roles and providing collaborative support from the school principal cannot be understated in supporting inclusionary environments through the use of para-educators (McLeskey, et al., 2014; Sharma & Salend, 2016; Wadsworth & Knight, 1996).

Instructional Delivery Models

Choosing a model for delivery of services is no doubt extremely important, but just as important is the structure that helps those services be more effective. As previously mentioned, the collaboration among all professionals as well as including families in the decision-making is extremely important and necessary (Cook & Friend, 1995; Rainforth & England, 1997; Solis et al. 2012). Another part of ensuring success is done through providing effective instructional frameworks that meet the needs of students based on staffing resources and other factors (Cuaston & Theoharis, 2014; Hehir & Katzman, 2012; McLeskey, et al., 2014; McLeskey, et al., 2018). McLeskey et al. (2018) contend that improvements in student achievement can only be obtained through a change to researched based teaching practices, the strategies used in the classroom. Changes in research based teacher practices, can only be done through collaboration and teamwork (McLeskey, et al. 2018). Finally, collaboration and teamwork should be solely focused on individual students through the use of data (McLeskey, et al., 2018; McLeskey, et al,

2014). Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are two highly researched and effective instructional practices that promote the inclusion of all students. It is the principal that can provide leadership to ensure that these effective structures are integrated into the culture of the school.

School principals can only guarantee a free and appropriate education for all students by managing and supporting excellence in the teachers and in the effectiveness of the instruction (Katz, 2013). Loewenberg and Forzani (2009) state that “teachers are key to student learning, and efforts to improve teacher quality have proliferated” (p. 497). Ensuring teacher quality is where school leaders can have one of the most impactful effects for an inclusive environment and on students that struggle academically (Master, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2014; Lynch, 2012). In fact, Lynch (2012) states “principals influence teachers who then influence students (p.42). A school leader’s influence starts with the school leader’s vision. Although teacher quality starts at the preservice level, it is the school leader’s vision of what good instruction is based upon that portends to success in the school; the school principal is the key to ensuring effective instructional practice and thus the success of inclusion (AuCoin, 2014; Billingsley, et al., 2017). MTSS, and UDL are highly effective instructional practices that rely on data to pinpoint specifically where quality instruction can impact the inclusion of all students (Billingsley, et al., 2017; Brooks, 2016).

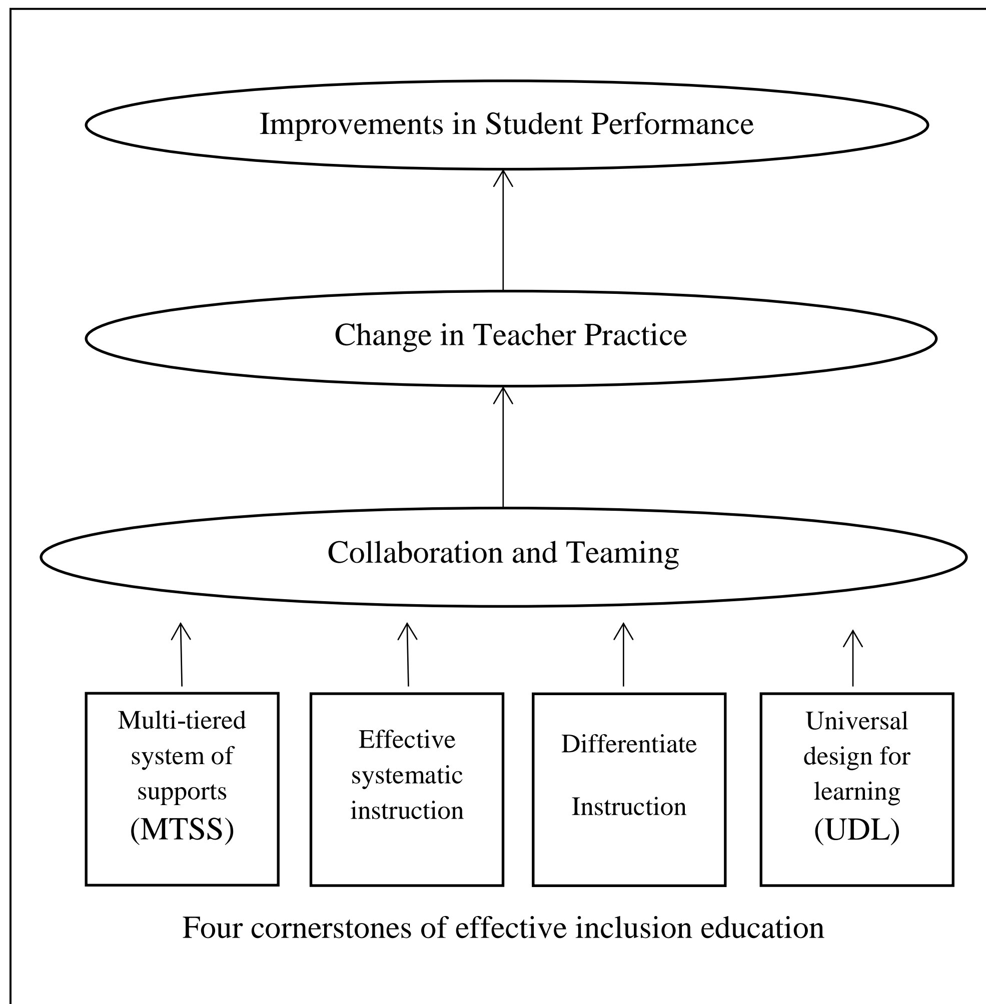
MTSS is described as “a framework that employs data-informed decision making in the delivery of academic and behavioral instruction and support to all learners based on their individual needs and responsiveness” (McLeskey, et al., 2018, p. 50). The framework for MTSS and similar researched based supports such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS) focus on improved student outcomes (Sugai &

Horner, 2009; Utley & Obiakor, 2015). The roots of these frameworks arose from the accountability movement of IDEA (2004) and NCLB (2002) and although not mentioned by name, fall under the category of scientifically based research initiatives (Sugai & Horner, 2009).

McLeskey et al. (2018) provides a theoretical model that connects effective inclusive instruction with teacher collaboration and can be the basis for understanding the connection between providing structure and supporting effective inclusionary instruction. A review of effective programming can provide us with further impetus for consideration of this model. However, it is ultimately the principal that can support and implement these supports.

Figure 2.1

Enhancing Effective Inclusive Education through Collaboration



The Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability and Reform center, known as CEEDAR, has supported the joint document called Principal Leadership: Moving Toward Inclusive and High-Achieving Schools for Students with Disabilities (Billingsley et al. 2017). This document provides school leaders with some basic guidelines for overseeing effective inclusionary environments such as: supporting high expectations for students with disabilities, developing positive, orderly, and safe learning environments, promoting effective instructional practices, supporting a system for progress monitoring, creates a collaborative culture for teachers' work, provides opportunities for professional learning and teacher feedback, and developing a culture that supports and values diverse learners. Billingsley et al. (2017) also clearly lay the responsibility of supporting inclusive environments on the school leader or principal by stating "In inclusive schools, principals work to ensure that all members of the school community welcome and value students with disabilities, and they encourage everyone in the school, as well as parents and those from other agencies to collaborate and share their expertise so that students with disabilities have opportunities to achieve improved outcomes in school and post-school life." (p. 42). Damer (2001) furthers this notion by stating "One recognized hallmark of successful inclusion programs is collaboration among all individuals" (p.21). This is most evident in the classroom where instruction takes place. In conjunction with that document, McLeskey and his team produced as set of research based high leverage instructional practices for use with students with disabilities. This list includes:

- Identifying and prioritizing long and short-term learning goals.
- Systematically designing instruction toward a specific goal.
- Adapting curriculum tasks and materials for specific learning goals.
- Teaching cognitive and metacognitive strategies to support learning and independence.

- Providing scaffolded supports.
- Use of explicit instruction.
- Use of flexible grouping.
- Using strategies to promote active student engagement
- Use of assistive and instructional technologies.
- Providing intensive instruction.
- Teach students to maintain and generalize new learning across time and settings.
- Provide positive and constructive feedback to guide students' learning and behavior.

(McLeskey et al., 2017)

These practices are not meant simply as a check-sheet for school leaders but a way for teacher behavior in the classroom to focus on instructional practice in any content area (McLeskey et al. 2017). Although these practices are geared primarily toward special education teachers, inclusive general education classrooms with special and diverse needs demonstrate a need for these guidelines. For example, identifying and prioritizing long and short term goals is an area supported by educational researchers for every teacher that has students with disabilities included in their classrooms in order to meet the student's specialized learning goals (McLeskey, Maheady, Billingsley, Brownell, & Lewis, 2019). Similarly, Scott, Vitale, & Masten (1998) identified "a representative illustration of the major categories of teacher adaptations (typical or substantial) appearing in the literature" (p.107) such as modifying instruction and assignments, altering instructional materials and curriculum, varying instructional grouping, and facilitating progress monitoring, that almost mirror many of the strategies identified by McLeskey et al. (2017). The Scott et al. (1998) literature study reported that the adaptations by general education classroom teachers benefited the entire class and not only those students with disabilities. They

also surmised, based upon teacher reporting, that the adaptations were reasonable and did not require an inordinate amount of extra time to implement.

The emphasis on collaboration between special educators and general education teachers has led to an educational principle known as Universal Design (UD, now known as Universal Design for Learning or UDL). These principles first started out as an alteration in the physical environment to accommodate persons with physical disabilities but was also then applied to the educational realm (Katz & Sokal, 2016; McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2006). Shaw et al. stated in 2006 that "Although it is premature to promote UD as an effective model of inclusion, it is timely to iterate the question of alternative approaches to effective instruction" (p. 172).

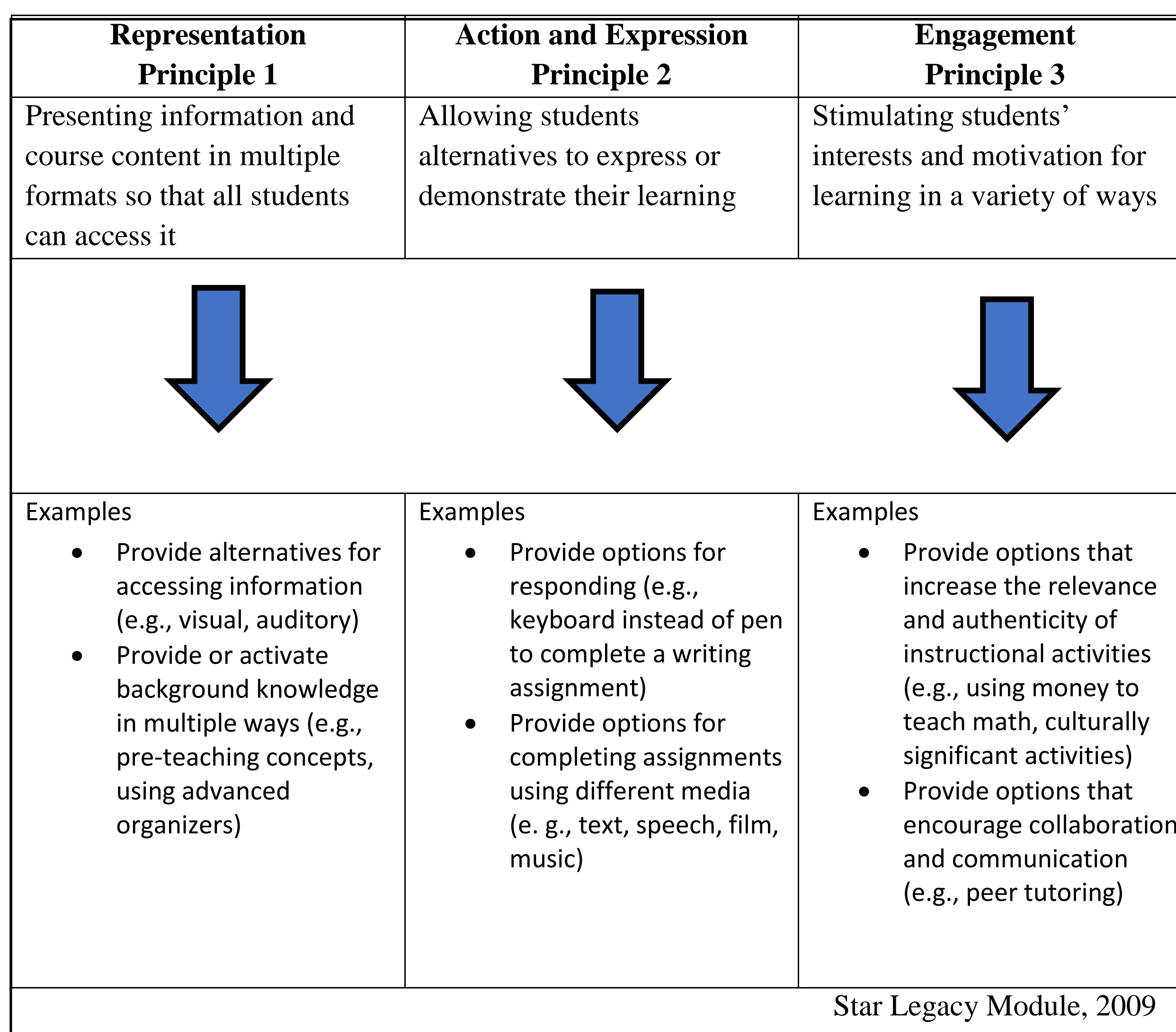
Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, and Jackson (2002) went on to say that "The UDL framework helps us to see that inflexible curricular materials and methods are barriers to diverse learners just as inflexible buildings with stairs as the only entry option are barriers to people with physical disabilities" (p.9). Hitchcock et al. (2002) go further by suggesting that too many educational programs focus on the students as the problem when the tools used for educating are in need of change. The idea for supporting and reason to use UDL is to remove those barriers that prevent students with disabilities from having successful and supported access to the general curriculum by focusing on appropriate and effective instruction for all students (Katz & Sokal, 2016; Jimenez, Graf, & Rose, 2007). This should be the goal for school principals, provide access, offer support and ensure opportunity for success.

Katz and Sokal (2016) cite a number of studies that demonstrate the success of UDL in promoting the success of students with disabilities in an inclusion setting. While the social aspect of inclusion is generally noted as the main reason given as to why students with disabilities

should be educated alongside non-disabled peers, Katz and Sokal (2016) note research that emphasize the actual learning process, especially group learning and student engagement.

Courey, Tappe, Siker and LePage (2012) noted that one of the key benefits of using UDL can be found in the approach to lesson planning. They reference the following graphic from The STAR Legacy Module (Appendix E) for UDL as a way for educators to form an understanding of how educational objectives can be differentiated.

Figure 2.2



Representation Principle 1	**Action and Expression Principle 2**	**Engagement Principle 3**
Presenting information and course content in multiple formats so that all students can access it	Allowing students alternatives to express or demonstrate their learning	Stimulating students' interests and motivation for learning in a variety of ways
↓	↓	↓
Examples • Provide alternatives for accessing information (e.g., visual, auditory) • Provide or activate background knowledge in multiple ways (e.g., pre-teaching concepts, using advanced organizers)	Examples • Provide options for responding (e.g., keyboard instead of pen to complete a writing assignment) • Provide options for completing assignments using different media (e. g., text, speech, film, music)	Examples • Provide options that increase the relevance and authenticity of instructional activities (e.g., using money to teach math, culturally significant activities) • Provide options that encourage collaboration and communication (e.g., peer tutoring)
		Star Legacy Module, 2009

These researchers suggest that by designing instruction around multiple ways to represent, express and engage students in the content, successful inclusion is possible. McGuire et al. (2006) discussed the idea of using UDL in regular education classes as a way to improve outcomes of all students. They go further by suggesting that if UDL was utilized as the instructional platform in all classrooms, less focus would be needed for remediation and compensatory education and it could lessen the overall need for supports specifically for children with disabilities (McGuire et al., 2006). Implementing and supporting models like UDL is an area where principals can provide direction and ongoing support for teachers to ensure effective inclusionary environments.

Summary

The principal has been a position of leadership for over 100 years. The position has evolved into one that has taken on tremendous responsibility but mostly to ensure effective educational environments for all students. Principals' background experience, knowledge and competency provide a foundation for the leadership and culture they nourish as well as the management of structure within the building and in the classroom that create an effective environment for all students to flourish.

It has now been over 40 years since P.L. 94-142 and the movement to include all students in our general education classrooms. Although reform has pushed some gains over time, supporting special needs through inclusion continues to be an area of ongoing struggle for school leadership (Bilingsley, McLeskey & Crockett, 2017; DiPaola, et al., 2004; McLeskey, Waldron, & Redd, 2014). In fact, even though inclusion was mandated through law for decades now and the higher expectations of achievement added to force districts into supporting students with special needs, few gains have been realized (Billingsley, McLeskey & Crockett, 2017;

McLeskey & Waldron, 2006). An understanding of the current state of inclusive environments may help us understand more ways to grow in supporting students with disabilities. We can begin to understand what inclusionary environments look like by investigating the background experiences of the principal, especially in regard to what helps their decision-making process, the leadership and how it is demonstrated in the culture for inclusion, and the structural supports and programs that are put into place to ensure effective inclusionary environments. A research model will be developed that will be designed to gather information in those areas for examination.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Statement of the Problem

Public Law 94-142 known as the Education for All Handicap Children Act (EAHCA) of 1975 and its upgrades, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), have mandated that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; USDOE, 2010). This mandate has resulted in students with disabilities being mainstreamed into classrooms with their non-disabled peers in a process known as inclusion (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017; Booth, 1999; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Hehir & Katzman, 2012) The result has been more students with disabilities being served in in general education classes than ever before (Mackey, 2014; McLeskey & Wladron, 2015). School leaders, and specifically school principals, have had to deal with ever increasing responsibilities including the physical management of the building, ever shrinking budgetary constraints, curricular maintenance, instructional programming along with being the visionary change agent in the building (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). The inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education environments has posed a great challenge on school leadership since it is really special education programming in a general education setting (Bateman & Bateman, 2014; Booth, 1999).

The challenge of supporting inclusionary environments for school principals has been wide-ranging. Many principals may not have ever been exposed to teaching or working with students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012). To compound that issue, many school principals have had little to no experience or education in specialized programming to support students with disabilities (Lynch, 2012). This has led many researchers to question their competency and leadership in

regard to supporting inclusionary environments (Bateman et al., 2014; Bateman, Gervais, Wysocki, & Cline, 2017; Lynch, 2012). P.L. 94-142 was a promise of equal access for a quality education for students with disabilities (Bicehouse & Faieta, 2017). The responsibility of following through on that promise lies in the hands of the building principal as the leader; it is the principal that can ensure a successful and supportive environment that grows the potential of all students, including those students with disabilities (Schmidt & Venet, 2012; Templeton, 2017; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). This research study sought to understand what inclusionary environments look like through the eyes of the principal, the leadership supporting them, and the structural management that supports students included in the general education classrooms.

Research Questions

The following research questions provide a guide for learning and understanding more thoroughly about inclusion through an examination of a school principal's background experience, vision and leadership, and approach to managing inclusive environments.

1. What role has a principal's background experience as a teacher, employment experience, and certification coursework played in the decisions regarding inclusionary environments?
2. How does a school principal implement a vision of acceptance and support for students with disabilities, especially in an inclusionary setting?
3. How does the principal develop an environment of collaborative inquiry for the professionals involved in inclusive classrooms to thrive?
4. What are the structural arrangements and instructional programming implemented by school principals that support inclusionary environments?

Research Design and Methodology

In order to gather information to answer the previous questions, a brief overview of research designs can assist us in understanding which design would best provide the data necessary. The answer as to which research methodology would work best in this particular sense is in the nature of the approach of what I wanted to accomplish and for the researcher to identify their own philosophical position (Mayer, 2015). Phenomenological qualitative research is concerned with exploring and discovering meaning from the environment through description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Tracy, 2013). Maxwell (2013) stated that qualitative studies are the best approach for description because they validate "the participant's perspectives and view their reality" (p. 22). In contrast to other research methods, phenomenological qualitative research pursues deeper meaning beyond a cause and effect result; qualitative research "is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018, p. 38).

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the social setting within a school that interacts with and through the leadership and management of the principal. This study also sought to understand how the uniqueness of each principal, his/her prior experiences and how their education regarding inclusion, assists him/her to make decisions regarding inclusion. For example, if a principal does not have a background in special education and has had limited special education development in their certification area, what or whom do they rely to make decisions for supporting inclusionary environments? To achieve this, the researcher used a phenomenological qualitative approach through an analysis that attempts to inductively understand the experiences encountered in a specific environment and describe what

those environments look like and how they operate through the eyes of the principal (Babbie, 2016; Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Reiners, 2012).

A phenomenological qualitative research can achieve understanding of these kinds of environments by using a descriptive, constructivist approach. Constructivist theory opines the idea that the researcher immerses in the social and cultural experiences of an environment, interacts with the subjects, and constructs meaning from the data collected (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Warren & Karner, 2010). A constructivist approach is necessary for this research because of the complex nature of personalities involved, foundational structure of inclusion in an individual school, and the culture of everyone involved in an inclusionary environment. Structuration theory "directs the researcher's attention to the relationship between individuals and institutions" (Tracy, 2013, p.59). It is this theory that guided my approach to understanding the relationships, structure and actions taken by school principals to create an enriched inclusionary environment.

A phenomenological qualitative approach and a thorough an analysis of data gathered can help us to inductively understand these aspects of the principals being studied (Babbie, 2016; Bloomberg et al., 2016; Cresswell & Cresswell, 2017; Reiners, 2012). Having the principal describe his/her background experiences with inclusion provided the researcher with the data necessary. In order to gain a thorough understanding of the social setting surrounding inclusionary environments, the following data was gathered and analyzed:

- The backgrounds and perceptions of a principal's preparation as well as personal teaching experiences and how it impacts their approach to inclusion as a process.
- The principal's approach to mission, vision and the cultural challenges of managing inclusionary environments.

- The principal's perceptions of the relationships among all professionals involved in the education within inclusionary environments.
- The principal's perceptions and attitudes toward managing staff in an inclusionary environment in conjunction with a chosen mode of implementation such as consultation partnerships, team teaching or para-supported models (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2007).
- A principal's thoughts and descriptions of the approaches and structures used in the classrooms where students with special needs are supported.

These types of data can most appropriately be obtained through participant interviews (Bevan, 2014). Tracy (2013) stated that "interviews enable the researcher to stumble upon and further explore complex phenomena that may otherwise be hidden or unseen" (p. 132). Interviews can pull meaning between participants to uncover perceptions, ideas, actions and narratives of the environment (Tracy, 2013). Moustakas (1994) states "Phenomenology is committed to descriptions of experiences, not explanations or analyses" (p. 58).

Participant Population and Sampling

I recruited Principals as the primary population for analysis. I selected participants using purposeful or theoretical sampling, because the data gathered helped best fulfill the goals of this study (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Seidman, 1991; Tracy, 2013). Principals are crucial for demonstrating leadership and control over the inclusionary environments discussed and are the best population to understand all the aspects of inclusion. It is the principal that must lead the efforts to change culture across the school to one that is more inclusive. It is the principal that must take the lead in managing staff and supporting specific modes of inclusionary supports. It is the principal that observes, offers support, and creates a vision for driving academic success.

I determined potential participants using a theoretical-construct sample questionnaire, found in Appendix A (Tracy, 2013; Warren & Karner, 2010). I also used theoretical-construct sampling to narrow down participants to those managing inclusionary environments using a demographic questionnaire (Tracy, 2013, p.136). I began to initiate contact to district superintendents through email asking for permission to conduct research in their district (Appendix B). Once permission has been obtained, I contacted the potential participant (Appendix C) and asked them to follow a link to the demographic questionnaire. Prospective participants could either continue by completing demographical questionnaire or simply ignore the request for participation. Prospective participants were informed that they would receive compensation if they were chosen for research interviews. I purposefully selected study participants that met the following criteria:

- Principals with at least three years' experience.
- Principals of small (population of 100-1000) rural schools in Western Pennsylvania that are from the consortium of Intermediate Unit 4 (Grove City, PA), and Intermediate Unit 6 (Clarion, PA).
- Principals that have had experience as a classroom teacher.
- Secondary level principals- Middle School or High School (grades 7-12).

There are several reasons for selecting participants that fit these specific criteria. Principals should have at least three years of experience because I believe there is an extreme learning curve to handling the duties of Principal. I believe it would take three years in order to have a real understanding of the nature of the intricacies of the job description; managing inclusion is generally not the first thing one thinks about in this role. Principals that are the sole administrator in the building are preferred. This goes along with the idea of having a small rural school; many

small schools have eliminated assistant principals or vice principals leaving only one individual with those duties. Choosing a principal that has actual classroom teaching experience is important. Currently, in Pennsylvania, any educator with an education certificate may apply to obtain a principal certification. This includes guidance counselors, speech therapists, occupational therapists and other specific certifications that do not involve direct classroom teaching. It is important in this study to understand if the experiences with inclusion in the classroom as a teacher have impact upon the decision-making processes as a principal. Finally, inclusion is different in a secondary school versus that of an elementary. Secondary schools tend to be subject driven more than in elementary or primary schools (DeVroey, et al. 2016; Wallace, Anderson & Bartholomay, 2002).

All participants chosen from the submitted demographical datasheets were contacted and given the opportunity to participate in the full research study. Data from the demographic questionnaire was recorded and is provided in Appendix D. All principals that agreed to participation in this study were contacted via email as long as they fit the parameters for recruitment criteria. Although acknowledging the difficulties regarding the proper number of interviews for qualitative studies, Malterud, Siersma, and Guassora (2015) recommend the concept of "information power using study aim, sample specificity, use of established theory, quality of dialogue, and analysis theory" (p. 2). Morse (2000) uses related categories but places heavy emphasis on the depth of the data. My intention was to gather enough data to provide a rich contribution and detailed description of information regarding inclusionary environments (Dworkin, 2012; Seidman, 1991; Tracy, 2013). However, more interviews would have been undertaken if it was felt that the richness and depth of data did not provide a clear description of the scene and more was needed to be uncovered through further interviewing (DeCuir-Gunby &

Schutz, 2017; Warren & Karner, 2010). I contacted the participants for instructions and scheduling of the interviews once all were identified and met all criteria.

I ensured confidentiality using the following steps:

1. An initial communication sent to principals of small rural schools that provided a description of the research including purpose, overall design, and participant protections as well as consent to participate in research (Appendix C). All potential participants were required to submit a completed demographic questionnaire (Appendix A). Participants were also be notified of compensation for participation.
2. I chose participants based upon previously listed criteria for participation. l attempted to hold up to two potential participants as back-up for participants that withdrew or if there was a need for further data.
3. I electronically archived all demographic data using a password protected file. I also assigned a participant number to all participants and the only thing connecting the participant to the research was the contact email address for communication purposes. The participant designation was the only connecting information to the data from this point forward.
5. I began to conduct all interviews with participants at the site school where they are the principal through online streaming programs such as ZOOM or Skype. Before the time of interviews, I obtained informed consent for recording of the interview. All interviews were recorded.
6. I transcribed all interviews from recordings and then deleted recordings. I also secured all transcriptions on a pass protected computer or computer database.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection were completed through single participant, semi-structured, informant type interviews in which the interviewees "are experienced and savvy in the scene, can articulate stories and explanations that others would not" (Tracy, 2013, p. 140). As noted previously, inclusionary environments involve a multitude of personalities, differing structure, and are constantly evolving to meet the needs of the individuals involved. School principals must manage all of these aspects. Due to these factors, I utilized a semi-structured, ethnographic type of interview which allowed for a more conversational approach that lead to spontaneous and emergent exchange of information and told the story of the inclusionary environment of each principal (Englander, 2012; Seidman, 1991; Tracy, 2013). Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) state in-depth interviews "offer the potential to capture a person's perspective of an event or experience" and this was a major point of this research (p.155).

A responsive interview stance where the researcher began to build "a reciprocal relationship, honoring interviewees with unfailingly respectful behavior, reflecting on their own biases and openly acknowledging their potential effect" was used (Tracy, 2013, p. 142). The interviews were semi-structured in that the researcher asked the initial question or provided a prompt for discussion but allowed room for clarifying questions and maintaining a somewhat casual atmosphere (Bevan, 2014; Englander, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). The key to getting a deeper understanding of the experience of the day- to-day functions of a principal was to "listen actively and to move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant has begun to share" (Seidman, 1991, p.59).

The researcher obtained informed consent for recording before the interview. Initial greetings were followed by a warm-up/ get to know one another discussion about how they came

to be a principal. Research questions were generated from the three areas of research: background and experience in special education, leadership of culture, and structural management.

The intent of the interview question or prompt was to explore the inclusionary scene and to gather phenomenological data from the interviewees. I sought to avoid probing questions in order to keep the participant at ease in discussing and describing their environments, but open ended, descriptive questions and prompts were used to further define the scene. Questions focused on the experiences of the principal that reflected on behaviors, actions, and posed the ideal situation for an inclusionary environment. After obtaining informed consent, the following questions and prompts guided the interview process:

Background and Experience

1. In what ways have your experiences as a teacher in dealing with inclusion influenced your thinking as a leader overseeing inclusionary environments?
2. Please describe a time as a teacher dealing with inclusion that was frustrating and how did you handle the frustration?
3. What have you found in your pre-service principal preparation program that is different or similar to your on-the- job experience as a principal in regard to inclusionary environments?
4. Describe situations you experienced as a principal dealing with inclusion that have been frustrating and how have you dealt with them.

Leadership and Culture

1. What advice or guidance have you given to staff that are reluctant to include students with disabilities into the general education classroom?

2. Describe the relationship you have with the general education teacher in regards overseeing inclusion in the classroom and how do you cultivate a working relationship that supports inclusion?
3. Imagine yourself as a teacher in your building and describe what you see as the perfect environment for inclusion as well as the supports you would need for success.
4. Imagine the perfect inclusionary scenario for you as a principal and describe what it looks like.

Structural Management

1. Identify and describe the structures that you use to manage inclusion in your building (for example collaboration, team teaching or the use of paraprofessionals)?
2. Please describe inclusionary strategies you would use if you were a teacher back in the classroom?
3. Please describe how you create an environment of collaboration between all the stakeholders involved in supporting the inclusion of all children.
4. What types of academic strategies do your teachers utilize in the classroom to support student inclusion into the general education classroom and can you describe what they look like or how they operate?

Credibility and Authenticity

Maxwell (2013) argues that "qualitative researchers generally deal with validity threats as particular events or processes that lead to invalid conclusions" (p. 124). Qualitative studies do not always produce results similar to quantitative research so criteria such as validity and reliability do not fit with many qualitative research (Krefting, 1991). This researcher was attempting to describe inclusionary environments through phenomenological study. Due to the

nature of this type of research, I attempted to support the credibility of the process and the confidence or authenticity of the results through the use of specific qualitative devices.

Researcher bias is a common problem in qualitative research (Maxwell, 2013). I am currently in a principal position and was formerly a special education teacher. Having that background could have impact on how results were collected and interpreted. It would be easy to allow personal belief systems about what an inclusionary environment looks like to have influence over collection and interpretation. This researcher could have held, consciously or unconsciously, a bias in the approach to this research which was acknowledged and is part of the process.

Researcher bias can also affect collection of data processes. "Participant reactivity" as described by Maxwell (2013) and further discussed by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016) occurs when the researcher blends their role as information seekers with the role of the interviewee. This becomes evident in the interview process by adding questions that may be leading or suggestive. I intended to avoid this potential bias by closely following the interview questions and only asking for further details or clarifying information that describe the environments researched.

Member checking was also be used to add credibility and authenticity to the transcriptions of materials and results. Koelsch (2013), describes member checking as the phase where "persons who provided the information are able to determine if the researcher has accurately reported their stories" (p. 170). I began conducting first level member checking with all participants by supplying individual transcripts to the interviewee for their review. In addition to the first level member check, another level was added to enhance authenticity of results. Shenton (2004) recommends "member checking should involve verification of the investigator's

emerging theories and inferences as these were formed during the dialogues" (p. 68). I completed this by sending the results first level data analysis to each interviewee for their review accompanied by a brief reflective commentary to ensure results matched the thinking that was intended.

Data Analysis Procedures

Phenomenological research provides an abundance of rich, descriptive evidence of the environment and participant's perceptions of their environments (Willis, 2008). I gathered that evidence through participant interviews and transcribed all data into the research database NVivo. As the data began to be analyzed, I used member checking to verify the clarity and inferences of the data with the interviewee.

The data analysis stage of this research was intended to meet the goals for this project and gain an understanding of what inclusionary environments look like through the eyes of principals. Robson, et al. (2016) describes three types of coding for qualitative data obtained through interviews: Open coding, axial coding, and substantive-level coding (p. 163). I attempted to accomplish this following these five stages of thematic coding analysis according to Robson and McCartan (2016, p.469):

1. Familiarizing yourself with the data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Identifying themes
4. Constructing thematic networks
5. Integration and interpretation

Initial data was organized by participant and by category while the researcher tried to get a feel for the data and what it was describing. The individual questions were divided into three

main categories: background and experience, leadership and culture, and structural management. The initial intent was to begin to form an understanding of what is happening or what it looks like in each of these areas, and to get a general feel of these environments and the emergent themes (Reiners, 2012; Robson & McCartan, 2016). Tracy (2013) refers to this as the data immersion phase, where the researcher simply tries to begin forming an overall viewpoint about the data and is not meant for interpretation. Using primary-cycle or first-level coding through NVIVO software or similar computerized data management, I began to build a story using only the language pulled from each question. NVIVO is a computerized software program that helps to provide a structured coding system that can help researchers focus on the ideas behind clusters of information. This stage of coding served to describe or demonstrate the basics of the data and connect the data based on similar language patterns used by the interviewees (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Tracy, 2013).

Primary coding summarized the data based upon and modified from Saldana's (2016) data and codes table as identified in this figure (p. 230).

Figure 3.1

Participant	**Interview Summary**	**Primary Codes**
Principal A		
Principal B		
Principal C		
Principal D		

As Saldana (2016) stated, "first cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data" (p. 236). I planned on coding data and summarizing based upon the categories of questions.

I intended on viewing the data based upon the categories of the questions: background, leadership, and structural management. Although I attempted to explore the scene of inclusionary environments through the eyes of the principal, generating initial ideas and familiarizing myself with the data was done through InVivo coding. Saldana (2016) discusses InVivo coding as "a word or phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record" (p. 105). I began to ruminate on the exact words as taken from the transcripts and attempted to put my own mind into the mind of the principals I interviewed, especially as it related to each category. For example, in the first category of background, I sought to get a feel for the experiences of the principal as a teacher, as the same individual going through their principal preparation program, and finally as a principal making decisions about inclusionary environments. It was then, when I was familiar with the data, I began to identify key ideas.

Second level coding brings the data forward for comparisons and identifying themes (Tracy, 2013). I will used Axial coding to begin reassembling individual words and give meaning to the words or phrases and identifying themes (Tracy, 2013). I constructed thematic networks to provide meaning from the data in a way that connected or grouped data together. In this phase of coding, I was looking for specific actions or strategies that the principal verbalized, words that described feelings or beliefs, personal values and how it affects the principal's ability to support inclusive environments, settings, relationships, along with other words or phrases that are descriptive of the phenomena. Saldana (2016) suggests that with each level of coding, "the codes should become fewer in number, not more" (p.235). I used axial coding to predicate all prior codes on the themes that arose from each category, especially as it described the key ideas in the categories of background, leadership, and structural management. Once again, the focus was on description and exploration of inclusionary environments by the principals.

The final phase of data analysis involved making analytical decisions about the significance of the data collected, especially in comparison to research already done regarding the topic of inclusion. This is where I attempted to integrate and interpret what I have discovered with what is known. I used a constant comparative method to make comparisons of the data to one another, analyze and code information, and develop themes for each category (Kolb, 2012). This was the time to decide if further code fracturing is necessary or if the data was ready for analyzing for theory. Tracy (2013) stated that the qualitative data, at this point, should tell us more than just what is happening or going on in the scene. She stated that researchers at this point should be able to make some assumptions about causality. This researcher did not attempt to assign causality but simply made connections to current and past research in order to understand the inclusionary environment in a more enlightened way moving forward. Mayer (2015) stated "Exploratory research seeks new insights into phenomena and sheds light on ambiguous situations…. Descriptive research in contrast addresses more specific issues" (p. 53). This research is was about more thoroughly understanding the environments of the principals and schools of this study; corollary evidence to why this is happening was not the aim of this research but exploring and describing the scene will support an understanding of inclusion (Lester, 1999).

Using the thematic data, I began to develop and integrate ideas into meaning (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In this interpretive stage, I began to use critical analysis techniques such as compare and contrast, comparison of similarities and differences, and tried to develop the emergent themes into a coherent description of inclusive environments.

Summary

School principals have a tremendous amount of responsibility. Part of those responsibilities is ensuring a quality education for students with disabilities through the process known as inclusion. Principals' background experience and competency provide a foundation for the leadership and culture they nourish as well as the management of structure within the building and in the classroom that create an effective inclusionary environment. It is this environment that this research sought to explore and understand. A descriptive, phenomenological research was conducted on these inclusionary environments which included one-on-one interviews and qualitative analysis of the data extrapolated from those interviews. It was the hope of the researcher to learn and understand the social structure of inclusion through the interactions of the people tasked with the responsibility of overseeing inclusionary environments: the principal.

Chapter 4 Findings

Preface

Phenomenological qualitative research is concerned with exploring and discovering meaning from the environment through description (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2018; Tracy, 2013). The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of the social setting within a school that interacts with and through the leadership and management of the principal. In order to provide the volume of data necessary to satisfy phenomenological research methodologies, this study planned for at least ten participants. After following a strict methodology to recruit participants to provide the necessary data for phenomenological research, only three participants could be secured that also fit the criteria parameters set by the researcher as identified through the demographic questionnaire. Based upon the data received, it was determined to conduct a three-participant case study using phenomenological approaches.

Gerring (2004) stated that a case study is "an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (p.342). In this research, I conducted an intensive case study of three principals using phenomenological techniques that provided data to explore and discover meaning through descriptions of the principal's background and experience, leadership and culture, and the structural management of the inclusionary setting. This research was conducted through participant interviews with principals from three rural schools. Before reviewing the findings derived from those interviews, the following demographic data will provide an overview of the demographic values of principals that participated throughout the process.

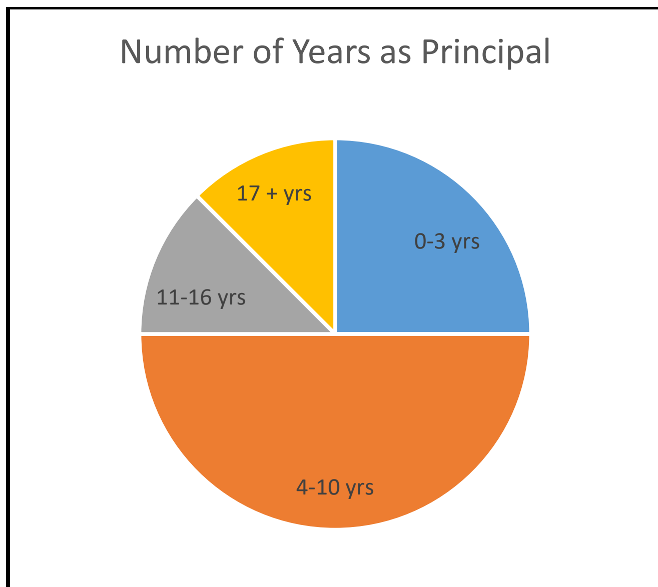
Demographic Data

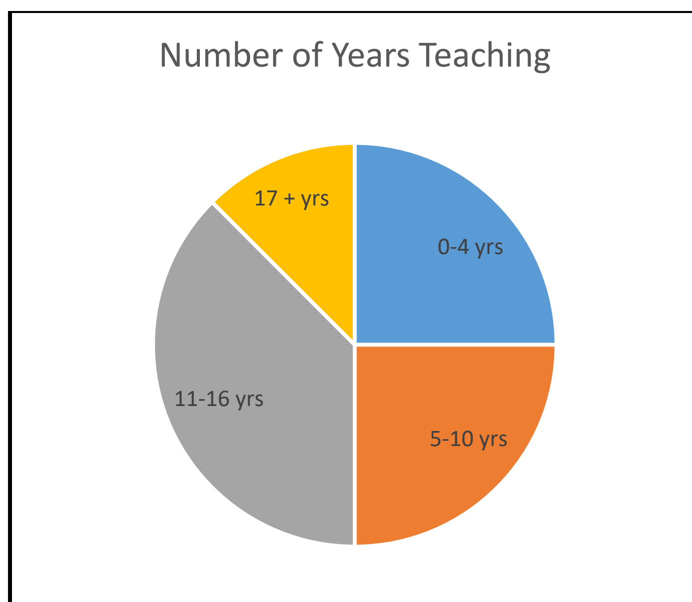
To begin this study, participants had to be drafted according to the study criteria

- At least three years of principal experience.
- Principals of small rural schools (100-1000 students).
- Must have had experience as a classroom teacher.
- A secondary level administrator (middle or high school 7-12).

A demographic questionnaire was given to all prospective participants. Appendix A and D contains a complete list of demographic questions and responses. The overall demographic data collected before the interviews can provide some interesting insights for comparison, and there are areas of interest that can be pulled from the overall responses to the demographic questionnaire.

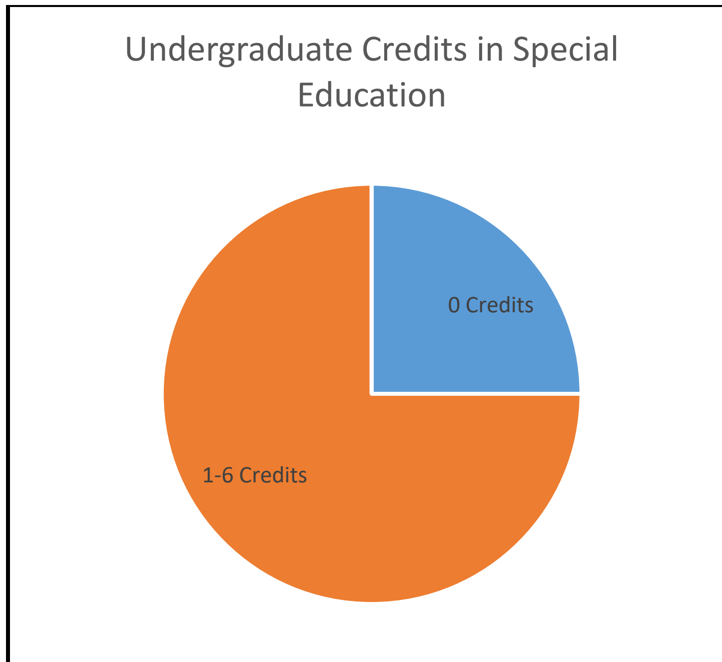
The following two graphs shown here represent the number of years holding a principal position, and the number of years in education.

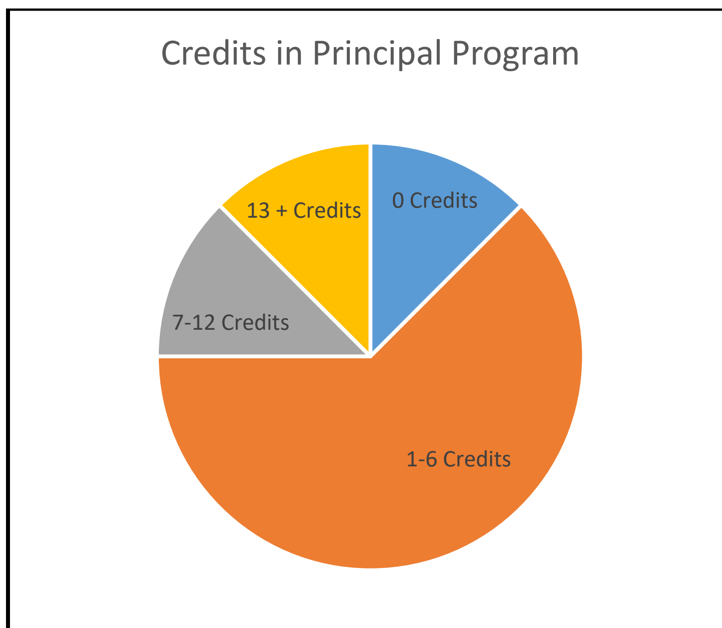




These two questions, how many years working as an administrator and number of years teaching are elemental in getting an idea of the individuals who lead inclusionary environments in our rural schools. 50% of the principals have between four and ten years as a principal. Total teaching experience is wide ranging but 50% have ten or less years teaching experience and 13% have 17 or more years teaching. There were two principals that had no years teaching experience at all because they entered education as school psychologist and classroom teaching was not a requirement through their principal certification.

Another area of interest is the number of special education credits that these principals took in their undergraduate programs and in their principal certification programs. These graphs are represented here with undergraduate credits listed first.





As one can see, 75% have between one and six course credits in special education while taking undergraduate coursework. In fact, out of all principals taking the demographic questionnaire, 25% had zero credits in special education in their undergraduate work. Similarly, 63% of the respondents had between one and six credits of special education in their principal

certification program, 12.5% had 7-12 credits, and 12.5% had zero credits. There was one respondent that never took a course with a special education focus.

When looking at the content areas that were taught, 75% of the respondents were teachers of the core content areas of reading/ELA, math, science, or history/social studies. None of the respondents were dual certified in special education. In reviewing the makeup of individual buildings, there was one principal that oversaw a building that could not be considered rural. Each class had over 500 students per grade level. Eliminating that respondent as an outlier in the data, this left an average grade level class size of 84 students. For a 7-12 principal, this would be 504 students in the building. This fits right in the middle of the study criteria for small rural schools (maximum 1000). Inside the classroom, individual teacher class size inquiry demonstrated that 50% of the respondents said that they had more than 21 students per individual class being taught. Finally, 62.5 % of the principals stated that they oversee 31 or more teachers.

Participant Demographics

This case study research identified three principals that met the participant criteria: (a) have at least three years' experience, (b) are principals of small rural schools (average of 483 students in their buildings), and (c) are secondary level principals (9-12, and two with 7-12 schools). The following figure can provide us with an overview of the specific demographic for each of these principals. The bottom line of data provides an average with which to compare each of these principals.

Figure 4.1

Subject	Content Taught as a Teacher	Total Years as a Teacher	Total Years as a Principal	Number of Students in Building	Number of Teachers Supervised	Undergraduate /Graduate Credits in Special Education
Principal A	History	14	9	536	42	12
Principal B	Science	16	11	525	43	12
Principal C	Mathematics	11	6	390	35	9
Average	N/A	13.6	8.6	483.6	40	11

All three principals were core content teachers in the areas of science, history, and mathematics early in their careers. This is important for this case study because my intention from the very beginning was to explore and understand the experiences of principals that had to manage inclusionary environments that would involve academic challenges that are most difficult for students with disabilities. Many of these students struggle with reading, writing, being able to organize and plan, difficulties with social interactions in an academic setting. Core content teachers must be able to modify and accommodate classroom content in a specific way to support these students. It is quite different supporting inclusion in a science classroom than it is in physical education or music education. Hands on classrooms such as home economics, computer literacy, and technical education also requires a different approach. I wanted to see what the teacher did early in their career and make comparisons to that same individual as a building leader managing inclusion. Having experience as a core content teacher provided a perspective that has a lot of data to compare.

These principals have an average of almost 14 years of teaching experience and an average of 8.6 years as a principal. It is important to know also that all three principals interviewed have an assistant principal. Two of the principals noted that the assistants job description mostly dealt with discipline and management of extra-curricular support programs. Principal A noted that the assistant in his building did collaborate with teachers and himself during monthly meetings but really was not involved in managing issues related to inclusionary environments. Principal C also noted that the special education director had a significant impact in her building regarding any special education initiatives. This impact included management and evaluation of special education teachers. She also stated that oftentimes they would observe co-taught classes where she would observe the general education teacher and the special education director would observe the special education teacher.

It is interesting to note that these three principals have an average of 11 credits in special education throughout their academic preparation programs. All three principals had six course credits in special education during their principal preparation programs. The nature of these courses will be discussed further in the findings. The principals oversee an average of 483.6 students and 40 teachers.

Coding Analysis Process

It is important to understand the specific phenomenological processes that were undertaken to extricate data, code, define, and focus on the themes that coalesced around the thoughts and ideas provided through the interviews. From those networking of themes, the essence of thought was rebuilt around the key ideas of background and experience, leadership and culture, and structural management.

Step one in the process, known as primary coding, is simply reading and thinking about the information provided in a very broad way. This is an attempt to just get a feel for the overall tone that was expressed by the individual principals. This "get to know you stage" gave me the most basic impressions that would be used for providing codes. There was no real interpretation done at this point. Secondary coding began by looking at specific data that could be described by words or small phrases. For example, when one principal described his own experience as a student in school, he spoke about his own struggle with dyslexia. His tone of voice while describing this along with his explanation as to why he fights hard to support students with disabilities is the classic example of having empathy. By coding this phrase with the word empathy, I was able to provide a clear description that would eventually resonate through other texts in the interview.

I initially identified five basic ideas that would later expand and emerge to 11 identifiable codes. Once all the codes were identified, a specific explanation or definition of all the codes was written and all codes re-examined for consistency and alignment in conjunction with the examples or evidence pulled from the interviews. I used a constant comparative method to refine codes that were similar and continuously scrutinize each with the definition. Providing examples pulled directly from the interviews were key to clarifying the connection to the definition and ensuring that all data in the code was correct.

The following figure as derived from Tracy's codebook excerpt (2013), can help one to visually examine the process I utilized for preparing for secondary coding.

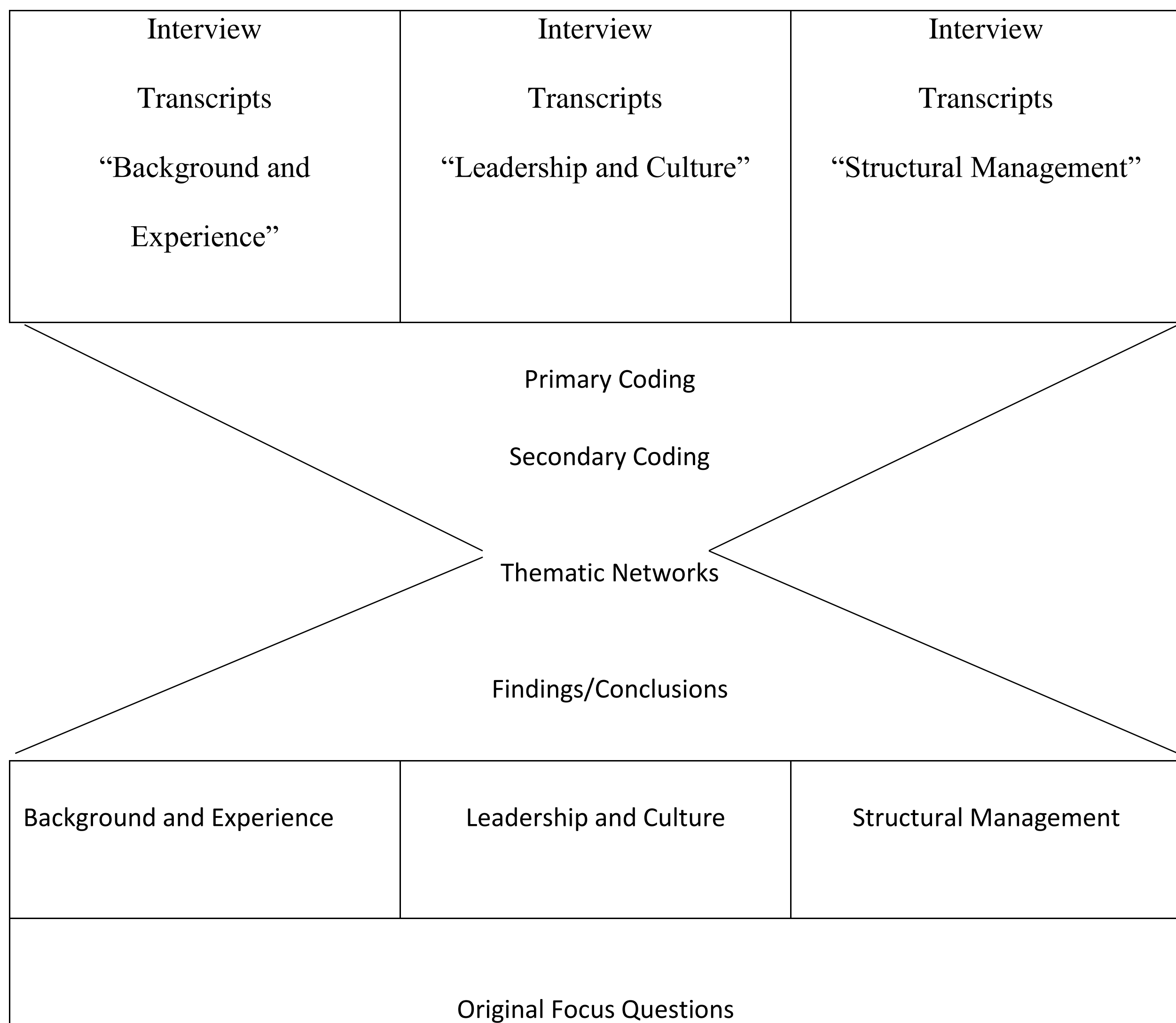
Figure 4.2

	Question	Code	Definition	Example
Principal A	1.1	Empathetic (Emp)	Being able to put yourself into the shoes of another person and see the human aspect/struggle of their condition	One thing that I found you know, is sometimes if we hold hard and fast to this, and you only get one chance, that's, that's it. Then kids that are in special ed struggle in those types of environments.

Using the aforementioned code "empathetic", I collected examples from all three participants in order to find the common theme running through the contextual conversations that revolve around the code. This provided the basis for secondary coding that involved comparing, scrutinizing, and creating thematic networks (Tracy, 2013). This is not a single linear task but one that circumvented back onto itself, removing one theme and replacing until all similar themes came together to form an idea that I could use to rebuild and support ideas from the initial interviews that were connected to the original focus. This rebuilding provided the foundational material for me to develop a true description and exploration of these principal's inclusionary environments. I took these descriptions and brought them back to my original focus headings: background and experience, leadership and culture, and structural management of inclusionary environments. This resulted in findings for this case study that provide a description and exploration of the principal's inclusionary environments for this research.

It is important to note that I used member checking to support credibility and the authenticity of all data. The participants of this study were contacted and provided a copy of their individual interview transcripts for review and critique of accuracy. They were contacted a second time and presented with the emerging themes that I extracted through the coding process. Participants were encouraged to look closely at the data provided to identify any discrepancies. The following figure provides a visual conception of the flow of data through this entire process.

Figure 4.3



I want to revisit the quote from Gerring (2004) because not only did he speak about case studies being a single unit meant to help researchers understand similar units, he also said that the units represent an observation of data from a specific single point in time. This is true of my research and it is important to know that the three principals here are not the same individuals they were when they first started teaching. They are not the same individuals that they were when they began their principalships. This study is a representation of their thoughts and beliefs on that specific day and how they look at their management of inclusionary environments up to that time. My research is simply an attempt to look at these three examples, explore what is happening and compare it to what current research on the topics provide. I did not look for causation but only to understand their phenomena. To make these connections, I attempted to recreate and formulate their story directly from the focus questions that began this quest.

Descriptive Statistics

RQ 1: What role has a principal's background as a teacher, employment experience and certification coursework played in the decisions regarding inclusionary environments?

There were several codes that combined to formulate ideas that answer this question. The emergent theme from these codes is that these principals rely on background experiences as a teacher to drive decisions regarding inclusionary environments.

I asked each principal what they found in their pre-service principal preparation program that was similar or different than their on-the-job experiences, especially regarding inclusionary environments. Each of these principals had credits in special education during throughout their academic careers and in their principal preparation program. This question fleshed out the most obvious answer regarding the role of certification coursework and how it impacts the decision-making process.

Principal A focused his response to the question about pre-service principal preparation by stating "there are lots of differences (between what is taught and what he does). He went further by stating that "you deal with what is, what should be, what the ideal situation is, and what is the realistic situation". He went on to discuss how the attitudes of people toward inclusion impact his ability to manage inclusion and he indicated that his preparation did not provide him with the skills to deal and how it affects students. He said "If they don't buy into inclusion, it becomes, you know, something that is difficult for the kid to be successful because they are not bending or changing anything for a student that struggles with things".

Principal B focused on the inclusion aspect to this question and stated that "it was almost glossed over". He went further by saying how inclusion was presented "here, inclusion is this, but it wasn't really delved into. They would talk about some benefits of it but not delve into that". This principal also discussed his principal program and stated that when it came to special education, the "spent more time on inclusion within that law course than we did any place else… looking at lawsuits and different things". This principal pointedly stated regarding his principal preparation that "I really felt more my time in the classroom and my time observing what was going on in our learning community as a teacher prepared me more to address inclusion as a principal".

Principal C had difficulty thinking of anything related to inclusion being discussed in her principal program. She stated, "I don't remember taking a lot of courses about special ed, just in general, and definitely nothing that I can remember (about inclusion)". She corroborated what principal B said about inclusion not being a large component of the program by saying it "wasn't substantial enough for me to remember about inclusion". She also offered that "I think that's probably pretty limited in most principal programs". Her most direct statements provide an

answer that leads to the theme that principals look to experience rather than their coursework for gaining skills in dealing with inclusion. She said “I can’t really say that the preparation program influenced me in any sort of way” and “I think the majority of experience I have or knowledge I have is just because of the kind of on the job things versus anything I learned in a principal program”.

The data provided by these principals was not even the most telling part of this story. It is the emotional response that each one gave. I observed outright laughter from Principal A, a big smile while responding as if the question was simply a joke from Principal B, and Principal C paused, tried to respond, hesitated and finally said “I can’t really say that the preparation program influenced me in any sort of way”. The suggestion that their preparation programs prepared them for dealing with inclusion was the most distant thing in their minds.

The other part of that question regarding background experiences was not as obvious but very telling. One of the ways this can be uncovered is through a connection of a set of interview questions that were asked. When asked how experiences as a teacher influences their thinking as a leader overseeing inclusionary environments, Principal A said that “I saw that as a teacher, that’s (developing compassion and empathy) what I was looking for. That we need to teach everybody. What’s the best way and doing it. And I would say that has really tailored me as a principal”. This principal summed up the idea that prior experience, the history that one brings with them, has impact on their leadership now. It goes further even than that. Each of these principals prized specific things as a teacher. Principal A prized giving students’ lots of choices when he was a teacher. Principal B stated that he was left to fend for himself as a teacher, rarely saw anyone, and stated “it would have been golden in the early years to have a co-teacher”.

Principal C emphasized her experiences with co-teaching and how valuable she thought it was in terms of managing classrooms with diverse populations.

The theme from that line of questioning merged with a theme that came from the questions regarding structure and management of inclusionary environments. All principals stated similar opinions about what they support in their buildings now as a leader. Principal "A" suggested that what he values giving support to all students through a program that he started called "voice and choice". It provides students with control over a variety of choices to produce and assess proof of their learning. The other two principals emphasized over and over the importance of co-teaching within their buildings. Principal "B" goes to great lengths to cover every core content area (English, math, science, and history) with co-teachers. This connection between these individual's background experiences and their current role as leaders over inclusionary environments is unmistakably similar and evidently powerful in a way that cannot be ignored. It provides us with insight that can lead to a more detailed appraisal of leadership approaches.

RQ 2: How does a school principal implement a vision of acceptance and support for students with disabilities, especially in an inclusionary setting?

The theme of empathy, compassion, and acceptance of students with disabilities rang clear in the comments of all these principals. These principals support inclusionary environments through compassion, empathy and by modeling a social justice approach for students with disabilities. Principal A touched on the idea that support of these students is a civil rights issue. He stated "What is good for kids? It's not just special ed students, it's, it's all students". His thinking was representative of all three principals when he suggested that these students must be in regular classes and educators must do whatever it takes to support the success of all students.

He stated, “I think the biggest thing is to diversify”. He went on to say “I guess what I’ve encouraged is to try different things”, “I’m always trying to figure out what the best way we can get this student through this material, show that they have the knowledge”. This principal recognizes the struggle that these students encounter, and his empathy moves him to meet this need. He discussed how “kids that are special ed struggle in those types of environments” and how he “try and give opportunities for students to do things”. His empathy for these students and their struggle has led him to support what he calls “voice and choice”. This is a program he has implemented to recognize the needs of students but to “give you a choice of what, you know, what assignment you want to do to show that you’ve mastered materials”. His implementation of a program that offers students choices sends the message that everyone has their own strengths and weaknesses, but that this does not mean that they cannot learn. It also sends a clear message that empathy and compassion for students with disabilities is expected in his building.

Principal A understands how students with disabilities need to have supports that help them overcome barriers to their success and he encourages his staff to do the same. He discussed attitudes toward students with disabilities by saying “sometimes it is awful hard for people with a higher I.Q. to understand the struggles that people go through”. Despite his assessment of the attitudes that some people have toward students with disabilities, he sticks to the vision that he supports in his building. His vision is to have “each student find success and I want them to be able to master, whatever it might be that you are going over”. Staying dedicated to this vision of accepting and supporting these students sets the example for his staff and speaks clearly to his personal convictions to implementing inclusionary programming.

Principal “B” provided many examples, across all interview questions that emphasized that he has, and always would continue to support students with disabilities. In relation to

students with special needs being included in the general classroom, this principal saw as a teacher that "there wasn't an opportunity for those kids to see other students' model for them appropriate behavior" if they were not in an inclusion setting. Principal B then went on to discuss how he approached his principal when he was a teacher to make changes to move these students into an inclusionary setting with all kids. He told his principal "we've got to teach them all". He stated that their actions led to not only "differentiate for those kids in that inclusive classroom, but also it gave them an opportunity to meet different kids to see different kids model for them". The whole impetus for this action was "to have other kids develop some compassion and empathy for students". Principal B demonstrated empathy himself, and as a teacher wanted to impact the learning environment by pushing to have an inclusionary environment that also created an empathetic attitude among the other students.

This principal spoke about the time and energy he puts into his leadership by modeling for his teachers. He says "I spend time with those kids (in a lifeskills classroom). I get to know those kids". He also stated "I think it's important to see that your staff, and your people in your building see that you're giving these students quality time, and not just there". He also discussed how staff need to see the leader spending quality time with all students. Principal B emphasized this point by saying regarding inclusion "if that's number one. They've got to see you living it. I'd say you're modeling that and they're seeing that you are not just spending time with the athletes or you're not just sitting down with the National Honor Society kids, but that you are giving time to everybody".

Principal B also demonstrated his empathy and compassion by making a connection to his childhood. He described the struggles he had dealing with dyslexia and having difficulty writing. He spoke about his struggle as a child when he said, "I had a bunch of problems taking

notes or even readable notes, and things like that". Principal B discussed his time as a teacher. He made it a point to do note outlines, and modeling. He said that "for some of those kids who never had that before, that was helpful". Principal B used compassion and understanding for students with disabilities to support them, and it is a big factor his leadership approach. Although he no longer has direct control at supporting students in inclusionary settings, he manages his staff so that the support will be there.

As a building leader, Principal B utilizes teachers in a way that emphasizes their strengths and focuses on achievement. He begins by saying "I've talked to my staff about the belief that every student can achieve". He described one teacher as "a very strong co-teacher in math" and went on to say "I don't use her for coverages. She is exceptional in the math co-teaching environment". The number one reason he identified her among his staff was because she is "an advocate for those kids in that classroom who need it". This approach certainly affects the culture in his building and encourages his staff to support all students with an empathetic approach. This principal also modeled his care and concern to a very personal level. He discussed his commitment by saying "

Principal C felt as if the culture of acceptance in her building was set by previous administration. She stated, "they've been, you know adopting an inclusive type of approach for a few years before I was even here". Principal C also felt that as a leader, one needs to implement a vision of acceptance by being "visible and that would be visible in classrooms that are co-taught and those that are not". For her, this is "one of the key ways to build relationships with people". Relationships are important to her because she "learned so much, not just about their teaching, but just about them as people".

Principal C feels that her staff are very accepting of students with disabilities. When discussing teachers that are reluctant to support inclusionary environments, she noted that "I don't know that I had that problem". She also states that "I really had to prove myself" to her teachers. Principal C has done this by supporting teachers in a broad way. She discussed providing "constructive feedback" and supporting co-teaching by giving the teachers "common planning times" and long-term commitments that puts two individuals in a co-teaching environment in that arrangement for more than one year. By doing this, Principal C feels she can implement her vision of inclusion in a more supportive way.

This case study reveals that these principals do these things through modeling and supporting high expectations among their staff and demonstrating empathy and compassion through their leadership. It is expected that the teachers have a similar mindset as these leaders and their will be no compromise. This investment in energy and time sets an example for their other staff. Their staff see them working hard and see them pushing for high quality in every way.

Although these principals gave an indication that reluctance to include students with disabilities is not a problem, all three provided comments that say otherwise. The reluctance appears not to be outright opposition, but a more passive aggressive stance toward inclusion. Principal B stated that the special educators would rather have students with disabilities in their rooms in a pull-out type of environment. He went on to indicate that he felt that his teachers believe it is "easier". In discussing issues regarding situations that are frustrating, Principal B states that "we still have to fight that year in, year out about pull out classes". These teachers seem reluctant to support inclusion in this way.

Principal A mentioned that any resistance is in methodology and lack of interest in differentiating instruction. He created a special math class that would deal support lower achieving students as well as students with disabilities. He stated that he “received much pushback” regarding special education initiatives and it is frustrating to him. Finally, Principal C specifically stated, “A lot is determined by, you know, attitudes of people toward inclusion… they do not buy into inclusion”. Principal C adds to this negativity by saying “This sounds awful, but some of them might say, can I get a break from co-teaching?”. This indicates that negative attitudes are still prevalent, although not outright resistant to supporting students through inclusionary methods.

The consensus was that these principals feel that every student can learn and can benefit from being in the general education classroom. They also felt very strongly that students with disabilities benefit from the social aspect. Principal A noted that they need to be exposed to “real life” and that “It’s going to be frustrating at times, but I mean, they need to be exposed to it”. Principal B stated, regarding student success, that “grades aren’t a true measurement of learning and that’s why it’s always been bigger than just an A, B, C…”. He went on saying “This is about life and this is about more than just the academic. This is about educating people how to treat each other and to work together regardless of abilities”. This is the approach to these principals’ support to create an environment of acceptance for students with disabilities.

RQ 3: In what ways does the principal develop an environment of collaborative inquiry for the professionals involved in inclusive classrooms to thrive?

Managing teachers, schedules, and all the intricate, competing requirements of a principal in small rural districts is an ongoing struggle. The emerging theme from the data related to this topic is that these principals support collaborative inquiry through informal means.

All three of these principals have assistants. That does not seem to be of great benefit to them when they are constantly putting out fires in the buildings. Each of these principals indicated that time for collaboration was oftentimes difficult. Both Principal A and Principal B indicated that having the assistant principal allowed them to schedule and attend meetings at least once per month to discuss the needs of special learners in the regular classroom. Principal A specifically said that in his building, they have "monthly, sometimes bi-monthly… special education meetings, where all special education teachers talk about every student in high school and we go through this in about an hour". During this time, they "discuss where their (special education students) strengths, where their weaknesses are, and what we can do". The goal is "at the end of the day, if we find people struggling… we try our very best to try and pinpoint problems and add that as a safety net to try and catch problems before they get too big". Principal A also emphasized valuing opinions. He states that "if you have open discussions and I think that you are very frank about things that you can and cannot do. And you know, things that you think would help to get the student to move forward. I think that helps". This principal sets aside specific times for collaboration and brainstorming for students with disabilities.

Principal B emphasized how scheduling aides him in developing an environment of collaboration. He focuses on setting scheduling as "a priority with making sure that we are setting time aside for those co-teaching opportunities". Co-teaching is his main support network for managing inclusion. He states "I know when you are looking at that (co-teaching) and it makes it tough but I think that you need to prioritize that (scheduling) too if you want to be successful, then it has to be a priority". Principal B stated that he "almost always talk at any faculty meeting about inclusion and what our practices are and what we are doing". He also

discussed “pretty active team meetings” and his personal investment by meeting “with the department heads and what are people struggling with” in regards inclusionary supports.

This principal also emphasized communication from himself and all teachers. Principal B offered support for an electronic program which helps “teachers communicate with students, parents, all those things they are supposed to put in there”. He feels he set the example himself and ensures that teachers see this as an expectation. Principal B provided an example of a teacher that would use this program and be able to see anyone else that made contact with the parents, including himself.

Principal C was the only differing voice in this category because she stated that the special education director dealt with staff members one on one regarding inclusion of students with disabilities. She admitted “I don’t know that I do a great job of that primarily because… hands off on a lot of the things”. She mentioned that she did attend some IEP meetings but did not further the discussion regarding collaboration regarding how inclusion is supported. She stated that this task was handled more from the special education director’s position.

The emphasis from this principal in terms of supporting teachers was on “being visible in classrooms that were co-taught” and providing insight into how differentiation can support these classrooms. Principal C did express difficulties in managing schedules. Regarding her own experiences as a teacher, she said “didn’t necessarily have a regular teacher that would come into the classroom on a regular basis”. She then moved to a district that supported co-teaching and “started to learn what benefit that I could have and how it can help me in the classroom in terms of differentiating for the students”. However, one of the biggest difficulties was when “my co-teacher, and really no fault of her own, ….. is that she often would be scheduled other places”. Principal C went on to describe it was extremely difficult to be collaborative when time together

was not a priority. Common planning time was not a reality for her, and she would "have like those brief really short conversations either right before class started, or you know, at the end of the day". She recognized as a teacher a change in culture had to happen so that "we started to move in a good direction".

For Principal C, collaboration requires time, and as a principal, this is her biggest challenge. She says "I feel like I don't have the time necessarily to really help those people learn the skills that they need to really adopt a true co-teaching classroom just because of the demands of everything else you have to do in a day". Principal C feels that being "visible" is very important and helps her "build relationships with people ... just being out there". Despite her efforts to do these things, time is still an issue. She noted that her teachers have "asked for common planning times" and "consistency of who their co-teacher is". The problem for her comes in scheduling for her building. She said, "sometimes I find it difficult to schedule the students, how would I say, to balance the number of students with IEPs and the number of regular education students in the classroom". These factors impact her ability to offer common planning time and consistency in managing her staff in the most effective way.

In reflection on past experiences as teachers, these principals noted that they did not have the support they wanted to properly support students with disabilities. The support they provide now is geared toward having discussions about how to differentiate instruction through go-teaching and how to overcome barriers such as scheduling time and providing opportunities for collaboration. This seems to be a high value idea that they must have to support students with disabilities. Collaboration is key in allowing this to happen. On a wish list, the principals in this study mentioned common planning times as something that they would like to pursue more often but none were successful based upon the information they provided.

RQ 4: In what ways do school principals approach and ensure inclusionary environments that are focused on progress, growth, and achievement as identified by current research?

Co-teaching and differentiation are the main themes emerging from information presented by these principals to support inclusionary environments. Based upon the information provided through these interviews, one would conclude that co-teaching and differentiation is the sole approach to satisfy the needs of an inclusionary classroom.

Principal A is the only principal that did not speak as much about co-teaching. He did talk about his early teaching career and stated, “I had a class with many students that had IEPs and was often given a co-teacher”. He does use co-teaching as a model now but emphasized supports offered through the use of aides. His approach is to “look at all the schedules of all the students and provide aide support where it’s most needed”. He also mentioned the fluidity of these supports by stating “If a student is suddenly struggling in class, we need to give them more aide support. If they are accepting of that aide support, then we do that”. This principal also suggested that his special education teachers focus on “monitoring their caseload grades that if they see someone starting to slip or whatever it might be, then they get in touch with the regular teacher, find out what’s going on and those types of things”.

In terms of differentiated approaches, Principal A attempted to do this as a teacher, supports it as a principal, and if he had the perfect inclusionary environment, it would start with everyone having empathy for students with disabilities and then doing whatever it takes for a student to be successful. He stated, “the first thing is giving all people understanding” and then “I want each student to find success, and I want them to be able to master whatever it might be that you are going over”. He then connects educator’s ability to do these things with having students with disabilities being successful by saying, “There is something there that those students can

master and they can develop skills and move forward, and be able to be successful in life". Principal A focused on success in the classroom to generating long term success throughout the rest of the student's life.

Principal A discussed differentiation as something he did in his experience as a teacher and now as a leader in his building. He discussed that as a teacher, he tried to "give opportunities for students to do things, in their own strength". He also discussed what that looked like by saying "you know what assignment you want them to do to show that you have mastered the material and some kids are writing papers, some people are doing an art project, some people are doing the actual test". He went on to discuss the monthly meetings he has where the staff discuss specific student needs and the interventions used to support these students.

As a principal, he now supports a program of "voice and choice". This program allows teachers to "figure out the best way we can get this student to get through this material, show that they have the knowledge. But we know that their reading level is not high, or their math skills are struggling…. What can we do to make it easier for them to understand?". It is important to him as a principal that "teachers that can get kids excited about being in school or finding success are the ones that are most successful (for inclusion). Differentiation to this principal is individualizing materials, presentation and assessments for each student based on their strengths and working on weaknesses.

Principal B focused his responses to structurally supporting inclusion by discussing co-teaching in his building. He stated that he early in his career, "it would have been golden to have a co-teaching class". In his building now, he stated the perfect scenario for him would be continuing to offer co-teaching and using teachers based on their strengths to make inclusion stronger and more effective. He said "it's about identifying your strengths and your people and

finding that stuff. So, I think the perfect thing is to find those people who can mesh and work with others, but also be an advocate for those kids in that classroom who need it". Principal A also said, "we set a priority with making sure that we are setting time aside for those co-teaching opportunities". In his building, he has "between a dozen and 15 co-taught classes and basically across the board in math, science, history, English, and reading". He also suggested that he uses paraprofessionals, but "more so... in our life skills classroom" where more intensive supports are necessary.

When asked about inclusionary strategies he would use if he were back in the classroom, Principal A discussed his views of differentiation. He first talked about having empathy for the students with disabilities that he experienced and then went on to discuss the difficulties he saw with reading, writing, and note taking more than anything. This principal saw "a number of things that got in the way of them performing" so he did things like "note outlines", "when I would do a lab, I would model that… I would have this setup on my desk" and he modified tests.

Principal A states that he utilizes the strengths within his own staff to support differentiation in his building. He said "Let's set up an opportunity for them to, for us to work together to address those needs. How can we do that? Let's find a teacher on our own staff who does that well like differentiating .. what makes them good… why are they a good example of differentiation?". He feels that using assessments to "identify... where kids are, where the gaps are and things along those lines" can provide his staff with enough information to meet the differentiation needs of his students.

Principal "C" discussed prior teaching experiences with a co-teacher and stated, "I taught in an inclusion classroom and inclusive practices was just that this, oftentimes, my co-teacher, she'd be pulled to go to IEP meetings". When asked directly what the perfect inclusionary

scenario would be for her as a principal, co-teaching was at the top, and time for co-planning was also mentioned. She stated, “I would definitely start with the ability to have common planning time, daily would be great, but at this point, I will take weekly if we can get that”. It is a high priority for her to be supportive of co-teaching and she wants it to be successful. This principal also mentioned that another advantage of having co-planning time was that it could “always be able to put the same teacher with or same special education teacher with the regular education teacher… they know how to work together”. She connected this discussion with scheduling so that two teachers could have co-planning time together, work together over time, and build a good collaborative relationship. If Principal C were a teacher back in the classroom, she stated she would want maximum time for co-planning with her co-teacher and would “definitely do a better job of looking at individual student’s progress and I would say this would be true for all kids, not just students with IEPs”. This principal feels that with a co-teacher and the time for planning together, one could “really zero in on what a kid needs and then be able to give them specific things at their level and move them forward with a co-teacher”.

Principal C discussed her building structure by stating “we try to be consistent of where they (special education teachers) are, but they do not spread out amongst all the classes that we have, where we have students that need support”. She has five special education teachers in her building. When they need more support, they “do have two paraprofessionals of which are certified aides versus non-certified aides, and we use them”. It is obvious that this principal values the co-teaching arrangements and uses those teachers to the fullest extent, and then adds further supports through the use of paraprofessionals. She also discussed again how the special education supervisor makes some of these leadership decisions in her building. In the core

content areas of math, history, science, and English, they do not utilize "pull out" classes but instead use co-teaching and inclusion as a support.

Principal C, similar to Principal B, also discussed using assessments that identify "what instruction will look like moving forward". She utilizes these assessments so that teachers can "differentiate what the kids have to do from their assessment results". Her idea of differentiation would be to provide assessments to identify student needs, and to provide time for co-planning to deliver targeted instruction to meet those needs.

Summary

In summary, the data extracted from the interviews discussing background experience and certification, leadership and culture, and structural management, provided us with a rich and insightful view into the daily lives of three principals managing inclusion in their buildings. The data analysis suggests these emerging themes:

1. These principals rely on background experiences as a teacher to inform their decisions for managing inclusionary environments.
2. These principals support inclusionary environments through compassion, empathy and by modeling a social justice approach for students with disabilities.
3. These principals support collaborative inquiry through informal means rather than a structured approach.
4. These principals value co-teaching and differentiation of content as the most effective way to manage inclusionary environments in their buildings.

A discussion of these findings in conjunction with current research can help us to understand more clearly what is occurring in the settings of these three principals and compare these principal's management of inclusion with what is currently known.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

Restatement of Purpose

This qualitative case study explored how rural school principals oversee inclusionary environments through descriptions of their background and experience, leadership and culture, and structural management of those environments. This study involved data collection through interviews with three principals. Based upon the descriptions provided by the three principals interviewed in this study, themes emerged that offered a snapshot of the "scene" in these three schools. This study is not designed to assign causation, however, relevant comparisons to current literature can be made as well as identification of the contrast between these three schools in relation to that research. In this chapter I will include a discussion and interpretation of the themes that have emerged as well as references to the overall demographic information that was collected as it has importance to the themes.

Theme one: The principals that participated in this study rely on background experiences as a teacher to drive decisions regarding inclusionary environments.

This is a bold statement to make regarding these three principals given the amount of professional development that is invested in school leaders. These three principals have an average of 11 course credits in special education throughout their academic careers. This information is unlike the study done by Lynch (2012) who identified principals that may not have been exposed to instruction on topics like special education. Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, and Ahlgrim-Delzell (2006) would agree with the Lynch (2012) study because they suggest that many licensure programs are not providing in-depth coverage of special education topics. The fact that these principals had course credits in special education means that they were at least exposed to specific instruction around special education. However, as noted by both Principal B

and Principal C, their exposure did not deal with inclusion specifically and if it was a discussion point, it was mostly in regard to litigious matters that a principal could encounter. When it comes to inclusion, none could say with certainty that the topic was broached in even a vague way. The question raised then is where do they get concrete and useable information to support inclusionary environments?

This theme was derived mostly from comments made directly by the principals, and the emotional context with which the comments were given. Principal B is a great example of the emotional point being made here. He stated, "I really felt more my time in the classroom and my time observing what was going on in our learning community as a teacher prepared me more to address inclusion as a principal". Recorded in my side notes was the comment regarding this principal's emotional response; *"he made this statement with a short laugh and then a very large grin"*. The other two principals had similar responses both in the verbiage they used and in their physical response. Principal A even intimated that the way you handle things like inclusion as a principal have no real connection to what you may have been taught. He spoke of what could be or what you want and the reality of a situation. These principals clearly believe their prior experiences with inclusion were more impactful than their principal pre-service programs. They place value on their personal experiences over that of any professional development they may have had reflecting support of students with exceptionalities.

There is very little research that connects a principal and previous teaching experience to their competency in managing inclusion. Hess and Kelly (2005) offer the idea that many principals are relying on collegial relationships to navigate the realm of what does not get taught in principal preservice programs. This could be part of what is happening here, however, it was

not brought up at all. These principals spoke clearly of their experiences with inclusion when they were a teacher, and these experiences translated to an almost parallel structural arrangement for supporting inclusion in their buildings that they oversee. An example of this is when Principal C described her experiences with co-teaching early in her career, and then the descriptions of the inclusionary supports she implements with her teachers. The aspects of inclusion she found valuable as a teacher are related to those she is working to ensure are available to her teachers now.

Howley, Howley, Yahn, VanHorn, and Telfer (2019) made the suggestion that principals may not be prepared to provide effective leadership in areas outside of their area of specialty, like special education. None of these three principals were certified in special education. In fact, none of the principals that took the demographic survey were certified in special education. Again, I was not looking for causation, but certainly having coursework specific to inclusion, which can be considered a special education initiative in the general education classroom, would be beneficial to these principal's leadership roles.

In relation to coursework and exposure to special education, the demographic questionnaire presented some interesting information. Two principals reported no teaching experience at all and one of the respondents has not had a single course credit in special education. This is very reflective of the study by Lynch (2012) that made that exact point about principals and professional development. These two principals reported through the demographic survey that their educational experiences were tied to previous positions as school psychologists. A question that would arise from this in regards to this theme is, if these principals rely on previous teacher experiences with inclusion to guide their leadership of inclusionary environments now as a principal, where would the principals that had no teaching

experience and no coursework in special education find assistance in guiding inclusion in their buildings?

Theme two: These principals support inclusionary environments through compassion, empathy and by modeling a social justice approach for students with disabilities.

This theme relates back to leadership and culture in that it speaks to the attitudes and belief systems of the principal, and demonstrates leadership in promoting inclusion as a social justice issue sets a cultural tone that can have an effect on those working within the system it is operating. Causton and Theoharis (2014) discuss how principals must have a clear and precise vision of what inclusion should look like. AuCoin (2014) goes deeper into how that happens by suggesting that the leadership values of the entire school are reflected in and from the school principal. The principals in this study demonstrate their leadership qualities through compassion and empathy for students with disabilities.

When one thinks about leadership, empathy and compassion are not words that typically come into the discussion. In fact, in the past, many people viewed the display of any emotional contexts with leadership as something not preferable or as negative to the performance of the organization (Berkovich & Eyal, 2015). Over time, the demonstration of moral qualities and the display of emotions have become more accepted and valued as necessary (Jin, 2010; Berkovich & Eyal, 2015). Mulla and Krishnan discussed moral qualities like empathy and asked the question “What constitutes a good leader?” (p. 129). The go on suggest that empathy is a critical quality for leaders that seek to provide transformative leadership to their organizations (Mulla & Krishnan, 2011). The participants in this study provided many reasons to support the statement that empathy, compassion, and a positive attitude for students with disabilities are a driving force in how they lead and support inclusionary environments.

These principals spoke with language that truly demonstrates that they have care and concern for their students speaks volumes about what they value. Principal B discussed at length about how he attempts to give every group, from high performers and honor students to those less privileged and those that are often forgotten, his time and energies. He values every student and tries to meet their needs by removing barriers that are specific to them. This sends a message to his staff that every child has value and deserves the best education available. He went further by stating that he makes it a point that his staff see him approach student issues in a caring and concerning way. He makes it obvious that education is a personal connection to those students. That is leadership. The leadership that demonstrates a focused vision on providing quality education for every student ensures that social justice is being served appropriately.

The empathy described by these principals also shows the attitudes they have for students with disabilities and the requirement of FAPE. These principals have a positive attitude and gave every indication that this was an unmovable notion. Principal A made this clear through his discussion of the voice and choice program. This is a program he has supported that provides students with a multitude of options for expressing their specific needs and demonstrating how they have mastered content through differentiated evaluations. Voice and choice is done in his building to ensure that students are able to be supported in the least restrictive environment ensuring FAPE is preserved. Principal A was consistently positive in his description of this program. His frustrations were expressed through his disappointment in staff that did not feel students with disabilities deserved to have options, or to be in classes with non-disabled peers. But it is empathy and his view of FAPE as a social justice issue that continues to drive him to meet the needs of every student in his building.

Ball and Green (2014) reported slightly negative attitudes of principals toward inclusion which is not found in the descriptions of these principals. Other research has focused on the attitudes of principals toward inclusion and their results suggest that overall, attitudes of principals are positive, but depending on the disability category, principals may be less inclined to be positive, for example autism or emotional disturbance (Cook et al.,1999; Horrocks et al., 2008). Each of these principals have students of a wide range of disability categories within their schools. They gave no indication that any of these students were a burden, required more resources, or detracted from the education environment in the school. In fact, each of them was continually positive in their descriptions of the students, the programming that supports students with disabilities, and values them as individuals in their educational communities.

The empathetic approach and positive attitudes of these principals is exemplary. However, a principal cannot maintain and support inclusionary environments on their own. They impact these environments in an indirect way, through example and through leadership. It is ultimately the teachers and those directly involved every single day that can have the most influence. Teacher attitudes toward special education and toward inclusion specifically has seen improvement over the years but is still lacking in many ways. Researchers are not seeing the outright resistance demonstrated early after the adoption of IDEA (Bicehouse et al., 2017). Many newer teachers have never been exposed to a classroom that was not inclusive. Negative attitudes of teachers toward inclusion has generally been somewhat negative for a variety of reasons (Sanagi, 2016; Lupart 1998). What is the attitude of the teachers in these principal's buildings?

Two of these principals reported that "I haven't had a ton of reluctance from teachers to have kids in their classes" (Principal A), and "I don't know that I have had that problem at this

district" (Principal C). However, all three principals also gave indications of pushback in terms of changing instructional methodology in support of students with disabilities, resistance to co-teaching because of power struggles, and some teachers not "buying into inclusion". Clearly there may not be outright resistance seen early on in the history of inclusion in support of FAPE, but there is still a passive resistance that can have a negative impact on a building's ability to manage a positive climate. These three principals seem to be supporting inclusion in a way that demonstrates that every student can learn and that every student deserves to have equality in educational choice, but still have some work in providing leadership for change within their staff.

There are questions that arise from around the topic of teacher attitudes. Although the principals themselves work hard to provide inclusionary environments that are supportive for students with disabilities, from their perspective, teachers are not as supportive. In what ways can they provide leadership that effectively eliminates the ongoing negative attitudes of other professionals in their buildings? Do the teachers need more support in the form of professional development or ongoing teacher improvement toward understanding inclusion?

Theme three: The principals in this study support collaborative inquiry through informal means rather than a structured approach.

Collaboration is the core to successful inclusionary programming (DiPaola et al., 2003). This is something that takes a great amount of effort and commitment to the goal of high-quality education in an inclusive school (McLeskey et al., (2015). In this case study, only Principal A had regularly scheduled time set aside for collaboration. He meets with his staff at the minimum bi-monthly to discuss student needs. His description leads one to believe that it is not focused on inclusion as much as simply sharing information on all students to solve a variety of issues and

barriers. Both Principal B and C reported time being strictly informal, such as in faculty meetings and teachers collaborating before or after class, or after school. The faculty meetings discussed by Principal B can be considered informal because it does not meet the guidelines for effective collaboration, namely specificity and problem solving. The descriptions provided by Principal C are an extreme example of informality. Hehir and Katzman (2014) discuss this by suggesting that collaboration must be student specific, engage everyone in problem solving, and involving all stakeholders including parents. Wallace et al., (2002) discuss the difficulty associated with secondary classrooms. The collaboration they discussed was vision specific and involved everyone that touches the child's life, educators, parents, and applicable outside agencies. The descriptions provided by all three principals would not meet the criteria set by these researchers.

All three principals have assistant principals working with them, but they discussed the lack of time, and the numerous other duties that had to be managed making collaboration difficult. Principal C discussed most of her collaborations for inclusion being handled by the special education director and this included discussions about inclusion. Her involvement was limited to checking in to see if any support from her was needed. Principal B stated that the current lack of substitute teachers that would provide some release time for the regular teaching staff has complicated planning collaborative time that is regular and focused. He also mentioned difficulties in managing other aspects of his own position, primarily related to discipline and parent meetings that were unrelated to inclusionary issues. Principal A similarly mentioned issues related to staffing and scheduling as barriers to providing collaborative opportunities. Besides his monthly meetings, his staff rarely have the time to discuss specifics about effective

programming. He views their approach as more reactive when problems are identified rather than proactive.

Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) conducted a case study of a principal that has had success in supporting inclusionary environments. The principal, Tom Smith used the metaphor of "lubricating the human machinery" to describe his approach (p. 253). This approach is one that looks at two aspects of principal leadership: identifying teacher needs and providing ongoing support. By identifying the teacher's current needs for effective inclusionary practices, and guaranteeing professional development for those teachers, Tom Smith was able to keep the machinery of inclusion moving in a positive and productive way.

Since these principals are working in rural school districts where limited funding for staff and resources is always a barrier, what can be done to alleviate some of these pressing duties that interfere with their ability to manage and the teachers' ability to collaborate effectively? Another question that would help bring understanding to this problem would be what specific responsibilities do principals have in common that interfere with the focus on instructional leadership? Perhaps more research into how schools that are demonstrating effective inclusionary environments would lend insight into these questions.

Theme four: These principals value co-teaching and differentiation of content as the most effective way to manage inclusionary environments in their buildings.

Specific structural arrangements within the school can increase the effectiveness of inclusionary environments. No matter what vision a principal may have for inclusion, if the wrong approach is utilized, inclusion may not be as effective at supporting every student for success. All three principals in this study value co-teaching and differentiation as key tools they use to support inclusion in their buildings.

The assertion made in this theme is supported by the descriptions of these principal's teaching experience, along with descriptions of what they do as principals to support inclusion in their current positions. All three principals emphasized various reasons why co-teaching was a valuable asset to them as teachers. Examples provided ranged from simply managing an ever-growing class size to having someone to bounce ideas off regarding pedagogical approaches. Principal A noted that it simply makes management of differentiation of content much easier when there are two people in a classroom. As a principal, he has made it a point to put as many co-teaching opportunities as possible in his building.

Principal B has had teaching experiences that range from the time when co-teaching was not emphasized until now, when as a principal of a 7-12 building, he makes sure that every core teacher has a co-teacher working alongside as much as possible. He related how much he wanted someone in the early days to help him manage behaviors, and to support students that were having a difficult time in his classroom. As a principal, he feels that it is vital to have students with disabilities in the general classroom, and to do everything possible to support those students in these classes. He accomplishes this through supporting co-teaching opportunities in the core contents. Principal B described his belief that students must learn socially as well as academically. He expressed that having a co-teacher in the room can provide the support for students to learn both academically and socially by being there to assist and manage issues that would come up and interfere with learning.

Principal C described her experiences teaching in a southern state that did not utilize co-teaching as much. In fact, she did not have one. Coming into Pennsylvania, she was given a co-teacher right away. Principal C specifically mentioned the ability to differentiate as well as having an extra set of eyes and hands in the classroom was beneficial to her. When she moved

into a leadership role, one of her goals was to ensure that the general education teacher had access to a co-teacher if possible. Principal C also described her frustrations as a teacher was when her co-teacher was pulled for meetings or other coverage duties. She mentioned that as a leader, she would do everything she could to keep co-teachers together over a number of years, and that keeping them together daily is a priority.

Co-teaching, as defined by Cook and Friend (1995) is “two or more professionals delivering substantive instruction to a diverse of blended group of students in a single space” (p. 2). More recent descriptions of what co-teaching looks like or how it should operate include planning instruction, delivering instruction and assessing instruction by two professionals in the same room (Isherwood & Barger Anderson, 2008; Dieker & Murawski, 2003). There are also numerous studies that specifically describe how those three aspects of teaching are accomplished such as one teaching/ one assisting, parallel teaching, and team teaching (Solis, Vaughn, Swanson, & McCulley, 2012; Kilanowski, Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007).

Although all three principals discussed co-teaching as the core strategy to meet inclusionary requirements, none could say specifically what the roles of the teachers were in any classroom. For example, when asked if they did team teaching or parallel teaching, it was simply stated that they could not state which strategy was used at a particular time, or for a particular purpose. Principal A focused on the individualized approach in his building and relied on the teachers to make all determinations regarding how support is provided in an inclusionary classroom. For him, it does not matter who is fulfilling a role, just so it is meeting the individual needs of the student.

Principal B also suggested that all staff have their own strengths and that he tries to utilize his staff to maximize their talents to support students. This becomes difficult and limiting in many ways because he feels some staff simply do not want a co-teacher for various reasons. He stated that some teachers do not want to give up control to another person. He also stated that they do not see the value in having one like he did when he was a teacher. He mentioned that in his early days, "it would have been golden to have a co-teacher". Principal B discussed how he evaluates the teaching situation regarding teacher strengths, personalities, student needs and content areas taught. This approach is supported by researchers that points to success by using resources and personnel to maximize effectiveness (Cuaston & Theoharis, 2014; Hehir & Katzman, 2012; McLeskey, et al., 2014).

The discussions about differentiation were focused on IEP specific adaptations and modifications and not on classroom specific tactics that could support all students. Principal A discussed at length using manipulatives, extra time for completion of projects, adaptions of tests and similar modifications to instructional approaches. McLeskey et al. (2019) identified high leverage practices that are not specific to students with disabilities but that provide a structure within the classroom that supports every student. These strategies include using data for assessing the acquisition of learning targets, using explicit instruction, and providing scaffolded supports. These strategies can benefit all students in a classroom, but in McLeskey and his peer's opinion, are necessary components of inclusive classrooms. In the case of these three principals, classroom strategies of this nature were not discussed. They only spoke at length of co-teaching, differentiation, and IEP specific adaptations for students with disabilities. There was no discussion of UDL or of the Star Legacy Model or any specific research-based initiatives for supporting inclusion or in support of all students within the inclusive classroom.

The overarching question raised here is why were the research-based models not even mentioned? Is it a lack of knowledge about these programs or have other more pressing concerns taken precedence? Could it be that these programs are known but viewed as too difficult to implement? Perhaps it ties to the first theme in this research and these principals simply do not have the background knowledge to approach an adoption of a school wide initiative such as the Star Legacy Model or any program that contains the four cornerstones for effective inclusion: MTSS, effective systematic instruction, differentiated instruction, and UDL.

Implications for Future Research

The key themes found in this study point to a number of questions that could be the basis for future research. One of the most glaring questions is regarding the background experience and professional development of principals as it relates to their ability to carry out certain aspects of their job duties. In this study, I focused on inclusion. However, given the nature of principals' duties, especially in rural schools, it could be any number of responsibilities. It would be most interesting to conduct a similar study on principals that have had experience as music, physical education, or even someone with a special education background. It would also provide those in public education with research that can be used to make changes that are necessary to improve our practices moving into the future.

Another area of interest that could be utilized for future research is the area of structural management of inclusion. The "why" of how particular mode of support is chosen. For example, why is co-teaching chosen over the consultation model? Why would parallel teaching be the model most utilized over team teaching? A study geared toward exploring those questions could benefit and inform school leaders and education professionals about the roots of the decision-making processes.

Finally, the demographic questionnaire reveals some aspects that have been a problem for years. Specifically, the questions about the amount of coursework in special education that school leaders have been exposed to throughout their educational career. We know principals need this instruction, yet there are individuals being give certifications to lead schools with zero exposure to vital information. This dilemma needs further study. Improving what we are doing is a noble goal and the biggest reason for continued research in these areas.

Limitations of the Study

Bagdoniene and Zemblyte (2005) note that "qualitative research, because of the small number of respondents, usually is exploratory and its results are not applied to populations" (p. 27). This is certainly a limitation with this study. The descriptions of three principal's inclusionary environments cannot be extended to most or all inclusionary environments. This study can only speak directly to these specific examples. Along with the notion that these examples are specific to these principals, this study was not a direct observation of these environments. These descriptions are the perceptions of these individuals combined with my own interpretations of their perceptions. It is here that potential bias can creep into the data. There is quite a bit of room for error or lack of precision which is a limiting factor.

Queiros, Faria, and Almeida (2017) stated regarding case studies that "it can be difficult to establish a cause-effect connection to reach conclusions and it can be hard to generalize, particularly when a small number of case studies are considered" (p. 377). This too fits this study in its description of limitations of qualitative research. Although I did not seek to assign causation from the onset of this study, it can be easy to try and make cause-effect suggestions that are not truly there.

Finally, one area of weakness in this study is researcher competence. This is especially true for the interview phase of this research. It was difficult to obtain detailed data as the interview was taking place. Once the interview was over and more information was needed at a different time, it is difficult to get the participant back “into” the line of thought and thinking that would provide more accurate information. Member checking was valuable to aide this research study and avoid that, but it was noted in a communication with one participant.

Summary and Conclusion

This study sought to answer the overall question of what is being done to support inclusionary environments as seen through the eyes of school leaders, and specifically the school principal. This question is more pertinent in rural school districts where principals must manage numerous tasks and responsibilities. Through exploration and descriptive discussions with three rural school principals, I believe that I have uncovered a number of areas that can be explored through further research. I approached this study by using qualitative methods to explore the background experience and certification coursework, principal leadership, and how the inclusionary environments are structured. Qualitative methodology was utilized to get a perspective that cannot be obtained through surveys and calculations of singular responses. This is real life to these principals, and I believe I got that perspective.

The three principals in this study work hard to support students with disabilities. They believe in the notion that all students can learn, and all students deserve to be given the opportunity to learn in an environment that is supportive and nurturing. This is not to say that improvements in supporting the inclusion of students cannot be made; it simply acknowledges that progress is happening, that there are continual barriers that need breached, and that there is hope for never leaving a child behind in our educational institutions.

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FIGURE 2.1

Enhancing Effective Inclusive Education through Collaboration

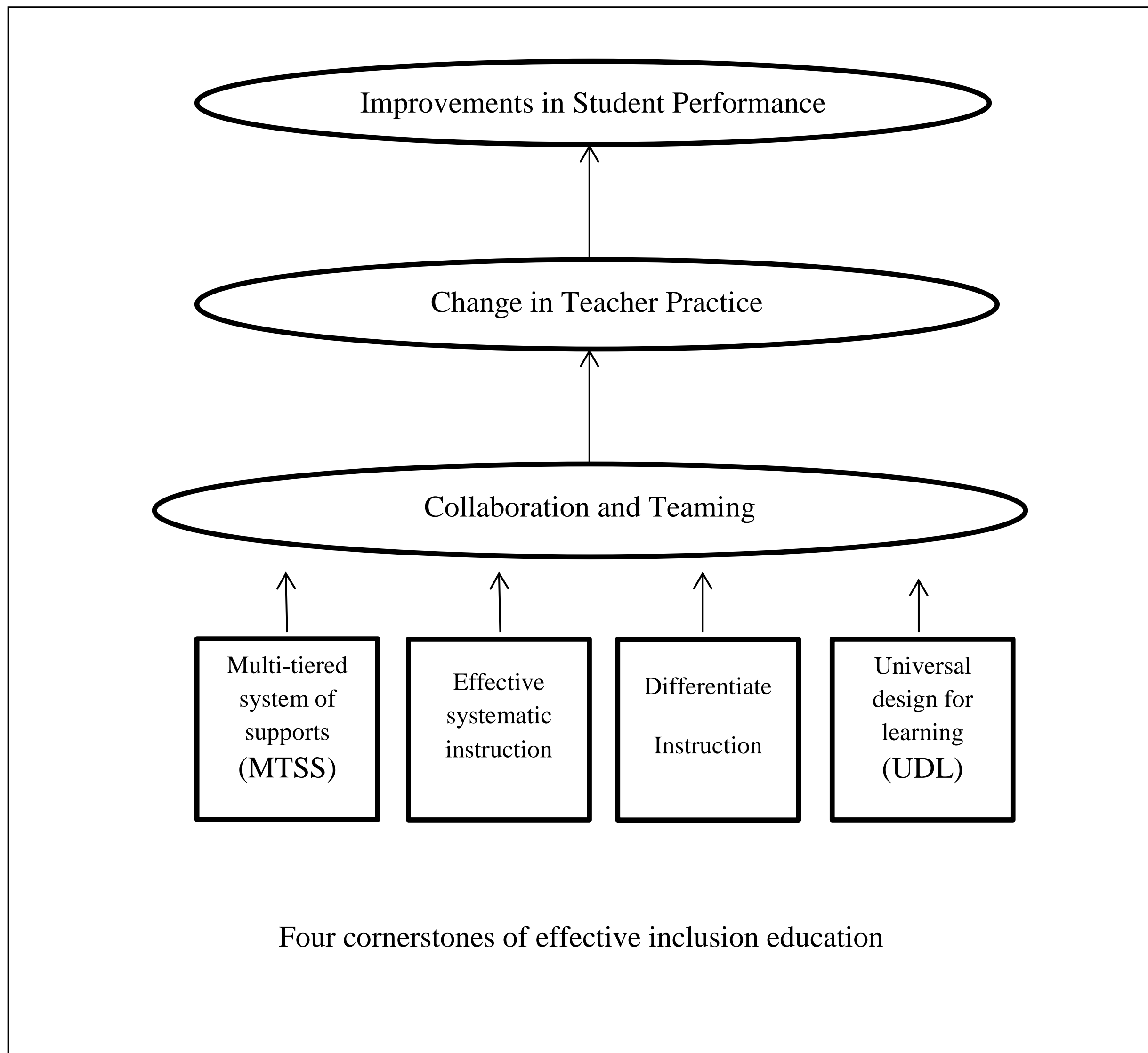


FIGURE 2.2

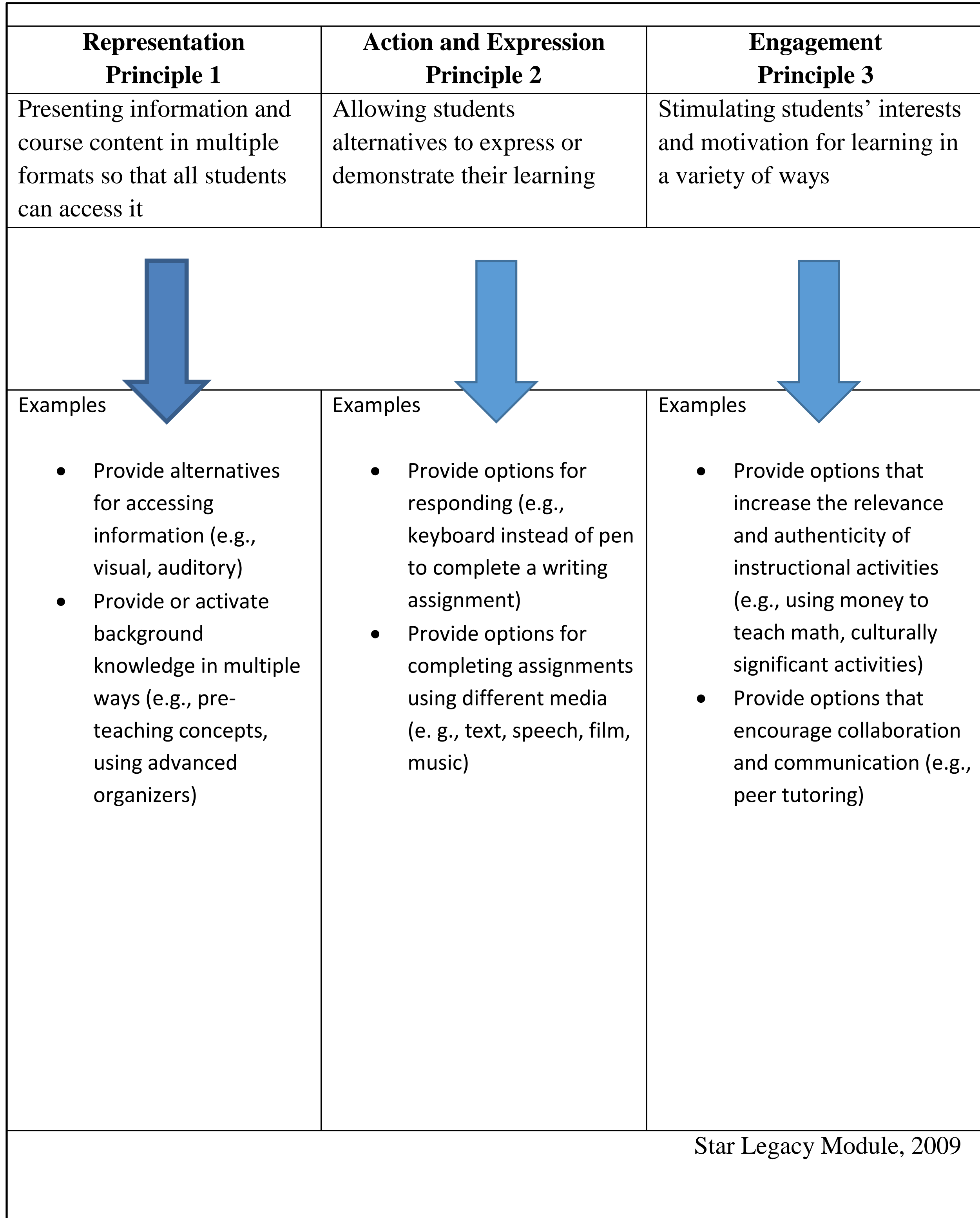


Figure 3.1

Participant	Interview Summary	Primary Codes
Principal A		
Principal B		
Principal C		
Principal D		

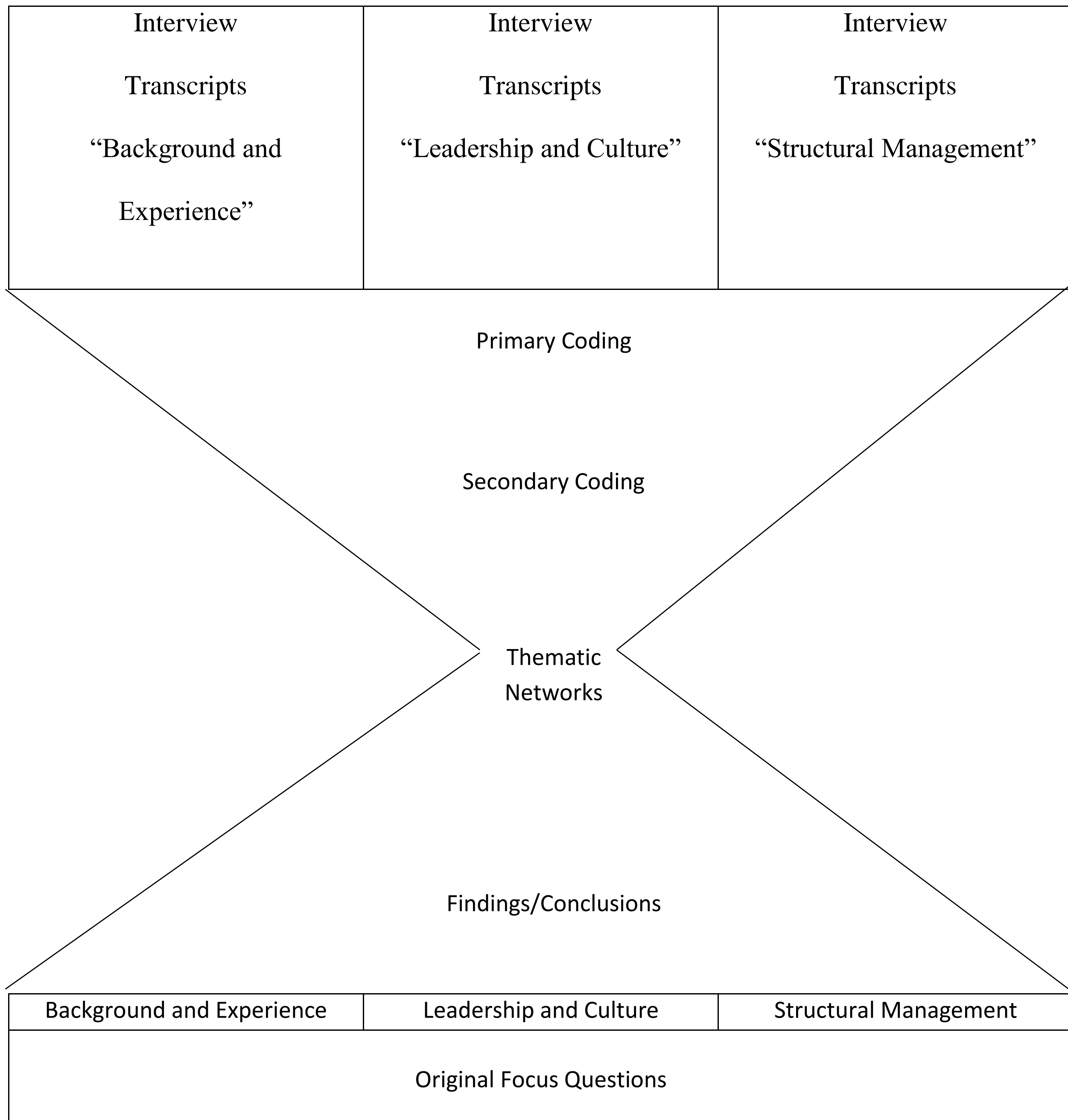
Figure 4.1

Subject	Content Taught as a Teacher	Total Years as a Teacher	Total Years as a Principal	Number of Students in Building	Number of Teachers Supervised	Undergraduate /Graduate Credits in Special Education
Principal A	History	14	9	536	42	12
Principal B	Science	16	11	525	43	12
Principal C	Mathematics	11	6	390	35	9
Average	N/A	13.6	8.6	483.6	40	11

Figure 4.2

	Question	Code	Definition	Example
Principal A	1.1	Empathetic (Emp)	Being able to put yourself into the shoes of another person and see the human aspect/struggle of their condition	One thing that I found you know, is sometimes if we hold hard and fast to this, and you only get one chance, that's, that's it. Then kids that are in special ed struggle in those types of environments.

Figure 4.3



APPENDIX A

Demographic Questionnaire

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION: This is simply a demographic survey that will act as a tool to narrow this research study's potential participants. This does not guarantee an invitation to participate in the research. If chosen to participate in this research study, I understand that participation is completely voluntary. I understand that I may withdraw at any time without explanation or penalty. I also understand that full participation (interview and two follow-up communications) will allow me to be compensated with a $50.00 cash card.

Email Address: ____

What is your current position?

- o High School Principal
- o Jr. High School Principal
- o Elementary Principal
- o Middle School Principal

What grade levels are you responsible for as a principal?

- o Grades 7-12
- o Grades 9-12
- o Grades 7-8
- o Grades 5-8
- o Grades k-6
- o Other

Are you the sole principal of your building (no assistant principal)?

- o Yes
- o No

How long have you held a principal position?

- o 0-4 Years
- o 5-10 Years
- o 11-16 Years
- o 17 + years

How many years of teaching experience did you have before becoming a principal?

- 0-4 Years
- 5-10 Years
- 11-16 Years
- 17 + Years

What content area was the majority of your teaching experience?

____

Are you dual certified to a content area and special education?

- Yes
- No

Approximate number of undergraduate credits in special education.

- 0
- 1-6
- 7-12
- 13 +

Approximate number of special education credits in your principal certification.

- 0
- 1-6
- 7-12
- 13 +

What is the average student population per grade level of your school building?

____

What is the average class size in your building?

- 0-10
- 11-15
- 16-20
- 21 +

How many teachers do you supervise?

- 0-10
- 11-20
- 21-30
- 31 +

This researcher using this questionnaire intends to do a phenomenological study that seeks to explore the social structure an environment of inclusion through descriptive qualitative analysis. Principals are the focus of this study. Would you be interested in compensated participation in this study which would include a face to face interview and at least two follow-up conversations? I verify that indicating yes means that I have read and understand this consent form and would willingly agree to participate in this study under the terms described if so invited.

- o Yes, I would like to be considered for participation.
- o No, I am not interested in participating in this study.

APPENDIX B

DATE: 12-28-2019

Dear School Superintendent,

My name is William Jordan, a Doctoral student from Slippery Rock University. I am reaching out to you to obtain permission to conduct Phenomenological Qualitative Research with your district. The purpose of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of the social setting within a school that revolves around the leadership and management of inclusionary environments by your principals.

In order to achieve the goals of this research, I am asking permission to contact high school principals and invite them to complete a demographic questionnaire for the purpose of narrowing down possible participants. If the principal is willing and chosen to continue, he/she would be interviewed, and contacted two times afterward for member checking to add credibility to the study.

I have attempted to make this process as easy as possible for you because I know you are extremely busy. IRB requires a signed signature on your district letterhead. The attachment with this email can be copied on to your letterhead. Please insert your district name in the appropriate location, sign, scan and email that document back to XXX@sru.edu. If it would be easier to use the postal service, please respond back and I will mail the permission to you. If you have need for clarification or have further questions, I may be reached at XXX@sru.edu or by calling 814-XXX-XXXX.

Thank you in advance for supporting my research and life-long learning.

Sincerely,

William B. Jordan

APPENDIX C

Dear School Principal,

My name is William Jordan, a Doctoral student from Slippery Rock University. I am contacting you to recruit participation in Phenomenological Qualitative Research. Permission to contact you has been granted previously by your Superintendent back in January.

This research seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the social setting within your school that revolves around the leadership and management of inclusionary environments. I seek to understand more clearly how your background influences your decision-making processes, how you inspire culture and vision, and how you structure and manage inclusion.

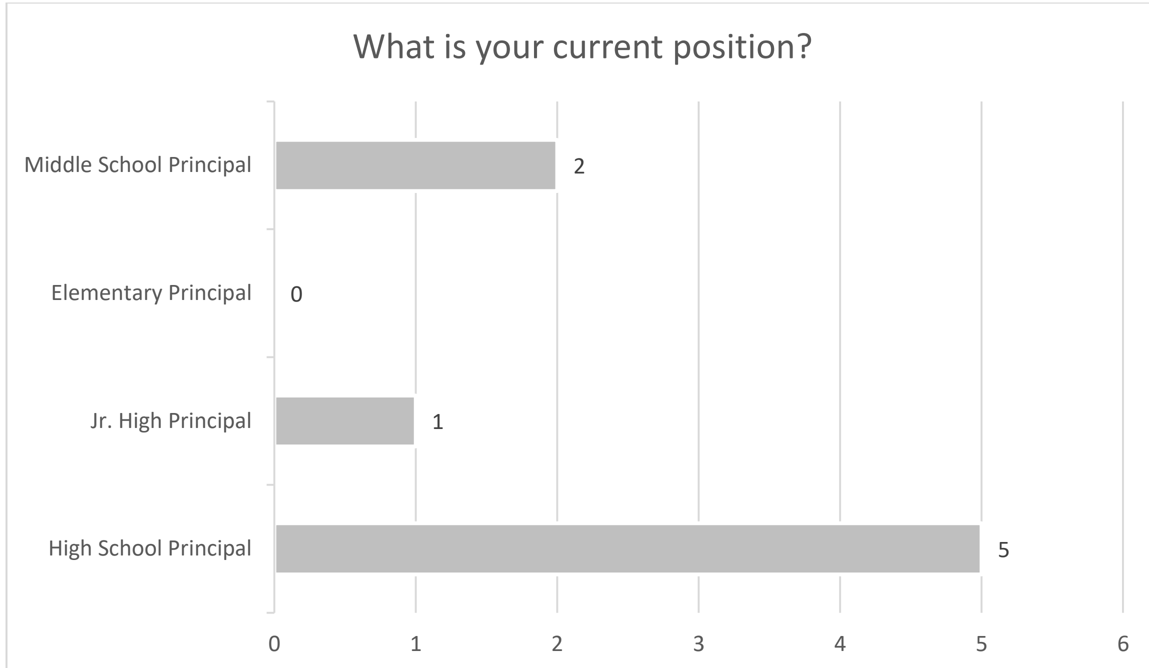
In order to achieve the goals of this research, I am asking you to begin by completing a demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire is a tool to narrow potential study participants. If you agree to become a participant of this study and are chosen, you will be interviewed at least one time, and be contacted at least twice for accuracy and credibility (please see consent to participate in research for details). To recognize and support your participation if you are chosen to complete all aspects of the study, I will be offering compensation in the form of a $50.00 cash card.

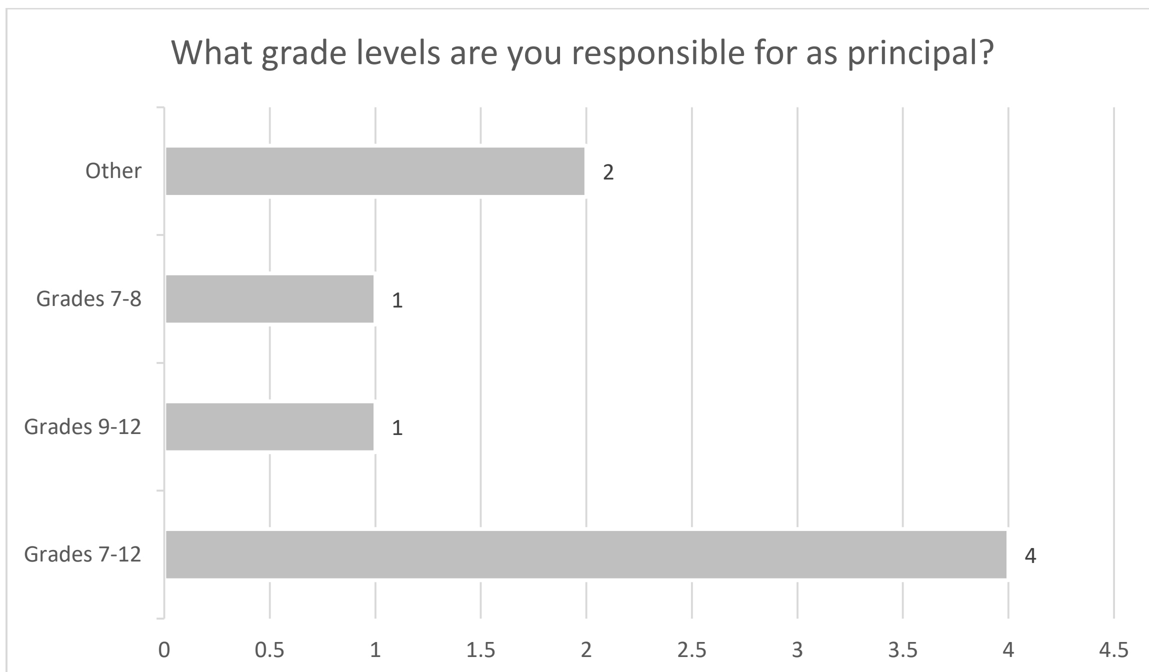
The demographic questionnaire consists of 14 responses and should average two minutes of completion time. The demographic questionnaire can be accessed here: (https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSeqhN-e894_wsSYPaH9QKsZ5dx-ejyzkXZINhDrbC35JawrYg/viewform?usp=sf_link)

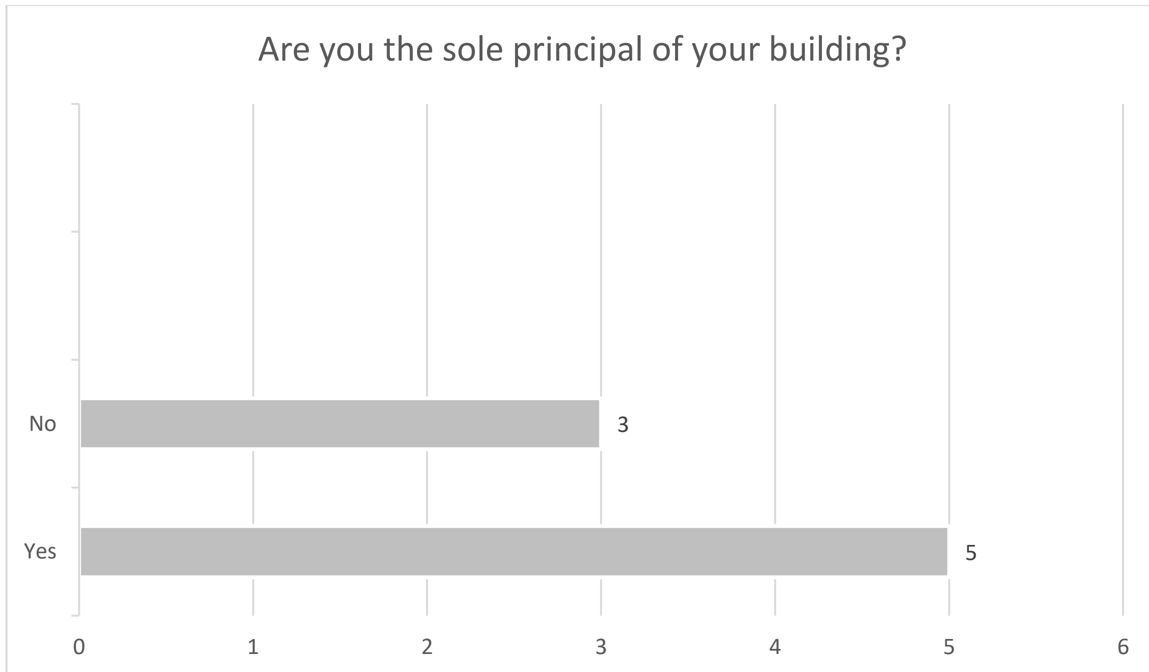
If you have need for clarification or have further questions, I may be reached at XXX@sru.edu or by contacting me at 814-XXX-XXX.

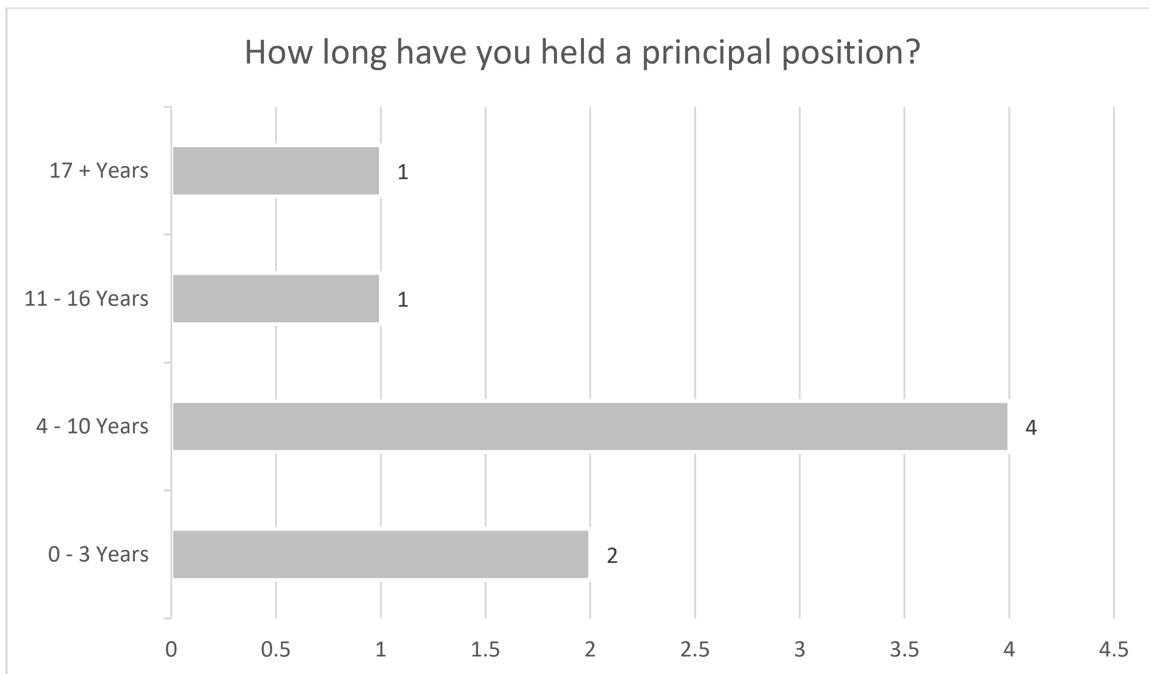
I sincerely thank you in advance for supporting my research and life-long learning.

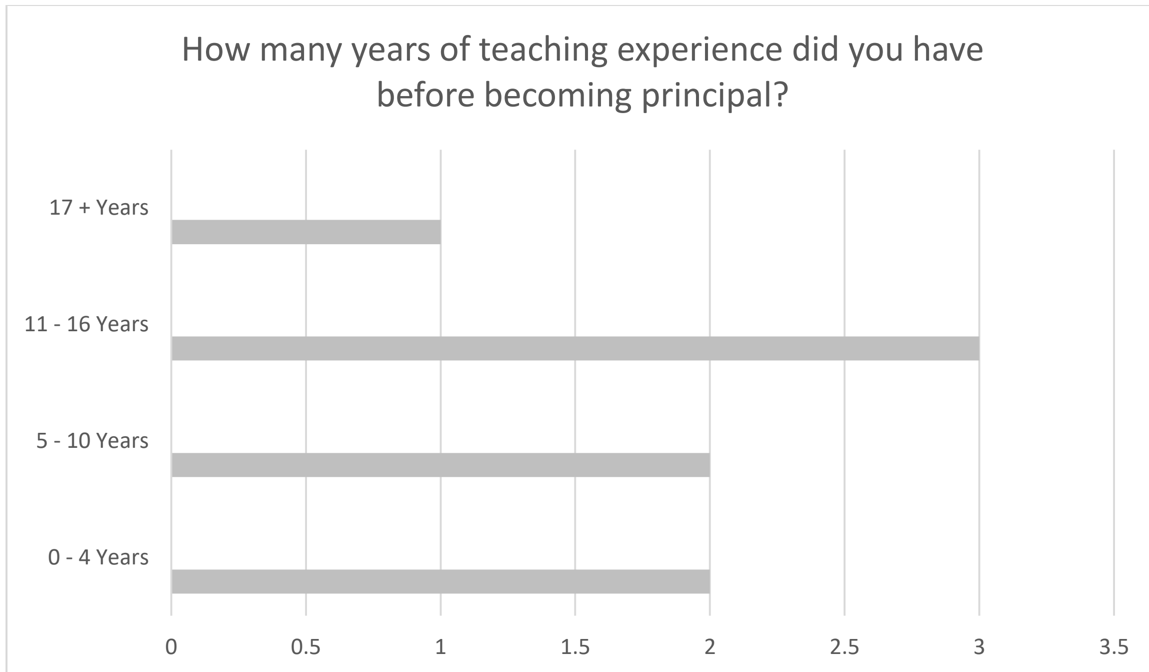
APPENDIX D

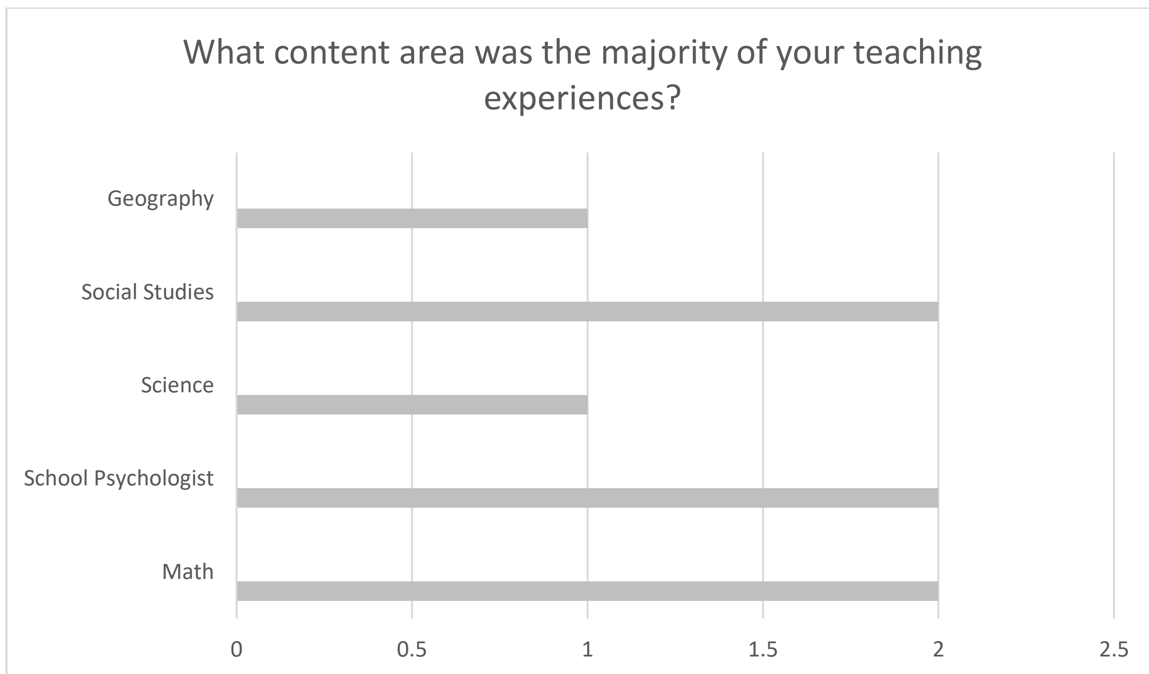


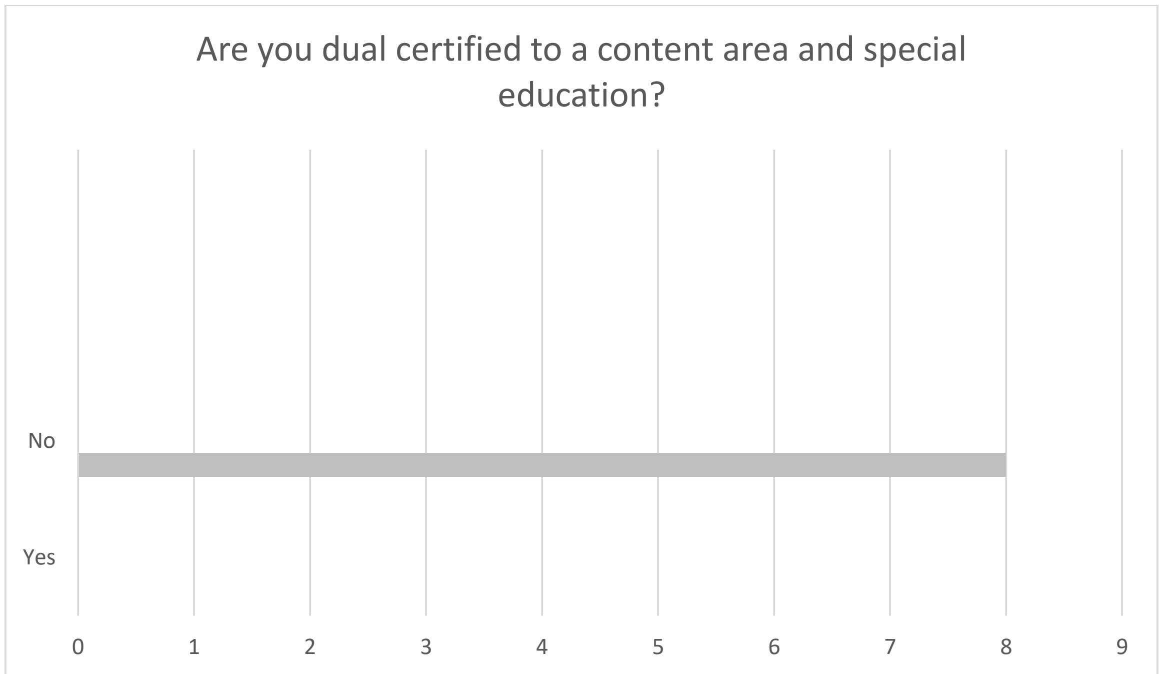


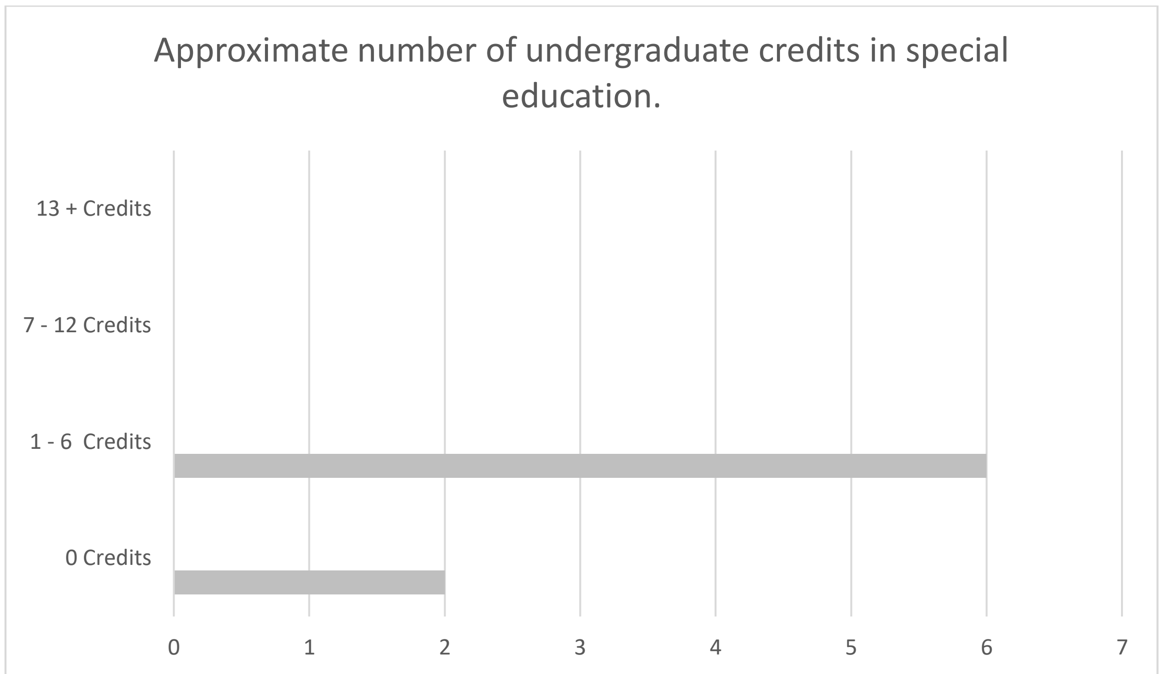

Are you the sole principal of your building?
No
3
Yes
5
0
1
2
3
4
5
6

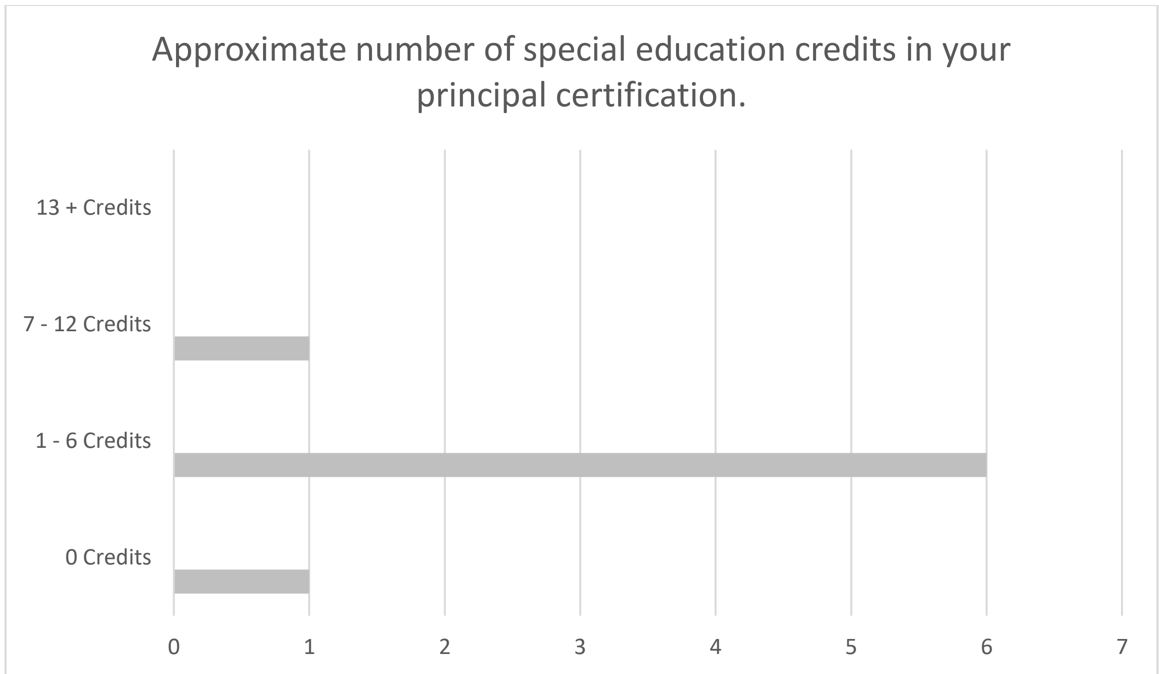

How long have you held a principal position?
17 + Years
1
11 - 16 Years
1
4 - 10 Years
4
0 - 3 Years
2
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5
4
4.5

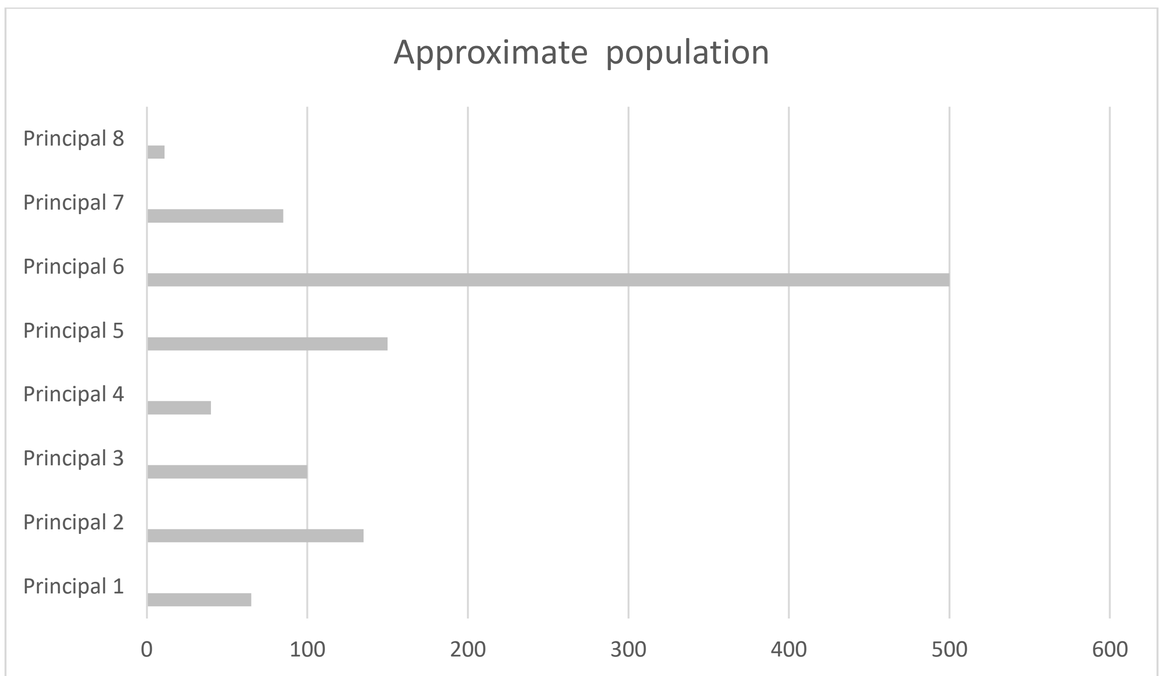

How many years of teaching experience did you have before becoming principal?
17 + Years
11 - 16 Years
5 - 10 Years
0 - 4 Years
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5
3
3.5

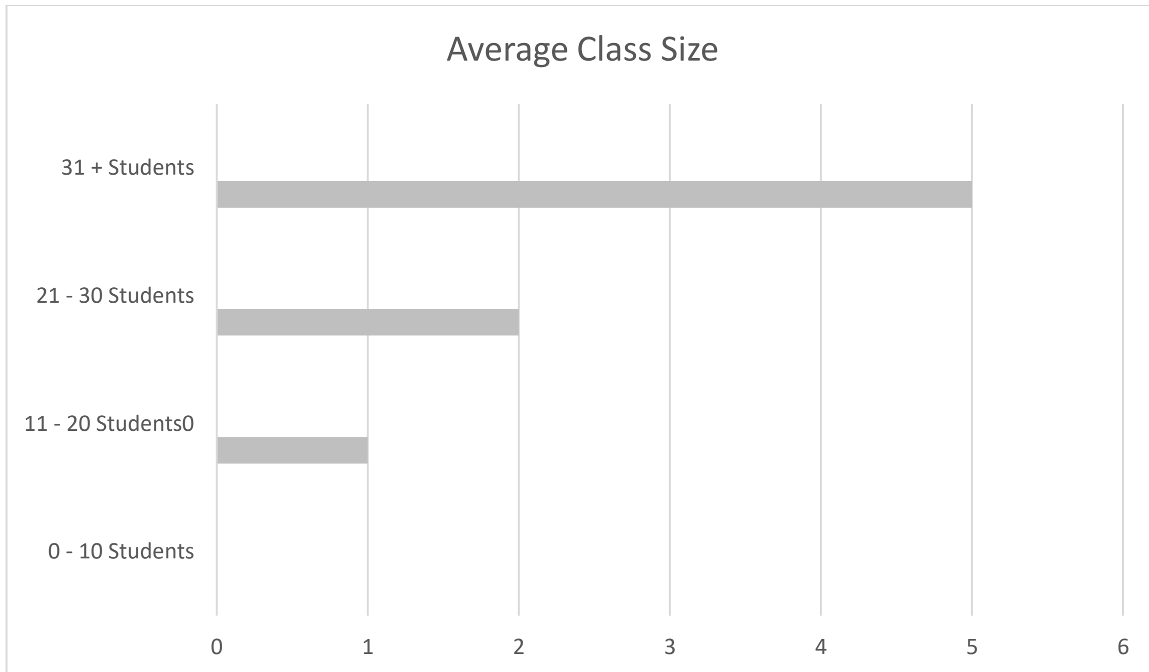

What content area was the majority of your teaching experiences?
Geography
Social Studies
Science
School Psychologist
Math
0
0.5
1
1.5
2
2.5

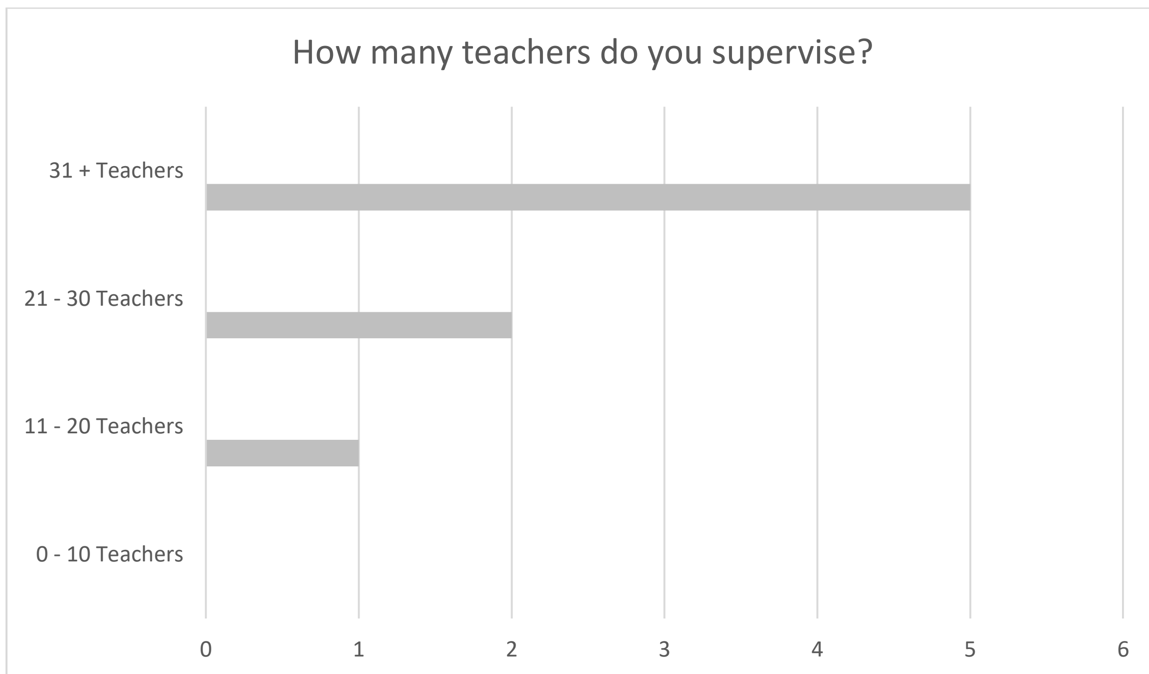

Are you dual certified to a content area and special education?
No
Yes
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9


Approximate number of undergraduate credits in special education.
13 + Credits
7 - 12 Credits
1 - 6 Credits
0 Credits
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7


Approximate number of special education credits in your principal certification.
13 + Credits
7 - 12 Credits
1 - 6 Credits
0 Credits
0
1
2
3
4
5
6
7


Approximate population
Principal 8
Principal 7
Principal 6
Principal 5
Principal 4
Principal 3
Principal 2
Principal 1
0
100
200
300
400
500
600


Average Class Size
31 + Students
21 - 30 Students
11 - 20 Students0
0 - 10 Students
0
1
2
3
4
5
6


How many teachers do you supervise?
31 + Teachers
21 - 30 Teachers
11 - 20 Teachers
0 - 10 Teachers
0
1
2
3
4
5
6