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TEACHER PERCEPTION TOWARD STUDENTS WITH CERTAIN DISABILITIES
IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

in Educational Leadership

in the Center for Leadership and Learning
of the College of Education

May 2019

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Program: Educational Leadership

Degree: Doctorate of Education

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Date

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Abstract

Teacher expectation for student success in the classroom is an effect size that can be used as an indicator of student success. Students with disabilities such as Autism, emotional disturbance, specific learning disabilities or other health impairments are often viewed as being unable to be as successful in a general education classroom than their peers. There were 11 participants in this study. Participants were from the northwest corridor of the state. Participants were public school general education teachers. They varied in range from Kindergarten through grade 12. This study reinforces the need for general education teachers to have a better understanding of how to accommodate for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. This understanding will give teachers the confidence needed to maintain a positive expectation of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Without adequate teacher preparation, students with disabilities will continue to be placed in more restrictive settings which denies them a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA).

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background of Problem

On November 29, 1975, President Gerald Ford signed Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142, 1975). This law helped change the way students with disabilities were educated (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). This law amended the Education of the Handicapped Act which was enacted to provide educational services for handicapped students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). It outlined the way states would be financially reimbursed for educating students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). In 2015, PL 94-142, now better known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was reauthorized to include Least-Restrictive Environment (LRE) within the free and appropriate public education (FAPE) which is the right of every student with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

In the United States, over 1.8 million students with disabilities were educated outside the general education classroom in public school settings in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Today, close to seven million students with disabilities are educated in the public school setting with 62% of them spending more than 80% of their day in a general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This means 38% of students with disabilities are not being educated in general education classes with their peers. These numbers suggest there is a gap between the intent of IDEA and what is being practiced in the public school setting.

The work of John Hattie states teacher expectations are a large influencer of student success (Killian, 2017). According to Killian (2017), the factors that most influence student achievement are teacher estimates of student achievement, response to intervention practices, scaffolding, and teacher expectations. This indicates that teachers, specifically their perceptions and methods, are big influencers on student success in the classroom (Killian, 2017). This also demonstrates that general education teachers' perceptions or expectations for students with disabilities would have some influence on students with disabilities classroom achievement (Waack, 2015).

Since research indicates teacher attitude and perception is related to student achievement, it is important to explore teacher outlook toward students with disabilities in their classroom, as teachers' perceptions may have a huge bearing on whether a student can remain and receive instruction in a general education setting which is also the least restrictive setting for all students (Hattie, 2009). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore general education teachers' perceptions toward students with varying diagnosed disabilities in their classrooms. Specifically, the focus will be on teachers' perception toward students with Specific Learning Disabilities, Autism, Emotional Disturbance, and Other Health Impaired (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). These disabilities are recognized by the State of Arkansas and are the largest categories of primary handicapping conditions in the state (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). For the 2017/18 school year, the state of Arkansas recorded 4,826 students as having Autism, 990 students diagnosed with an Emotional Disorder, 11,753 students diagnosed as Other Health Impaired, and 19,120 students were diagnosed as having some type of Specific Learning Disability. This is according to data collected from Cycle Four or December 1

counts. The total of these four categories of disabilities makes up 60% of all the school aged students with disabilities in public schools for the past school year (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

The Present Study

The purpose of this study was to explore general education teachers' perceptions toward students with varying diagnosed disabilities in their classrooms. The study was conducted by interviewing 7-10 general education teachers in two different school districts in the northwest corridor of the state of Arkansas. These teachers were from a large school district and a small school district and included elementary and secondary positions. Teacher participation was contingent upon their willingness to meet and be interviewed by the researcher. These teachers were found by conducting a preliminary survey that sought to determine their willingness to participate in the interview process. Their answers were gathered, reviewed and compiled. This qualitative data was used to determine the overall perception of general education teachers toward the inclusion of students who have been diagnosed with certain disabilities in their classrooms.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this document, there will be many terms, phrases and acronyms used. The following educational and special education related terms and definitions are provided to assist the reader.

- **“Arkansas Department of Education” or “ADE”** is the state education agency for public schools. It is a service agency that provides support, service, and leadership for schools in the state of Arkansas. In the 2017/2018 school year, there were 238 districts, 1,053 K-12 public

schools, 15 Education Service Cooperatives, 479,258 K-12 students and 33,203 teachers (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

- **“AU”** is an acronym which refers to the handicapping condition of Autism. Autism is a developmental disability that may affect communication and social interaction and can adversely affect a student’s educational performance (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).
- **“ED”** is an acronym referring to the handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance. This is a condition which exhibits several characteristics such as an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual factors, inability to make or maintain relationships with peers, inappropriate behavior or feelings, depression, or a development of physical ailments or fears that are associated with personal or school issues (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). This term can include schizophrenia (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).
- **“FAPE”** refers to a Free and Appropriate Public Education. This is what is to be provided to all students with special needs according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act. It is an education designed to meet the needs of each child so that he or she can make appropriate progress in light of the child’s individual circumstances (101st United States Congress, 2004).
- **“General or Regular Education Setting”** is a term used to describe a program or place of education where typically developing students receive

their education. Teachers in this setting do not usually have training in teaching students with disabilities (Webster, 2017).

- **“IDEA”** is an acronym used to refer to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. This act governs all federal and, therefore, state special education rules and regulations. It was enacted in 1975 as the Education of Handicapped Children and amended in 1990 to become the Individual with Disabilities Act. It was re-authorized in 1997 and again in 2004 (101st United States Congress, 2004).
- **“IEP”** is the acronym referring to an Individualized Education Program or Plan. This plan is for any student who qualifies for special education services in a public-school setting. Each plan is set up to meet the unique and individual needs of the student (101st United States Congress, 2004).
- **“Inclusion”** is defined as the act of including or the practice of encompassing students with disabilities in a general education classroom setting (Merriam-Webster, 2018).
- **“LRE”** refers to the Least Restrictive Environment. This is an environment in which a child will, to the extent appropriate, participate with nondisabled peers (Office of the Superintendent of Public School Instruction, 2016).
- **“OHI”** refers to the handicapping condition of other health impairment. This condition can include health issues such as asthma, diabetes, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, Tourette’s syndrome or any other chronic or

acute health condition that could adversely affect a student's educational performance (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

- **“Self-contained”** refers to a placement setting for students with disabilities. This setting has a smaller teacher to student ratio as compared to a general education classroom that may have anywhere from 20-30 students depending upon the grade level (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). In Arkansas, a self-contained setting ratio may be a teacher to student ratio of 1:6, 1:10 or 1:15 and oftentimes has paraprofessionals or classroom aides to assist with the education of students with severe impairments (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).
- **“SLD”** refers to the handicapping condition known as Specific Learning Disability. This disability is a disorder in the basic processes involved in using or understanding language (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). It may manifest as an inability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations and applications (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). Students with this condition usually have average or above average intellectual capabilities but do not perform at expected achievement levels (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

Research Questions

The questions that guide this study are:

1. What are some perceptions general education teachers have about students with certain disabilities participating in the general education setting?
2. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with Autism to participate in the general education classroom setting?
3. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom setting?
4. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired in the general education classroom setting?
5. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of a Specific Learning Disability in the general education classroom setting?
6. What training and from where have teachers received to help them manage students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
7. What do teachers believe they need to have a more inclusive classroom?

Significance of the Study

This study hopes to uncover the gaps in general education teacher training for students with disabilities. This study may show the need for more in-depth preparation for general education teachers who will be working with a continually growing population of students with disabilities. This study may provide insight into teacher preparation programs and the need to provide more classes regarding how to work with

students with disabilities in the general education classroom. It may also provide the opportunity for school districts to understand the importance and necessity of providing professional development that centers on disabilities and how to support general education teachers so students with disabilities can be included in the least restrictive setting.

Assumptions

It is assumed that teacher preparation programs do not adequately prepare general education teachers to be confident in their ability to work with students with disabilities in the classroom even though federal law mandates the least restrictive environment must always be the first placement consideration. This lack of confidence may be due to the limited required classes general education teachers take that are geared to special education students or exceptional student learners. It is also assumed teachers participating in this research were truthful in their answers.

Limitations

The scope of this study is limited to Northwest Arkansas. Results may be specific to this region due to differences in demographics and experiences. However, results of this study may be transferable to other regions.

Delimitations

The participants in this study are general education teachers in Northwest Arkansas. This study does not include special education teachers or teachers in private school settings, as special education teachers' focus and training is on students with

disabilities, and private school teachers may not be exposed to the number of students with disabilities who are found in a public school setting.

Summary/Organization of the Study

IDEA mandates students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment in which the student can show progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Students should be able to be in an environment that provides a balance between ambitious and challenging goals where a child can make progress as determined by the child's circumstances (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Hattie found teacher perception of student ability has an impact on the success of the student in the classroom (Hattie, 2009). Thus, an examination of teacher perceptions concerning students with certain handicapping conditions and how these students fit into the general education classroom is warranted. By determining teacher perception and the potential gaps in teacher preparation of students with disabilities, this study will assist school districts in planning professional development which targets this particular group of students.

This chapter provided the background of the problem and the purpose of the study as well as the need to look further into teacher perceptions of students with disabilities. Definition of terms as well as limitations and significance of the study have also been outlined. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature regarding students with disabilities, their inclusion with their general education peer groups as well as the state of Arkansas' requirements for a general education teaching license. Chapter Three provides a methods overview that includes participants, research design and a description of the survey used. Chapter Four will present the results of the survey as well as an analysis of

the data gathered. Chapter Five will present a discussion of the results and the implications of those results which will include recommendations for future research, higher education practices, and professional development at local district levels.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This study explores general education teachers' perceptions toward students with varying disabilities in their classrooms. Specifically, the focus will be on teachers' perception toward students with Specific Learning Disabilities, Autism, Emotional Disturbance, and Other Health Impaired. These disabilities are recognized by the State of Arkansas as the largest growing disability categories (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). In this literature review, an overview will be provided regarding the history of education and the right to be educated in the United States; policy and programs regarding students with disabilities; educational experiences and outcomes for students with Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impaired, and specific learning disability; inclusion and teacher perception of educating students with disabilities; Arkansas requirements for teachers and teacher preparation programs. The work of John Hattie is used as a conceptual framework.

History of Education and the Right to be Educated in the United States

The history of education in the United States can be traced to the year 1635 with the establishment of the Boston Latin School which was designed for sons of high social classes (Sass, 2017). The boys who attended this school were destined, in the minds of the establishment, to become leaders in their communities (Sass, 2017). The Massachusetts Law of 1647 declared that every town of at least 50 families must have a schoolmaster who would teach the children to read and write (Sass, 2017). For towns over 100 families, there would be a master of a Latin grammar school who would prepare students to attend Harvard (Sass, 2017). Education was not equitable in the early years of

the United States (Sass, 2017). In places where there were no schools established; only boys were taught to write. This was due to men handling all the affairs of the businesses and households at that time (Sass, 2017). It was believed girls only needed to be able to read so they could share religious ideals with the children (Sass, 2017).

First schools for girls and students with disabilities. The Ursuline Academy of New Orleans was the earliest school for girls and was established in 1727 by the Sisters of the Order of Saint Ursula. This school produced the first female pharmacist (Sass, 2017). The Academy was supported by the first established convent in the United States and was the first free school for girls (Sass, 2017). It was also the first school to teach Native Americans and female African-American slaves (Sass, 2017). The Ursuline Academy was the first boarding school for girls and the first school of music in the New Orleans area (Robenstine, 1992). Schooling for girls that was supported by taxes began in 1767 in New England (Robenstine, 1992). This idea did not catch on with all states, as some of the wealthy families did not want to pay to aid poor families (Robenstine, 1992). The Young Ladies Academy in Philadelphia, established in 1787, was the first girls' academy in the 13 colonies (Sass, 2017).

In 1817, the first permanent school for the deaf was established (Sass, 2017). The Connecticut Asylum at Hartford for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons was co-founded by Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet and Laurent Clerc (Sass, 2017). This was followed by the New England Asylum for the Blind which was established in 1829 in Massachusetts (Sass, 2017). The Experimental School for Teaching and Training Idiotic Children was established in 1848 by Samuel Gridley Howe (Sass, 2017). The New York State Asylum for Idiots opened in 1851 (Sass, 2017). The Pennsylvania Training School

for Feeble-Minded children was a private school for students with intellectual disabilities and opened in 1853 (Sass, 2017).

The right to education. In the early years of formal education in the United States, attending school was not required of anyone. However, in 1840, a compulsory education law was passed in Rhode Island, the first state to have such a law (Gladhill, 2014). Massachusetts followed with a similar law in 1852 (Gladhill, 2014). These laws said school attendance was a requirement. Students with disabilities were not included in this compulsory attendance law. In 1893, the Supreme Court ruled in *Watson v. City of Cambridge* that students who were considered “weak in mind” would be unable to reap any benefits from instruction, would bother other students and, due to making “uncouth noises,” could be expelled from the school setting (Gladhill, 2014). The Supreme Court of Illinois determined in 1958 that the compulsory attendance law did not require the state to provide a free public education for feeble-minded or mentally deficient children (Gladhill, 2014). The Secondary Education Act (SEA) of 1965 provided funding for desegregating black schools as well as assisting in the education of disadvantaged students. This was the first time students with any type of disability had been included in federal funding (Gladhill, 2014). The SEA was in response to the number of segregated schools even after the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling in 1954 determined separate was not equal. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was the catalyst for educating students with disabilities, and the SEA put up the funding and the threat of revocation of funding if integration of students with disabilities did not occur (Gladhill, 2014).

Policies and Programs Regarding Students with Disabilities

There are numerous policies and programs in place which affect and govern the educational experience of students with disabilities. This section discusses the policies, laws, and some programs that have been put into place, both nationally and at some state levels, in order to establish education for all students including those with disabilities.

Separate is not equal. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 laid groundwork that said separate was not equal. This landmark ruling went on to include much more than just racial segregation. During the late 1960's, it became apparent to some members of Congress that students with disabilities, in spite of the best efforts of the Civil Rights Act, were not included in the educational process on an equal basis with students who did not have disabilities. This produced the need for legislation to include safeguards for students who learned in ways that were different (Gladhill, 2014). On April 9, 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) went into effect and granted equal access to education for all students. This act gave federal funding to help provide for students of poverty (University of Kansas, 2018). In 1971, the *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* established students with disabilities must be placed in publicly funded school settings that met the students' needs (University of Kansas, 2018). These needs would be determined through individual student evaluations. Also in December of 1971, *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* made it illegal for the District of Columbia to exclude "exceptional" students, which included students with mental disabilities as well as learning and behavioral disabilities in publicly funded settings (University of Kansas, 2018). Congress conducted an investigation in 1972 in order to

determine how many students with disabilities were not being served in the appropriate environment. This investigation discovered out of eight million students, 2.5 million received an inadequate education, while 1.75 million were not even enrolled in school (University of Kansas, 2018). As a result of these findings, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was passed in 1973. This act was designed to protect people with disabilities from discrimination (Gladhill, 2014).

Even the Rehabilitation Act was not enough to ensure equality for those with disabilities. Therefore, in 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) better known Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142) and changes for students with disabilities truly began (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). When PL 94-142 was first enacted, there were more than eight million handicapped children in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). One million of these handicapped students were not educated in the public school setting with their general education peers (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). It was determined that more than half of the eight million students did not have the opportunity to receive appropriate educational services (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Though EAHCA was passed in 1975, the whole of the law did not take effect until 1977 (Gladhill, 2014). During this time, teachers began to be trained in instructional and diagnostic methods that helped them to provide effective education to handicapped students (Gladhill, 2014). The law stated emphatically that states and local educational agencies would provide an education as well as related services to handicapped students (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). At this time, Congress recognized states did not have the funding to support the training needed to provide educational services to these students. Thus, EAHCA also set up a

program where states would be funded for the education of handicapped students based upon the number of students in the state or local school district (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The IDEA. In 1986, then President Ronald Reagan signed the Handicapped Children's Protection Act which gave parents of students with disabilities more input into the development of their child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP). In January of 1990, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and Autism were added as new disability categories. Included in this change was the addition of a transition plan which helped to transition students from secondary to post-secondary. The Handicapped Children's Protection Act was then known as Public Law 101-476 (University of Kansas, 2018). This law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997 under President Bill Clinton. At this time, amendments were added that gave states the authority to expand the age of developmentally delayed students from birth to five years old to between six and nine years old (University of Kansas, 2018). Amendments were also included that determined all students must have access to the same curriculum (University of Kansas, 2018). IDEA was reauthorized in 2004 and again in 2014 and is also known as Public Law 108-446 (Samuels, 2015). The 2014 reauthorization reiterated the Department of Education's dedication to serving students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

The focus of IDEA is for students with disabilities to be appropriately placed within the public education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). These students, according to IDEA, are to be placed with non-disabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as often as possible (101st United States Congress, 2004).

These students qualify for additional educational services under IDEA when they have a diagnosed handicapping condition. When the law was passed in 1975, there were nine disability categories (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Today, the state of Arkansas recognizes 12 areas in which a student age five to 21 may qualify for services (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). The United States Department of Education Office of Special Education recognizes 13 disability areas. Arkansas puts Blindness under the category of Visual Impairment (Understanding Special Education, 2016).

Educational Experiences for Students with Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impaired, and Specific Learning Disabilities

Including students with disabilities in general education classes is a national issue and not exclusive to the State of Arkansas. Currently, there are several placements available for students which include general education classes, resource classes where a student is pulled out for a specified amount of time per day to address deficit areas, self-contained classes where a student spends the majority of the day in a small classroom with a teacher in order to work on building skills in deficit areas, inclusion classes where a student is in a general education classroom with a general education teacher and a special education teacher, therapeutic day treatment where a student receives mental health services, homebound services where a student receives at least four hours of academic services per week, and residential placement where a student stays and is able to access mental health services 24 hours a day (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). Students with disabilities are more often than not excluded from what is considered normal educational opportunities (Odongo & Davison, 2016)). It has been

noted this exclusion often includes gifted and talented students (Odongo & Davison, 2016).

Kleinert, Towles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman, & Kerbel (2015) examine the subject of disabilities and the implications for general curriculum access. They acknowledge students with disabilities most often require repeated instruction and continuous ongoing support as well as adapted materials and different ways of accessing and showing mastery of information (Kleinert, et al., 2015). Their research determined the general education classroom teacher provides advantages because of their expertise in the core content areas, and their knowledge of the materials used for particular subjects. Learning with their own age peer group is also an advantage for students with disabilities due to peer support (Kleinert, et al., 2015). The researchers found there were higher gains in the areas of adaptive behavior and social competence for students who were in the inclusive classrooms (Kleinert, et al., 2015). The next section will explore Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, and Specific Learning Disabilities in more detail.

Autism. Autism is defined by some as a neurological condition that may include characteristics such as obsessive-compulsive behavior, echolalic speech patterns, social skills challenges, sensory issues, and nonverbal communication (Autism Speaks, 2018). However, not all people diagnosed as having Autism have all of these characteristics (Autism Speaks, 2018). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in every 59 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder or ASD (Autism Speaks, 2018). This number has increased since 2000 when tracking of ASD began (Autism Speaks, 2018). At that time, one out of every 150 students were diagnosed as

having Autism (Autism Speaks, 2018). It is believed that increased awareness as well as screening in minority communities has led to this increase of identification (Autism Speaks, 2018). Students have been successfully identified as young as two years-old but most are not diagnosed until age four or until they begin a school type program (Autism Speaks, 2018). Early diagnosis and intervention can be key to helping students who have autism in general education settings (Autism Speaks, 2018).

According to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) (2018), there are more boys identified as having autism than girls. The rate for boys is one in 38 while girls is one in 152 (NIMH, 2018). Caucasian students are identified one in 58, while African American students are identified one in 63; Asian and Pacific Islanders are identified as one in 74 while Hispanic students are identified one in 71 (NIMH, 2018).

According to secondary general education teachers in one study, a third of the students with Autism were taught using the standard grade level curriculum general education students received (Newman, 2007). Almost half of the teachers polled reported some modifications were made to the general education curriculum for students with Autism while around 12% of the students required substantial modifications to the grade level curriculum (Newman, 2007). These teachers also noted students with Autism seemed to participate less than other students in the general education classroom (Newman, 2007).

In the general education classroom, students with Autism spend more time alone (Saggers, 2015). This solitary behavior leads to teasing, bullying, and verbal aggression from others which causes the student with Autism to often engage in reactive aggression (Saggers, 2015). Students with Autism appear to have fewer friends and smaller social

networks which can lead to higher levels of social anxiety in the general education classroom (Saggers, 2015). Those students who were able to have positive relationships with peers reported having better support and better school experiences. These students also report their friendships with others were very fragile due to having difficulties with conversations and being able to understand non-verbal social cues (Saggers, 2015). It has been suggested students with Autism may have the most difficult time with general education peers due to their inability to understand social concepts which can lead to increased anxiety (Saggers, 2015). In addition to social concepts, students with Autism also indicated classroom noise, workload, homework, and handwriting led to high anxiety and hindered their ability to be successful in general education settings (Saggers, 2015). Classrooms which are quiet, orderly, and teachers who do not yell but are calm and proactive instead of reactive help to create a successful environment for students with Autism (Saggers, 2015). These students want to be treated like all other students with the needed support rather than being singled out. Having quiet places to work when needed and a teacher who recognizes this need before it becomes a high anxiety situation can lead to success in the classroom for all students, not just those with Autism (Saggers, 2015).

Nathan Hughes is a student with Autism who graduated with his Master's Degree in Education of Students with Moderate Disabilities (Hughes, 2016). He recounted his days in public school as both positive and negative. Much of the positivity was due to being able to connect with and have support from his peers (Hughes, 2016). His memories of being unsuccessful usually came from changes in routine and the frustration of teachers. He admits he could sense the frustration and would often respond with

resentment and anger (Hughes, 2016). From his experiences, he has learned self-advocacy and the ability to comfortably interact with others. He hopes to be able to instill these abilities in other students with Autism (Hughes, 2016).

Emotional disturbance. According to the Arkansas Department of Education (2018), emotional disturbance is a mental condition that can have one or more characteristics. These characteristics may include but are not limited to inappropriate behavior or feelings, a consistent mood of unhappiness or chronic depression, an inability to learn that is not due to intellectual or health issues, and physical symptoms or irrational fears which manifest themselves from personal or school issues (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

In 1994, there was a national agenda developed that worked specifically on better results for students with serious emotional disturbances in the United States. (Osher & Hanley, 2001). In 2001, a study conducted by The Chesapeake Institute at American Institutes for Research explored the achievements accomplished through the implementation of this National Agenda (Osher & Hanley, 2001). First Step to Success was an early intervention program aimed specifically at kindergarten students. It involved universal screening of all students, training for teachers, peers, parent/guardian and caretakers. This program improved student behavior and continued to work for these students for at least three years (Osher & Hanley, 2001).

There have also been several school wide programs developed. One such program was Project Achieve, which included staff training in behavioral and educational strategies. It used a cognitive-behavioral curriculum (Osher & Hanley, 2001). In many schools, Project Achieve was able to lead to decreased disciplinary referrals, special

education referrals and placements, as well as suspensions and retentions (Osher & Hanley, 2001). Project WRAP, which consists of school based wraparound services that focus on serving the whole child, has led to reductions in hospitalizations, and more placements in least restrictive environments (Osher & Hanley, 2001). Through this national agenda, there have also been district initiatives as well as state and county programs and agencies that deal directly with student mental health (Osher & Hanley, 2001). The main characteristics of these programs that seem to have been detrimental in their success is the training and support given to school personnel, high social and academic expectations, respect for students and families, student-centered instruction, collaboration between all parties, and building leadership who did not quit or give up on these students (Osher & Hanley, 2001). The most significant reason given for the success of these programs is the school culture embraced and implemented a common set of values which included nurturing and supporting these students and their families (Osher & Hanley, 2001). While culture is a big part of the success of these programs, culture is also a barrier in some schools. There has to be building or district wide buy in for students to be successful. One teacher who does not think these students should be in an inclusive environment can sour the culture of the entire building (Osher & Hanley, 2001).

From 1995 to 2005, the number of students between the ages of 6-21 who were diagnosed with emotional and behavioral disorders increased by 10% (Tsai, et al 2013). According to the National Longitudinal Transition Study (2013), 75% of high school students who have experienced suspensions or expulsions had been diagnosed as having an emotional disorder. These students also had the highest dropout rate when compared to students with other types of disabilities (Tsai et al., 2013). These statistics suggest

schools may not be providing the services these students require in order to be successful in the educational environment. The three main obstacles which were identified as keeping students from being successful in the school were a lack of academic accommodations, lack of mental health and behavioral services as well as a lack of teacher support and training (Tsai et al., 2013). From 1995 to 2010, the National Longitudinal Transition Study only found five other relevant studies concerning emotional or behavioral disorders. This indicates there has not been adequate research completed to help determine potential best practices for students who are identified as having emotional disturbance (Tsai et al., 2013).

In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit alleging the state of Georgia through the Georgia Network for Educational and Therapeutic Support or GNETS was segregating students with behavior problems. They also alleged these students were receiving inadequate educational programs in inferior facilities (Samuels, 2017). This suit is currently on hold pending the outcome of a Florida lawsuit which will determine whether or not the Justice Department has the authority to file lawsuits under Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act or ADA (Samuels, 2017).

Another study conducted by Buchanan, Nese, and Clark (2016) indicated even though students with disabilities have more opportunities in school than ever before, students who have been diagnosed as having an emotional disturbance do not show as much progress as students with other disabilities. They have shown lower academic achievements by failing more courses, receiving lower grades as well as having more incidents of expulsion and a higher dropout rate than their peers (Buchanan et al., 2016). In 2014, 43% of students with an emotional disturbance diagnosis were served in the

general education classroom for a minimum of 80% of the day. These students need more intensive treatment and intervention supports that they do not currently receive in the general education environment. Many of these students spend part of their educational career in a residential or day-treatment environment. This environment releases students back to public school settings once they have either completed their program or their insurance will no longer pay for the therapeutic services. This transition back to a school setting usually has no follow-up from the mental health facility. This causes a disconnect between the environment that addresses the mental health needs of the student and the environment that concentrates on the academic needs of the student (Buchanan et al., 2016).

Research conducted by Gladhill (2014) indicates small class sizes are not the best setting for students who were diagnosed as having a primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance. The researched further uncovered these students did not make much progress in math or reading in any type of educational setting. It was determined this was because the greater need was to address the behavioral issues before the academic issues could be addressed (Gladhill, 2014).

Other health impairments. Other Health Impairments encompasses many things. It can cover medical diagnoses such as diabetes, asthma, epilepsy, seizure disorder which can limit strength, alertness and quality of life, attention deficit disorder (ADD) or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (Centers for Disease Control, 2017). In 2016, according to a National Survey of Children's Health conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there were 6.1 million children age 2-17 years old diagnosed with ADHD (CDC, 2018). Previous surveys indicated students who were

diagnosed between the ages of 2-5 increased by 50% from 2007 to 2012 (CDC, 2018). In 2016, nearly two out of three children who were diagnosed with ADHD also had an additional mental health disorder. Parents reported 62% of children ages 12-17 were taking ADHD medication while 69% of children ages 6-11 and 18% of children ages 2-5 were taking ADHD medication (CDC, 2018). Of these children, almost 32% were receiving medication and therapy while 23% were not receiving either therapy or medication. Thirty percent were treated with medication alone (CDC, 2018). Fifteen percent received therapy with no medication (CDC, 2018). In Arkansas, a 2016 parent report indicated 17% of children were identified as being ADHD as compared to 9.9 % in 2003 (CDC, 2017). Students with the diagnosis of Other Health Impairment oftentimes struggle academically. This may be due to attendance issues caused by health problems or suspensions due to behavioral problems which can be attributed to ADHD (CDC, 2018).

Research conducted by Michael Norman (2016) indicated parents believed schools were not doing what they could to address the social or academic needs of their child with the disabling diagnosis of Other Health Impaired. The parents interviewed believed entering special education services at school caused trauma and was confusing to both students and parents (Norman, 2016). Parents believed student success or lack of success is due to the school focusing on academics as opposed to the health issues of the student (Norman, 2016). They believed since the student has the Other Health Impaired diagnosis, health should be the driving force that plans student instruction. The perception of success in the public school setting of students who have been diagnosed as Other Health Impaired is that there is minimal success (Norman, 2016).

A similar study indicated students who required help in the form of a paraprofessional often felt stigmatized (Ervins, 2015). These students felt as though having support in terms of a person who was with them all day prevented or discouraged peer interaction (Ervins, 2015). Ervins (2015) research also found some of the students without disabilities were uncomfortable having students with disabilities in the general education class and those students should be educated in a more specialized setting. While it was noted that students' perception was many times unclear as to whether inclusion of students with disabilities was positive or negative, many students with disabilities believed the work was not appropriate for them in the general education classroom (Ervins, 2015).

Specific learning disability. Specific Learning Disability is the largest category of disabilities served in the public school setting. There are approximately 2.3 million students diagnosed with specific learning disabilities; this denotes close to 35% of students who receive special education services (LDAA, 2018). Students who have this diagnosis usually have difficulties in language, reading, and/or mathematical calculation and problem solving (LDAA, 2018). There is no cure for learning disabilities (LDAA, 2018). Students who receive this diagnosis learn coping skills and strategies to be able to function in not only a public school setting but a work environment and life in general. Retention is high for students with a specific learning disability diagnosis, with about 38% being held back and about 50% being expelled or suspended in the 2011 school year (Morin, 2018). One in five students with specific learning disabilities has some type of learning issue. However, only one in 16 has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to address Specific Learning Disabilities (Horowitz & Whittaker, 2017). Though science

has shown specific learning disabilities are caused by differences in brain structure and executive functioning skills, many teachers, around 33%, still believe these students are lazy (Horowitz & Whittaker, 2017). According to a survey completed by the National Council of Learning Disabilities, a large percentage, 43%, of parents did not want others to know their child had a disability (Horowitz & Whittaker, 2017).

In a general education classroom, students with specific learning disabilities often ask themselves if they have the skills and the ability to succeed in the classroom (Spicer, 2014). Questioning themselves in this way, while they watch other students working independently, may lead to lack of self-confidence as well as physical and psychological issues such as twitching, tapping, sweating, and frustration (Spicer, 2014). When these students are given a topic they enjoy, however, students appear to focus, persist, and rise to the academic challenge. A familiar or liked subject area turns their self-talk from negative to positive. Their academic success becomes something they believe is attainable instead of being out of their reach (Spicer, 2014).

School age students who have learning disabilities many times lack the social support which helps them to succeed in general education classes (Teoh, Cheong, Woo, 2014). In a study of 120 middle-school-age students, those who had multiple or more severe learning disabilities seemed to have less parent and peer support. This is in contrast to the students who only had one learning disability or no learning disability (Teoh et al, 2014). The lack of support for students who have learning disabilities in more than one area has the potential to hinder their success in the general education classroom (Teoh et al, 2014).

Inclusion and Teacher Perceptions of Educating Students with Disabilities

This section will address the requirements for inclusion in the classroom, teacher perceptions of inclusion and integration of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, and the negative perceptions regarding inclusion. Considering Hattie's meta-analysis of effect sizes and influencers on student achievement, teacher expectations and teacher estimates of achievement are indicators of potential student success in the classroom (as cited in Waack, 2013). When this is combined with the directive of federal law, it can cause issues for both student and teacher (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Requirements for inclusion in the classroom. The least restrictive environment (LRE) is a part of IDEA legislation and has been monitored and tracked by the federal government and the Office of Special Education for over 30 years (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). LRE regulations, as laid out in IDEA, state to the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are to be educated with non-disabled students (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The exclusion of a student from the general education setting should only occur when the severity of the disability cannot be overcome with supplementary aids and services will not help the student achieve at a satisfactory rate (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). Schools are to consider how they need to support students with disabilities in the general education settings before considering a more restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Teacher perceptions of inclusion and integration of students with disabilities in the classroom. According to Lupu (2017), elementary or primary teachers appear to be more open and willing to embrace the idea of integration than secondary teachers. Lupu (2017) also found students with physical disabilities are more accepted than

students with mental issues. Lupu (2017) found teachers who believe students with disabilities belong in the general education classes have a different teaching style than those who think these students belong in a more restrictive setting. She cited a study that also suggests the severity of the disability and teacher attitude have an influence on the acceptance of the student in the general education setting. The study identified teacher attitude toward students with disabilities as being influenced by inadequacies in training, lack of classroom materials, poor learning conditions, overloaded curriculum, large classroom sizes, and the severity of the disability. While the teachers in this study generally had a positive attitude toward students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom, they did believe it would cause more work on the part of the teacher (Lupu, 2017).

In a 2016 discussion paper, Portelli and Koneeny from the Department of Social Justice Education at the University of Toronto in Canada, discovered people from all over the world and from all different perspectives including parents, teachers, theorists, practitioners, and students believe quality education should be an inclusive education (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018). They also found questions such as who should be included, why should they be included, how should they be included, and whether or not equity and inclusivity are the same (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018). Portelli and Koneeny (2018) believe inclusion is an idea that must be strived for but must also be recognized as a vision that might never be fully implemented. The idea is inclusion is a continual process which will require many interventions and strategies which would be in constant need of monitoring and amending (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018).

Negative perceptions about inclusion. There are many myths surrounding inclusion that teachers sometimes believe. Some believe just having the opportunity to be in a general education classroom with general education peers is sufficient for inclusion (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018). There is also the belief that standardization along with equality will ensure inclusivity. The main myth that seems prevalent concerning inclusion is one dealing with deficits. This myth has been predominant throughout education and is born from white, middle-class virtues still prevalent in modern day education. This is the same mentality that blames the victim for their own situation (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018). This type of thinking begets the idea students must be able to adapt to the curriculum in place or participate in a different program (Portelli & Koneeny, 2018).

Cassady (2011) found teachers had the most negative perception about students who had or were diagnosed with behavioral disorders. She discovered teachers seemed to be more anxious about the instruction and modifications required for these students in the general education classroom. Teachers were also concerned about not being able to form bonds and connect with students who were diagnosed as having an emotional disturbance (Cassady, 2011). Cassady explored the assumption that educator opinions can affect the teacher-student relationships which at many times is the backbone of student learning. When teachers have a negative attitude toward having these students in their classrooms, they may not do what must be done in order for these students to experience success such as using non-traditional instructional strategies, modifying work or providing a different way to show mastery than just a standardized type assessment (Cassady, 2011). Not being willing to put the supports in place because of their

perception of a student with an emotional disturbance diagnosis does not lend itself to an environment where the student can be successful (Cassady, 2011).

In further research of full inclusion for students with Learning Disabilities (LD), Kirby (2017) found even though federal policy was created to promote inclusion and access to general education for students with disabilities, public school practices continue to isolate these students. She stated assumptions held by society are based upon the medical model of disabilities. The medical model views a disability as a flaw within a person (Kirby, 2017). Using this mindset, justification is there to create a public policy which states these students need to be placed in a special setting to remedy or overcome areas of weakness. Many teachers see inclusion as a compromise. Some teachers believe the social benefit of a general education placement was a trade for the skilled expertise of a special education teacher (Kirby, 2017). Kirby (2017) found the majority of teachers did not feel as though they had the tools and were not confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. This leads to the general assumption that students with disabilities are best served in the special education classroom even if the teacher is weak in the core content areas (Kirby, 2017). This assumption leads back to the medical model of ableism that favors normative abilities and continues to oppress best educational practices for students with disabilities. The question should not be how we fix our students with disabilities. The question should be how can we make our classrooms a place where all students can learn and are unconditionally accepted (Kirby, 2017).

Finally, a study conducted by Tkachyk (2013), indicated secondary teachers had a more negative perception of students with disabilities in their general education

classrooms. Her findings suggest secondary teachers believe this because they are required to cover more content and at the secondary level students should be able to be more responsible for their learning. This could potentially put students with disabilities at a disadvantage (Tkachyk, 2013). This research also indicated even though teachers may have inclusive classrooms they may not be implementing inclusive practices. Lack of support for these teachers as well as the task of managing 25-30 students at a time were potentially contributing factors in teachers having negative perceptions about students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Tkachyk, 2013).

Arkansas's Educational Approach to Teaching Students with Disabilities

This section discusses the State of Arkansas' educational approach to teaching students with disabilities. It includes the 12 handicapping conditions currently recognized by the state, what the state requires to be a licensed teacher, and the teacher preparation program as it pertains to the special education classes offered for general education teachers at three of the largest universities in the state. It is important to examine this information in the context of this study in order to determine whether or not teachers are adequately prepared to work with all students.

Students qualified to receive services. Today, the state of Arkansas recognizes 12 areas in which a student age five to twenty-one may qualify for services (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). These categories are Autism, Deaf-Blindness, Hearing Impairment, Intellectual Disability, Emotional Disturbance, Multiple Disabilities, Orthopedic Impairment, Other Health Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury and Visual Impairment (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). For purposes of brevity and due to the increasing

numbers of these handicapping conditions, this study will look at students with specific learning disabilities, Other Health Impaired, Autism and Emotional Disturbance and the perceptions general education teachers have about these particular disabilities (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

Teacher preparation programs in Arkansas. The State of Arkansas requires a person be licensed to teach in a specific area before being hired by a public school district (Arkansas Department of Education, 2017). To apply for a license in Arkansas, a person must have at least a Bachelor's Degree (Arkansas Department of Education, 2017). A person may receive a license through a non-traditional program which usually occurs when a person's degree is not in education. Background checks, copies of college transcripts, and testing in specific areas are required (Arkansas Department of Education, 2017).

Each university in the state has slightly different criteria for a degree in education. The programs at three largest Universities in the state of Arkansas were chosen for this study. Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, Arkansas offers several areas of study in education (Arkansas State University, 2018). They offer programs for Elementary Teachers, Special Education Teachers, Middle Level Teachers, Secondary Teachers, K-12 Licensure as well as a Masters of Arts which allows students who hold a degree in another area earn a teaching license (Arkansas State University, 2018). To obtain a degree in Elementary Education or Middle Level Education, the only required class concerning students with disabilities is a three hour course called 'The Exceptional Student in the Regular Classroom' (Arkansas State University, 2018). Arkansas State does offer an undergraduate degree in Special Education that requires more in-depth

courses for teachers who will be working specifically with students with disabilities (Arkansas State University, 2018). They offer courses focused specifically on students who have Autism or have been diagnosed as having an Emotional Behavior Disorder as well as other disabilities ranging from mild to severe and profound. These courses are not offered for a general education degree (Arkansas State University, 2018).

Arkansas Tech University in Russellville, Arkansas offers degrees in Elementary Education, Middle School Education, and Secondary Education (Arkansas Tech, 2018). The degree program in Elementary Education requires nine hours of special education classes. These classes are ‘Development and Characteristics of Diverse Learners,’ ‘Foundations of Special Education,’ and ‘Planning, Instruction and Assessment for Students with Disabilities’ (Arkansas Tech, 2018). None of these courses are required for a Middle Level degree. However, at the Secondary Level, the class ‘Educating Developing, Diverse and Exceptional Learners’ is offered. This course looks at normal human development across all domains, considers heredity and environmental factors and how they contribute to a person’s ability to learn within a school setting (Arkansas Tech, 2018). Learning, intellectual, and emotional disabilities are also examined in this course (Arkansas Tech, 2018).

The University of Arkansas (UA) in Fayetteville, Arkansas offers degrees in Elementary, Middle, Secondary, and Special Education (University of Arkansas, 2018). The University of Arkansas requires nine hours of courses dealing with special education topics. ‘Survey of Exceptionalities’ is a course that provides an overview of characteristics of students who have exceptional needs in both elementary and secondary settings (University of Arkansas, 2018). The ‘Teaching Children with Mild Disabilities’

course provides methods for teaching young students with mild disabilities in grades Pre-Kindergarten through fourth as well as understanding interventions. The ‘Teaching Children with Severe Disabilities’ course provides methods for teaching students who are more diversified in their educational degrees. This course only covers students in Pre-Kindergarten through fourth grade (University of Arkansas, 2018).

When considering preparation programs for general education teachers, it does not appear Arkansas State, Arkansas Tech or the University of Arkansas offer courses that adequately prepare general education teachers to be able to work with students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Conceptual Framework—The Work of John Hattie

Qualitative studies often use a conceptual framework which investigates understudied areas and looks for emerging theories (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). The framework is used to build a foundation, discuss the usefulness of a study, analyze the study, evaluate the design of research, and provide a reference point for interpreting data and findings (Rocco & Plakhotnik, 2009). In this study, the conceptual framework is John Hattie’s meta-analysis of effects on student success to teacher perceptions of having students with specific disabilities in their general education classroom. This study is guided by Hattie’s work because Hattie’s meta-analyses indicate teacher expectations have a large influence or effect upon student achievement. This study explores teacher perceptions of students because Hattie’s work suggests if general education classroom teachers have negative perceptions of students with disabilities in their general education classrooms, it will have a detrimental effect upon the student’s ability to succeed (Hattie, 2009).

Background of John Hattie. John Hattie is a Professor, Dean, and Director of the Melbourne Education Research Institute at the University of Melbourne in Australia. His work concentrates on areas that include measurements of teaching and learning as well as performance indicators. He served as a Professor of Education at the University of Auckland, New Zealand and the Project Director for e-asTTle, an online tool that assesses students' (ages 5-10 years old) achievement and progress in reading, writing, mathematics, and language (Waack, 2014). He is the author of *Visible Learning* and *Visible Learning for Teachers*. His book *Visible Learning* provided an overview of 15 years of research regarding what effects learning in schools (Waack, 2014).

Hattie's research. Hattie's has completed over 800 meta-analyses that cover more than 80 million students (Killian, 2017). Meta-analysis is a technique used to put together different studies which may indicate the effects one relationship can have on another (Fives & Gregoire, 2015). There are many detractors to meta-analysis. The detractors believe in many instances apples and oranges are being compared. This does not seem to outweigh the advantages of using this type of research to make broad suggestions as to what might be effective in the arena of education (Fives & Gregoire, 2015). In fact, many have taken Hattie's research and used it to create checklists of what will and what won't work in schools, though this was not the intent of his work (Waack, 2013). Hattie's research, though controversial to some, is used in many school districts across Arkansas, including Springdale, Fort Smith, Fayetteville, Bentonville, and Rogers.

Hattie's work involves effect size, which is a statistical measurement that considers the strength between two variables. Effect size within meta-analysis combines different studies into one analysis (Statistics Solutions, 2013). According to John Hattie's

meta-analyses regarding variables that lead to student success, teacher estimates of achievement has a 1.62 effect size (as cited in Waack, 2013). This indicates if a teacher has a preconceived idea of a student due to a handicapping condition, the student may not get the same consideration as a student without a disability. In addition to estimate of achievement, interventions for disabled is said to have a .77 effect size on achievement (Waack, 2015). Teacher expectations in general have a .43 effect size on student achievement (Waack, 2015). Student-teacher relationships, according to Hattie, have a .52 effect size and not labeling students comes in at a .61 effect size (Waack, 2015). This appears to indicate students with disabilities may not be given the opportunity to be successful in a general education classroom unless the teacher is able to look beyond their label, build relationships with these students as well as have continued high expectations for their academic achievement (Killian, 2017). When considering Hattie's work, it must be noted not all of the influences were studied to the same extent. He also does not indicate the effect sizes and their influence should be looked at in isolation (Waack, 2013).

Periodically, Hattie's original list of effect sizes is updated. The most recent update was done in 2017 and currently includes over 250 factors (Waack, 2015). Teacher expectations still ranks at a .43 effect size while ADHD has a -0.9 effect (Waack, 2015). Anything over a .40 is considered to have a large impact on student achievement outcomes. Hattie is quick to point out educators should not just ask what works but ask what works best when analyzing what helps students achieve (Hattie, 2009). He is adamant that what teachers do on a daily, weekly, monthly and yearly basis matters for student achievement (Hattie, 2009).

Hattie believes teachers who are successful have a mind frame that understands the importance of their work and the impact it can have on a student (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). They consistently spend their time searching for feedback so they can have a positive influence on their students (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). According to Fisher, Frey, and Hattie (2016), students will live up to teacher expectations even if those expectations are low. These expectations become a student's reality. Teachers' expectations should not be unrealistic. They should look at each student's ability and set expectations based upon student strength as well as the state required standards (Fisher, et al., 2016). Teachers can help students understand their expectations by establishing a learning intention (Fisher, et al., 2016). These intentions should be communicated to students using easy and student friendly language (Fisher, et al., 2016). Teachers must look for ways to be able to communicate the intentions to even the lowest level learner in their classroom. How and when they choose to deliver their expectations and learning intentions can build or destroy trust and the relationship between students and teachers (Fisher, et al., 2016).

Though Hattie's work has many detractors and receives much criticism for being too broad, there are prior studies which support his findings. Prior to Hattie's research, there was a study done in a classroom in 1968 which was many years before John Hattie started putting together his meta-analysis. This study has become known as the Brown Eye-Blue Eye experiment and was conducted in Jane Elliot's third grade class in 1968 (Public Broadcasting System, 2003). In April, Elliott, a third grade teacher in Riceville, Iowa tried to help her students understand the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The classroom was divided by eye color. The group of blue-eyed students was told they were

smarter, neater, and kinder than the brown-eyed students. Ms. Elliott praised them during the day. They also received extra privileges. The brown-eyed students had to wear collars and had their behavior criticized throughout the day. She switched on the second day and the blue-eyed students wore the collars while the brown-eyed students were given extra privileges. During this two-day experiment, the students who wore the collars and were made to feel inferior took on the look of inferior students. They would not look the teacher in the eye, slouched, and would not volunteer to answer questions. Their tests performances were poor, and their behavior deteriorated (Public Broadcasting Service, 2003). This study, which Ms. Elliot conducted several more times until 1970, indicates students live up to teachers' expectations of them. This further indicates if teachers have a perception of how a different disability may manifest itself in their classroom, the student may not be given the opportunity to be successful. Following up on Jane Elliot, she is now 84 years old and still speaking to audiences about discrimination. While she concentrates on race, her message transcends race as she repeatedly says we are all part of the human race and prejudice--any prejudice--is a learned behavior. This reiterates the idea that if it can be learned, it can be unlearned (Bland, 2017). This leads to the belief that teacher perceptions can impact teacher behaviors, and teacher behaviors can impact student achievement (Greenfield et al., 2016).

Summary/Conclusion

The United States has done many things to try to protect the rights of students with disabilities to be educated. No longer are males the only ones deemed fit to be educated. No longer do our schools have names such as The Connecticut Asylum at

Hartford for the Instruction of Deaf and Dumb Persons, The Experimental School for Teaching and Training Idiotic Children or The Pennsylvania Training School for Feeble-Minded (Sass, 2017). The Civil Rights Act of 1964, SEA of 1965, and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* in 1954 brought about change for educating students with disabilities (Gladhill, 2014). PL 94-142 brought about more sweeping changes and requirements for schools who received federal funds. These changes included educating students with their age appropriate peers. After all, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* determined separate was not equal (Gladhill, 2014).

According to John Hattie, teacher estimates of achievement have a better than average effect on student success (Waack, 2015). Teacher expectations in general also have a major effect upon student success (Waack, 2015). When reviewing Hattie's research, it becomes important to know what teacher's thoughts are about students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. It is also important to understand what training teachers have had in order to work with students who have disabilities. Jane Elliot's experiment regarding how students react to teacher expectations in 1968, though based upon race, can be broadened to include students with disabilities. Ms. Elliot is now 84 years old and her message is still important 50 years later. We are all part of the human race and prejudice is a learned behavior for us. What has been learned can also be unlearned (Bland, 2017).

In Chapter Three, a qualitative research design approach will be discussed as will trustworthiness and reflexivity. Participant selection as well as data analysis will be discussed.

Chapter 3

Method

Introduction

In order for any student to show growth in the general curriculum classroom, teachers must have expectations the student can succeed (Hattie, 2009). Teacher perceptions toward students play a role in expectations and whether they believe a student can make progress. If teachers have a negative perception of students with certain disabilities, those students will almost certainly not be successful (Hattie, 2009). The purpose of this study was to examine general education teachers' perceptions toward students with varying diagnosed disabilities in their classrooms, specifically; the focus was on teachers' perception toward students with Specific Learning Disabilities, Autism, Emotional Disturbance, and Other Health Impaired (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018). The questions that guided this study are:

1. What are general education teachers' perceptions about students with certain disabilities participating in the general education setting?
2. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with Autism to participate in the general education classroom setting?
3. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom setting?
4. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired in the general education classroom setting?

5. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of a Specific Learning Disability in the general education classroom setting?
6. What training and from where have teachers received to help them manage students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
7. What do teachers believe they need to have a more inclusive classroom?

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to conduct this research. Qualitative research seeks to understand what people feel and why they feel that way. It is a depth of understanding that is not possible in a quantitative approach (Patton, 2015). Qualitative data come about through observations, interviews, and working in the field. The phenomenological approach focuses on how people make sense of experiences and how these experiences transform or determine perceptions whether consciously or unconsciously (Patton, 2015). The present study sought to understand general education teachers' perceptions toward students with varying diagnosed disabilities in their classrooms. The qualitative data collection technique of interviews was used to gather information about Arkansas general education teachers', who do not have special education endorsement or certification, perceptions of the inclusive school setting.

Participants

Participants in this study included general education teachers in Northwest Arkansas from one large and one small school district.

Sample. Eleven general education teachers in two separate Northwest Arkansas school districts, one large school district and one smaller school district, were included in

this study. General education teachers who do not have a dual license in special education or hold an endorsement in special education were asked to volunteer to participate in this study. Participants in this study represented each level of school (elementary, middle, junior high, and high school). Those teaching music, art, media specialist, physical education, gifted and talented, family consumer science, and agriculture or computer science were not included in this study. There were no other selection criteria for participants in this study.

Sampling method. Participants were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. A convenience sampling is a sampling of participants who are easy to reach or contact (StatTrek, 2017). There are many general education teachers across the state of Arkansas who fit the criteria for participation in this study. Due to the current location of the researcher, the number of potential participants in the northwest corridor of the state coupled with a short timeline to conduct interviews, the convenience sampling technique was the best choice for this study. Determining who to ask to participate in this survey was accomplished through contact with the building or district administration team. Once permission was received from the school district, an email was sent to building principals asking for the names of potential participants. After the list was received from the building administrators, an email was sent to these teachers asking if they would be willing to participate in this study. If a teacher was willing to participate in the study a time was set up to conduct the interview.

Data Collection

Before beginning any research in the large district, permission was received from the research approval committee of the district. An explanation of the research, who was

involved, list of research questions and timeframe was submitted to this committee for approval prior to beginning the research. Upon gaining approval, data was collected through semi-structured open-ended interviews with individual teachers. This means questions were determined in advance. The semi-structured interview approach means all participants were asked the same basic open-ended questions in the same order (Patton, 2015). The interview method was chosen because of a need to find out what prior experiences teachers have had with students with disabilities. Feelings and thoughts are not things that can be easily interpreted even if they are observed. The interview method gives a researcher the opportunity to know how the teacher viewed and reacted to particular experiences when students with disabilities were in the general education classroom. This means the experiences of the participant has meaning (Patton, 2015).

Interviews were set up via email and conducted in fall 2018 at a time and place chosen by the participant. Interview questions explored the number of years the teachers had been teaching, the size of district(s) they had experience in, and their experiences with and perceptions of a student(s) in their classroom who has (a) Autism, (b) specific learning disability, (c) been diagnosed as having an emotional disturbance, and (d) who is other health impaired. Interview questions can be found in Appendix B. Follow up questions were asked as needed for elaboration and clarification. All interviews were recorded and transcribed to aid in credibility (Patton, 2015).

Trustworthiness

In qualitative research, credibility serves the purpose that validity and reliability serve in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Different studies have differing opinions on the purpose of reliability in qualitative studies. Some say reliability

determines dependability, while others believe reliability is not relevant in qualitative studies (Golafshani, 2003). The same opinions are expressed for validity in qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Researchers do agree, however, there is a need for checks and measures for qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). The opinion is being able to establish trustworthiness is valuable when trying to determine validity and reliability of a study (Golafshani, 2003). Random sampling, using a wide range of participants, working to ensure honesty in participants, establishing there are no right or wrong answers, and being transparent within the final report to any discrepancies or biases that may have occurred will promote trustworthiness of not only the study but of the researcher (Shenton, 2004).

Reflexivity

Reflexivity is connected with ethics and acknowledges the researcher not only collects data but must also construct interpretations (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It is an active, ongoing process which involves critical reflection of the factors that influence or bias the researcher (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). It also gives the researcher the opportunity to reflect upon personal reasons for the study and the relationship to the study (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). Because reflexivity acknowledges the role the researcher's experience plays in the study, it requires a great deal of self-monitoring on the part of the researcher so personal bias, beliefs and experiences do not cloud the study (Berger, 2015).

The topic for this research is a personal one for me. I began my educational career at a small school district in a high school special education classroom. Not long after that, my brother's middle son was diagnosed as having Autism. During my

educational career, I have served in the capacity of a special education supervisor for a consortium of small school districts, served as a Pre-Kindergarten Program Director and Elementary Principal, and am currently serving as the Director of Special Education for the largest school district in the state of Arkansas. Throughout my journey, I have had the pleasure to work with many professionals who embrace all children as equal and work to include everyone in the educational process. I have also worked with professionals who believe students with disabilities should have separate classrooms and many times even separate buildings. I have watched with wonder as my nephew has excelled in ways that were not supposed to be possible for him. He is now 20 years old, holds down a job, and has a driver's license. As the years have gone by, I have put myself in the shoes of my brother and my nephew. I have approached the inclusion of special education students through their eyes. I have tried to view things from the lens of the parents of these students and what a struggle it must be every day for their children to be included. This began my questioning of what can I do, what can a district do, what can the State Department and higher education do to help teachers be equipped to work with these students. To do this, I must first discover what the perceptions of the general education teachers are. What have their experiences been? What training or professional development have they received? What is my role as a special educator to help others understand inclusion can be a rewarding thing for all involved?

Data Analysis

Once interviews were completed, they were transcribed. The data was analyzed for patterns using the constant comparative method (Lincoln & Guba, 1984).

Summary/Conclusion

This qualitative study used interviews to gather information from general education teachers in the state of Arkansas about their experience and perceptions of students with certain disabilities in the regular education classroom. The study invited participants to discuss their training and needs in order to accommodate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. The following chapters will present the data from the conducted interviews as well as the analysis of the answers and recommendations.

Chapter 4

Results

The factors that most influence student achievement are teacher estimates of student achievement, response to intervention practices, scaffolding, and teacher expectations (Killian, 2017). This indicates the teacher, specifically their perceptions and methods, are big influencers on student success in the classroom (Killian, 2017). This also demonstrates that general education teachers' perceptions or expectations for students with disabilities would have some influence on students with disabilities classroom achievement (Waack, 2015).

With this in mind and considering federal law which states students with disabilities must be educated in the least restrictive environment, the purpose of this study was to collect data from general education teachers concerning their perception of the ability of students with certain disabilities to be successful in the general education classroom. This study also looked at teachers' years of experience, whether their experience was in a small or large district, and the preparation they received in their teacher preparation programs. The guiding questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are some perceptions that general education teachers have about students with certain disabilities participating in the general education setting?
2. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with Autism to participate in the general education classroom setting?

8. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom setting?
9. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired in the general education classroom setting?
10. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of a Specific Learning Disability in the general education classroom setting?
11. What training and from where have teachers received to help them manage students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
12. What do teachers believe they need to have a more inclusive classroom?

Sample Information

Eleven respondents were interviewed for this study. Respondents were recruited using a convenience sampling technique. There are many general education teachers across the state of Arkansas who would have fit the criteria for participation in this study. Due to the current location of the researcher, the number of potential participants in the northwest corridor of the state coupled with a short timeline to conduct interviews, the convenience sampling technique was the best choice for this study. Data saturation was used to determine when to discontinue data collection. When the majority of data seems to replicate itself, the term saturation is used; at this point, the respondents' answers were very similar with no true outliers in their experiences or opinions (Sims, 2017).

Table 1 summarizes the demographic information for all respondents. Ten of the respondents were female and one was male. Most (n=10) had teaching experience in Arkansas exclusively. In terms of experience teaching, responses ranged from less than five years (n=1) to 20-plus years (n=2). Most (n=7) had taught for six to 15 years. About half of all respondents (n=6) had only taught in small school districts (up to 5,000 students), and three had teaching experience in both a large and small school setting. Four of the respondents taught at a secondary (7-12th grade) level while seven of the respondents taught at an elementary (K-6th grade) level.

Respondents were also asked specifically about their undergraduate education. Eight respondents received an undergraduate degree in education. Three respondents received their teaching license through non-traditional methods, meaning their undergraduate degree was in an area other than education. When this occurs, the person has to return to school and pick up additional classes in order to be able to pass the required tests for educational licensure in the State of Arkansas. The respondents were also asked whether or not they had taken or been offered any classes that covered students with disabilities in their undergraduate programs. Six of the respondents indicated they did take at least one special education college course. Two of the respondents said they were not offered any special education college courses, while three of the respondents obtained their license through the non-traditional method and took at least one special education class when they were working toward their teaching licensure. Out of the six respondents who took classes concerning special education, only one had a disability-specific class. The other five took special education classes that gave an overview of disabilities and the theories behind behavioral development.

Table 1

<i>Demographics of Respondents</i>			
	Value Label	N	% of Total N=11
Gender	Female	10	91%
	Male	1	9%
School Size Experience	Small/Medium 0-10,000	6	55%
	Large > 10,001	3	27%
	Both	2	18%
Years of Teaching Experience	0-5 years	1	9%
	6-10 years	3	27%
	11-15 years	4	32%
	16-20 years	1	9%
	20 + years	2	18%
Location of Experience	In Arkansas	10	91%
	Outside Arkansas	1	9%
Grade Level Experience	K-6	7	63%
	7-12	4	37%
Teaching License	Traditional	8	73%
	Non-Traditional	3	27%
Special Education Undergraduate Classes Offered			
	0 Classes offered	5	45%
	1-4 Classes offered	6	55%
	5+ Classes offered	0	00%

Note: Data obtained from interviews with general education teachers

Findings

The findings for each research question in this study are presented below.

RQ 1: Perceptions Regarding Students with Disabilities Participating in the General Education Classroom

The first research question in this study was: What are some perceptions that general education teachers have about students with certain disabilities participating in the general education setting? During the interviews, participants were asked four questions related to this research question: What type of disabilities have you worked with in your general education classroom setting? What were your experiences in working with students who had these disabilities? What are some positive experiences you've had working with students with disabilities in your classroom? What are some negative experiences you've had working with students with disabilities in your classroom?

When asked what type of disabilities they had worked with in their own classroom environment, respondents listed many different types of disabilities. The most prevalent was speech language impairment (n=8). They also have worked with students who have Autism (n=6), Hearing Impairments (n=2), Specific Learning Disabilities (n=6), Intellectual Deficits (n=2), Vision Impairments (n=2), Emotional Disturbance (n=7) and Other Health Impairments (n=6). Under Other Health Impairments, the disabilities most respondents listed was asthma (n=2), diabetes (n=3), cerebral palsy (n=3), and seizure disorders (n=2).

Respondents generally agreed that, given enough supports, students with disabilities could participate in the general education classroom. One respondent believed there is a certain fear of teaching students with disabilities. Respondent 7 stated:

Instruction for teaching these students who have disabilities is frequently delivered with an undertone of fear—with lawsuits and license revocations always a possibility. These are perceived burdens which may potentially have an impact

on perception of students with disabilities and make teachers shy away from wanting them in their classroom.

Respondent 9 agreed:

I believe all students should be given a chance because all children are capable of learning and success is measured in many different ways. It may be stressful at first, but with the supports and strategies provided by special education teachers, the student should be able to get in rhythm and learn more constantly with time.

Though most respondents agreed students with disabilities can be successful in the general education setting and should be allowed to participate in these classes, some appear to draw the line when these students have behavioral difficulties or cause the teacher more work. For example, respondent 10 has worked with students who have ADD, ADHD, Dyslexia, Autism, Cerebral Palsy, Tourette's, developmental delays, intellectual disabilities, and violent tendencies. She stated:

I have a great love and respect for all students whether or not they have a disability. Most of my experiences have been very rewarding. My negative experiences have involved students who are highly unpredictable and have violent tendencies. I take student safety very seriously. When a child puts the safety of other children at risk, then I believe the rights of all children should matter-not just the rights of the student with special needs. Violent behavior cannot be tolerated in a public school setting, and teachers should not be put in a position of trying to protect all the other children from a violent student. Sometimes these

students are also a risk to themselves. There should be a great deal of consideration before a student is placed in a general education classroom.

Respondent 6 taught in an elementary school for 10 years. She has worked with a wide range of learning disabilities. She has had some negative experiences but with effective modifications and medications these students were able to stay in her classroom. One of her highlights involved a student who would not speak much while another involved a boy struggling to make friends.

When she spoke, you could barely hear her, but then we started doing readers' theatre. She created puppets and backdrops and used different voices for her characters. She came out of her shell. It was awesome to see her shine. Another student was having a hard time making friends. He was put in a small group with a student who had shared interests. Together, they created a commercial. It is important to find out what the students enjoy and work with them to be successful in those areas. Play to their strengths and what they know instead of concentrating on what they don't know.

Respondent 11 thought the inclusion of students with disabilities took too much time away from the general education teacher. She stated:

Students with disabilities are in the general education classrooms. Teachers are not always equipped with the means necessary to make the accommodations and/or modifications necessary to provide the best possible instruction to these students. I feel there are a lot of students within any given classroom who need special accommodations/modifications creating an enormous amount of

individualized work for the teacher. It has almost come to the point where a general education teacher has to create 10-20 individual lesson plans for one lesson. This is to be done within a planning period which is usually cut short for a variety of reasons on a daily basis.

RQ 2: Perceptions Regarding Students with Autism in the General Education Classroom

The second research question in the study was: What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with Autism to participate in the general education classroom setting? During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions about working with students with Autism: What is your perception of students with Autism in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you believe this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?

Considering the condition of Autism, three respondents indicated they had positive experiences with these students in the classroom, one had a negative experience, four had both positive and negative experiences while three had no experience working with students with Autism. Respondents were asked if they thought, based upon their experience and training, students with Autism could be successful in a general education classroom setting. Nine of the respondents believed students who have Autism can be successful in the general education classroom. Respondent 8 stated:

The teacher may have to try many different approaches in order to find what works best for that student. The teacher must be flexible and understanding what works best for some students does not work best for all. The teacher must create a classroom culture to accept all students and an understanding that we are not all the same.

Respondent 1 stated:

Students with Autism can be very successful in the general education classroom. Having a student with Autism in the classroom made me more focused and more deliberate in what and how I was teaching. I had to be more cognizant of the strategies I was using in the classroom and the need to be routine oriented for these students. The teacher has to help those students learn to pick up on social cues so the student can get along with his or her peers. Every day is a new day and must come with a clean slate. That is a growing experience for teachers. There is not enough interaction with people who are different. Students need to be exposed to those who are different from them because that is what they will find in life. The classroom teacher will need many strategies and classroom preparation to build a personal rapport with students so they can learn to respect everyone's boundaries. It takes all different kinds of people to make the world go round. We all have to work together to get through the day and take care of business.

Respondent 11, who taught 11 years with six being in a private setting, was one of the respondents who thought students with Autism needed more support in order to be

successful in the general education classroom. Her response was based upon her experience of a child in her classroom. She had 20 students along with an assigned aide. She stated:

Even with an aide, this child required the attention of and help from all adults available. This left the other students without adequate instructional learning. This child was very disruptive and was a challenge even with the aide in the classroom. Since this child was in constant need of help, it left one person to be in charge of the other 19 students. The class was within ratio numbers but it created an environment that was not conducive to learning. If a child with Autism is going to be in the general education classroom, they should be receiving services from a personal aide.

Respondent 7 also suggested support was a key factor in the success (or not) of students with autism in the general education classroom. Participant 7 stated:

I have observed a few students with this diagnosis who require a great deal of one-on-one instruction to complete very minor tasks, so that leads me to believe a general education classroom may not provide the support these students need to progress.

Respondent 9 said in his six years of education, he has not ever had a student with Autism in his classroom. He would not assume to know whether students with Autism could or could not succeed based upon his lack of experience.

The remaining respondents agreed students with Autism could be successful in the general education classroom for the most part. They all agreed teachers would need

to be taught strategies to help them mostly in the area of behaviors students with Autism oftentimes exhibit. One respondent was quick to say “inappropriate behaviors should not be acceptable because of the impact it could have on regular education students.”

Respondent 3 stated:

If we are given the strategies to help these students they can be successful in the general education classroom. I mean, that’s what life is about. We have differing abilities everywhere whether is it church, school or work. Why should we segregate a student who has Autism? I see those little kids form friendships. The adults are the ones who are more scared of those types of things and are uneasy about it. The children embrace it with this loving heart.

Respondent 4 who taught at a junior high level stated:

To accommodate these students, we have to have strategies and learn specifically what will help to make these students successful. That is my job. My job as a teacher is to get through to them. I have to learn what they need in order to get it and then instruct that way.

RQ 3: Perceptions Regarding Students with Emotional Disturbance in the General Education Classroom.

The third research question in this study was: What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom setting? During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions about working with students with Emotional Disturbance: What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as

emotionally disturbed in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you believe this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?

Two respondents stated they had positive experiences working with students diagnosed as Emotionally Disturbed while two reported negative experiences, four reported both negative and positive experiences while one reported having no experiences with Emotionally Disturbed students.

Six respondents believed students with this disability could be successful in a general education classroom.

Respondent 3 stated:

It would make me more alert. I would have to change. I would have to change how I look at things and how I structure things. The more I know about a student or about the situation the better equipped I am to be able to avoid triggers. It is important to know what the triggers are and to be alert. It would be very different than having a class of 25 with no red flags. I have talked to my students before and explained to them some of their classmates may have other issues and it is up to them to help me show them how to behave especially when we don't understand something. It requires more background work but it can be done and all can be successful.

Respondent 6 said:

I believe these students can be successful in the general education classroom. I also believe they need regular counseling sessions and possible medication. My hope would be that a student who is emotionally disturbed would grow and learn from other students, learn coping strategies, learn how to form friendships, and how to be a friend.

Respondent 5 stated:

I think there's quite a bit of undiagnosed emotionally disturbed students around. They may be called oppositional or diagnosed as having Attention Deficit Disorder but they are truly emotionally disturbed. There are some students who are also way overmedicated and walk around in a constant zombie like state. Student success is going to depend greatly on what group of kids they are with. If you put kids who are defiant with a disorderly group, it's never going to be a good thing. They will just play off of each other. This makes it difficult for everyone in the class.

Three respondents had similar answers in that they basically believed a student could be helped if they knew the teacher cared for them and would take care of them.

Respondent 8 stated:

Students are being exposed to more and more difficult situations. The longer I teach the worse it becomes. So many students are coming from rough homes. I absolutely believe these students can be successful. I think it is important to collaborate with your school counselor and mental health therapists if applicable. The teacher needs to be aware of any emotional issues a student may have so they

can help meet that students' needs the best. A special place may be set up in the classroom if a student needs a calm down area. You could teach the student a signal to be able to let the teacher know they are overwhelmed and need a moment.

Respondent 2 believed the student needs to know someone cares. She stated:

You have to let them know you're going to be there and care for them and take care of them. Your first job is to keep them safe and they have to help you with that. If they don't want to talk to you, maybe you can have a word or signal that shows something is triggering them. If I can't help, I can find someone who can. As for the other kids in the classroom, you talk to them about things that could potentially happen and what they need to do in case it does.

Respondent 11 was positive but still expressed some concerns:

Having a child in the general education class who has been diagnosed as emotionally disturbed can be very frustrating. It would be beneficial to have a trained professional available for the child to have access to at all times during school hours. I feel classroom teachers are not properly trained to handle all the emotional issues a child might have and therefore cause more damage to the child. If this child was able to receive professional help more than once a month visits, I think the daily struggles would greatly decrease.

Five respondents did not think a student with an Emotional Disturbance diagnosis could be successful in the general education environment. Most of the five respondents cited safety for all students as a concern. For example, respondent 9 said:

I am very cautious about behavioral issues and the affect it has on all the students in the classroom. The experience I had with an emotionally disturbed child was not positive. The child was violent, interruptive, and violent to myself and other students. The general education setting is no place for a child who displays that type of behavior due to the unsafe environment it creates for other students.

Based upon my experience, I believe other students would suffer when a student with an Emotional Disturbance was in the general education classroom.

Respondent 10 also cited safety as the most important consideration when working with students who are emotionally disturbed. She stated:

It is all dependent on the severity of the students' condition. Each child is different and the environment may prove to be too much for them. Safety should be the utmost priority and then learning. If those two things are conducive to the child being in the classroom, then there should be no reason why the child could not participate. However, if the student can't adapt, a better solution or placement should be sought.

Respondent 7 who has taught for three years and received her teaching license through a non-traditional program stated:

Having a student with an emotional disturbance in the classroom can be a monumental challenge, particularly if the student has tendencies for physical violence. The teacher needs to be patient and work to build a trusting relationship with this student. If the teacher can do that there is the potential for a positive outcome for all involved. The challenge is the unpredictability of the type and

intensity of an outburst. The teacher must always have the safety of the entire class in mind, but this is amplified when a student who is emotionally disturbed is present in the room. Students are often on edge because they have witnessed a prior outburst. Students shouldn't have to feel any fear while sitting in a classroom. There was a sigh of relief from my students one time when a volatile student was removed from the classroom. All students deserve to have an education in a safe and nurturing environment.

Respondent 1 also referred to safety in her statement:

It is hard. We have such emphasis placed on us as classroom teachers in general education—being able to provide a certain amount of content to get through in classes due to testing. It places a very real strain on both the teacher and the students. Take for instance my field of science. We are required by law to have 20% labs. There are some labs you can't do with students who have behavioral issues. They don't need scissors, knives and certain pieces of equipment like the Bunsen burner. If you reasonably predict the behavior of the student that can really limit the experience for all the students in the room.

Respondent 4 expressed she never had emotionally disturbed students in her class. She stated “usually they are the self-contained ones”.

RQ 4: Perceptions Regarding Students with Other Health Impairment in the General Education Classroom

Research question four asked: What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired in

the general classroom setting? During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions related to this research question: What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as other health impaired in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you think this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?

Under the Other Health Impaired primary handicapping condition, nine respondents reported positive experiences while two reported negative experiences. All respondents had worked with students with this impairment. Ten out of 11 respondents believed students who have the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired can be successful in the general education classroom. Several respondents used examples that encompassed physical aspects such as heart issues, diabetes, and asthma.

Respondent 10 who has been teaching for eight years said this:

I have a student with Cerebral Palsy in my classroom this year. She is not academically impaired. She is a positive influence in our classroom. She, and students like her, have every right to be included. It not only benefits them, but the other children benefit by learning to be compassionate, understanding, and grateful for their own health.

Respondent 3 also talked about the physical aspects of a student being diagnosed as other health impaired. She stated:

We have those students who are very impulsive but we also have students who are diabetic. It's really not going to cause any type of issue except for a teacher having to be aware for medical reasons. I think those students are also required to have a health care plan in case of emergencies.

Respondents 2, 4, 6, and 1 also referred to the medical aspects of students who have the label of other health impairment. They all made statements indicating they would have conversations with their class in case a student would have some sort of physical issue in class. They also talked about the importance of instilling in others the need to take care of their classmates. Respondent 6 stated:

Every student needs the opportunity to learn and succeed. With effective accommodations and support from teachers and support staff, students with Other Health Impairment will succeed in the classroom. Students, many times, are supportive of one another and are willing to help one another.

Respondents 11 and 5 both referred to Attention Deficit-Hyperactivity Disorder in their response to other health impaired students. Respondent 5 stated:

Students with ADHD can't sit still and are usually all over the place. This can disrupt their learning and the learning of other students in the class. They have no organizational skills either. Just like students who are emotionally disturbed, their success may depend largely upon who is in class with them. Will the other students feed off of this student and disrupt the class? If that is the case, no one learns and the teacher has a hard school year.

Respondent 11 expressed concerns in this way:

We all know children come to us needing more than book learning, but when children who are diagnosed as Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder are introduced into the general education classroom a whole new set of parameters are included. If it is just a matter of modifying assignments or seat arrangements, etc. I feel the general education teachers are prepared. But when the classroom is disrupted on a daily basis, as it frequently is with the ADHD students, learning for all stops.

RQ 5: Perceptions Regarding Students with Specific Learning Disabilities in the General Education Classroom

Research question five asked: What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of a Specific Learning disability in the general education classroom? During the interviews, participants were asked the following questions tied to this research question: What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as having a specific learning disability in the general education classroom? How did you come to form this opinion? Do you think this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the classroom?

Nine respondents reported positive experiences working with students who were diagnosed as having a Specific Learning Disability while two reported negative experiences. These nine respondents also believed these students will be able to be successful in a general education classroom. Respondent 3 stated students with specific

learning disabilities are the students who have to be pulled out of class more than once per day and given “explicit” instruction in their deficit area.

Respondent 1 said:

Students who have a specific learning diagnosis can learn as long as the classroom teacher makes sure they remained caught up with the majority of the class. I might have to do more work with this type of student and review more than I would other students but as long as they understood the big ideas, they can be successful.

Most respondents thought students with specific learning disabilities could be successful as long as the teachers had the appropriate support and strategies. Respondent 9 stated:

Specific Learning Disabilities are much easier to deal with because you can mold your lessons to better fit the needs of the child. If a child struggles with reading, the teacher can use one on one time to strengthen the child’s ability, peer-to-peer tutoring can be used as well as other alternate methods of instruction.

Respondent 7 also believes these students can be successful. She stated:

I have worked with several students with this diagnosis. I believe they can be successful and show progress in the general education classroom. They will need some extra support, such as Tier II or Tier III intervention, but my opinion is this is absolutely doable. I don’t think a student with this diagnosis would negatively affect the classroom environment for other students in any way. Rather, some

supports a teacher offers for this student, such as reading aloud a text, will be beneficial for all students.

Respondent 1 stated:

These kids can be successful. You just baby step through the content even in a general education class. Start at square one and make sure everyone's on the same page. Include hands-on components if needed. If it's math, help to show them where those numbers need to be plugged in. Everything is done on a computer or calculator. They just don't know where to put it. Can they understand the big picture concept? What is the big picture they need to get in order to claim mastery? They may not be able to manipulate the computations but do they understand why they need to know this? Teachers have to be willing to change their thought process and how the student can show them what they know.

Respondent 4 believed sometimes it's just a matter of bridging the gap between what's in their head and what they know and being able to get it out. Similarly, respondent 8 and 6 both believed with the right accommodations and/or modifications, students with specific learning disabilities can be successful in the general education classroom.

There were a few respondents who were hesitant to say students with specific learning disabilities could be successful in the general education classroom. For example, Respondent 8 thought general education teachers needed more support for these students.

If teachers were given specific information about the individual students' deficit area as well as strategies to help, the student might be successful in the general education classroom. This, however, needs to start when a student is young. It can't wait until the student is in third or fourth grade. They are too far behind at this point.

Respondent 5 seemed to believe student success depends upon the students' willingness to work hard. She stated:

The ones with real reading disabilities, unless they're willing to work hard to get over it, they will be minimally successful. At an eighth grade level, if a student can't read at a third grade level, they won't be able to make it. It's very hard to get them to be successful. These are the kids who either give up or cause classroom disruptions because they don't want their buddies to know they can't read. At this level, they don't really care about trying to please the teacher anymore.

RQ 6: Teacher Training

The sixth research question asked: What training and from where have teachers received to help them manage students with disabilities in the general education classroom? In addition to demographic information that was collected related to teacher training (see Table 1) during the interviews, participants were asked the following questions tied to this research question: In your opinion what could institutions of higher learning do to promote positive perceptions toward students in the general education classroom? In your opinion, what could the State Department of Education provide in

the way of professional development or other type of training to promote positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the general education classroom? In your opinion, how might the State Department of Education be inadvertently reinforcing negative experiences and/or perceptions toward students with disabilities? In your opinion, what could the local school district provide in the way of professional development or other type of training to promote positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the general education classroom? In your opinion, how might the local school district be inadvertently reinforcing negative experiences and/or perceptions toward students with disabilities? What could be done to give general education teachers more confidence in their ability to provide what students with disabilities need in order to be successful and show progress? What do you need in order to have a more inclusive classroom?

Ways higher education and the state can help. Respondents were asked what they believed higher education could do to help general education teachers have a more positive perception of students with disabilities ability to be successful in the general education classroom. Respondent 4 said:

Higher education should help to remove the stigma that seems to come with having a disability. Students are getting there. They are just getting there a different way. They are still viable and intelligent kids. Teachers should be taught how to concentrate and strengthen what the student is good at instead of concentrating on the things students are unable to do. They need to teach teachers all students are valuable and have something to give.

Respondent 2 stated:

Every [student teacher] intern should have to spend time in a special education classroom or a general education classroom that has special education students. Until undergraduate students are given the whole picture and not just the pretty dog and pony show, they will not understand what teaching is about. School districts and higher education institutions place student interns in classes with teachers who are successful in every aspect of their classroom. By this type of placement, an intern is not exposed to the struggles that teachers, especially new to the profession teachers, deal with on a day to day basis. They need to know what will be on their table and what they will be dealing with in the classroom, especially in an elementary classroom where many students have not yet been diagnosed.

Respondent 1 said:

Students going into an internship really need to go in with their eyes open. They don't need to be in the classroom with all the students who have no issues. They need to see high conflict situations and be trained for those. We all know being trained then facing the actual situation can be two different things. Until you are in that situation, you really can't predict how you will react. But when new teachers come in and they have never experienced a student meltdown or have never seen a meltdown successfully de-escalated, how will they know? They need to have these experiences as interns not during their first year of teaching.

Respondent 9 stated:

Higher education should spend less time telling students how to write the “perfect” lesson plan, spend less time creating all the “pretty bells and whistles” for a lesson and teach how to appropriately discipline certain children, how to deal with an irate parent, and how to handle certain issues that come about with students with disabilities. After all, you can train anyone to write a lesson plan after they get hired. Is education truly about lesson plans? Is it about an agenda sent from a local educational cooperative? Higher education and the State Department of Education should listen to the teacher in the classroom and act on their needs. The state should look at the massive amounts of Individualized Education Plans that are being handed out. Are they justified? Are we over identifying students? Teach us what to do? We may not have specialized in students with disabilities, but they are in our classrooms. We can learn what to do to help these students be successful if someone would only teach us.

Respondent 3 stated:

Higher education is doing a disservice to new teachers by not telling them the type of students they will have in their classroom. It is no longer a maybe that students with disabilities will be in the classroom. They will be there and they are there. They need to be able to have conversations with teachers who are working with these students every day. They need to be given scenarios and strategies of what to do. They need to know more about classroom management and student engagement. New teachers come in jaded and then are very overwhelmed when they see what the real world of teaching is all about. They look around and say this isn't what they told us teaching was going to be like.

Respondents 11, 5, 6, 8, and 10 also suggested undergraduates be offered classes specific to some of what they perceive to be more involved disabilities such as Autism. They believe these classes would be more beneficial than classes that give summaries of disabilities. Case studies with real world scenarios along with strategies would be helpful as well.

All of the respondents believed the state should require more special education training for undergraduate students. They believe if the Arkansas Department of Education would require more special education training especially more disability specific training, then higher education would offer these classes. They would be forced to offer these classes, otherwise they would lose students. Respondents also suggested the State Department could require professional development that was disability specific. These disability specific requirements could be rotated so a different one was required every year. Respondent 4 believed disability specific training would help make teachers more confident when a student walks into the classroom. Professional development should be created so general education teachers could gain meaningful and useful strategies for implementation in the general education environment. Respondent 8 stated:

I believe part of our required yearly professional development time should have an emphasis on students with disabilities. Unless you are a special education teacher, most of your professional development is not geared toward this. Part of our yearly requirement should be about strategies for working with students who have certain disabilities.

Respondent 7 stated:

Learning how to make accommodations and/or modifications should be taught whether in a college class or in a yearly professional development session.

Teachers often view this as more work for the general education teacher but it doesn't have to be that way. It is a perceived burden that may have an impact on teacher perceptions of students with disabilities. It would also be helpful to hear success stories from other teachers who have been through the battlefield. I would like to know what strategies they used to help these students be successful. The more collaboration there can be between general education teachers and special education teachers will lead to more success for students with disabilities.

Negative perceptions reinforced by the State Department of Education. Five of the respondents did not think the State Department of Education reinforced any negative perceptions toward students with disabilities. Respondent 10 stated:

I don't feel they are, and I really don't like conspiracy theories. People don't go into education to hurt anyone. The people in our business are truly trying to help students and do what is best for kids and help create contributing citizens.

Respondent 9 believed the State Department should not allow so many IEP's to be written. He thought the number of students in special education was a negative for teachers. Respondent 7 reiterated what she had said in a prior statement:

As I stated previously, making accommodations and modifications and adhering to the goals and objectives of an IEP and the potential for lawsuits or losing your license is presented with a sense of dread and fear. That can definitely be reinforcing any negative perceptions.

Respondents 6, 4, and 5 thought by not requiring general education teachers to have more professional development in the area of special education strategies, they were reinforcing negative perceptions by downplaying the importance of reaching these students.

Ways local districts can help. On a local or district level, respondents believed teachers should be allowed to visit classrooms whether they were veteran teachers or interns. Several respondents expressed the desire to observe in a special education classroom for a day. Others expressed interest in having a special education teacher observe in their general education classroom. Two other respondents thought the best way to make certain students with disabilities were successful in general education classroom settings is for these students to be in an inclusion or co-taught setting. This is an educational environment where two teachers, one a general education teacher and the other a certified special education teacher, work in unison during a class period. The teachers work together to plan a lesson, teach the lesson, modify or adjust the delivery method of the lesson, and give extra support to all of the students even those without a diagnosed disability. Respondent 2 summed it up by saying:

All of us, no matter how intellectually equipped we may be, will struggle with some concept at some point. When everyone is taught together with two teachers, the stigma is not there because everyone has the opportunity to get the extra help. Even just having an assistant like Kindergarten assistants who floated from class to class could be a huge help when dealing with students.

Respondent 9 had very clear thoughts on what the local district can do to help not just the general education teacher but the special education teacher as well. He stated:

Special education teachers need more help in the form of paraprofessionals. In a small district, do not put the burden of an entire building on one teacher. Allow the students to spend time in the general education classrooms while they are young. Allow them to interact with peers and don't just leave them in one room all day with only a couple of people to interact with. When these students are not given the opportunity to spend time with their same age peers, it gives a negative connotation to everyone that there is some reason these students are isolated. Students and teachers wonder why these kids are kept away from everyone else. Let them come into the classrooms more. Let them interact and make new friends. Don't build a wall of fear. Build one of collegiality and trust. Include everyone.

Negative perceptions reinforced by local school districts. Respondents, as they did when asked about negative perceptions and the State Department, did not, as a whole believe the local districts were doing anything to reinforce negative perceptions. Respondent 7 again reiterated that districts and the State Department were wary of lawsuits and that was their main concern. Respondent 9, however, seemed to have strong feelings toward the district and negative perceptions when he stated:

The only time I see a select few students is when they have something like a Christmas play and the child is on stage. This gives me a negative image because I would like to get to know this kid in the classroom and not just see them on special occasions. All occasions are special to them when they get to interact and make new friends. The district should make the effort to include these students and not hide them away like they have something contagious. The school may

not see this as projecting a negative image. For general education teachers and general education students, it projects an image of there is something wrong with those kids and they can't be in my classroom.

Help for general education teachers. As stated earlier, respondents believed general education teachers need more support in order to be confident in their abilities to work with students who have disabilities. They felt the support teachers need begins with their undergraduate program and class requirements. They believed more disability-specific classes and training would help teachers with strategies needed to meet student needs. Respondent 1 stated:

We spend time learning about theories, theorists, and pedagogy in classroom management. But it doesn't always help when you walk in to a classroom. They don't prepare you for potential high conflict situations that could lead to student aggression or give you strategies to help the non-reader. They need to be able to meet with teachers who don't have the ideal classroom and hear how things really are.

Participants also believed time to collaborate with special education teachers was vital to the success of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Respondent 2 stated more than once:

I would like to be able to go in the special education teachers' classroom and watch them teach a lesson. I would also like for them to come to my classroom and teach a lesson. It would benefit a new teacher or intern teacher to be able to

see the same type of lesson taught two different ways. It would give them perspective. We can all learn from each other.

Along with training and collaboration, yearly required professional development and additional paraprofessionals in the general education classroom were mentioned by respondents as supports that would help students with disabilities be successful and teachers less fearful of having them in the general education class. Respondent 8 stated earlier in this chapter:

I believe part of our required yearly professional development time should have an emphasis on students with disabilities. Unless you are a special education teacher, most of your professional development is not geared toward this. Part of our yearly requirement should be about strategies for working with students who have certain disabilities.

RQ 7: Thoughts on Inclusivity

The last research question was: What do teachers believe they need to have a more inclusive classroom? This question was asked directly to participants in the interviews.

On a personal classroom level, respondents generally believed there needed to be time set aside for them to collaborate with special education teachers. They believed this time would allow them to work together to help learn about specific students, their disability, and what they needed to change either in the physical aspect of their classroom, the delivery of instruction or the expectation for mastery. Respondent 4 is a junior high teacher. She stated:

We need people to come in and show us how to set up our classrooms. We need to know what would work best for this particular student then what would work for the student on the other side of the room. What strategies can we use so this student can show me he really does understand the big picture of different shapes in Geometry or how to sort and classify? Can I use things like big and small to judge whether a student knows what classification means?

Some respondents expressed that being able to learn from the experts in special education would help them be able to know how to check for understanding and mastery, as well as be able to create an environment where all students have the opportunity to be successful. Respondent 5 believed more time in Professional Learning Communities with the special education teachers would be a tremendous help. She stated:

I get some time with the special education teachers during our PLC times but they get pulled for meetings or to administer a test. So, my collaboration time is cut short. I know there is so much more I could glean from the special education teacher but we just aren't given that kind of time during the school day. We do have lives after work and many can't stay after hours or come in early to meet. If we just had time to collaborate, I believe we could do so much more for these students.

This sentiment was also specifically addressed by Respondent 7 who stated:

We just don't have enough time with the special education teachers. They have so many things they could share with us such as how to scaffold a lesson, how to modify for a particular lesson, and how to change our instruction so all children

will understand. But the special education teachers are pulled away for meetings and completing paperwork. There is just not any time for us to work together.

Three respondents expressed in order to be able to help students with disabilities in the general education classroom be successful support is needed in the area of a trained paraprofessional. They stated having a paraprofessional in the classroom who has been trained to work with students with disabilities would go a long way in lightening the burden that having these students in the classroom places upon the teacher. For example, Respondent 2 earlier discussed assistants such as those who are assigned to the Kindergarten classes and float from class to class to help when needed (See RQ 6 findings above for quote).

Full inclusion is an idea many teachers believe would be beneficial to the students in their classrooms. Respondent 8 stated:

I believe more support and collaboration time with the special education teacher would benefit my classroom. It would be more effective for the special education teacher to be in my classroom than to just pull the student out. We could work together and help the identified students as well as the unidentified students.

Respondent 3 had prior experience in a full inclusion classroom. She stated:

I would be willing to have a full inclusion classroom. We worked together that year, had a common planning time and it worked for the students. We were able to do good things for all the students in the classroom. It always seems to go better when there is a team effort. Two experts getting together to do the right

thing for students. I am not sure why they didn't like the idea of full inclusion. I would volunteer if they wanted to try again.

A few respondents believed training or professional development would help them as would access to manipulatives. Respondents 10 stated:

I would love sensory tools to help students with specific needs such as weighted stuffed animals, sensory fidgets, beaded seat cushions, foot bands for bouncing their feet on, noise cancelling ear phones, and exercise trampoline, etc. I believe these things along with training on real strategies to support these children behaviorally and academically would help my classroom be more inclusive.

Respondent 6 agreed:

I need professional development on different disabilities and strategies to use in the classroom. I need meetings with special education teachers so I can ask questions or can get help coming up with ideas to help students. I need a calming area in the room, headphones with microphones, more technology for students who need voice control/translation, and I need to bring in lessons that include students with disabilities, so students understand everyone may be different, but we all have unique and special things we bring to the classroom. One of my main focuses needs to be writing down positives for each student. When we focus on the positives coming into our classroom instead of the negative, we can visualize each student in a positive light.

Summary

Respondents had varying degrees of experience with students with disabilities. The responses to RQ1 revealed the majority had experience with a wide range of disabilities in their general education classrooms. They recalled positive experiences and even some negative experiences positively. When looking at RQ2, the respondents mostly reported positive experiences with students who have Autism. Only one respondent reported only negative experiences with students with Autism in the general education classroom. They all agreed students who have Autism could be successful in the general education setting. RQ 3 asked about students who were diagnosed as having an Emotional Disturbance. Again, the respondents mostly had positive experiences and believed these students could succeed in the general education classroom. RQ 4 asked about perceptions of students with Other Health Impairments. All respondents were positive in their answers. They focused mainly on the physical aspects of these students instead of the things that might not be visibly noticeable at first, for instance, Attention Deficit Disorder. All agreed these students would be able to be successful in the general education classroom.

Students with Specific Learning Disabilities was the subject of RQ5. The majority of respondents were positive about these students and their ability to succeed in the general education classroom. RQ 6 discussed teacher training and preparedness. None of the respondents believed they were trained to be able to work with these types of students in their undergraduate or graduate programs. They did not think current teaching candidates are being prepared to work with these students either. They believe higher education, the State Department of Education, as well as their own districts need

to provide more training on specific disabilities. As a whole, they believe students with disabilities can and will be successful in general education classes if provided with enough training and support. Respondent 3 said, “Truly, we’re all special education teachers nowadays.”

RQ 7 asked teachers what they needed in their classroom in order to make it a more inclusive classroom. The overall answer was training and support. It was discovered support meant different things to different respondents. Some believed support to mean more collaboration time with special education teachers while some thought support should come in the form of an extra person in their classroom. A couple of respondents believed manipulatives would provide them some support in their classroom. All agreed more training was needed. They believed the State Department needed to require more training to gain a teaching license and make yearly special education training a priority. They also believed the local district should have expectations of teachers being trained to work with students with disabilities. The respondents’ answers were overall very positive toward having students with disabilities in their classrooms and their ability to be successful in the general education setting.

Chapter 5

Findings

When PL 94-142 became known as IDEA and included LRE within FAPE, students with disabilities began being pushed into general education classes more frequently (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Teachers who only had a general education background were required to work with students with disabilities even though they might not have had the training to do so successfully (Gladhill, 2014). Since many general education teachers have no training in dealing with students with disabilities and since Hattie (2009) has identified teacher perception as important when considering student success, this study was conducted to determine what general education teacher perceptions towards students with certain disabilities might be. The study also looked at teacher preparation programs and district offerings for strategies to teach students with disabilities. Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impaired and Specific Learning Disabilities were the four disabilities chosen for this study. According to state data obtained from the Arkansas Department of Education website, these four categories totaled 59,324 students in the 2016/17 school year and 60,697 students in the 2017/18 school year (Arkansas Department of Education, 2018).

The guiding research questions for this study were as follows:

1. What are some perceptions that general education teachers have about students with certain disabilities participating in the general education setting?
2. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with Autism to participate in the general education classroom setting?

3. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Emotional Disturbance in the general education classroom setting?
4. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of Other Health Impaired in the general education classroom setting?
5. What are teacher perceptions concerning the ability of students with the primary handicapping condition of a Specific Learning Disability in the general education classroom setting?
6. What training and from where have teachers received to help them manage students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
7. What do teachers believe they need to have a more inclusive classroom?

Summary of Findings

A total of 11 teachers were interviewed for this study. There was only one male who participated in the study. Six participants had only taught in small or medium school settings with less than 10,000 students. Three participants taught in a large district while two had experience in both small and large districts. Respondents have anywhere from 20+ years of experience to one year of experience. Only one respondent had ever taught outside of Arkansas. Seven respondents taught at the elementary level while four taught at a secondary level. Three of the respondents got their degree through non-traditional methods. Six respondents said they were offered or required to take one to four special education classes in their undergraduate program while five respondents were not offered or required to take any special education classes.

Respondents, expressed having positive experiences when students with disabilities were in their general education classroom. This sentiment extended across the four disabilities considered in this study which were Autism, Emotional Disturbance, Other Health Impairment, and Specific Learning Disability. Even when a respondent reported a negative experience, there was still a positive outlook that these students could be successful in the general education setting. All respondents agreed support was the factor in the success of these students. Support was expressed as an actual person or paraprofessional in the classroom, collaboration with special education teachers, professional development training every year, and undergraduate classes on certain disabilities.

Discussion and Conclusions

For this study, there were three major findings. The first finding was the willingness of the general education teacher to learn about students with disabilities and to have them participate in the general education classroom. This finding is key to moving forward to more inclusive environments for these students. Secondly, respondents believed students with disabilities could be successful in the general education classroom, even if they reported a negative experience with a student who had a particular diagnosis. They expressed concerns with safety of all students but still believed with supports these students could participate and be successful.

The last major finding and one that is most important for the future of all students and special education in general, was they were not adequately trained in how to work with these students. While this may not have been a surprise, their desire to learn so the

students could be successful was. Each of these major findings are discussed in more detail below.

Willingness of Teachers to Learn about Students with Disabilities

This study found general education teachers overall were willing to have students with disabilities in the general education setting. Not only did they express their willingness to work with these students, they also discussed the strategies and support needed for student success as well as the benefits to having students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Teacher acceptance of students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The eye opener of this study was the willingness of the general education teachers to have students with disabilities in their classrooms. Even those who had some negative experiences expressed willingness for these students to be in their classrooms. Previous research (as well as the researcher's own experience in schools) tends to demonstrate teachers are not always open/accepting of students with disabilities in their classrooms. For example, Hughes (2016), a person with autism, documented his experience of being in the general education classroom. He sensed the frustration of his teachers, which affected his behavior (Hughes, 2016). Hughes went on to earn a Master's Degree in Education of Students with Moderate Disabilities and works to help students self-advocate (Hughes, 2016). Further, prior research indicated secondary teachers were more negative than elementary teachers when dealing with students with disabilities (Tkachyk, 2013). In Tkachyk's (2013) study, secondary teachers were required to cover more content and expected students to be able to be in control of their own learning.

However, the findings of this study did not support this, especially from the participant who taught a junior high Advanced Placement science class.

According to Hattie (2009), respondents' openness to the potential for benefits for all students (not just the students with the disabilities) and their desire to have these students in their general education classroom sets these students up for success. Hattie's (2009) meta-analysis studies gave a .43 effect to teacher perception of student expectation and a 1.62 effect size to teacher estimates of achievement (Waack, 2013).

Support and strategies. Respondents in this study consistently expressed the need to have more support from special education teachers and paraprofessionals. They were clear in their desire to have these people either in the general education classroom with them or having a time set aside for collaboration. They were also adamant about their need to have strategies to work with students with disabilities in the general education classroom. These strategies could come in the form of professional development, collaboration with colleagues or even higher education classes. Participants' concerns for lack of strategies and support is also supported by the .77 effect size of interventions for students in Hattie's work (Waack, 2013). Further, a study by Lupu (2017) identified teacher attitude as being influenced by inadequacies in training and lack of support in general (Lupu, 2017). Importantly, in this study, even though respondents discussed lack of training, they still appeared to be very willing to have students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Benefits of students with disabilities in the general education classroom.

Respondents in this study consistently described having students with disabilities in their class as making them better teachers. It made them more aware of their teaching style,

their focus on main points, time management, classroom space, and modifying/accommodating how instruction was delivered as well as different ways a student could show mastery of a subject or skill. They also expressed having students with disabilities in the general education classroom helped the other students. They talked about how the students could learn how to deal with those who might learn differently or need more help whether it be physically or academically. This supports the work of Shady, Luther, and Richman (2013), who found having students with disabilities in a classroom not only improved teacher flexibility but also provided the general education student with a greater understanding of others and how they learn.

Experiences with Particular Disabilities

Participants in this study were very eager to discuss their particular experiences with students who have diagnosed disabilities. The majority of respondents reported positive experiences with these students in the general education classroom, and only a few respondents actually reported having any type of negative experiences. This study focused on teachers' experiences with students with emotional disturbance, autism, and other health impairments. Overall, most participants had experiences with students with all three diagnoses in their classroom.

Emotional Disturbance and Autism. Respondents were quick to express that students who were diagnosed as Emotionally Disturbed or had Autism had the potential to disrupt a classroom. These two disabilities were the ones that concerned teachers in this study the most. Their concerns centered around safety; in particular, they expressed concern for being able to keep all students in the classroom safe. Research conducted by Gladhill (2014) supported respondent concerns in this study. Gladhill (2014) found

students diagnosed as emotionally disturbed did not make much progress in math or reading in any type of educational setting. Gladhill (2014) also determined the lack of progress was due to the students not being able to have their behavioral issues addressed. This hinders the students' ability to successfully access academics no matter what setting the student may be in (Gladhill, 2014). Students who have been diagnosed as having Autism usually spend more time alone. This behavior often leads to teasing, bullying, and aggression from other students. This, in turn, may cause the student who has Autism to engage in reactive aggressive behavior (Saggers, 2015). The data from this study showed it is the aggressive behaviors of these students that concern the general education teacher.

A 2011 study by Cassady found teachers were concerned about the inability of these students to form friendships and connect with peers. The study also indicated teachers were anxious about the required instruction and modifications these students need in order to be in the general education classroom (Cassady, 2011). The unwillingness to put the supports in place for these students does not create an environment conducive to success (Cassady, 2011). An important takeaway of this study is, despite concerns, the respondents were willing to have these students in the general education classroom and willing to learn more about how to help them be successful.

Other Health Impaired. When listing the students they worked with, respondents listed students by their medical diagnosis (e.g., diabetes, cerebral palsy, seizure disorders) instead of their academic diagnosis, which is Other Health Impaired. Respondents were very positive when discussing these students. A study by Lupu (2017) supported this. Lupu found students with physical disabilities were more accepted than

students with mental issues (Lupu, 2017). This may be because tangible disabilities are more easily accepted. Overall, respondent concerns with students who were diagnosed as Other Health Impaired were not as great as students who were diagnosed with other disabilities. There was concern for student safety when discussing students with Emotional Disturbance and those who have Autism, but similar concerns were not voiced when discussing students who were diagnosed as Other Health Impaired.

Teacher Training

For three of the largest post-secondary institutions in Arkansas, there doesn't appear to be an emphasis on special education courses in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. This also appears to be true for the licensure requirements for the State of Arkansas. Yearly professional development requirements in terms of special education are very general and not disability-specific. This puts veteran and new teachers at a disadvantage when there are students with disabilities in their general education classes. Participants in this study frequently discussed their need for adequate training, strategies, and support.

Adequate training. All of the respondents in this study agreed they were not adequately trained to work with students with disabilities. This included deficiencies in both their undergraduate experience as well as their yearly required professional development that is mandated by the Arkansas Department of Education and their local school districts. Respondents believed if they had the proper training at all levels, they would be able to be more prepared to work with these students and make certain they could be successful.

Lupu (2017) found teacher attitude toward students with disabilities is often influenced by inadequacies in training. This also leads to the assumption by teachers that these students would cause more work for them (Lupu, 2017). Respondents in this study were confident they could help these students be successful if they had the support and continued training. This attitude is very different from the teachers in the Lupu study.

Strategies and support. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given they did not feel they had enough teacher training to work with students with disabilities, respondents in this study were very clear they wanted to know more about strategies for working with students with disabilities and were willing to learn if the opportunity was presented to them. Their suggestion was that the State Department of Education require professional development in this area every year. This finding is not surprising given a majority of teachers do not feel as though they have the tools and are not confident in their ability to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms (Kirby, 2017).

Implications

IDEA requires students be placed in the least restrictive environment with their peers as often as possible (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Implications for Practice

With this in mind, there are implications for practice, for the State Department of Education, higher education, local school districts, teachers and continued research based on the results of this study.

For the State of Arkansas. The State of Arkansas Department of Education sets the rules and regulations for teacher licensure within the state. Results of this study

suggest adjustments concerning licensure requirements are necessary and would be supported by teachers. All participants in this study noted the current requirements are not adequately preparing teachers for the classroom setting. The State Department of Education must be diligent in keeping teachers up-to-date with the latest best practices and what works with students with disabilities. While emphasis is put on standardized testing and being proficient and advanced, a large number of students in Arkansas classrooms today need more than what sheer academics will bring them. In order to serve the students in the here and now, teachers need to be able to re-visit and continually learn new strategies. The State Department could help this by changing professional development policies as well as licensure requirements. This helps teachers who are currently in school and the veteran teachers continue to build their toolbox on how to best work with all students in their classroom and thus help all students be successful.

For higher education. Higher education should take a hard look at the current requirements in teacher preparation programs with regard to special education preparation. All teachers in this study were general education teachers, and all of them had experience working with students with disabilities in their classrooms. However, they all had very little training for this in their undergraduate programs and indicated they would have liked more. The requirements for an undergraduate degree in education should be adjusted to give incoming teachers the tools they need to successfully teach and support all students in the classroom. The classes and the requirements have changed little over the years but students have changed tremendously (Will, 2018). More and more students are coming into the public school settings with disabilities (Will, 2018). Higher education must give teachers the ability to work with these students. Doing so

may help with teacher burn out and teacher shortages. This is also addressed under implications for school districts.

Advocates also indicate one or two special education classes for the general education teacher is not sufficient for the teacher to know how to work with students with disabilities (Will, 2018). Will (2018) found less than one-third of higher education programs require any time in a special education program for their student-teaching internship. Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform, otherwise known as the CEEDAR Center, is currently working with over 20 states to further develop their teacher preparation programs in order to better prepare teachers to serve all students, especially students with disabilities (Will, 2018). California is currently changing its teacher preparation program to include strategies to work with diverse learners. Syracuse University is now offering a dual elementary/special education program (Will, 2018). Teachers and administrators at all levels must start looking at all of our classrooms as diverse. If this is done on the front end, teachers would not have to work so hard to adjust to the diversity once they get in the classroom setting. The term diverse and equity once only covered race, language, gender, and poverty. Disability has been left out of that definition and needs to be included (Will, 2018). The findings of this study show Arkansas teachers are ready and willing to have this training.

For school districts. While school districts are mandated to offer certain professional development trainings per year by the Department of Education, they also have some leeway in what they offer every year. The findings from this study suggest local districts should be aware of the makeup of their students and adjust their

professional development offerings accordingly. This may also trickle into particular buildings and classrooms.

The teachers who participated in this study indicated they did not feel they had enough support or professional development in the area of working with students with disabilities. Administrators need training as much as teachers when dealing with students with disabilities in order to help and support their teachers with best practices and strategies. Teachers need to be willing to change the way they have always done things and step outside the box (participants in this study indicated they are aware of this and ready to do it). While many respondents expressed their idea of support as being an aide or paraprofessional in the classroom, some studies indicate some students who required extra help in the form of a paraprofessional often felt uncomfortable (Ervin, 2015). Having an adult with them all day often prevented and discouraged peer interaction and was embarrassing to the student (Ervin, 2015). Importantly, participants also indicated professional development was needed (in addition to in-the-classroom help), and local districts could help provide this type of training and continuing education for their teachers and other staff.

Another potential implication for school districts (as well as State Departments and higher education) is teacher shortages due to inadequate trainings and lack of preparedness. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2014) found the lack of pedagogy preparation often led to teachers leaving the profession after their first year. Those who were better prepared and trained were more likely to stay after the first year (Ingersoll et al., 2014).

For future research. This study provides important implications for future research: expanding this study to other areas of Arkansas and other states, examining the

perceptions of general education teachers on the inclusion of student with disabilities in the classroom, and examining the perception of students with disabilities on their inclusion in the general education classroom. This would also be a follow up on Ervin's 2015 study which revealed some students without disabilities were uncomfortable having students with disabilities in the general education classroom while some students with disabilities did not believe the work or the environment was appropriate for them (Ervin, 2015).

Summary

In conclusion, the general education teachers who participated in this study noted their willingness to have students with disabilities in their classrooms as long as they were given the appropriate supports and strategies to help these students be successful. The safety and success of all the students in the classroom was the main goal of all respondents. They were all willing if they could be given the tools to make this happen for all students. This willingness is in direct contrast to other research studies.

The final points of this study and chapter were implications on what the State Department, higher education, and local school districts must do in order to provide the teachers with what they need to serve all of the students in their classroom. The training needed would benefit teachers, administrators, students, and parents and help to remove the fear of lawsuits as well as the stigma that often comes from being a student with a disability. Education must reflect the world we live in today not the world that was yesterday.

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Appendix A

IRB Approval



**Office of Sponsored Programs
and University Initiatives**
Administration Building, Room 207
1589 North Boulder Avenue
Rogersville, Arkansas 72801

Office: 479-886-4327
www.atsu.edu

November 20, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved Tara Broussard-Harshaw's IRB application, "Teacher Perception toward Students with Certain Disabilities in the General Education Setting," through November 20, 2021. The approval code is Harshaw_112018.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. Kuroki".

Masanori Kuroki, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair



Appendix B

Springdale Research Approval



SPRINGDALE
SCHOOL DISTRICT

Director of Accountability
Melody Morgan

TO: Tara Harshaw
FROM: Melody Morgan
DATE: October 3, 2018
SUBJECT: Research Request

Dear Ms. Harshaw,

Thank you for your submission to the Springdale School District to conduct research in our district.

The committee has reviewed your proposal to study *Teacher Perception Toward Students With Certain Disabilities In The General Education Setting*. The committee has approved your research proposal.

We appreciate your interest and desire to include Springdale in this important work.

Sincerely,

Melody Morgan

Melody Morgan
Director of Accountability and Assessment
Springdale School District

cc: Dr. Marcia Smith
Dr. Kathy Morledge
Dr. Mary Bridgforth

Appendix C

Interview Questions

1. How many years have you taught? Have all of these years been in Arkansas?
2. How many of those years have been in a public school setting? If not, what other settings have you taught in?
3. Has your teaching experience varied as far as district size? If so, what size districts have you taught in?
4. In your undergraduate program, what classes did you take or were available to you that concerned students with disabilities? Were these classes disability specific? If so, what disabilities were covered?
5. What type of disabilities have you worked with in your general education classroom setting? What were your experiences in working with students who had these disabilities?
6. What are some positive experiences you've had working with students with disabilities in your classroom?
7. What are some negative experiences you've had working with students with disabilities in your classroom?
8. My next few questions are about experiences with students with specific types of disabilities/diagnoses. What is your perception of students with Autism in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you believe this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?

9. What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as emotionally disturbed in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you believe this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?
10. What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as other health impaired in the general education classroom? How did you come to form your opinion? Do you think this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the class?
11. What is your perception of students who have been diagnosed as having a specific learning disability in the general education classroom? How did you come to form this opinion? Do you think this student can be successful and show progress in the general education setting? Why or why not? How might a student with this diagnosis potentially affect the classroom environment for other students in the classroom?
12. In your opinion, what could institutions of higher learning do to promote positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
13. In your opinion, what could the State Department of education provide in the way of professional development or other type of training to promote positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the general education classroom?

14. In your opinion, how might the State Department of education be inadvertently reinforcing negative experiences and/or perceptions toward students with disabilities?
15. In your opinion, what could the local school district provide in the way of professional development or other type of training to promote positive perceptions toward students with disabilities in the general education classroom?
16. In your opinion, how might the local school district be inadvertently reinforcing negative experiences and/or perceptions toward students with disabilities?
17. What could be done to give general education teachers more confidence in their ability to provide what students with disabilities need in order to be successful and show progress?
18. What do you need in order to have a more inclusive classroom?