# FACTORS RELATED TO OPTIMAL SERVICE DELIVERY MODELS FOR STUDENTS WITH MODERATE TO SEVERE DISABILITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL RESEARCH INQUIRY

Emily Ledesma

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A Dissertation

Presented to the

Faculty of

California State University,

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

in

Educational Leadership

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by

Emily Joyce Ledesma

June 2018

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

The educational rights of students with disabilities are supported through federal mandates, as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) safeguards a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Special education students encompass a wide range of individual and unique learning needs, thus the creation of educational environments that utilize fluid and flexible service delivery models is warranted. Furthermore, students with moderate to severe disabilities (MSD) require specialized academic instruction that promotes advancements across several developmental areas, which includes cognition, adaptive skills, communication, and emotional awareness. Exploring educational service delivery models that proficiently address the unique needs of students with MSD is essential, as limited research exists in this specific area. Utilizing a qualitative phenomenological research methodology, this study sought to explore an informal class reassignment program that provides educational instruction to students with MSD. Additionally, the intent behind this study was to explore how the informal class reassignment program influenced the special education teachers' perspectives regarding learning outcomes for students with MSD, if at all. Moreover, this study sought to explore how moderate to severe special education teachers experience, define and describe an informal class reassignment program specifically designed to target the individual earning needs of students with MSD. This inquiry incorporated semi-structured interviews

combined with reflective field notes to gain a deeper understanding of the

participants' lived experiences. Consequently, the findings shed light on factors

that relate to optimal service delivery models for students with MSD.

*Keywords*: moderate to severe disabilities, service delivery model, special

education, moderate to severe special education teachers.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my three beautiful daughters. Lily, Addy, and Savanah, you mean the world to me.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Today's educational organizations exist in a world of continual and fluid alteration, as they must persistently evolve, adjust, and regenerate to ensure survival (Klimek, Ritzenhein & Sullivan, 2008). The significance behind educational platforms is evident, as education can transform and influence the individual lived experiences. Dynamic educational institutes function as a living organism, which seeks to transform as societal demands change, thus generating relevant learning experiences. Maintaining effective learning environments that incorporate research-based practices is imperative for all educational spaces. Providing meaningful and appropriate academic instruction is essential to all students, regardless of their ability levels. Recognizing individual learning styles, needs, and developmental levels are necessary to ensure all public schools generate successful learning environments.

Educational systems must establish, maintain, and monitor programs that meet the individual needs of diverse learners, which include students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act, and the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) created access to educational spaces for all students with a disability (National Council on Disability, 2016). Safeguarding the educational rights of students with disabilities is mandated through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

(IDEA) (Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, & Smith, 2004). Furthermore, the IDEA, which

was enacted in 1975, mandates that all children and youth ages 3–21 with

disabilities must be provided with a Free and Appropriate Public Education

(FAPE), (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics,

2016). Simply creating access to education does not ensure optimal learning

outcomes for students with disabilities, thus IDEA creted six principles that

govern the education of students with disabilities (Turnbull et al., 2004; Snell &

Brown, 2006). Table 1 illustrates the six principles in IDEA.

Table 1

*Six Principals Governing the Education of Students with Disabilities*

| |
|---|
| **Zero reject:** A rule against excluding any student. |
| **Nondiscriminatory evaluation:** A rule requiring schools to evaluate students fairly to determine if they have a disability and, if so, what kind and how extensive. |
| **Appropriate education:** A rule requiring schools to improve individually tailored education for each student based on the evaluation and augmented by related services and supplementary aids and services. |
| **Least restrictive environment:** A rule requiring schools to educate students with disabilities with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate for the student with disabilities. |
| **Procedural due process:** A rule providing safeguards for students against schools' actions, including a right to sue in court. |
| **Parental and student participation:** A rule requiring schools to collaborate with parents and adolescent students in designing and carrying our special education programs. |

*Note. Exceptional Lives Special Education in Today's Schools* (Turnbull et al., 2004).

Providing individualized special educational related services to students with disabilities within a public-school setting is not a simple task, as fluidity of program implementation, support services, and resources must transpire. Flexible program options, tailored to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities are imperative, as individuals' skill sets are in a constant state of change. As the education enrollment for student with disabilities increases within the state of California, the ability to target individual needs, progress monitor, and the application of essential supports is impacted. Table 2 illustrates the total enrollment by age and disability, ages ranging from birth through twenty-two years from the year 2010-2015 within the state of California.

Table 2

*Special Education Enrollment by Age and Disability Statewide Report*

| Reporting Cycle Year | Total Enrollment |
|---|---|
| 2010 | 678,929 |
| 2011 | 686,352 |
| 2012 | 695,173 |
| 2013 | 705,279 |
| 2014 | 717,961 |
| 2015 | 734,422 |

*Note.* California Department of Education, Special Education Division, 2016, Retrieved from http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/.

Students with disabilities, warrant exposure to diverse educational supports, programs and resources, as individual needs must always be taken into consideration by an IEP team. Students with moderate to severe disabilities

(MSD) may require the implementation of additional services, educational learning environments, and supports, which directly affect the educational organization, as the obtainment of the essential special educational personnel combined with resources is justified. Maintaining flexible learning environments that target all areas of childhood development is vital for students with MSD. Multiple educational program options and placements must be made available to students with disabilities, as this is mandated through IDEA (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003).

A continuum of program options and service delivery models must be made available to students with disabilities, thus safeguarding access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Turnbull et al., 2004). The LRE is an imperative component embedded with IDEA, as access to general education curriculum, activities, and peers is supported. The continuum of options ranges from the most natural learning environments to the most restricted and segregated learning environments. In addition, the LRE provision mandates the removal of the general educational environment should only occur when the nature or severity of the disability impacts learning outcomes despite the incorporation of supplementary aids and supports (Snell & Brown, 2006). A 2015 study concluded, the level of severity pertaining to one's disability generates a strong prediction regarding the educational placement (Kleinert et al., 2015). The construction of effective service delivery models is essential in meeting the ever-changing needs of students with disabilities. Table 3 illustrates

the total number of enrollments pertaining to educational environments for students with disabilities within the state of California.

Table 3

*Part B Child Count and Educational Environment, California 2015*

| Educational Environment | Total Enrollment |
|---|---|
| Homebound & Hospital | 2,096 |
| Inside regular class less than 40% of the day | 139,804 |
| Inside regular class 40% through 79% of the day | 130,150 |
| Inside regular class 80% or more of the day | 350,995 |
| Residential Facility | 775 |
| Separate School | 20,713 |
| Parentally placed in private schools | 2,951 |

*Note.* U.S. Department of Education, 2015, Retrieved from
https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016) conclude the percentage of students who participate in special education programs has decreased between the years 2004-2005 (13.8 percent) and 2013-2014 (12.9 percent). Despite the decrease in special education program enrollment, there is a documented increase in students deemed eligible for special education related services under the eligibility of other health impairment, autism spectrum disorder, and intellectual disabilities (National Center for Educational Statistic, 2016). Students deemed eligible for special education related services under the following categories: intellectual disability,

autism spectrum disorder, and multiple disabilities were more likely to be educated in more restrictive settings (Kleinert et al., 2015).

Furthermore, the state of California has a documented increase of students deemed eligible for special education related services over the past decade. More specifically, the California State Department of Education, Special Education division concludes an enrollment increase of 52,453 from the year 2004 to 2015 (California Department of Education, 2015). The increase in students with disabilities enrollment into the California public school system has directly impacted school districts located within the Southern California regions. Various school districts must ensure they provide a quality education to students with disabilities, therefore essential personnel, resources, and support are demanded. Table 4 illustrates the number of students ages six through twenty-one served under IDEA, Part B, by disability in the state of California, 2015-2016.

The enrollment increase of students with disabilities has generated risk for higher caseload numbers for special education teachers across California. The caseload enlargement creates a high demand for extra support and resources, as meeting the needs of each individual student can construct challenges. Increase in staff ratios, implementation of designated curriculum, and the utilization of evidence-based practices (EPD) are several warranted additions to the educational environment (Snell & Brown, 2006). In addition, students with MSD may exhibit and engage in maladaptive behaviors, which can negatively influence the learning environment. Stressful work environments that contain a

lack of support and collaboration may negatively impact teacher resilience, as

teacher burn-out can transpire. Establishing effective learning environments that

meet the individual needs of all key stakeholders is imperative. In addition,

creating service delivery models that support the increasing student with

disability population are warranted.

Table 4

*Part B Child Count and Educational Environments, California*

| Disability Category | Total Enrollment |
|---|---|
| Autism Spectrum Disorder | *79,165* |
| Deaf-blindness | *83* |
| Developmental Delay | *-* |
| Emotional Disturbance | *24,199* |
| Hearing Impairment | *10,415* |
| Intellectual Disabilities | *39,562* |
| Multiple Disabilities | *5,554* |
| Orthopedic Impairments | *9,754* |
| Other Health Impairments | *78,326* |
| Specific Learning Disabilities | *287,431* |
| Speech or Language Impairments | *109,883* |
| Traumatic Brain Injury | *1,607* |
| Visual Impairments | *3,129* |

*Note.* U.S. Department of Education, 2015, Retrieved from
https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/static-tables/index.html

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Students with moderate to severe disabilities have diverse learning and adaptive needs, which warrant the execution of flexible learning environments. Educational organizations must refrain from utilizing a "one-size-fits-all" model, thus the traditional special education service delivery model must become fluid in nature, changing as the needs of the student alter. The study of various service delivery models pertaining to students with MSD is warranted. The identification of effective attributes that create optimal learning environments for students with moderate to severe disabilities is one of the many challenges special education researchers face. Continued efforts to accommodate this growing student population is essential and supported by federal mandates. To ensure educational platforms are meeting the instructional needs of students with disabilities access to appropriate programs is imperative. The study of how

optimal learning environments influence special education teachers, the families of special education children, and the community in which they live is part of the identification process.

This study will explore a specific learning environment, designed to meet the individual needs of students with MSD within a designated California public-school. The learning environment embedded within this study is identified as a "special school," thus specifying it only provides educational instruction to students with disabilities. The designated school selected for this inquiry resides in the River County Unified School District, which is housed within Southern California. It is imperative to note that all identifiers and proper names have been assigned a pseudonym, thus ensuring confidentiality.

<p style="text-align:center">Problem Statement</p>

Serving Students with Mild to Severe Disabilities

There is an increasing quantity of persons deemed eligible for special education related services within the state of California. Although eligibility criteria fall under one of the thirteen disability categories embedded within IDEA, each individual functions uniquely in nature. Similar diagnoses do not generate nor identify the exact symptoms or the severity of the disability. Individuals with a disability must have access to an individualized education plan, supports, and educational environments. Creating educational environments that utilize fluid and flexible service delivery models is warranted, thus providing opportunities to shift as the needs of the student alter. Students with MSD may require support in

a variety of developmental areas, such as cognition, adaptive, communication, and social and emotional development. More specifically, persons with MSD function at different levels within each of the identified developmental areas. Creating educational programs that recognize this ideology is imperative, as targeting each individual level is necessary to ensure optimal learning-outcomes. Exploring how the modification and individualization of a learning environment influences the lived experiences of key stakeholders is essential, as students with MSD are deemed in a constant state of change. In addition, studies exploring the learning environments for individuals with MSD are limited (Downing & Peckman-Hardin, 2007; Kleinert et at., 2015; Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Continued research focused upon the student with MSD population is justified.

## Purpose Statement

It is imperative for educational organizations to establish and generate effective procedures and methods that strive to meet the individual needs of students with MSD, as this population has increased. Traditionally, students with MSD are primarily served in segregated classrooms and settings (Kleinert et at., 2015). Segregated classrooms and settings can be identified as the following service delivery models: self-contained classroom, special schools, and nonpublic schools. Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati & Cosier (2011) describe self-contained classrooms as distracting, lacking academic rigor, and unstructured, which contradicts identified benefits and justification for a more

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segregated placement. It is evident the student with disability population is increasing within the state of California, thus it is reasonable to assume the increasing population will contain individuals with MSD. Although emerging research concludes students with MSD can gain academic and social benefits from inclusive settings, the continued practice is to provide educational related services and supports in more restrictive environments (Kleinert et at., 2015). Identifying effective practices embedded within more restrictive educational environments for students with MSD is vital, as continued research is required.

The objective of this research inquiry is to explore an individualized, flexible, and fluid service delivery model, which only provides educational related services to students with MSD. The identified service delivery model is deemed "most restrictive," as it is provided in a segregated school. This study will add to the limited research pertaining to students with MSD, which will aid in the ability to illuminate effective learning environments for students with MSD.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

Guided through a qualitative research design, the research questions will seek to explore personal experiences and perceptions pertaining to the specific learning environment for students with moderate to severe disabilities. The researcher served as a key instrument in the data collection process, which will transpire within the natural setting (Creswell, 2013). The research questions will serve as a vehicle to understand and explore the personal lived experiences of those who encounter the identified service delivery model. Exploring how this

service delivery influences the lived experiences will be obtained from participant's personal stories and interviews, thus empowering individuals through their voices (Creswell, 2013). The following research questions will be utilized to explore how the identified service delivery models influence key stakeholders, if at all.

1. How do moderate to severe special education teachers and school personnel define, describe, and experience an "informal class reassignment program," offered at one elementary school within Southern California?

2. How have the experiences of moderate to severe special education teachers in working with an "informal class reassignment program," shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to students with MSD learning-outcomes, if at all?

## Significance of the Study

Students are separate living organisms who must be educated in ways that meet each individual leaning needs. More specifically, "Students are not uniform raw materials but a diverse collection of living, breathing human beings with complex personalities and life stories" (Cozolino, 2014, p. 7). Educational organizations must recognize the complexity embedded within each student. The traditional education system assembly model, where the "one-size-fits-all mindset must diminish. Acknowledging the unique life stories of all students is demanded

by educational institutes, thus providing support necessary to educate the "whole child." Embracing the notion that educational spaces can support all areas of developmental progression is imperative, thus the production of efficient members of society can transpire through the educational system. The identification of a diverse student population is essential, as educational spaces can transform to meet the individual and unique needs of all students. Diverse student population can include students with disabilities and school systems must evolve to meet the ever-changing needs of this unique population.

According to the United States Census Bureau (2010), approximately nineteen percent of the United States population had a disability, which accounts for 56.7 million individuals. In addition, a 2.2 million increase of persons with disability has been documented from the years 2005 through 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, an increase in persons with a severe disability increased from 34.9 million to 38.3 million during the years 2005 through 2010 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The U.S Census Bureau (2010) report states there are approximately 2.6 million children under the age of fifteen who classified with a severe disability. Unfortunately, individuals with a severe disability are less likely to be employed and more often experience poverty, which may impact their quality of life. Table 5 illustrates employment status for adults twenty-one to sixty-four years of age.

Table 5

*Total Percent of Employment Status for Adults 21 to 64 Years of Age in the U.S.*

|  | Employed all 24 months | Not employed for a spell of 12 or more months | Not employed all 24 months |
|---|---|---|---|
| Severe Disability | 19.9 | 14.8 | 49.9 |
| Non-severe Disability | 54.8 | 9.1 | 14.1 |
| No Disability | 61.1 | 8.3 | 9.2 |

Note. U.S. Census Bureau, 2010

The ongoing exploration of how students with MSD are educated within the United States public school system is crucial. It is evident this population has increased and students with MSD have individual learning needs. Educating the "whole child" is essential, as this enhances one's quality of life and personal lived experiences. Moreover, humans are shaped by environmental influences; therefore, creating effective service delivery models embedded within educational organizations, which target the unique and individualized needs of students with MSD, is imperative. This inquiry supports demand for continual research regarding the student with MSD population, as this populace has increased. Exploring diverse learning environments and how they can influence lived experiences is vital, thus the identification of effective attributes can transpire. Educational service delivery models that focus on students with MSD can be reformed through the findings concluded from this inquiry.

Theoretical Underpinnings

A qualitative research design allowed the researcher to understand how environments can shape individual experiences and how individual experiences can influence the encountered environment (Glesne, 2011). This inquiry utilized a descriptive research design to address the constructed research questions. Exploring how the personal perceptions and lived experiences "of educators" have been shaped by a shared experience will be carried out within this study. More specifically, personal perceptions, experiences, and descriptions regarding a shared experience will be obtained. Understanding how a shared experience can influence several individuals' lived experiences is essential, as a deeper understanding can impact educational practices or policies (Creswell, 2013). Acquiring significant statements and themes will aid in the ability to illuminate the commonalities amongst each participant. The present study is designed to obtain a "textural description" of experience, thus shedding light on the essence of the experience (Creswell, 2013).

Assumptions

There are several assumptions embedded within this inquiry. It is assumed that the special education teachers participating in the study are considered knowledgeable and highly qualified. This assumption implies each participant holds the required teaching credential, degree, and certifications required to effectively execute all essential duties within their field of practice. In addition, it is assumed that each participant involved in the study will produce reliable and

thoughtful feedback throughout the interview process. Finally, it is assumed that the constructed interview questions will generate the necessary information warranted to efficiently answer the developed research questions.

Delimitations

This inquiry will not explore the individual lived experiences outside of the shared phenomena. More specifically, information regarding personal relationships outside of the designated environment will not be obtained. Information pertaining to individual lifestyles, family backgrounds, and home environments will not be explored. Lastly, this study did not ask nor answer the following question, "How does an informal class reassignment program adhere to all components, embedded within a student with MSD Individualized Education Plan (IEP)?" This question, while an important considerate, is not the focus of this study. Only information relevant to the shared experience will be obtained, as this data will effectively address the composed research questions.

Definitions of Key Terms

Student with Moderate to Severe Disabilities

Although the term "moderate to severe disability" is utilized within the literature, there is not an authoritative definition (Snell & Brown, 2006). For the purpose of this study, a student will MSD will be defined by the following description a student who continually demonstrates significantly below average intellectual functioning, which may exist simultaneously with deficits in adaptive

behavior, motor development, sensory, and communication skills (Turnbull et al., 2004). The student can comprehend and execute classroom procedures; however, the student may continue to have difficulty with changes in schedules and routines. The student demonstrates difficulty comprehending and following complex directions. The student can learn rote information; however, may have difficulty with generalizing and transferring information across environments and individuals. The student's identified disability impacts their capability to access the core curriculum. Finally, the student would benefit from instruction that is a multi-modal approach to learning, providing many opportunities for repetition and practice.

Free and Appropriate Public Education

All students ages three through twenty-one years with a qualifying disability must be provided access to a free and appropriate public education at the public's expense (Cambron-McCabe, McCarthy & Eckes, 2014). The term Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is an essential component embedded within The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), which safeguards the rights of students with disabilities, thus guaranteeing access to a public-school education. Through the development of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) a student with a disability will receive the essential supports and resources that specifically target individual needs. All elements embedded within the IEP will be executed in a timely fashion once parental consent has been obtained. In addition, all suspected areas of disability will be evaluated, thus

illuminating deficits in developmental areas so that proper supports can be implemented. In addition, a student with a disability must be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE). An inadequate execution of the IEP is a violation of student rights and a denial of FAPE, which generates the risk of litigation.

## Summary

The students with moderate to severe disability population is increasing; therefore, finding methods and procedures that effectively educate this exceptional population is warranted. Developing successful learning programs that target individual developmental needs is one way to ensure public school systems are safeguarding an access to FAPE. Continued research regarding students with moderate to severe disabilities is demanded, as the educational system and student population are in a constant state of change. Obtaining personal descriptions, perceptions, and experiences pertaining to an informal class reassignment program that directly targets students with MSD can prove significant, as potential policies and practices can develop.

## Organization of the Study

This research study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 presented the purpose and significance behind the study. Chapter 2 presents an overview of the literature surrounding educational impacts and legal mandates regarding students with disabilities. Chapter 3 identifies and explains the selected research design and methodology utilized within the study. In addition, specific data

analysis procedures and reliability elements are outlined within this chapter.

Chapter 4 displays the qualitative analysis of the data collected, which will be

depicted through participant quotes, tables, and graphs. Chapter 5 provides

conclusions drawn from the data analysis combined with the researchers'

recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore an informal class reassignment

program, which directly provides specialized academic instruction (SAI) for

students with moderate to severe disabilities (MSD) in a semi-segregated

educational setting. Continued research pertaining to various service delivery

models for this unique student population is imperative, as students with MSD

often have diverse and individualized needs (Ryndak, Ward, Alper, Montgomery

& Storch, 2010). There is insufficient research pertaining to students with MSD,

as a vast majority of studies have been centered upon students with mild to

moderate disabilities (Kleinert et al., 2015; Ryndak et al., 2010; Williamson,

Mcleskey, Hoppey & Rentz, 2006). In addition, the ever-changing societal

demands warrant the execution of studies exploring how various educational

environments influence outcomes pertaining to students with MSD (Kleinert et

at., 2015; Ryndak et al., 2010). Although past studies have illuminated the

benefits produced from educating students with disabilities in general education

classrooms, there is a lack of research connecting inclusive practices and

outcomes for students with MSD (Ryndak et al., 2010). Lack of research focused

on students with MSD justifies a need for a continued exploration of how a

service delivery model can shape lived experiences and outcomes for students

with MSD. Building historical knowledge regarding the field of special education is essential, as various advancements have been made with the intention of establishing and maintaining effective learning environments, in which all students can learn.

## History

Prior to 1975, educational access for students with moderate to severe disabilities was limited if not denied, as most who exhibited moderate to severe disabilities were institutionalized (Kurth, 2015; Rotatori, Obiakor & Bakken, 2011). Unfortunately, most individuals with disabilities spent their lives in institutions, therefore this exceptional population received limited resources and legal provisions. According to Aron and Loprest (2012), more than one million children with a disability were housed in state institutions prior to 1975, consequently impacted access to public school education. The intention of institutionalization was to provide educational and vocational programs to individuals with disabilities; however, most facilities served as a vehicle to segregate and control this exceptional population (Rotatori et al., 2011). Lived experiences as well as life outcomes were negatively impacted by lack of options offered within the institutionalized setting. Unfortunately, the lived experiences of institutional life for a person with a disability varied, as conditions within the facilities ranged from suitable to appalling. Despite plentiful employees, established programs, and goodwill many facilities were deteriorating, overpopulated, and unsanitary. Mandates pertaining to the treatment of

individuals with disabilities were warranted, thus humanitarian, legal, and economic issues began to emerge (Rotatori, Obiakor & Bakken, 2011).

Through the efforts of several significant instrumental historical events such as, the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Section504), the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P.L. 94-142), the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1990 (IDEA), and the 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA, educational pathways and outcomes for students with disabilities were transformed (Prager, 2015). In 1975, Congress initially enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as P.L. 94-142, which is entitled, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) (Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006). The intention of the passage of EAHCA was to safeguard congressional support regarding educational rights of students with disabilities. More specifically, "The EAHCA's legislative history shows that Congress intended through the collective efforts of federal, state, and local government to extend equal education access to children with disabilities and, as a result, the federal government increased funding for special education to assist school districts in meeting their statutory and constitutional obligations" (Prager, 2015, p. 658). The urgency to properly educate all students with disabilities was now supported by federal legislation, thus safeguarding one's civil rights and equal access. Although the passage of EACHA proved significant, the continued development of educational settings in which, services, environments, and practices are individualized to specifically target areas of

need, was warranted. Additional legislation was required to develop efficient

pathways towards independence for persons with a disability.

The need to ensure that all individuals, despite their ability levels, are

granted equal opportunities is the driving force behind the enactment of the ADA.

In 1986, the National Council on Disability, formally known as the National

Council on the Handicapped, published an influential report entitled: "Toward

Independence: An Assessment of Federal Laws and Programs Affecting Persons

with Disabilities-With Legislative Recommendations", with the hopes of creating

change that enhances the quality of life for persons with disabilities (National

Council on the Handicapped, 1986). More specifically:

> The National Council of the Handicapped is charged by
>
> stature with reviewing Federal Laws and programs affecting
>
> persons with disabilities and assessing the extent to which
>
> they "provide incentives or disincentives to the establishment
>
> of community-based services for handicapped individuals,
>
> promote the full integration of such individuals in the
>
> community, in schools, and in the workplace, and contribute
>
> to the independence and dignity of such individuals.
>
> (National Council on the Handicapped, Executive Summary,
>
> para 1, 1986).

Through the guidance, support, and involvement of individuals with

disabilities, parents, advocates, and members of the National Council on the

Handicapped, the report was constructed with the intentions of establishing legislation that dissolved the alienation of persons with disabilities from the general community.

The report findings concluded that persons with disabilities faced unnecessary barriers that were not contributed to their disability. Recommendations included, but were not limited to, the following: Funding towards independent living centers, accessible housing, the establishment of various means of accessible public transportation, accessible facilities, measures that aid in the decrease of a disability, and educational rights for students with a disability. The comprehensive report proved to be influential with regards to promoting the civil rights of individuals with disabilities. Several years following the composure of the "Toward Independence: An Assessment of Federal Laws and Programs Affecting Persons with Disabilities-With Legislative Recommendations" report, the National Council on Handicapped, now the National Council on Disabilities (NCD) continued to advocate for the rights of individuals with disabilities. Due to the efforts of NCD, The Congressional Task Force on the Rights and Empowerment of Americans with Disabilities was established (ADA National Network, 2016). The historic year of 1988 proved to be significant for persons with disabilities, as Sen. Weicker and Rep. Coelho in the 100th Congress proposed the first version of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA National Network, 2016).

On July 26, 1990 President George W. Bush enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which prohibited employment discrimination against persons with a disability deemed qualified to perform all activities required of a job (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014; Erdos, Knapp & Faley & Long, 2006). The ADA reauthorization significantly impacted the lives of individuals with disabilities, as the call for equality was demanded, thus supporting anti-discrimination. More importantly, provisions regarding accessibility of public facilities, which includes educational institutions, equal employment opportunities, and telecommunications, significantly enriched the quality of life of individuals with a disability (Sawyer, 2004). Despite the progressions toward equal treatment of individuals with disabilities, the demand to provide an appropriate public education for children with a disability was warranted. In 1990, the EACHA was amended and renamed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003, Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 2006; Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006). IDEA significantly impacted the lives of students with a disability, as those who were once excluded from the general education population were now granted access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restricted environment (LRE).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) produced educational opportunities for students with disabilities, therefore opening the doors to a public-school education. IDEA not only granted access to a public-

school education, it also ensured students with a disability benefited from their learning environment (Turnbull et al., 2004). Furthermore, public institutes can create platforms for cognitive development, behavioral progression, and social communication advancements, which seek to promote the highest level of independence for a student with a disability. More importantly, children with disabilities are entitled to the same lived experiences as nondisabled children. The historic Supreme Court case decision pertaining to the *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) supported the advocates of special education advocates desire to ensure students with a disability are not segregated nor discriminated (Turnbull et al., 2004). Through the deliberate actions of advocacy groups, the educational treatment of students with disabilities expanded as the reauthorization of P.L. 94-142 was carried out by Congress, thus generating (IDEA). In 2004, IDEA was reauthorized, as it continued to be the most significant legislation supporting the needs of students with disabilities (Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 2006).

The reauthorization formulated a revision to the federal law, as IDEA is now known as The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). IDEIA provides federal funds to state and local agencies with the intent to deliver a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IDEIA is enforced and overseen by the Office of Special Education Programs (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014). Although the participation in the IDEIA funding program is voluntary, all

states partake, as they must comply with Section 504 of the Vocational

Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (Cambron-McCabe et

al., 2014; Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006).

Students who qualify for IDEIA services must fit into the following thirteen

qualifying categories: Other health impairments, autism spectrum disorder,

emotional disturbance, speech or language impairment, visual impairment

(including blindness), specific learning disability, deafness, hearing impairment,

deaf-blindness, orthopedic impairment, intellectual disability, traumatic brain

injury, and multiple disabilities (Altshuler & Kopels, 2003; Cambron-McCabe et

al., 2014; Kurth, Morningstar & Kozleski, 2014). It is vital students with disabilities

are properly identified, thus ensuring they receive access to federal mandates,

supports, and resources. Under the direct mandate of IDEIA the "child find"

principle, safeguards the identification and evaluation of all students with a

disability, regardless of residential factors or language barriers (Cambron-

McCabe et al., 2014; Shapiro & Derrington, 2004). The identification process is

imperative for students with qualifying disabilities, as essential educational

supports, programs, and resources can be established in the students current

learning environment. In addition, students who have been identified with a

qualifying disability are protected by federal mandates set forth through IDEIA

provisions. IDEIA embraces six key principles, which aid in the ability to

effectively educate and serve students with disabilities. Appropriate education;

nondiscriminatory evaluations, zero reject; least restrictive environment; parent

and student participation, and procedural due process make up the six key principles of IDEIA (Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006).

Appropriate Education transpires when a student with a disability receives an individualized education plan (IEP) that generates benefits and fosters progression toward individual goals (Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006). In addition, a student with a disability must be educated in the least restrictive environment, thus safeguarding access to nondisabled peers. More importantly, all students, regardless of the severity of their disability, will have granted access to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE), as the zero-reject principle applies. Students with a disability will receive the essential supports and resources that will enable them to become successful within public school settings. Resources, programs, therapy services and educational supports that promote individual student achievement will be provided free at the public expense. Students who foster qualifying disabilities, therefore eligible for IDEIA services will have educational access from age three through twenty-one years. Educational services must be executed within the grounds of an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary educational organization that meet the standards of the state educational agency (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014; Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe & Schrandt, 2006). The six principles embedded in IDEA, provide opportunities to enhance one's quality of life through the production of skill sets that lead to higher levels of independence across developmental levels.

Prior to 1975, students with disabilities had limited educational options, as most children either attended a private school at the expense of their parents or did not attend a school at all, resulting in the child remaining in the home setting. The desire for equal treatment and acceptance are components sought by students with moderate to severe disabilities, their families, and advocates within the field of special education. Although severe cognitive deficits can impact typical awareness, some individuals with a severe disability recognize the notion they may be viewed differently from the general public. FAPE ensures access to learning spaces for children with MSD, thus a free public education is provided at no cost to the family. In addition, a continuum of service options is considered by an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team when determining a public school district's offer of FAPE, which is to be provided in the least restrictive environment (Yell, Katsiyannis, Ryan, McDuffe & Mattocks, 2008).

Nondiscriminatory evaluations are a central component embedded within IDEIA, as they illuminate the individual needs of a student with a disability. An evaluation can identify skill deficits linked to a critical developmental area; therefore, appropriate interventions can be applied, if warranted. The utilization of multiple evaluation instruments is supported through IDEIA, as both strengths and weaknesses can be depicted. An evaluation must be carried out prior to a child receiving special education related services. In addition, IDEIA requires the administration of a multifaceted evaluation with valid assessment instruments, as all areas of suspected disability must be assessed. Cognitive functioning,

developmental abilities, communication, adaptive skills, and social and emotional levels are several areas that can be taken into account during the evaluation process (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014; Smith, 2005; Turnbull, 2005).

Students with qualifying disabilities are re-evaluated at least every three years, as the obtainment of current present levels of performance is essential to program placement, services, and eligibility. Findings concluded from the assessments are utilized to make informed decisions by the IEP team members, as data can illuminate progression or regression in relation to skill sets. Individual student's needs are taken into consideration, as a customized education plan is crafted to meet the individualized needs of the student. School districts must obtain parental consent before an assessment can be conducted; therefore, an assessment plan is generated with the intentions of identifying which areas will be assessed. In addition, parents have the right to an independent second evaluation at the expense of the district if they are displeased with the original evaluation results.

The composure of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is indispensable for students with qualifying disabilities, as the IEP targets specific and unique individual needs. An IEP team consists of not less than one of the following individuals: The parents and/or guardian of a child with a disability, special education teacher, general education teacher, local education agency representative, other relevant personnel, and whenever appropriate, the student with the disability (Gartin & Murdick, 2017). Identifying how the students'

disability impacts learning within the general education environment is discussed by the IEP team (Gartin & Murdick, 2017). Student's strengths, parental concerns, evaluation results, academic needs, and developmental levels, and overall functioning skills are areas addressed through the IEP process (Prager, 2015). Annual IEP reviews are conducted as a means to ensure proper program and supports are provided to the student (Gartin & Murdick, 2017). Although the IEP will be reviewed on an annual basis, legal guardians can request an IEP team meeting more frequently should any concerns arise, as the IEP is deemed an evolving document that can be altered as the needs of the child changes. During the IEP process a continuum of services will be discussed amongst IEP team members, thus guaranteeing the student with a disability is granted access to an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (Yell et al., 2008). All elements of the IEP must be carried out efficiently and with fidelity; therefore, safeguarding the rights of the student. An inadequate execution of the IEP is a violation of student rights and a denial of FAPE, which can generate mediation and due process proceedings.

The IEP is a fundamental legal document for students with disabilities, thus mandating required supports, resources, services, program options, and annual goals. Composing an effective IEP that specifically meets the individual needs of a student with MSD is essential. A methodically crafted IEP can generate instrumental pathways that support goal attainment, independent living, and enhance the quality of life for a student with MSD. Educational benefits

combined with socialization benefits are two key components that must be considered by the IEP team when a program placement and supports are discussed. The IEP team must ensure the student with a disability is educated in an environment that is deemed least restrictive. In addition, the IEP team is mandated to only remove the student from a general education setting when the nature or severity of the disability combine with the use of supplementary supports proves will prove unsuccessful in a general education setting (Carson, 2015; Marx, Hart, Nelson, Love, Baxter, Gartin & Schaefer Whitby, 2014).

Educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) is a vital component embedded within IDEIA, as the law mandates students with disabilities must be educated with nondisabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014; Prager, 2015; Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 2006, Yell, 1995). The LRE is determined by the IEP team and only during an IEP meeting, as any changes to the current educational setting must be executed through this process. An IEP meeting creates a space in which considerations pertaining to the LRE occur, as all IEP team members participate in a collaborative discussion. It is imperative to note that special education is not a place but rather a service, which shall be provided to a student with a disability, thus ensuring the individual needs are met (Marx, Hart, Nelson, Love, Baxter, Gartin & Schaefer Whitby, 2014). The removal of the general education environment will only be executed if the IEP team determines the student will not be successful despite the assistance from supplementary

supports (Marx, Hart, Nelson, Love, Baxter, Gartin & Schaefer Whitby, 2014; Prager, 2015). In addition, federal law states students with disabilities are to be educated at their home school, when the appropriate program is available. If the necessary program is not provided at the student's home school, the district can contract with outside agencies or transport the student to another school setting that fosters the essential program. This process guarantees the child has access to an appropriate program that meets the student's individual needs (Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 2006).

It is essential to have parent or guardian participation in the IEP process, as they can offer valuable insight to the specific needs of the child (Diliberto & Brewer, 2012). Moreover, federal mandates generated from IDEIA, safeguard the rights of parents and guardians, as participation in decisions pertaining to the identification, evaluation, and placement setting is required (Rosenberg, O'Shea & O'Shea, 2006). Parental and guardian input regarding a child's strengths, weaknesses, and essential supports is imperative for educational personnel, as home and community life can be shared amongst team members. Goals and objectives can be developed within an IEP with the intentions of teaching students with a disability the vital skills necessary for an independent lifestyle. The ability to achieve individual life goals is one of the driving forces behind parental and guardian participation, as decisions made during an IEP meeting can influence lived experiences.

Parents and guardians have the legal right to assist in making decisions

for their student with a disability, however should a disagreement arise the parent or guardian has the right to procedural due process (Dagley, 1995; Zirkel & Scala, 2010). Parents and guardians are made aware of their parental rights through receiving a copy of IDEIA procedural safeguards at least one time per year. Respectively, school districts make valid attempts to generate IEPs that best meet the individual needs of the student. On occasion, parents or guardians may disagree with the evaluation instrument or findings, program plans and supports, placement decisions, or the offer of a FAPE. Should there be the inability to resolve a disagreement at an IEP meeting, the parent or guardian is permitted to file a complaint, hold an additional IEP meeting or participate in mediation hearing. A mediation permits the process of a dispute resolution in which the key stakeholders gather to resolve a conflict pertaining to an IEP. The mediation process involves the participation of a neutral third-party representative, which aids in the conflict resolution (Dagley, 1995; Zirkel & Scala, 2010; Nowell & Salem, 2007). If an agreement is not reached the involvement in a judicial appeal at the state court or federal court level may be warranted based on the incapability of conflict resolution generating from the initial IEP complaint.

Obtaining parental and guardian participation is essential in effectively educating students with MSD, as functional curriculum can be designed to address students' needs across settings. Hilton and Henderson (1993) concluded the importance of parental involvement, as the generalization of skill sets can transpire in both the home and school environments. More specifically,

Hilton and Henderson (1993) reported parental involvement produced higher rates of achievement when skills were taught in both the home and school setting. Building communication between the home and school community is vital, thus ensuring the individual needs of the students is illuminated and supported. Creating collaborative relationships with parents or guardians is crucial, as skill development must occur across settings. Involving parents and guardians in the educational process for their child is imperative; therefore, increasing the students' overall quality of life and generalization skill sets.

IDEIA has had profound impacts on special education students, as students who were once excluded from the public school environment are now granted access to a public school education. The opportunities for students with disabilities are evolving through IDEIA; therefore, creating optimal pathways that enhance life outcomes. The rights of students with disabilities are protected, thus safeguarding the establishment of essential supports and placements through procedural safeguards. Life experiences as well as long-term goals are positively shaped, through the development and implementation of IDEIA. The six principles embedded within IDEIA provide support, guidance, and funding, hence ensuring all students with disabilities have access to a public education. The IEP process and development are essential to a student with disabilities, as the IEP identifies both strengths and weaknesses, while systematically composing a plan that will enrich strengths and support weaknesses. Students with disabilities will be educated in the least restrictive environment and will have guaranteed access

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to a free and appropriate public education. Parent and guardian involvement

generates advocacy, which will influence future legislation pertaining to

individuals with disabilities, thereby creating pathways with the intent of

improving public education for all students.

No Child Left Behind

The continuation of legislative support for students with moderate to

severe disabilities was demonstrated through the passage of The No Child Left

Behind Act (NCLB). The No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, formerly known as the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, continues to provide

federal funding support for students in k-12th grade (David & Cuban, 2010).

Funding generated through NCLB targets the closer of the achievement gap,

impacting both disabled and non-disabled students. The primary focus of NCLB

is driven by four main ideologies, which include stronger accountability

measures, flexible funding control, evidenced based teaching practices, and

school of choice options for parents (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). More

recently, on December 10, 2015 President Barack Obama reauthorized and

renamed NCLB; therefore enacting the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

(Peurach, 2016). Ensuring all students, regardless of their societal upbringings

are entitled to equal educational opportunities is a core belief implanted within

the ESSA. Decisions pertaining to standards, accountability, and school reform

were central components, embedded with the ESSA (Peurach, 2016). A renewed

concentration regarding evidenced-based practices that seek to enhance the

effectiveness and student outcomes are the primary factors of the ESSA

(Callahan & Shifrer, 2016).

It is evident students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate

public education, thereby safeguarding their civil rights. Current legislature acts

as a pathway to public education, creating opportunities and granting access.

Unfortunately, it does not guarantee optimal learning environments for students

with disabilities. *Hudson v. Rowley* proved to be a significant and historical court

case in the 1980s. In a 1982 Supreme Court decision, it was concluded

appropriate education was merely granting educational access for students with

disabilities and not necessarily establishing educational environments that

produce maximum possible achievement (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). Much

discussion has been centered on what is the best educational environment for

students with disabilities.  More specially, what educational service delivery

model produces optimal results for students with moderate to severe disabilities?

A continuum of service options produces a framework for special educational

professionals, as an educational placement in the LRE is essential for students

with disabilities. A continuum of services can include the following educational

programs: General education class, general education classroom with

supplemental aids and services, general education class with related services,

general education classroom with consultation or collaboration from a special

education educator, general education classroom with push in specialized

academic instruction (SAI), general education classroom with SAI in a separate

setting, separate classroom with SAI for a majority of the day, separate

classroom with SAI for a majority of the day utilizing an alternative curriculum,

state special school, non-public school, alternative education, home and hospital,

and instruction in a non-classroom setting. Service delivery models have been

established as a means to provide a learning space in which essential supports,

services, and instruction can be provided to the student with a disability.

Traditional Service Delivery Models

Inclusive Model

Students with disabilities, who are educated within a general education

setting, are immersed and served in an inclusion service delivery model.

Inclusive education is supported through IDEIA, thus students with disabilities are

entitled to free and appropriate educational environments that are deemed least

restrictive in nature (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007, Loiacono & Valenti,

2010). Existing research concludes various benefits from inclusive practices,

which include enhanced social skills, emotional development, communication

progression, and higher levels of independence (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011,

Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Olson, Leko & Roberts, 2016). A study

conducted in the year 2006, found students with disabilities, who were educated

in inclusive settings, progressed in higher rates academically than disabled

students in self-contained settings (Signor-Buhl, Leblanc & Mcdougal, 2006). The

provision of all academic instruction is generated from the general education

teacher in an inclusion service delivery model. Differentiated instructions

combined with the implementation of a multi-modal approach to learning are essential elements in this educational environment. Approximately, forty percent of students with disabilities are provided educational instruction in a regular education setting (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). The majority of students who are granted access to inclusive educational environments typically have mild deficits, thus students with more severe disabilities are educated in alternative placements provided by the continuum of services (Loiacono & Valenti, 2010).

Inclusive settings offer several benefits to students with disabilities; however, numerous studies found general education teachers may lack the skills or knowledge to successfully integrate and educate students with disabilities in their general education classroom (Schoger, 2006). Students with disabilities warranted the implementation of diverse instructional strategies. More specifically, the utilization of differentiated instruction is vital for students with disabilities, as learning needs vary. General education teacher must be able to meet the individual learning needs of all students. Knowledge regarding diverse learning styles combined with knowledge pertaining to evidence-based practices is commanded from general education teachers. Addressing the academic, social, and domestic needs of a student with disabilities may pose challenges for general education teachers, should they lack the formal training and skill sets (Schoger, 2006). Preparation programs that are centered on successfully educating students with disabilities in the general education setting is imperative.

Additional resources and supports can be provided to a student with a disability, should such interventions be warranted. More specifically, a study concluded students with disabilities are pulled from the general education setting, as they are not obtaining educational benefits from this learning environment (Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, & Fafard, 1995). This particular service delivery model utilizes a blended approach, as portions of the day are spent in both a general educational classroom and a special education classroom. Essentially, the student with a disability will receive educational instruction from a general education teacher and a special education teacher (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). This particular model implements specialized academic instruction pullout services, which will be provided by a special education teacher, therapist, and other personnel (Dev & Haynes, 2015). Goals and objectives embedded into a students Individualized Education Plan (IEP) can be addressed and supported in the resource support service classroom. The primary function of this service delivery model is to provide a small group presentation of materials with the intention of producing a deeper understanding of challenging concepts for the student. Small group instruction can be centered on language arts and mathematics concepts, which are individualized to meet the individual learning needs of the student (Jones & Hensley, 2012). The teaching of strong foundational skills is essential in resource support service classrooms, thereby

students can obtain the vital skills that promote academic success in relation to academic standards and self-destination (Jones & Hensley, 2012).

Educating students with disabilities in a resource specialist program model can be beneficial in meeting the unique and individual needs of the student (Jones & Hensley, 2012; Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, & Fafard, 1995). The development of critical skills can be taught through small group instruction; therefore, enhancing student achievement. More specifically, small group instruction can be catered to meet the individual learning style of the student (McLeskey & Waldron, 2011). Although, observable profits can generate from a resource specialist program model, several studies conclude contrasting findings. One study argued that pulling a student with a disability out of the general education setting for portions of the day resulted in the student missing core content; therefore, impacting their ability to learn new material. The pullout services, while supporting the specific learning needs of the student, generated harm as the student was not able to fully access all learning concepts covered throughout the general education classroom (Williamson et al., 2006). Arguably, pulling a student out of a general education classroom for portions of the day, may negatively impact the students ability to obtain key content information, resulting in learning gaps. Lastly, one study recognized a significant decline in the amount of students with disabilities placed in more restrictive settings, as inclusion is an increasing trend among educational institutes (McLeskey, Landers, Hoppey & Williamson, 2011). Providing educational learning

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environments that are least restrictive is supported by federal mandates; however, additional research is warranted to explore the effects of such environments (McLeskey et al., 2011; McLeskey & Waldron, 2011; Williamson et al., 2006).

Self-Contained Model

Students with moderate to severe disabilities are deemed unique learners; therefore, they require instruction across various and extensive curriculums (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Educational instruction may include curriculum centered upon life skills and functional academics. Students with MSD acquire knowledge at slower rates in comparison to their nondisabled peers (Alper & Ryndak, 1992). Often repetition and intention instruction, coupled with evidenced-based practices (EBP), are essential in successfully educating students with MSD (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Small group presentation of materials, differentiated instruction, multi-modal approach to learning, and rote learning are significant components, embedded within a self-contained service delivery model (Signor-Buhl, LeBlanc & McDougal, 2006). Students with MSD enrolled in a self-contained classroom received specialized academic instruction (SAI), which was provided by a special education teacher. In addition, students with MSD may be educated in a self-contained setting for the entire school day, thus limiting access to the general education population (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). However, access to the general education population may occur during recess, physical education, and school-wide assemblies. The primary focus of

instruction is to teach students the skills necessary to be a successful and independent member of society.

Although educational placement trends show a reduction in students with disabilities assigned to more restrictive settings, there continues to be a continuum of program options, thus self-contained classrooms are a current possibility amongst educational organizations (Hoge & Rubinstein-Avila, 2014; Williamson et al., 2006). Furthermore, students with MSD are more frequently placed in self-contained classrooms, which are recognized as a more restrictive environment (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Reduced student teacher ratios, small group instruction, slower pacing guides, and individualized learning strategies are several benefits generated from the self-contained model (Moody, Vaughn, Hughes & Fischer, 2000; Signor-Buhl, LeBlanc & McDougal, 2006). Students who required more structured and routine-based learning environments profit from a more shielded learning setting. In addition, students with disabilities may also engage in maladaptive behaviors, which proves difficult to address in a general education setting. Highly controlled, structured, and strategic environments, in which negative behaviors can properly and immediately be addressed prove to be optimal learning environments for students with behavioral concerns (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). One study found self-contained classrooms offer more peer support, as students are placed in cohorts that remain intact for several years (Jones & Hensley, 2012). Students with similar disabilities may find connections with each other; therefore, produce

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meaningful and supportive relationships. The development of supportive

relationships amongst students with disabilities can be identified as one benefit of

a self-contained model (Jones & Hensley, 2012).

Although several studies found self-contained models to be effective in

regards to educating students with disabilities, harmful effects from placing

students into this model has also been illuminated (Causton-Theoharis et al.,

2011; Ryndak et al., 2010; Signor-Buhl, LeBlanc and McDougal, 2006). A study

conducted by Signor-Buhl, LeBlanc & McDougal, (2006) concluded students

educated in inclusive groups achieved higher scores with regards to reading

achievement when compared to similar students educated in self-contained

classrooms. Scores for mathematics revealed similar performance levels when

compared between inclusive and self-contained educational settings (Signor-

Buhl, LeBlanc and McDougal, 2006). Similar results were obtained from a 2010

study, in which performance outcomes of two students with similar disabilities

were compared (Ryndak et al., 2010). This study revealed the student educated

in an inclusive model obtained more skills relating to overall social

communication and independent living when compared to a student educated in

a self-contained classroom (Ryndak et al., 2010). In addition, a 2011 critical

inquiry explored how self-contained models may impact students with disabilities

through environmental factors. This critical analysis found a self-contained model

distracting, lacking proper behavior techniques, and limiting in relation to general

education access (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). Conflicting evidence on how

diverse service delivery models influence students with disabilities is evident within the literature. Existing data pertaining to instructional practices and professional perceptions regarding the self-contained service delivery model for students with MSD is minimal (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Determining the effectiveness of a self-contained program is essential in analyzing how this model impacts students with MSD.

Separate Day Facility Model

Students deemed severely or profoundly impaired, resulting from a physical or mental disability can be educated in a special day facility (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). One study revealed students with severe cognitive disabilities are placed in segregated educational settings at higher rates than students with mild cognitive disabilities (Kleinert, Toweles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman & Kerbel, 2015). Furthermore, the *38th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2016*, conclude an increase in students enrolled an educational environment classified as, "other environments," as a 1.3 percent increase occurred between the years 2005 through 2014.  According to the report, "other environments" includes the following service delivery models: separate school, residential facility, and home, which accounts for 5.3 percent of students with disabilities served under IDEA, Part B. Similar findings revealed in a 2014 study confer stagnant movement of students with significant disabilities in general education settings, which contrasts with movement for students with mild disabilities

(Ryndak et al., 2014). Lastly, results from a 2014 study conclude students who are placed in the most restrictive environment are more likely to remain in a segregated environment for the duration of their academic career (Kurth, Morningstar & Kozleski, 2014).

The separate day facility encompasses a variety of special education professionals ranging from speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, adaptive education teachers, nurses, psychologists, and special education teachers. Only approximately five percent of the student with disability population is educated in a special day facility (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003). Classroom dynamics include smaller teacher ratio, small group presentation of materials, and customized learning environments that supports the cognitive, adaptive, and physical needs of this unique student population. A separate day facility is regarded as a more restrictive environment, as the students who received educational services in this specific placement have limited access the general education population (Kurth, Morningstar & Kozleski, 2014). In some situations, students with disabilities who receive educational instruction from a separate facility may have no contact with their nondisabled peers. Providing educational services in more restrictive environments for students with moderate to severe disabilities appears to be the continued trend amongst educational organizations (Kleinert, Toweles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman & Kerbel, 2015.

Despite common tends in educational placements for students with MSD, there is a growing body of research that identifies benefits generated from inclusive settings. More specifically, learning opportunities and skill obtainment can be acquired from nondisabled peers in inclusive classrooms (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Kleinert, Toweles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman & Kerbel, 2015; Ryndak et al., 2010). Effective instruction delivery methods, which includes embedded instruction and functional skills in academic core content are several proven best practices for inclusive settings (Kleinert, Toweles-Reeves, Quenemoen, Thurlow, Fluegge, Weseman & Kerbel, 2015). In addition, a 2002 study indicated students with MSD enrolled in inclusive settings made gains in both development and social proficiency, which was slightly better than students with MSD enrolled in separate settings (Fisher & Meyer, 2002).

Educating students with disabilities requires the implementation of diverse learning methodologies combined with the presentation of materials in ways that are accessible to all students (Jackson, Ryndak & Billingsley, 2000). In addition, diverse learning models can be utilized to meet the individual needs of students with disabilities. The literature identifies several service delivery models provided to students with disabilities, as a continuum of program options remains a commonality amongst school systems. Classically, students with mild disabilities are educated in educational environments deemed least restrictive (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Kurth, Morningstar & Kozleski, 2014). As the severity of

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a disability increases, so does the likelihood of a placement in a more restrictive environment (Tzivinikou & Papoutsaki, 2016). A vast amount of literature is centered on the students with mild disabilities, as inclusion is heavily researched and presented in the current literature.  Studies focused on students with MSD; in particular, those serviced in self-contained classrooms are narrow. Unfortunately, there is limited research regarding the impacts and perceptions of students with MSD and an educational placement within a separate day facility (Moreno, Aguilera & Saldana, 2008).  In addition, there is limited research describing instructional practices for students with moderate to severe disabilities (Pennington & Courtade, 2015).  Special education teacher perceptions regarding semi-segregated settings and how this service delivery model influences the lived experiences of those immersed in the environment is significantly limited.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

Conceptual Framework

Learning theories evolved to explore how knowledge is acquired and obtained, with the intent of understanding how information is processed and preserved.  Learning theories are evident in current and past educational organizations, as instructional practices, programs, and curriculum implementations are guided upon learning theories.  This study will utilize a conceptual framework, which will focus on the following learning theories: Social learning theory, operant conditioning, and environmentalist learning theory.

These three theories will aid in the description of the learning process for students with MSD and will illuminate the impacts and influences a service delivery model can bestow upon the lived experiences and student-learning outcomes. These conceptual guides will seek to explore the relations between the phenomenon, the alternative service delivery model, and the individual experiences.

Social learning theory suggests individuals learn through the direct observation of others and the behaviors in which they exhibit. A consequence that immediately follows an executed behavior may increase the risk of repetition when the consequence produces a desired outcome or response. Moreover, a consequence can permanently alter one's behavior, thus generating socially acceptable behaviors (O'Donnell, Reeve & Smith, 2007). In addition, repetitious behavioral patterns emerge through the direct experience or by observing the behaviors of others (Bandura & Walters, 1977). In addition, children observe and reproduced behaviors initially occurring by others; therefore, fostering the development of decision-making skills. A decrease in disruptive behaviors can be achieved through the establishment of a positive classroom environment, in which prosocial student behaviors are supported (Reinke, Herman, & Stormont, 2013). Students who observe optimistic teachers and supportive peers will likely thrive within their learning environment, as the enhancements of behavioral and academic gains may be obtained. A service delivery model can influence and alter a classroom environment, thus manipulating learning outcomes for students

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with MSD.

Operant conditioning involves the utilization of both antecedents and consequences, as means of producing and reinforcing behaviors. Students learn and acquire new skill sets through the use of reinforcements and punishments, as there are direct correlations between the environmental stimuli, consequences of those interactions, and the students' behavior (O'Donnell, Reeve & Smith, 2007). Through the utilization of ongoing positive and negative reinforcement, behavior is developed and maintained (Rispoli, Ganz, Neely, & Goodwyn, 2013). Classroom management and structure can be effectively established through the use of operant conditioning, as the distribution of desired tangibles or the escape of a non-preferred task can be implemented. In addition, students who have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) benefit immensely from exposure to positive and negative reinforcements. Operant conditioning sets the foundation for Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA), which is identified as an effective intervention for providing educational content to student with ASD. Furthermore, McPhilemy and Dillenburger (2013), concur interventions based on behavior analysis, generate significant and long-term outcomes for students with ASD, when utilized early and intensely. Desired learning outcomes for students with MSD will be enhanced through the incorporation of daily ABA, which can be embedded within a service delivery model.

Environmental stimuli can directly impact an individual's ability to obtain and maintain knowledge. Environmentalist learning theory states a child's

environment directly shapes and influences individual learning outcomes and behaviors. More specifically, permanent impressions that shape behavior, while simultaneously building knowledge, transpire through a learner's experience (O'Donnell, Reeve & Smith, 2007). Encouraging and fostering efficient learning environments promote positive academic and behavioral gains. In addition, a healthy educational environment, in which desired social and emotional development is acquired, can be achieved through promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem. Educational settings that are deemed negative in nature, generate potential harm as the attainment of individual life goals may be impacted. Service delivery models provided to students with MSD could significantly influence classroom environments, thus impacting student learning outcomes and behaviors. Through the use of learning theories, the researcher explored an informal class reassignment program, which only provides educational services to students with MSD in a semi-segregated facility. This conceptual framework will guide the warranted research questions combined with the appropriate methodology utilized within this study.

Informal Class Reassignment Model

Students with moderate to severe disabilities require educational environments that directly target individual learning needs; therefore, the implementation of flexible educational settings, services, and programs are warranted. Throughout this literature review, various benefits and potential harms have been illuminated from each "traditional" service delivery model. The

continued exploration of diverse service delivery models is evident, as the individual needs of students with MSD are in a constant state of change. There are identified gaps in the existing literature pertaining to students with MSD (Downing & Peckman-Hardin, 2007; Kleinert et at., 2015; Pennington & Courtade, 2015). More specifically, the exploration of alternative and diverse educational settings for students with MSD has been acknowledged and recommended by various researchers (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Kleinert, et at., 2015; Ryndak et at., 2010.

Furthermore, several identified studies embedded within this literature review proclaimed the need for future research, as educational practices must continually evolve (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011; Downing & Peckman-Hardin, 2007; Kleinert et at., 2015; Pennington & Courtade, 2015; Ryndak et at., 2010). The study of alternative service delivery models is warranted, as the clarification and illumination of best educational practices are essential in meeting the unique and individual needs of students with MSD. This inquiry aid in the exploration of alternative service delivery model, as this study targets an informal class reassignment program.

This study will explore how an informal class reassignment program influences the lived experiences of those who directly interact with this "non-traditional" model. More specifically, how personal perceptions, descriptions, and experiences are shaped by the informal class reassignment program, if at all, will be obtained. The literature exploration conducted for this study did not identify

nor find similar studies regarding this specific service delivery model; therefore, the need to explore the informal class reassignment program is justified. Although similar studies have not been conducted, elements pertaining the potential benefits embedded within this particular model will be furthered discussed. The informal class reassignment program maintains a lower student ratio, which current research identifies benefits regarding lower student ratios within special education settings, as they could potentially accommodate the different needs of students with MSD more proficiently (Suter & Giangreco, 2009).

Suter and Giangreco (2009) concur lower student ratios aid in the ability to evolve to the ever-changing needs of the educational organization. Successful educational environments designed to meet the individual needs of students with MSD must target the following developmental areas: Cognition, adaptive, expressive and receptive communication, and social and emotional development. Meeting the specific and individual needs of students with MSD may pose challenges in a "traditional" service delivery model, as federal mandates require the students' IEP to be implemented with fidelity. Parental concerns regarding IEP implementation may result in litigation, should the execution of the IEP be deemed inadequate (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014). In addition, Russ, Chiang, Rylance and Bongers (2001), conclude smaller class size for students with disabilities produce higher levels of engagement and teacher retention rates. Zarghami and Schnellert (2004) state smaller student ratios increase the

potential of improved learning, reduce discipline problems, and assist in the teachers' ability to understand the individual needs of each student. The informal class reassignment program strives to maintain lower student ratios, as the average caseload size contains ten students with MSD.

The informal class reassignment program utilizes a grouping strategy to assign students with MSD to a particular tiered program. More explicitly, classroom programs are customized to support the individual needs of students with MDS through the establishment of the following models: Inclusion, functional academics, learn-to-learn, and life skills. Through the establishment of five classroom models, students with MSD have access to instructional methods that specifically target their current learning needs. The inclusion model provides interaction and learning opportunities with nondisabled peers, as the semi-segregated "special school" is located adjacent to a traditional elementary school. Students with MSD, who are assigned to this particular classroom model, spend a portion of their day in a general education classroom. The special education teacher assigned to the inclusion model accompanies their students to the general education classroom. The special education teacher supports the learning process through modifying and differentiating the designative curriculum so that the students with MSD can access the learning content.

Students with MSD, who are assigned to the functional academic's model, receive alternative curriculum, which is consistent amongst most self-contained classrooms (Schoger, 2006). Special education teachers of students with MSD

must ensure their students learn and master the "life-skills" required to be independent adults (Whetston, Abell, Collins & Kleinert, 2012). The functional academic model generates instruction that targets "real-world" scenarios, thus preparing the student with MSD for independent living. More specifically, academic instruction may include the following, functional money math, reading recipes, recognizing and understanding environmental print, and identifying personal information. In addition, students with MSD, who are enrolled within this class model, demonstrate "ready to learn" skills, as they require minimum prompting to follow a direction and compete a simple task.

The learn-to-learn classroom model provides educational instruction for students with MSD who engage in maladaptive behaviors, which directly impeded the learning of self or others. Providing education instruction that supports an increase in positive behavioral gains is essential, as students with challenging behaviors are less likely educated in less restrictive environments (Smith, Katsiyannis & Ryan, 2011). The learn-to-learn classroom models utilizes direct systematic instruction, prompting strategies, differentiated instruction, which strive to promote a generalization of skill sets. The intention of this model is to empower students with MDS, reducing maladaptive behaviors while simultaneously teaching the essential coping skills required to maintain socially acceptable behaviors.

The life-skills classroom model provides daily living instruction that produces higher levels of domestic and adaptive skills. Students with MSD, who

are placed in the specific classroom, are exposed to, but not limited to, instruction that focuses on the following: Self-care, self-feeding, proper hygiene, and dressing skills. Snell and Brown (2006) state the ability to successfully manage self-care needs, produces significant benefits for individuals with severe disabilities, as greater levels of independence are achieved. In addition, proficiency toward self-care management promote health, self-determination, and a positive self-image for persons with significant disabilities (Snell & Brown, 2006). The teachings of domestic and adaptive skills embedded in the life-skill classroom model generates self-control and a sense of accomplishments for student with MSD. It is imperative students with MSD learn and master self-care needs, thus these routines will be executed by the student rather than another individual (Snell & Brown, 2006).

The informal class reassignment program permits the fluid transition between classroom models once the student with MSD has mastered the essential skills sets. Although four out of five classroom models can be identified as a self-contained setting, each class provides specific instructional content focused on meeting the current individual needs of the students. The students with MSD are able to switch classroom models as their individual needs and skill sets evolve. The informal class reassignment program provides intensive and highly focused instruction geared toward promoting self-determination, self-control, and self-esteem. The classroom model placement is grounded on the following assessments: Basic3 Benchmark (B3B) assessment and the Verbal

Behavior Milestones Assessment and Placement Program (VB-MAPP). The B3B assessment targets the following areas: Functional academic, domestic, vocational, community, and recreation and leisure. The B3B assessment is specifically designed for students with severe disabilities and was developed by special education teachers. In addition, the B3B assessment is aligned to the Basic3 curriculum, which aids in the developmental progression of essential life skills for persons with disabilities up to twenty-two years of age.

The VB-MAPP is an instrument utilized to measure a student's current skill level, thus the development of individual goals and objectives can be composed (Barnes, Mellor & Rehfeldt, 2014). In addition, the VB-MAPP is administered to students with autism spectrum disorder and other language delays (Barnes, Mellor & Rehfeldt, 2014). Furthermore, the VB-MAPP measures an individual's verbal repertoire across three developmental levels, which include birth through eighteen months, eighteen months through thirty months, and thirty months though forty-eight months. Through the use of B3B assessment and the VB-MAPP assessment, students with MSD enrolled with informal class reassignment program are assessed to determine the classroom model placement. Students with MSD are placed in the appropriate classroom model gear toward meeting their individual needs in relation to instructional levels, personal care, and social and emotional wellness.

Research Questions

1.   How do moderate to severe special education teachers and school

personnel define, describe, and experience an "informal class reassignment program," offered at one elementary school within Southern California?

2. How have the experiences of moderate to severe special education teachers in working with an "informal class reassignment program," shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to students with MSD learning and developmental outcomes, if at all?

## Summary

This review of the literature on special education outlines decades of progression, as the treatment and educational practices for students with disabilities has positively advanced. Through historical measures, federal mandates, and landmark court cases, the field of special education has transformed to meet the individual needs of this exceptional population. Simply opening the doors to public school education proved significant, yet the need for customized learning spaces with the intent of promoting developmental outcomes continues to be justified. The research identified several traditional service delivery models for students with disabilities. The potential benefits and harms produced from each service delivery model was displayed throughout the existing research. In addition, the request for additional research pertaining to students with disabilities was evident within the literature. More specifically, studies centered upon educational practices, program placement, and students

with MSD are warranted. It is evident, today's society is evolving, thus educational practices, policies, and procedures must be altered to remain current. More importantly, educational reforms must adhere to all student populations, including those with moderate to severe disabilities.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The demand to better serve and educate youth with moderate to severe disabilities is supported through the establishment of significant federal mandates (Cambron-McCabe et al., 2014; Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Turnbull et al., 2004). More specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 has generated an instrumental impact on the field of special education. Prior to 1975, this unique student population experienced limited educational opportunities, as a vast majority were institutionalized (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Furthermore, students with MSD were often denied access to public school education, which negatively impacted life outcomes and experiences. The inability to acquire essential life skills through the direct involvement of a public-school education, restricted opportunities for students with disabilities. Public school education serves as a transformational vehicle, as students with MSD gain the essential knowledge and skills to successfully carry out daily living tasks. The ability to become independent in relation to daily living skills is imperative, as students with MSD achieve higher levels of self-confidence and self-worth (Snell & Brown, 2006). Research shows ample learning environments promote student academic gains and higher levels of independence (Albrecht, Johns, Mounsteven & Olorunda, 2009). The identification of effective attributes within the informal

class reassignment program will support and shape current and future educational practices, thereby influencing and safeguarding the quality of educational instruction for students with MSD.

## Research Design

Educating youth with MSD is not a simple task, as multiple pedagogy practices must be considered and executed. Furthermore, the expansion of children diagnosed with a disability is of concern for many educational organizations embedded within California. All public educational institutions must be capable of providing FAPE, which must target all areas of developmental need for a student with MSD (Turnbull et al., 2004). A review of the literature revealed limited research pertaining to effective elements and attributes embedded within a service delivery model for students with MSD (Pennington & Courtade, 2015). Exploring a service delivery model pertaining to students with MSD is justified and warranted, as the educational system is in a constant state of change. To appropriately explore an informal class reassignment program, that directly educates students with MSD, a qualitative methodology was selected for this study. More specifically, the obtainment of a detailed understanding regarding the informal class reassignment program further validates the execution of a qualitative descriptive research design (Creswell, 2013; Krathwohl, 2009).

Using a phenomenological approach, this study explored and described an informal class reassignment program through the perspectives and lived

experiences of special education school personnel regarding learning outcomes for students with MSD. A phenomenological approach was selected, as it consents the exploration of the lived experiences of individuals immersed within the informal class reassignment program (Creswell, 2013; Krathwohl, 2009). Additionally, a phenomenological approach concentrates on similarities amongst each participant, describing individual behaviors, and perceptions as they experienced the phenomenon. The ability to view the phenomenon from the eyes of the participants, combined with the obtainment of detailed information pertaining to the informal class reassignment program was sanctioned through a phenomenological approach (Krathwhol, 2009). An interpretation of the lived experiences aids in the establishment and alteration of educational policies and practices that meet the unique needs of students with MSD.

<center>Research Setting</center>

The informal class reassignment program selected for this study is located in Southern California, which is housed within a large public school district. The informal class reassignment program is one of fifty-two elementary schools in a public school district. The informal class reassignment program identified as a semi-segregated facility, which provides academic instruction to students with MSD in grades kindergarten through sixth. During the study, the informal class reassignment program contains an enrollment of sixty-seven students with MSD (California Department of Education, 2017). In addition, the informal class reassignment program employed eight special education teachers, all of whom

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hold a valid moderate to severe education specialist credential. Furthermore, the informal class reassignment program is situated in a high-poverty location, thus ninety-six percent of students with MDS who attend the program are deemed socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education, 2012).

Research Sample

Participants utilized for this study included adult personnel who were 21 years of age or older. The sample consisted of both male and female, all of whom directly interacted with the student with the MSD population within the informal class reassignment program. In addition, the research sample consisted of five moderate to severe special education teachers. All of the participants held the appropriate credentials required to carry out their occupational roles. More specifically, all teacher participants held a valid moderate to severe educational specialist teaching credential. The recruitment of desired participants was essential for this inquiry as the purpose of the study is to gain a deeper understanding of personal perceptions regarding an informal class reassignment program and how it influences learning outcomes for students with MSD. Purposeful sampling was executed to ensure all participants had interacted with the informal class reassignment program, thus all participants had experience of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). All participants in this study were recruited through district provided email addresses. Information describing the purpose of the study combine with the reacher's contact information was distributed through direct emails sent by the reseacher (See Appendix A). All participants were

asked to provide a pseudonym, therefore safeguarding confidentiality. Table 6

illustrates participant information.

Table 6: Participant Information

| Name | Age/Gender | Grade/Subject | School | Experience | Education |
|------|-----------|---------------|--------|------------|-----------|
| Anthony | 46-55 years Male | 3-6th moderate to severe SDC Inclusion Tier 1 | Applewood | 16 years | Bachelor's Degree, Master of Arts Degree in Special Education, and Clear Education Specialist Credential |
| Alex | 36-45 years Female | K-6th Moderate to Severe SDC Life Skills Program Tier 3 | Applewood | 10+ years | Bachelor's Degree and Clear Education Specialist Credential |
| Juliana | 36-45 years Female | 3rd-6th Moderate to severe SDC Inclusion Tier 3 | Applewood | 9 years | Bachelor's Degree and Clear Education Specialist Credential |
| Amelia | 26-35 years Female | 1st-6th Moderate to severe SDC Behavior Program Tier 2 | Applewood | 15+years | Bachelor's Degree and Clear Education Specialist Credential |
| Brooke | 26-35 years Female | K-6th Moderate to severe SDC Inclusion Tier 3 | Applewood | 12+years | Bachelor's Degree and Clear Education Specialist Credential |

## Informed Consent

Prior to the data collection process, the study was submitted for review to

the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the California State University, San

Bernardino and the Internal Review Committee (IRC), which was required by the

designated public school district (see Appendix B and Appendix C). The purpose

of the IRB and IRC is to ensure the potential harmful effects and all risk factors

are illuminated (Creswell, 2013). Furthermore, following the IRB and IRC

approval, an Informed Consent form was provided to each participant (see

Appendix D). The Informal Consent form provided participants with information

pertaining to the study, which included the purpose of the study, the parameters

of the study, and participant expectations. In addition, the obtainment of

participants' signatures determined the participants understood the purpose of

the study, the parameters of the study, and the expectations of the participants.

Through the Informed Consent form, participants were made aware that

involvement in the study is voluntary and they were free to withdraw at any time.

Lastly, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire,

which consisted of five questions (see Appendix E). The demographic

questionnaire was utilized, as a means to obtain descriptive information relating

to each participant.

## Research Data

Using semi-structured interviews and reflective field notes, essential data

were obtained for this study. The execution of semi-structured interviews, as a

form of research data, was deemed most appropriate for this study. Furthermore,

data obtained from the semi-structured interviews shed light on participant

experiences and perspectives (Glesne, 2011). In addition, the semi-structured

interview data proved significant in illuminating participant perceptions regarding

learning outcomes for students with MSD who were educated in an informal

class reassignment program. The interview protocol consisted of face-to-face

interviews within a quiet, physically comfortable, and private location (Glesne, 2011). Moreover, reflective field notes were composed during each interview session. The intention of the reflective field notes was to record my personal reactions, emergent patterns, and individual reflections pertaining to each interview session and participant responses (Glesne, 2011). Utilizing multiple research data sources were imperative for this study, as it generated a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

## Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews, consisting of nine open-ended questions combined with reflective field notes were utilized within this study. The application of semi-structured interview questions proved significant for this study, as in-depth probing transpired (Glesne, 2011). More specifically, "The intent of such interviewing is to capture the unseen that was, is, will be, or should be; how respondents think or feel about something; and how they explain or account something" (Glesne, 2011, p. 134). Interviews were conducted in a quiet, physically comfortable, and private location, which was a school office.  Interview protocol consisted of face-to-face interview sessions, lasting 45 to 60 minutes in length. Interview sessions were audio recorded on two digital recording devices, thus ensuring imperative data was successfully obtained. During and after each interview session, I composed reflective and descriptive field notes. The field notes obtained were both reflective and analytic in nature, thus provided detailed information that enhances the ability to visualize the moment (Glesne, 2011).

All data obtained from the study was secured on the researcher's computer, which was password protected. In addition, data was also stored on a portable hard drive, which was stored in a locked filing cabinet located in the researcher's office. All data will be kept for seven years in a locked filing cabinet located in the researcher's office. More specifically, all interview transcriptions and reflective field notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. In addition, all audio recordings were stored in a locked filing cabinet during the transcription phase. The duration of the transcription phase was approximately two weeks. Audio recordings were erased once the researcher obtained the transcriptions. Data located on the computer or hard drive will be deleted and the trash bins will be emptied after seven years.

## Data Analysis

A transcendental phenomenology approach was employed within this study, allowing systematic data analysis procedures to transpire. The initial phase of the data analysis required the researcher to utilize data analysis principles originated by Moustakas (1994). I initiated the data reduction proceedings by implementing (epoche), which executed the disconnection of memories embedded within the researcher regarding the phenomenon (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). I transcribed verbatim, the responses provided by each participant. The second phase of the data reduction procedures required the identification of all significant statements embedded within transcriptions and composed field notes; therefore, all significant statements were highlighted. The

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development of codes through clustering significant statements and information

was the third phase in the data reduction process. Creating categories to

represent the data and shed light on the personal experiences of the participants

was an imperative step in the data analysis, as the researcher developed codes

based on the identified significant statements. Relevant quotes directly pulled

from the transcriptions and the field notes were interjected into an appropriate

category, providing order while illuminating patterns, similarities, and differences

amongst the participants. The fourth phase mandated further reduction of the

data; thus, the development of themes surfaced. The development of themes is a

critical element in qualitative research as the fostering of a "common idea"

emerges (Creswell, 2013). A constant comparison method was utilized as a

means to examine and reexamine the data. The fifth phase warranted through

the data analysis process was a theme synthesizing method. The intention of

synthesizing the constructed themes was to generate a detailed description of

the experiences each participant endured (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

Lastly, I executed the sixth and final stage of the data reduction procedures,

which called for a construct and composite description of the overall data findings

and themes. More specifically, the researcher intentions were to capture the

meaning and essence of the experience through intuitive integration (Moerer-

Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

## Validity and Trustworthiness

To ensure I established trustworthiness several strategies were employed throughout the study. Member checking was utilized as a means to ensure accurate data was obtained. Participants were provided a completed transcription of their individual interview session through an email attachment. The purpose of member checking is to allow each participant the opportunity to review their personal responses; therefore, corrections, rejections, or alterations could transpire if warranted. The participants were provided two weeks to email back the transcripts with any corrections, comments, and clarifications. Capturing a detailed description of the, moment in time, was conducted through the self-audit process, which assisted in trustworthy findings.

## Positionality of the Researcher

My personal lived experiences, both present and past, have altered the manner in which I conduct research, interpret data, and interact with the participants. My passion for serving individuals with disabilities is evident through my academic achievements, professional career path, and personal life experiences, as I am driven to enhance the quality of life for those with a disability. My interest in the field of special education was not innate, as my life journey shaped the individual I am today, thus producing an aspiration to construct environments where all ability levels are embraced. Professional, I strive to support and create educational environments that enhance all areas of childhood development. Establishing academic enriched learning platforms which

embrace social and emotional development is my primary objectives for students with a disability.

As a young child, I was not exposed to individuals with disabilities. Attending a public elementary school proved to foster limited exposure to students with disabilities, as they were often kept separate from the general education population. My lack of exposure to individuals with disabilities created a sense of apprehension, as I was unsure how to interact or engage with this particular population. Reflecting back upon my initial emotions and perspectives regarding individuals with disabilities creates a sense of sadness, as I am disheartened by my lack of empathy and acceptance. Although my initial perspectives regarding individuals with disabilities were ones of uncertainty, life occurrences rapidly and eternally shifted my beliefs and behaviors.

When I was thirteen years of age, my mother endured a serious life-threatening medical complication that warranted the amputation of both of her legs. The mother I once knew was forever changed, both mentally and physically. Unfortunately, accepting her physical body proved to be significantly difficult, as she fell into a severe state of depression. Coping with my mother's altered physical form combined with disparities contributed from her mental state proved challenging, as I displayed struggles processing this new norm of life. Worthless was a self-perception that was often existent within my mother, despite the support from her family. Witnessing how outsiders viewed my mother's physical appearance has altered my life, as I now strive to promote

acceptance amongst individuals with disabilities. My past experiences have allowed me to empathize with families who care for a loved one with a disability, as I recognize how this lived experience can influence the family unit.

Professionally, I have served and educated students with MSD within the public school setting for over a decade. My experiences as a special education teacher have generated opportunities to work at both the elementary and secondary school levels. I have extensive experience working with a wide range of disabilities, thus I have the knowledge and skill sets warranted to establish and maintain effective learning environments. Differentiated instruction, applied behavior analysis, and utilizing of prompting techniques are several components employed within my teaching style. Moreover, I understand the daily teaching experiences of teachers who educate students with MSD. I have personally faced challenges that may arise with the contours of a special education classroom. Such challenges may include, maladaptive and aggressive behaviors exhibited by a student with MSD and minimal staffing support. My teaching journey has shaped my own perspectives regarding educating students with MSD. Furthermore, I believe the field of special education is in a constant state of motion and continuous refection must occur to maintain and shape effective learning environments for students with MSD.

My passion to maintain and shape effective learning environments for students with MSD has lead me to pursue a professional career in public school administration. Currently, I am a special education program specialist for a large

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school district, which is located within southern California. I manage and support a variety of educational programs that serve students and adults with a disability. As a special education program specialist, I have numerous opportunities to observe and experience diverse learning environments for students with MSD. I have the opportunity to communicate and collaborate with a variety of key stakeholders that directly interact and experience various service delivery models for students with MSD. My knowledge and perception regarding educating students with MSD has significantly been impacted through my professional career, as a special education program specialist. As a special education program specialist, I aid in the development of IEP's for students with MSD. I collaborate with key IEP team members to construct IEP's that support the unique and individualized needs of a student with MSD.

My personal and professional life has produced opportunities to assist individuals with disabilities. I am beyond grateful and honored to serve this unique student population, as I aspire to illuminate effective elements that can contribute to a more productive learning environment. As a past moderate to severe special education teacher and current special education program specialist, I understand the triumphs, obstacles, and daily work routines my participants may endure, as I can relate to their lived experiences. Many of the behavioral challenges that arise in a moderate to severe special day classroom can negatively influence a special education teacher. Often times, moderate to severe special education teachers endure physical harm and emotional stress,

as some students may exhibit hostile behaviors. My work as a special education

teacher allows me to display empathy towards my participants, as I understand

the stress and emotions that may transpire due to undesired student behavior.

More importantly, I extensively understand the work that is required of a

moderate to severe special education teacher. The opportunity to positively

influence the life of an individual with a disability and those who educate students

with disabilities is exceptionally gratifying; therefore, it drives my professional and

academic career. My passion for supporting individuals with disabilities is evident

in this work, which influences the way I interrelated with my participants,

employed a critical lens, and interpreted the data.

## Summary

Exploring the nature in which special education personnel define,

describe, and experience an informal class reassignment program for students

with MSD within a semi-segregated setting is not a simple task. In addition, the

exploration of how an informal class reassignment shape and reshapes the

personal perceptions of special education personnel is complex. The execution

of multiple instruments was warranted, thus ensuring this study achieved

triangulation, validity, and trustworthiness (Glesne, 2011). As the researcher, I

decided to utilize semi-structured interviews and reflective field notes, which

aided in the ability to obtain significant in-depth data. Through the use of

phenomenological data analysis procedures, the illumination of codes and

themes emerged, thus providing the construction of the meaning and essence of

the reported experiences. Results and findings generated from the data analysis

are discussed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

A transcendental phenomenological methodology was utilized in this study, as a means to explore the lived experiences of moderate to severe special education teachers who have worked with and encountered an informal class reassignment program. The following research questions were employed to illuminate the essence of the phenomenon:

1. How do moderate to severe special education teachers and school personnel define, describe, and experience an "informal class reassignment program," offered at one elementary school within Southern California?

2. How have the experiences of moderate to severe special education teachers in working with an "informal class reassignment program" shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to student with MSD learning-outcomes, if at all?

Introduction

Chapter Four provides a detailed description of the following: Participant profile, significant themes, and composite description of the overall data findings and themes. Furthermore, textual descriptions will encompass the essence of how the moderate to severe special education teachers define, describe, and experience the informal class reassignment program. In addition, personal

perspectives regarding the informal class reassignment program will be illuminated.

## Sample Demographics

This study contained five moderate to severe special education teachers. All of the five moderate to severe special education teachers have a moderate to severe education specialist teaching credential. One of the participants has acquired a master's degree in special education. In addition, all of the selected participants have taught students with MSD in the informal class reassignment program. The moderate to severe special education teachers utilized for this inquiry participated in a semi-structured face-to-face interview, which lasted approximately one hour in length. Lastly, each participant was asked to complete a demographic questionnaire created by the researcher prior to their interview session. Table 6, using pseudonyms, illustrates participant questionnaire information.

All five of the participants selected for this study had over nine years of experience in the field of special education. In addition, three of the five participants began their teaching career within the informal class reassignment program. Furthermore, one of the five participants worked alongside his colleagues to develop the informal class reassignment program. Lastly, four out of the five participants continue to educate students with moderate to severe disabilities within the elementary level.

## Results of the Study

The data warranted for this study was obtained through semi-structured interviews and descriptive field notes. Prior to beginning the interview session, the purpose of the study was explained to each participant and I addressed all questions stated by the participant. The role of the participant was shared before initiating the interview session. Confidentially procedures were discussed, as a means to safeguard the identities of each participant, thus each participant provided a pseudonym. Following signed informed consent, I proceeded with the interview session, which occurred in a private office located in a school. Each interview session was audio recorded on two digital devices. I transcribed the audio recordings verbatim and participants were provided with a copy of the interview transcription via email attachment. Lastly, each participant was provided two weeks to review the completed transcription; therefore, ensuring the obtainment of accurate results. Once I had received confirmation from each participant that their transcription was accurate, I began the data analysis process. The initial phase of the data analysis required the researcher to utilize data analysis principles originated by Moustakas (1994).

1. *Epoche:* The analysis began with a reflective description of my own personal experiences as a moderate to severe special education teacher. The intention of this process was to execute the disconnection of memories embedded regarding the phenomenon (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004).

2. *Significant Statements:* All significant statements embedded within each

transcription and composed reflective field notes were highlighted, thus

reduction of data not directly correlating to the phenomenon was eliminated.

3.  *Clustering Significant Statements:* The development of codes through

    clustering significant statements and information was the third phase in the

    data reduction process.

4.  *Creating Categories:* Creating categories to represent the data and shed

    light on the personal experiences of the participants was an imperative step

    in the data analysis, as I developed codes based on the identified significant

    statements. Relevant quotes directly pulled from the transcriptions and the

    field notes were interjected into an appropriate category, providing order

    while illuminating patterns, similarities, and differences amongst the

    participants.

5.  *Development of Themes:* The development of themes surfaced, as a

    constant comparison method was utilized as a means to examine and

    reexamine the data. Theme synthesizing method was employed with the

    intention of synthesizing the constructed themes to generate a detailed

    description of the experiences each participant endured (Moerer-Urdahl &

    Creswell, 2004).

6.  *Composite Description Themes:* A construct and composite description of

    the overall data findings and themes was the final stage of the data analysis

    process. More specifically, capturing the meaning and essence of the

    experience through intuitive integration was executed. (Moerer-Urdahl &

Creswell, 2004).

<center>Descriptive Data</center>

<u>Epoche</u>

My interest in exploring diverse services delivery models for students with MSD generated from my own personal lived experiences, as I have educated students with MSD for over eleven years. Throughout the years, I have developed a deepened awareness to the ever-changing needs of students with MSD. The individual needs of a student with MSD are complex; therefore, warranting the demand for unique resources and supports. Educating, developing, and supporting the needs of diverse learners posed challenges as essential supports and resources appeared stagnant. Frustrated, I sought to explore alternative service delivery models that specifically targeted the students with MSD population. Specifically, I sought to explore how moderate to severe special education teachers experienced, defined, and described an informal class reassignment program. In addition, I wanted to see if their personal lived experiences shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding learning outcomes for students with MSD, if at all.

During the interview process, I refrained from sharing my own personal experiences with the participants, as I did not want to influence their responses. Furthermore, my communication was limited, as it primarily served as a vehicle to ask interview questions and clarifying questions. I engaged in continuous self-awareness throughout the data analysis process, as I wanted to ensure my own

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personal experiences, thoughts, and perceptions were bracketed out from data collection and analysis. Separating my own biases was an imperative practice, as it limited the influence they had upon the data collection and analysis process.

Participant responses were accepted without judgment, as I omitted my own biases. On one occasion, a participant who was asked to define and describe the informal class reassignment from their perspective asked if their response was sufficient. I responded by informing the participant that I am seeking to gain a deeper understanding of their personal perspectives and lived experiences. The drive behind my response was to capture the personal lived experiences of the participant and not to influence their response; therefore, safeguarding the obtainment of authentic data.

<u>Themes</u>

Through the data analysis process, significant statements, codes, and categories emerged, as similarities between participants surfaced. Continued analysis and a constant comparison of the data revealed three themes, which are outlined below:

1. creating effective systems of supports,
2. developing inclusive practices, and
3. generating purposeful and systematic instruction

<u>Theme 1: Creating Effective Systems of Supports.</u> A comprehensive review of the data revealed significant statements; therefore, formulating meaning and developing the first theme. Theme 1, creating effective systems of

supports was generated from the five participant interview responses and

reflected field notes. Table 7 displays the findings produced from Theme 1.

Illuminating significant statements and formulated meaning is followed by a

discussion describing the lived experience of the participants.

Table 7.

*Significant Statements and Formulated Meaning Examples of Theme 1: Creating Effective Systems of Supports*

| Significant Statement | Formulated Meaning |
|---|---|
| We just felt that to better suit the needs of the kids we needed to give the appropriate staffing in the classroom. (Anthony, 2017). | Appropriate staffing supports the individual needs of students with MSD. |
| I mean give us all the kids…you know that are challenging; but provide the appropriate staff for these kids so that they get a chance and it kind of just felt like both the students and I were both like overwhelmed. (Amelia, 2017) | |
| Especially when you have, you know, with building opportunities for the students that your staff collaborates and works together to build that. (Alex, 2018) | Collaborative relationships build connections to support student outcomes. |

**Appropriate staffing supports the individual needs of students with MSD.**

Appropriate support staffing was an evident recurring notion displayed

throughout each interview. All five participants shared the significance behind

appropriate staffing, and how this essential resource can better meet the

individual needs of students with MSD. More specifically, the incorporation of appropriate support staffing was viewed as a way to address the social, emotional, and behavioral challenges in students with MSD. In addition, appropriate support staffing led to lower levels of stress and higher levels of work satisfaction. Participants also disclosed challenges when dealing with lower support staff ratios, as feelings of not meeting the needs of students with MSD occurred.

One teacher shared how the importance of establishing appropriate support staff was considered during the creation of the informal class reassignment program:

We took a look at staffing of those programs. We felt that our tier one and tier two programs required a staffing ratio of anywhere from one to three or four. . . Depending on how many students. Then, our tier three program would have about a one to six ratio. We tried to keep the classes about five to ten students. We just felt that to better suit the needs of the kids we needed to give the appropriate staffing in the classroom. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Another teacher regarded appropriate support staff as a critical component in meeting the diverse needs of students with MSD. More importantly, she felt that appropriate support staff would generate the ability to address the behavioral needs of students with MSD more sufficiently.

She went on to say:

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I mean, give us all the kids . . . you know that are challenging, but

provide appropriate staff of these kids so that they get a chance . . .

and it was just kind of just felt like both the students and I were both

overwhelmed because we knew that . . . you know, there was just

too much going on . . . there's too much going on and we both were

just trying to do our best and I can see in the students . . . you

know, that they just wanted to follow a simple request, but then they

had a student over here yelling in their ear and pounding . . . it was

just a lot of kids who had major, major behavior challenges and

there were just some things we just don't have control over.

(Amelia, interview, 2017)

This participant was willing to educate students who displayed significant

maladaptive behaviors; however, felt she needed more resources in terms of

appropriate support staff in order to address the social and emotional wellness of

a student with MSD. Furthermore, she described that not only the teacher, but

also the students felt the need for more support staff in the classroom. The need

to ensure appropriate support staff was evident in Amelia's interview, as the

demand for appropriate staff warranted a sense of urgency.

She went on to say:

A lot of overwhelming and stressful and what contributed to that

was just what I said . . . not having the appropriate staff for these

students. You know, if these students were sent to us . . . to that

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site, because they needed a more restrictive environment, then

okay, but let's provide appropriate staff and support and resources

for those students before they get here. Not, you know, send them

and then let's have an IEP a month later . . . and then you know,

just so it was very and eye opener for me. (Amelia, interview,

2017).

Obtaining essential support staff is warranted in meeting the needs of

students with MSD who engage in maladaptive behaviors. Furthermore,

acquiring the appropriate support staff in a timely fashion is imperative, as this

promotes a reduction in stress levels for moderate to severe educators. In

addition, the obtainment of appropriate support staff instilled a belief with the

moderate to severe teachers, as appropriate support staff revealed a connected

to positive student outcomes.

One participant went on to say:

I actually liked it because you could bounce ideas off people or if

you were short in one classroom and they could pull from another

classroom. We don't have access to that here. If I have an aide

out...like I am done. I am out an aide...we just struggle. Like, being

at a site where there's more you could pull as the needs arose.

Which was very beneficial, because one year . . . like, I could've

had three aides because the need was there, but next year I may

not need that or those three aides and so they would take those

aides and put them where they needed to be, but they were all still

at the same site and they weren't losing their jobs. You know they

were just kind of floated [*sic*] around where the needs were, and it

was nice. It definitely benefited it. (Brooke, interview, 2018)

The teachers who directly encountered and worked with the informal class

reassignment program recognized the importance of establishing and

maintaining appropriate support staff. The importance behind appropriate support

staff is to ensure the unique and diverse needs of student with MSD are met and

supported. Furthermore, in the event a teacher has a decrease in support staff,

the ability to utilized existing staff housed in the other tiered classrooms proved

beneficial. More importantly, recognizing the staffing of a moderate to severe

classroom should be based on the individual needs of students with MSD and

not the number of students in the classroom is necessary.

**Collaborative relationships build connection to support student outcomes.**

The use of collaborative relationships developed through effective

communication, positively influenced outcomes for students with MSD. A

reduction of instructional stagnation transpired by the incorporation of

collaboration relationships. Instructional stagnation can be defined as the inability

to influence student-learning outcomes due to ineffective instructional practices;

therefore, exposure to fundamental skills is limited. All five participants touched

on the importance and value in establishing collaborative opportunities between

the special education teachers. Furthermore, developing a close working

relationship fostered a sense of connection and belonging. Unity was achieved through collaboration amongst special education teachers; therefore, creating support systems within the educational environment.

One participant described the significance behind collaboration, as a means to support outcomes for students with MSD.

She went on to comment:

> I would work closely with the other inclusion teacher and I would
> ask him...I would collaborate with him and say okay, ...what do my
> kids need to know in order to be successful in your classroom? So,
> we did a lot of collaboration and he would tell me . . . they need to
> know to . . . you know, type on the computer and they need to be
> able to sit and attend for such amount of time and so I think just
> working collaboratively you know with the other inclusion teacher
> that helped give me you know a bigger focus to what I needed to
> attend to as far as academics and readiness skills to be successful
> in the next class setting. (Juliana, interview, 2018).

The collaboration process created intentional focus for Juliana, as she sought to teach the essential skills necessary for her students to be successful in more advanced tiered classroom. Understanding the expectations of each tier of the program led to greater levels of purposeful instruction for students with MSD. Furthermore, the collaboration process generated smoother transition procedures, as the teachers worked together to ensure the student was ready to

move up to the next tier.

One participant described the collaborative transition process, as he went
on to comment:

> Definitely, the staffing ratio and then also I think that the quarterly
> meeting is with all the teachers the collaboration that we had to talk
> about. I am seeing this strength and weakness in this kid . . . can
> we try moving them up to the next tier? And you know, and then,
> the teachers would go back and forth and observe the kid. . . Yes,
> you know, I think that student is ready to come up. And we would
> look at those programs. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Higher levels of focus and smooth transitions for students with MSD are
evident benefits from the collaboration between the special education teachers.
Building connection through collaborative relationships proved beneficial, from
the participants' perspectives. More specifically, higher levels support, unity, and
a sense of belonging were established through the collaboration process. The
creation of a team approach was developed in the informal class reassignment
program.

One participant described her feelings of unity when she went on to say:

> We were a team. For the most part, we all got along. Well, we were
> pretty supportive like if there were like some people that disagree
> with each other . . . I think we were pretty close-knit. We wouldn't
> let anybody mess with us. I think that is great to have. Especially,

when you have, you know, with building opportunities for the

students that your staff collaborates and works together to build

that. I have had students where, from my classroom, I would send

them to the inclusion class for like maybe thirty minutes, but if we

didn't have that relationship it wouldn't work . . . it might not work.

(Alex, interview, 2018).

Similar feelings of support were reported by another participant, as she

went on the comment:

Yes, I definitely think being all together . . . you know all on the

same campus. Being able to collaborate with all our teachers. We

are all on the same boat. We've all gotten our kids at least one

time, so we were able to collaborate just, you know, brainstorm

ideas. Umm, so that was very supportive. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

The ability to collaborate, as a means to gain support and develop as an

educator, proved valuable for one participant as she described her initial teaching

experiences.

She went on to remark:

Well, it was kind of nice starting there because I had a lot of

different people to bounce ideas off of and model stuff for. So,

being a new teacher, it allowed me to grow a lot, and I felt like I had

that support, and then because you don't have a lot of support

being on a segregated site or on an integrated site. You're just kind

of in your own world and you get what you get and that's tough. It

can be, especially if you don't have the support of admin . . . like

admin support. Or, if they do not have an understanding of what we

deal with verses [*sic*] there any admin that was brought in had to

understand the concept of special education and so you always

had that support of your admin plus your peer teachers and I just

thought that was beneficial (Amelia, interview, 2017).

Safeguarding appropriate support staff and maintaining effective

collaboration opportunities between special education teachers was deemed

significant from the participants' perspectives. The ability to effectively target the

individual needs of students with MSD warrants the incorporation of appropriate

support staff. Negative feelings and beliefs could be contributed to insufficient

support staff, as the participants voiced concern in meeting the needs of students

with MSD. Additionally, establishing and maintaining effective collaboration

opportunities for the special education teachers promoted student outcomes.

Greater levels of focus and support were achieved through the collaborative

efforts. Mentorship and unity was built, therefore connection between the special

education teachers transpired.

Theme 2: Developing Inclusive Practices. A comprehensive review of the

data revealed significant statements; therefore, formulating meaning and

developing the first theme. Theme 2, developing inclusive practices was

generated from the five participant interview responses and reflected field notes.

Table 8 displays the findings produced from Theme 2. Illuminating significant

statements and formulated meaning is followed by a discussion describing the

lived experience of the participants.

Table 8.

*Significant Statements and Formulated Meaning Examples of Theme 2:*
*Developing Inclusive Practices*

| Significant Statement | Formulated Meaning |
|---|---|
| Well kind of like I said before . . . the friendships because when you have the inclusion program they are gaining their friendships with the regular kids. (Brooke, 2018) | Inclusion opportunities generates meaningful relationships. |
| So, without having any role models it was very difficult to really see any progress. (Amelia, 2017) | Inclusive relationships promote learning outcomes for students with MSD through engagement and motivation. |
| They learn better from their peers. I can teach a math lesson and have a peer teach the same thing and they're just more motivated and more engaged. (Amelia, 2017) | |

**Inclusion opportunities generates meaningful relationships**.

Formulating inclusive bonds between students receiving special education

services and students receiving general education services was an evident

recurring priority displayed throughout each interview. All five participants

mentioned the importance and value behind developing inclusive practices for

students with MSD. Establishing and maintaining inclusive learning environments promote social and emotional wellness for students with MSD.

One teacher described how inclusive practices within her classroom promoted social and emotional development for her students with MSD.

More specifically, she describes how those inclusive interactions created a sense of school community:

> Social and emotional for the inclusion program outcomes had a heavy impact just on their social skills. In general, I mean our kids had great social skills. They interacted with their general education peers and they worked on social skills on a daily basis. Like I said, with PBIS and then we also did positive action. We worked on positive action, so we did a lot of role-play with our kids. I think it definitely was a boost in their confidence. They felt like they belonged, which they did. They definitely had friends and they all played well together on the playground. I think it was great for our kids. (Juliana, interview, 2018).

Juliana's experience with an inclusive learning environment clearly illuminates the importance of social interactions between students with MSD and nondisabled peers from her perspective. Juliana realizes the social and emotional benefits created from those interactions, promotes a sense of belonging for her students. More importantly, the connection her students felt between the general education peers helped build higher levels of self-

confidence within her students. Juliana's experience with the inclusive learning environment left a positive impression, as she felt inclusion opportunities is warranted.

Another teacher added that inclusive practices formulated strong bonds between the students with MSD and the general education population. Furthermore, the bonds creating caring friendships, which were evident during playground encounters.

She went on to say:

> I do, I do . . . they really had some strong bonds and you could see like out at recess or just event in the classroom they were really excited to see each other or a regular education kid would come into the room and be like, "Hey so in [*sic*] so…how are you?" you know or one kid would get hurt and they would be like, "Are you okay?" You know, you could just see that they really cared and formed friendships. (Brooke, interview, 2018).

Brooke realized how inclusive interactions generated strong caring bonds between her students with MSD and the general education population. In addition, these interactions promoted positive social exchanges, which built receptive and expressive communication skills.

Furthermore, a sense of acceptance and understanding was established, as she recalled:

I just think in general, just having that interaction and then they're in

the regular education, they're more socially aware and more

receptive towards our kids and understanding of our kids. And then,

they're more willing to play with them out on the playground or if

they see them out in the community, they are not going to give

them weird looks. Or, because I even noticed that here, when my

kids are out on the playground and someone doesn't know my kids

and they will like stare or point and will be like, "What's wrong with

that kid in a walker?" You know, but when we had kids coming in

and working or the inclusion program they had a better

understanding of them and the social aspect of them. (Brooke,

interview, 2018).

Recognizing the importance of inclusive opportunities for students with

MSD despite their ability levels was identified in Alex. Alex's role in the informal

class reassignment program was the tier one teacher; therefore, she educated

the students identified as needing the life-skills classroom. Despite her students'

ability levels, she ensured their educational day included inclusive opportunities.

She went on to say:

We didn't have as much interaction with the regular ed students,

but we did make…we did try to make time to have that…like we

would go into the inclusion classroom for poetry readings and at the

beginning some of the…you know we would just go in and listen

and it became were my kids were actually budding up with other

students and participating. Then I would have third grade students

come into my classroom and come in and read to my students for

about thirty minutes a day. So, we tried to create time to for them to

interact with their peers, but I would say it wasn't the same amount

of time as the inclusion. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

Creating inclusive spaces in an educational setting proved beneficial to

not only the students with MSD, but also the general education students from

Brooke's perspective. Exposure through meaningful interactions promoted a

healthy acceptance to diversity. In addition, an understanding was established,

thus creating awareness of the individuals with disabilities population. Higher

levels of understanding and acceptance produced essential relationships for all

students regardless of their ability levels. Moreover, a culture of acceptance was

established and maintained through those meaningful and inclusive connections.

**Inclusive relationships promote learning outcomes for students with**

**MSD through engagement and motivation.** Establishing healthy inclusive

relationships between students with MSD and non-disabled peers promoted

learning outcomes. One teacher described how such relationships influenced the

learning outcomes for her students with MSD.

She went on to say:

Yeah, we say a huge improvement because now these kids were

not only being social and socializing with their peers, but they were

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learning and what I found was sometimes . . . well, actually, what I

found is our students learn best from their peers. They learn better

from their peers. I can teach a math lesson and have a peer teach

the same thing and they are just more motivated and more

engaged. So, I started to see little bits of wow I need to get some

more in here… not just thirty minutes once a week. How can I get

some more? So, the social and emotional did help a lot too

because even when we did have kids who were having a hard time

and you know as teachers we try to go over and figure what is

going on and another peer would come and say, "It's okay," and

you know, they understand and they are their friends and have

some type of relationship with them . . . it just was kind of like light

bulb...these kids need relationships with peers, and so some of

those students who don't care for those relationships . . . doesn't

mean they don't need them. (Amelia, interview, 2017).

Learning outcomes for students with MSD was supported through

inclusive interactions from Amelia's perspectives. More specifically, she felt that

those interactions created a better understanding of the academic content when

it was presented by a general education peer. Higher levels of engagement may

have been a contributing factor from her perception. Recognizing this notion,

Amelia felt compelled to establish more inclusive learning opportunities for her

students with MSD.

Furthermore, creating daily inclusive encounters proved significant for Amelia; therefore, shaping her personal perspectives, as she went on to say:

> Umm . . . so, it definitely shapes my personal perspectives . . . on just how these students should be placed, assessed. I've just seen in little tidbits, in just in getting a buddy reader and doing just the small things of having inclusion time with other students. That I have just seen how important it is. Not just once a week for thirty minutes but everyday these kids they need to see their peers umm . . . show them the behaviors that are expected, because that's what are kids [*sic*]. We are not expecting to see our kids read from a social science book, but you know . . . alright, right now we are supposed to be sitting and raising our hands and flipping through the book. You know whatever the case maybe . . . so, it's definitely changed what I know . . . because I know they need that now. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

In addition, inclusive practices embedded within the school community are vital, as they promote social benefits outside the school environment, from Amelia's perspective. Specifically, Amelia recognized the need to teach appropriate social interaction skills with her students with MSD. Acquiring essential social interaction skills within the school setting would set the foundation of future community interactions with both familiar and unfamiliar persons. Through her conversations between the students' family members,

Amelia gained insight on the importance of human connections through social interactions. She felt such interactions were significantly influence the quality of life for both her student with MSD and their families.

She went onto describe:

> So, I found that a lot of parents were, you know...during IEP's … "He doesn't really play with anybody and you know I want him to learn to play with somebody you know with his cousins." When I saw that this was a need, I was like how can we get these students, you know, little by little, a bit more social in a fun way. So, I started doing table top games that they liked even if they were just doing parallel play, sitting next to each other. And, I found that just even that there...sometimes they are standoffish, but eventually they have come around where they have made a comment. Where they have initiated a "hey look." It's always been small progress at that school just because of the cognitive level has always been a little bit lower. But, I've just found that that has been so beneficial with even the tier system the with the way that it was. Just having the socializing and the emotional part of it wasn't too much teaching that we had to do on our part. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

Amelia's interview revealed a significant notion that social skills are developed through meaningful interactions with nondisabled peers. Merely, it is not something that you can teach; however, it is something you can guide and

support through strategic facilitation and opportunities. Furthermore, social skills are developed through the act of "doing", and not through direct instruction from the teacher. The motivation to interact successfully with their peers was evident throughout Amelia's interview. Similar feelings were identified in Brooke's interview.

She went on to say,

> Umm, yeah because there was [*sic*] times that like you could see the interaction between them and they would try to explain it to them in a way that we didn't. And, I was like, "Okay, I didn't think of it that way." And coming from like a peer they were not, almost more receptive because it was like..., "Oh, it's not my teacher telling me what to do." Sometimes we tune them out too. And we were just like, "Okay, I am just tired." You know, but if it is a friend or peer telling you, you are more interested. You are more willing to be receptive towards...does that makes sense? (Brooke, interview, 2018).

Through Brooke's experiences, inclusive interactions proved significant, as student engagement was influenced from her perspective. More specifically, the content delivery method, when presented by a general education peer, was in a fashion that was more relatable or more engaging. Brooke's perspective yielded a high-level importance towards inclusive practices, therefore creating

inclusive opportunities for students with MSD should be highly considered by educational organizations.

        <u>Theme 3: Generating purposeful and systematic instruction.</u> An in-depth exploration and review of the data exposed several significant statements; therefore, formulating meaning and developing the third theme. Theme 3, generating purposeful and systematic instruction was produced from the five participant interview responses and reflected field notes. Table 9 displays the findings produced from Theme 3. Illuminating significant statements and formulated meaning is followed by a discussion describing the lived experience of the participants.

**Tiered programing formulates educational opportunities.** It is evident, students with MSD have an array of needs and ability levels. Grouping students deemed as having MSD disabilities into one classroom may impact the ability to provide targeted instruction; therefore, influencing the educators' ability to meet the individual needs of their students with MSD. Mixed ability classroom may create challenges for educators, as instructional approaches must address the learning needs and styles of all students (Valiandes & Neophytou, 2018). Constructing a needs-based classroom design, specifically crafted to target the needs of students with MSD created educational opportunities. More importantly, recognizing the significance behind the demand to fashion alternative learning spaces, was reported by the participants embedded within this study. It is recommended educational organizations generate optimal learning environments

for students with MSD; therefore, supporting meaningful progress. Establishing

diverse programming aided in the creation of educational opportunities from the

perspectives of all five participants.

Table 9.

*Significant Statements and Formulated Meaning Examples of Theme 3:*
*Generating Purposeful and Systematic Instruction*

| Significant Statement | Formulated Meaning |
|---|---|
| So, it's not a like a box, like it's not like there...we are not in a single box, we can branch out into different areas for opportunities. (Alex, 2018) | Tiered programing formulates educational opportunities |
| So, it wasn't just you know, write your name . . . you know, it made my (why) to be just . . . more driven, more focused (Amelia, 2018) | Focused and strategic programing fosters intentional instruction for students. |
| I started to see you know, where it was headed and where our students were geared towards going and what things to actually work on with our students. (Amelia, 2017) | |
| When the teacher is aware of what the needs of their students are, they can better target the instruction of the student. (Anthony, 2017) | Needs based instructions promotes educational efficiency |
| It's definitely about meeting the needs of students and supporting the teacher in creating proper programming for the students. (Anthony, 2017) | |

One participant went on to say:

I think the purpose of it was to be able to reach all areas of the

spectrum of the moderate to severe, so I think that's why they

decided to do the tiers; so they could, like I said to reach all those

different areas. Did I think the purpose was being met? I think at the

beginning. I think they had a good grasp of it and they did a really

good job of separating those kids into the tiers. (Brooke, interview,

2018)

A similar experience was noted by another participant, as she described

the purpose of the program in the following fashion:

The purpose of the program was to group the students by the

ability, like you would in a regular education class, like you would

by grade level. So that your class is focusing on the same skills,

like you're working on the same . . . Like, before we would have

classes that were just by age or how we would get our classes

filled. But, you are building a curriculum for almost every kid. So,

you are working on so many different skills that you cut yourself

short on things and you're not able to meet all the students needs

as well as you would if everybody was working at a closer level.

(Alex, interview, 2018).

Alex's perspective yielded significant information, as she felt the specific

needs of her students with MSD could be better met when educated in classes

that contained students with similar ability levels. Additionally, Alex recognized

that her students may not be all on the exact same level, however they could

essentially work with the same educational materials, while working towards

different learning outcomes. Alex expressed concern when having to differentiate

instruction, thus warranted a one-on-one educational approach for students who

were deemed higher functioning.

This concern was evident in Alex's description of a past student and her

experiences with that particular student, as she went on to say:

> So, I think with the student, when she was in my class, our main
>
> focus with mom was to like, "I want my kid to be where she
>
> belonged." So, I did work a lot with her. I had to do a lot of one-on-
>
> one with her because physically she belonged in my classroom, but
>
> the skills she was working on were way beyond so . . . a lot of my
>
> class time we would do centers, but I would have to do one-on-one
>
> with her and pull her in other curriculum than what the rest of the
>
> classroom was doing, and I think that's where it gets a little difficult.
>
> Like, in my class we . . . you know we would group kids and work
>
> on . . . say we would be working on pegboards. Some kids are
>
> working on identifying colors. Some kids are working on picking up
>
> pegs and putting them into a pegboard. You know, every kid is
>
> working on different things, but they can perform the same task, so
>
> that is what I think I really liked about how this program worked
>
> because you're working on the same task and you can but, each

kid there might be their main goal is a little bit different. I think that

is what I enjoyed about this program. (Alex, interview, 2018)

Brooke's classroom experiences revealed similar results to Alex's, as she

proclaimed the informal class reassignment program aided in the ability to meet

her students' needs more effectively. In addition, Brookes' story revealed a

comparison between her experiences with the informal class reassignment

program and her current teaching model, which is aligned with the traditional

moderate to severe special education classroom. Brooke outlines the importance

of differentiated instruction, as a means to of meet the individual needs of

students with MSD. In addition, Brooke shared she felt it was easier to

differentiate instruction for students with MSD when they are grouped by ability

levels. Furthermore, Brooke shared she was able to provide a higher level of

focus centered on student needs when working with the informal class

reassignment program.

Brooke went on to say,

I do only because you could focus more on the kids' needs and we

could better differentiate between the groups you do have. So,

even though in the inclusion program, you still had tiers within that

program. You still had to differentiate but umm...you could still . . . it

was easier to group them and differentiate. Umm, and it was just

easier . . . like verses [*sic*] my class this year. I have like profound

kids to kids that are doing double digit with regrouping umm and it's

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just like harder for me to differentiate and then you add the

behaviors into it the non-verbal and the kids that are running at like

a six-month-old and it's just a lot harder to structure and

differentiate your groups. So, I think it shortened the span of

differentiation that you had to do by having that tier group. (Brooke,

interview, 2018)

The experiences and feelings felt by both Alex and Brooke were several

driving forces that led to the creation of the informal class reassignment program.

Although, they did not aid in the establishment of the program, they fostered

similar feelings and beliefs pertaining to the traditional moderate to severe

service delivery model. More specifically, meeting the needs of students with

MSD was more efficient when they were placed in settings containing students

with similar ability levels. One participant, who was assisted in the development

of the informal class reassignment program, illuminated compelling justifications

pertaining to development of the program when he went on to say:

We, as teachers, sat together and said...What do we think our

students have in terms skill set that they should be in a particular

type of program. We knew our profound kids needed a particular

type of program. We knew our inclusion kids needed a particular

type of program. And then the students who were kind of in the

middle that needed a more intensive program to deal with

behavioral issues because they couldn't sit and attend...how are

they going to learn? So, we needed to have a program specifically

structured toward that. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Identifying the needs of students with MSD and how the special education teachers would best meet those needs were the center of conversation amongst the special education teacher population house at the specific elementary school. Utilizing collaboration conversation, workable solutions arose with the intention of producing higher levels of learning outcomes for students with MSD. Developing the informal class reassignment program created educational opportunities from the Alex's perspective, as she felt the program provided a leveled support system through proper programing.

Anthony went on to say:

Because what we found was that when all the students were all

placed together, the teacher focused on that student with the

behavior, the students who could learn . . . you just kind of kept

them busy with busy work, and the students who were profound

just never really had time to meet their needs because it's like . . .

just keep them safe I'll get to them when I have time . . . well, the

behavioral challenged student, those functional skills...they needed

more of our attention. And, so that's why we created what we felt to

be a program that would better suit the needs. (Anthony, interview,

2017)

Recognizing a need to generate an educational space that meets the individual needs of students with MSD was evident throughout the participants interviews. Formulating the informal class reassignment program stemmed from a collaborative process between special education teachers. Understanding the needs of their students with MSD and the desire to provide a more effective instruction drove the desire to develop an alternative educational experience. Moreover, the intention of the informal class reassignment was to foster a specifically designed program that addresses the unique needs of the students with MSD population.

**Focused and strategic programing fosters intentional instruction for students.** The informal class reassignment program produced higher levels of focus and drive for the participants embedded within this study. Several of the participants shared their experiences with the informal class reassignment program created more intentional instruction, as a means to enhance students learning outcomes. Motivation to move the students through the tiered program proved significant, as educational opportunities created such realities. Anthony viewed the informal class reassignment program as providing "stepping-stones," when he said:

> So that as they developed their skills we could then meet on a quarterly basis to assess and then talk about moving them up to the next tier. Eventually, you know getting them up to our tier three program . . . whereas they became more successful in our inclusion

. . . what we call our inclusion program . . . those students would then have a second look at. Could they go mild moderate? Could they go into a higher program where these were stepping-stones and we felt that the kids needed these stepping-stones. (Anthony, interview, 2017).

The ideology behind the "stepping-stone" notion instilled greater levels of motivation and focus, thus influencing the teaching practices amongst several of the participants.

Anthony continued to say:

Well, as I stated earlier… It's definitely about meeting the needs of the students and supporting the teacher in creating proper programming for the students. When the teacher is aware of what the needs of their students are, they can better target the instruction of the student and so do I feel it was being met? Absolutely, we were definitely seeing progress on from a year-to-year basis. We were seeing kids move up our tiered program and into our . . . what, we would call our tier three program. The challenge that we had was when we wanted to move the kids back to their neighborhood schools the parents loved our program and didn't want them to leave and that was one of the huge challenges and that's what we had talked about possibly making this a district-wide program. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Creating proper programming, as a means to meet the needs of students with MSD was a shared purpose of the informal class reassignment program from Anthony's perspective. Anthony felt the tiered program provided better opportunities to support the unique and individual needs of students with MSD. More specifically, Anthony's perspective suggested the tiered program produced the ability to specifically target areas of need more proficiently. Higher levels of strategic planning and focused instruction was developed, as the motivation to move students through the tiered program shaped several teachers teaching practices.

This notion was confirmed when Amelia went on to say:

I was trying to find that balance. How are they finding this balance? I didn't understand it. So, my experience to be honest with you was tough at the beginning. As I was getting that . . . just finding that purpose I started every year it was different, but I started you know gearing up my class towards how they can move onto these next tied classrooms. So, the tier three . . . so my goals were written a little bit more geared towards what are they doing in the tiered classrooms. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

Creating the informal class reassignment program, which encompassed a multi-tied design, proved beneficial from the perceptions of the participants embedded within this study. Classroom dynamics and goal development was centered on the unique needs of students with MSD. Focused and intentional

instruction was influenced by the utilization of a systematic and "stepping-stone" approach.

Furthermore, the experiences encountered by the participants sharped personal perceptions, which is outlined in Brookes' response:

Just because, like I said before . . . I think the kids got more out of it and you're able to focus more on okay, this group needs more of the academics, so let's focus on the academics and get them as high as we possibly can. This group needs more social, more of the communication skills and the domestic skills, let's focus on that, and let's have more of the domestic classroom work on the life skills and the cooking and you know. I think it was a good idea to have those different aspects because then you could solely focus on those verses [*sic*] having classroom of . . . okay this kid needs that, and this kid needs this, and this kid needs that. How am I going to run my whole class with like all these different levels? So, definitely, I think it was a good program. (Brooke, interview, 2018)

The ability to address the diverse needs of students with MSD is challenging from Brooke's perspective. In addition, she expressed concern pertaining to meeting the needs of her students with MSD outside the informal class reassignment program. Feelings of disappointment transpired when the informal class reassignment program dissipated.

Brooke went on to say:

I thought it was a good idea and the kids enjoyed it and I thought

they got a lot out of it . . . of the different tiered program. I was kind

of disappointed when it kind of faded out . . .because, I did think it

was easier . . . not necessarily easier, but I think it was more

beneficial for the kids. And as it kind of faded away, you didn't see

as many of those interactions with kids or with the social . . . like

when they would see a regular education peer that there were

excited to see them. You wouldn't get that excited "hi," that our kids

had. They weren't super excited to see them. They were just like

someone else . . . that interaction. (Brooke, interview, 2018)

Similar feelings were captured in Amelia's interview, as she viewed the

informal class reassignment as holding significant importance. More specifically,

Amelia's interview captured her true feelings pertaining to the traditional

moderate to severe service delivery model when she went on to say:

Well, so it means a lot to me. It's vital and very important that we

have these informal class reassignment programs and again,

because it is informal, you know, it's nice because of the fluidity.

We don't have to wait, you know, for a certain time, you know. If we

see progress, let's move in on it. Let's do everything that we can at

the moment because sometimes our kids will show progress and

then it's like it never even happened. I just liked the fact that we

could do that . . . that we could make a change. We didn't have to

sit there and have a meeting and wait and then write out a plan and

it was just like . . . let these kids try this out and rise to that occasion

and just succeed. So, it is completely important. Oh my gosh, if we

were to go back to just, you know, just everybody all kinds of . . . I

mean just the range of it . . . just to be so wide . . . it would be very

difficult. And, I think it wouldn't benefit any student. To be honest

with you. It would kind of like a babysitting job is what it would turn

into. Yeah, so it can get ugly so . . . It is very important...very

important to me. (Amelia, interview, 2017)

It is evident, the informal class reassignment was vital from Amelia's

perspective. The incorporation of the multi-tiered model embedded in the

informal class reassignment program enhance the learning outcomes for

students with MSD from Amelia's perspective. More importantly, the participants

integrated within this study felt the informal class reassignment program

generated significant benefits for the students with MSD, as they felt teachers

could better meet the needs of their students. Higher levels of focus, motivation,

and strategic instruction transpired from the multi-tiered program design.

Personal beliefs and behaviors were altered by through the experience and

encountering of the informal class reassignment program. More importantly, the

personal stories shared by the participants yielded positive outcomes for

students with MSD, as learning results improved through the implementation of

the informal class reassignment program.

Anthony's personal feelings which were revealed during the interview session conveyed a similar message when he went on to comment:

> Well, it shaped it as it makes you want to come to work. You know when you feel like you're accomplishing something with your students, it makes you continue to have the rigor for the students to achieve even more and when the teachers are feeling defeated . . . then, it's hard to make the classroom environment exciting. And so, because you feel like you're not getting anywhere, but when we found that when we had the tiers the teachers knew that they were seeing success. They could see the students go onto the next level and they knew they were a part of that. And so every year we would see those students and knew we had a part of that. Changing that student's life and so, I know our kids are capable of more so how has it shaped in my opinion? I know our kids are capable of more and it's our responsibility as educators to find more ways to challenge them. (Anthony, interview, 2018).

It is evident that the informal class reassignment program created educational benefits for students with MSD from Anthony's perspective. Anthony shared he endured feelings of enjoyment, as he felt pride, ownership, and value while working with the informal class reassignment program. Contributing factors that led to feelings of enjoyment transpired from the notion that the informal class reassignment program produced educational benefits for students with MSD.

This is evident when Anthony remarked:

> Well, it means to me that it's a valuable program for students with special needs. I saw it work. I saw it at the onset. I saw how we tinkered with it as a group of teachers to make it an even better program. I've become somewhat disheartened as it's been dismantled because I felt like we were really achieving something, and I believe in my students . . . so it continues to have me . . . you know be the best that I can for all my students. However, I feel that right now, as we have a whole mixture . . . I feel like I'm not meeting those needs anymore because I'm kind of teaching to the middle versus targeting those students . . . versus targeting those students' needs. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Incorporating a tiered learning systems approach held high value for the participants included within this study. A sense of accomplishment and achievement exposed greater levels of work satisfaction. Witnessing success, which could be measured by a student moving through the tiered program, attributed to advanced feelings of work gratification.

**Needs based instruction promotes educational progression.** Participant interview responses revealed students with MSD gained benefits from exposure to the informal class reassignment. Furthermore, participants responses exposed positive educational gains, as the students with MSD displayed signs of progress. Student progress was uncovered through Anthony's personal story of a

former student.

Anthony went on to say:

I'm thinking of, there's one young man who was in our tier two program, who was very non-verbal and I can see him, the challenges that he had being able to express what he needed. When we saw that he had staying [*sic*] with the group we said let's put him into our tier three program. And this particular young man with the structure of the tier three program and the access to the regular education peers I saw him really blossom as a young man. He was very social he would wave to the regular ed. kids and he loved the interaction with the regular education kids. So, seeing him with the challenges that he had in the one environment and moving up to the next environment . . . you could see the change that occurred, but the year before that when the behaviors were you know . . . throwing chairs, the frustration he was encountering it took about a half year to a year of maturity for him to be able to go up to the next level (Anthony, interview, 2017).

Higher levels of instructional focus and support led to the success of one former student, from Anthony's perspective. In addition, exposure to a multi-tiered learning environment proved significant for a student with MSD, as instrumental skillsets were acquired. Using pacing supports and progress monitoring, the student was successfully moved through the informal class

reassignment program.

A similar successful outcome occurred for another student who was educated within the informal class reassignment program, as Anthony went on to comment:

> And I also see again you know I think of another young man who . . . the behaviors that he was encountering, was [*sic*] very frustrated, aggression, and hitting others, but coming over to the classroom and coming up to the next tier we were then seeing, even though we had more support in the other class . . . as he moved up because we saw improvement. We saw just glimmers. We said okay, he's got the academic ability, but he still gets frustrated, so we transitioned him over to half days, and as he got comfortable with the environment and began to trust the environment, then we moved him over full-time. And, we would see he could handle this environment, and then we were able to move him on to a regular SDC middle school class or middle school classroom. (Anthony, interview, 2017)

Through his shared personal stories, Anthony described how the informal class reassignment program influenced the lived experiences of two former students. The multi-tiered program created scaffolding supports, which allowed the student to progress and transition throughout each tiered program successfully. More importantly, each student was able to accomplish higher

levels of independence; therefore, influencing ones' quality of life. Furthermore, the informal class reassignment program assisted in growth pertaining to positive behavioral gains, as each student displayed a reduction in maladaptive behaviors. Overall levels of social communication were enhanced, as the students with MSD were more engaged with the general education population. More specifically, the students with MSD participated more often in social opportunities with their general education peers, from Anthony's perspective.

The educational system is in a constant state of change, as students' needs continue to alternate from sociality influences. Creating educational platforms and environments that seek to support this ever-changing student population is warranted. Furthermore, continuing to support the needs of students with disabilities should be a continued conversation amongst educational leaders. Explicitly, discussing the unique needs of students with MSD and how educational organizations can better meet their educational needs is imperative. Uncovering optimal learning programs and the contributing factors that correlate to positive learning outcomes for students with MSD is vital. This study sought to explore the lived experiences of special education educators who encountered the informal class reassignment program, as a means to uncover optimal educational practices for students with MSD.

## Essence of the Informal Class Reassignment Program

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore how moderate to severe special education teachers define, describe, and experience an

informal class reassignment program. In addition, this study sought to explore how the informal class reassignment program shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to learning outcomes for students with MSD, if at all. All the participants utilized for this study worked directly with the informal class reassignment program. Several of the participants began their educational career teaching in the informal class reassignment program. One of the participants was on the initial planning team; therefore, aided in the development and implementation of the informal reassignment program. Four out of the five participants continued to teach students with MSD at the elementary level. Finally, all five participants conveyed feelings of enjoyment, as working with the informal class reassignment program created higher levels of work satisfaction.

Program effectiveness was a common shared belief amongst all the participants utilized in this study. All five participants deemed the informal class reassignment program as beneficial for students with MSD. Intense focus and strategic instruction contributed to higher levels of success for students with MSD. The informal class reassignment allowed the teachers to better target and meet the individual needs of their students with MSD, from the perspectives of the participants. In addition, developing and maintaining inclusive practices for students with MSD proved significant, as social skills were positively enhanced. Furthermore, the frequency of meaningful social exchanges between the students with the MSD population and the general education population

increased; therefore, creating meaningful relationships. The establishment of meaningful relationships supported higher levels of engagement and motivation for students with MSD, which influenced learning outcomes. Greater levels of work satisfaction transpired, as the participants were able to observe progress pertaining to learning-outcomes for their students with MSD.

Similarly, the participants highlighted the importance behind appropriate staffing and collaboration opportunities. Ensuring there was sufficient support staff in the classroom environment was a main concern among the participants. Deficits in classroom support staff generating negative impacts, as the participants felt they could not address the social and emotional needs of their students with MSD. More specifically, some students with MSD exhibited heightened aggression while in the school setting. Severe aggression can affect the safety and overall climate of the classroom environment. Maintaining sufficient support staff aided in the ability to address maladaptive behaviors in the school setting.

The continued need for collaboration between educational personnel was a notion recognized by all the participants. Through the interview process, it was evident how vital on-going collaboration opportunities are amongst special education personnel, as this process supports student development. The informal class reassignment program encouraged collaborative conversation between the tiered programs. More specifically, quarterly meetings occurred with the intention of discussing student progress, program expectations, and transition

opportunities. This on-going communication led to higher levels of support for students with MSD. Furthermore, the established collaboration platforms promoted focus, connection, and support between the special education personnel.

The data generated from this study concluded similar findings amongst all five participants in all categories, thus no outliers were identified. All five participants viewed the informal class reassignment program as having meaning and value. Additionally, all five participants felt the purpose of informal class reassignment program was being met, as they felt student needs were addressed more proficiently through intentional instruction, inclusive practices, effective collaboration, and appropriate support staff.

## Summary

Chapter four outlined and provided a detailed description of the results obtained for this study. The findings utilized for this study were obtained through individual interviews with each participant. This study incorporated five participants, all of whom have directly worked with the informal class reassignment program. Nine carefully crafted interview questions were used during the interview process, as a means to capture the lived experiences of the participants embedded in this study. More specifically, the interview questions sought to gain a deeper understanding of how special education teachers define, describe, and experience the informal class reassignment program. In addition, understanding how the informal class reassignment program shaped or reshaped

the moderate to severe special education teachers' personal perspectives pertaining to students with MSD learning outcomes, if at all, was pursued. The execution of a detailed data analysis process proved significant for this study. This study incorporated a six-step data analysis process, which included the following stages: epoche, significant statements, clustering significant statements, creating categories, development of themes, and composite description themes. Utilizing an interconnected data analysis approach is essential for phenomenological qualitative inquires, as the examination of the data yields an unequivocal structure of the lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The following three themes emerged from the data: creating effective systems of supports, developing inclusive practices, and generating purposeful, and systematic instruction. Finally, this chapter described the essence of the informal class reassignment program through a detailed description.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Chapter five includes the following content areas: study overview, recommendations for educational leaders, next steps for educational reform, recommendations for future research, and limitations of the study. Furthermore, Chapter five will include a brief discussion of the purpose of the study, which will identify the connections behind the purpose and proposed recommendations.

## Overview

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the lived experiences of moderate to severe special education teachers who have worked with an informal class reassignment program. Specifically, the objective of this research inquiry was to explore an individualized, flexible, and fluid service delivery model, which only provides educational related services to students with MSD. The identified service delivery model is deemed most restrictive, as it is implemented in a segregated school setting. In addition, this study added to the limited research pertaining to students with MSD, which has unveiled factors that relate to optimal service delivery models for students with MSD. The research questions that guided this study are as follows: How do moderate to severe special education teachers define, describe, and experiences an "informal class reassignment program," offered at one elementary school within Southern California? How have the experiences of moderate to severe special education

teachers in working with an informal class reassignment program, shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to student with MSD learning-outcomes, if at all?

Recommendations for Educational Leaders

This study generated several recommendations that can be utilized by various educational leaders across school districts. The intention of the recommendations is to create and maintain optimal learning environments for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Recognizing the unique needs of students with MSD and understanding how to better serve this specific population is recommended. Furthermore, educational organizations serve as a vehicle that can support childhood development; therefore, influencing lived outcomes for students with MSD. Recommendations generated from this study can be incorporated into school districts policy and procedures; therefore, prompting the way in which students with MSD are educated. More importantly, program options, service delivery models, and essential supports can be guided by the findings obtained from this study.

**Develop and maintain effective systems of supports through appropriate staffing and collaborative relationships.** The participants in this study believed the identification and obtainment of appropriate support staff is mandatory, as these resources safeguard the ability to meet the individual and diverse needs of students with MSD. In addition, the responses generated by the participants highlighted the importance of collaborative relationships amongst district

administrators, site administrators, and special education teachers. Moderate to severe classrooms are unique in nature, as they provide individualized instruction that seeks to meet the specific needs of a student with MSD. Ensuring adequate support staff is imperative for an educational classroom that serves students with MSD. More specifically, special education classrooms that contain students who warrant higher levels of support and supervision should encompass a greater quantity of support staff. Students who exhibit maladaptive behaviors, require mobility assistance, or have lower adaptive functioning levels may benefit from a special education classroom that has a greater amount of support staff. Closely monitoring each program is recommended, thus ensuring essential staffing is maintained as the needs of the program evolve. Obtaining sufficient quantities of substitute support staff is vital, as this will ensure the needs of a moderate to severe classroom are continuously and consistently met. Furthermore, reductions in student to teacher ratios proved beneficial, as the participants believed this strategy assisted in the ability to proficiently support students' needs and maintain safety through sufficient supervision.

**Educational leaders must establish, maintain, and promote collaborative opportunities throughout their educational organization.** Developing successful collaborative spaces promotes professional development and connection amongst special education personnel. Providing ongoing collaborative opportunities for special education staff, thus creating connections through supportive relationships, is essential. The participants in this study

expressed the importance of their collaboration meetings, as student-learning

outcomes were influenced through effective communication. The responses

obtained from the participants highlighted the value of collaborative experiences,

as targeted instruction and strategic lesson plans were executed; therefore,

promoting student achievement. Focusing on the essential skills required for a

successful transition between each tier program occurred through the

collaboration of the special education teachers. More importantly, frequent and

ongoing collaboration meetings enhanced student-learning outcomes through

guidance pertaining to instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, and

scaffolding techniques. It is recommended that educational leaders establish

collaboration events for their special education staff throughout the school year.

Maintaining focused collaboration meetings that seek to support learning

outcomes for students with MSD is an additional recommendation. In addition,

providing districtwide collaboration meetings should be considered, as this builds

capacity through the dissemination of effective instructional ideas.

**Developing inclusive practices for students with MSD aids in the**

**development of effective social skills, which supports meaningful**

**relationships.** This study yielded the significance behind inclusive practices, as

access to the general education population enhances social and emotional skills

for students with MSD. Through inclusive opportunities, the students with MSD

developed meaningful relationships with their general education peers.

Meaningful relationships were measured through direct teacher observation, as

positive social interactions between the general education students and the students with MSD were noted. In addition, the participants' responses disclosed the general education student population demonstrated empathy toward the students with MSD, which was an indicator that meaningful relationships were established. It is recommended that educational leaders, special education teachers, and members of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team consider inclusive practices, as a means to promote social and emotional development for students with MSD. Furthermore, inclusion opportunities for students with MSD should be considered through collaborative discussions amongst IEP team members and during an IEP meeting. More specifically, goals, objectives, and services embedded into a students' IEP should complement inclusive practices, when appropriate. Discussions pertaining to the development of inclusive relationships between a student with MSD and a general education peer should transpire during a student's IEP meeting. A review of the warranted supports embedded into the students' IEP and how those supports can promote access to inclusive practices must be conducted.

**Inclusive practices promote student engagement and learning outcomes through positive interactions.** It is essential educational organizations establish inclusive opportunities that encourage and support academic progression through the guidance from general education peers. The participants in this study concluded higher levels of engagement were achieved when the instruction was delivered by a general education peer. In addition, students with MSD displayed

greater levels of motivation pertaining to task completion, when they were assisted by a general education peer. Furthermore, several of the participants reported students with MSD exhibited a greater level of comprehension and mastery regarding content knowledge, when the educational materials were presented by a general education peer. Communication between the students with MSD and the students in a general education setting appeared to be an effective intervention. More specifically, communication served as vehicle to disseminate vital learning content to students with MSD. Furthermore, the learning content delivered by a general education peer was presented in a fashion that was more relatable and more comprehensible to a student with MSD. Effective communication influenced positive learning outcomes for students with MSD, which was identified by the participants incorporated in this study. The production of higher levels of motivation and engagement for students with MSD promotes educational growth. This study illuminated the importance of inclusive collaboration between students with MSD and their general education peers. Educational organizations should strive to build connections between diverse student populations, thus diminishing a silo mentality.

**Purposeful and systematic instructional approaches are optimal recommendations as a means to advance learning outcomes for students with MSD.** The informal class reassignment program employed a tiered system approach to classroom placement. Specific tiers were utilized as a means to group students, according to similar ability levels or individual needs. The

informal class reassignment program incorporated the following tiered

classrooms: Life skills, learn-to-learn, functional academics, and inclusion. The

intention of the development of the informal class reassignment program was to

create specific classrooms that targeted the needs of students with MSD. One

study recommended teachers conducted ongoing needs-based assessments

with the intention of using the data to group students based on interests, learning

needs, and readiness levels (Atfab, 2015). The traditional service delivery model

for students with MSD essentially encompasses a wide array of ability levels and

student needs. Several participants shared their personal experiences with

encountering a more traditional service delivery model, expressing great concern

over the ability to effectively educate their students with MSD. Specifically, one

participant shared her thoughts regarding a more traditional service delivery

model for students with MSD, as she felt this model functions as a supervision

program rather than an educational enhancement program.

  The creation of a tiered program that fostered deliberate instructional

strategies and grouped students with similar ability levels assisted in the

capability of producing targeted instruction, which better met the individual needs

of the students with MSD. Similar findings were identified in a research study that

focused on how ability grouping procedures influence learning outcomes for

students with disabilities (Hornby & Witte, 2014). Furthermore, the findings from

this specific study revealed differentiated instruction and competitive programs

were easier to execute when students were grouped by ability levels (Hornby &

Witte, 2014). The informal class reassignment program provided an outside differentiated technique, as students with MSD were placed in the most appropriate tiered classroom program. Differentiated instruction can be defined as a process through which educators can promote access to the essential curriculum by identifying the individual needs of students with MSD; therefore, generating intentional instructional experiences (Lynch, Hunt & Lewis, 2018). Furthermore, differentiation is viewed as an optimal pedagogy practice, as it supports the individual needs of students (Valiandes & Neophytou, 2017). Although differentiated instruction is deemed beneficial, this intervention can create several challenges for teachers due to limited preparation time, heavy caseloads, and lack of resources (Valiandes & Neophytou, 2017). The informal class reassignment program allowed less differentiated instruction to transpire in the contours of the classroom, thus supported higher levels of intentional instruction.

The ability to provide intentional instruction, through the informal class reassignment program, nurtured positive learning outcomes of students with MSD, from the perspective of the participants. The participants felt they were able to meet the needs of their students more effectively, as the degree of differentiated instruction was decreased within the classroom setting. Due to the tiered program, the participants shared they had greater levels of instructional focus and a higher desire to support student learning outcomes. The findings from this study were consistent with a 2014 study, as the intention of grouping

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students based on ability levels was supported by the need to provide targeted instruction (Hornby & Witte). Grouping students with MSD by similar ability levels proved beneficial by the participants, as it reduced the demand to build separate curriculums for each student. Essentially, students could work on similar skills or tasks that were issued within the specific tiered program. Educational leaders should consider utilizing a grouping approach for students with MSD. Rather than placing an array of students with diverse ability levels into one classroom, an educational organization can elect to create tiered programs throughout a school or school district. This type of intervention could generate higher levels of instructional focus and the ability for special education teachers to meet the needs of students with MSD more effectively.

The informal class reassignment program created educational opportunities for students with MSD, as students who demonstrated progression could advance through the tiered system. This stepping-stone approach instilled greater levels of motivation within the participants. Higher levels of motivation generated quality instruction for students with MSD, as the special education teachers strived to move their students through the tiered program. Positive student gains were observed and measured by students advancing through the informal class reassignment program. The purpose of each tiered program was understood and acknowledged by the special education personnel. Targeting specific skills through carefully crafted lesson plans ensured students with MSD were exposed to imperative educational content relevant to their individual

needs. Given a purpose and not a placement created educational opportunities for students with MSD. Working towards student advancement within a tiered system created strong motivations to execute purposeful instruction for students with MSD. Educational leaders should consider establishing a tiered educational program for students with MSD, which incorporates collaborative opportunities amongst the special education teachers. Collaborative opportunities and a tiered educational approach created positive effects for the students with MSD and their teachers.

## Next Steps for Educational Reform

Federal mandates protect the rights of students with disabilities; therefore, safeguarding access to public education within the least restrictive environment (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003; Turnbull et al., 2004). This study brought light to the continued importance behind inclusive practices for students with disabilities. Existing research concludes various benefits from inclusive practices, which contain enhanced social skills, emotional development, communication progression, and higher levels of independence (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011, Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Olson, Leko & Roberts, 2016). The majority of students who are educated in inclusive environments typically have mild deficits, thus students with more severe disabilities are educated in alternative placements (Loiacono & Valenti, 2010). Unfortunately, this may cause greater levels of isolation between students with MSD and non-disabled peers. Although students with MSD may benefit from specially designed instruction taught by a

special education teacher, creating ways to support and mandate inclusive interactions with the general education population is strongly recommended.

## Recommendations for Future Research

Continued research focused on the students with moderate to severe disabilities is recommended, as limited studies exist. It is evident students with MSD have diverse needs and ability levels, thus warranting specially designed academic instruction. How to best serve and educate this exceptional population demand the attention from educational leaders across school districts nationwide. This study sought to explore an alternative method utilized to provide educational instruction to students with MSD. Focusing on the personal perceptions of moderate to severe special education teachers regarding an informal class reassignment program illuminated optimal components necessary to support the needs of students with MSD. Recommendations for educational leaders were outlined within this study, therefore highlighting the vital components necessary to positively influence the lives of students with MDS through education. Students with MSD are in a constant state of change, thus ongoing research is mandated to safeguard optimal learning environments. Suggestions for future research are as follows:

1. Establish a larger participant sample size, which would incorporate moderate to severe special education teachers, parents of students with MSD who attended the informal class reassignment program, and support personnel.

Support personnel would include, district psychologist, instructional assistants, site administrator, and related service providers.

2. Execute a study that seeks to explore the personal perceptions of moderate to severe special education teachers working with the informal class reassignment program and moderate to severe special education teachers working with a traditional moderate to severe service delivery model. Specifically, exploring how each learning environment shapes personal experiences and perceptions regarding student-learning outcomes, if at all.

## Limitations of Study

This study incorporated five moderate to severe special education teachers, which may have generated limitations due to the sample size. The specific service delivery model explored through this study is deemed unique, as it embraced an alternative approach to educating youth with MSD. Furthermore, this particular program was implemented in one isolated school, which was housed in Southern California. Due to the exclusive nature of this study, a small sample sized was obtained. A larger sample size consisting of special education support staff and parents of the students with MSD who encountered the informal class reassignment program may prove beneficial. Although this study utilized a small sample size, there was much gained through the exploration of the informal class reassignment program. Educational organizations can implement the recommendations embedded in this study, as a means to ensure optimal

learning environments for students with MSD. Moreover, this study will illuminate the continued importance of exploring alternative learning environments for students with MSD, as there is limited research. Ensuring the creation of optimal learning environments for students, regardless of their abilities, is mandated; therefore, supporting societal development and independence.

## Conclusion

This study sought to explore how moderate to severe special education teachers define, describe, and experience and informal class reassignment program offered at one elementary school within Southern California. In addition, this study explored the experiences of the moderate to severe special education teachers in working with an informal class reassignment program. Specifically exploring how the informal class reassignment program shaped or reshaped their personal perspectives regarding program effectiveness pertaining to students with MSD learning outcomes, if at all. Based on the lived experiences of the 5 participants used in this study, and the findings that emerged through the data analysis, the following conclusions were made.

The development of inclusive interactions between students with MSD and students without a disability is recommended. Gains in social development are not necessarily achieved through access to the general education population, but rather through the establishment of meaningful inclusive relationships between the two student populations. The achievement of inclusive relationships promoted higher levels of engagement, motivation, and comprehension of

content knowledge for the students with MSD. The perspectives of the participants yielded a greater sense of belonging within the school community, as the students with MSD were accepted by the general education population. Educational organizations must consider how inclusive relationships can be established and maintained, as this intervention significantly influences the instructional outcomes for students with MSD.

Furthermore, the informal class reassignment established a tiered system approach to educating students with MSD. Crafting specifically designed tiered classrooms, which were established through collaborative efforts amongst the moderate to severe special education teachers, produced the ability to meet the needs of students with MSD more effectively. Rather than attempting to meet the diverse needs of students with MSD in one singular setting, students were grouped by similar ability levels. Essentially, this intervention reduced the degree in which differentiated instruction was warranted, which was the most significant finding yielded from this study. One participant noted the continued need for differentiated instruction; however, she expressed the range was condensed. Higher levels of instructional focus were accomplished, as the participants felt compelled to move their students through the informal class reassignment program. Viewing each tiered classroom as a stepping stone proved instrumental as intentional lessons were created to ensure the students developed the skills required to be successful in the higher tier.

Educational organizations must maintain the essential supports and

resources warranted to provide optimal educational opportunities for students

with MSD. Maintaining appropriate support staff proved vital for the participants

in this study, as they felt they were better able to support the needs of their

students. Moreover, assisting student mobility, maladaptive behaviors, and

classroom instruction was aided through the obtainment of appropriate support

staff. Lastly, maintaining ongoing and effective collaborative interactions between

key personnel is essential. More specifically, identifying specific skill sets needed

to advance to the next tiered classroom occurred through collaborative

conversations. Collaborative conversations focused on student learning

outcomes promoted academic progression for students with MSD.

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

**College of Education**
*Office of Doctoral Studies*

## "Optimal Service Delivery Models for Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities"

### INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Study:** You are being asked to participate in a qualitative research study, which is seeking to gain a deeper understanding of how an informal class reassignment program can influence the learning outcomes for students with moderate to severe disabilities. This study will explore the personal perspectives and lived experiences of special education teachers and school personnel who have worked with the informal class reassignment program.

**Participants' role in the study:** If you agree to participate in the study, you will participate in one in-depth interview. The interview will include questions pertaining to your personal experiences with the informal class reassignment program. Interviews will be approximately 60 minutes in length and will be conducted in a school office. Finally, with your permission, I would like to audio record the interview. You will be provided a copy of your transcribed interview through an email attachment. You will be provided two weeks to respond to the researcher in the event you desire to change the interview content you have provided. To ensure confidentiality, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym, therefore protecting your personal identity. In addition, the name of the school district and school will also be provided with a pseudonym, thus safeguarding confidentiality.

**Participant responses will be confidential:** All records of this study will remain private and will be stored in a locked file cabinet, which will only be accessible by the researcher. Any form that is made public will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you, your educational organization, or any individuals mentioned.

**Participation is voluntary:** Participating in this study is voluntary. In addition, you may choose to skip any question that you do not wish to answer. If you do decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw at any time without any repercussions.

**Risks and benefits:** There is minimal risk for participating in the study. Participants may experience discomfort in sharing personal experiences and perceptions regarding the informal class reassignment program. This study is beneficial, as there is limited research centered on learning outcomes for students with moderate to severe disabilities. Furthermore, exploring a diverse service delivery model, such as the informal class reassignment program, could potentially guide future policies and practices within the field of special education. More specifically, the ways in which students with moderate to severe disabilities are educated within a public school setting, could be influenced by the findings generated from this study.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participating in this study.

**If you have questions:** If you have questions, concerns, or comments about the research, you

909.537.5651 · fax: 909.537.7056 · http://edd.csusb.edu
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*Office of Doctoral Studies*

can contact the lead investigator, Emily Ledesma at 002458598@csusb.edu or the dissertation chair, Dr. Bonnie Piller, California State University, San Bernardino at bpiller@csusb.edu. Should you have questions or concerns pertaining to your rights as a subject in this study, you may contact the Institute Review Board (IRB) by calling 909-537-7588.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

**Statement of Consent**

I have read the information listed above. I have received answers to any and all questions I have asked and all procedures all fully understood. I consent to participate and take part in this study. By signing this consent form, I am stating that I am at least **18 years of age.**

Participant Signature_____Date_____

Participant Name (Printed)_____

**In addition to agreeing to participate in the study, I also consent to having the interview audio-recorded.**

Participant Signature_____Date_____

Participant Name (Printed)_____

*All data will be kept by the researcher for seven years beyond this study.*

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APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
SAN BERNARDINO

November 08, 2017

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**
Expedited Review
IRB# FY2018-25
Status: Approved

Mrs. Emily Ledesma and Prof. Bonnie Piller
Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Ledesma and Prof. Piller:

Your application to use human subjects, titled "Factors related to optimal service delivery models for students with moderate to severe disabilities: A phenomenological descriptive research study" has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The informed consent document you submitted is the official version for your study and cannot be changed without prior IRB approval. A change in your informed consent (no matter how minor the change) requires resubmission of your protocol as amended using the IRB Cayuse system protocol change form. **Your application is approved for one year from November 08, 2017 through November 07, 2018. Please note the Cayuse IRB system will notify you when your protocol is up for renewal and ensure you file it before your protocol study end date.**

Your responsibilities as the researcher/investigator reporting to the IRB Committee include the following 4 requirements as mandated by the Code of Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46 listed below. Please note that the protocol change form and renewal form are located on the IRB website under the forms menu. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years. Please notify the IRB Research Compliance Officer for any of the following:

**1) Submit a protocol change form if any changes (no matter how minor) are proposed in your research protocol for review and approval of the IRB before implemented in your research,**
2) If any unanticipated/adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research,
3) To apply for renewal and continuing review of your protocol one month prior to the protocols end date,
4) When your project has ended by emailing the IRB Research Compliance Officer.

The CSUSB IRB has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval notice does not replace any departmental or additional approvals which may be required. If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, the IRB Compliance Officer. Mr. Michael Gillespie can be reached

by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application approval identification number (listed at the top) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Caroline Vickers*

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D., IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

CV/MG

APPENDIX C

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD MODIFICATION LETTER

## CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY
## SAN BERNARDINO

January 30, 2018

**CSUSB INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD**
Protocol Change/Modification
IRB# FY2018-25
Status: Approved

Mrs. Emily Ledesma and Prof. Bonnie Piller
Doctoral Studies Program
California State University, San Bernardino
5500 University Parkway
San Bernardino, California 92407

Dear Mrs. Ledesma and Prof. Piller:

The protocol change/modification to your application to use human subjects, titled "Factors related to optimal service delivery models for students with moderate to severe disabilities: A phenomenological descriptive research study" has been reviewed and approved by the Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). A change in your informed consent requires resubmission of your protocol as amended.

You are required to notify the IRB if any future substantive changes/modifications are made in your research prospectus/protocol, if any unanticipated adverse events are experienced by subjects during your research, and when your project has ended. If your project lasts longer than one year, you (the investigator/researcher) are required to notify the IRB by email or correspondence of *Notice of Project Ending* or *Request for Continuation* at the end of each year. Failure to notify the IRB of the above may result in disciplinary action. You are required to keep copies of the informed consent forms and data for at least three years.

If you have any questions regarding the IRB decision, please contact Michael Gillespie, Research Compliance Officer. Mr. Gillespie can be reached by phone at (909) 537-7588, by fax at (909) 537-7028, or by email at mgillesp@csusb.edu. Please include your application identification number (above) in all correspondence.

Best of luck with your research.

Sincerely,

*Caroline Vickers*

Caroline Vickers, Ph.D, IRB Chair
CSUSB Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**Interview Questions**

1.  Describe your role in working with the informal class reassignment program and how would you describe the informal class reassignment program?

2.  What was the purpose of the informal class reassignment program from your perspective, and do you think the purpose was being met?

3.  Describe the experiences of students with moderate to severe disabilities in the informal class reassignment program. Feel free to give examples or tell me stories.

4.  From your perspective, how did the informal class reassignment program influence learning outcomes for students with moderate to severe disabilities in the following developmental areas, if at all?
    a.  Tell how it influenced Adaptive learning outcomes.
    b.  Tell how it influenced Social and Emotional learning outcomes.
    c.  Tell how it influenced Cognitive learning outcomes.

5.  What feelings did you experience while interacting with the informal class reassignment program and what contributed to those feelings?

6.  How have those feelings shaped or reshaped your personal perspectives regarding learning outcomes for students with moderate to severe disabilities?

7.  What does the informal class reassignment program mean to you and why?

8.  What words and thoughts do you associate with the informal class reassignment program?

9.  In what ways has the informal class reassignment program influenced your professional educational career, if at all?

Interview questions created by Emily Joyce Ledesma

APPENDIX E

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

**DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE**

**Special Education Participant Information**

What is your age group?

        a. 18-25
        b. 26-35
        c. 36-45
        d. 46-55
        e. 56-65
        f. 66 or older
        g. Decline to answer

What is the highest degree you have completed?

_____

What type of teaching credentials have you obtained?

_____

How many years have you been an educator in the field of special education?

_____

What grade or grades span did you teach while working with the informal class reassignment program?

_____

Demographic Questionnaire created by Emily Joyce Ledesma

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