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Teacher Perception: Secondary Level Skill Development Support for Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

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TEACHER PERCEPTION: SECONDARY LEVEL SKILL DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT

FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC LEARNING DISABILITIES

A Dissertation

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This Dissertation for the Education Doctorate in Transformational Teaching

and Learning Degree

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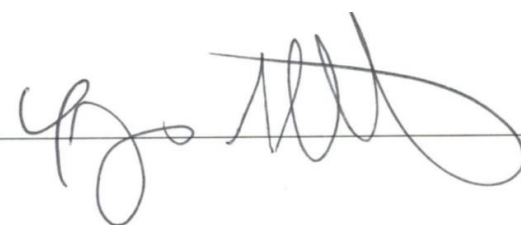
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Abstract

Defining the special education framework and teacher roles continue to be a challenge as schools face the differentiated needs of 21st-century learners. Delineating the functions and duties of special education teachers (SETs) at the secondary level provides a unique challenge, which is addressed by a midsized suburban high school developing the Inclusive Consultation Model (ICM). This innovative instructional model is school-wide and multi-disciplinary, impacting both special education and academic teachers. Through weekly consultation, the SET supports the content teacher in contributing instructional methods to meet the varied student needs in class. Outside of class, SETs justify the value of their professional support by teaching students with disabilities in a dedicated skill instructional room (SDR) as an integral part of the students' IEP goals and skill interventions. The targeted instruction provided in the SDR encourages goals for education which allow for student differences. Through a series of qualitative surveys, open-ended questionnaires and a focus group, teacher data was gathered to ascertain the effectiveness and challenges of meeting special needs at the secondary level using this focused instructional method. The obstacles, frustrations, achievements, and rewards revealed in SET perspectives guide pedagogy to further contribute to the academic knowledge of the role, and ultimately, purpose of educators in providing student intervention. Future research could inform how an instructional model using trained teachers providing targeted intervention in separate settings could impact student engagement and academic performance.

Keywords: special education, inclusion*,* differentiated instruction, learning disabilities

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: 4. 13. 2020

To special educators,

especially my peers on the frontlines of special education,

who are always fighting for what is best for students

with compassion and patience.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past few decades, special education as an instructional system and the role of special education teachers (SETs) have been in a state of progressive change. Since the mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) to educate children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) alongside children who are non-disabled, there is an increased emphasis upon the general education classroom. As schools moved students with disabilities from segregated to inclusive settings, the differentiated needs of these students were met with a traditional co-teaching model where an academic teacher was paired with a SET in the same general education classroom. However, there are several challenges in the traditional co-teaching model at the secondary level due to the higher content level and subsequent study skills, as well as the impact of high stakes testing (Mastropieri, M., Scruggs, T., Graetz, J., Norland, J., Gardizi, W., & McDuffie, K., 2001). This high school found that placing all the special needs students in co-taught classes slowed the pace of those settings and increased behavioral issues. Also, due to lack of planning time and content expertise, the SET was often relegated to the role of disciplinarian or paraprofessional. Finally, the adoption of the school motto "To enable ALL students to succeed in a changing world" and implementation of group intervention strategies led to a re-examination of the traditional co-teaching model, with this high school implementing an instructional model to meet the particular needs of the secondary level better.

Problem of Practice

Due to emphasis on measurable student outcomes suggested by federal legislation such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2004) mandating progress and annual statewide assessment, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA,1997) promoting accountability for instruction and evaluation, and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) confirming state annual testing, labels such as "at-risk" or "learning disabled" are employed to categorize

low achieving individuals who do not achieve the standards or norms. Research suggests that this risk status classification is not only potentially harmful to students as a form of oppression, but it can influence teacher perception of student abilities, affecting the relationship by causing students to be misidentified, or held to lower learning expectations from their teachers (Brown, 2016; Mirci, Loomis, & Hensley, 2011; Sensoy 2017). However, this harm can be mitigated by interspersing categorized students with their non-disabled peers while providing specified supports and skill instruction. In a full inclusionary program, there are no boundaries or distinctions between an academic education student and a student with disabilities, for needs are provided through assistance and supportive services to help the student succeed in the classroom regardless of limitations (Dalien, 2011).

Yet primary among special education challenges is providing focused instruction in the students' area of disability. In a separate setting, teachers can provide specific learning skills for independent problem solving and task completion that can be applied in general education classrooms (Cole & McLesky, 1997). The emphasis on skills (vs. everyday accommodation) intentionally addresses the secondary transition focus of current state initiatives. According to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) requirements, special education students receive transition services beginning at age 14. A new instructional special education service program, the Inclusive Consultation Model (ICM) attempts to meet this need by having a dedicated instructional room that contains resources for use by SETs with special education students, as well as being an area for focused instruction. The goal is to use the ICM to provide exceptional service delivery for students of need.

SETs at this mid-sized, predominantly white suburban high school have been actively involved in developing this model, with the recent addition of focused skill instruction for students in the Skills Development Room (SDR). In this location, SETs intend to instruct students in areas of weakness and monitor their progress individually, while also organizing and

maintaining records. During the open period in their schedules, special education students and

others in need of academic supports are scheduled to access these resources in the SDR.

The academic support provided by the school's ICM offers a unique opportunity to fulfill

the school motto in enabling all students to succeed. In the SDR setting, SETs can provide

academic skills to special education and students at risk through focused supplemental

instruction. Yet, there is also a deliberate intention to establish supportive relational connections

that enhance high school students' engagement and motivation (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). The

educational skills are designated in the areas pertaining to student IEP goals: reading

comprehension assistance, written expression development, math calculation/computation, and

executive functioning assistance.

Rationale for the Study

The interventional, targeted instructional approach examined by this study is an example

of a promotive educational program, as suggested by Jenson & Fraser (2016), which is beneficial

for all students, regardless of risk exposure. Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, & McGinley (2011)

describe teacher frustrations within a traditional consultation model, where there were no

resources set aside to accomplish small group and individualized instruction for special

education students. However, with this initiative, ICM teachers can not only quickly verify that

these students are performing well in their current classwork but can also provide the students

with the needed skill instruction and encouragement (DeMartino & Specht, 2018). This study

obtained data that reflects the teachers' perception of running this first-time program, their

opinion of successes, challenges, and elements that are crucial for the implementation of the

model.

This study addresses some of the challenging aspects for SETs instructing high school

secondary special education. Along with fulfilling their role of instructional remediation, SETs

often provide a relational connection as they face typical teenage behaviors such as apathetic

attitudes toward learning and lack of homework completion. Student work avoidance behaviors are often precipitated by negative or even catastrophic thinking (Minahan, 2018), as well as internalized low expectations by having low self-esteem or acceptance of poor performance (Mirci et al., 2011). Students with poor academic skills may also be impacted by the attitudes and actions of educators regarding teacher expectations. For some students, difficulty with executive function skills like time management and homework completion are a direct cause of poor academic performance used to identify them with a special education label, subsequently holding them to low expectations or exclusion from their non-disabled peers (Brown 2017). Students needing support in these areas are also among those targeted for instruction in the SDR. Assisting these students with work completion and basic homework monitoring duties often dominate the SET's work, and this takes time away from using their expertise in special education instruction. These issues are common complaints among SETs (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, & Patterson, 2015), and why many research results show many of them performing the role of assistant teacher or paraprofessional (Conderman, & Hedin, 2013; King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, & Preston-Smith, 2014; Scruggs et al., 2007), Without using their specialized skills as educators, SETs perform lesser tasks such as chasing students for homework completion or monitoring separate test settings.

Another problematic aspect of inclusive implementation is teachers' integrity to the shared goals and vision. Coming to light during the Professional Learning Community (PLC) the previous year, the SET's alignment to the ICM SDR directives proved a foundational topic to be addressed and examined. When examining the purposes of implementation, several teachers mentioned that they were not sufficiently trained and were lacking support, which could result in adverse outcomes from interventions put in place without proper teacher training (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The SETs have difficulty understanding the directives or sticking to the outlined vision when faced with pressing student issues. Teachers, who through lack of integrity

to the model, could face the frustration of an unresolved student behavioral issue and therefore be unlikely to use this form of consultation (DiGennaro Reed, Blackman, Erath, Brand, & Novak, 2018). Using teachers' perspectives of implementation assists in defining ICM goals to better improve this vision of interventional pedagogy for students with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this action research was twofold. Primarily, the research assists in developing instructional support for students of need in the researcher's high school, yet it also examines the role of the SET in this process. At this stage in the ICM development, student interventions were generally defined as providing reading, writing, math, and executive function skills through focused instruction by SETs. A large part of this research focused on the effectiveness of this outside of the classroom instructional support for students of the ICM. This support was provided in classrooms called Skills Development Rooms (SDRs), where teachers instruct a small group of students in learning skills based on IEP goals or classroom teacher recommendation. In the SDRs, SETs provided specific instruction to students in their area of disability to enable improvement in areas of weakness by the fading to mastery of specially designed instructional skills. They offered special education students approximately fifteen minutes weekly of focused instruction in the students' areas of weakness, and the remainder of the period in academic support. The SDR instructional period was arranged during the students' free periods in specified rooms with a SET and an academic teacher. The SETs also provided support for soft skills such as note-taking, test-taking, and studying, and executive functioning. The ICM instructional system enabled SETs to better support, understand and encourage students, charting a practical course of action for this high school. In an iterative process, teachers reflected on their implementation of ICM in the SDR and how they fulfilled their role. The hope is that this research will provide future insight into the foundational issues, challenges,

and benefits of such an approach as an alternative or complement to the traditional co-teaching model.

Research Questions

This study specifically addresses the following questions:

> **Question 1:** How do SETs fulfill their role in providing SDR student instruction? (implementation, process challenges, vision)

> **Question 2:** How do SETs perceive the impact of SDR support for the students? (relationship, learning challenges -academic and skill goals)

Definition of Terms

- Academic teacher: For the purpose of this study, the academic teacher is the person responsible for providing instruction in the general education classroom to non-disabled and students with disabilities with the support of the SET.

- Co-teaching: The co-teaching classroom is an inclusive setting where a academic teacher and a SET work together to educate students with special needs while helping them achieve IEP goals using one of six approaches (Friend, 2015). For the purpose of this study, it is also referred to as the traditional co-teaching model.

- ICM: The Inclusive Consultation Model is a new system of special education support, with SETs providing weekly teacher consultation with the academic teachers and targeted instruction outside of the classroom for students with disabilities (DeMartino & Specht, 2018).

- Inclusion: Inclusion in education is placing students with disabilities with their non-disabled peers in general education classrooms when appropriate. This placement is a continuum of services from full inclusion without support to co-teaching in the classroom and is the subject of contentious debate (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 4). Since federal

legislation does not include the term 'inclusion,' the placement of these students is based

upon the IEP team's interpretation of the student's LRE.

- LRE: The least restrictive environment is the federal mandate placing students with

   disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate on a continuum of services from no

   special education support to special self-contained settings. The Individuals with

   Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states, "To the maximum extent appropriate, children

   with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities,

   are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate

   schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational

   environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that

   education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be

   achieved satisfactorily (IDEA, 20 USC Sec. 1412).

- SDR: The Skill Development Rooms are designated areas where SETs instruct a small

   group of students in learning skills determined by their IEP or identified area of

   weakness.

- SET: For the purpose of this study, the Special Education Teacher (SET) is the person

   who is focused on the needs of students with disabilities and responsible for consulting

   with teachers, assisting with instructional modifications, ensuring student

   accommodations, and maintaining IEP requirements.

Summary

In the move to more inclusive services to meet secondary needs, this school is making an

effort to use ICM with outside of class instructional intervention to achieve the school motto in

enabling all students to succeed. For special education students, the ICM offered prescriptive,

focused instruction in the students' area of disability in the SDR. A work in progress, ICM has

been implemented with a reflective series of incremental steps of special education service

delivery. Formerly, in the traditional co-teaching setting, teachers were often frustrated when time and resources were not set aside to accomplish small group and individualized instruction for students with disabilities (Eisenman et al., 2011). Many SETs also faced the frustration of not being able to use their special education expertise to provide differentiated instruction and strategies instead of working as an aide to help students with work completion and basic homework monitoring duties. The ICM intentionally addressed this issue by having separate, focused instruction outside of class provided by SETs in the SDR.

This research examined how the SET connection of prescriptive, individual instructional support in the SDR can assist students in improving skills in their area of weakness (as determined by their IEP), as well as to provide them with the needed skill instruction and encouragement to manage their academic tasks independently. At the secondary level, the skills emphasis directly meets the current state and federal policies mandating transition accountability. For many low-performing students, executive function skills like time management and homework completion are a direct cause of poor academic performance used to identify them with a special education label. Exacerbating this student shortcoming, further research suggests that risk status classification is not only potentially harmful to students, but it can influence lower learning expectations by their teachers (Sensoy, 2017). Yet with the SET in a consultative role, accommodations can be provided by the academic education teacher in class while the SET provides student remedial support outside of class in a small group setting. In this setting, ICM teachers can quickly verify that these students are performing well in their current classwork, and also provide the students with the needed skill instruction and encouragement. Underlying these steps is a deliberate intention to establish supportive relational connections that enhance high school students' engagement and motivation (Kelly & Zhang, 2016). For this reason, "at-risk" students are also placed in SDR to make an effort to meet their academic and even emotional needs as well.

Being new, the effectiveness of this aspect of special education service delivery has not been examined, but current research was needed to see how this system is being implemented on the front lines. The teacher comments not only reveal their integrity to the ICM goals and vision, but exposes practical barriers and philosophical dissonance to using a pedagogical method based on the medical model while seeking student equity. This collaborative effort should not only add knowledge to the field of special education in student pedagogy, determining how to deliver their interventional support efficiently, but it also raises questions of how this prescriptive remediation to norms can be a form of oppression.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Special Education Inclusive Instruction

Any discussion of inclusive education needs to begin with this question from the high school's head principal, "What is best for the student?" It is imperative that the focus for students with disabilities is on supporting student needs in their area of weakness, providing the services they need for academic success. This support is in accordance with Federal law (IDEA, 2004), special education is a service and not a place where students are sent. These services of supportive instruction can be provided outside of the classroom as a means for the student to participate with their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent, following the LRE. The student's placement is supported by the Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) that is entitled to any student that has an Individualized Education Program (IEP). In a consultant model, the SET is focused on ensuring that students' SDI is met, and also responsible for providing the full range of direct and indirect services for these students (Burns, 2004). A common ground report of the American Institutes for Research (2002) pointed out that students with a specific learning disability require intensive, iterative, and explicit instruction to achieve academic success. The rigorous common core content standards (2010) and national push for students to be prepared for career and college require the SET to be better prepared to determine how to best provide students with disabilities the appropriate instruction to meet these higher standards (Leko et al., 2015).

In education today, there is a pertinent discussion on how to best interpret and define special education instruction to be relevant to 21st-century learning. This is part of an ongoing discussion; the establishment of government's role in public education began with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA, 1965), which provided equal access for students with disabilities along with funding and supportive policies. Special education then

moved from an emphasis on access to inclusive programs as required by the Individuals with

Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), and then to a focus on performance and academic

excellence required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002). Aligning IDEA with the

requirements of NCLB, the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004)

contributed by providing impetus for research-based interventions and guidance for teaching

behavioral expectations at a systems level (Landrum T. J., Tankersley, M., & Cook, B. G., 2012),

These federal policies have now been codified into Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015),

giving states the powers and responsibilities in assessing students to enable student academic and

vocational transition success for college and career. At the high school level, schools have been

examining instructional models and special education solutions to determine which services best

meet the needs of students with disabilities for post-graduation success.

      One of the solutions for achievement-based assessment of intervention services,

Response to Intervention (RTI), was developed out of the regulations of IDEIA through the

growing dissatisfaction with traditional measures of learning disability (Fletcher & Vaughn,

2009). RTI provides a means for schools to meet the federal guidelines through identification,

instruction, assessment and support in tiered levels of academic intervention. The impact of the

implementation of RTI has revamped educational systems and caused the line of distinction

between special and general education to blur as far as roles and responsibilities (Fuchs, Fuchs,

& Stecker, 2010; Björn, Aro, Koponen, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2015). Similar needs are now also met

through the service delivery system (MTSS), a new incarnation in the multi-tier system of

supports (Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013) which adds a systemic framework that examines educational

conditions using universal design for learning. Although promising, evidence for programs that

are successfully implementing intervention for struggling students at the high school level is

sparse, as most research is conducted on interventions at the elementary level (Bartholomew &

DeJong, 2017). The high school where this study was conducted is creating an intervention

system by a continuous pattern of improving on present services, incorporating elements of RTI and MTSS such as evidence-based practices and data-based problem solving, but creating their unique version using the ICM as an interventional tier. Working with the special educators is not unusual, for most principals do not have the training or resources for Tier 3 interventions and often depend on the SETs to help with academic needs (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). In the secondary setting, Tier 3 interventions are more difficult because they are intended to assist the student in growing academically instead of merely providing time to complete assignments. Since students are not pulled from class, like in elementary schools, supplementary periods are required to receive academic instruction (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017).

In the co-teaching model, the question of "whether individual learning needs can be met in classrooms full of students with a diversity of skills" (Bjorn et al., 2015) is the issue that drives the justification for intensive instructional interventions outside of the classroom. In today's classrooms, academic teachers have the responsibility of differentiating core instruction to meet the range of student needs. The inclusion of students with disabilities often requires the need for student reinforcement of skills in the classroom due to concomitant poor academic achievement, executive function (organization and study skill deficits), and motivational concerns (DeMartino & Specht, 2018). Teachers need to analyze the students' progress in the classroom through curricular measures and expected learning opportunities in order to inform the collaborative decisions for placement and support (Artiles & Thorius, 2010). To ensure student learning, academic teachers can implement differentiated instruction in the classroom with scaffolded instruction and diverse learning strategies (Tomlinson 2003). The SET can assist the academic teacher with planning differentiated class instruction while also providing remedial instruction for students outside of class (Landrum et al., 2012). SETs providing intervention outside of the classroom, such as learning skills and strategies, will help the student to perform independently in their general education classroom (Cole & McLeskey, 1997).

Defining the Theoretical Framework of SDR

Defining the special educational framework and teacher roles continues to be a challenge at this high school, so the examination of the strengths and shortcomings of the SDR is a valuable asset to understanding its framework and overall pedagogical vision. Outside of the general education classroom, the instructional role of SETs is in helping students meet academic goals or prepare for assessments. In the SDR setting, SETs can work one on one or provide group skill instruction with a few students. In these settings, the lower student-to-teacher ratio enables teachers to work with a small group of students where they can ascertain whether lack of academic progress is due to lack of effort or lack of understanding (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). Student accountability is met by using an action plan in the form of self-monitoring sheets to enable the students to set and reach academic, organization, and social goals (Lee, Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2009). The relational connection that develops between these teachers and students can help the intervention to be more effective (Kelly & Zhang, 2016; Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). According to current research, many SETs are seeing an increase in collaboration with other teachers and assessing students as part of their primary duties (Bjorn et al., 2015). These added responsibilities are adding to the stress of managing all the instructional student support. It is not uncommon that SETs have issues with teacher acceptance of support, and not having time to prepare, or provide leveled instruction during the individual time with students (Zigmond, 2003).

When defining the educational framework of full inclusion at this high school in the past, SETs have had to face obstacles which have commonalities with current research. The role of the SET has led to questions of blurred lines of student support, weak teacher collaboration, unclear delineation of roles, and uneven teacher parity as SETs are forced to clarify or even justify their positions (Bjorn et al., 2015). Added to these concerns about their role, SETs also may perceive the underlying threat of being phased out, as trained paraprofessionals provide the student

support. If they are used primarily as instructional aides in the classroom (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007), couldn't they be replaced by an aide? In theory, if the school moves to RTI support and identification, it could save the schools money by having less special education needs in the long run (Petrilli, 2012). Having two teachers in the classroom is expensive (Petrilli, 2012), and ICM has saved the district money as SETs service entire grade levels, requiring less teachers. Could the future job of the SET be doing paperwork and larger caseloads? To combat this likelihood, SETs can give research-based instruction for students in their areas of weakness to justify the value of their professional assistance. As specialists in the provision of skills strategies, the SET can fulfill a pivotal role in student success. Authentic special education practice involves the instructional expertise of SETs to meet individual student needs, which are beyond the scope of the academic teacher, while providing the relational connection for effective intervention (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017).

Models of Support for Special Education

The federal mandate for student access followed by the failure of both the segregated special education classes and pull-out approaches gave incentive for theorists to determine how to overcome educational barriers for students with special needs best. In 1986, the seminal Regular Education Initiative of the federal government (1987) was proposed by former Assistant Secretary of Education, Madeleine C. Will, as a means of school improvement and educational excellence for students with special needs. Will mentioned the failure of pull-out approaches to meet the educational needs of exceptional students and how it might even create barriers to learning (Will, 1986). She emphasized the shared responsibility for students, requiring SETs in the general education setting to collaborate and adapt learning environments and instructional practices to meet the needs of the diverse learners in the classroom. She pointed to inappropriate special education diagnosis due to lack of educational options for learning styles, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, as well as the barriers of an arbitrary deficit-based standard and teacher

unwillingness to modify curricula (Will, 1986). The emphasis upon the failure of the learning environment, rather than the student, supports the foundation of critical disability theory which asserts categorical social systems based on ability have harmful effects for individuals. These stigmatizing labels are associated with poor performance, lowered academic and social expectations (Will., 1986). The focus on student failure rather than prevention is a struggle inherent in the educational system today. Essentially, this is about taking responsibility for all students of need using pedagogical practices that prevent unnecessary labeling and placement. Uncategorized students who require additional instruction or who are at risk for school failure should be supported without requiring the over-identification of diagnostic testing that produces stigmatizing labels.

The ICM service model meets this call for a single-coordinated system that frees students from the oppression and stigma of labels. Consolidating special education students into regular education with the support of SETs can help to avoid the stigma of social failure by facing learning problems as opportunities for focused instruction. The ICM assists teachers in providing intervention techniques that are directly linked to classroom expectations, helping to break down educational barriers. Teachers can assist by using a universal design perspective to make a curriculum that considers the needs of all of their students. Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides expectations and needs considering all backgrounds and abilities to maximize student engagement (Kennette, 2019). UDL understands that all students possess strengths and needs, and by structuring teaching in a way that all students can engage in learning, it avoids the frustration for SETs to make modifications or play catch-up to help their students meet academic tasks (Baglieri et al., 2011). In this research, SETs primarily pointed to the job of meeting academic homework and classwork, as it superseded the focused instructional goals. If modifications are required, differentiated instruction allows for content, process, or product

modifications to the learning tasks to incorporate diversity (Baglieri et al., 2011). Modification of

tasks is performed through collaboration between the SET teacher and the academic teacher.

There is no consensus on the roles and responsibilities between academic and SETs, let

alone a way to measure special education model effectiveness (Mastropieri et al., 2001).

Conclusions from empirical data are inconclusive, showing research having an insufficient base

due to the special education setting being methodically flawed due to the multiple factors

involved in educational settings and methods (Zigmond, 2003). At the high school level, students

need to learn in various instructional methods depending on the various domains of the

educational environments. In order to improve generalizability, research should not be about a

place, but on meeting individual student needs. In an inclusive model, it is accepted that the

general education setting with the highly qualified academic content teacher is best for a majority

of students, but to do this, students with disabilities may require support with interventions

outside of class. Students require individual supplemental instruction and additional academic

support which can be best provided outside of classrooms. In this location, the aspects which

define special education - effective strategies and an individualized approach (Zigmond, 2003)

can be provided by the SET. Supplemental resource programs such as the SDR intentionally

provide that form of support.

To move forward in special education, researchers need to examine the educational

context, models of inclusion, and the subsequent role of SETs, and the educational experiences

of students with disabilities. In ICM practice at this high school, academic teachers

accommodate students with special needs in the classroom. Students with disabilities are

distributed evenly throughout the classes. It is demonstrated that full inclusion programs such as

this help to eliminate stigma by involving the students with disabilities in all class activities and

instruction, allowing them to integrate into the social fabric of the classroom (Zigmond & Baker,

1996). Avoiding the stigma of a label from segregation or isolation, all students have full access

to services and accommodations, including modified assignments, tests, and tutoring is available

during school. But special education needs to take a step further by providing students with

disabilities full equality with an educational practice that not only removes stigma but resolves

questions from disability scholars and the voice of the disabled. Disrupting views that are taken

for granted in special education and overcoming social obstacles to maintain human dignity

regardless of difference are "welcome ideas that do not sit easily with current beliefs and

assumptions" (Baglieri et al., 2011).

Special Education as a Service, Not a Placement

This school fits in as part of that change, moving from the separate setting to traditional

co-teaching to full inclusion with the adaptation of the ICM. Special education at the high school

is not a placement, but a supportive form of instructional service delivery for students with mild

learning disabilities, allowing them full access and placement in the general education classroom.

Individualized skill instruction, remediation, and an independent work focus are provided as

additional support depending on the student's need. This school service delivery is an attempt to

combine intensive instruction with full opportunity for learning in the classroom. Teachers are

responsible for modifying the learning environment to allow access, but unfortunately, students

often require direct or focused intervention to achieve current or long-term academic goals. At

the secondary level, the content and setting of these classes made it impossible for teachers to

sustain direct and focused intervention for individual students. Instruction and materials can be

modified, but it is much more challenging to adjust the pacing and curriculum of a full inclusion

classroom. ICM supplemental instruction allows teachers to continue with the academic

curriculum, supporting students to maintain the academic pace. Consultation and outside of class

remediation is provided in lieu of pull-out instruction in order to achieve student learning goals.

Pull-out programs often are detrimental to the student, as it removes them from pertinent

instruction (Zigmond & Baker, 1996). Pull-out instruction is often over-simplified with a

substandard curriculum as well (Vlachou et al., 2015). According to research, students report feeling that pull-out programs limit their access to the general education curriculum and the friendships in the classroom (Shogren et al., 2015).

In special education inclusion settings, the difficulty remains for SETs to overcome excessive caseloads and scheduling issues while providing meaningful, productive instruction, specific skill, and strategy instruction for students with disabilities. For this purpose, inclusion models must intentionally provide individual student needs through empirically supported practices that are carefully planned and executed (Zigmond & Baker, 1996). The focus of the SDR instruction outside of the classroom delivers a course of action that is amenable to this task.

Skill Instruction in the SDR

The SDR is a dedicated instructional room, which contains resources for use by strategic teachers with students with disabilities, as well as being an area for focused skill instruction. In this location, SETs can instruct in areas of weakness and monitor special education students' progress individually while organizing and maintaining records. During the open period in their schedules, special education students can access these resources. Explicit direct skill instruction, small interactive group instruction, and specific strategy instruction positively influence the academic performance of LD students (Swanson, 2017). Teaching in areas of weakness can be critical to the success of the special education students in the classroom as well as impacting their transition to career or college.

By focusing on the student's practical use of strategies instead of work completion, teachers can increase learning time and meet the needs of every student (Minahan, 2017). Once again, this stresses the importance of instructional intervention by SETs to remedy this so-called disability. The use of interventions for students outside of the traditional classroom (as provided by this model) encourages goals for instruction which are not random quick fixes, but clearly defined supportive, proactive strategies which allow for student differences. The provision of

research-based instructional materials and instructor training are other considerations that will enable focused skill pedagogy. Professional development to provide the establishment of high-quality behavioral skills exercises and support techniques for educators will allow them to effectively implement student interventions (DiGennaro Reed et al., 2018). Using trained teachers, quality resources, and research-based strategies in a separate, supportive, flexible environment should lead to increased student academic performance.

SDR skill instruction was established after examining the significant needs of special education students. Interventions were presented as focused, intensive, goal-oriented, and consistently administered. The focus on necessary skills for intervention is informed by student IEP goals or substantiated through the teacher referral process. After examining the major areas of skill deficits, these instructional skill areas were identified as Math Skills Instruction, Reading Skill Instruction, Writing Skill Instruction, and Executive Functioning Soft Skills. For example, one area of instructional SDR support is in the area of executive skills instruction. The commonly needed support for executive skills specifically assists high school students with time management, task initiation, and organization. Upon examination of this support, a SET might provide insight into how motivation and engagement impact work completion, suggesting how an underlying genuine inability to perform the routine task of time management is impacting student performance. Targeted instruction in executive function is an effective use of the SET's expertise, which could enhance the self-esteem and value of the teacher instead of playing paraprofessional roles like chasing students for homework.

The Role of the SET at the Secondary Level

With changing expectations and environments, SETs at the secondary level find that their function and roles are impacted, causing a loss of their identity. Due to duties outside of class and lack of planning time, multiple teachers, caseload maintenance, and IEP meetings, the SET is often relegated to a supporting role in the classroom. The SET teacher often assumes the

role of instructional aide, instead of being utilized for their expertise in diagnosing and remediating individual learning problems (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007). The prescriptive method of instruction diagnoses student learning needs through a variety of assessments and education explicitly tailored to meet the learning need by a skilled, specially trained teacher (Zigmond, 1995). The more sophisticated content and transitional needs at the secondary level require SETs to teach a wide variety of skills and fill multiple instructional and planning roles (Wasburn-Moses 2005). When assisting students, SETs might consider themselves having a lack of depth of knowledge in the content area needing support. Students requiring special treatment from SETs also can cause a detrimental division in the co-teaching classroom by association (Baglieri et al., 2011). Being a co-teacher in the class leaves SETs overburdened with multiple and competing responsibilities: their role of teaching conflicts with expectations, the burden of paperwork, diverse needs, and limited opportunities to individualize instruction (Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Yet at the secondary level, the SET's role is not to be an equal in content instruction, but that of a specialist, providing differentiation for students. While working as a facilitator of support, less planning time will be required as they assist with focused student support for the teachers. In this way, teacher parity can be achieved as both teachers fulfill their areas of expertise by working as a specialist, helping students with disabilities by pre-teaching, creating study guides, and assistance with skills needed for mastery of concepts (Dieker & Rodriques, 2013). Outside of class, the SET can provide for special instruction and tutoring for those students who develop their expertise at a different rate, an essential understanding of the ICM. Having teachers provide academic skills outside of class time can complement classroom instruction rather than replacing the education by removing the student from the classroom for specialized instruction.

The pressure of IDEA's continuum of placements/services and NCLB's standard-based approach are also factors that contribute to SET role confusion. To remedy this confusion, SETs

should revive their valued role of reaching the most difficult to teach children and perform

evidence-based practices from contemporary special education research as expert teaching

instructors (Fuchs et al., 2010). The ICM supports the point that although differentiated

instruction is the key to meeting the needs of students, individual support may best be provided

to students outside of the classroom in a more manageable setting. Here, the focused instruction,

as well as an opportunity to practice, can be factors to benefit students with disabilities (Landrum

et al., 2012). Assisting students outside of class with focused instructional time and equally

distributing students to inclusive classrooms to avoid classroom disproportionate special

education student percentage (the "Genademic" class) are two steps that will enable the inclusive

classroom to become a safe and supportive environment. The ICM system directly remedies

student needs by providing a SET to assist students with strategic instruction in content and skills

promptly.

The SET as Consultant and Collaborator

A crucial aspect of the law that the ICM addresses is that of the competence and

qualifications of the teachers of special education students. The requirements of NCLB (2004)

stated that teachers must be deemed highly qualified, with a bachelor's degree and a full state

certification or proof that they know the subject they teach. These requirements apply to teachers

providing direct instruction in core academic subjects, but not directly to teachers in a support

role in the classroom. Yet there is a push to consider SETs in the traditional co-teaching class as

equals in this "marriage," even though they may not be a qualified content instructor, and they

may be lacking the expertise of college coursework in the field. Also, ICM affirms that the role

of the SET is highly valued, to be a specialist in adapting curricula, providing strategies,

behavioral support, and interventions.

In the ICM role as a consultant, the SET can use these skills to assist the teacher while

supporting special needs students outside of the classroom. Consultation is one of the

inclusionary practices that provide successful collaboration. In successful inclusive schools, there is a collaborative responsibility of student ownership (Wallace, Anderson, & Bartholomay, 2002). The goal for teachers is to enable the student to participate in the regular education classroom to the maximum extent (Burns, 2004). Having teachers work with the student to improve academic skills provides the student value and purpose. The use of intervention could have a significant effect on students' ability to perform in the classroom. Instruction in classroom learning strategies and skill-based supports are a few of the research-based interventions that improve classroom performance. (Scruggs, Mastropieri, Berkeley, & Graetz, 2010). The SET can provide students this instructional support outside of class to complement the teacher's classroom teaching.

During shared planning time, SETs should share the responsibility of educating the students by providing their expertise to create successful learning opportunities (Carpenter & Dyal, 2010). As early as possible, teachers should collaborate to determine feasible, differentiated, and specific interventions that best meet student needs (Landrum et al., 2012). In consultative models like the ICM, there is scheduled time at the beginning of the year and then weekly for the SETs to meet with the content area teacher. Taking steps for instructional transformation using a collaborative, practice-based approach with general and SETs could be an effective solution to meeting student needs (Leko, Brownell, Sindelar, & Kiely, 2015). When both teachers work together in a creative manner, this forms a mutually beneficial learning environment (Laframboise et al., 2004). Systematic progress monitoring by a collaborative team of teachers in a continuous improvement program is an effective means of student intervention (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2016; Taylor, Hallam, Charlton, & Wall, 2014). Ultimately, the collaboration of all the stakeholders is the crucial ingredient for a successful inclusive school (Carpenter & Dyal, 2010). Effective inclusion programs require active cooperation and

communication among all members of the inclusion team (McLesky & Waldron, 2002). This team approach must include administration, academic teachers, and the community.

Differentiation in the classroom is the most effective way to help prevent many learning development problems (Austin, 2015). However, providing individualized instruction within a class period of 40 minutes with 30 students is impractical and needs to be performed outside of class. Also, to meet the demands of standardized assessments, teachers must devote a large percentage of their instructional time and curriculum, making it difficult to differentiate instruction efficiently (Austin, 2015). Consulting with a SET will assist the content teacher in providing instructional methods to meet the varied needs during class, such as strategies for flexible grouping, graphic organizers, and book choice.

Focused skill instruction lays a foundation for class performance and complements academic demands. The SDR provides research-based strategies in small group settings requiring up to twelve weeks. Those requiring these focused interventions generally are students receiving special education services. Special education trained teachers can effectively deliver intensive, urgent, and goal-directed instruction (Zigmond, 1997). These interventions can be provided in the SDR, responding to immediate needs based on the expectations of the general education classroom, as well as working towards IEP goals. In this way, transitory learning issues can be distinguished from a bona fide learning disability, which is a consideration for special education identification and placement. However, despite these supports, teachers need preparation and professional development to teach students with disabilities effectively. SETs are already ideally suited for interventional strategies, but many general educators have not had this training. Both teachers could benefit from shared reflective practice as well as repeated learning opportunities to teach student literacy and behavioral intervention (Landrum et al., 2012).

A Collaborative Approach to Student Learning

A focus on the student is imperative in developing a clear vision of the SDR, enabling all students to learn in an atmosphere of mutual respect. The collaborative nature of interactive dialogue between the student, the SET and the academic teacher will help students learn as well as provide both teachers with more job satisfaction. Thus, the development of the ICM is accomplished in an environment of a professional learning community, having "shared understanding, a sense of identity, high levels of involvement, mutual cooperation, collective responsibility, emotional support and a strong sense of belonging as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone" (DuFour, 2016, p. 20). In order for change to happen, it needs to have ownership and buy-in from the participants (Costa, 2015, p. 14). Therefore the SET's buy-in to the instructional model is imperative, as is the sense of trust that their voices and input are valued and a vital part of the program's development. The importance of building a trusting relationship with administration is essential to promote professional learning community development, with it, progress will be inhibited (Thompson, Gregg, & Niska, 2004). If members feel threatened or unsafe, they will avoid participation (Dehdary, 2017).

Effective collaboration is founded on clarity of purpose and teacher responsibility as an essential part of a successful program (DuFour, 2016, p. 113). Working with ICM over the years, this researcher found that a strong sense of educational vision is a cohesive force which needs to be maintained, and understanding the vision is required for change to be effective and established. Dehdary describes this shared sense of purpose as a marker in identifying a strong professional learning community with a "clear sense of mission and shared values" (2017). If the high school shares a common vision, overcoming obstacles by working together, finding compromise, and adjusting to meet needs, it can move forward in improving pedagogy for both students and teachers. The educational system truly can move forward when the vision has the

consensus of the PLC team, even when some disapprove (DuFour, 2016, p. 130). The responsibility to participate in a collaborative effort was demonstrated by the SDR team in the surveys and focus group, creating a shared vision to help this school develop a clear agenda for action. Research demonstrates that a systemic process supported by the collaborative team working together towards goals interdependently and being mutually accountable improves student achievement (Thompson et al., 2004; DuFour, 2016). Teachers working autonomously and together at the same time can be a powerful collaborative process. Sharing their instructional methods with each other, the inevitable growth of the teachers' knowledge will ultimately benefit student learning.

The environmental context is responsible for the growth and nurturing of learning. The quality of learning is dependent on the climate of the learning community. One of the structural changes impacting this study's learning community was the influx of ninth graders due to the change from 'junior highs' to 'middle schools' occurring last year. School climate was impacted as high school teachers dealt with the fallout of new teaching assignments and locations, along with the pedagogical challenges that ninth graders bring to the high school learning environment. These added challenges were met as teachers collaborated with special educators in the context of this educational shift. Combined with the move towards full inclusion, these structural shifts were part of the changing inclusive educational model that required reflective action. The value of critical reflection is mentioned as one of the factors necessary in making transformative change, particularly though the "teachers questioning of assumptions that underlie habitual patterns of thought and action" (Webster-Wright, 2009). There were definite applications for challenging assumptions through reflective action (Dehdary, 2017) in this high school context. Many traditional methods of pedagogy were questioned as well as critiquing the current inclusive initiatives. These challenging questions are informed and framed by the context: the

physical structures, social interactions and even the "hidden implicit workplace expectations" (Webster-Wright, 2009). The process is time-consuming yet rewarding as teachers work together to find creative working solutions, improving their pedagogical methods to help all students learn. This is opposed to the general assumption that teacher learning can be mandated merely through engagement in professional development programs, programs that often only pay lip service to embedded practice and reflective action (Webster-Wright, 2009). The transformative change to the educational model occured in a collaborative community of professionals and was not accomplished individually by strong leadership. Of course, supportive leadership was provided and is needed, which is certainly applicable to any educational environment.

Inclusion Challenges at the Secondary Level

The place for special education in instructional systems and the role of SETs have been a source of critical debate over the past few decades. When examining this issue, there are several limitations in the traditional co-teaching model at the secondary level, and by addressing these limitations, the argument can be made for an instructional model that meets these needs. According to research, students with disabilities struggle with having success when meeting requirements at the secondary level (Dieker & Rodriquez, 2013). At the high school level, subject teachers are considered content specialists, while SETs typically focus on individual learning needs. Students with learning disabilities often require and thrive with instruction peculiar to their disability, which may be challenging to accomplish in the course of the regular education lesson plan (Henderson & Ferreira, 2014). Teachers also face frustration in not having the time or resources set aside to accomplish small group and individualized instruction for special education students (Eisenman et al., 2011). The challenge in the inclusive setting is having little time available for teacher collaboration to individualize material for students, and often the emphasis for these students is content-focused with subject matter requirements instead

of a student-focused, developmental orientation as seen in elementary grades (Solis,Vaughn, Swanson & Mcculley, 2012). Also, teachers might have a predisposition for a teacher-centered classroom, with content expectations and autonomy in course offerings (Cole and McLeskey, 1997). Worrell (2008) summarizes the school implementation problems affecting inclusion as being negative teacher attitudes, lack of knowledge about special education issues, poor collaboration, limited instructional repertoire, inadequate assessments, lack of administrative support, and lack of planning time.

On top of the implementation issues, there are many academic challenges at the secondary level of the high level and pace of a wide range of academic content often due to the increased demands for high stakes testing (Cole and McLeskey, 1997; Mastropieri et al., 2001). Secondary students with disabilities are held to high expectations, but often have weak study skills, struggling with making the transition to high school to overcome the large gap between their skill level and classroom demands (Cole and McLeskey, 1997). Due to these distinctive secondary level challenges for teachers, there is a lack of compelling evidence in support of the benefits of co-teaching at this level (Dieker & Rodriquez, 2013; Eisenman et al., 2011; Henderson & Ferriera, 2014). The evidence is further compounded by the variety of teaching approaches and instructional frameworks, along with a multitude of classroom variables in the secondary classroom. Co-teaching only shows a moderate effect as an inclusion model in the meta-analysis of co-teaching research (Murwaski and Swanson, 2001).

Another obstacle for students with disabilities at the secondary level in co-taught classrooms is not having their needs met due to demands on the often unlicensed, overworked SETs (Scruggs, Mastropieri, Berkeley, & Graetz, 2010). In high schools, SETs have difficulty providing intensive and prescribed instruction in basic skills, progress monitoring, and one-on-one instruction (Dieker & Murawski, 2003). The students themselves may also be challenged in a co-taught classroom due to the confusion of the variety of differentiated lessons or

concentrating when both teachers are talking at the same time (Henderson & Ferreira, 2014). Compounding learning difficulties at the secondary level, students display challenging behaviors such as low motivation, frustration, and resisting academic demands behavior difficulties, which affect a teacher's ability to provide high-quality instruction (McKenna. 2013). Students also tend to view the SET as an aide, and not their teacher due to the behavioral redirection and functional skill assistance they often provide to students (King-Sears et al., 2014). Exacerbating this perception is the reality that most SETs lack expertise in the content area yet provide advanced vocabulary and higher-level analytic skill support required at this level (Dieker & Rodriques, 2013). Also, due to the configuration of the traditional co-teaching model with time-constraints in inclusive secondary classrooms, some students with disabilities may receive no strategic instruction or re-teaching (Zigmond & Matta, 2004).

Role ambiguity is a core challenge for SETs as they often feel inferior to academic teachers in content knowledge. This frustration is exacerbated by being regarded as assistants expected to resolve dilemmas of behavior management, serving as a mediator for the student, resolving conflicts, dealing with parents, and abandoning their expertise in providing individual instructional support and specialism (Vlachou, Didaskalou, & Kontofryou, 2015). Yet, according to research, the practices of special education co-teaching support and behavior management in the classroom are demonstrated to have little effect in improving instruction or student learning outcomes (Volonino & Zigmond, 2007).

Successful inclusion consists of increasing active learning, providing basic skill support in all content areas, increasing strategy repertoire and modifications, understanding special education laws and students, teacher collaboration, and improving behavior management and community building (Casale-Giannola, 2012). SETs often feel not prepared in terms of academic resources, infrastructure, and attitudes while feeling obliged to accept responsibility for the well-being of students' social and emotional needs (Vlachou et al., 2015). The reality of promoting an

inclusionary system at the secondary level presents the struggle of meeting students' diverse learning needs while overcoming time constraints, in effect juggling the responsibilities to provide remedial academic support, skill instruction, student behavioral and social needs. Yet often, additional instructional support places emphasis on reteaching core subject areas, usually at the expense of social, study, or vocational skills (Wasburn & Moses, 2005; Vlachou et al., 2015). Although the vital obligation for SETs is instructional support and monitoring progress of students, the heavy academic-orientated content at the secondary level makes it difficult for SETs to provide additional support within the daily schedule (Wasburn & Moses, 2005; Vlachou et al., 2015). Success is managed by teachers' shared responsibility and collaboration in scheduled planning time to identify student needs and support strategies (Carpenter & Dial, 2007).

Challenging Traditional Understanding of Students with Disability

Action research in the special education field must begin with the difficult task of understanding the current definitions of disability as it relates to individual difference. The ADA (1998) defined disability as having "a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of (an) individual; a record of such an impairment; or being regarded as having such (an) impairment" (U.S Department of Justice, 2007). The number of individuals with disabilities has been increasing to over 40 million, compromising 12.6% of the American population (Bialik, 2017). The number of students with disabilities has also been growing over the years as well. During the years of 2017-18, 14% of all public school students received special education services under the IDEA, of which 34% were identified as having a specific learning disability ("Children and Youth With Disabilities," 2019). The identification and subsequent categorization of students is based on a medical model which understands disability as a deficit from national norms. Not only do special educators have to understand disability as it relates to the students' educational setting, but SETs also should challenge

disability discrimination as a social construct impacting their school, one that limits the individual's status and opportunity and can be considered a form of oppression.

Discrimination and oppression toward the minority group of the disabled are known as ableism, a bias that limits access and opportunity in social institutions. The definitional issue is compounded with the legislated policies and educational push of NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, 2011) and other governmental programs that pressure school systems to identify students according to national norms, thereby creating a deficit perspective of learning disability as something to be remediated, and provided with labels of "at-risk" and "learning disabled." However, these meanings of disability have expanded and evolved, being no longer constrained to the deficit-based medical model (Baglieri, Vale, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Societal interpretations of differences are to a normed body which can change over time, and thus are arbitrary distinctions (Annamma, Boelé, Moore & Klingner, 2013). The very definition of intellectual disability has changed in recent years, along with the terminology used by educators. For instance, in special education, the term "mentally retarded (MR)" was replaced by "mentally challenged" to the current "intellectually disabled (ID)." Those who were labeled mentally retarded in 1973 were "essentially cured" when the AAMD revised the definition from an IQ score of 85 to an IQ score of 70, a change precipitated by calls for reform due to over-representation of people of color (Annamma, Conner & Ferri, 2013). Other labels such as LD and ED are also changing and products of social judgment. The continually evolving definitions of what is labeled as a disability demonstrate the danger of oppressing others through the deficit-based identification process.

Disability Studies in Education - DSE

Disability scholars help us to consider how categorizing is context-dependent, and a social, political, economic, and cultural practice (Baglieri et al., 2011). Until the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) decision, the practice of exclusion was the norm for students with

disabilities. Throughout the sixties, special education considerations played a part in the

development of rights for students with disability. With the passage of the Elementary and

Secondary Education Act (1965), federal funds were provided to help educational equity for

marginalized students with amendments specifically supporting students with disabilities. The

Civil Rights Movement reflected broader civil rights movements that included individuals with

disabilities as an oppressed group. This disability rights movement gained momentum in the

early seventies as equal opportunities for those with disabilities was enforced with the

Rehabilitation Act (1973) and the subsequent sit-ins over section 504 in San Francisco. This was

followed by the expansion of special education as a medical model based upon definitional

identification. As the special education field developed, scholars supporting the Critical Race

Theory's social justice reforms impacted the special education field, producing Disability Studies

in Education (DSE). The DSE perspective challenges the deficit-based medical model foundation

of special education, offering various lenses to "influence how we conduct research, the ways we

teach, and the place of students with disabilities in schools"(Baglieri, Valle, Connor, &

Gallagher, 2011). DSE represents a change from the focus on individuals with physical, social,

or educational limitations to how the physical, social, or educational environments impose

limitations on individuals (Berghs, Atkin, & Graham, 2016). DSE offers a perspective that views

disability as the result of a societal imposition rather than a problem located in an individual to a

viewpoint where disability is imposed on people by society and is thus "an opportunity to deepen

and broaden our understanding"(Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Believing that

society impairs people, DSE counters the medical model, which views disability as a problem

caused by impairment, which has individual consequences, thereby reclaiming the experience of

disability (Berghs et al., 2016). DSE makes a distinction between physical or mental impairment

and disability as defined through experiences of social oppression. Since DSE is centered on an

individual's experiences, this perspective encourages activism for social change by putting the person with a disability in control of their own lives (Berghs et al., 2016).

Since special education has roots in the Brown decision and the liberatory civil rights movement of the sixties, this action research in special education would be irresponsible without addressing the theoretical concerns of racializing ability (Annamma et al., 2013) , challenging the norms of disability and White privilege which label and place a disproportionate number of African-Americans and lower classes in special education (Blanchett, 2006). According to Critical Race Theorists, racism and ableism are interconnected normalizing processes that are ingrained in society (Annamma et al., 2013). This historical oppression of labeling continues to be a factor in the identification of at-risk and students with disabilities who receive special education services, and also for this school's students in the SDR. That percentage in this researcher's study is not a factor that is being examined; nevertheless, it is a consideration when discussing labels and disability according to this subjective school SDR diagnosis.

In the high school setting, there is often a perception of what is a normal ability as opposed to an abnormal disability. DSE scholars view this form of labeling students "learning disabled" as a form of institutionalized oppression. The designation as "abnormal" justifies and contributes to the labeling of learning disabled as a deviation from the norm (Baglieri et al., 2011). DSE critics question the established and sometimes arbitrary normative center based upon the standard of what is defined as a "normal" child (Annamma, S., Boelé, A., Moore, B. & Klingner, J., 2013). The learning-disabled label is arbitrary because what is considered normal in one context may not be in another. As evidence, what is deemed to be normal is context-dependent, for a student may be disabled or cured by crossing a state or district line (Brantlinger 2004). In this way, special education actually augments the deficit-based mentality with its specialized testing and service providers, reifying human difference by marking individuals

according to what is deemed as normal levels (Baglieri et al., 2011). By participating in their interventional role, the SET could be seen as an unwitting participant in oppressive practice.

Against this background lies the theoretical position of the ICM, a special education service model that endeavors to provide full inclusive access and specially designed support to learning disabled and other low performing students without stigmatizing them by label segregation in front of their peers. SDR is the location of special education instructional support provided to these students outside of the classroom to enable academic success. The theoretical position underlying this support is the focus of this action research. The goal of the ICM is to provide those services which allow full participation in the educational system. The supportive nature of consultative teacher and student discourse allows students the opportunity to reframe the understanding of disability as something to claim instead of something to disdain, moving students to equity instead of placing them in a subordinate position (Caldwell, 2011). By servicing all students of need instead of just the labeled special education students, the SDR teachers can address concerns and provide support for all students to participate in the general education classroom successfully. Placed among non-disabled peers, special education students can avoid discriminatory or degrading labels that are often used to categorize students. The labels are a factor used to recognize difference and "in addition to inferring shamefulness, to be called 'special needs' or identified with another disability euphemism prevents children with disabilities from participating in disability positive or self-advocacy" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 14). By sharing the classroom with disabled peers, the other students will not be inclined to see labeled students as "other" and a target of ridicule. Full inclusion also avoids the oppression of placing those with disabilities into what Foucault (1977) called "quarantined spaces," by ensuring that special education is not a place or location, but a service delivery structure (Civil Rights Project, 2001). When students are segregated into special education classes, such as slower-paced, abbreviated curriculum co-taught classrooms, it becomes a form of structural

segregation. Separating students into co-taught and general education classes points to the continuing theoretical concept of inclusion as a service delivery model instead of an educational philosophy or practice (Baglieri, 2011).

Seeking a Socially Just Service Delivery Model

Inclusive education theory and practice are about removing learning barriers and enabling ALL children to succeed; therefore, social justice practices as advocated by DSE demand consideration. Connecting practice to student outcomes requires an understanding of the system and organization of the special education program (Wasburn-Moses 2005). The IDEA (1997) focused on access with input-based objectives, whereas now there is a focus on student outcome-based objectives. "The President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education" (2002) initiative took this a step further, emphasizing the results of successful post-graduate transition. This initiative's implications for practitioners enforces shared responsibility to provide science-based educational prescription for students with disabilities, rather than merely performing the process of regulatory compliance and liability (Berdine, 2003). Both SETs and academic teachers are now held accountable for student achievement, connecting their teaching practice to student outcomes based on standardized test scores. The danger of this educational movement of service delivery is that "teachers are increasingly being deskilled and forced to act as semi-robotic technicians good for little more than teaching for the test..." (Giroux, 2011, p. 126). Since student outcomes are the focus of education, teachers need to plan ahead with an action agenda that allows for critical pedagogy. Hence, research is needed about teacher roles, responsibilities, and models of inclusive education at the secondary level to enable a reasonable pragmatic transition from access to results.

A socially just practice would be providing support not only for the disabled but for all learners. This framework requires being inclusive and participatory instead of exclusionary and marginalizing, using socially just questioning practices instead of procedural techno-rational

implementation (Baglieri, 2011). The robotic high stakes testing and rigid state standards demand a regimented expectation that all students must be taught in the same way, place, and time, performing to the standards of the same normative assessments. As a result, and especially at the secondary level, teachers endeavor to actively engage students with disabilities "to achieve passing grades, earn high school credits, pass high-stakes tests, and prevent school dropout" (McKenna, 2013). The pressure to meet the state levels (and receive funding) leads to a systematic implementation of a curriculum that is based upon normative expectations which does raise academic expectations. However, true equity would be considering all students as having strengths and weaknesses rather than defined as outliers according to how they meet or do not meet curricular demands (Baglieri, 2011).

Eliminating discrimination caused by the location of special education services and the general ineffectiveness of co-teaching, ICM was developed with equity in mind. It is hoped to remedy the injustice and stigmatization of students with learning needs, focused on Zigmond & Baker's (1996) instructional integrity for students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Following the systemic performance demands which produce students identified as learning disabled according to that deficit-based medical model, the SDR was designated as the location to provide learning strategies (reading, writing, and study skills) outside the classroom, enabling students to learn independently without the assistance of a co-teacher.

As they take responsibility for educating all students, teachers also function as agents of change in the educational organization of the classroom, differentiating the curriculum and providing accommodations to students with disabilities. The SET serves as a weekly consultant for the teacher as well as an advocate and instructor of strategies for the students. Working as a student advocate, SETs often provide strong support from the limited resources of overburdened systems (Laframboise et al., 2004). The SDR instruction piece of the ICM serves as a case study of the evolution of this process. However, teacher attitudes can affect implementation. In

Worrell's article "7 Deadly sins of Inclusion" (2008), school sin #1 is that negative teacher perspectives can make inclusive programs a candidate for failure. Many teachers are reluctant to change the way they teach, believing their teaching is not the issue or perhaps even not considering the proposed new strategies (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). Change is especially difficult in high school because most secondary teachers have a set routine and are used to working alone or within their specific departments. But teachers and students, as transformational agents of change, are simultaneously forming and being shaped by their educational environment. Implementing an innovative service delivery model is an experience of learning as a social construct, balancing past methods of instruction, and striving towards continual improvement.

Labeling and Categorizing Students as a Form of Oppression

The realization of difference is intertwined with negative social experiences such as segregation and exclusion, exhibiting behaviors of bullying, labeling, and name-calling (Caldwell, 2011). It is not uncommon to hear students at the secondary level refer to the special education resource room as the "sped" room. This form of social segregation and discrimination is similar to those who have struggled to overcome labels given to race, gender, sexual orientation, and belief systems (Caldwell, 2011). A student who is segregated will also receive the pejorative moniker of a "sped student." The categorizing nature of special educational determination reflects the civil rights movements' expression of outrage over societal oppression, and aligns with the perspective of critical race theorists, particularly when considering the disproportionate amount of African American students labeled as special education or "at risk."

When looking into labeling and categorizing students, it is clear that the subjective methods teachers use need to be examined, particularly in light of race and privilege. Ability tracking and special education are enacted as a form of racial segregation (Blanchett, 2006). The high incidence of African American students in special education provides the impetus for the

examination of possible latent oppression from existing educational, social structures. Students

identified with low incidence categories of developmental disabilities are often placed in

segregated settings such as the learning support classroom, and African American students not

only are more commonly labeled for services, but they also do not make the achievement gains

as their White peers (Blanchett, 2006). The underlying system of special education itself needs to

be critically examined. The system, which was established to support marginalized students, now

actually maintains and promotes White privilege and racism by keeping African American

students from an equitable education in the general education classrooms (Blanchett, 2006).

      In society today, the understanding of disability for individuals with intellectual and

developmental disabilities is a work in progress, with much to learn. Leaders in the disabled

rights movement for the disabled community focus on participation, making personal

transformation while sharing social bonds with others (Caldwell, 2011). The relationships

established with critical supporters can provide those with disabilities the ability to resist

oppression, and this marginalized community could inform the construct of identity. Growth in

knowledge should gain momentum in the future as the disabled community's self-advocacy

(claiming personhood by finding a voice) coupled with society's celebration of difference could

ultimately lead to a society that understands difference as a positive self-concept (Caldwell,

2011). This positive self-concept is part of the theoretical basis for the existence of the SDR as

an inclusive service delivery system that challenges the social construction of impairment

through the responses which resist labels, advocates for students, and helps to form a positive

disability identity. By maintaining support for all students of need, the SDR could help students

to see their limitations instead of their label. Building "trusting environments to build confidence

and foster resistance to oppression" (Caldwell, 2011) can be a goal of the SDR and is reflected in

teacher responses to the area of relationship. Avoiding the stigma of labels and building

supportive relationships is a substantial part of disability identity and suits the philosophical vision outlined by the ICM.

In this analysis of disability research, this researcher has been challenged by multiple articles referencing the oppressive leveled system of education as an expression of power (as suggested by Friere), the prescriptive deficit-based medical model diagnosing special services, and the historical social construct model's development of disability which has led to ableism. However, all of these perceptions are results of categorizing students to receive special services, coupled with laws in place to ensure that the needs of labeled special education students are met. Providing a label was a necessary part of the process which allowed special education instruction in a separate setting, and then later to provide co-teaching classrooms. Now, continuing the fulfillment of the LRE, schools are moving to full inclusion, where trained teachers are able to provide accommodations for all students to succeed in the classroom. The inclusive education process at this high school continually examines the logistics to provide supportive levels of service in spaces intentionally created to be "used in multiple, flexible, and shifting ways for all groups of students across the school day" (Oyler, 2011). These are undoubtedly significant developments towards the goal of a fully inclusive environment.

But the stigma of the special education label remains. That label is used for teachers to say, "your kid" and have negative perceptions of these students in their classes. When teachers' lower expectations or special education simplifies the challenge, this contributes to the stigma (Kirby, 2016). It also impacts the learning-disabled student to feel that their academic abilities are inferior. In this researcher's experience, when SETs interview students to see what their special education label means, they often say, "I don't know" or even reply, "it means I'm dumb," leading one to question the whole idea of labels.

Yet once one questions the label, they are challenging the entire special education system. After all, these labels provide the money needed to provide services and even the researcher's

job. RTI has assisted this high school in rethinking how to meet the needs of all students and is helpful in changing the school's perspective about them. With its emphasis on the instructional tools and not the disability, RTI is helping to develop discourse about the construct of disability as it relates to student achievement and instruction (Kirby, 2016). Teachers need scheduling models that create time to be "prepared with new tools needed to meet the needs of today's high school students, and they also must be prepared in the new ways they must work together to use the tools and strategies available to them" (Wallace, Anderson, & Bartholomay, 2002). Much of the SET's time in this high school is spent with students without labels, as the team works to assist any student of need in their grade level. It has become so much a pattern of operation that many SETs do not even know which students they work with are in special education. Perhaps this is the "radical but necessary transformation," which provides education for all students in an obvious yet complicated answer to meeting the needs of all students (Kirby, 2016). "enabling ALL students to succeed in a changing world."

The Connecting Relationship for Transformational Change

Often students with disabilities receive limited individualized attention in typical high school settings (McKenna, 2013); therefore, the SET assisting outside of class can provide the student with a stronger social identity. The conceptual role of a teacher as a student advocate and mentor meets the guidelines of social justice ideals. As the teacher encourages student development, this will help to motivate the student, providing a sense of identity. The teacher needs to be intent on delivering instructional equity as a moral necessity, nurturing student motivation to achieve attainable individual goals. By considering the needs of the student and giving them voice, the student with disabilities can be empowered for educational progress with purpose. In the SDR setting, the SET's commitment to educational equity and success can be shared with the student to make a transformational change.

In small group and one-on-one instruction, the SET is in the prime location to use their specialized skills and special need sensitivity for maximum effect. Releasing the co-taught SETs from the classroom provides more flexibility with staffing and time, which are significant barriers to proper progress monitoring (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). By providing targeted instruction in the SDR, SETs can make authentic assessment of students with disabilities through constant progress monitoring to provide learning information which will guide further instruction toward skill goals. The student learning information can assist instructional decisions as the academic teacher meets with the SET to modify and review the curriculum for differentiated instruction and authentic assessment. Increasingly, academic teachers are trained with these skills through special education university preparation, veteran teachers witness the latest batch of teachers adjusting to meet the needs of their students much differently than just five years ago.

The future vision of ICM is to direct endeavors to that radical transformational vision that is being revealed when examined with a social justice lens to develop a theoretical framework. It concerns the almost utopian ideal of creating an environment where students' needs can be met, resulting in empowering a formerly marginalized group of individuals (Kirby, 2016). Teachers need to take the responsibility to create supportive environments, acting as "inventive pragmatists" (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994) who recognize the need for change. Growing in knowledge and ability, students can be positively impacted by the "transformational experiences" (Giangreco, 1993) of teachers who are willing to become champions of social justice.

The Educational Environment as a Space for Social Justice

It is the SET's responsibility to ensure that the classroom is a space for student equity and equality. Building on the foundation of critical educational pedagogy from the works of Giroux and Friere to pursue social justice, SETs can not only provide access and opportunity but work for compensation to empower students of disability through critical reflection. The SDR can be considered an emancipatory, democratic classroom space where student voice is respected,

facilitating learning instead of the teacher-centered Frierian "banking" model of education. By working with the student to achieve realistic academic outcomes aligned to transitioning to vocational aptitudes, teachers can support goals for success. The relationship between the teacher and the student can be one of critical educational reflection as they both share the responsibility of curricular decisions. In this method of praxis, the student can make an impact on society as a transformative means of empowerment, "to enable students to become critical agents capable of linking knowledge to social responsibility, and learning to democratic social change" (Giroux, 2004). Teachers, as social justice educators, using the liberating space of the full inclusion classroom without the stigma of labels (Caldwell, 2011), can challenge perceptions of inequality and oppression. Rather than dividing students into categories that cause stigma, schools need to consider how to integrate support resources for ALL students (Gabel & Connor, 2008; Shogren et al., 2015). The student's self-esteem is also bolstered by eliminating the special education label, which can become a form of oppression by prejudice from peers and teacher perception. This liberatory class space can be empowering for students as SETs perform the role of a visionary activist for social justice, as mentioned by Bree Picower (2012), becoming an educator that works both inside and outside the classroom for social justice.

The subjective social standards and oppressive judgment from categorical identification of those with disabilities are cause for social reform and teacher action; yet, social justice is often a theoretical, abstract idea which may leave teachers feeling overwhelmed by literature, thereby finding the practice of teacher activism a daunting task (Picower, 2012) or unsure exactly how to implement empowerment practices in education. On top of this, the power of the law stands with the federal (medical) definitions of disability based on a deficit-based understanding. This difference in interpretation leads to a different instructional focus for students with disabilities and continues a system of oppression. But if the educational environment is viewed as a social justice frontier, the SET relationship can be liberating and productive due to the supportive,

caring interactions which lead to student success. This student/teacher relationship encourages students to trust and builds their self-esteem. It is essential to view students from an asset value approach where the focus is placed on the gifts of the individual instead of the shortcomings. Annamma states that "ability and dis/ability are perceived and created based on ideologies of race and located within social and institutional structures as well as personal attitudes" (Annamma, Conner & Ferri, 2013). With a positive self-view, disability could be reframed from its oppressive, negative connotation to be claimed as a positive aspect of identity and point of pride (Caldwell, 2011). Teachers can embrace a critical pedagogy where they seek what is best for the students and encourage a social change of perspective. In the book *Disability Studies and the Inclusive Classroom*, Baglieri and Shapiro (2017) encourage educators to consider "a critical consciousness of how children with disabilities are disabled in school, how children become disabled by school, and how we may work together to seek emancipatory experiences in education" (p. 16). This knowledge will undoubtedly impact the potential for transformative change.

Critical scholars question the very foundations of special education, questioning areas relevant to this research, such as the segregated special education classrooms and interventions aimed at specific deficits. These supports are based on a medical model where disability is within the individual as something to be fixed (Connor, 2013), and designated for the school's intervention system. In the medical model, the focus is on the individual as the site of the problem, and education practices are developed to prioritize remediation of disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 6). The medical model is the dominant perspective about disability in schools with SETs having the job of fixing or curing the disability as their primary focus in the child's education. There is much to learn from the DSE scholars by trying to avoid stigmatizing difference and combating ableism with equal educational opportunities. The debate about disabilities is strengthened by scholarship that "encourages dialogue and embraces pluralistic

values" (Baglieri et al., 2011). DSE is less interested in improving "special" education and more interested in improving education for all (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2017, p. 12). It is possible to use DSE applications to the curriculum as well as access by answering their call for Universal Design and differentiated instruction in the classroom. The integration of the disability studies' pragmatic, instructional, historical, and sociocultural factors could be considered as part of any social justice reform movement.

Combining Theoretical Positions

Combining the philosophical foundations of disabilities in special education with disability studies into a central vision for the implementation of SDR instructional support could provide a roadmap for combining these disparate ideas. Research from both special education and disability studies can provide critical information and insights for supporting students with disabilities (Kuo, 2015). By considering both schools of thought, better-informed services and considerations will be provided to students with disabilities. Primarily, from a social justice perspective, both value the educational rights of the student. A solution for a workable framework for SETs at this high school is to combine the call for differentiated instruction and universal design as a part of the disabilities theorists' perspective on an overall view while implementing the focused research-based intervention as part of special educational consideration. Universal design provides access to academic instruction to enable all students to meet educational goals and create classroom communities to benefit all students (Baglieri et al., 2011). Differentiated instruction allows for meeting the needs of a full range of student diversity by "teachers proactively modify curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities, and student products to address the diverse needs" (Tomlinson, 2003). Providing these methods of pedagogy will release the student from excessive academic demands while both informing and allowing the SET to provide focused instruction.

DSE praxis is to promote school inclusivity and access, using a social construction of disability and a rejection of the medical model. DSE challenges the current laws based upon the deficit-based views of disability, which fail to consider disability as an equally valid way of being. Disability studies generate knowledge about macro-level processes such as how "societal attitudes about diversity intersect with disability issues" (Baglieri et al., 2011). Federal policies have failed to transform general education instructional practices and taken for granted societal views of disability, even though students with disabilities have been provided support (Ferri, 2015). Therefore, action research in the special education field must begin with the difficult task of understanding the current definitions of disability as it relates to education and also engaging with disability as a social construct, one that limits the individual's status and opportunity.

Analyzing these theoretical positions, this researcher discovered the following distinctive philosophical elements of special educational pedagogy: first, the medical model definition which governs the understanding of disability, secondly, the oppression of the disabled as expressed by DSE theorists, and lastly, the frustration of SETs to find that middle ground, as they struggle to fight against and uphold a system of oppression and redemption.

Looking at special education as a critical scholar, it appears the first step is to examine what constitutes a disability and how it is identified. The expanding definition of the Autistic Disorder spectrum and the growing number of identified students with disabilities attest to society's propensity to categorize and label difference within a scientific medical model. The growth in labeling everyone is part of a socially and politically concept of disability based upon changing, even arbitrary norms. At the secondary level, students themselves see the label as oppressive, often rejecting accommodations due to the deficit-based value that is determined by a setting or instruction outside of the classroom. The pejorative use of "Sped" or "Special" and the changing definitions is evidence of the continuing social construct of disability in terms of labeling as "other." Clearly, defining and categorizing students against standardized norms is

problematic, as demonstrated by the over-representation of students of color within special education. Although beneficial for providing rights to students, the system of special education continues to marginalize many by reifying human differences based on deficit-based social structures, contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline, and negatively impacting future vocational opportunities. The subjective social standards and oppressive judgment from school personnel identification of those with disabilities is certainly an issue for further study.

Secondly, the education of students with disabilities needs to be considered from a social justice perspective. The current movement towards full inclusion continues to reframe educational practices, but it also raises more difficult questions. Using DSE as a lens, Annamma's (2013) concept of "ableism" is demonstrated through paternalistic monitoring and managing students with disabilities who are "unable to attend to their own needs and learning." DSE allows for other conceptualizations of disability, which in term can help educators look at disability as a natural form of variation instead of a human deficit (Connor, 2019). In the inclusive classroom of ICM, ableism, and deficit-based assessment can be avoided by teachers using universal design and differentiated instruction with targeted support structures to cover the broadest range of support for all students. On a schoolwide level, related issues of insufficient funding, using culturally unresponsive curricula, and inadequate teacher preparation as areas requiring intervention to eradicate oppressive processes (Annamma, 2013).

Lastly, SETs are looking to find their place in this system, working to find a balance between advocating for the accommodation of the special needs of the student while simultaneously being committed to holding these students to meeting the proficiency "norms" of performance. The oppressive nature of the deficiency-based standards causes considerable damage to the identity of the learning support student and situates the problem within the child. Students are provided remedial class periods as a remedy to, in effect, "cure" their learning problem. Having a remedial class can deprive these students of class periods where they could be

expanding their high school experience with experiences in art, music, and other electives, which would provide enrichment to their high school education. To meet the curricular demands at the secondary level, SETs provide consultation/collaboration with the classroom academic teacher to modify or adapt requirements to allow the student with disabilities to participate with their peers in the general education class. The interpretation of these accommodations most often falls to "extended time" at the high school level. Playing a game of constant catchup wears the student down and discourages them as they spend more time on a subject they like least. It also frustrates the SET as they see much of these assignments as "busy work" or mindless activity worksheets involving no student learning. Assignments are prioritized according to points rather than the importance of knowledge. A SET will often advocate for the special education student, requesting exemption or modification of expectations for a grade. The oppressive experience this system has on special needs students also needs the representation of SETs to amplify the voices of those with disabilities.

Yet many of these oppressive curricular and academic demands could be eliminated if the teacher used universal design and differentiation in the classroom. Providing this in-class accommodation would leave the SET free to provide focused remedial instruction and pre-emptive assistance in classwork. This support could be liberating, presented to those students who desire additional instruction. If offered to all students, the stigma and placement of these services would eliminate the recognition of pejorative labels.

Summary

Literary scholarship is rife with pertinent discussion on how to best interpret and define special education instruction to be relevant to 21st-century learning. In a practical sense, the vision of the SDR has strong scholarly support for this new direction in navigating the best course of pedagogy for students with disabilities. By having SETs target instruction to meet the

students' area of need rather than merely providing accommodations in the classroom will enable

students to gain the confidence to find success in the regular education setting. These skills will

serve them as they transition to postsecondary careers or college. But perhaps of equal

importance is the relational connection of having a teacher encourage and assist students in

achieving these goals (Kelly & Zhang, 2016) should help improve performance, motivation, and

attendance. Without the stigma of a label, students will be proud of their achievement as they

perform to the level of their non-disabled peers and fade to mastery of the essential academic

skill instruction. Support for academic and transitional goals, enhanced by the consultative nature

of the student/teacher relationship should assist a student in finding success in achievement and

the accountability could help to improve motivation to attend school. Teachers trained by

professional development of high-quality behavioral skills and support techniques will allow

them to implement student interventions effectively. Collaborating as a professional learning

community, teachers can grow in their knowledge and teaching skills. This role of being an

active, continuous learner will also set a model for students to emulate.

When examining the theoretical position of inclusion, particularly the special education

service delivery system of the ICM, it is imperative to keep the student as the center of the

discussion. Researching the literature inevitably leads to the more significant questions of not

only whether co-teaching is an effective means of meeting student needs, but how students are

identified and why students are held to these standards. Could this be a form of institutionalized

oppression? ICM endeavors to provide full inclusive access and specially designed support to

learning disabled and other low performing students without stigmatizing them by label

segregation, yet the push for academic success to meet high-performance measures can be a form

of oppression for students who do not meet the normalizing standards. The SET needs to be an

advocate for these students, building relationships, providing a liberating space for learning, and

encouraging a positive self-concept. Perhaps in this way, SETs can combine the foundation of the medical deficit-based model with the philosophy of disability studies.

Above all, research resoundingly affirms that a safe environment and trusting relationship must be established with the students and the teachers for effective intervention (Bartholomew & DeJong, 2017). With the support of SET consultants, academic teachers will have the ability to maintain their high academic standards while enabling special education students access to a non-discriminatory classroom of their peers. With SDR instruction, students will gain self-esteem as they overcome skill deficits to perform to the level of their non-disabled peers. SETs advocating for students in a consultative relationship with their teachers will provide students assistance in meeting academic and transitional goals. In these ways, this promotion strategy of providing individualized skill instruction should assist this high school in obtaining favorable outcomes.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

This research investigated the problem of skill development using a schoolwide focus to determine the effects of an innovative service delivery system which provided focused support to increase student performance. The use of action research proved to be the most suitable in achieving these goals. Action research is an ideal method for teachers and others in the learning environment to gather information about learning and practice for the purpose of effecting improvement in school educational practices that will ultimately improve student outcomes (Mills, 2018, p. 10). Instead of a search for generalizability of data for defining educational "Truth," action research was suitable for democratic inquiry into the effects of the educational intervention with the purpose of taking action to make positive change in the local context of the school (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 26; Mills, 2018, p. 161). This is particularly relevant in this case with the researcher as part of the educational team. The power of action research is not in the generalizability but "relevance of the findings of the researcher or the audience of the research" (Mills, 2018, p. 162).

The collaboration and partnership of SETs in the research helped to define this study as action research, through the iterative process of problem-posing, knowledge creation, and action-taking cycles (Brydon & Maguire, 2009). This methodology lends itself to pragmatic solutions by a group effort to act upon immediate, relevant data. Action research proved an effective collaborative strategy to not only to build knowledge in the field of inclusion, but to find practical solutions and actions to take to resolve this school's current educational issues. This method revealed current instructional issues that teachers face, using an educational process where the participants were engaged in improving their work environment.

In an effort to improve educational praxis, this study was part of an action research iterary process of implementation, evaluation, and reflection. As the research moved into reflection, deeper philosophical questions arose which demanded attention. This consideration of social justice should not have been a surprise, for Brydon and Maquire (2007) argue that all research is a political action due to knowledge dealing with the distribution and power. The intentional focus of this collaborative research was to make structural and systemic changes which could positively impact the students, and the student's position as a victim of oppression came to light. With a mindset of what is best for the students, this action research could be used by SETs as a vehicle for liberatory action for social change. The research exposed questions of philosophical issues such as social justice and emancipation which, if acted upon, could provide an opportunity for the school to make transformative pedagogical change.

The focus for analysis in this study was the individual teacher responses to the survey questions and focus group discussion. The special and regular education perspectives were intended to reveal the value of the instructional model and the direct impact on student engagement and motivation. The experiences that the teachers have had throughout the year enabled them to present a perspective that reveals the struggles and rewards of meeting the needs of the disabled and at-risk students. This focus supported the purpose of developing instructional support for students of need and providing the contribution that the teacher relationship brings to student engagement. Anticipating the unforeseen obstacles and issues that arose during implementation, the action research methodology used to garner teacher perspectives provided a means where areas of challenge were addressed efficiently to improve special education and interventional service delivery.

This study was framed about a series of questions presented in a survey to special education and academic teachers to gather evidence of their implementation of the SDR and the concomitant relational experiences that impact student educational development. As opposed to

interviews, questionnaires are generally accepted as part of the school culture and allow the researcher to quickly collect large amounts of data (Mills, 2018, p. 180). The teachers were part of the staff where the research was conducted, both special education and academic teachers with past experience in traditional co-teaching ninth through twelfth grades. The focus group follow-up provided data through a valuable interview technique that is particularly useful to lead to a shared understanding of the questions posed by the researcher (Mills, 2018, p. 123).

A team of SETs worked as a team over the past five years involved in implementing the ICM, overcoming challenges, and helping to develop a robust framework of support for special education students. Guided by the mantra, "What is best for our students?," the incremental rollout of increasing inclusive services has served the school well, having administrative and community support. Progress has been made through the years of having seasoned and new teachers providing insightful perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the model from a utilitarian "what works" team process. At the conclusion of the year, the data was shared with administration and the others in the special education department to establish credibility, an action particularly applicable when performing schoolwide action research (Mills, 2018, p. 157).

Description of Setting/Context

This study was conducted at a mid-sized, predominantly white northeastern high school in a large suburban township, the district has an average family household income of about $40,000. Yet, a fifth of the students receive free or reduced lunches, signifying they are at or below the poverty line. The high school has a racial demographic of 93% white, with 2% of Asian, Black, and Hispanic races. The high school consists of grades nine through twelve, with over 2,000 students and over one hundred faculty and staff members. About 150 special education students are serviced by the school with the support of 18 SETs. Roughly 150 students or 11% of the students in this high school are labeled "special ed," "sped," "at-risk," "learning disabled," "emotionally disturbed" or "autistic," close to the national average. Of these students,

a majority have difficulty with work completion, specifically seen in the inability to plan, focus, organize, and complete tasks. Almost all of the students labeled OHI (Other Health Impairment) and particularly those with ADHD struggle with aspects of this weakness. Outside of this, another 5% or more have Chapter 15 or 504 accommodations for "Protected Handicapped" students. There was also a small group of students who were work avoidant "reluctant learners" or lacking skills for reasons unknown, labeled "at-risk" for dropping out, and thereby given intervention support from SETs. All in all, about 100 students were serviced weekly in an SDR placement during their free periods.

Study Participants and Selection

Participants for the surveys were recruited from current special and general education SDR teachers in grades nine through twelve. All teachers who chose to voluntarily participate in a questionnaire were included in this process and confirmed by a letter of consent to participate in each survey. A link to a google form questionnaire was provided, where participants could make anonymous responses to open-ended questions. Fourteen responses were made to the questionnaire: two academic teachers and twelve SETs providing skill instruction in Executive Function, Math, Reading, Writing or a combination of these areas. Members of the focus group were chosen from voluntary respondents who answered affirmatively to participate and also signed the consent form. For the sake of discussion efficiency, the focus group was limited to seven members. The group leader monitored the focus group without the presence of the researcher.

The Researcher's Role

As the research developed, the researcher continued to fulfill his role at the high school as a special educator and certified English teacher working with the twelfth-grade English department supporting all the main-streamed students as per the ICM. The researcher worked in a transformational environment where teacher ideas for educational improvement were valued

and supported by the administration and staff, who approved the steps of development. As a high school SET, the researcher laid the groundwork for the SDR program of providing students direct instruction with strategies for success. The SDR is the final piece of the ICM system, a program in the seventh year of implementation. Significant effects of the researcher's role was only in the initial establishment of the ICM and SDR. Developing inclusive support is of phenomenological interest for the researcher, having previously approached the subject in the *Preventing School Failure* journal article (2019) "Collaborative co-teaching models and specially designed instruction in secondary education: A new inclusive consultation model." The ICM system fit the school's increasing special education needs with flexibility that allowed new teaching allocation and duties without impacting the budget. Logistically, the research took place at the high school, interviewing teachers of Skill Development Rooms (SDRs), scattered informal areas as opposed to the traditional Resource Room.

The researcher made substantial effort to avoid bias and influence on the data collection process. In this qualitative research, the researcher interacted with his peer SETs in the school setting; however, not in an influential or leadership role. Since this relationship could have impacted the findings, it was important for the researcher to practice reflexivity to keep from influencing the data (Bourke, 2014, p. 2). There was a deliberate effort to allow the process to unfold without influence and direction from the researcher. The researcher also maintained self-critique, examining how his involvement might influence the process and refraining from informal comment to peers on the research questions. The researcher in this study was one of several special education SDR teachers at the site where the study was conducted, and he did not have any positional advantage over the other teachers. All the study participants were also teachers of SDRs, but the researcher did not offer comment or participate in the surveys and the focus group. All SDR SETs were responsible for implementing the SDRs, aligning the IEP supports, maintaining progress monitoring, and making weekly connections with the student

participants. The SET's experience in this process yielded information for the research question

analysis of teacher roles and teacher parity purely on their responses to the established questions.

Instrumentation

This researcher built the research questions upon specific issues that came out of eight

professional learning community meetings run during the 2017-2019 school years. The meetings

consisted of SETs and often an administrative representative. These eight meetings discussed the

development of ICM as the model was expanded to all the high school grade levels and

disciplines as part of the transition from a traditional co-teaching model to the consultation

model. The issues which were concerning SET ICM duties and roles, instructional focus and

supports, as well as logistics in where to meet students to provide the support. During these

meetings, the freedom of expression and the recurrent intentional focus on solutions instead of

the typical teacher "gripe session." The PLC met to discuss instructional concerns and used the

meetings to build a "lessons playbook" of online resources. Most of these were executive

function (study skills and organization) provided by SETs for all special education students with

that need. The PLC helped matters to be resolved at least temporarily, and usually with an action

plan for resolution. For this research, the SDR issues were re-examined with the purpose of

looking at the effect of teacher relationships and their perceived role in running skill

development rooms. The current research examined the teachers' perspective through the mixed

methods of two questionnaires and a focus group. The survey questions and focus group review

protocol were established through member checks and an overview of the data by educational

peers in the doctoral cohort.

Procedures

Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kutztown University was

obtained to ensure the rights and welfare of the study participants. Application for research

permission contained the description of the project and its significance, methods, and procedures,

participants and identifiable data, and research design. The required information was shared with

the head principal who reviewed the proposal and verbally approved the request to research on

campus. The research was also discussed with the assistant principals who are involved in setting

logistical and administrative support for the SDR. Later, the interim high school head principal

also looked over the materials, and after discussion gave written consent to conduct the study.

The survey questions and focus group discussion points were established after being reviewed

with the principals and the special education team leader. The team leader also served as the

facilitator of the focus group.

Data Collection

The researcher administered two brief surveys to evaluate specific conditions such as the

actual implementation of the model, the challenges or rewards for teachers and students, and

areas for SDR instructional improvement (Appendices C and E). Each questionnaire took

voluntary respondents about ten to fifteen minutes. The first survey was provided at the end of

the spring semester one year after the SDR was established, and then again at the end of the fall

semester of the following year after suggested changes were implemented.

Near the end of the year, a small number of survey completers were invited to participate in a

focus group discussion. Open-ended questions elicited the teachers' perspective on the impact

and efficacy of personal connection on student skill development. Also, the teachers' thoughts on

their responsibilities and roles, as well as the implementation of the SDR model itself, were

gathered as data (Appendices D and F).

The teacher survey and focus group data were collected for the purpose of exploring

teacher perception of their role in the process of addressing student needs, the effectiveness of

the model, and the perceived impact on the students. Also, information to determine teacher

perceptions of student improvement in areas of weakness were assessed through their reported

observations of the fading to mastery of specially designed instructional skills.

The nature and scope of this qualitative data are initiated through the anonymous surveys described above. The survey was followed by a separate request for participation in a focus group, which entailed having a half dozen participants answering provided questions in an informal recorded session in IPCs (Individual department Professional Centers) without the presence of the researcher. The researcher documented informal responses about the SDR program as outlined above with computer software. The focus group session lasted for approximately forty minutes.

Data Coding

The analysis of the data obtained from the surveys and focus groups occurred in iterative coding phases. Themes were compared and contrasted according to the perspective of the SET and general educator. Grade level, student special education designation, and SDR instructional focus were noted. The categories of SDR executive function, math, reading, and writing instruction were grouped for commonalities. Other factors involving the teachers' perspective of the relationship and their aptitude to develop this in only a twice-weekly period were considered.

It could have been possible to measure progress in these skill areas through progress monitoring, providing a quantifiable number. However, using quantitative academic grade performance or biweekly IEP progress monitoring data is not examined due to the many variables in grade performance and teaching pedagogy. Progress monitoring validity is compromised due to the increasing difficulty and levels of the tests and concepts learned, making it impossible to quantify rates of progress (Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2003). Also, not only do individual teachers vary considerably their grading process, but it has been shown by empirical research they vary in their ability to impact different student outcomes (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). Finally, another concern is the reliability of data to determine whether the students are maintaining previously mastered skills (Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2003). In light of these concerns, this study only generally addressed progress in student academic and skill goals to elucidate the role and

instructional experience of the SET who runs the SDR. This approach maintained focus on the instructional purpose of the instruction and the adherence to the specific skill sets.

Any identifying information collected was kept in a secure location, and only the researcher had access to the data. Participants were not individually identified in any publication or presentation of the research results. Aggregate data of the surveys and focus group was used. The signed consent form and assent form were kept separate from the data, making it impossible to link their responses to them. Quotes were transcribed from written or verbal responses that occurred in the focus group or informal discussion resulting from this work. Pseudonyms were used to protect the focus group participants' identities.

All data was kept in the researcher's possession to ensure confidentiality and followed the IRB protocol. All handwritten notes and journal entries were stored in a locked file drawer, with only the researcher having access to the records. The only individuals with access to an identifiable teacher data were the focus group participants and the researcher. Archival data of the researcher's typed notes from PLCs were saved in a password-protected computer. Audio recording of the focus group was conducted using a digital recorder software file provided by a focus group member. This file and digital responses were kept by the researcher to validate scoring and calculate inter-reliability statistics. Data collection was completed on November 30, 2019. After three years, digital data and audio will be permanently deleted, and all hard copies of data will be shredded.

Validity

As referenced by Mills (2018) in his text *Action Research* (p. 153), Guba's article "Criteria for Assessing the Trustworthiness of Naturalistic Inquiry" (1981) mentions the key criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These areas were addressed by this study with several applicable measures. For credibility, the prolonged participation in the study allowed the researcher to participate

actively in the setting for the school year as the data was being gathered. Having the use of critical friends to help the researcher reflect and develop insights was also invaluable to the process. Member checks were made as the data was shared with the participants. Triangulation to help credibility, dependability and confirmability was achieved by using the variety of open-ended questionnaires, survey questions, and focus group discussion. The descriptive comment data should allow for transferability to other high school settings. The candid comments could be relatable for SETs in other inclusive schools. The data is kept on file as an audit trail for dependability. Confirmability is accomplished by the reflexivity of allowing the participants and administration to discuss the data in seeking support for transformative system change. The history of the ICM has been one of small, determined steps forward while adapting to the needs and concerns of all stakeholders. The success of the SETs to meet the students' needs in a general way also attests to validity, at least in the eyes of administration, and SETs continue to examine and maintain yearly goals from IEP present levels of performance and short-term goals reflected in the quarterly progress monitoring. All these factors will add to the crystallization of information obtained to establish trustworthiness and generalization.

The dissertation team reviewed protocols before using them in the study. They also previewed the dissertation proposal chapters and gave guidance. The dissertation team consisted of three committee members who have experience in qualitative inquiry. One is a special education professor, highly qualified to offer valuable input, having experience teaching special education at the college level and general and special education, including teaching in co-taught settings in high school. Another professor has extensive administrative experience and knowledge of educational research, serving in the role of the district superintendent. The third is also a university professor and has published books and articles on related topics of differentiation and diversity. Also related to the university, inter-coder reliability was conducted with the assistance of two other doctoral students. This was a required assignment during a

course on methodology and part of the university's doctoral process. As the researcher worked

through the coding, definitions were developed which were then provided to the two students.

Using these codes and definitions, the doctoral students used the working codes to "blindly"

determine the categories for three pages of question responses and focus group statements. Both

doctoral students matched the application of statements to codes with a strong degree of

consistency with the researcher's interpretation. Using this information, the researcher sharpened

the focus of the categories and codes to unify interpretation of the data.

Some critical friends worked with the researcher in this setting. As part of a special

education department that has been working together for over ten years, there is a rapport,

encouragement, and shared responsibility of common values meeting the needs of the students.

The critical friends helped to arrange the meeting and the recording of the focus group so that the

researcher's influence was minimized. They also later shared in discussion of the topics as the

main issues were categorized, helping to ensure that the codes did not have researcher bias.

Sharing a common desire to make change for the good of the whole group, they were a strong

support for action research. When teachers engage fully, using the tools of respectful discourse

and investigation, transformative change can occur. All the original members received the

outline the researcher sent and the request to focus on three or four particular points which we

plan to address with the department special education director. In informal conversation, many

SETs expressed appreciation for the researcher's former efforts and a willingness to move

forward with this research. They wondered what could practically be accomplished with their

limitations but were counting on the researcher to help fix things since so many were under stress

and because "this was your (the researcher's) baby originally!" They appreciated his approach

and wished that the researcher's method would have been used to transition to the SDR

components gently with the pilot program that had originally been planned. The intention to

voice concerns, and then present them to the special education supervisor to make institutional

change was empowering and positive. The decisions made through surveys and focus group reflection are informed through this research, providing immediate local impact. The effectiveness of the SDR instruction is being examined reflectively to ensure success and overcome obstacles, for teacher abilities and fidelity could impact the success or failure of this instructional support.

Summary

The medium suburban high school in this study was a perfect setting to do transformational action research. As the high school moves to a consultation inclusion model, about a dozen SETs are helping to develop new roles to better service the special education students. These SETs are an integral part of supplying inclusive special education support and instruction to students with disabilities in separate instructional rooms. Interventional support is provided in small group settings of the SDR, along with skill instruction in executive function skills, reading, writing, and math. SDR teachers voluntarily participated in a questionnaire as part of the process. The researcher, also a high school SET, laid the groundwork for the SDR program of meeting student need with direct instruction and strategies for success. The SDR is the final piece of the ICM system, a program in the seventh year of implementation. The current research examined the SETs' perspective through the mixed methods of surveys, questionnaires, and a focus group. The SET survey-questionnaire and focus group data were collected to explore teacher perception of their role in the process of addressing student needs, the effectiveness of the model, and the perceived impact on the students.

This action research study is crucial to the development of inclusive special education services. The data and findings reviewed and discussed will shape the model going forward. Action research is certainly appropriate and even beneficial for its iterary process of implementation, evaluation, and reflection. Through analysis and reflection of what is working and what is not, pragmatic solutions are developed by a group effort to act upon the immediate,

relevant data. Following critical criteria of trustworthiness in qualitative action research, the researcher followed university protocols, and validity was ensured through inter-coder reliability and critical friends. This action research is often participatory as part of the special education department development of secondary inclusion led by a group of teachers working together for over ten years. The researcher's role is one of collaboration between researcher and participants in posing the questions and helping to guide the overall ICM vision. Through thinking on these questions, social justice issues come to the forefront, encouraging special educators to look at how their work can be emancipatory for students who are marginalized by failure to maintain standardized norms of performance. Perhaps the SET can use their role to empower and equip students with disabilities for success.

This qualitative study examining perceptions of academic teachers and SETs in the implementation of instructional support should add to the research knowledge as well as have practical application immediately in the school special education service delivery. The generalization of this information can be readily implemented in other schools across the nation. The teacher to student connection demonstrates the power of a caring teacher in enhancing student engagement and motivation. Through the survey and focus group process, teacher perceptions of the impact of these connections and the rewards and obstacles they face in implementing this service model will supply useful information for reflective practices leading to transformative change.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter outlines the data collection and coding analysis process used to develop the thematic codes using grounded theory methodology. Following the explanatory schema, the researcher presents description and discussion of the codes as they relate to the research questions. The result of this action research was conducted to answer the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do SETs fulfill their role in providing SDR student instruction?

Research Question 2: How do SETs perceive the impact of SDR support for the students?

The emergent codes are illustrated by teacher responses emphasizing key themes from the open-ended questions, the survey questions, and focus groups. The themes related to the first research question concerning teacher roles is split into two subcategories - the SDR process and the SDR role. The themes relating to the second research question about student support are split into three subcategories of skill instruction, academic remediation, and teacher/student relationship. Following this presentation of data, a section outlines findings concerning the overall teacher perceptions of aspects of the SDR - the vision, implementation, SET role, skill instruction, academic remediation and the teacher/student relationship.

Data Collection Summary

Twelve SET and two academic teacher participants responded to the first survey (Appendix C). All responses were anonymized to protect their identities. The survey questionnaire with SETs served as the primary source of research data. This survey contained a few general survey questions designed to collect teacher perception of the impact of the SDR, with open-ended questions. The survey specifically asked if they made a personal connection with the students and the impact, whether the SDR was effective in supporting the students' IEP

goal, and whether it met the student needs. Then it asked for challenges/obstacles and rewards/benefits of SDR for teachers and students. Finally, it asked for suggestions for improvement and other comments. All questions were answered by the respondents. Thirteen out of fourteen respondents gave suggestions for improvement, and eight respondents gave added comments.

The focus group discussion centered around SET perceptions of their role and responsibilities served as supporting research data. The focus group were asked what SETs learned through the experience, their responsibilities, their role and the role of the academic teacher in their room. Also, questions were asked about perceptions of the students' respect, effectiveness of the intervention, and the teacher/student relationship. Finally, the group was asked for suggestions for improvement and where they saw the future of inclusive support for SETs (Appendix D). All members participated in responding to the questions. The focus group involved seven anonymous SET team members, one serving as facilitator and one as recorder. The facilitator reported that there were four men and three women on the team, following guidance of the researcher's group protocol (Appendix G). After the focus group was recorded, the information was transcribed manually by the researcher, and then reviewed for emerging themes. Following this exploratory method of developing codes from similar SET open-ended responses, the researcher also utilized grounded theory methodology through the developmental process of discovering emergent issues from the data.

Six SET teacher participants responded to the follow-up survey (Appendix E). All responses were anonymized to protect their identities. This second survey questionnaire with SETs expanded on the previous research data of teacher perception of the impact of the SDR, also with open-ended questions. The survey specifically asked the classification status of the SDR students, and how the SDR was actually implemented at this point in the year. Once again,

it asked for challenges/obstacles and rewards/benefits of SDR for teachers and students. Finally,

it asked for more suggestions for improvement. All respondents replied to every question but the

last; three respondents wrote their suggestions to that question.

Coding Analysis

All teacher responses from the surveys were coded manually during open coding. The

researcher coded the survey responses and analyzed for categories or themes. Due to the specific

nature of the questions, the topics for study were outlined fairly easily, with categories of SET

perceptions of the implementation, process, and roles being addressed. reflecting the intent of the

survey and focus group questions. The survey responses and focus group transcript were

uploaded into computer software, Atlas.ti, for analysis. The researcher searched to find sub-

categories emerging from the similarities in the open codes as part of the process of grounded

theory methodology. From the survey data, fifty-three codes emerged. Using Atlas.ti data

organization software, the researcher took all the vignettes and the open codes and re-grouped

them into more specific categories. Each vignette was reviewed for relationships with other

codes. Grouping of the selected codes emerged from the process and the relationships of the

selected codes then formed the start of theoretical coding. Comparing the focus group responses

with the survey question codes helped the researcher to remain consistent in emphasizing key

points during coding and allowed sixteen themes to develop from the responses.

The themes developed from responses to the survey followed the research questions and the

survey questions' topical inquiry:

- the SDR process, SDR intended purpose, implementation, and future vision of SDR

- SET role fulfillment, teacher benefits, challenges, SET modifications and academic

    teacher's participation

- student IEP goal skill instruction, student skill benefits and challenges

- academic content remediation/homework, academic benefits and challenges

- teacher/parent relationship and teacher/student relationship

The survey responses were coded manually according to five major categories: SET Process;

SET Role; SDR Skill Instruction; SDR Academic Remediation; SDR Teacher/Student

Relationship. These categories formed the basis for the findings and guided expanded research in

these areas (Appendix F).

Explanatory Schema

In the SDRs, fourteen SETs provided specific instruction to about sixty students in areas

of disability to enable improvement in areas of weakness by the fading to mastery of specially

designed instructional skills. In this location, SETs instruct students in areas of weakness as

determined by the IEP goals and monitor their progress individually, while also organizing and

maintaining records. During the open period in their schedules, special education students and

others of need were scheduled to access these resources in the SDR. This resource solution with

instruction in IEP goals is critical to the success of the students because it facilitates the

transition to college and career readiness. The school's yearly movement towards full inclusion

and the support that SETs provide have been performed incrementally by planning, pilot

program, partial implementation by subject, then full grade implementation. At each juncture, the

teachers reflect upon the development and modify to best adapt the instruction to the school's

resources. The SETs were provided with planning time and peer-shared online instructional

resources to help meet the new initiative. Administration worked out the logistics, delegating

SDR classrooms to be shared with the support of academic teachers. The special education

leadership team provided a shared Google special education classroom with online links to

instructional attachments that were updated intermittently. Finally, a major source of support

came from other SETs who provided hard copies of instructional materials from their areas of

study.

The current dissertation's focus of study reviews data which reflects the teachers'

successes, challenges, and elements which are crucial for the implementation of the model. It is

being found that assisting these students with work completion and basic homework monitoring

duties often dominates the SDR, and this takes time away from spending time in special

education instruction. For the very needy special education students, the question becomes "what

is of higher importance - grades or skills?" The qualitative data gleaned from teacher surveys,

interviews, and team meeting notes has substantially driven and informed the educational

decisions and direction of this special education service delivery model.

An ICM/SDR leadership team was developed with the special education department

leader and eight other SETs. They meet each semester to review the implementation plan and

improve upon it. They also discuss practices and procedures to see if it upholds the school's

mission to enable student success and to ensure effective implementation of the initiative. The

results of meetings are discussed with the administration and the special education director. A

work in progress, nine team meetings with SETs have occurred so far, and administration has

been supportive in supplying logistical measures. Through these meetings and other special

education in-services have provided the rationale and materials for implementation. The

meetings address challenges and brainstorms solutions. SETs have continued to develop the SDR

model, now in its second year. The process is driven by a yearly discussion with the principals,

using input from the special education department leader. The reflective surveys and focus group

notes obtained for this study contain the data which was examined.

Research Question Codes

The findings of major frustrations, impediments, rewards, benefits, as well as suggestions for properly implementing skill instruction in SDRs for students with minor learning disabilities are described below. The issues are categorized by teacher comments which explain their perspective and thoughts. After a process of coding analysis, the SET responses were categorized according to the two main concepts stated in the research questions:

1. "SET Role" codes

2. "SDR Support" codes

These codes contain the central ideas of the data's sixteen coded themes within the concepts.

1: SET Role Codes

The SET responses in this area concern their implementation, purpose, and future process of running the SDR. These comments present the SETs' logistical perspective in planning and organizing the new program, founded in the SETs' understanding of the intended ICM instructional purpose. Ultimately, these comments reveal the SETs' philosophy behind their position in meeting needs for students with disabilities.

Teacher Role codes were focused on the SET perspectives of two central developmental ideas that emerged from the data: the experience of the "SDR Process" in establishing the SDR according to the ICM intention and the "SDR SET Role" that the SETs developed for themselves as they faced challenges and modified those intentions.

SET Process.

Implementation. Teachers faced several challenges and obstacles as they implemented SDR. They felt the lack of or need for tools and required steps for running the SDR. These are challenges from the beginning including training needs or skills. A typical response was, "I didn't have a working tool box for all areas that needed to be addressed: Executive functioning, math,

reading, and writing." The SDR model was put in place without running a pilot program, and with only two days of summer preparation. Logistics were accomplished by a principal without teacher input.

The expectation of having the academic teacher's coverage for the period is an issue that affected the co-teaming relationship. These coverages were intended to fill in when SETs had other responsibilities. The relationship between the two teachers varied. Most of the time, academic teachers would just be there for coverage when the SET was absent. This is reflected by the eventual process shown in this comment, "So most days it was just me and my kids and he would just stick his head in sometimes and just say, Everything okay?"

SETs worked together to contribute to making the SDR work. They made modifications as it went along by making proposed instruction and offering suggestions for future steps. Group responses demonstrated their perception of the SDR model, its goals and function. They also considered the past as well as future direction of the SET's role and responsibilities. However, overall, it was "building the plane while flying it." This made it very difficult and elicited negative responses. A typical negative response was, "It was everybody kind of flew by the seat of their pants, which is what it is. But this wasn't fine for me."

The SET's experience of confusion points to not knowing how to implement the program. This can lead to latent issues of poor communication or misinformation. Not only did teachers have confusion over the process, but even the students themselves were wondering what the SDR purpose was. A teacher commented, "What I learned was that kids didn't know what it was - the biggest thing I got from day one. Most of the kids had no idea why they were in the room, and I don't know…"

Teachers outlined the experience in instructing the student in their area of disability, areas defined by IEP goals in the following areas: math, reading, writing, and executive function. Yet

they struggled to teach the skill sets when the students themselves did not appreciate the support, or even know they needed it. Many students did not know "...why they were in there, or why they even had to work on those IEP goals…or even knowing what their IEP goals were."

Purpose. The experience of SDR required the SETs to make modifications and adjust their instructional focus. The reality of the operation of the SDR became apparent after several weeks and the teachers' thoughts on how SDR was actually run are included in this category. One teacher reflected a common feeling by commenting,"we were a dumping ground the entire year for students."

The SDR teachers' process suggestions for improving the model, including what to avoid and questions needing answers were instrumental in making the SDR process work. They approached with a "can do" attitude and came to recognize how they could make the improvements in the best manner. One teacher said, "We need to figure out where we want to be at the end of the year with the kids to help us fill in the gaps at the beginning of the year."

Vision. An insightful comment came from a teacher who found themself frustrated by the difficulty of setting up the new system of instruction. She said, "SDR should be at the middle school level. It is rather late to start working on skill development at the HS level when it is not happening at the lower levels. Most students need tutor support or to work on HW and other assignments to pass their classes rather than working on developing their skills at this stage of the game."

SET Role.

Challenges. The SETs were given both specific and general instructional responsibilities. The teacher expectations of implementation were quickly covered in an overall sense with generic instructional tasks to be performed in small, fifteen minute increments. Still, they

struggled to accept their new expectations: "...we had to actually take time to prep, that's what we felt - me included, and the people I spoke to. It was an extra duty placed upon us."

The Chapter 15 and 504 plan students are those who receive specially designed instruction without the IEP support as well as behavioral students and at-risk students. These students were given to the teachers to instruct in SDRs without having any specific guidance. A teacher says, "I remember going to meetings or talking to parents. It seemed like they're more so for kids with chapter 15's and IEPs where parents expected like some sort of therapy session or like helping with anxiety and stuff."

Benefits. Being in a focused instructional setting provides benefits for student learning: "They have people that care about them individually that are trying to help them. It's better than being in a traditional study hall because they need that individual attention." And benefit was also found for the SETs teaching practice: "I do enjoy getting to work more one on one with students. The ICM model has removed much of this during my daily schedule so this is one of the few times I actually get to teach." Along with teaching students, the SET would often use the time for not only instruction in goals, but also in learning skills. When facing a new concept, they would share their approach to finding solutions, in effect modeling methods of learning, teaching the student how to independently gain knowledge. A SET teacher with an English background found herself teaching math SDR, not one of her strong points: "'I had a lot of math kids too on all different levels. And then I looked - and this sounds like a teachable moment - that I was like, "All right. I don't know, you don't know. What's our next step?" And then we looked at the tutoring and I was like, "OK...let's go - Authentic material." Then I'm just trying to teach them the learning skills saying, "I don't know what you don't know. What's our next step?"' In this manner, a shared learning experience provides a foundation for future learning experiences. Teachers also tried to complement the instructional content of the classroom

(authentic material) as much as possible. A teacher would "find the problem, work on a solution, using authentic materials."

Academic Teacher. To enable the possibility of meeting students for these small group instructional settings, logistics were arranged for use of classes which were during the tutoring time of academic teachers. In this way, the academic teacher shared their room with the SET, each providing instruction to their group of students. One SET mentioned an issue that arose: "I caught a little backlash from the regular teacher that I was sharing the room with because they felt that by me giving them (assistance), in their eyes, I was coddling them and not empowering them." The role of the SET was to instruct, but also to support the students with other academic or even social needs, whereas the academic teacher was providing remedial tutoring to achieve class standards. Another SET concurs with the academic teacher's misunderstanding and difference of perspective: There'd be times when I've been working with the kid to bring a forty-five percent in class up and get it up to like a sixty-five, and I feel like, "Look, you have a 65 for the quarter! All right! Good job!" High fives, like praising them because they worked so hard to get there. And then I got the regular teacher in the back going, "Well that's not good enough. Sixty-five shouldn't be what we're high-fiving about." And I'm like, can we not - only in my head - I'm going, what I do for a living, in my world a sixty-five is when I would do cartwheels, pat you on the back and then it's like a little victory that they worked so hard to do."

When discussing the shared room responsibilities (co-teaming), a teacher mentions, "We were able to, some of the time, we were able to tag team students' work...work with students on authentic material. There was a really good teacher in the room. His sole role was if I couldn't attend, he was there for attendance." The academic teacher provided the backup for the SET, which was a common occurrence, particularly for absence due to IEP meetings or student issues. Sometimes the academic teacher even developed a beneficial relationship - as a SET mentions,

"You develop friendships with colleagues that perhaps you had not had the chance to in the past." This was not always the case: "I'd say that my teachers that I worked with were fantastic and it was nice to have a backup in the event that you had an IEP meeting to attend, you had another class to give a test to, but not you. I know, I was lucky in that I had really good teachers in SDR, but you know, I don't think that was the way it was across the board" (light laughter).

Modifications. SETs began the year with a focus on student executive functioning skills as they relate to organization, work completion and study skills. The teachers transitioned as they saw fit to other learning objectives as demonstrated by this Writing SDR SET: "During the beginning of the school year we had some mini lessons on executive functioning and then on writing. Midway through the 1st Marking Period the main focus was on the completion of outstanding assignments for a number of the students in the room. Now I am doing a mini-lesson on (computer) writing prompts…" Or this Math SDR SET's process: "Check grades, Complete missing assignments, complete math progress monitoring, math worksheets if all other work is complete. Usually no phones. Sometimes they can listen to music with headphones if working diligently." However, the method of instruction was dependent entirely on the teacher's preference. During the focus group discussion, a SET mentions, "it was everybody doing their own thing, but it was never 'This is what you need to do.'"

2. SDR Support Codes

The SET responses in this area concern the instructional challenges and benefits of providing SDR for students with disabilities. In the survey question about the impact of SDr for student motivation and encouragement, teacher responses scored an average of 3.2 out of 5 or a 62% rating of effectiveness, demonstrating a slightly positive effect. The scores for meeting academic needs was less, at 2.4 or 48% effectiveness, and skill instruction effectiveness about the same at 2.3 or 46%. These scores reveal the truth in the comments that SETs made in open-

ended responses and focus group discussion. These comments present the SETs' actions to meet the demands of instructing in the student area of weakness, simultaneously endeavoring to meet their academic demands. This experience was also founded in the SETs' understanding of the intended ICM instructional purpose, with the added sense of responsibility to establish a working relationship with students and their parents. These comments reveal the SETs' philosophy behind their attitudes which determine their actions to meet needs for students with disabilities.

Student Support codes were focused on the SET perspectives of two central developmental ideas that emerged from the data: the benefits and challenges of "Skill Instruction" vs. "Academic Remediation" for students, and the "SDR Relationship" that the SETs tried to maintain with the students and their parents.

Skill Instruction.

Benefits. The ultimate stated purpose of SDR was to instruct the student in their area of weakness. This instructional piece addressed the student IEP goals, and was the final piece of the inclusive instructional model. SETs supported this by having special education students develop an awareness of their needs and know what accommodations were provided for them in the classroom. Self-advocating for needs is a crucial part of meeting special needs at the secondary level in preparation for transition to college or career. A teacher describes the process as,"I kind of printed their IEP goals for them so they can see why they were there and then I gave them a copy of their SDIs so that they knew what they're having." The students benefitted by "having one on one time with a teacher in a small setting, (where they) can ask questions, discuss issues, get problems resolved." And the specified instruction in the student area of weakness was succinctly described by a SET: "When working with them individually, students are able to learn a skill they need to be successful."

Challenges. A SET Math SDR teacher had some particular difficulties. She mentions,"We had three or four sections of math SDR where the kids were varied levels of math. It wasn't just all kids Algebra one or all kids Algebra two, like I had one kid in Algebra three senior topics, one kid in Geometry three, one kid in Algebra one and one kid in Algebra two and it was really hard to kind of cohesively help them." This will be a challenge which would need to be addressed by being sure math instruction was grouped effectively.

Another common opinion was shared about the effectiveness of SDR skill instruction at the late point in the student's education: "SDR should be at the middle school level. It is rather late to start working on skill development at the HS level when it is not happening at the lower levels, Most students need tutor support or to work on HW and other assignments to pass their classes rather than working on developing their skills at this stage of the game."

Academic Remediation.

Benefits. Although the SETs did attempt to focus on the area of weakness, the skill instruction would often get set aside in order to help the student meet academic demands. An assumption of many SETs is that the skills are developed in the general education classroom. This comment sums it up pretty well: "SDR is great on paper but without a set curriculum or lines to color within it is lost because as we as teachers get busy and the kids get bogged down, the skills towards IEP goals gets lost and the focus becomes, 'How can I help you be successful?'" From a pragmatic perspective, these kids do need someone to sit with them and work through worksheets and assignments as opposed to teaching them reading strategies and writing skills, etc. They are getting those skills in a regular education classroom." Another SET agrees yet goes further to explain the academic support as a "guided study hall," a concept mentioned several times by respondents: "Most students needed a guided, quiet place to work. I provided that more than making improvements on their academic needs." and reflected in this

comment as well, "They get some more one on one attention then they would in a general study hall."

Challenges. As mentioned in the previous skill instructional challenge, academic performance is the other investment of instructional time and SDR focus, and also the next logical step to be addressed. The instructional purpose of SDR requires determination of whether SDR is to be used for instruction in IEP skills or class reteaching, completing work for passing classes. This dissonance was a major theme for SETs. One said, "I want to go over this facet, with authentic material and the student's grade in class. Did that outweigh me taking 10 to 20 minutes going over multiplication tables if it was a math SDR?" At the heart of this issue is the question, "What is best for the student?" Most SETs made the decision to help the student pass academic classes over working on IEP goals. Another SET stated the challenge of doing what was best for the student in this way: "Being told (by admin) that you had to work on a specific deficit (math, reading, writing, EF) when the student was clearly failing classes and the student wanted to do work for the classes they owed work (this turned into a struggle and battle). This is when teachers started deviating from the plan. "How could we, as professionals, neglect this part of our job? We are here to help these children succeed in their classes!"

At issue was the completion of incomplete classwork and homework. This demand took precedence in the mind of the student, and often lack of completing classwork and homework was a causal aspect of being labeled with a disability. For this reason, many students did not even recognize what area of weakness or goals to improve in those areas. A SET explains, "The majority of students in SDR have difficulty completing their assignments in a timely manner. They want to use SDR time to complete these assignments. We are expected to be instructing these students on their IEP goals and it is very difficult to get them to comply when they want to complete their actual coursework."

Another teacher describes this situation with frustration: "It's a never-ending cycle. They are so backed up w/ work because they don't have the skills and/or support at home. Then they have 40 minutes to work on stuff to get caught up. But the (SET) teacher is also supposed to work on a skill. They're not invested because they only see that they have to get that assignment done. The assignment may get done but then the cycle starts all over again with the next assignment. Classroom teachers, though having good intentions, are not understanding the implications of their grading/work policies." Academic teachers are a major part of the success of the ICM program. It begins in the classroom. SETs feel that this is a part of the program: "We're doing it reactive, trying to keep kids' grades up. And this is my view - we're not in a position where we can have good teachers trying to adapt and modify. It is a struggle too. Some teachers do it great. Others do not."

Teacher/Student Relationship.

Parent Relationship: There was an unwritten expectation that the SDR would provide supports which were beyond the intent of basic instruction. Parents also were not properly explained the true purpose of SDR. A teacher explains, "IEP meetings SDR is being presented or perceived as some type of cure-all for all the kids need." This was especially problematic when the SDR seemed like a solution for many of the executive functioning behaviors. A SET explains, "The parents expected like some sort of therapy session or like helping with anxiety and stuff." SETs did not feel they were qualified to provide what was presented in the IEP meetings: "It was seen as something that it wasn't. Because I remember going to meetings or talking to parents. It seemed like there's more so for kids with chapter 15's and IEPs where parents expected like some sort of therapy session or like helping with anxiety and stuff. And I tried, but it wasn't geared 100 percent towards the kid, it was more like a presentation to everyone. And then, like I did the best I could with the executive functioning, but I don't feel

really well trained in that to be able to say I can help someone like I should with that. The

expectation was that I was supposed to be helping them. I feel more comfortable with the reading

and writing, but...(teaching executive functioning) well, that's a different story." Despite the

purpose of SDR for executive function areas of weakness, the SETs held responsibility for the

student's academic grades in the parent's eyes as well. One SET stated, "The parent expectation

is based on grades. They will say, "I want SDR. This is great!" but we don't get emails about the

kid's messy backpacks - we're getting "Why does he have a 38 in Biology?!"

The challenge of overcoming issues from home is often a factor in the student's academic

performance which directly impacts the SDR. SETs are often aware of these issues, and often

feel helpless in advocating for the students. They recognize the disparity of socioeconomic status

and the negative consequences on the students, a step toward social justice. One SET stated this

concern, "I feel like the school, the teachers in the school, don't understand the living conditions

of kids in this district and the responsibilities they have outside of school. Kids are taking care of

their brothers and sisters because their parents work. They're working to help the family. Then

we give too much homework. And then it's, I feel disproportionately, affecting special ed kids

because of socioeconomic status. Things like that, that, um, it just, it's the makeup of their lives.

And then they get homework. They don't have time to do it. They have other things that they

have to take care of." SETs proposed slowing down this aspect saying, "we need to pump the

brakes on the high expectations that SDR is a remedy for all of a student's needs. Parents

perceive the room to be a magic potion for fixing a student, but I feel if SDR time is not used to

complete classroom assignments, it is a double-edged sword."

Student relationship: One of the major purposes of SDR was to make a teacher/student

connection in order to positively impact performance. Although this was not stated, the

relationship directly contributes to the success of the SDR. The SETs wanted to make more of

that impact, but they were often forced to work on skills which might not be in the student's best immediate interest or counting as credit for graduation. A SET states, "Students do not get a credit for this. So part of the issue is we're putting kids through this where their feelings are that they're getting nothing out of it."

The role of the teacher as instructor of SDR entailed a variety of skills. The relationship with the student was certainly one of the strongest connections mentioned from teacher comments. SETs brought a particular skill set to the SDR which had proven results. This may have been academic or even socioemotional support which was enabled through the individual attention given to students. A typical comment was "We were able to create that one to one type of relationship that it helped us at the least make hopefully a difference with those kids." Other SETs mention the beneficial teacher relationship impacts students who have negative influences by saying, "If you could build a relationship with the students you could have another positive influencer with the individual students," and "There is an added eye on the student. Students know someone they can turn to."

On the other hand, these interactions between the student and teacher are experiences that impact the student's respect for the SET's role, the buy-in to the SDR program, and the motivation which affects performance. One teacher said, "the kids personally - towards us, that respect was there. We didn't actually feel maybe they respected the class as much. I'm certain that they didn't really think it was as important as their other class, but with us there was still respect for authority, I guess you can say." As for the buy-in into the SDR instruction, students wanted the time for other tasks. A teacher voiced their frustration by saying, "students had zero buy-in and it was tough to motivate them to do what we needed to do in SDR. They wanted to have us help them with actual work they needed to do in order to pass or get good grades." This situation was exacerbated by the fact that most students did not know what they were doing

there, or what disability they had: "None of my students even knew why they had an IEP and what their goals even were." Without such an understanding of their disability, how could the students be expected to be motivated to perform these added tasks?

Findings Overview

As determined by reflective data input from the leadership team, SETs have been generally effective in meeting student needs, but there is certainly room for improvement as suggested by a needs assessment in past surveys. Information from a recent staff inventory survey for needs assessment identifies their current struggles and needs. Staff members define the SDR initiative as a place where students can have supportive teachers "that care about them individually and are trying to help them. It's better than being in a traditional study hall because they need that individual attention." However, there are too many systemic problems at this point. Students are not taking responsibility; many do not even know what they have an IEP for, or what their disability is. Teachers are helping with classwork and homework completion. Without a clear overall system, SDR becomes "only a band-aid solution," and teachers need more prepared instructional materials to keep it from becoming a guided study hall.

In order to work properly, the SDR should be a place where SETs (SETs) can not only provide instruction in a student's area of weakness, but also provide learning strategies, repetition, multi-sensory techniques, memory enhancing skills, and compensatory skills to enhance each student's capacity to achieve his/her IEP goals. It had been determined that the current student progress monitoring had uneven results due to lack of focused, direct skill instruction in these areas of weakness. Once SDR focused instruction is in place, progress monitoring data could support the effectiveness of the model. The initial positive effects of the ICM were measured earlier by a discussion with teachers, observation and student grade performance, which led to the implementation of a pilot model, followed the next year by a

departmental implementation, then yearly grade level expansion, and finally full school implementation. The final piece, ICM skill instruction in the SDR, is now in its second year. Current SDR effectiveness is also measured by a discussion with students and teachers; however, these measures do not address the overall vision of the system of ICM support.

The SDR could improve instructional support if other areas of academic support were provided. What is required is a central location of a Support Center to accomplish the vision of the ICM and improve on service delivery. From past teacher input, a major obstacle in ICM was the movement of SETs throughout the building without a predetermined location. The addition of Chapter 15 and "at-risk" students for skill development, instructional academic support and intervention have required SETs to meet this need. At the secondary level, this is best accomplished by preparing a Support Center for instructional support and typical special educational support such as soft skills in studying and executive function, as well as having a test center for special education accommodations. This overall system of support can address these issues and provide exceptional student services. The continued improvement of the SDR and the development of a support center is part of the vision in meeting student needs. In the Support Center (SC), a quarterly Support Plan for success will be developed for each student based on information gathered from teachers, the IEP Team, assessments, and student input. Another big step in student support is to provide special needs testing accommodations. For the Testing Center (TC), tests will be dropped off at the desk with instructions for accommodations. Testing protocols will need to be developed by the leadership team.

Envisioning a special education service delivery model that fully meets the needs of all students and helps them to achieve maximum success is contingent on a plan with goals and timelines to fully realize the vision. There was a setback recently when we attempted to implement too much too quickly without the requisite pilot program. Although ambitious, this

action plan should outline the necessary steps required to meet the vision. Along the way, the reflective work of the leadership team should identify possible challenges and how those challenges will be addressed.

SET Process

The researcher's endeavors would best be described as insider action research at the site where he works through the creation and leadership of the ICM over the past years. Therefore, his role in this action research was often to address issues with the SDR that require "complex juggling of multiple roles and relationships" (Herr and Anderson, 2015, p.130). The researcher's role as mediator and leader was eliminated over the summer as administration took the lead and he focused on his dissertation. After seeing the many comments on the confusion and difficulties SETs had with the implementation of SDR, it is necessary for the researcher to step back into that space and rally the teachers once again. This reflects the problems with sustainability which can occur when there is no oversight or maintenance (Dehdary, 2017). The leadership team made of SET specialists working with administration and other qualified stakeholders are responsible for ensuring that they make the best of their resources for meeting the students' needs. Indeed, collaborative consultation models are based on parity and reciprocity between experts (Eisenman et al., 2011). The reflective process has helped to discover areas of improvement for the researcher and his colleagues in this setting as they worked together as a collaborative team in an effective problem-solving manner. SETs often play the role as a mediator, processing the data and information for reflection and subsequent action and are at the forefront of ICM considerations when it comes to roles and responsibilities. Although some SETs feel that administration could resolve issues with a logically irrefutable mandate, the reality is that one size does not fit all, especially when dealing with teenage students. It is important to remember the clear goal of doing this is to support student achievement and learning. The collaborative and

organic method of this PLC produced effective solutions which had the support of the entire

team. It also provided invested team members who are willing to build an improved instructional

model.

The complaint that there was no clear direction was mentioned in the data, an issue heard

several times during previous PLC meetings. The usual training for special education inclusive

initiatives have been as follows: After meeting with PLC members and providing focused topic

points, the special education team typically organizes a plan of implementation which is then

presented to administration and then to the entire special education department, using a

PowerPoint presentation followed by a question and answer session. The researcher's original

vision of running a focused pilot SDR (Skills Development Room) program for a year was

dismissed when the principal ran the model with full implementation across the disciplines. This

was originally planned for the third year, but although having the vision implemented

immediately fulfilled the researcher's goals, the method almost derailed years of work and

threatened to destroy the instructional model. Also, according to the data, several SDR SETs

appear to be missing the original purpose of the SDR intervention. The department leader

supported the idea of having these small group contacts, but he envisioned more of an overall

mini-resource room mentality that he called a QSDR (quiet study and development room), using

"authentic materials" or work that needs to be accomplished in their content classes. Although a

helpful concept, it is not what the original purpose of these rooms, and part of intervention which

other supports can meet. There are several who were inclined to this resource room mentality.

The reason that teachers did not see the vision was that their philosophy of helping

special education students pass and complete assignments (academic needs - the SET's former

role) was conflicting with the focus on their areas of disability. Which value takes precedence?

They agreed that IEP needs are essential, but how about using "authentic materials" to address

areas in a less focused approach? In the researcher's opinion, this proposal threatens the power and results in the implementation of the model. Although special educators share the value of the worth of the special needs student, collectively, SETs are not on the same page when it comes to meeting them. A major challenge was defining the mission and trying to maintain the vision of the ICM despite the teacher's desire to return to old habits like the former "Resource Room." The definition of student achievement in the SDR came to the forefront of the focus group conversation, expressing genuine frustration and confusion. When the high school talks about their fundamental educational purpose being that all students learn and achieve success, they must be sure to set goals, create collaborative systems that clarify and provide evidence sharing responsibility as a reflective "professional learning community" (DuFour et.al 2008, 20). After all, this high school's mission is "To enable all students to succeed in a changing world." The collaborative approach is an effort to achieve that goal.

Despite the possibly damaging start to the new instructional model's vision utilizing the SDR, the initial vision of the ICM remains intact. With the allowance of teacher autonomy, the high school is able to move forward with the idea that this year is a learning year, and this innovative instruction serves as a sort of "pilot model" for next year's planning. It may well be that some of the first ideas of how the instructional methodology should be enacted will be adjusted to a "both and" mentality where other considerations and needs are met through a combined model. The vision also is impacted by the growth of technology to meet student needs and the reality of the constantly changing educational pedagogy of the future. The new vision developed through the results of this research leads to a more collaborative and supportive team working for the whole group. The challenges faced were considered surmountable by the shared plans of action and possibilities found in the focus group. Having a group of educators spending their time to improve the system from the ground up is an administrator's dream.

SET Role

The research revealed several shared values. The value of the student kept coming to the forefront of the discussion. Most of this school's SET current attitudes are reflected in their strong commitment to truly caring and meeting the academic and emotional needs of special education students. Building on these shared values to combat the one size fits all social understanding, the school PLC shared the goal to provide support for all students, transitioning the school to a fully inclusive model with the added expertise as a special educator. After the first year of implementation, there are many students (particularly 9th graders who are with a traditional co-taught teacher) who were failing for the second quarter. Consequently, the SDR was used by many to help these students complete classroom tasks. Student achievement then became defined as passing their classes. The other areas outlined in the IEP were considered secondary. This value of caring for the student superseded the value of targeted skill instruction. Another value which has proven golden is the value of the professionalism and self-efficacy of the special education teacher, the need to support each other, listen to one another, and work collectively to meet inclusive goals for the benefit of the entire group. The opportunity to participate in the direction of the SDR gave renewed energy and positive encouragement to some beleaguered special educators. Teachers engage fully when they are allowed to use the tools of respectful discourse and investigation (Wormeli, 2017). The intention to voice concerns to be presented to the special education director for support has worked out favorably, and certainly reflects a social justice perspective. Although the researcher would have preferred going right to the head principal and quickly resolving the issue, the new method of forming a group to work up from the bottom seems to be a more positive route, and could yield stronger buy-in. Ultimately, the steps of this research with substantial delineated questions from the focus group will lead to decisive actions which best suit the staff and students.

SDR Skill Instruction

The stated purpose of SDR as outlined in the vision of the ICM was to provide a means to give direct instruction to the student in their area of weakness as outlined by their IEP goals. This is the logical prescriptive solution to the medical diagnosis of disability and was part of the legally defensible support for this inclusive model. As mentioned in SET comments, it "looks great on paper" and "parents love it." In the traditional co-teaching model, there is limited opportunity to address specific skills with targeted instruction. This can only be accomplished outside of the classroom, but would typically be in resource room settings, which are not amenable to such direct instruction due to the amount of other students. Yet in the SDR small group setting, direct instruction can, and did, occur. SETs mentioned how they endeavored to stick to skill instruction for one or two students using the "tool box" that was provided or improvising their own mini-lessons using online resources. This session would last for about fifteen minutes, with the remainder of time spent on homework or other skill-related activities. This was particularly effective for SETs to have access to progress monitoring assessment which is usually conducted bi-weekly. For instance, a math SDR provided instruction on how to do fractions after seeing the low scores in that area on the assessment. Instruction would then move to other specific areas where the student scored low. SETs also mentioned how they were able to raise student awareness of the area of weakness - the justification for why the student was identified as a student with a specific learning disability (SLD). In theory, this instruction could conceivably move many borderline students out of special education. When considering transition to college or career in the near future for these high school students, this remedial prescriptive solution makes a lot of sense.

However, despite the initial progress made in the first few weeks, the SET inevitably succumbed to the pressure to help their students succeed in meeting classroom academic needs

and put skill instruction on the back burner. Some tried to use "authentic (class) materials" to teach related skills. This approach could possibly be effective, but it runs the danger of not being especially targeted. The many similar comments bring to issue the SET's misunderstanding of the intent of the SDR. The skills are those determined by the IEP team's designation of annual goal to be progress monitored, but often to the SET, these goals are not considered to be as important as HW or other assignments needed to "pass their classes." It is true that these fundamental skills should have been worked on earlier as a teacher mentioned, but the absence of these skills is precisely why targeted instruction is warranted! Should goals be adjusted to reflect CBAs (curriculum-based assessments)? If not, then the onus is on the school to demonstrate how they provide that direct instruction to show progress on the IEP goal charts.

SDR Academic Remediation

For most SETs, the ICM's intended focus on learning skills was changed to concentrate on academic remediation. Teachers moved from focusing on student proficiency in essential skills to a focus on academic grades. These actions appear to be more of a result of the poor implementation and the continuing struggle between the past co-teaching philosophy and the inclusive consultation pedagogy. These are not necessarily obstacles, but areas of concern. Perhaps by stepping back, the researcher permitted structural and cultural obstacles to block the change process (DuFour, 2006, 100). Feeling that their performance negative critique raised "defensive walls" that were not constructive (Wormeli, 2017) and a loss of trust (Thompson, Sue & Gregg, Larry & Niska, John, 2004). The teachers felt intimidated because they were not sufficiently trained, and many did not endorse the change to begin with.

Another challenging aspect is revealed in the SETs desire to do monitoring and homework duties. Teachers accepting this as a role reveals that the vision failed due to not being firmly anchored in the culture (DuFour et.al 2008, 101) when the transition to the new program

was implemented. This was an area of challenge for us since this new SDR instructional piece

was implemented with the usual "build it while you fly it" mentality that causes teacher ire. The

lack of true buy-in was revealed in comments revealing a willingness to go back to the former

resource room practices. This would be extremely discouraging if this lesser use of SET teachers

and an inferior inclusive model would arise that is not part of the true vision of ICM, as a matter

of fact, it would be missing the heart and philosophy of this movement.

SDR Teacher/Student Relationship

The time the SET spends with a small number of students can have a positive impact on

student performance. As mentioned, the SET would often provide understanding of the student's

IEP and learning needs. Executive function lessons in regard to study skills and work habits were

also modeled and shared with the students. Many teachers would use a goal sheet to enhance

student accountability for completed tasks during the period. According to the survey question

about establishing a personal connection with their students, ten of the fourteen teacher

respondents (71%) responded that they did, and most SETs (seven of thirteen) also mentioned

this relationship positively impacted student performance. Although progress data was not

gathered to verify this assertion, the lessons provided, and the extra skill instruction likely

increased academic grades and progress monitoring in those areas. On the research survey

questions, most SETs said SDR effectively met academic needs, while most mentioned that they

saw the students only making moderate progress in the instructional area of weakness. The

shared struggles and small victories in accomplishing basic tasks plausibly affected student

attitudes and motivation in the classroom as well. In this area of the survey, most SETs stated

that they did establish a personal connection with their students. This is not surprising, knowing

the dispositional teaching nature of SETs.

Working together in one-to-one skill tasks and sharing goals helped to enable the "hidden agenda" - connecting with these students and other at-risk students to provide the encouragement and support they need for classroom success. Unfortunately, due to class size and multiple needs, the academic education teacher might have a difficult time finding the opportunity to give encouragement and support during or even outside of class. The SET's individual contact with the student during the SDR sessions can fill this gap and provide the attention these often-marginalized students need. A SET can advocate for student needs as they fulfill their role as a consultant and partner for the academic teacher. SETs are in a prime position to provide not only academic and skill instruction, but also helping to meet socio-emotional needs that impact many of the at-risk and special education students. Based on the reflective nature of this instructional discourse, other student needs might require service besides only progress toward mastery of skills. For even if the student with disabilities is successful in the classroom, there may be pressing student emotional needs to be met in the SDR, for academic teachers who effectively improve test scores may be alternately ineffective in improving student attitudes and behaviors (Blazar & Kraft, 2017). The SET provides focused time to interact personally with the student to "make a difference." Considering all of the needs of the student on these multiple levels can be an act of social justice as SETs work in a liberatory fashion, supporting the student in an individual, caring relationship. The SET working in a relational manner as a facilitator, advocate, and coach is part of a positive, empowering dynamic for student educational success.

When both students and teachers have shared values in alignment with the similar mission, the possibilities for positive outcomes are more likely to be attained. The underlying power in this process is engagement of the students by having teachers that can help students meet academic grade requirements while building individual student skills with the supportive

relationship of the SDR teacher. With all stakeholders sharing the student's goals and learning

purpose by monitoring progress, it improves the student's ability to produce the intended results.

The ultimate goal of student self-efficacy is achieved through this reflective process which then

improves student learning (Wormeli, 2017).

Summary

The data from SET comments revealed systemic problems with the SDR as it was

implemented. They managed as best they could, modifying as they saw fit. The SETs had

difficulty incorporating lessons without having a prep period to plan lessons. Prepared lesson

plans were not provided for them, and they were required to create them from online sources.

Due to the fluid nature of skills, student needs and levels could fluctuate, which required on the

fly adjustments. Most students themselves did not understand the reason they were given this

period, and many were not taking responsibility. SETs inevitably found themselves primarily

helping with classwork and homework completion as the SDR became a form of guided study

hall.

Due to the immediate class wide implementation and mentioned lack of clear direction, it

was natural that many of the SETs did not share or maybe understand the ICM vision. SETs

appeared to be missing the original purpose and found themselves using a mini-resource room

mentality with their small group of students. This function is not surprising since the school is

still in the transition of the SET role established from their past traditional co-teaching

responsibilities. The overall philosophy became one of helping special education students pass

and complete assignments. The comments revealing the efforts SETs took to teach skills while

also assisting the student in other areas suggests a solution of a "both-and" mentality.

During implementation, the collaborative and organic method of SETs meeting in a PLC

produced effective solutions that had the support of the entire team. This reflective process again

affirms how the reflective process has helped the SETs give exceptional support to the many

students in this inclusive model. The SETs developed their role using several shared values; high

regard for academic success, emotional support for the student, and a genuine commitment to do

what was best for the student. The SETs endeavored to stick to skill instruction, but they often

abandoned the intended skill-based remedial prescriptive instruction. This action could be due to

a misunderstanding of the intent of the SDR, or more likely, the pressing student academic needs

at the moment often superseded the instructional skill goals. Throughout, their comments showed

professionalism and support for each other. However, it was clear that most SETs were not

sufficiently trained for this task. Since the SDR had to adapt to meet other student needs, this

form of instructional support did not address the overall vision of the system of ICM. To remedy

this, the homework and classwork intervention could be supplied by the establishment of a

central location. A Support Center could provide these needs, and also having a Testing Center

would relieve many of the SET responsibilities, which kept them from focusing on the IEP skill

area.

From the responses, most SETs developed positive, supportive connections with their

students and showed genuine caring. The strength of the SDR came from the relationship with

these students and other at-risk students as SETs provided the encouragement and support to

meet the students' socio-emotional needs. The SETs were intent on making a positive impact on

student performance through the one-on-one relationship. The comments reveal the SET

frustration in their efforts to help students succeed while considering all of the needs of the

student on multiple levels, and the clarification of the SET's supportive role. For high school

students, all support should aim for the goal of student self-efficacy in transition to post-

graduation employment or education.

The findings lead to a philosophical examination of the SETs' role in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. It is found that through the relational role in the individual context, the SET can be an emancipatory advocate for students who might feel bound by low self-esteem from oppressive testing standards. Questioning the underlying vision of SDR can be used as a call to re-examine the philosophies behind this instruction and ascertain whether making this a focus is socially just. The SET comments make a case for a compromise or shared responsibility to benefit both the student and the driving educational demand for high stakes testing scores.

Chapter 5: Conclusion, Discussion, and Future Considerations

Conclusion: Special Education Inclusive Instruction

Vision of Equity

  The purpose of this study was to reveal the inner workings of SETs as they implement new components of a special education service delivery model. The starting point of this research was rooted in the establishment of the ICM and the struggles to move from a traditional co-teaching model to a fully ICM. This study examined the teacher's perspective of running a program from scratch, so to speak, or "building the plane while flying it" as teachers in this high school commented. This intentional use of the SDR, the next ICM component, was central to the ICM philosophy - instructing special education students in their area of disability. The goal of the SDR (Skills Development Room) is to provide those services which allow full participation in the educational system. This kind of consultative support offers an opportunity to reframe the understanding of disability as something to claim instead of something to disdain, moving students to equity instead of placing them in a subordinate position (Caldwell, 2011). By servicing all students of need instead of just the labeled special education students, SETs can address concerns and provide support for all students to participate in the general education classroom successfully. Placed among non-disabled peers, special education students can avoid discriminatory or degrading labels that are often used to categorize students. The students no longer bring the negative consequence of meaning since there is no perceived difference. This social justice framework was the starting point the researcher used to develop theory from the research data.

Process of Implementation

  The first steps required the restructuring of special education accommodations and supports. These supports were expressed in the specially designed instruction (section 6) of the

student's IEP. There were several versions of modifications which seemed to be irrational, or at least not grounded in any disability. The high school's special education department leader referred to them as the "new car options" as parents, and students would select SDIs that would make their academic experience easier. When overviewed, these supports were mere Band-Aids over the more significant issue of executive function, often operating as a crutch that would remain for the student's entire educational journey. Of course, none of these supports could be carried to further education and certainly not "in real life." Using the acumen of my legal partner, we made "legally defensible SDIs" which were aligned to the student identified weaknesses while also considering the student's vocational goal. Many of these SDIs were stated to be "faded to mastery." a new concept which reveals the prescriptive philosophy behind the interventions - a means to improve student skill, not mask or limit it.

The next major step was to free the special education co-teacher from the classroom. This removal could only be accomplished when special education students were split equally between the classes, immediately eliminating the co-taught class as a dumping ground for reluctant learners and incalcitrant students. The SET stepped in as a consultant, assisting the teacher with meeting the diverse needs in the classroom. The SET could also be used to give guidance for meeting accommodations and supports, as well as provide strategies to target individual skills or modify curriculum. In this way, teachers used differentiation within the class. Most SDIs were quickly met in the classroom by the academic teacher. Yet, there is still a significant barrier to overcome from teachers' resistance to interference with classroom instructional practices, particularly the traditional co-teaching practice. There were relationships (marriages) that had to be broken. This divorce did not make them happy. Also, some new authority relationships have been detrimental to the overall vision of ICM. To effectively overcome these challenges, it could require both top-down and bottom-up strategies (Mills, 2018, p. 231). Currently, the SDR special education team takes responsibility and guidance for the instructional process. That has good and

bad effects due to the uncertainty and lack of a unified vision from the collaborators, both teacher and administration. The results of this study should help to remedy this situation as this special education team continues the reflective process.

Action Research in ICM

The goal of action research should be improving the educational experiences of students in reflective practice and process. Whenever the researcher proposed a new step in the ICM, the head principal would say, "What is best for the kids?" emphasizing the need to keep the student as the ultimate focus. When things get difficult or even facing failure, SETs still believe they can make a difference in children's lives. Having experienced the spectrum of action research aspects in the researcher's past ICM endeavors, it is a constant assertion of his beliefs and lessons learned. The researcher's particular area focused on instructional strategies is a team effort that requires constant adjustment. Ongoing action happens because "the very dynamic nature of teaching necessitates that teachers make many changes to instruction during the course of the day based on formative feedback" (Mills, 2018, p. 222) which produces a positive educational change in a connected manner.

The research questions centered around the SET understanding of the purpose of SDR, whether it was for instruction in student skill development, academic assistance, or social-emotional needs. Also, as the model developed, these teachers were defining and modifying their SDR roles as they met instructional challenges to maximize student support and performance. The data was chosen from a teacher perspective, to allow for insight into the development of support from an experiential viewpoint that allowed for ownership and buy-in. The information was gathered and coded to see what themes emerged. In the researcher's analysis of the high school teachers' responses, he discovered themes such as planning/implementation, barriers/challenges, experiences, and lessons learned. The answers grouped into categories of purpose, instructional needs, teacher role, and student goals. Looking at patterns in the responses,

the researcher determined that most of the process involved SETs trying to do the right thing, frustrated by lack of instructional resources and time, and placing the student's immediate academic needs as a priority. This deduction led to an evaluation of how the role of the SET is to be defined when so many expectations are required. Essentially, it is about the student. That is where the teachers found their pedagogical footing. What happened from there depended on the teacher.

Analysis of data was done using qualitative responses in surveys and also by using focus group interviews. The researcher provided guidance by preplanned questions, but not participation. Here, teachers were able to express their frustration in a setting that used the information to make positive change. This analysis was completed over the summer. The chief complaints were covered, and teachers once again stepped in to do as they thought wisest. The initial positive effects of the ICM were measured by a discussion with teachers, observation, and student grade performance. Current SDR effectiveness is also regulated by a conversation with students and teachers; however, these measures do not address the overall vision of the system of ICM support. The SDR could improve instructional support if other areas of academic support were provided. What is required is a global action plan to accomplish the vision of the ICM and improve on service delivery.

In reviewing literature pertinent to the topic, the researcher discovered that the primary positive indicator of student achievement is having focused instruction from the teacher (Landrum, et al., 2012). He also found how SETs act as agents of social justice, as they support students and advocate for them to the academic teacher (Laframboise et al., 2004). The instructional disconnect seems to be initiated in the classroom, with SETs attempting to differentiate or remediate after the fact. In classes where differentiation and universal design are considered, there is less pressure on students with disabilities to make up ground to meet normative standards (Baglieri et al., 2011; Tomlinson, 2003). After reviewing these elements, the

researcher endeavored to make some foundational statements to express a unified vision of support for students with disabilities.

Discussion: Understanding Students with Disabilities

Reframing Disability with a Social Justice Perspective

In this final section, the researcher synthesizes and analyzes the data discussed in the previous chapters to develop a rational theory for working in the field of special education, particularly in an ICM. The researcher found out several insights into the functioning of special educational pedagogy, both from a practical instruction perspective and also from a sociocultural understanding, as well as reframing the researcher's understanding of disability itself. The theoretical propositions from findings that were developed by grounded theory stimulated questions for hypotheses that can be tested in further research. These propositions support the conclusions from the literature that reflect the frustrations of the SETs to meet all of the needs of the students under their care (Eisenman, et al., 2011). This study also contributes to special education research at the secondary level by revealing the reality of the academic pressure from high stakes testing (Mastropieri, et al., 2001) and maintaining passing grades which drive special education support. Despite the best intentions of instruction aligned with the areas of student weakness, most instructional class time is spent addressing homework and trying to engage disconnected students, and administrators rely on the SETs to make such interventions to enable students to meet classroom expectations.

Fighting against segregation, full inclusion avoids the oppression of placing those with disabilities into quarantine spaces (Foucault, 1977), allowing access, and ensuring that special education is not a place or location, but a service delivery structure (Civil Rights Project, 2001). Special education itself can be considered a social justice movement for human rights, having roots in the Civil rights advocacy movements against educational discrimination and the exclusion of children of disabilities. Formerly, federal initiatives such as the IDEA (1997)

focused on access for students by providing special education services. Yet with the support for access, special education inadvertently supported exclusion by segregating students into self-contained classrooms and then later into co-taught "sped" classes. For no doubt, when students are separated into special education classes, such as slower-paced, abbreviated curriculum co-taught classrooms, it becomes a form of structural segregation containing students of "subaverage" performance (Baglieri, 2011). This form of segregation has ties to the oppression challenged by the Civil Rights movement of the sixties and closely aligns with Critical Race Theory perspective, particularly when considering the African American students who are part of the system either labeled as special education or at-risk.

In a true inclusive classroom, teachers will be prepared to teach ALL students, balancing the need for institutional academic responsibilities of the medical model with the personal relationships that break boundaries of difference. Classrooms reflect cultural and social hierarchies which need to be critically examined to eliminate inequality and injustice (Oyler, 2011). Disability scholars help to reveal how the special education system, made to support marginalized students, now actually maintains White privilege and promotes racism by keeping African American students from an equitable education in the general education classroom. The historical oppression of labeling continues to be a factor in the identification of at-risk and students with disabilities who receive special education services in the SDR. The percentage of African American students in this researcher's study is not a factor that is being examined; nevertheless, race is a mandatory consideration when discussing labels and disability. The SET should be acutely aware of issues when the intersectionality of race or gender could be a cause for social oppression to marginalized students and be ready to stand as an advocate for systemic change.

As the data of SET comments revealed the struggle to help students meet the oppressive academic standards, the researcher's analysis raised issues of social justice. Examining the data

in light of research in the special education field revealed theoretical foundations which

questioned the "norms" that defined disability itself, leading into Disability Studies in Education

(DSE), a branch of Critical Race Theory. The constant pressure to get students to an acceptable

grade forced the researcher to question the education system's intense focus on the deficient

student to instead focus on the equity of instruction in the classroom. Research from disability

scholars remind us that equitable opportunities to learn and the home environment should be

considered for students that do not respond to high quality instruction or interventions (Kuo,

2015). A DSE approach suggests that it is best practice for educators to consider how to remove

the barriers to meeting student needs in the school, and question organizational or even social

structures. The differences in students should be celebrated as a variety of human diversity.

Stigmatizing categorical stereotypes should be challenged and questioned by SETs. For instance,

this study reflects the common move to use "people first" language (e.g. "student with

disabilities") helps others understand the focus on the person above labeling them as "other." For

now, SETs can lead the way in raising awareness of the issues of societal oppression for students

with disabilities, even if they cannot remove the medical conception of disability as something

"needing a cure," they can provide a supportive environment of instruction that builds on a

student's areas of strength while addressing academic needs (Ashby, 2012).

      Reframing disability with a social justice perspective also leads educators to question the

very foundations of what is called special education. As the theoretical framework was

examined, the questions were raised of the justification for inclusive services as the researcher

questioned the special educational medical model. This high school is possibly providing

prescriptive instructional support at a high cost to these students who should be enjoying

electives like art and music instead of the constant grind of skill-based remediation. Yet a

paradigmatic shift of philosophical foundation from a medical deficit-based model to a

sociocultural framework requires a complete overhaul of special education as it is known and

experienced today. Ultimately, it comes to the point of "biting the hand that feeds you" as issues of funding and power come into play. Also, there is a danger that the constant theorizing of special education models could be seen as failing to generate social action as educators fail to agree on a unified perspective (Berghs et al., 2016). This question of "why?" threatened to shipwreck the focus of the ICM to provide prescriptive instruction, but also could remove its function as a liberating measure of social justice for students with disabilities. As a result of the researcher's analysis of the teacher responses, a clear vision is needed if SETs plan to implement further support. Teacher collaboration is an essential ingredient for the implementation of any school system initiative, so a shared vision could provide the motivational teamwork that is needed to overcome obstacles.

Avoiding Categorization of Students

To avoid categorizing students, educators must change their philosophy of categorization and labels, ensuring that they meet the needs of all students in their classrooms. The purpose of classroom pedagogy should be in assessing and understanding their students and not merely sorting students into categories requiring remediation (Oyler, 2011). However, when student need is determined, active, focused instruction and providing immediate intensive intervention for learning deficits could assist in supporting students in the classroom. The focused impetus to service all students impacts the role of the SET and the relationship with the students. As these instructional needs are supplied for all students, the line of distinction is blurred between the at-risk students and labeled special education students. The SETs in this study formerly serviced only special education students, such as students with mild learning disabilities, other health impairment, and emotional disabilities. After the implementation of the ICM instructional supports, SETs are also providing service to Protected Handicapped (Chapter 14, 504 plan) students and the "At-Risk" students, with the understanding of assisting ALL students of need. DSE scholars question limiting support to only students with a diagnostic label (Ashby, 2012),

and by having SETs meet the instructional needs of all students who are trying to meet academic

standards, the school is moving in the right direction.

Special education also faces a challenge when SETs come into the classroom to provide

deliberate instructional support for special education students. This tension is also evident by

some administrators still holding to the "push-in, pull-out" model at this school, a possibly

stigmatizing mindset that ICM has grappled with in the past. At the secondary level, this action is

met with embarrassment, particularly for seniors, or even used as a crutch to enable students to

be off-task until they get the individual attention from the SET. Although the IDEA and the least

restrictive environment (LRE) points to special education as a service and not a location,

exclusionary attention from a SET can be detrimental to the student's wellbeing and even

considered oppressive. For this reason, avoiding singling out students would be in line with the

IDEA's mandate to provide special education services in the regular classroom "except where

those services cannot be achieved satisfactorily" (IDEA, 1997). The service can be provided

through the academic teacher's differentiation or "good teaching practice," and further service

needs can be provided outside of class time. When providing services in the classroom, the SET

can open the invitation to any student who wishes to receive assistance. This sensitivity to

placing the student first and being aware of oppressive actions is another action for SETs to

engage in social justice.

Mitigating Testing Barriers

Once again, the research affirms the negative issue of over testing of special education

students, even with formative assessment. Also, the biweekly progress monitoring (viewed as

formative assessment) seems an unnecessary burden. It often seems to make the most sense to

move students to a 504 plan, particularly if they have ADHD, due to concerns that many of the

accommodations become a crutch for poor studying skills. This change can be managed by

providing the same special education supports extra time for testing, the separate setting for

focus, modified/chunked significant assignment deadlines, all without the constant biweekly plus annual progress monitoring testing, which marks the special education student. Being exceptionally bright students (as many with ADHD are), they often see how useless testing is without the instructional component, which marks formative assessment. Merely setting goals does not achieve the progress that students can make with a relationship that involves providing teacher feedback and new short-term targeted measures (Lee, Palmer & Wehmeyer, 2009). Progress in goals often does not occur in the diagnostic assessment process, as is often evidenced by paraprofessional testing a student with yet another leveled math measure as part of a triennial re-evaluation. This testing can take a full period for three or more days, which causes this researcher to recognize how formative assessment fails when students experience testing fatigue, have no incentive to perform, or when the test itself is not administered properly. These issues of maintaining assessment adherence to a mandated system can be considered a form of oppression (Baglieri, 2011).

The instructional component SDR can meet the need for proper formative assessment and progress monitoring. Initially, students are placed in SDR according to their IEP goal, which is based on their area of disability. In the SDR, the SET gives a diagnostic assessment to determine the student performance level, then targeted instruction is matched with appropriate support or strategies. This instructional class meets for a four-week (15 min. @ 3 times a 6-day cycle) process. It involves a series of flexible, formative assessments based on the student's instructional progress, along with feedback and encouragement. This embedded testing is supported by the SET's relationship with the student reinforced during the remainder of the class times.

ICM Secondary Level SET Roles

One of the certainties of teaching in the 21st century is the inevitability of change. The SET has seen their role move from a specialist to a segregated classroom teacher, then to a

"married" co-teacher fulfilling one of six roles as suggested by Friend (2015). The SET specialized position would fluctuate depending on the nature of the academic teacher and the agreed collaborative system that was developed contingent on time and opportunity. These classrooms were often dumping grounds for special needs students and reluctant learners, often in major core subjects consisting of over 70% of students with IEPs at the high school level. Managing the off-task behaviors and splitting students into groups could often cause division between students and even between teachers. As SETs at the high school struggled to find their function, they experienced a loss of respect and their identity as teaching professionals. Due to lack of planning time for preparation or lack of content expertise (Scruggs, et al., 2007), the SET would often find their role relegated to teacher support due to the other special education responsibilities such as caseload and IEP meetings.

As this school moved to a more fully inclusive system, many former co-teachers found themselves developing their role as teacher consultants and collaborators for a grade-level subject. The dumping ground was eliminated as well as the "sped" co-taught class. As students with disabilities were distributed equally throughout the general education classes, the overwhelming pressure of meeting the higher academic pace at the secondary level (Cole and McLeskey, 1997) while managing multiple challenging student behaviors was alleviated. Student needs were met through weekly meetings with the teacher and followed up by the SET during the student's study hall. Student contact was made on an as-needed basis, with location set to the nearest available open room. As SETs realized most of their time was spent with homework intervention, the school moved to build up its homework intervention to include a separate setting "resource room" support. In this way, the SETs could focus more on remedial help and focused instruction, which more suited their professional role as special educators.

The high school setting requires that SETs have a variety of skills to fill their multiple roles of instruction mentioned in Wasburn-Moses' research (2005). They can meet with students

for special instruction or tutoring, as well as providing assistance and extra time for student mastery of class concepts. The SET role also entails providing teachers with helpful modifications to instructional materials and assessment, as well as ensuring that accommodations are being met for the students in the classroom. The SET can be an invaluable resource for meeting the special needs of not only students with disabilities, but also issues involving autism, emotional disability, and other health impairments. Having a SET outside of class time can complement the teacher's class instruction. SETs also benefit from the greater flexibility and recognition and collaborative use of their special education expertise (Dieker & Rodriques, 2013). In-house research of the effectiveness of the ICM has demonstrated continued positive outcomes, and ICM continues to be under examination. It is anticipated that these perceptions of the teachers can provide an insight into the foundational issues and benefits of such an approach as an alternative or complement to the traditional co-teaching model.

The final piece of the ICM envisioned having SETs work in a prescriptive manner in the SDR, even using the metaphor "the surgeon (SET) as opposed to the doctor (academic teacher)" during program implementation. This role intentionally provided the SET with the recognition of their expertise in skill strategies and specialized instruction. The SETs were given areas of their strength, whether math, English, reading, or executive functioning, and were provided locations to meet weekly with students to provide focused instruction in the student's area of weakness as outlined in the IEP, a move that allowed SETs to use their ability to instruct small groups in basic skill deficits in these areas. With a medical model perspective, working on an individual level with direct, focused instruction, meeting student needs will promote growth in the areas of weakness that will impact academic performance and build self-esteem.

Inclusive Education: Enabling ALL Students to Succeed

Combining SDR medically based diagnostic instruction with the social justice perspective of recognizing assets and advocating for students with disabilities will reap great

rewards. For teachers in the classroom, collaboration with the SET will assist the academic

teacher's diagnostic monitoring of formative class assessment as well as promoting opportunities

for supportive complementary skill instruction. A synthesis of supporting students with skill

remediation as well as considering the student's value as an individual and sociocultural

background will truly enable ALL students to succeed. For this dual purpose, disability scholars

contribute a perspective which is necessary to fully understand the students under the SET's

care. Part of the unwritten job, hidden agenda, or socio-emotional aspects of special educator

pedagogy is to provide the emotional support and a trusted setting to build a child's self esteem

and confidence (Caldwell, 2011), increasing motivation to perform academic tasks. This

supportive role came to light in the data and deserves more attention. The underlying philosophy

that special educators can challenge is the societal educational concept of defining norms which

push students to marginal positions. SETs can approach SDR learning environments by

recognizing and appreciating student strengths and background. By challenging societal norms,

SETs participate in scholarly schools of thought supported by DSE, Critical Race Theory, and

Queer Theory, and align with transformative social rights movements like civil rights, feminism,

and LGBTQ activism. Current pre-service SETs are being trained with knowledge in these areas;

however, more training and professional development are warranted.

        To also perform as active leaders in social justice, academic education teachers need to

use universal design to create a curriculum that meets the full range of needs of the students in

their classrooms. Teachers must make steps to engage students with relevant lessons that are

appropriate for them, considering the child's background as well as knowledge. Current teachers

need training and professional development as well to not only prepare equitable pedagogy, but

to also combat former deficit-based perceptions with an appreciation of student strengths.

Embracing difference, the classroom atmosphere could be a liberatory space (Picower, 2012),

devoid of the expectations of normalcy.

Special education has a long way to go in its commitment to fulfilling the promise of inclusion. Due to this constantly changing world, inclusive education will always be a malleable work in progress and not a completed final product. Although disability scholars reject the medical model, it is clear that special education's current interpretation of disability is required for the identification of students and as a means to address the need using funding from the federal government; therefore, a symbiotic combination of the two philosophies needs to be considered. By making organized, incremental steps for social justice and including all stakeholders in a unified vision of support, high schools can collectively create transformative change.

Limitations

Although the dissertation committee critically reviews the dissertation and its process, there are three areas of limitations in this study: the researcher's positional influence and bias, the geographical location, and the teachers' potential bias.

Since this study began in action research, the researcher is also a participant in the ICM program. For the past ten years, the researcher also has been involved in piloting the model and continues to guide its development, so his influence might present itself in the research. Research has already been published in this area by the researcher. Also, established internal relationship factors of having supportive peers could influence the perceptions of data points. Throughout the process, the researcher has been actively seeking criticism and advice from his peers in special education, but unintentional bias might be considered a limiting factor.

Secondly, the participants are from one geographical area and demographic, which could be considered a potential limiting factor by a perspective from a single school. Since ICM is a program developed out of the classroom, the possibility of generalization has not been done with the model. The fact that this study is being done at a single suburban, middle-class school without a diverse student population is another potential factor of limitation.

Thirdly, although teachers were assured of their anonymity and confidentiality, it is possible that they might have responded with an instructional bias. As in any qualitative study, some respondents might have taken the opportunity in the surveys to exaggerate due to dissatisfaction with the instructional delivery model or expand their impact on students, or they might have limited their genuine feeling for the sake of not being contentious. Although the focus group was made of SET teachers, it did include the department leader in special education, and the recorded focus groups might be impacted by group dynamics, which are outside of the control of the researcher. To achieve reliability, respondents are volunteers, and focus groups are conducted without the researcher present.

Future Considerations

The results of this study have several implications for further research, which could be considered from a social justice perspective. The relationships established with key supporters can provide those with disabilities the ability to resist the harmful effects of oppression. Avoiding the stigma of labels, and building supportive relationships is a big part of disability identity and suits the philosophical vision outlined by the ICM. The SDR provides this supportive learning environment where the positive student to teacher relationships can be an impetus for improved academic outcomes. Using a social justice mindset, SETs can consider ways that school policies could enhance or possibly even limit opportunities for students with disabilities. Also, the construct of disability identity is informed and refined by the voices of this marginalized community. Having the safety of a space to speak freely, the student can work with the SET's support as an advocate for student needs. It is hoped that the research conclusions challenge the deficit-based social construction of impairment through these teacher responses, demonstrating the value of the student as a person, resisting labels to help them form a positive disability identity. This process of changing theoretical positions could be an area of further study.

It is also possible to examine the SDR from a systems framework, as any advance in the inclusive model would require. This quantitative study would require comparing data points to determine how effective the instruction was in closing the achievement gap between the students represented in this research and their general education peers. This data could entail academic performance or skill-level progress monitoring to determine the efficacy of ICM as it has been implemented. Also, providing the SDR as part of a credited level of special education support would build buy-in for students who make the commitment for learning. Credited classes should be offered to support core instructional classes to enable students to master skills that they are missing (or failed the previous year?) or reinforcing areas of weakness, addressing their immediate need and producing positive outcomes. i.e. foundational English courses which remediate skills and incorporate reading and writing strategies.

Further research would be warranted as the process goes forward, which leads to some earnest questions to consider. With the focus on the disability, many students will master the skill and no longer be identified for special education support services. Many of these accommodations were in place to help the student pass academic courses for concomitant issues such as work ethic, study skills, and homework. Will these students now have to be re-evaluated? Are these issues sufficient to require an IEP? Wouldn't 504 Chapter 15 services be adequate to meet these needs? These questions are crucial when we fully embrace the purpose of providing exceptional special education to meet student needs, which is the high school's ultimate goal. This researcher looks forward to meeting these challenges with the special education team.

Future research could include examining how the collaboration of SETs and academic teachers in the inclusive secondary environment impact student performance, specifically as to whether it leads to academic success. Although the emergent themes related to teacher concerns and the best use of the SDR period for student achievement, there is much to learn from teachers who are working solo and meeting student needs beyond what the researcher envisioned. This

information needs to be gathered. The data to support the effectiveness of the SDR instruction is

mostly intangible rewards, evidenced through the stronger teacher/student relationships and

success in meeting academic requirements. This could be gathered in a qualitative manner

through a survey, but this researcher can attest that there is a visible change in the demeanor of

the educators as they have adjusted to the new norms. Through shared dialogue, several topics

have been addressed where these teachers have made decisions based on their professional

discretion instead of the initial outlined mandates.

　　　　To implement a program such as this, the SETs themselves are the impetus for making

change in a collaborative inclusive culture. It will be interesting to see how the teachers will

create a better program based on the relationship with the student. In this setting, this researcher

is positive that administration, as well as parents, are happy with the positive influence these

teachers would have on the students in SDR. This relationally focused program would take the

targeted instructional approach of ICM to another level. A renewed program vision would stress

the connection that is made with students. This relational framework is powerfully effective in

producing motivation which results in improved academic performance. PBIS Positive

Behavioral Intervention Support (PBIS) is an example of an effective intervention which also

could fit well with the instruction that is provided in the SDR. In PBIS, students provide

authentic data from which teachers interpret how to provide effective behavioral interventions,

facilitating successful learning outcomes (Austin, 2015). Students with issues of executive

functioning or recalcitrant behaviors could be managed by maintaining a focused goal with the

student in a respectful, positive environment that is mindful of social, curricular, and ecological

context influences (Hinton, 2015). Using PBIS research-based strategies should prove effective

in small group settings requiring up to twelve weeks, which is about equal to a high school

quarter. This approach is key to developing a relationship with the student, which is one of the

main goals of the SDR program, and effective in student motivation. Maybe that is the direction

to go next.

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Appendix A

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY SURVEY CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH

PARTICIPATION

Study Title: Secondary-Level Skills Development Support for Special Education, Protected

Handicapped, and At-risk Students

Principal Investigator: Philip Specht

Student Researcher: N/A

As a doctoral student in the College of Education at Kutztown University, I am planning to

conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has essential information

about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to participate in this

study, and the way information about you will be used if you choose to be in the study.

Why are you doing this study?

You are being asked to participate in a research study about your experience with the skills

development instruction in relation to successful student learning outcomes.

The purpose of this study is to obtain data which reflects the teacher perception of running this

first-time program; their thoughts on successes, challenges, and curricular elements which are

crucial for the implementation of the model. This information will be used to evaluate specific

conditions such as the perception of special education students in their attitudes, performance

and supports met, and teacher observations of student mastery of instructional skills. Utilizing a

mixed-method design approach, I hope to substantiate the importance of a focused professional

learning community of SETs in meeting the diverse needs of our students.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?

You will not be asked to do anything additional for this study beyond the expectations of participating in two skills development evaluation/surveys. Only consenting participants will have the survey results used in the study.

Study time: Teachers will be given an email link to survey their satisfaction and effectiveness of the skills development room; one for each semester. These surveys will be collected and recorded using an excel spreadsheet. Total time to complete each survey is estimated from 5 – 10 minutes.

Study location: All study procedures will take place at Boyertown High School.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. Because the survey is anonymous, your identity is protected, unless you specifically request that you be identified with a statement or comment.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

Your participation in this study does not involve any physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – we will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for me or others?

A very likely benefit to participants is the positive transformative change that may occur by sharing their first-hand knowledge of the enacted curriculum in this study. The intention to voice concerns and solutions, present them to our SE director, and join school administration to make an institutional change could be empowering and positive. The next steps forward will be informed through this research, providing immediate local impact. Taking part in this research study may not directly benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that will help our fellow teachers and ultimately, our students.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If the results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used.

While the study is underway, all hard copies of surveys will be kept by the researcher, locked in a filing cabinet. Only the researcher will have access to survey results online.

I may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers.

Financial Information

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from this study at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to discontinue participation. Both voluntary participation and non-participation with the survey will have no impact on your opportunity to contribute to the instructional model.

If you decide to withdraw from this study, the researcher will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

<div align="center">

Consent

</div>

I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered. If I have additional

questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described

above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature:_____

Date:_____

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

Appendix B

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY CONSENT FORM FOR FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPATION

Study Title: Secondary-Level Skills Development Support for Special Education, Protected Handicapped, and At-risk Students

Principal Investigator: Philip Specht

 Student Researcher: N/A

As a doctoral student in the College of Education at Kutztown University, I am planning to conduct a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has essential information about the reason for doing this study, what I will ask you to do if you decide to participate in this study, and the way information about you will be used if you choose to be in the study.

 Why are you doing this study?

 You are being asked to participate in a research study about your experience with the skills development instruction in relation to successful student learning outcomes.

 The purpose of this study is to obtain data which reflects the teacher perception of running this first-time program; their thoughts on successes, challenges, and curricular elements which are crucial for the implementation of the model. This information will be used to evaluate specific conditions such as the perception of special education students in their attitudes, performance and supports met, and teacher observations of student mastery of instructional skills. Utilizing a mixed-method design approach, I hope to substantiate the importance of a focused professional learning community of SETs in meeting the diverse needs of our students.

What will I do if I choose to be in this study?

You are being asked to participate in a focus group.

 Study time: Focus group participation will take approximately one period (40 minutes) on one day.

Study location: All study procedures will take place in the department IPC at Boyertown High School.

 I would like to audio-record this focus group to record the information you provide. I will store these tapes in a locked filing cabinet, and they will only be used by a transcriber and then researcher. It is required for participants to be audio recorded.

I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity unless you specifically request that you be identified by your actual name.

What are the possible risks or discomforts?

To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life.

As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information we collect from you could be breached – I will take steps to minimize this risk, as discussed in more detail below in this form.

What are the possible benefits for me or others?

A very likely benefit to participants is the positive transformative change that may occur by sharing their first-hand knowledge of the enacted curriculum in this study. The intention to voice concerns and solutions, present them to our SE director, and join school administration to make an institutional change could be empowering and positive. The next steps forward will be informed through this research, providing immediate local impact. Taking part in this research may not directly benefit you personally, but we may learn new things that will help our fellow teachers and ultimately, our students.

How will you protect the information you collect about me, and how will that information be shared?

Results of this study may be used in publications and presentations. Your study data will be handled as confidentially as possible. If the results of this study are published or presented, individual names and other personally identifiable information will not be used. The only individuals with access to identifiable teacher data will be the transcriber and the researcher.

While the study is underway, all digital recordings will be kept by both the transcriber and the researcher, locked in a filing cabinet. Only the researcher will have access to records. Data will be recorded from audiotape recordings from the focus group. Raw data will be coded with a numbering system so that participants are not identifiable. Each participant will be given a unique number for data recording purposes (01; 02; or 03).

We may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers.

Financial Information

Participation in this study will involve no cost to you. You will not be paid for participating in this study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Participation in the focus group is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in the focus group, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from the focus group at any time, and you will not be penalized in any way for deciding to stop participation. Both voluntary participation and non-participation in the focus group will have no impact on your position in special education.

If you decide to withdraw from the focus group, the researcher will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used.

<div align="center">**Consent**</div>

I have read this form, and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions, and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Signature:_____ Date:_____

If you agree to participate, please say so. You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

We may share the data we collect from you for use in future research studies or with other researchers – if we share the data that we collect about you, we will remove any information that could identify you before we share it.

Appendix C

Survey Questions from First Semester

1. What is your role as SDR instructor? What SDR skills did you instruct this year?

2. Have you established personal connections with your students?

3. Have you seen students progressing in their area of weakness?

4. How does your support connection impact student engagement/motivation?

5. How effective are you in meeting the needs of the student?

6. How effective is this SDR in supporting these students' IEP goal in area of weakness?

7. How did you modify the SDR to meet student needs?

8. What challenges/obstacles are there for SDR teachers and students?

9. What rewards/benefits are there for SDRteachers and students?

10. How could SDR be improved and what are the reasons for this improvement?

    *Other comments?

Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. What has been learned through the experiences of implementing the SDR?

2. How do teachers perceive their responsibilities in the SDR model?

3. How do SETs feel about their role/positionality?

4. How does co-teaming the SDR affect the regular education teacher?

5. Do teachers perceive a difference in student respect for their role?

6. How is student intervention being transformed through this process?

7. How does the teacher/student relationship impact the instruction?

8. Where is the delineation of teaching special education and at-risk students?

9. How could SDR be improved and what are the reasons for this improvement?

10. What does the group see as the role of the SET in the next five years? Next twenty?

Appendix E

Survey Questions from Second Semester

1. What skill is the focus of your SDR?

2. How many special education students participate in this SDR?

3. How many Chapter 15 (504) students participate in this SDR?

4. How many NON Chapter 15 students participate in this SDR?

5. How do you actually run this SDR?

6. What are the problems/challenges of SDR that you face as a teacher?

7. What are the benefits/rewards of SDR you receive as a teacher?

8. What are the problems/challenges for students in SDR?

9. How has the SDR improved?

10. What needs to be in place for SDRs to run better?

Appendix F

Coding Categories and Themes

Code	Code Group 1	Code Group 2	Code Group 3	Code Group 4	Code Group 5
Process - future	SDR Process				
Process - implementation	SDR Process				
Process - purpose/vision	SDR Process				
Teacher modifications			SE Teacher role		
Teacher role - benefits			SE Teacher role		
Teacher role - challenge			SE Teacher role		
Teacher role - RE			SE Teacher role		
Skills - benefits					Student skill instruction
Skills - challenge					Student skill instruction
Academic - benefits				Academic remediation	
Academic - challenge				Academic remediation	
Student home relationship		SDR relationship			
Student teacher relationship		SDR relationship			

Appendix G

FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Roles: facilitator **** (dept. leader), team **** (SE), **** (SE), **** (SE recorder),

   **** (SE), **** (SE).

Objective: *to discuss the effectiveness and implementation of the SDR for special education*

students

1. What has worked:

2. Chief challenges:

3. Brainstorm:

4. Consensus/actions (Calendar):

Details of the focus group questions and the open coding analysis of the focus group: