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A phenomenological study of the perceptions of inclusive preschool education through the lens of interdisciplinary early childhood educators.

Brooke Noon
University of Louisville

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

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DEDICATION

To my best friend, and most supportive husband, Jeremy

Thank you for always encouraging me to follow my dreams and supporting me along the way in every one. You are my everything and this is for YOU! We made it!

I LOVE YOU!

To my children, Jacob Michael and Patrick Andrew, my life's greatest blessing

I am SO proud to be your mother and even more proud of the fine young men you are maturing into. My wishes for you in life are optimal health and true happiness. Follow your dreams, work hard to make them come true, and know your father and I will ALWAYS support you in all you do! Be greaT!

I LOVE YOU MORE!

Oakley Francis- thank you for snuggling me during all of my classes and writing sessions- my sweet baby girl I love you!

through my career. Teaching is my calling, and I commit to always giving my all to my students- you deserve it!

Students of the past and students of the future—THANK YOU!

ABSTRACT

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE
PRESCHOOL EDUCATION THROUGH THE LENS OF INTERDISCIPLINARY EARLY
CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS

Brooke Noon

November 5, 2023

Young children with special needs have been educated in early childhood settings with typically developing peers for over 40 years. Successful educational inclusion in the least restrictive environment requires appropriate aids and supports (Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004)

Although researchers have studied many aspects of special education, little investigation has been conducted on the perspectives of dual certified interdisciplinary early childhood educator's (IECE) perceptions on full inclusion in preschool. This study was designed to examine the connection between the perceptions of IECE teacher's experiences as a dual certified educator in preschool. In total, 10 IECE teachers were interviewed and completed a survey on their experiences and beliefs about inclusion to meet the needs of their regular education and special education students. Using descriptive and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013), the study found that IECE teachers believe in inclusion in public preschool and find it as an effective model of instruction for their students. The study also produced recommendations for schools and districts to improve supports for IECE teachers. In addition, recommendations for educational policy reform were suggested.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Across the United States, children with disabilities, from three to five years of age

are educated in early childhood special education programs operated by local school

districts. Inclusive preschool education means that students with disabilities are supported

in chronologically age- appropriate general education classes and receive the specialized

instruction delineated by their individualized education programs (IEPs) within the

context of the core curriculum and general class activities (Halvorsen & Neary, 2004).

Research consistently demonstrates that high quality, inclusive environments are

associated with positive outcomes for young children (Camille, Vargus, Ryan & Barnett,

Espinosa, Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal & Thornburg, 2010). Yet, preschool inclusion has

been a topic of debate in education as the ratio of special needs children versus typically

developing children is difficult for teachers to meet the needs of all their students.

Teachers are challenged with educating the students with severe and profound

disabilities, and not having well trained special education staff in the classroom

consistently. All public preschool teachers in Kentucky are dual certified as

Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educators (IECE). They are responsible for managing

the regular education and special education caseload. IECE teachers write special

education Individualized Education Programs (IEP), they collect progress monitoring

data based on students specific IEP goals, and they implement the individualized

instruction for the special education students in their class. In addition, they are responsible for planning the regular education curriculum, differentiating instruction for the regular education students, monitoring and assessing their growth, as well as communicating progress to administration and families. This is different from the K-12 special education environment where co-teaching is the model that supports the students and the teachers. Co-teaching is a service delivery in which the student is served in the regular classroom by a special education teacher and regular education teacher working together to implement the Individualized Education Program (IEP) and provide instruction and access to the general education curriculum (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021). IECE teachers serve dual roles at the preschool level, a special education teacher and a regular education teacher. Understanding the lived experiences of the certified preschool professionals is necessary to improve inclusive preschool education. Investigating public preschool teacher's perspectives of inclusive learning environments is the focus of this research study.

Context of the Study

The teachers that participated in this case study work in public preschools, within Kentucky, that are a part of The Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, n.d.). OVECs mission is to provide professional learning, advocacy, and services that support, lead and inspire. OVEC provides a vehicle for conducting regional planning and is a consortium of 15 school districts serving over 155,000 students in north central Kentucky. (Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, n.d.). The teachers, within the OVEC preschools, serve the youngest students in their perspective districts. Children must qualify to be a participant in the early childhood

program within their district and state of Kentucky. Public preschools serve children from three years to five years of age in mixed age, mixed ability, inclusive classrooms. Three-year-old students must have a specific labeled disability and an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) to enroll. Four-year-old children must qualify based on financial need formulated from their parents' income as well as the number of family members in their household. Public preschool in the state of Kentucky, while not mandatory, is an early intervention for at-risk students.

Statement of the Problem

Public preschool classrooms are comprised of students with intense special needs yet there is no co-teaching model for preschool. Preschool teachers are dual certified as regular education teachers with special education certification. How this classroom condition of one teacher for all students with dual certification influences the teacher's perception of their interactions with their students and their perception of their ability to help their students grow should be of great concern. The researcher's interest in the perspectives of IECE teachers in public preschool began in the fall of 2021. They became a district resource teacher in public preschools in the state of Kentucky. Their role, as a special needs resource teacher, was to support 27 teachers in six different schools with the effective implementation of their teaching focusing on their special needs students. They taught teachers how to write IEPs, collect data based on IEP goals, provide resources for effective classroom management, as well as visual and sensory supports for students. The researcher recognized the high demands placed on IECE teachers and their lack of knowledge regarding how to meet the needs of their severe and profoundly disabled students while still managing the instruction for their typically developing

students. Many classrooms had a special education ratio greater than 70%. The inclusive classroom conditions, of only one dual certified teacher, affects the teacher's perceptions and influences their interactions with their students.

Individuals with Disabilities Act, IDEA, states that children with disabilities are to be educated with non-disabled children to the maximum extent possible (IDEA, 2018). Preschool eligible special needs students spend one hundred percent of their school day with typically developing peers in the OVEC school districts where the research participants worked. Children with disabilities are to only be removed from a less restrictive environment when the extent and severity of their disabilities prohibit an appropriate education in the less restrictive general education setting (IDEA, 2018). Students in Kentucky's preschool program do not have an option to attend school in a self-contained special education room, as they do not exist. The least restrictive environment for all disabled preschool students, by default, is in a full inclusion classroom. The severity of needs within a preschool classroom range from non-verbal autistic students to children with a mild speech delay. When a special education student enters kindergarten, they automatically have two certified teachers to support them. A regular education teacher, as well as a special education teacher collaborate to serve this child starting in kindergarten. However, preschool classrooms only have one certified teacher who acts as the regular educator and special educator. In inclusive preschool, a special education student only has instruction from one certified professional consistently, unless they receive speech services. Students who qualify with having a speech impairment do receive speech instruction from a certified speech therapist. In addition, many teachers leading these early childhood classrooms are earning initial

teaching certification through an option six model in the state of Kentucky. This is due to the shortage of certified teachers nationwide. There are not enough certified teachers to fill the overwhelming number of classroom vacancies. Option six teachers are required to have a bachelor's degree from any field, and earn their initial teaching degree outside of the school day. They are not required to complete student teaching prior to taking the job, and lack formal training prior to leading a class on their own. Having gained a better understanding of the perspectives of interdisciplinary early childhood teachers can provide school leaders with new ideas for promoting a positive view of inclusion at the school and district level to best meet the needs of the diverse students these teachers serve.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children asserts that inclusion in the general education classroom is the best practice for educating preschool children with disabilities (Hilbert, 2014). Additionally, in a joint statement, the U.S. Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2015) called for all preschool children with disabilities to be provided access to high-quality inclusive educational programs so that they may be afforded the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities (Barton & Smith, 2015). Today, the implementation of inclusion into classrooms requires teachers to have a positive view, plenty of time, energy, dedication, and assurance toward the process (Salisbury, 2006). Teachers need to have the appropriate training, and declarative knowledge, to support the diverse needs of early childhood students in their classrooms. Teachers' energy and positive view of their role in early childhood is difficult because of the high demand of student needs, overall general workload, and lack of training to support the students with severe and profound

disabilities. How this classroom condition of one teacher for all students with dual certification affects the teacher's perception of their interactions with their students and their perception of their ability to help their students grow should be of great concern.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative study focused on how preschool teacher's experiences, as a dual certified special education and regular education teacher, influenced their day-to-day work as an educator. Research on related topics exist, particularly co-teaching models of special education, but there is limited research on the phenomenology of full inclusion in preschool. This study specifically examined teacher's perceptions of managing a regular education and special education caseload as one teacher through the lens of the participating early childhood teachers. This qualitative study focused on the perceptions of early childhood public school teachers in Kentucky. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perceptions of inclusive teaching?

RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?

RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have

regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular

education students?

Surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted to identify how IECE

teachers perceive inclusion. The research questions addressed the factors that contributed

to the expectations set for students with disabilities, and the implementation of inclusive

practices. In addition, questions were asked to address the experiences the teachers had

when working with their regular education students.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and pragmatism guided this study.

A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of

their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Interviews from

dual-certified preschool teachers offered a lens into their views of inclusion and the

impact of their roles to deliver instruction in order to meet the needs of their students.

Phenomenological methodology is a form of inquiry, which seeks to understand a human

experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study focused on the preschool teachers' perspective

and experience of leading their regular and special education students in a full inclusion

classroom. Phenomenological methodology was used to look at the phenomenon of full

inclusion through the lens of preschool teachers implementing this instructional model.

Researchers use phenomenological research designs to understand a
phenomenon's universal nature by exploring the views of those who have
experienced it. This approach is popularly used to study lived experience, gain a
deeper understanding of how human beings think, and expand a researcher's
knowledge about a phenomenon. Qualitative phenomenological research design

aims to uncover what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it (Ho & Limpaecher, 2022).

This qualitative study focused on the IECE experiences allowing the researcher to find commonalties among the participants day-to-day work as an educator. This study uncovered what public preschool teachers in Kentucky experience as a dual certified preschool teacher.

Pragmatists believe that education should be an ever-evolving process of reviewing, reconstructing, and integrating experiences as individuals move through life (Drew, 2020). In this study that focused on early childhood education it was necessary to recognize that learning and growth are ever evolving and that daily experiences constitute growth; therefore, pragmatism is another theoretical framework that aligned with this research. John Dewey, one of the main theorists of this framework, believes that one should learn by doing and that the real process of education and research is the process of learning to think (Drew, 2020). In the education field, pragmatism is an approach to learning that focuses on keeping things practical. Early childhood educators rely on practicality to support their day-to-day interactions with students, especially special education students. Pragmatic researchers believe that social interactions are important and are one of the primary experiences that everyone has in their everyday lives. Pragmatists focus on the outcomes of action (Morgan, 2014). It is with a pragmatic approach that basic and practical questions, as well as heuristic procedures, guided this study. The social interactions that teachers have with students were the foundation of this work. From understanding these experiences, future action can be taken to implement educational and social change.

The research design for this study was a qualitative case study. Case study research is commonly found in many social science disciplines as well as the practicing professions (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning). The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018). A case study is research of an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. It is an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. A case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis. Any or all methods for gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in data analysis focusing on insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing in this class. A case is a bounded system; think of the case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). A case study is an inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth: a single program, activity, event, or process of one or multiple individual persons (Creswell, 2009). This study focused on a single program within the district's school system: early childhood. It specifically focused on teachers who are responsible for the inclusion of special education students in public preschool.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used within this study:

Child with a disability: means a child evaluated in accordance with 707 KAR 1:300, as meeting the criteria listed in the definitions in this section for autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional-behavior disability, hearing impairment,

mental disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment which has an adverse effect on the child's educational performance and who, as a result, needs special education and related services (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021)

Collaboration/Co-teaching: A service delivery in which the student is served in the regular classroom and a special education teacher and regular education teacher work together to implement the IEP and provide instruction and access to the general education curriculum (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Special education and related services provided to a child identified with a disability that is provided at public expense, includes preschool through secondary school education, and applies to all children with a disability, including those suspended or expelled from school (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educator: A person holding this certificate shall serve as a primary developer and implementer of an individual program for children with or without disabilities including an individual education plan (IEP) and individual family service plan (IFSP) with consultation and support from a specialist according to the needs of the child. "Interdisciplinary" means a preparation program combining early childhood and early childhood special education (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Individual Education Program (IEP): An individual education plan written to meet the unique needs of a child identified with a disability. It is a legally binding

agreement that guarantees the services specified in the plan will be provided to the child (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the law that gives qualified children with disabilities the right to receive special and related services in public schools. The IDEA applies to children from ages three to 21 (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Least Restrictive Environment: The educational setting that provides the child access to the general curriculum and same age peers as much as possible based on the child's needs. Determining the LRE is a decision made annually by the ARC (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Special Education: Specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parents, to meet the unique needs of the child with a disability including instruction in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings. Special education means speech-language pathology services, travel training, and vocational education (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI): This describes what the teacher does to adapt the content, teaching methods, and delivery of instruction to best meet the needs of the student. Specially designed instruction is also where the IEP should describe all instruction needed for the student to use assistive technology devices, materials or services (Kentucky Administrative Regulations, 2021).

Organization of the Study

      The study is organized as follows: chapter one includes the introduction, context of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, theoretical framework and methodology, definition of teams and the organizational summary of this study. Chapter two begins with a comprehensive review of the relevant literature with a historical primer of special education law, followed by inclusion and the social theorists who support it, and ends with a subsection focusing on teacher identity, reflexivity, and power. Chapter three provides an in-depth description of the qualitative case study methodology used to collect and analyze the data. Chapter four presents the findings of the study including themes revealed from the qualitative data analysis. Finally, chapter five summarizes the findings of the study, and offers implications and recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In this chapter, a comprehensive review of the relevant literature is provided as a historical context of the role of inclusive education for special education students at the preschool level. It begins with a literature review including a brief historical primer on the U.S. special educational system. It then focuses on the literature on the inclusive theory of education and discusses multiple theorists' research and their findings on inclusion. The next subsection reviewed is that of early childhood educators' perspectives on inclusive education, with a focus on identity theory, educator identity, teacher reflexivity, and power relations in teacher identity. The chapter ends with a summary that captures the major themes of the research in terms of findings and methods used to arrive at these conclusions. The chapter ends with a clear conclusion of the research of the literature and a concise justification for the study. Four research questions guided this study with the first serving as an overarching driving question and the following three focusing on preschool teachers' phenomenology as related to their perceptions of full inclusion in preschool learning environments.

RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perceptions of inclusive teaching?

RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?

RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?

History of Special Education

The first portion of this literature review highlights federal laws within the United States public education system passed to protect the rights of disabled citizens attending school. A review of the following laws is shared: Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), Americans Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 specifically section 504. Inclusive education in the preschool systems is reviewed as well. These laws preserve the rights of students and their families and help integrate students with special needs into society without segregating them. Although laws differ from state to state, the acts passed by Congress standardize the treatment of students with special needs across the country (Masters in Special Education Degree Program Guide, n.d.). Laws are a form of behavior modification (Turnbull, 2005). They regulate the behaviors between the government and the governed, and shape the

behavior of both. In this respect, laws play a traditional role of social engine- shaping the way that society operates (Turnbull, 2005).

The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) is a federal piece of American legislation that provides support for children with disabilities in public and nonpublic schools. The most comprehensive education was formally called PL 94-142 or the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The act was written to make available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children. The IDEA provides the framework for how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 7.5 million (as of school year 2018-2019) eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). This act has for decades protected the rights of disabled citizens to ensure they receive an equitable education in order to prepare them for their independent future. IDEA also ensures citizens ages 3-21 years of age are taught in their least restrictive environment (LRE) appropriate to their individual needs. LRE is an important part of the IDEA. LRE is not a place but rather a principle guiding a child's special education program stating that special education students should be in the regular education classroom as much as possible. Where a child learns is only part of the equation. LRE applies to a student's entire education program, including services to make sure every child has the equal chance to participate in school activities (Morin, n.d.). The IDEA had its genesis in a movement of parents and educators fighting to secure public education for children with disabilities. These efforts gained inspiration from both the broader civil rights movement and the belief that inclusion in

public education could help children with disabilities gain independence (DeMonte, 2010).

IDEA has specific iterations focused on early childhood education and the protection of special children in their schooling. In 1986, Congress enacted PL- 99-457, the Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1986, to assist states in establishing a system of early intervention services for children with disabilities aged three to five and their families. Congress enacted the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), also known as the EHA, in 1975 to support states and localities in protecting the rights of, meeting the individual needs of, and improving the results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and their families (IDEA, 2018). Studies of the effectiveness of preschool education for the handicapped have demonstrated beyond doubt the economic and educational benefits of programs for young, handicapped children. In addition, the studies have shown that the earlier intervention is started, the greater is the ultimate dollar savings and the higher is the rate of educational attainment by these handicapped children (Trohanis, 1988).

The American with Disabilities Act ensures that people with disabilities can thrive (Bubar, 2021). The ADA is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life. ADA prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in the private sector. It protects equal opportunity to employment and public services, accommodations, transportation, and telecommunications. Section 504 of ADA applies to all persons with disabilities regardless of age. It covers preschool and adult programs as well as elementary and

secondary education, requiring equal and accessible transportation, architecture, educational programs, and nonacademic services (Eric, 1992). Like IDEA, Section 504 has specific procedural requirements for the identification, evaluation, placement, and safeguards for preschool, elementary, and secondary students, and encompasses Child Find, which mandates school systems to identify and locate students with disabilities throughout a community's school system (IDEA, 2018).

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was passed by congress in 1973. Regulations implementing the statute became effective in 1977. For many years school districts perceived its main obligation as ensuring physical access to public buildings. For example, ramps were installed, curbs were cut, elevators were added to multi-level buildings, and restroom stalls were enlarged. Schools were at the same time committed to compliance with special education regulations now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - (IDEA). With passage of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Congress required that school districts make their programs and activities accessible and usable to all individuals with disabilities. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has become active in assisting school districts in further defining "access." The definition of access means more than physical access; a student may require special accommodations such as modified assignments in order to benefit from their education (Division of Special Education, 1999). IDEA is an education law that mandates students with disabilities receive an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to support learning. The Rehabilitation Act of 1793 is a civil rights law that mandates anyone with a disability has accommodations and modifications to academic and non-academic experiences. The diagram below compares and contrasts an IEP derived from IDEA and a 504 derived

from section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1793.

Figure 1. Ghairband's (2019) IEP vs 504

Early childhood special education professionals are in a position to implement the

latest evidence-based research findings and improve their effectiveness teaching

preschoolers with special needs (Walden University, n.d.). Disabled students require

accommodations and modifications, as well as specialized education services, in order to

be successful in public school. ADA directly influences early childhood education

because there is no age limit within the law and it ensures non-academic supports are

available to children and families of disabled children. IDEA directly affects public early

childhood students and their families through specialized education plans written in an

IEP. Intervention services are essential for assisting children with their physical,

cognitive, communication, social, emotional, and adaptive development. The special

educators, social workers, and other qualified professionals who provide early

intervention services all play a crucial role in helping boys and girls with special needs

overcome developmental delays (The University of Texas Permian Basin, n.d.).

Educators working in early childhood implement the laws that protect disabled students

from the start of their educational journey.

Inclusion

The second portion of this literature review highlights preschool inclusion,

discusses literature on the inclusive theory of education and discusses multiple

theorists' research and their findings on inclusion. The movement toward inclusion of

preschool age children with disabilities originally gained national attention with the

passage of Public Law 99-457, the IDEA amendments of 1986. It addressed the

inclusion of preschoolers by extending the provisions of the least restrictive

environment (LRE) to children with disabilities ages three through five years. The

developmental importance of inclusive services for young children with disabilities is

clear. Over the last 30 years, the evidence regarding inclusive service delivery for

young children with disabilities has accumulated rapidly (Strain, 2014). Children with

disabilities in inclusive classrooms who have opportunities to interact with typically

developing peers demonstrate higher levels of social competence and better

communication skills (Guralnick, Connor, Neville, & Hammond, Connor, 2006).

Multiple social theorists have identified that inclusive learning environments

benefit typically developing children as well as neurodiverse students. Lev Vygotsky and

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Abraham Maslow are world-renowned social scientists. For centuries, they have theorized that social interactions support human growth and development. In this subsection, a review of these theorists' work in relation to present day inclusion in preschool is reviewed.

The uniqueness of Vygotsky's approach lies in his understanding of the disability not as a biological impairment having psychological consequences, but as a sociocultural developmental phenomenon. Vygotsky argued that a disability is perceived as an abnormality only when and if it is brought into the social context (Gindas, 1995). Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development is based on the idea that development is defined both by what a child can do independently and by what the child can do when assisted by an adult or more competent peer in a social setting. Knowing both levels of Vygotsky's zone is useful for teachers, for these levels indicate where the child is at a given moment as well as where the child is going. The zone of proximal development (ZPD) has several implications for teaching in the classroom (Slavin, 2005). ZPD is considered the distance between the actual level of potential and the level of development as made known by the problem solver (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky believed children learn about their world through physical interaction. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory asserts that learning is essentially a social process in which the support of parents, caregivers, peers and the wider society and culture plays a crucial role in the development of higher psychological functions (Williams, 2022). Vygotsky's theory that children learn from their peers, supports inclusion in early childhood education because he teaches that supporting children with positive peer interactions supports growth for abled and disabled students.

For learning to occur students have basic needs that need to be met. The more needs that are met, the more students will learn. Maslow's hierarchy, developed by Abraham Maslow in 1954, is a way of organizing the basic needs of students on different levels (McLeod, 2007). The more levels that are met, the more a student will learn. Maslow's hierarchy of needs applies especially to students with exceptionalities, because often, students with exceptionalities have needs that are more difficult to meet (Lutz, 2016). Abraham Maslow (1970), in his discussion of a hierarchy of human needs, pointed out that belonging was an essential and prerequisite human need that had to be met before one could ever achieve a sense of self-worth (Kunc, 1992). This belief that humans need to feel a sense of belonging strongly aligns with inclusion. Maslow teaches that when a child's psychological and safety needs are met, they can advance to the next level on the hierarchy - love and belonging. Inclusive preschools provide belonging and foster an environment where less able peers can learn from typically developing children. Segregating students into special education classrooms will not provide a sense of belonging for students with special needs in the school (Lutz, 2016). For this reason, students should be included in the least restrictive environment possible (Lutz, 2016). The sense of belonging is imperative for all children to learn, especially those with identified disabilities. Research and experience are showing that students in segregated programs do imitate and learn, but often what they imitate and learn is the inappropriate behavior of their classmates (Kunc,1992). Furthermore, there is growing documentation of students who seemed incapable of learning appropriate behavior and skills in segregated settings achieving these previously unattainable goals once integrated into regular classrooms. Students, in

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segregated classrooms or programs, were being denied the opportunity to learn

socially appropriate behavior and develop friendships with their peers (Kunc, 1992).

Maslow believed that human potential and self-motivation occurred when specific

needs were met. Love and belonging were on his hierarchy of needs supporting

the belief that inclusive learning environments were best for children with special

needs.

The following position statement defines early childhood inclusion and

identifies the relevant features and recommendations for developing quality inclusive

preschool programs. The Division for Early Childhood Education (DEC) and the

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) definition of

inclusion is as follows (DEC/NAEYC, 2009):

> Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that
> support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family,
> regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as
> full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of
> inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their
> families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social
> relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full
> potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high
> quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and
> support.

Creating an environment that fosters children's confidence in themselves as

learners, encourages children's active participation in their learning, promotes children's

ability to understand and appreciate others, encourages meaningful relationships with

other children, and promotes mastery of skills and knowledge with special and regular

education students in the same classroom is a model of inclusive education (Abraham,

1993). Inclusive learning provides all students with access to flexible learning choices

and effective paths for achieving educational goals in spaces where they experience a sense of belonging.

Inclusion is based on the understanding that all children and families are valued equally and deserve access to the same opportunities (Lathan, 2022). In an inclusive preschool environment, all children learn together in the same classroom with a full inclusion model. Children must qualify to be a participant in the early childhood program within their district and state. Three-year-old students must have a specific labeled disability and an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) to enroll. Four-year-old children must qualify based on financial need formulated from their parents' income as well as the number of family members in their household. Public preschool in the state of Kentucky, while not mandatory, is early intervention for at-risk students.

The IECE teachers in these preschool classrooms work to serve the regular education students in their classroom attending based on financial need, as well as the special education students attending with a labeled disability. The IECE teachers are responsible for managing the special education caseload as well as a regular education caseload. Preschool is not mandatory in the state of Kentucky and serves as an early intervention for qualified students. Early intervention services in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), along with information regarding how and where those services are provided (Pacer Center, 2020). The goal of early intervention in preschool is prepare students for kindergarten with a focus on socialization and kindergarten readiness skills.

Teacher Identity, Reflexivity and Power

The third portion of this literature review will highlight teacher identity, teacher reflexivity and how power relates to the role of an educator. The concept of teacher identity refers to how teachers identify themselves as educators, including who they are as professionals, and who they strive and are empowered to become in a constant process of reflecting on their practices and experiences. Teacher identity is not a static entity; a teacher constantly constructs and develops a reflective sense of self through looking into his or her practice and life of teaching, as a mirror (Palmer, 1997). Taking time to understand how teachers perceive themselves, as well as their role as an educator, allows them to gain a greater understanding of themselves and their own identity in their field of work. Providing space for reflection creates the opportunity for teachers to grow and for needed changes and collaboration to occur. Teacher identity is as a complex and dynamic configuration of personal and professional factors that more or less influence each other (Beauchamp, Thomas, Beijaard, Meijer, Verloop, & Izadinia, 2017). A teacher who can recognize their personal implicit bias as well as analyze professional factors that may create challenges in their career can better assist them as they face potential challenges in their work.

It is important to pay attention to the beliefs that teachers bring with them when they enter teacher education, and the tensions these may cause. Against this background, they point to the need for doing 'real' identity work in teacher education. They furthermore argue that ownership, sense making, and agency are essential concepts for understanding and provoking identity learning in teacher education (Beauchamp, et. al. 2017). Creating space for teacher positionality is necessary for

educators to become teachers of equity. Reflecting on one's personal life, culture, and experiences allows them to realize the implicit bias they bring to the classroom. In a race-conscious society, the development of a positive sense of racial/ethnic identity not based on assumed superiority or inferiority is an important task for both white people and people of color. The development of this positive identity is a lifelong process that often requires unlearning the misinformation and stereotypes we have internalized not only about others, but also about ourselves (Tatum, 2001).

In the social justice movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the gay rights movement, the labor movement-reflected and created major shifts in our cultural values. A common effect from the justice movements was a thorough reexamination of power within the social research enterprise (Leavy, 2014). Power also exists in the public school system as it is an extension of the community and social justice outside of the classroom lives within them as well. Diversity, equity, and inclusion discourses can both challenge and reproduce hegemonic power relations in classroom communication (Wilkinson & Hartsough, 2021). Schools and systems of schooling require similar attention to, and inclusion of, reflexive practices when working to construct or deconstruct norms and values that are inherent to everyday experiences in schools (Wozolek, 2021). Teachers who are open to reflexive practices have a growth mindset that help support equity in learning for students. Creating equitable learning environments for children, and their families, are building blocks on the social justice quest for promoting and understanding diversity at large. Time and space to deconstruct societal norms to have anti-bias thinking and learning environments for students is necessary.

The inclusion of students with special needs, in the preschool classroom, is debated among teachers who work with these students (Ordóñez de Pablos, Lytras & Zhang, 2021). Teachers perceptions are the thoughts, opinions, and beliefs that instructors hold based on their personal experiences; the term usually refers to how teachers conceptualize their professional activity and behavior, as well as their teaching practices and experiences (Ordóñez de Pablos et al., 2021). Teacher perceptions towards inclusion may be influenced by training they have had (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000).

> While federal legislation requires inclusion in the least restrictive environment for all students with special needs, many factors affect whether teachers welcome students with disabilities into their classrooms. Recent studies have found that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are positive. In fact, many teachers agree that students with special needs benefit from both the general education curriculum and interaction with their typically functioning peers (Harkins & Fletcher, 2015).

Attitudes, and perceptions, of providers may be particularly important in determining whether community-based, and school settings, welcome children with disabilities (Frazeur Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004) . Attitudes of teachers can contribute positively or negatively to the availability effective programs (Buell, Hallam, Gamel, McCormick, & Scheer, 1999). Inclusive practices have placed students who would have been in the special education classroom into general education classrooms. Consequently, general education teachers have had to adapt both their practices and their perceptions of students with special needs (VanCleef, 2019). Perceptions refer to the views held by a person or a group of people depending on how they conceptualize a situation (Avramidis, et al., 2000). Researching preschool

teacher's perceptions of inclusion is necessary to add to current studies on teachers experiences who work with special needs children in early childhood.

Literature Review Summary

The literature review revealed the need for full inclusion in preschools classrooms as the laws of the United States have outlined that children with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education (FAPE). They are entitled and to learn in their least restrictive environment (LRE). Preschoolers should be taught with the support of learning alongside typically developing same aged peers. IDEA is important because it allows students with disabilities to get the education they need to thrive. In the case of small children, IDEA allows parents to access the services necessary and gives parents tools to fight back if they believe a school or a school district is neglecting their child's needs (Morin, n.d.). Understanding the laws put in place to protect young citizens, and their right to be educated, is essential to understanding the significance of this study.

Understanding inclusion, in the preschool learning environment, is necessary to understand the role of early childhood educators. Preschool teachers in Kentucky carry the role of the regular education teacher as well as the special education teacher. Research has been done in the field of special education alone, as well as co-teaching between special education and regular education teachers. However, looking at the perspectives of IECE teachers in Kentucky preschools has limited findings. There is a gap in the literature about how the structure of public preschools influences the teacher's perceptions. It is also necessary to understand that social theorists, such as

Lev Vygotsky and Abraham Maslow, have uncovered the importance of social development in early childhood. Vygotsky believed that social interaction plays a critical role in children's learning, thus supporting the framework of how public schools youngest students learn best. Abraham Maslow provides a hierarchy model to illustrate how students are motivated to learn and develop. As students' basic needs are met and they move up the hierarchy, they grow according to this continuum. It is at the third level where students need love and belonging. Disabled students need to learn alongside typically developing peers to have a model of positive peer behavior and love. This fully supports that inclusive learning is essential in early childhood. Maslow's hierarchy of needs supports inclusion, justifies, and supports the study of inclusion at the preschool level.

Many researchers have conducted phenomenological studies with educators. A great deal of work on teaching and learning, students' educational experiences and teachers' perceptions of their identity. Yet, there is a need for research on public preschool teachers. This research study was necessary as the lived experiences and perceptions of those educators who are solely responsible for a special education caseload and a regular education caseload deserved to have their experiences understood.

In this literature review, a historical primer and background of special education was provided. The social justice movement resulted in laws being written to support and protect students with identified disabilities. Yet, the perspectives of teachers having to uphold those laws and support those learners everyday has not been studied in depth in Kentucky. The literature provides perspectives on how

children learn best regarding social theorists beliefs of the past. The findings of this study may help schools realize inclusive learning is best for children but also unveils patterns within experiences that can enlighten future change in early childhood education.

Chapter three outlines the research methodology and design, including the purpose, design, data collection, and data analysis procedures. The chapter also includes a discussion of the study's limitations, credibility, and ethical issues.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the research methodology that was utilized for this qualitative research study gaining insight into teacher perspectives of inclusion in preschool. "Qualitative research has emerged in response to the inability of quantitative research to provide a robust and meaningful understanding of the dynamic operations of human social life" (Ortiz Stringer & Aragon, 2021). A phenomenological approach allows the researcher to focus on gaining insight into individual teachers' lived experiences as a dual-certified special education and regular education teacher. This chapter outlines the research process that used to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perceptions of inclusive teaching?

RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?

RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?

Chapter three is organized as follows. It begins by stating and rationalizing the choice for conducting a qualitative research study. The first subsection discusses the research methods focusing on the theoretical frameworks. Then the research methods of the qualitative case study are discussed. Next, the strengths and limitations of this study as well as the context of this qualitative case study are shared. Then, the various data sources utilized and the corresponding data collection procedures use to obtain them were presented. The procedures used to analyze the data sources are also explained. Ethical considerations of the research were shared, and careful consideration was given to working with teachers choosing to partake in a study sharing classroom experiences that may be difficult to talk about. Finally, the researcher explores their positionality and provides insight into their role as a scholar-practitioner conducting research in school district within Kentucky.

Research Methods and Design- Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and pragmatism guided this study. A phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). Interviews from

dual-certified preschool teachers offered a lens into their views of inclusion and the impact of their roles to deliver instruction in order to meet the needs of their students. Phenomenological research was conducted with participants who have lived the experience. Phenomenological methodology is a form of inquiry, which seeks to understand a human experience (Moustakas, 1994). This study focused on the preschool teachers' perspective and experience of leading their regular and special education students in a full inclusion classroom. Phenomenological methodology was used to look at the phenomenon of inclusion through the lens of preschool teachers implementing this instructional model.

> Researchers use phenomenological research designs to understand a phenomenon's universal nature by exploring the views of those who have experienced it. This approach is popularly used to study lived experiences, gain a deeper understanding of how human beings think, and expand a researcher's knowledge about a phenomenon. Qualitative phenomenological research design aims to uncover what a particular experience means to a group of people and how they experienced it (Ho et al., 2022).

This study uncovered what IECE teacher's experience to can gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives.

Phenomenological research is a deep investigation of what experiences mean to people. At its core, it concerns the investigation of everyday human experiences in order to learn people's common sense understanding and the meaning they make of their experiences and the experiences of others (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological research requires a researcher to focus on people's experiences of a phenomenon to obtain

comprehensive details that provide a basis for reflective structural analysis that ultimately

reveals the essence of the experience (Bliss, 2016). Intentional questions to guide the

research participants to share their experiences illustrate how this study is directly aligned

with the theoretical framework of phenomenology. This study explored, described, and

explained the perspectives of interdisciplinary early childhood educators' experiences

with a full inclusion model in preschool.

Pragmatists believe that education should be an ever-evolving process of

reviewing, reconstructing, and integrating experiences as individuals move through life

(Drew, 2020). In this study it was necessary to recognize that learning and growth are

ever evolving and that daily experiences constitute growth; therefore, pragmatism is

another theoretical framework that aligns with this research. John Dewey, one of the

main theorists of this framework, believes that one should learn by doing and that the real

process of education and research is the process of learning to think. In the education

world, pragmatism is an approach to learning that focuses on keeping things practical

(Drew, 2020). Early childhood educators rely on practicality to support their day-to-day

interactions with students, especially special education students. Pragmatic researchers

believe that social interactions are important and are one of the primary experiences that

everyone has in their everyday lives. Pragmatists focus on the outcomes of action

(Morgan, 2014). It is with a pragmatic approach that basic and practical questions, as

well as heuristic procedures, were created to guide this study. The social interactions that

students have with one another, in a full inclusion classroom was questioned in this study.

The social interactions that teachers have with students are the foundation of this work,

and from understanding these experiences, future action to implement educational and social change can occur.

Research Methods and Design—Qualitative Case Study

The research design for this study is a qualitative case study. Case study research is commonly found in many social science disciplines as well as the practicing professions (e.g., psychology, sociology, political science, anthropology, social work, business, education, nursing, and community planning). The distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2018). A case study is research of an individual, program, event, group, intervention, or community. It is an in-depth understanding of the situation and the meaning for those involved. A case study does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis (Yin, 2014). Any or all methods for gathering data, from testing to interviewing, can be used in data analysis focusing on insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing in this class. A case is a bounded system; think of the case as a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The purpose of this case study was to describe how early childhood educators perceive inclusion within the preschool instructional program. In this study, the researcher intended to understand the perceptions of a cross-section of teachers to learn how inclusion in preschool classrooms affects and drives their instruction. A case study is an inquiry in which the researcher explores in-depth: a single program, activity, event, or process of one or multiple individual persons (Creswell, 2009). This study focused on a

signal program within several public school districts in Kentucky's OVEC educational cooperative: early childhood.

A qualitative methodology is suitable for studies on phenomena within their natural environments, attempting to interpret or make sense of the phenomena in terms of meanings in which participants display (Yin, 2018). A case study examination involves an in-depth investigation of a group, person, or community involving variables of interest rather than data points (Yin, 2014). The community of early childhood educators was the focus of this study with the research having been conducted in their natural environment within their school setting.

The study involved a single population of educators, IECE preschool educators. This case study constituted a bounded system by existing independently of inquiry within the respected boundaries of the case pertaining to understanding how teachers perceive the world in which they work (Yin, 2014). The case and the context in this study are the early childhood teachers giving their perceptions on inclusion. This qualitative case study utilizes a bounded case holistic research design (Yin, 2018). The case study design provides the tools that allow the researcher to study the phenomenon in detail, gaining a better understanding of the experiences that contribute to the participants' perceptions of inclusion.

Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research data stems from the human experience. It can open a window into audiences' minds that quantitative data cannot show and paint a richer, more holistic portrait of behavior (Dudovskiy, n.d.). As an action researcher, the researcher chose

qualitative research because they wanted to understand the lived experiences of teachers to gain perspective into the social science of special education. Researchers use this approach to explore; to robustly investigate and learn about social phenomena; to unpack the meanings people ascribe to activities, situations, events, or artifacts; or to build a depth of understanding about some dimension of social life (Leavy, 2017). The strengths of qualitative research can be examined in detail and in-depth. Interviews are not restricted to specific questions and can be guided and redirected by the researcher in real-time. The research framework and direction can be quickly revised as new information emerges. The major weaknesses of qualitative research are more focused on the individuals: researcher and research subject. Subjectivity, influence of personal biases, and connection/lack thereof to research theory are all potential issues. Numbers can tell their own story without a supporting narrative (Heath, 2020).

Context of the Study and Data Summary

The schools for this case study were public preschools, within Kentucky, that are a part of the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, n.d.). OVECs mission is to provide professional learning, advocacy, and services that support, lead and inspire. OVEC provides a vehicle for conducting regional planning and is a consortium of 15 school districts serving over 155,000 students in north central Kentucky. That covers the counties of Anchorage Independent, Bullitt County, Carroll County, Eminence Independent, Gallatin County, Grant County, Henry County, Jefferson County, Oldham County, Owen County, Shelby County, Spencer County and Trimble County (Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative, n.d.). The teachers, within the OVEC preschools, serve the youngest students in their perspective districts. Children

must qualify to be a participant in the early childhood program within their district and state of Kentucky. Public preschools serve children from three years to five years of age in mixed age, mixed ability, inclusive classrooms. Three-year-old students must have a specific labeled disability and an active Individualized Education Program (IEP) to enroll. Four-year-old children must qualify based on financial need formulated from their parents' income as well as the number of family members in their household. Public preschool in the state of Kentucky, while not mandatory, is early intervention for at-risk students.

> Kentucky's preschool education programs are available for all four-year-old children whose family income is no more than 160% of poverty; all three- and four-year-old children with developmental delays and disabilities, regardless of income; and other four-year-old children as placements are available based on district decision. The preschool program is designed to be developmentally appropriate for young children. "Developmentally appropriate" is defined in law to mean that the program focuses on the child's physical, intellectual, social, and emotional development, including interpersonal, intrapersonal, and socialization skills (Kentucky Department of Education, 2020).

Data Sources and Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected from two sources: a teacher survey, and teacher semi-structured interviews. All participants were provided with an informed consent (appendix c) form outlining information as well as the data collection expectations explaining their role as a participant in this research. Potential research participants, who received consent forms, were informed that they are free to talk with the researcher regarding questions or concerns they had regarding participation in this voluntary research study. Below further explains the data sources that were utilized

Survey: A teacher survey was utilized to provide an overview of teacher perceptions regarding their experience as dual-certified teachers working with regular and special education students in one classroom. It provided the opportunity for teachers to reflect on the full inclusion model of instruction. The survey (appendix A) consisted of 10 categorized questions with multiple-choice selections for responses. Twenty certified teachers at participating OVEC preschools were invited to complete the survey.

Interviews: The second data source utilized in this qualitative study was one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. Interviews are one of the most valuable data sources in case studies when focusing on human behaviors (Yin, 2018). A select purposive sample of 10 early childhood preschool teachers, with varying levels of professional experience, were selected. Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling) is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on his or her own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study (Dudovskiy, n.d.). In addition, teachers were purposively selected to ensure diverse representation. The interview protocol (appendix B) consisted of 10 questions. The questions were intentionally formulated to gain insight into the lived experiences of the teachers chosen to uncover rich, descriptive data. Each interview lasted between 20 to 40 minutes. The interviews were held via Microsoft Teams and were transcribed via Microsoft Teams. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and coded. Ten certified teachers completed a semi- structure research interview.

Data Analysis

Analyzing text and multiple other forms of data presents a challenging task for qualitative researchers. It involves organizing the data, conducting a preliminary read of the database, coding and organizing themes, representing the data, and forming an interpretation of them (Creswell, 2013). During the data analysis phase of this study, the researcher employed an objective lens. Through a structured ethical reflection, they analyzed their personal biases and became aware of their research positionality. They employed multiple strategies to review the collected information. Coding is an integral part of qualitative research for many scholars that use interview or focus group data (Parameswaran, U. D., Ozawa-Kirk, J. L., & Latendresse, G., 2020). They utilized coding for this case study with the process of first order coding and second order coding. They utilized in vivo coding, using the exact words from the participants, to strengthen the validity of the research for each data source as the first order of coding. They utilized axial codes in the second phase to uncover relationships among the initial descriptive coding to construct linkages between the data collection sources.

Survey: First, a descriptive analysis of the survey data was done. For the 10 multiple-choice questions, the most frequent words selected by the teachers helped determine overall data trends. The open-ended survey questions provided the opportunity to find commonalities among the participants' experiences. Inductive reasoning was used to find specific commonalities among responses. That data was analyzed to form general themes. A survey may provide a very useful tool for extending the data collection process

to a broader range of participants (Stringer et al., 2021). 10 certified teachers chosen to partake in the study completed the survey.

Interviews: One of the most important sources of case study evidence is the interview (Yin, 2018). The researcher, to look for themes, coded all 10 interviews. Microsoft Teams transcribed the interviews. The visual transcripts allowed the researcher to code and find common themes from the annotation and analysis. In addition, the recorded Microsoft Teams interviews provided the researcher with an auditory reference to reference. At the closure of all participant interviews, transcripts were coded. This step consisted of forming codes or categories, which represent the heart of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2013). The researcher reviewed the transcripts to find words or short phrases offered by the participants. This inductive process, allowed the researcher to look for overall themes. The coding was conducted in two stages; first and second order coding. The initial coding looked for overall themes and second order coding was line-by-line analysis of the transcripts. The objective of the initial coding was to get a general overview of the data by reading through and understanding it. The second phase coding was more specific. Interpretation in qualitative research involves abstracting beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data (Creswell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

Special education in public schools is a civil rights issue that bridges the gap toward equity. Special education in preschool works to serve at-risk children to intervene and support their overall development delays. In addition, public preschools serve at-risk students in poverty to provide an early boost to support their development and kindergarten readiness. It is the moral, civic, and legal responsibility of special education educators to meet the needs of their learners with fidelity. Because of the researcher's role as an educator, with 22 years of public-school experience, they made a conscious effort to not share their beliefs and values when conducting research with the participants. They listened, analyzed, and worked to understand the experiences of the research participants. Being an educator who has worked with students from preschool through elementary years, they may have presented with a biased view towards certain topics regarding developmentally appropriate practices in the first years of school. They are a parent of a former special education student, and bring very personal biases towards fairness regarding inclusion in education. One of the most prominent tasks of qualitative researchers is to minimize the flaws in observation and endeavor to gain truthful knowledge (Sanhari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi & Cheraghi, 2014). Throughout this research process, it was imperative to not view the collected data with a bias, and to remain objective through the entire journey. The researcher is a former preschool classroom teacher, with their own instructional practices and pedagogy. They may have brought unrecognized beliefs and core values to the table, but acknowledged their implicit bias. Through this research, they become an active, engaged, and informative advocate of early childhood education in a new role as researcher. This work helped expand their knowledge of preschool inclusion

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as well as analyze their beliefs that current interdisciplinary early childhood educators have. The researcher plans to use the results of this research to implement change.

Informed consent was recognized as an integral part of ethics in research carried out in different fields. For qualitative researchers, it is of the utmost importance to specify in advance which data will be collected and how they are to be used (Sanhari, et. al, 2014). Informed consent adheres to the ethical practices within qualitative research. All participants chosen to participate were provided with an informed consent form outlining information about the study and a clear explanation of their role was defined (appendix C).

As an action researcher, it is important to understand the role of deep reflection and analysis of dealing with the human perspective. Action research seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in collaboration with others, in the pursuit of solutions to concerns of people (Brydon-Miller, Rector-Aranda & Stevens, 2015). A structured ethical reflection (SER) was developed in order to conduct ethical checks throughout the research process. The SER tool focused on the moral and ethical commitment the researcher made as an action researcher. These values focused on the relational aspects of the research process that are key to developing strong partnerships with the research participants, which improve the research itself and will lead to more sustainable change. The researcher has clearly defined values that showcase their ethical commitment to the teachers and research participants. While being aware of their personal bias towards the research, they led with the principles of fairness, respect, trust, empathy, and honesty. These basic values defined their moral commitment to the

research process. Of the five values chosen for the reflective process, they intentionally researched with trust and empathy at the forefront. Trust in action research is paramount as it is the researcher's ethical duty to share only the truth of the study. As they conducted research, they kept in mind the importance of standing by the values of fairness and most certainly were empathetic to the collected data shared.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher posed both racially and culturally grounded questions to them self so that the questions raised awareness relating to the consciousness of both known and unknown, unanticipated issues, perspectives, epistemologies, and the varying positions of this research topic (Milner, 2007). The researcher is a learner, thinker, and person who finds school and education a place of comfort and joy. They attribute their love for school to the positive experiences they had as a learner and the influential experiences had at all of the schools they attended. Yet, as a researcher, they were aware that school is not always a safe and comfortable place for children and families. It can feel intimidating and stoic for people who may not have grown up with positive schooling experiences. Education is highly valued in the researcher's family, their mother and two aunts were educators. Choosing a career in this field of education was a natural and respected choice among their family. An examination of their racial and cultural heritage, as well as their own background, may influence the research process (Milner, 2007). It is necessary to embrace reflexivity when researching in order to engage in critical self-awareness throughout the research process.

Having their mother as a professional role model greatly influenced their desire to pursue their doctorate as their mother earned her PhD at the University of Louisville, which propelled her career into educational leadership. From her, the researcher learned to reflect on herself as a researcher. They chose to pursue a doctorate of education because participatory research resonated with them and they are a qualitative thinker and value human interaction. They have always had a passion for early childhood education. Working with young learners has been a focal point of their career and they wish to be a change agent by influencing reform in education.

Their path to becoming passionate about special education began during their undergraduate studies. They developed a fond respect and love for public education while attending Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. They pursued a bachelor of science in early childhood education, and from day one of their degree program, began working within public schools. They grew up attending private schools and were never exposed to special education. During their pre-service days at Miami of Ohio, they began to challenge and question the religious schooling they experienced and developed a true love for the democratic principles of helping all children learn within schools. They believe in supporting diverse thinkers, students, and families through public education. They see their work as an educator as an honorable service. It was not until they were exposed to something different from my upbringing in private schools that they began to gain a new perspective and passion for their future role as a teacher of all children.

Their true passion for early childhood education and special education became one when they became a parent. She and her husband are blessed with two sons. Their

oldest son displayed diverse learning needs from his earliest days. The researcher became a true advocate of early intervention for children with developmental delays when they became a mother. She and her husband are proud that their sons were the first two children, on both sides of their family, to attend a public school where their oldest son received special education services. As a passionate early childhood educator and a special education advocate, they were aware of their personal bias and remained objective with the research participants during this study. In addition, they were aware of the importance of qualitative research and the process of conducting it. How education research is conducted may be just as important as what is actually discovered in a study (Milner, 2007).

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to clarify the purpose of utilizing a case study research approach. A qualitative action research design was explained to answer the research questions. An overview of the research methods utilizing the theoretical frameworks of phenomenology and pragmatism were explained. Strengths and limitations of qualitative research were addressed as well as the context of the study, data collection and analysis, and research positionality and ethical considerations. Chapter four provides an in-depth analysis of the collected data as well as the implementation of the research methods and design outlined in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to report the perceptions of interdisciplinary early childhood educator's experiences with inclusion in public preschool. The following chapter details the findings of this phenomenological study to answer the following research questions:

RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perception of inclusive teaching?

RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?

RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?

Chapter four is organized as follows. It is divided into three main sections that include: (1) researcher positionality (2) data collection and analysis that incorporates the

participant profiles and (3) findings from a thematic analysis that corresponds to each of the overall four research questions. Chapter four also discusses the analysis of the survey and interview transcripts using deductive and inductive coding. Tables are used to present the thematic codes and quotes from the research participants, as well as the derived themes.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher is a current practitioner in the field of education. It is imperative for them to examine their positionality as it is related to the research topic. An analysis of their ethics as a researcher was conducted. It may be necessary for researchers to consider dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen in conducting research (Milner, 2007). The researcher is an educator with a deep passion for early childhood education, as well as early intervention for special needs children. They approached the research with an objective lens. They completed a structured ethical reflection to analyze their implicit bias. The implicit values and underlying assumptions embedded in action research are used as a set of guiding principles that can facilitate a democratic, liberating, and life-enhancing approach to research (Stringer et al., 2021). Their personal experiences with early intervention for their son shaped their cultural beliefs of inclusion in early childhood. The researcher is a parent of a special education student, and brings very personal biases towards fairness regarding inclusion in education. They were also aware that their personality is deeply passionate and as a researcher, they needed to listen and let the participants share their experiences without influence. They were aware and in control of their communication as to not let their feelings, opinions, or emotions affect the voice of the participants or their experiences. The following questions from the

Milner framework deeply impacted the researchers' preparation prior to data collection, and during the data analysis phase: In what ways do my racial and cultural backgrounds influence how I experience the world, what I emphasize in my research, and how I evaluate and interpret others and their experiences? How do I know? How do I negotiate and balance my racial and cultural selves in society and in my research? (Milner, 2007). The researcher is an educator who has worked with students from preschool through the elementary grades. They were also aware that they may present with a biased view towards certain topics regarding developmentally appropriate practices in the first years of school. Throughout the research process, it was imperative that they not view the collected data with bias, and remained objective through the entire journey. In addition, they are certified as an IECE teacher, with their own instructional practices and pedagogy. The researcher did not bring their beliefs or core values into the data collection process during the semi-structured interviews. They remained an unbiased researcher to not expose unforeseen dangers such as power or perspective. They strived to complete their research with intentionality and objectivity to truly remain neutral, yet aware.

Data Collection and Analysis Overview

Qualitative data analysis consists of a process of beginning with the development of questions, discovery, successive reading, and explanation of the study (Scott, 2013). There were two data sources utilized for this study. The raw data was derived from semi-structured interviews and a survey. There were 10 participants who each completed the survey and a semi-structured interview. After the collection of data was complete, the next phase of analyzing the data consisted of transcribing and coding the surveys. The researcher used the thematic analysis approach to identify patterned meaning across data

sets. The researcher used a five-step process for analysis of the raw data: (a) reading the data (familiarization with the data); (b) coding the data with annotation; (c) displaying the data (searching for and development of themes); (d) reducing the data (reviewing the themes); and (e) interpreting the data to develop thematic categories (Ulin, Robinson & Tolley, 2005). All interviews were transcribed using Microsoft teams. The researcher initially conducted manual coding by annotating transcripts to capture poignant quotes. The researcher used in vivo coding, as manual coding, to obtain codes by using the participant's exact words. Data collected, from manual coding, was analyzed with the research questions in mind and organized based on grouping of commonality for each research question. The transcripts utilized the thematic analysis approach to assist in identifying emergent themes.

Participant Profiles

All 10 participants in this study were interdisciplinary Early Childhood Educators (IECE) within the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative (OVEC) during the 2022-2023 school year. The 10 participants represented educators from several public school districts within OVEC. Twenty potential participants were contacted and sixteen confirmed participation. Ten teachers were chosen and all completed the consent from (appendix C) after being chosen for the study. The breakdown of participants is included in Table 1 with their identifier, gender, education based on their highest earned degree in the field of education, and their years of experience as a classroom teacher. Masters of an Arts in teaching (MAT) indicates the participant earned their teaching degree through a master's degree. M.ED indicates the participant earned their initial teaching degree as an undergraduate and holds a master's degree in the field of education. Option 6 indicates

the participant is earning their initial teaching degree in a master's degree program while

serving as the IECE teacher in a classroom. Undergrad indicates the teacher earned their

initial teaching certificate with a Bachelor's degree and serves as their highest earned

degree. To protect anonymity, their years of experience were broken down into 0-5 / 5-0/

10-15/ 15-20 and 20-25 year indicators.

Table 1. Demographics of Interview Participants

Teacher	Referred to as	Gender	Education	Years of Experience
Teacher 1	A	F	MAT	5-10
Teacher 2	B	F	M.ED	20-25
Teacher 3	C	F	M.ED	10-15
Teacher 4	D	F	MAT	5-10
Teacher 5	E	F	Option 6- MAT	0-5
Teacher 6	F	F	Bachelors	5-10
Teacher 7	G	F	MAT	0-5
Teacher 8	H	F	MAT	15-20
Teacher 9	I	F	M.ED	15-20
Teacher 10	J	F	MAT	5-10

Findings from Thematic Analysis

Themes for each of the four research questions were developed after the data

transcriptions were coded using deductive and inductive, or In Vivo, coding. The

emerging themes were organized and derived with two organizational strategies. One-way common themes emerged was with the use of anecdotal note taking capturing the quotes of participants that were found to be relevant. The researcher captured powerful and reflective quotes during the initial manual coding phase from repeated readings of the transcripts where they highlighted key notations through annotation. The second organizational strategy utilized was grouping the data according to which responses related specifically to each individual research question. It was then that they electronically organized the data based on commonality grouping for each research question. The following table details the codes and themes that emerged because of the coding process and are organized based on the four research questions.

Table 2. Emergent Codes/ Themes

Research Question	First-Order Codes	Second- Order Codes	Themes
RQ1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perception of inclusive teaching?	Experience with young children prior to teaching A personal desire to make a difference	Passion for early intervention A calling to the profession	Compassion for children
RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?	Inclusion is essential Early intervention is essential and must be	Professional self-efficacy All children can learn	Equity

Research Question	First-Order Codes	Second- Order Codes	Themes
	varied to specific to children's needs.		
RQ3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?	Special Education Training Challenging behaviors of the special education students Staff shortage of instructional assistants	Paperwork Limited strategies to use with special education students	Training and Experience
RQ4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?	Typically developing peers act as social role models	Social and emotional learning must be taught	Social Emotional Learning

Theme derived from research question #1: Compassion for children

RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perception of inclusive teaching?

The research study participants emphasized the love and passion they had for working with young children. Each participant had an experience prior to their formal schooling with children that influenced their decision to pursue education as a career, and thus shaped their perception of teaching and inclusion. Two participants were raised with foster siblings who had disabilities. This life experience made them feel the need to give back to their community. The theme of human compassion is validated by direct quotations from the participants' experiences with children prior to their formal schooling. Questions one, nine, and 10 of the semi-structured interviews, are aligned to the first research question and provide insight into the overall factors that influence an IECE teacher's perception of inclusive teaching.

First order coding: Experiences prior to the IECE teacher's formal schooling, and career as an educator, influenced their perception of inclusive teaching. Every participant shared an experience working with children that impacted their decision to work in preschool education validating the theme of human compassion for children. The participants felt comfortable and inspired to work in the preschool setting and shared their love of working with young children. The theme of compassion can be attributed to the codes that were revealed during the coding process. Direct quotations were highlighted to showcase the participants' compassion for children. The participants desire to help the earliest learners, and their work with children prior to teaching supports the first order code of having a personal desire to make a difference from the start. Four participants shared that they wanted their students to feel loved and supported. They care about their progress and are invested in their success. They had a personal desire to make a difference and were empathetic to the diverse needs of their students. The participants

easily articulated their compassion showcasing empathy and care towards their students and their willingness to help children in need. Participant C shared, "I started subbing in preschool and my mom is an educator…we were a therapeutic foster home and I think that we were always just taught empathy and such understanding for people with differences and I think that is where it started." This teacher's perception about inclusive teaching has been shaped because of exposure to others with differences, which helped shape their love for children and a vested interest in their wellbeing. These codes resulted in the theme of compassion.

Table 3: Quotes from research question one and first order coding: Theme of compassion

Research Question	First order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perception of inclusive teaching?	● Experience with young children prior to teaching ● A personal desire to make a difference RQ1 theme: compassion	B	*I worked at a daycare for a few summers and I also worked at a summer camp…I have always liked the younger kids* *My mom was a preschool assistant so I always grew up with preschool and found it interesting*
		D	*I worked for 14 years in a daycare before I came to this school."*

These experiences shaped the participants' perception of inclusion because they had a passion for working with young children and were exposed to those with disabilities and differences in their formative years. It is evident that because of family and prior experiences with children, the participants developed a love for children and their wellbeing. Five of the participants have family members who worked in the field of education so it was a respected and a familiar career choice for these individuals. Experiences with preschool children and growing up with family members in education are factors that influenced their perceptions of inclusive preschool teaching.

Second order coding: Deeper evaluation and examination of the transcripts resulted in in vivo coding during the second order coding process. Four of the research participants cited a passion for early intervention. They shared that early childhood teaching was a place they felt they could make a difference. Participant B shared, "I wanted to work with the youngest learners, I want to get that early impact." This quote validates the second order code of the participants feeling a call to the profession. Other participants discussed how they felt working with students in preschool was a way to intervene with the neediest of students and shared their true passion for wanting to make a difference from the beginning of children's schooling. Every participant during their semi-structured interview mentioned that children brought them joy as one of the reasons they chose a profession in early childhood.

Table 4: Quotes from research question one and second order coding: Theme of compassion

Research Question	Second order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's perception of inclusive teaching?	● Passion for early intervention ● A calling to the profession RQ1 theme: compassion	I	*I had my certification in the deaf and hard of hearing and the kindergarten kids were never ready…they didn't know their letters or numbers…they just weren't ready and I decided I wanted to change that and I wanted to be the one to get them ready*
		B	*Just seeing their little faces come in, and they are so happy to see you….and they give you a hug and say I love you…this is why I do this.*
		A	*I was an MSD teacher and I came to the preschool to observe some incoming kindergartners. I watched a kid*

Research Question	Second order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
			run out of the room, and an adult just followed him and let him do it. It made me think these kids need to learn skills and be ready from the beginning- it is not an option to just run out of the room.

The participants in this study indicated their love and desire for working with young children. It is evident that they have a passion for early intervention within the formative years of preschool. Education is a selfless job and the participants in this study felt a calling to this work and showcased compassion for children and a desire to make a difference in the lives of young students. Factors such as having a passion for intervention, feeling called to the teaching profession and having experiences with children while growing up all influence the perceptions of IECE teachers regarding inclusive teaching.

Theme derived from research question #2: Equity

RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?

The research study participants emphasized that they value inclusion in early childhood education. Understanding that public preschool is an intervention model for children with developmental delays, as well as low-income children, the participants

believe in early intervention. Seven participants shared first hand experiences that illustrate how inclusion develops students who learn to respect the differences of others and thus shaped their positive perception of inclusive teaching and positive interactions with their students. Three participants shared how inclusive teaching is challenging but a necessary model for developmentally delayed children. The theme of equity is validated by direct quotations from the participants' experiences with preschool children. Questions two, and three of the semi-structured interviews, are aligned to the second research question and provide insight into overall factors that influence an IECE teacher's perceptions, experiences, and interactions with their students.

First Order Coding: First order coding uncovered the value the participants had regarding inclusion. The participants' classroom experience, with a full inclusion model, has influenced their perception of inclusive teaching and equity. Common findings of the experiences shared were that students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students. Three participants shared that it is feasible to teach children with average abilities and exceptional needs in the same classroom and inclusion is an effective instructional model for public preschool intervention. Participant G shared, "Inclusion works whether it is for academics or whatever because kids adapt and adjust and being dual certified gives you leverage because you have that special education background knowledge." This quote as well as the ones in table five validate the theme of equity because a belief in inclusion and intervention are individualized and equitable practices in education.

Table 5: Quotes from research question two and first order coding: Theme of equity

Research Question	First order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ 2:How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?	● Inclusion is essential ● Early intervention is vital and must be varied to specific to children's needs. RQ2 theme: equity	J A	*I believe in inclusion…I wanted to be working with kids and this job brings me joy…the kids just grow and change so much and they are so forgiving towards each other.* *I think all kids can learn when given the right tools and teachers have an understanding that not all children will fit neatly into a box. Learning cannot look the same across all lessons and activities.*

From the shared quotes, it is evident that the participants believe inclusion is

essential and early intervention must be varied and specific to children's needs. It was a

common finding that learning must look different for students because of the multi-age

make up of preschool. In addition, three participants mentioned the special education

needs of the students are all individualized based on their IEPs and the students benefited

from this personalized model. The emergent codes were organized based on the relationships and commonalities of the shared quotes.

Second Order Coding: Deeper evaluation and examination of the transcripts resulted in in vivo coding during the second order coding process. Three teachers directly spoke to their ability to reach their students, which supported the second order code of professional self- efficacy. Participant C shared, "We can help them learn about understanding other people even if they may look different and sound different. All kids can do things and there's a lot of really amazing things they can do if we help them and point out to everyone what they are doing. One of my medically fragile students can do so much but we know he can and that's half the battle."

Table 6: Quotes from research question two and second order coding: Theme of equity

Research Question	Second order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their students?	• Professional self-efficacy • All children can learn RQ2 theme: equity	H	*I believe that all children can learn and make progress. I like to compare them to kernels of corn cooking to become popcorn. They are all in the heat and oil, yet they don't all pop at the same time. I fell this is a good analogy about learning, yes they go to the same school but they progress differently.*
		B	*I'm very used to balancing the needs of multiple ages and multiple needs in my classroom…I do feel equipped to meet their needs.*

These IECE teachers are committed to meeting the needs of their diverse learners

and believe that all children can and will learn. The research participants exhibited a

strong commitment to their profession. They believe they can make a positive impact on student achievement which supports the second order code of professional self-efficacy. Their positive perception of inclusion affects their experiences and interactions with their students. For example, participant J shared, "Inclusion is vital for preschoolers especially in our school district since it has the children interact with one another in a positive manner. With the number of IEPs and diversity we have, it is an important part for students to feel they belong and have a voice. I feel that it's a great idea to have inclusion and necessary." The direct quotes support the theme of equity because it demonstrates that different children are given what they need, and these teachers recognize their students all have different circumstances that require giving each student what they need in order to grow and succeed.

Theme derived from research question #3: Training and experience

RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?

The research study participants emphasized the importance of proper training and how teaching experience directly affects a teacher's perception of inclusive learning environments when working with their special education caseload. Five participants shared experiences that illustrate the necessity of special education training for the individuals working with students with Individualized Education Plans (IEP'S). Three participants shared how inclusive teaching is challenging but a necessary model for developmentally delayed children. There were several barriers to inclusion noted such as challenging behaviors, limited strategies known to work with special education students, and a staff shortage to support high needs students. The theme of training and experience

is validated by direct quotations from the participants' experiences with preschool children. Questions six, seven, and eight, of the semi-structured interviews, are aligned to the third research question and provide insight into the perceptions interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students.

First order coding: First order coding uncovered challenges the participants faced when working to meet the needs of their special education caseload. Barriers included the amount of special education training teachers receive, the increase of challenging behaviors of the special education students in recent years, and paperwork. Four participants shared that the paperwork as a dual certified teacher is too demanding and participant A said, "a challenge is the number of assessments we have to do with them." The staff shortage of instructional assistants resulted in a negative perception of the teachers' ability to meet the needs of their special education students and was also an identified barrier. The research participants felt that they do not have the proper training to work with children with varying special needs. This greatly influences their perception of meeting the needs of their special education students with the recent influx of aggressive and externalizing behaviors of students in addition to the rise in students identified with Autism on their caseload. Participant F said, "While I love the idea of inclusive classrooms and believe in it, I think we often put students with very high needs into the classroom claiming it as "best practice" when in reality, that's not the case. Their needs are not fully met, other students do not have as many opportunities to have their needs met (because all teachers are focused on the specific high needs student), and teachers do not always have the resources and strategies needed to truly make a

difference with the high needs students in a typical inclusive classroom. A lot of times I don't know what to do with extreme behaviors." Participant E shared, "only having one assistant made things harder because there's only two of us and we have six kids that are pretty much one-on-one."

Table 7: Quotes from research question three and first order coding: Theme of training and experience

Research Question	First order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?	• Special Education Training • Challenging behaviors of the special education students • Staff shortage of instructional assistants RQ3 theme: training and experience	F	*I feel like I'm always willing to grow, so I'm always asking questions and don't know if I'll ever feel I've arrived at feeling fully equipped. In recent years since covid the moderate and severe disabilities, as well as the rise in autism, has really made it hard to meet the needs of the special ed. students*
		C	*I have had a strong base in special education*

Research Question	First order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
		D	*where everybody else doesn't have as much so I feel inclusive learning environments in preschool is the only way to help the special education students. It's hard though if you don't have two full time assistants to help with all of the special education kids.* *I think it comes down to needing more resources with less curriculum to teach…meeting every individual need you're not able to do that in this program.*

The participants shared the challenge of meeting the needs of their special

education students with multiple and severe disabilities who exhibit very difficult

behaviors. One teacher shared that her class last year was made up of 12 developmentally

delayed students and not one child on her special education caseload was speech only.

This resulted in a tremendous amount of additional data collection and paperwork. In

addition, this put even higher demands on her classroom management and interactions

with her entire class. She shared, "A few years ago I had two assistants and could help the kids, but last year we just managed the behaviors which were just harder…a third person in the room makes a huge difference." This quote from participant I supports the first order code of the staff shortage of instructional assistants and the impact it has on the teacher's perception of meeting the needs of their special education students.

Second order coding: Deeper evaluation and examination of the transcripts resulted in in vivo coding during the second-order coding process. Seven teachers spoke about the challenges they faced regarding the rise in challenging behaviors of the students in recent years. Participant B, a veteran teacher of 21 years, shared, "In the last four or five years there has been a significant increase in children with disabilities, more development delays, other health impairment, and autism in our classrooms. It is difficult to get everybody what they need and sometimes the typical students may not get as much individual support as they need…It feels like putting out fires behaviorally rather than teaching."

Table 8: Quotes from research question three and second order coding: Theme of training and experience

Research Question	Second order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students?	• Paperwork • Limited strategies to use with special education students RQ3 theme: training and experience	A H	*We don't have the training that special class teachers have but we probably should…that makes it very challenging to meet the needs of our kids with the most severe disabilities.* *Writing the IEPS … I wasn't very good at that. When I first started 16 years ago the resource teacher was taking all of the data and she was writing the IEPS. Now we have to and I don't really know how.*

The responses to the third research question reveled a relationship between an

IECEs belief about inclusion to meet the needs of their special education students and the

amount of training they received. The two veteran teachers shared how the public

preschool program has changed over their careers. One major change was an increase in

paperwork as the special education case manager. Their training or lack thereof, affects

their beliefs about inclusion. Six teachers feel that they do not have the proper training or

preparation to work with the children with varying disabilities and lack strategies to help

students on their special education caseload with high needs. Participant F also shared

that many assistants did not know how to help many students and were just a warm body

in a room to meet the ratio that was needed.

Theme derived from research question #4: Social and Emotional Learning

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding
inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?

The research study participants emphasized the importance of typically

developing peers being positive social role models for all of the students in an inclusive

classroom. In addition, teaching social and emotional skills must be taught in preschool

and these beliefs directly impact a teacher's perception of inclusive learning environments

when working with their regular education caseload. Five participants shared the

importance of bringing awareness to children's emotions and the need to teach children

how to make sense of their feelings. Questions four and five of the semi-structured

interviews, are aligned to the fourth research question and provide insight into the

perceptions interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning

environments to meet the needs of their regular education students.

First order coding: First order coding unveiled the importance of inclusive classrooms

having typically developing students to act as positive role models for the special

education students. Participant B shared, "I love that students with disabilities are fully

included into my preschool classroom. The flip side, especially in recent years, is that our

classrooms have so many students with intense needs, that it becomes very difficult to meet everyone's needs. There are often not enough typical peer models for students with disabilities. You need good role models for kids to learn how to interact." The theme of social emotional learning (SEL) can be attributed to the codes that were revealed during the coding process. Direct quotations were highlighted to emphasize the participants' value placed on SEL for children.

Table 9: Quotes from research question four and first order coding: Theme -Social Emotional Learning

Research Question	First order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?	● Typically developing peers act as social role models RQ4 theme: social emotional learning	G	*I feel like you have children who are a little more caring being exposed to the students with disabilities- they all teach each other*
		H	*Typically developing kids are good models for everyone*

The research participants believe in inclusion. It is important to note that the participant's value having a range of abilities in a classroom to allow children to learn from one another and support their social development. Participant F strongly believes in peer interaction stating, "Typically developing kids model age-appropriate behavior

which in turn allows neurodivergent or ECE students to have exposure to behaviors and skills we want them to learn especially in play type situations when students are working together having back and forth conversations, and problem solving." The research participants' perceptions of inclusion for their regular education students is influenced by having a balance of students with disabilities and typically developing students so children can work together and learn from each other.

Second Order Coding: Deeper evaluation and examination of the transcripts resulted in in vivo coding during the second order coding process. Five teachers spoke about the importance and value of having a solid social emotional curriculum in place for all of their students but especially their regular education students. Participant E stated, **"**They need to learn that it is okay to have big emotions, but also how to properly handle tough emotions." Participant F shared, "Social emotional learning in preschool sets the foundation for all other social skills students learn as they age. It's crucial that students learn to follow directions, work with peers, share materials, regulate their emotions, manage their feelings, etc." The participants value SEL and believe that young children must be taught how to recognize and handle their behaviors and emotions in positive ways.

Table 10: Quotes from research question four and second order coding: Theme- Social

Emotional Learning

Research Question	Second order coding leading to theme	Participant	Sample Quote
RQ4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?	● Social and emotional learning must be taught RQ4 theme: social emotional learning	E	*It is important to teach social emotional learning in preschool because we set the stage for the rest of their lives. They need to know how to share, trade, and generally how to be a good friend.*
		H	*It's important to teach social emotions in preschool because they will be experiencing a variety of emotions, not just happy/sad. They also need to be able to deal with their feelings.*

Social Emotional learning is a theme that naturally emerged as a result of

analyzing the data on the participants' perceptions of working with their regular education

students. All participants shared their duties as a regular education teacher to include academic preparation for children going to kindergarten. Yet, seven out of 10 participants emphasized their passion for social emotional learning being a vital component of instruction to develop regular education students' ability to be successful in preschool and future years of schooling and life.

Summary of Chapter IV

The perceptions of 10 IECE teachers were highlighted after a thorough analysis of the survey and interview transcripts of data were coded. With both deductive and inductive coding, themes were derived from the quotes and sentiments shared regarding their experiences as dual certified teachers in public preschool. Implications and recommendations are given in chapter five that will focus on the teacher's perceptions of inclusive teaching found in this current chapter. Chapter five will also discuss suggestions for future research as well as recommendations for policy change within education.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE
RESEARCH

In an effort to explore the situational factors related to the perspectives of interdisciplinary early childhood educators on inclusion, the voices of 10 participants in the Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative were utilized. Through semi-structured interviews and a survey questionnaire, the participants gave reason and purpose to their experiences as a dual certified special education and regular education public preschool teacher. In this chapter, a summary of the findings to address the four research questions below will be presented. The implications, recommendations for future research and conclusions are discussed.

> RQ 1: What factors influence an interdisciplinary early childhood educator's
>
> perception of inclusive teaching?

> RQ 2: How do those perceptions affect their experiences or interactions with their
>
> students?
>
> RQ 3: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have
>
> regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special
>
> education students?

RQ 4: What perceptions do interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students?

Implications

RQ 1: Factors that influence early childhood educators' perceptions of inclusive teaching

Interpretations

The first research question revealed several factors that influence how public preschool teachers perceive inclusive education for young learners. Through the semi-structured interviews, the participants all shared an experience working with young children growing up that influenced their desire to pursue early childhood teaching. Although the experiences were varied in structure or form, every experience influenced the participants to enter the field. Three participants worked at summer camps as counselors for young children. Two participants were raised with special needs foster siblings, and five participants spent time in preschool classrooms or daycares. These experiences influenced the participants to pursue a career in early childhood education.

Another factor that influences educators' perspectives of inclusive teaching is the willingness to want to make a difference in the lives of children. The participants expressed a personal desire to make a difference on behalf of children and felt a calling to the profession in order to do so. Based on the data obtained the participants also expressed a passion for early intervention. Through personal anecdotes, it was evident that every teacher in this study had compassion for the needs and development of young

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children. They felt called to make a difference and were empathetic to the diverse needs of their students. The participants easily articulated their compassion displaying empathy and care towards their students and their willingness to help children in need.

Implications

Interdisciplinary early childhood educators feel they have been called to this profession and have an innate passion for helping children. Teaching is a demanding profession and one that in recent years has challenged educators. It is necessary to provide time and space for teachers to revisit their "why" and to reflect on their reason for pursuing their chosen career. It is easy to get caught up in the to do lists and demands of the job. To keep teachers revitalized, and passionate, reflective practices must be naturally integrated into job embedded professional development. Compassionate practitioners also need to be taught specific strategies to develop compassion in their students and class community. Knowing IECE teachers naturally have loving dispositions, job satisfaction may increase if instructional practices of compassion are intentionally taught to their students. These practices will also develop the self-efficacy of their students. Incorporating strategic lessons on compassion also aligns with the belief of the participants that inclusion is essential.

RQ 2: The perceptions of IECE teachers affect their experiences or interactions with their students.

Interpretations

The second research question revealed how IECE teachers interact with their students based on their perceptions of inclusive teaching. Through the semi-structured interviews, the participants all shared, with conviction that they believed in the inclusion model for early intervention in preschool. The full inclusion model is the only model of inclusion in use in public preschool within OVEC. The participants believed that students with cognitive disabilities and developmental delays should be provided accommodations and modifications to complete learning tasks alongside their typically developing peers. The study revealed full inclusion provides equity to students and that early intervention must be varied and specific. The IECE teachers believe the experiences among their diverse students create opportunities for all children to learn. They also believed it is necessary to have typically developing students on their roster to act as role models to the special education students. They are a vital piece to having an effective inclusion classroom.

Implications

For the full inclusion model to be successful there must be a class makeup that is intentionally designed to have a balance of regular and special education students on a roster. Educators believe in having special education and regular education students learn alongside one another. Research participants shared that students are placed in their classrooms based on class numbers and open roster spaces instead of potential implications on class dynamics. This practice creates a barrier to the full inclusion model. When several special education students are placed on a roster at once the dynamics of the classroom can change. This also increases the demands of the teachers.

Children are eligible to join the program at the age of three if they have a learning disability. With open and continual enrollment, caseload numbers within the classroom can create an inequitable balance. It was not uncommon for teachers in this study to have reported having two to three, severely delayed three-year-old students enroll midyear and caused the dynamics of their classroom culture to completely shift. To ensure the preschool inclusion model success, it is paramount that all the relevant resources are available. Universal pre-kindergarten could support the full inclusion model by offering preschool to all eligible four-year-old children rather than continuing the practice of only allowing those demonstrating financial need. The teachers in this study have a positive perception of inclusion that lays a foundation for success in their classrooms and affects their experiences and interactions with their students. The belief that all children can learn, and that children learn from one another was evident through this study. It is paramount that a balance of regular and special education students comprise a public preschool classroom to ensure an equitable learning environment for all students.

RQ 3: Perceptions interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students

Interpretations

The third research question revealed the perceptions IECE teachers have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their special education students. Through the semi-structured interviews, the participants shared common experiences regarding the need for proper training to meet the needs of their students. Additional issues such as a staff shortage of instructional assistants, paperwork and extreme behaviors were noted. The participants believe in inclusive learning

environments yet shared how within recent years the influx of high needs special education students has been very challenging. Many stated how they often are at a loss with how to manage and support their students and have limited resources to help them. Limited resources include less instructional assistants due to the staff shortage, the lack of declarative knowledge on specific disabilities, a limited toolbox of strategies to use with special education students, and a lack of pertinent training.

Implications

Interdisciplinary early childhood educators, in this study, believe in inclusive education. This foundational premise sets the stage for teacher success, if they understand how to fully implement full inclusion, and are supported when challenges arise. IECE teachers, in this study, made it clear they are in need of on-the-job training to meet the needs of the students with challenging behaviors. Preschool administration needs to build a collaborative team to support the teachers in the classrooms. Through collaboration with board certified behavior analysts (BCBAs), moderate and severe disabilities (MSD) teachers, as well as resource teachers within a building, teachers can get support. Pre-service training in special education is not enough to fully equip teachers in a multi-age full inclusion classroom. Intentional professional development, that is consistent and ongoing is necessary. In addition, IECE teachers need to be provided the time and space to collaborate with one another. Common planning time, as well as structured professional learning communities (PLCs) need to be prioritized and implemented with fidelity. Embedding professional development into the PLCs is another way to revisit topics of pressing needs as well as a way for administration to gauge teachers' needs so

they can create a plan to support their teachers. Teachers must feel prepared to educate special learners and have support in place to facilitate quality inclusion.

RQ 4: Perceptions interdisciplinary early childhood educators have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students

Interpretations

The fourth research question revealed the perceptions IECE teachers have regarding inclusive learning environments to meet the needs of their regular education students. Through the semi-structured interviews, the participants shared that typically developing peers are a vital piece to a full inclusion model in preschool. The four-year-old students who qualify for public preschool often act as social role models for each other and the special education children. It is within their student-to-student interactions that all children within the classroom benefit. The participants shared that social emotional learning competencies must be taught and become daily routines in the class for young children to develop in all domains. Empathy and kindness is cultivated when regular education students share space with children who need individualized educational programs. IECE teachers within the study believe that relationship building and emotionally safe classrooms are essential in early childhood. Data collected also revealed that preparing the regular education students for kindergarten was a priority but emphasized the importance of having the autonomy to choose when and how to teach kindergarten readiness skills. Several participants also stated that because of the recent influx of challenging behaviors within the classroom they felt that hindered quality

instruction needed for the regular education students to be fully prepared for

kindergarten.

Implications

IECE teachers must be directly taught how to implement a research based social

emotional curriculum. Teachers must learn how young minds develop and mature. They

must learn about the importance of teaching children to self-regulate and process their

emotions. Teachers need to learn the "why" behind brain development and the scientific

process of how young children's overall growth and development is affected by their

ability to establish healthy relationships with others and engage appropriately with their

peers. Schools need to adopt an SEL curriculum and implement it with fidelity within all

classrooms. Professional development, on the adopted social emotional curriculum, must

be continual. Staff must revisit components of the program on an ongoing basis.

Professional development must also be done within a team structure. Professional

learning communities should attend training together and then be given time to plan how

to properly implement research-based strategies in their classrooms. Teachers need the

proper training and preparation to work with all children. IECE teachers expressed that

full inclusion provides opportunities for the special education and regular education

students to learn from one another through role modeling and exposure to diverse

learners. They emphasized the importance of social emotional learning. It is the

responsibility of the administration within the preschool to provide these resources to

their teachers and support them as they implement programs. Administrative participation

and support is vital to developing positive attitudes within their staff where flexibility and

problem solving is noticed and appreciated.

Educational Policy Recommendations

This research could be powerful for any school district looking at offering several models of inclusion at the preschool level. The school districts within the OVEC region, that were represented in this study, had only a full inclusion model as the option for learning in pre-kindergarten. The first recommendation is that a partial inclusion model be offered. Individual special education students that would benefit from a smaller class size and more individualized instruction would have an additional special education teacher to teach them. When students enter the k-12 sector of learning multiple models of special education are available based on the specific needs of each child.

For example, co-teaching is an option allowing multiple certified teachers to collaborate regarding one student and the special education teacher acts as the case manager. Push in services also become available for the child. In addition, in the K-12 sector of learning there are special education limits, caps, put on teachers' caseloads. For example, a special education teacher working at the kindergarten level may only have 15 students on their caseload. My second recommendation is to create a formal policy with a specific formula for classroom make-up of students in public preschool. For example, a pre-k class cannot exceed 70% of their roster of special education students. In addition, I believe the developmental delay category needs to be further detailed for the sake of class placement and more importantly for more specific and intentional support for the student. A class with 70% of the special education students who have a speech delay is vastly

different from a class with 70% of the special education students with a developmental delay and/or autism. Money put into the seek fund needs to have a specific line item focusing on the special education categories within public preschool with weighted funding. Full day pre- kindergarten should be available to all 4 year olds regardless of income. In addition, wrap around services must be available for those in need. The state of Kentucky must have legislators discuss, and change, how the state funds early childhood education.

My third recommendation is for school districts to develop early childhood "academies" and create high school programs for students interested in working with children. High School students could potentially co-op within their school district working as an instructional assistant in classrooms to gain experience working with children. If they were unable to be officially hired, they could simply gain experience in a preschool setting by visiting classrooms and interacting with children. This study revealed that every teacher was exposed to working with children prior to pursuing formal schooling to become a teacher. An early childhood academy would introduce high school students to the profession and potentially develop their interest in this career. In addition, creating high school academies could possibly help mitigate some of the issues the staff shortage crisis creates in these classrooms. To extend this recommendation even further, I encourage high school academies to offer dual credit at the university level for students interested in pursuing their initial teaching degree. High school students would begin their preservice work within their school district, and potentially work towards earning their initial teaching certification. Finally, I would like to see a financial incentive for students who join the early childhood academy. If students join the high school

academy and follow it through earning initial certification, and then serve a minimum of three years within a school district they should qualify for loan forgiveness. This could remove a barrier for those wishing to pursue higher education. It would also incentivize enrollment in teacher programs.

My fourth recommendation is to restructure the level of support for current IECE teachers. I would like to create an early childhood professional learning network (PLN). An early childhood PLN would allow teachers to learn from and share ideas with each other. Teachers could share resources, tools, and materials that support their current needs. Connection through social media and virtual meetings would allow the early childhood PLN to reach teachers across districts within the state.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should focus on a current problem of practice discovered from this study. In recent years, there has been an influx of aggressive and externalizing behaviors of students in addition to the rise in autistic students on preschool teachers' special education caseload. A mixed method approach could be utilized to gain qualitative perspectives of teachers to understand their experiences as well as quantitative statistics to form a baseline of data that can begin to track and allow schools and districts the foresight to implement change based on current struggles and special education enrollments. This research can occur as a follow up study to further support current IECE teachers in the OVEC school districts. This future research could also explore specific professional development recommendations, strategies for preventing behavior escalation, and successful behavior plans for specific disabilities. In addition, research

must happen on a national level where preschool programs are studied within multiple states and districts. Looking for trends among effective programs that have, and have not, implemented universal pre-k within different states. Finding districts of similar demographics, who have experienced success, can allow for policy change within other states.

Conclusion

"I think all kids can learn when given the right tools and teachers have an understanding that not all children will fit neatly into a box. Learning cannot look the same across all lessons and activities." "I believe in inclusion." These two statements made by two different research participants encapsulate the heart behind this study. Interdisciplinary early childhood educators believe in their diverse student population and the model of inclusion to support all children. This study sought to explore the perceptions of these teachers through semi-structured interviews and survey questions. Qualitative data was collected to help others understand the commitment these teachers have to their regular and special education students. The vulnerability of the participants allowed the researcher to interpret the data and make recommendations to improve the working conditions of public preschool teachers within the OVEC region in Kentucky. These recommendations may improve job satisfaction for these teachers and in turn positively impact the students they teach.

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APPENDIX A

SURVEY

Please indicate your level of experience as an IECE teacher. Chose one that identifies with your most current level of education.

Option 6 educator working on completing my initial certification earning a master's degree

Regular certification educator with an undergraduate degree in education

Regular certification educator with an undergraduate degree in education and master's degree in education

Regular certification educator with an undergraduate degree in another field and an MAT in education completed prior to teaching

Other:

Indicate your level of experience in the field of education as an IECE teacher. As well as your experience in any other educational programs.

For example: I am in my second year of teaching having worked only as a preschool teacher.

Answer:

Please indicate what level best describes your experiences with the following statements.

Inclusive education at my school has been a positive experience for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Inclusive education at my school has been a positive experience for students without disabilities.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Inclusive education at my school is socially and adaptively appropriate for students with disabilities.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Inclusive education at my school is socially and adaptively appropriate for student without disabilities.

Strongly Agree

Agree

Neutral

Disagree

Strongly Disagree

Inclusive education at my school is academically appropriate for students with disabilities.

> Strongly Agree
>
> Agree
>
> Neutral
>
> Disagree
>
> Strongly Disagree

Inclusive education at my school is academically appropriate for students without disabilities.

> Strongly Agree
>
> Agree
>
> Neutral
>
> Disagree
>
> Strongly Disagree

As an IECE teacher I feel I am properly trained to fully support students with disabilities.

> Strongly Agree
>
> Agree
>
> Neutral
>
> Disagree
>
> Strongly Disagree

As an IECE teacher I feel I am properly trained to fully support students without disabilities.

> Strongly Agree
>
> Agree Neutral
>
> Disagree
>
> Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX B

Participant Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What made you choose to become an IECE educator and work in the field of early childhood? (RQ-1) How did you earn your certification?

2. Did you have any prior experience in early childhood prior to having your own classroom? (RQ-2)

3. How many children are on your class roster and of those on the roster, how many of those students have IEPS which labels them special education students? (RQ-2)

4. Understanding you are a dual certified teacher, please explain your duties as the regular education teacher. (RQ-4)

5. Do you feel equipped to manage the work expectations as the regular education teacher and why? (RQ-4)

6. Understanding you are a dual certified teacher, please explain your duties as the special education case manager and teacher. (RQ-3)

7. Do you feel equipped to manage the work expectations as the special education case manager and teacher and why? (RQ-3)

8. Please explain your feelings about only having a full inclusion model as the option for all early childhood students in your school and district. (RQ-3)

9. When you think of the aspects of your job that bring you joy, what are they and why? (RQ-1)

10. When you think of the aspects of your job that create challenges, what are they and why? (RQ-1)

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INFORMED ASSENT

Teacher Assent Form

My name is Brooke Noon; I am working under the direction of Professor Dr. Deborah Powers, in the College of Education at the University of Louisville. I am a doctoral student at the University of Louisville. I am inviting you to participate in a research study about preschool teachers' perceptions of inclusion. This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether you want to take part in it.

What am I being asked to do?

If you agree to participate in the study, I will ask you to participate in two steps. 1). A survey regarding your role as a certified preschool teacher. 2) I will ask you to participate in an individual interview in which I will ask you to respond verbally to 10 questions about your perceptions of your work as an interdisciplinary early childhood education regarding inclusion. I will record the interview in order to conduct an analysis of all interviewee responses later.

Key information about this study/ study purpose:

The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether you want to be a part of this study. The purpose of this study is to understand the perspectives of interdisciplinary early childhood educators on inclusion. I am interested in understanding your experiences working with special education and regular education students in a full inclusion classroom.

The purpose of this study is to understand educators' perceptions to find common trends among other teachers in your same education role.

Number of participants:

If you agree to participate, you will be one of 10 participants who will be participating in this research.

What are the benefits to me for taking part in the study?

Taking part in this study may not have direct benefits to you, but it will help me understand the importance of your experience as a dual certified teacher in preschool. Your participation may inform improvements in the design and delivery of special education in preschool for future teachers in this district and elsewhere.

Can anything bad happen if I am in this study?

I do not expect anything-bad happening to you but some teachers might have anxiety about being interviewed. I want to assure you that there are no right or wrong answers. I will offer the opportunity for interviewees to read the transcript of their interview to ensure transparency and integrity.

Who will know that I am in the study?

If you decide to be in the study, I will not tell anyone else how you respond or act as part of the study. Even if your colleagues or administration ask, I will not tell them about what you say or do in the study.

Do I have to be in the study?

No, you do not. The choice is yours. No one will get angry or upset if you do not want to do this. You can change your mind anytime if you decide you do not want to participate anymore.

Safeguards:

To minimize these risks and inconveniences, the following measures will be taken: You can skip any questions that you feel uncomfortable answering during the interview. You may skip any activity as part of the research. The interviews may be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you and at a place that is private.

CONFIDENTIALITY**:**

Total privacy cannot be guaranteed. We will protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law. If the results from this study are published, your name will not be made public. Once your information leaves our institution, we cannot promise that others will keep it private.

Your information may be shared with the following:

- The University of Louisville Institutional Review Board, Human Subjects Protection Program Office, Privacy Office, others involved in research administration and research and legal compliance at the University, and others contracted by the University for ensuring human participants safety or research and legal compliance
- The local research team
- People who are responsible for research, compliance and HIPAA/privacy oversight at the institutions where the research is conducted
- Applicable government agencies, such as:
    - Office for Human Research Protections

U.S. Department of Education (DOE) Funded Studies

Because the school is in a school system that receives funding from the DOE, we are required to tell you the following information.

The information we collect from the education or study records of you may only be used to meet the purposes of the study as stated in this consent. We will conduct this study in a manner that does not allow identification of you by anyone other than study team members or others who may have a legitimate reason to know. All instructional materials or survey instruments used for the research, including teachers' surveys, interviews and observation field notes, used in connection with this study, are available for you to see before the study begins if you ask to see it. If you want to see any of this information,

please contact me, Brooke Noon, and I will give you a date and time where it will be available for you to review. Once we have completed this study, we are required by the U.S. Department of Education to destroy or return to the school system all personally identifiable information when no longer needed for the purposes of the study. We expect this study to last for no more than one year, and we will destroy or return the information to the school system by January 1. 2024.

What if I have questions?

If you have questions about the study, you can ask me now or anytime during the study. You can also call me at (502) 245-2121 or e-mail me at brooke.noon@anchorage.kyschools.us. You may also contact Dr. Deborah Powers by email at debbie.powers@louisville.edu.

 If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the IRB Office at University of Louisville (502)852-5188 or by email: hsppofc@louisville.edu. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Signing below means that you have read this form and that you are willing to be in this study:

_____   _____

Name of the Participant (Printed)   Signature of the participant / date

_____   _____

Printed Name of Person   Signature of Person Explaining Consent
form / date

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Brooke Paul Noon

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EDUCATION: Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education
Miami University, Oxford Ohio
2002

Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction
Indiana Wesleyan University
2005

Doctorate of Educational Leadership
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2003

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Elementary School Classroom teacher
Anchorage Public Schools
2023-

Preschool Resource Teacher of Special Services
Jefferson County Public Schools
2021-2023

Preschool / Elementary School Classroom Teacher
Jefferson County Public Schools
2019-2021

Kindergarten Classroom Teacher
Oldham County Public Schools
2005-2019

Elementary School Classroom Teacher
Jefferson County Public Schools
2002-2005

HONORS Nationally Board Certified Teacher
Early Childhood Generalist
2007 and MOC 2017

Stellar Mentor Award
Jefferson County Public Schools 2023
Kentucky Department of Education National Boards Mentor

2022-2023

Recipient of the Samuels Family Scholarship at The University of
Louisville
2023

Recipient of the Kentucky Department of Education Early
Childhood Literacy Grant
2015

Recipient of the Oldham County District Pyramid Award for
Technology Integration
2010

PRESENTATIONS

National Boards Professional Development Journey
Jefferson County Public Schools, October 2022

Critical Pedagogy: Pragmatism in Action Research
Kentucky Spring Research Conference, March 2021

Professional Learning Communities at work
Oldham County Public Schools, April 2018

Annotation in Reading to Deepen Reading Comprehension
Kentucky Reading Association State Conference, November 2010