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SPECIAL EDUCATION: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE K-12 U.S.
EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

by

Erik Brault

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

May 2023

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EXCLUSION IN THE K-12 U.S. EDUCATIONAL
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ABSTRACT

The U.S. Department of Education defines students with disabilities as those having a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more life activities. Previous research has found that students with disabilities placed in inclusive environments perform better academically and socially compared to students with disabilities who are placed in segregated environments. Yet, we know that inclusion in K-12 general education classrooms across the country is not consistently implemented.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the effects, if any, of general education high school teachers' personal and professional experiences and knowledge on their attitudes toward educating students with disabilities within an inclusive learning environment. This study incorporated an explanatory sequential mixed methods approach. A survey was conducted with 173 teachers to gather quantitative data describing teachers' attitudes, dispositions, and training, and then, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of these teachers to better understand their preservice and inservice experience and knowledge about disability and inclusion.

Findings of the study showed that prior experience with disability, along with training and support in best practices during preservice credential programs and inservice practice shaped teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and in some cases hindered the implementation of inclusion models. The extent to which teachers had disability well defined in their preservice program, received training on regularly modifying assignments for students with disabilities, were provided a safe space in classes for disability to be discussed, and trained in how to implement positive behavior supports (PBS) in class, were more positively disposed toward inclusion. Conversely, a lack of an accountability system(s) seems to undermine the extent to

which the K-12 school system is consistently implementing a model of inclusion and providing the necessary support for students with a disability.

Overall, this study builds on our understanding of the issues that affect the implementation of inclusion and how best to support teachers in their efforts to support all students. This study has implications for those providing preservice to teachers and to school administrators who seek to support general education teachers' disability inclusion efforts.

Keywords: disability, attitudes about disability, inclusion, medical model, social model

ORDER OF PAGES

TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	viii
CHAPTER ONE SPECIAL EDUCATION: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE K-12 U.S. EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS	1
Statement of the Problem	15
Purpose	17
Research Questions	18
Significance of the Study	18
Overview of the Chapters	19
CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW	21
Legislation Concerning Disability and Inclusion	22
Parents' and Guardians' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion	25
School Leaders' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion	29
Students Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion	31
Teachers' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion	33
Professional Development Models Focusing on Attitudes about Disability and Inclusion	36
Summary	38
CHAPTER THREE METHODOLOGY	40
Research Design	41
Data Analysis	50
Positionality	55
Limitations	56
CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS	58
Survey Results	58
Inferential Analysis	70

Interview Results	76
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION	104
Interpretation of the Findings	105
Conclusions and Implications	121
Limitations	125
Recommendations for Future Research	126
Final Reflections	128
REFERENCES	130
APPENDIX A Survey	144
APPENDIX B Semistructured Interview Template	157
APPENDIX C Solicitation Letter to Prospective Teacher Participants	158

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Meeting IDEA Requirements by State	12
Table 2. Interview Participant Information	42
Table 3. District Comparison	45
Table 4. Corresponding Construct, Survey, and Interview Question Breakdown	49
Table 5. Demographic Statistics of Survey Respondents	60
Table 6. Disability Exposure/Experience Prior to Teaching	61
Table 7. Childhood K-12 Disability Diverse School Experience	62
Table 8. Preservice Teacher Credential Program Experiences	64
Table 9. Teacher Support	66
Table 10. Disability Model Comparison	68
Table 11. Teacher Attitudes About Disability	68
Table 12. Dependent Variable: Medical Model of Disability	70
Table 13. Dependent Variable: I Use Person-first Language More Than I Use Identity-first Language	71
Table 14. Dependent Variable: Social Model of Disability	71
Table 15. Dependent Variable: It Is Usually Apparent when Someone has a Disability	72
Table 16. Dependent Variable: Social Model of Disability	72
Table 17. Dependent Variable: Life With a Disability is Often Tragic	73
Table 18. Dependent Variable: Sometimes it's Best for Students with a Disability to go to Special Classrooms with Staff who are Better Trained to Support Them	73
Table 19. Dependent Variable: Teachers Need to Treat students with a Disability as if they are Fragile	74

Table 20. Dependent Variable: It is Usually Apparent when Someone has a Disability	74
Table 21. Dependent Variable: Students with Disabilities Often Cannot Keep up with Their Peers	74
Table 22. Dependent Variable: Sometimes it's Best for Students with a Disability to go to Special Classrooms with Staff who are Better Trained to Support Them	75
Table 23. Dependent Variable: Most People Have Some Type of Disability	75
Table 24. Dependent Variable: Teachers Need to Treat Students with Disabilities as if they are Fragile	75

CHAPTER ONE

SPECIAL EDUCATION: INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION IN THE K-12 U.S.

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

With the continual focus on civil rights in the United States, practitioners and researchers need to look no further than the public education system to see an alarming amount of inequality. Efforts to narrow the equity and opportunity gaps among K-12 students have often lacked effective support and accountability systems. Social constructs such as social attitudes, teacher expectations (Gershenson et al., 2016), lack of civility, divisive political systems, and institutional racism have created inequality (Powers et al., 2004; Sutton et al., 2017). This inequality in education is particularly apparent when it comes to the education of students with disabilities, specifically their access to effective inclusive education (Sutton et al., 2017). As an educator and researcher with over 14 years of experience, I believe that further inquiry is needed to understand the factors that support or challenge the education of students with disabilities.

Before discussing the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and the viewpoints around inclusion in public schools, the difference between disability and impairment should be noted to support further understanding of these terms which are used throughout this study. Ongoing criticisms and debates about the difference between disability and impairment continue to this day and it is important that scholars in education and disability studies continue to note the fluidity of both terms in the larger context of societal and medical modalities (Oliver, 2017). Disability is a social construct where a restriction or limitation of a person's ability, mental or physical, affects the performance of an activity or movement (Connor, 2019). Examples referenced in this study include movement disabilities, hearing and visual disabilities, speech disabilities, mental and cognitive disabilities, and learning

disabilities. More information on some of those areas of disability will be outlined in the chapters to follow.

Impairment on the other hand, is a loss or irregularity of mental, physical or functional structure of a person (Connor, 2019). Impairments can be temporary as well as permanent. Impairments can also be visible or invisible. Some examples of impairments include loss of vision or hearing, cognitive impairments such as Alzheimer's disease or autism spectrum disorder, chronic pain, or loss of an arm or leg.

Furthermore, it is important to explain disability inclusion from both the perspective of educators and educational scholars. Specifically, how disability studies in education are differentiated from special education. Disability studies in education is a multidisciplinary field that focuses on promoting inclusive education by taking into account different disability perspectives and the history of disability (Sandoval Gomez & McKee, 2020). The American Education Research Association's Disability Studies in Education (AERADSE) special interest group (2019) asserts that inclusion is the preferred educational model. AERADSE (2019) states that teachers must incorporate an "understanding of disability from a social model theory drawing on social, cultural, historical, discursive, philosophical, literary, aesthetic, artistic, and other traditions to challenge medical, scientific, and psychological models of disability as they relate to education" (p. 1). Ultimately, DSE's emphasis on the importance of inquiring about the different perspectives of disability supports the need for continual refinement of how and why teachers are practicing inclusion in their classrooms to the extent they deem necessary.

Today, special education incorporates the process by which students with disabilities are supported in schools. That process starts first and foremost with special education teachers who teach, coteach, and oversee the individualized education plans (IEP) of students with disabilities.

The IEP process tends to focus on the student's disability, which originates from the deficit-driven medical model of disability (McLaughlin, 2016). McLaughlin (2016) stated, "At the core of unearthing how this [IEP] document defines disability, then, is an understanding of the deficit ideology of disability" (p. 86). Although special education teachers oversee the IEP and implementation of the IEP process, it would be unfortunate to forget that general education teachers continually have students with disabilities in their classrooms throughout the day. And as my study and literature review of this study will show, those general education teachers are not always supported, trained, or willing to uphold the requirements of an IEP. As Baglieri et al. (2011) so diligently and eloquently state:

Special education, historically founded on conceptions of disability originating within scientific, psychological, and medical frameworks, will benefit from acknowledging broader understandings of disability. Although well intended, traditional understandings of disability in special education have inadvertently inhibited the development of theory, limited research methods, narrowed pedagogical practice, and determined largely segregated policies for educating students with disabilities. (p. 267)

Acknowledging the broader understanding of disability referenced by Baglieri et al. (2011) can help direct further inquiry into how and why teachers view disability in the way they do – hopefully in an effort to better understand teachers' practices when it comes to positive and effective inclusion practices, as well as how teacher practices can hinder the social and educational growth of students with disabilities.

Inclusion and Debate

One of the primary strategies offered to support the education of students with disabilities is inclusive education. Inclusion is referenced and argued from the viewpoint of the entity that

oversees that system - the U.S. Department of Education. More specifically, as my study takes place in San Diego, California, I reference the California Department of Education's definition of inclusion, which falls under the auspices of the U.S. Department of Education. The California Department of Education defines inclusion as "identifying students' individual needs, removing barriers to access, and providing appropriate accommodations for those students who need them" (California Department of Education, 2023).

Inclusive education occurs when students, regardless of the impairments they face, are placed in age-appropriate general education classes, and receive support enabling them to meet the standards embedded in the core curriculum (Alquraini & Gut, 2012; Bui et al., 2010). Those who support inclusive education suggest that students with disabilities can benefit from inclusion by obtaining greater social and academic skills as opposed to being in segregated classrooms (Blazer, 2017; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). Just as Blazer (2017) and Downing and Peckham-Hardin (2007) noted, scholars have argued that students with a disability in inclusive environments perform better academically compared to students with disabilities in segregated environments (Hehir et al., 2016). Furthermore, Hehir et al. found that students with a disability obtain cognitive and social benefits from inclusive education. Those scholarly assertions seem to suggest that inclusion is essential for the academic and social well-being of students with a disability. Of course, effective inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms involves multiple entities and stakeholders who vary in their opinions about inclusion, as I discuss later in this chapter.

Some research has pointed out some negative factors associated with inclusion. For example, this research questions the quality and effectiveness of inclusion (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Issues include concerns about student social isolation among students with a disability in

general education classrooms, the negative attitudes of peers, and teacher readiness in being able to provide optimal instruction for students with disabilities. Moreover, we know little about how teachers' attitudes, and experiences with inclusion or how their prior training may affect inclusion implementation and success. The debate about inclusion calls for more research to better understand how teachers and other stakeholders view inclusive education and how their beliefs affect its efficacy (Gordon, 2006; Slee et al., 2019). Specifically, it is important to know the consequences of inclusion for students' academic and social well-being. It is vital to point out that as in most endeavors involving the productivity of students and teachers, data can and should continue to be collected on how teachers and students understand inclusion and if it is supporting or hindering student learning – regardless of students' ability level. Yet, there seems to be minimal research on the matter.

The call for a closer examination of inclusive education is due in part to the fact that previous research has pointed out that students with disabilities are not reaching their potential due to a lack of proper classroom support and being excluded from and not being supported with social interactions with school peers (Siperstein et al., 2007), class scheduling issues and non-involvement of parents of students with a disability in educational planning (Buren et al., 2022), as well as teachers' failing to understand how to effectively support different student learning levels (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Mader, 2017).

A major aspect of inclusion debates pertains to ways in which to think about disability. Before getting into background information on the legislation in place affecting inclusion and the stakeholders involved in the implementation of inclusion in the U.S. educational system, it is important to note there are two prominent ways of thinking about disability that often frame support for or against inclusion. These models include the medical model of disability and the

social model of disability. The medical model of disability theorizes that disability is a product of biology that reduces a person's quality of life (Office of Developmental Primary Care, 2022). The medical model of disability neglects to consider environmental issues and the construction of disability.

A second model of disability is the social model of disability. This model theorizes that social factors are the main contributors to the inability of people with a disability to participate in society to the same extent as their nondisabled peers (Accessible Education Center, 2022; Office of Developmental Primary Care, 2022). In the social model, issues include negative attitudes toward disability and structures in place that exclude people with disabilities and undermine efforts to support their social, academic, and career journeys. Understanding the two prominent models of disability could hopefully help further inquiry into how and why teachers, among others, feel the way they do about their experiences with disability both from their past inside and outside the classroom as students themselves, and within their own teaching practice.

Before examining how various stakeholders feel about disability inclusion, I discuss the efforts and legislation put forth to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools.

Legislation

In 1975 as an effort to protect the civil rights of people with disabilities and their families, the U.S. Congress established Public Law 94-142, also named the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA). In 1990, EHA was reauthorized and renamed to what would become the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) which has since been continually updated to address ongoing efforts to refine its mandates. Interestingly, as a comparison, prior to 1975 only about 20% of children with disabilities were educated in U.S. schools, whereas in

2021, more than 66% of children with disabilities were not only in U.S. schools but also in general education classrooms for most of their day (IDEA, 2022a).

The U.S. Department of Education (2019) defines students with disabilities as those students:

With intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbance (referred to in this chapter as “emotional disturbance”), orthopedic impairments, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, or specific learning disabilities – who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (para. 4).

As the entity that oversees and regulates education across the country, the U.S. Department of Education’s definition and how they uphold that definition may need to be more closely examined to address more effectively what may be issues of insufficient support for students with disabilities and insufficient support of the teachers being asked to provide those supports. Furthermore, it may be time for the U.S. Department of Education and schools across the U.S. to promote, adopt, implement, uphold, and regulate a more nuanced model of disability. That could help inform and regulate not only the educational experiences of students with disabilities but also the accountability of educators responsible for providing services to those students as well as the support teachers need and receive to better support all students.

As IDEA and the progress of inclusion in the U.S. continue to move forward, important to note is that IDEA currently mandates schools to provide students with disabilities with free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment(s) (IDEA, 2022b, para. 1). Furthermore, the Department of Education (2019b, para. 1), in support of inclusive general

education classrooms, explains a least restrictive environment is a requirement of IDEA where students who receive special education should be in the same classrooms as other kids as much as possible. The premise of a least restrictive environment supporting the desegregation of students with a disability is a positive one at that. However, there needs to be further inquiry into if and how inclusion opportunities for students with disabilities affect or hinder their educational growth, and the barriers and successes teachers face when supporting students with a disability.

School Leaders

Debates about inclusion are continuing to take place among a multitude of educational stakeholders, many of which are outlined in Chapter 2. There are challenges in attempting to structure opportunities for inclusion. Some research on school leaders and inclusive education (Pedaste et al., 2021) and from personal interviews with multiple principals and administration across San Diego County, the site of this research study, we find that they face challenges in being able to devote enough time and resources to support students and meet the accountability measures of standardized test performances. Moreover, school leaders have noted that general education teachers may not be able to adequately support students with a disability due to a possible lack of knowledge on how to best do so.

Furthermore, school districts face some structural constraints. In general, districts continually face budgeting obstacles limiting funding available for support for credentialed teachers and support staff in inclusive classrooms. And in some cases, research has pointed out that teachers do not come to the classroom feeling prepared or supported to teach students with disabilities (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Phillips, 2016).

As continual uncertainty among school leaders on the effective facilitation methods promoting optimal inclusion persists, school leadership must continue to be researched in order

to better address the issues school leaders are having (Praisner, 2003). Though research shows that school leaders are in fact, for the most, attempting to implement some form of an inclusive culture on school campuses, it is not always to the extent the law mandates (Ball, 2012; Horrocks et al., 2008).

Parents

In 1954, the U. S. Supreme Court mandated that racially segregated public schools were unequal and neglected African American children of equal protection of the laws. African American children were subject to the same education as white children and segregated schools were not equal or just. After the U. S. Supreme Court's decision in 1954, parents of children with disabilities started suing school districts for segregating their children with disabilities.

Moving forward, in the 1970s, two cases also spearheaded change with respect to inclusive education for students with disabilities: *Pennsylvania Assn. for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (PARC)*, and *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia* (Wright & Wright, 2023). In both cases, parents of children with disabilities noted the regularity of not being able to uphold the rights of their children because they were led to believe that their children would be unable to find purpose or fulfillment in life. Specifically, Congress noted that:

Parents of handicapped children all too frequently are not able to advocate the rights of their children because they have been erroneously led to believe that their children will not be able to lead meaningful lives It should not . . . be necessary for parents throughout the country to continue utilizing the courts to assure themselves a remedy . . . (Wright & Wright, 2023, para. 31)

Even today, it is important to understand the roles parents play as it relates to supporting the optimal achievement of students with disabilities which at times have seen both action for and against inclusion. I detail some of those actions in Chapter 2. Ultimately, the ongoing issues of disability inclusion that parents and their children continue to face calls for further action to more succinctly understand how and why educational efforts being made to promote inclusion seem to be falling short at times.

Accountability Measures for Students

Although the effort put forth for educational equality for children with disabilities has been in many ways both difficult and trying for parents, teachers, civil rights activists, and other educational stakeholders, students with a disability are at the forefront of the debates and arguably, most affected. Through the efforts of previous legislation such as EHA, PARC, *Mills v. Board of Education of District of Columbia*, IDEA, and the many parents and supporters involved in advocating for equal education of students with disabilities, today, inclusive opportunities for those students are as embedded into the U.S. culture as they have ever been.

In 2004 a review and reauthorization of IDEA took place which among other things, required states to enact goals for the performance of children with disabilities that are in line with the goals and standards for nondisabled children. The 2004 reauthorization was important to the ongoing inclusion efforts of the U.S. educational system as the legislation laid the groundwork for what was supposed to be a country-wide accountability system called a State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR). SPP and APR evaluates states' efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of IDEA and describes how states will improve their implementation. Parts B and C of the SPP and APR included indicators that measure child and family results, and other indicators that measure compliance with the requirements of the IDEA.

Since 2015, Part B and C of the SPP/APR have included a State Systemic Improvement Plan through which each State focuses its efforts on improving a State-selected child or family outcome (U.S. Department of Education, 2020).

Today, the SPP and APR are the foundation of the accountability structures that are expected to guide the teaching and learning of students with a disability and their access to education – an education plan that allows them to reach their mental, emotional, and social potential. To what extent school experiences of students with a disability are affected by the SPPs and APRs is still in question. Furthermore, to what extent teachers can account for and implement the guidelines laid out in state SPPs and APRs is of question as well. Important to note is that previous research on student attitudes about inclusion has been conducted on both students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Research has shown that students feel that inclusion, at times and when done effectively, can be a positive experience (Knesting et al., 2008; Miller, 2008; Siperstein et al., 2007).

Teachers

Currently, as SPPs and APRs are in place to best support students with a disability with inclusion, important to note is that, ultimately, teachers oversee creating, enforcing, and upholding the lessons and disciplines being evaluated. Interestingly, teachers in California, for instance, make up only a small subgroup of people who are part of creating the performance plan for the state. As it pertains to my study and as an overview of the focus of California's performance plan as it pertains to students with disabilities, the administration of the California Department of Education states in Part B of their performance plan that they aim to:

Provide sufficient detail to ensure that the Secretary and the public are informed of and understand the State's systems designed to drive improved results for students with

disabilities and to ensure that the State Educational Agency (SEA) and Local Educational Agencies (LEAs) meet the requirements of IDEA Part B. This introduction must include descriptions of the State’s General Supervision System, Technical Assistance System, Professional Development System, Stakeholder Involvement, and Reporting to the Public (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Table 1 shows a 2020 list of state performance pertaining to meeting the requirements of IDEA Part B, which serves students with disabilities:

Table 1

Meeting IDEA Requirements by State

Meets requirements	Needs assistance (1 year)	Needs assistance (2 or more consecutive years)	Need intervention (1 year)
Alabama	Alaska	California	Nebraska
Arkansas	Connecticut	Colorado	
Arizona	Missouri	Delaware	
District of Columbia	Montana	Florida	
Georgia	Nevada	Hawaii	
Idaho	New York	Iowa	
Kansas	Virginia	Illinois	
Kentucky	Wisconsin	Indiana	
Louisiana		Massachusetts	
Maryland		Mississippi	
Minnesota		Maine	
North Carolina		Michigan	
North Dakota		New Hampshire	
New Mexico		New Jersey	
Ohio		South Carolina	
Oklahoma		Vermont	
Oregon			
Pennsylvania			
Rhode Island			
South Dakota			
Tennessee			

Texas
Utah
Washington
West Virginia
Wyoming

Not surprisingly, California has not met the IDEA requirements necessary to best support students with a disability – nor has almost half of the states in the United States. Further inquiry into how that empirically plays out among a subset of California teachers will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Of course, just as it does for all educational stakeholders, the current state of inclusion in the United States as it relates to teachers stems back to important historical legislation and activism efforts. For teachers, two laws are important to mention that allowed for the training of teachers who worked with students with a mental disability: Public Law 85-926 in 1958, and Public Law 86-158 in 1959 (Wright & Wright, 2023). Also, in 1961, the Teachers of the Deaf Act (PL 87-276) provided support for the training of teachers to work with deaf or hard-of-hearing students. Finally, in 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (PL 89-10) and the State Schools Act (PL 89-313) granted funds to states to help more teachers educate children with disabilities.

Teachers are key players in educating students with disabilities, yet research is lacking on their beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding inclusion. Teachers are expected to be equipped with knowledge of how and why to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms in order to effectively guide those students toward reaching their potential. As public education teachers who teach students with a disability are mandated by federal and state law to receive preservice teacher training and hold a bachelor's degree (IDEA, 2020), teacher inclusion practice gaps still persist as my study will outline and discuss.

Upon inquiry into teacher credential programs and in reviewing the credential requirements for programs across the country, it seems that the most preservice training general education teacher candidates receive involves taking classes on teacher pedagogy, child development, and the effect of social structures, language, and culture on learning. Those classes are supportive but limited in that they focus on either training general education teachers how to teach non-disabled students, or training special education teachers how to teach students with a disability. It seems that rarely do preservice teachers learn how to serve both student populations.

While general education teacher credential programs in California and other states require at least one course on teaching both students with and without disabilities, it is more common for general education teacher candidates to not be exposed to inclusive practices (Phillips, 2016; Will, 2018). As a result, many general education teachers believe they lack the preservice educational training needed to include students with learning disabilities in their classrooms (Mader, 2017). My study and the participants involved expand on that notion.

After teachers are credentialed, inservice teacher training and professional development are readily available. Training can help teachers learn how to work productively with students with disabilities, learn about inclusive educational practices, and work collaboratively with colleagues on inclusion efforts (Van Veen et al., 2012). Yet, it is not known to what extent teachers are taking advantage of those opportunities, nor if those trainings are readily available as it relates to their practice and if, how, and why the training is effective or not.

Learning how to include and support disabled students is essential, especially given the large number of students with a disability that are in classes throughout the country. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2019), roughly 800,000 students were enrolled in specialized schools (i.e., separate schools that segregate students with disabilities) in the 2015-

2016 school year, and a projected 13% of all public school students (approximately 6,591,000 students) were identified as having a disability. Yet, as previously discussed, general education teachers do not always have the knowledge or determination to create more inclusive learning arrangements (Kahn & Lewis, 2014). Challenges to inclusion also encompass the pressure teachers face to have all students meet state test score thresholds while operating on tight budgets (Bemiller, 2019; Horne & Timmons, 2009). Although some data suggest a lack of teacher preparation, the reasons why teachers are reluctant to create more inclusive educational opportunities remain vague.

Statement of the Problem

Most students with a disability in California are educated in public school general education classrooms (Legislative Analyst's Office, 2019). And seeing as San Diego County encompasses the full breadth of socioeconomic levels and a wide variety of minority cultures and overall diversity, choosing San Diego County as the site for this research study was intended to yield a participant pool that closely resembled the overall high school general education teacher demographic of the state. San Diego County is the second largest county in California. Children with disabilities represent about 5% of the population in the county, which is close to 23,000 children with some type of documented disability (County of San Diego, 2021).

Furthermore, I have a specific interest in high school teachers in the county. As graduation requirements for all students become more scrutinized in high school and given the pre-study interviews done with teachers in the county of all grade levels, I feel that high school teachers have a unique lens when it comes to practicing and upholding classroom inclusion. High school is the time when parents of some students with a disability make definitive decisions about if their child will be diploma-bound or not, and teachers, at times, have a direct say in that.

High school is when students with a disability and their parents might start making decisions on to what extent special education services need to be tapered down or phased out in preparing those students for life after high school where direct special education services are not always available – especially for free, which most services are for students with disabilities in public education in the United States. Further inquiry into high school teachers’ attitudes about disability and inclusion may also support future research into breaking down what inclusion looks like at the primary and middle school grades as well. That could help further assist in understanding the systematic processes that hinder or support inclusion throughout a child’s K-12 schooling.

Studies have suggested that some general education teachers do not know how best to support disabled students (Hsien, 2007). Moreover, I have found minimal information on how general education teachers implement inclusive education, the training they have received to support inclusion, teachers’ attitudes and dispositions toward inclusion and the consequences of these factors on the well-being of students. For example, to date, there is little information on how attitudes and familiarity with the needs of students with disabilities and teachers’ previous experiences and training impact their support of students with disabilities in K-12 classrooms. In addition, more empirical evidence is needed to better understand how teachers’ attitudes and dispositions toward students with disabilities and inclusive education factor into the student’s academic preparation (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Phillips, 2016).

Teachers have a great responsibility and play an essential role in decisions on the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Umpstead et al., 2013). Their attitudes, fears, and concerns may contribute to whether or not effective inclusion is occurring in public schools. Given legislation supporting the inclusion of students with

disabilities in the general education setting and the evidence Hehir et al. (2016) provided on the positive effects of inclusion, there continues to be uncertainty about how to make inclusive education readily available for students with disabilities and in identifying the reasons why inclusion is not more readily available to all public-school students.

Although teachers are supposedly trained on best practices to support the academic needs of all students, attitudes about students with disabilities may affect their disposition and willingness to support the need for inclusive education. Disability scholars such as Valle and Connor (2019) and Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) have argued that teachers' regularly occurring misconceptions of disability and the historical resistance in the field of education toward the social understanding(s) of disability play important roles in the lack of inclusive education.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to better understand the effects if any, San Diego County general education high school teacher's personal and professional attitudes and knowledge about educating students with disabilities have on their willingness or ability to create an inclusive learning environment. As previously noted, teachers feel lost or underprepared at times when implementing instruction and creating an inclusive environment benefitting all students equally (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Phillips, 2016). That lack of preparedness holds true as it relates to my anecdotal experiences both teaching in the general education setting and conversing with teacher peers for the past fourteen years. Teachers, at times, including myself in my early years of teaching, feel underprepared to support disability inclusion.

As all educational stakeholders continue to construct their attitudes toward inclusion or exclusion, one clear path toward change and opportunity for more effective inclusion is to focus on the role of general education teachers (Ball, 2012; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Praisner, 2003). The

U.S. education system could then be better informed on the ways, if any, teachers' preservice and inservice training(s) and attitudes affect the inclusion opportunities of students with disabilities. That in turn could better address the needs of teachers as they respond to inclusion imperatives as most public-school teachers are educating students with a disability every day. Ultimately, it is important to know the extent to which teachers understand effective inclusion practices when teaching students with disabilities. To that end, I conducted an explanatory sequential mixed methods study by first gathering quantitative data describing teachers' attitudes, dispositions, and training. Then, I conducted in-depth interviews with select teachers to better understand their preservice and inservice development around the topics of disability and inclusion.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this research:

1. To what extent, if any, can variation in high school teacher attitudes toward disability be explained by demographics, exposure, and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support?
2. What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education, and what factors have supported those attitudes?

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to provide information to educational stakeholders regarding the role that some San Diego County teachers play in supporting and/or challenging the implementation of disability inclusion. Effective disability inclusion efforts, as they relate to state and local educational standards and the requirements which call for specific

accommodations and modifications assisting students with disabilities, are not readily available to teachers nor are they mandated to the extent more teachers are practicing effective disability inclusion. Therefore, those effective inclusion efforts seem to lack accountability systems in place to uphold effectively supporting all students with a disability. This study aims to inform educators and district leaders as to some of the reasons why and how teachers are practicing effective inclusion, while others are not.

Finally, this study has the potential to further explain what elements of teachers' attitudes toward disability and disability inclusion stem from areas outside of school. Those areas include teachers' exposure/experience to disability prior to teaching and/or preservice teacher training experiences. This study also provides important information as to the role those teacher experiences with disability prior to teaching and their teacher preservice and inservice training are affecting their disability inclusion efforts.

Overview of the Chapters

The following information of this research study starts with Chapter 2, a literature review of scholarly research, educational-related publications, medical-related publications, and social publications on inclusive education. Topic areas include inquiry into legislation in place pertaining to the inclusion of students with disabilities in schools, followed by previous research on parents and guardians, school leaders, students, and teachers who have been affected by and are part of disability inclusion taking place in the U.S. educational system. Following Chapter 2, Chapter 3 will outline the methodology used to conduct the research study. The primary question guiding this research study is: In what ways, if any, do high school teacher's personal and professional attitudes toward and knowledge about students with a disability affect their attitudes toward inclusive education? In Chapter 3 I describe the explanatory sequential mixed methods

design of this study which was used to understand the relationship between teacher attitudes and inclusive education.

In Chapter 4 the results of the study are discussed. The chapter begins with survey results from the quantitative portion of the study followed by interview results from the qualitative portion of the study. Chapter 5 will start with a discussion of the findings of the study followed by future research and practice implications and recommendations, concluding with the limitations of the study and suggestions for future study.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following review of literature presents theoretical and empirical research on attitudes about disability and the practice of inclusion in public school classrooms. The considerable debate about the merits of inclusion in general education classrooms has continued to persist for well over a decade (Gordon, 2006; Slee et al., 2019). In this review, I focus on some of the reasons for this debate. While important legislation mandating inclusion in public schools exists, there are various factors that challenge inclusion. This review examines research that shows many of the reasons for exclusion, or the absence of inclusive education as an integral part of everyday schooling practice. This review discusses some of the practices that are aimed at encouraging inclusion and better-supporting students with disabilities (Baglieri et al., 2011; Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). It also explains how U.S. stakeholders are affected by the policies and the barriers to inclusive education.

The research strategy used to generate this literature review was to analyze educational and psychological scholarly databases for articles, books, and dissertations pertaining to attitudes about disability, school inclusion, and attitudes of schools, parents, students, and teachers. State and federal government education websites were also analyzed for education legislation and statistical data. Finally, I analyzed peer-reviewed research literature reviews to further investigate search criteria for subjects linking inclusion to attitudes about disability. I begin with a review of legislation mandating the rights and services for students with disabilities in U.S. public schools.

Legislation Concerning Disability and Inclusion

There have been extensive efforts supporting the evolution of legislation on disability and inclusion. Currently, Public Law 101-47, or IDEA, mandates that schools provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (IDEA, 2022a, para. 1). That is, students with disabilities should receive their education to the “maximum extent appropriate” with nondisabled peers (IDEA, 2022b, para. 1). The U.S. Department of Education (2018), in support of inclusive general education classrooms, specified that the least restrictive environment was a requirement of IDEA.

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of Education (2018) explained that special education students should not be removed from general education classes, even with supplemental aids and services, unless education in regular classes cannot be reasonably achieved. IDEA (2020a, para. 7) consists of the following key elements:

- Ensure that all children with disabilities have a free and appropriate public education available to them that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.
- Ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected.
- Assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to provide for the education of all children with disabilities.
- Assist states in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families.

- Ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities, coordinated research and personnel preparation, coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, support, and technology development and media services.
- Assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

IDEA has, at times, been the foundation for disability rights in schools, though not without problems (Hershey, 2002; Malhotra, 2017). Specifically, law experts agree there are no highly effective mandates to hold teachers accountable when teaching in some of the least restricted environments, which IDEA clearly states needs to take place (Dalton, personal communication, 2018). Dalton explained that although curriculum modifications in relation to state standards and student achievement are available to teachers, students with disabilities struggle to reach those standards. While Dalton did not aim to suggest teachers be held solely responsible for students' academic regression, she did feel that it was important to point out that mandates are in place to support students with disabilities without accountability systems to uphold those mandates. For more effective accountability, additional data needs to be gathered on the effectiveness of IDEA's current guidelines.

Consequences of IDEA, such as the effectiveness of the least restrictive environment(s) for students with disabilities, may be better evaluated by looking into broader systemic issues outside of teacher practice. Teacher attitudes about disability, training, professional development, legislative and educational system barriers, and prior teaching experiences with disability are all areas that could affect teachers' practice as it relates to supporting students with a disability in the least restrictive of environments. Educational scholars and other stakeholders support the

“ [re]claiming of inclusive education” which, of course, involves a “political agenda around which many strands of critical educational reform can cohere” (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 2117). Baglieri et. al. argued that disability studies in education can contribute to inclusive educational reform by challenging traditional models of disability and support more effective inclusive practices in schools. Baglieri et al. also note the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and attention to the intersections of disability with other social identities and components. And as with Baglieri et al. (2011), Malhotra (2017), who also incorporated a variety of educational stakeholders in his research around inclusion, political barriers, and reform, believes that the ongoing reclaiming of education is vital and could help strengthen and reevaluate IDEA’s guidelines and accountability systems. Malhotra examines disability politics in the global economy and how disability intersects with issues such as globalization, capitalism, labor, and human rights.

Malhotra’s reference to the reclaiming of education is important as it could further support the incorporation of all educational stakeholders’ views on disability. Malhotra’s discussion around the reclaiming of education could also support teachers and preservice teacher credential programs with their inclusion efforts by creating new social model driven ideologies around inclusion. Finally, Baglieri et al. and Malhotra’s efforts to include teachers, higher education practitioners, disability studies scholars, sociologists, and others in discussing inclusion reform could help continue the formation of much needed alliances to strengthen the mandates and accountability systems in place to better support effective inclusion in schools across the country and abroad. The K-12 U.S. public educational system is continuing to push toward an increase in classroom inclusion (Monreal, 2013). Yet, there is considerable

controversy as to whether inclusion is the appropriate strategy in which to educate students with disabilities. I review the various perspectives on inclusion in K-12 classrooms below.

Parents' and Guardians' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion

One major stakeholder group who is very vocal in the debate about inclusion of students with disability in the general education classrooms are parents. Specifically, some parents of students with disabilities have played a key role in upholding and advancing aspects of school operations pertaining to disability inclusion for decades, well before the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (Goldman, 2020; Pressman, 1987). In their roles to support the optimal achievement of students with disabilities, parents have faced support and challenges related to (a) school culture, (b) the development of individualized education plans, (c) class schedule, (d) special education service provider hours, (e) other advocates for or against overall inclusion in schools, and (f) vocational opportunities for high school students who are non-diploma bound and focusing on work-related curriculum and community-based opportunities (Buren et al., 2022).

Ball (2012) and Monreal (2013) addressed issues of inclusion in the context of parent involvement and how it has influenced the construction of a positive inclusive culture at school. Other research conducted in multiple regions across the United States has shown parents are mostly supportive of the inclusion of disabled students in general education classrooms (Blazer, 2017; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Peck et al., 2004). Most notably, Downing and Peckham-Hardin's (2007) study that included interviews with parents, teachers, and support staff found that inclusion created academic benefits and social success for those students with disabilities. Students with a disability were thought to gain greater access to all aspects of everyday life. Non-disabled peers of students with a disability were also said to benefit because

they formed a greater awareness of disability.

This research supports the claim that socially, and in many cases academically, all students benefit from learning together with same-aged peers. Downing and Peckham-Hardin's (2007) qualitative investigation allowed for a seemingly effective triangulation of educational stakeholder data to examine the benefits of inclusion. Even with the benefits noted in this study and others by Blazer (2017) and Peck et al. (2004), concerns with inclusion relating to the time available for educating each student, modification of assignments, a lack of pull-out services, and classroom behavior disruptions, among some parents both with and without a child with a disability have been continually occurring (Advocacy for Parents of Children with Disabilities, 2009; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Learning Disabilities Association of America [LDA], 2022).

The LDA is one organization that argues against supporting "full inclusion, or any policy that mandates the same placement, instruction, or treatment for ALL students with learning or other disabilities" (LDA, 2022). LDA suggests that general education classrooms are not fit to support some students with disabilities. Yet, LDA acknowledges alternative viewpoints, for example, noted in a study by Morano et al., (2020) which found that "while high school students with learning disabilities have needs in basic calculation skills, fractions, decimals, reading, social and behavioral skills...70% of the IEPs reviewed included only instruction [in these academic areas] in the general education setting" (LDA, 2022, para. 3). Students with a disability who are not included in general education classes will not receive the instruction they need. Specialized services such as modified instruction along with general education teacher and special education case manager regular communication could in theory support inclusion efforts. But as stated above, accountability systems may not always be in place to make sure those services are taking place. Furthermore, LDA's mission focuses mostly on inclusion as "full

inclusion” which means students with disability are in general education classes at all times with no pull-out opportunities to further support instruction, as opposed to partial inclusion which indicates a hybrid model that is part-time in general education classes, and part-time in direct pull-out classes with a focus on a modified curriculum.

Gilmour (2018) argued against current U.S. inclusion trends. Gilmour (2018, para. 2) notes there is “weak evidence” in academia that supports inclusion and suggests that general education teachers are not sufficiently prepared to meet the individual academic and behavioral needs of students with disabilities. Some parents agree with the notion that general education teachers are underprepared and have continually advocated for education reform to address this issue with the current state of inclusive education (Buren, Rios, & Burke, 2022). Furthermore, parents lack trust in their schools. They suffer from a lack of communication, involvement, and question support for their schools’ inclusion efforts. Roth and Faldet (2020) and Valente et al. (2016) interviewed parents of students with a disability and found, although their students were indeed in inclusive classrooms throughout their K-12 education experience, the inclusive environments were not suitable for optimal student achievement. Just as Gilmour (2018) noted, in the area of school preparedness, according to studies conducted by Faldet (2020) and Valente et al. (2016), parents felt a lack of support for disability inclusion. Ultimately, it seems that more research and reform efforts are needed to incorporate parents’ perspectives on the environments in which their children with disabilities are being educated.

Other studies of inclusive environments have shown that parents of students with disabilities weigh favorably toward inclusion because they have noticed social gains among their children, including an increase in socialization and involvement with same-age peers (Blazer, 2017; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Peck et al., 2004). Peck et al’s (2004) study

concluded that inclusive environments have prompted parents of students without disabilities to also see social gains in their children. Children without disabilities benefitted from inclusive classroom environments by having a more positive emotional sense of self, feeling they had a better classroom climate for learning, and feeling they had an overall positive attitude toward their peers with a disability. Despite these benefits, there remain concerns about which kind of learning environment is more effective in achieving greater academic gains (Leyser & Kirk, 2004).

Beyond the need for increased clarity on which environments are most favorable in supporting academic gain, there is a growing concern about the absence of parental involvement altogether. Some studies have shown a lack of parental involvement of parents of students with a disability or a lack of facilitation of that involvement among schools implementing inclusive classroom opportunities, which is worrisome to education scholars (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Elbaum et al., 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2014). Although parent involvement has been “a cornerstone of special education legislation,” to what extent and effect parent involvement influences education reform, can vary between school systems (Yell et al., 2009, p. 69).

Burke and Sandman (2015) noted:

One way for parents to share their insights and create systemic change is during an IDEA reauthorization..., although the public is afforded the opportunity to provide feedback during a reauthorization, individual parent input is frequently under-represented. (para. 1)

Similarly, Elbaum et al. (2016) noted that a “lack of specific preservice and inservice training that teachers receive in [how to] collaborate with parents, the competing time demands placed on teachers, and lack of administrative support” may be attributing factors to the lack of parent

involvement.

And finally, in Welchon's and McIntyre's (2014) study involving, among others, parents of children with a disability, they found that lack of parental involvement was greater among those parents with a child with a disability in comparison to parents of children without a disability. Welchon's and McIntyre's study supports the notion that general education teachers and schools may be underprepared to communicate with parents of students with a disability to the level of effectiveness necessary to further support student progress and family support with that progress. All studies discussed in this section (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Elbaum et al., 2016; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Peck et al., 2004) gathered data from small groups of parents. Leyser and Kirk's (2004) study was the largest of these studies, investigating multiple districts in one state.

In the future, it could be beneficial for studies to gather data from a substantially larger, widespread data pool representing more than just one state. Moreover, understanding of parental attitudes toward inclusion could be enhanced if more longitudinal studies were conducted on districts in one state or districts across multiple states. Ultimately, both suggestions have the potential to broaden our understanding of inclusion in schools and its effect on those who are disabled and those who are not disabled, as well as create a better understanding of parent's role in supporting or undermining inclusion efforts.

School Leaders' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion

School leaders are vital to the creation of school policies and practices that may or may not promote inclusion. School leaders are directly affected by educators' and community members' attitudes about disability. Their attitudes can inform their decision-making. Yet, with the emphasis on inclusion in U.S. public schools, there continues to be uncertainty among school

leaders about how, if, and when to facilitate inclusion (Praisner, 2003). Principals, vice principals, school directors, and other executive leadership members are for the most part implementing some form of an inclusive culture, though not always to the extent the law mandates (Ball, 2012; Horrocks et al., 2008). Studies have shown school leaders tend to view inclusion more positively when having had prior experience with disability (Ball, 2012; Monreal, 2013). However, even with prior positive experiences, school leaders continue to face challenges in providing inclusive education.

A study of 138 school leaders across the southeastern United States found that school leaders were limited in their training on inclusive practices, which, in turn, contributed to their negative attitudes toward inclusion (Ball, 2012). Ball's (2012) study showed school leaders had more apprehension toward including students with moderate-severe disabilities in general education classrooms compared to students with mild-moderate disabilities. Along with apprehension, school leaders also faced issues around ambiguous guidelines for effective inclusive education practices and a lack of accountability systems for following the laws for teachers supporting students with disabilities (Horrocks et al., 2008; Howard, 2012; Moore, 2012).

Ball's study is important as it was substantial in participant sample size and covered multiple states. It is important to note that Ball (2012), Horrocks et al. (2008), Howard (2012), and Moore (2012) omitted an extensive discussion of the details on how knowledge of what drives school leaders toward effective inclusive practices could improve inclusion at schools. Furthermore, all studies failed to give a clear definition of what inclusion can or should look like. The ambiguity around the structure(s) in place and the efforts of school officials leading those structures to uphold effective disability inclusion could be yet another reason why inclusion

efforts struggle to gain traction in some places. Further research is needed on how and why efforts should be made to address inclusion opportunities and enhance the experiences of students with disabilities.

Students Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion

Students' perspectives on disability are important for understanding not only the history of disability inclusion but how their attitudes affect decisions about inclusion. Siperstein et al. (2007) asked a national sample of 5,837 middle school students about their attitudes toward attending class specifically with students who have an intellectual disability. Their study indicated students (a) never or rarely ever interacted with peers having an intellectual disability in their classrooms and schools, (b) believed peers with an intellectual disability can participate in nonacademic but not academic classes, (c) viewed inclusion as having both positive and negative effects, and (d) did not want to interact socially with peers with an intellectual disability, particularly outside school (Siperstein et al., 2007). Siperstein et al.'s study provided important data as it incorporates students' attitudes and opinions on inclusion as it relates to educational procedural mandates, laws, and educational practices and shows how disability and inclusion can influence peer interactions among students with and without a disability (Bunch & Valeo, 2004; Wingate, 2005). This is important as it shows that those who have had little interaction with disability hold low expectations and deficit views. These views impact the experience students with disabilities have when they are at school.

Siperstein et al.'s (2007) study took place over a decade ago. There seems to be little to no more recent national sampling of students' attitudes toward inclusion. Furthermore, there is little to no longitudinal data on how students' attitudes toward inclusion and disability have changed over time, something Siperstein et al. (2007) and Bunch and Valeo (2004) noted as

important for understanding classroom inclusion.

Just as understanding nondisabled students' attitudes on inclusion is important, literature on the attitudes of students with a disability toward their inclusion with nondisabled peers and teachers is important as well. Knesting et al. (2008) interviewed students with disabilities and found that students were frequently willing to ask for help depending on whether they had a good relationship with their teachers or classmates. Knesting et al. (2008) found students with disabilities who had positive relationships with both teachers and peers considered special education services an essential part of their education. Alternatively, students with disabilities who felt uncomfortable receiving special education services "often cited embarrassment" (p. 272) as the reason for not seeking help.

In another study, Miller (2008) found students with and without disabilities sensed their views about inclusion and being part of the inclusion process at school were going unnoticed by school faculty. Furthermore, both Knesting et al. (2008) and Miller (2008) found students' attitudes and perceptions of belonging affected their satisfaction in school, regardless of ability or disability.

Combined with the research on parental attitudes, multiple studies dating back as early as 2007 have shown a trending concern over who should be involved in the creation and maintenance of an inclusive culture in schools and how promoting a culture of inclusion can be effectively achieved (Burke & Sandman, 2015; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Elbaum et al., 2016; Knesting et al., 2008; Miller, 2008; Rodriguez et al., 2014; Welchons & McIntyre, 2014). That research prompts the following thought: If students' feelings about disability are affecting their comfort at school, this might allude to a need to embed discussions about

disability and the kind of culture needed in educational institutions. Students' comfort could be at the root of every disability inclusion decision within those educational systems.

Teachers' Attitudes Toward Disability and Inclusion

A major aspect of disability inclusion pertains to teachers' attitudes and practices. There are many ways to think about disability and these ways are connected to two prominent models of disability that help to explain how teachers may view disability. First, the medical model of disability theorizes that disability is a product of biology that reduces a person's quality of life and should be looked at as a defect within the individual (Office of Developmental Primary Care, 2022). The medical model views disability as stemming "from a person's physical or mental limitations and is not connected to the social or geographical environments" (Accessible Education Center, 2022, para. 3). Some teachers adhering to a medical model perspective tend to believe that intelligence and abilities are fixed. Ultimately, there is a disregard for environmental issues and the construction of disability or academic achievement.

The second model or way of thinking about disability is the social model of disability, which theorizes that social factors are the main contributors to the inability of people with a disability to participate in society to the same extent as their nondisabled peers (Accessible Education Center, 2022). The social model views disability as a "consequence of environmental, social and attitudinal barriers" (Accessible Education Center, 2022, para. 2). In this social model, the factors at play include negative attitudes toward disability and structural arrangements that exclude people with disabilities and therefore undermine efforts to support their academic and career journeys. These frameworks that have been used to understand people's dispositions and attitudes toward disability are helpful for this study. As participants of my study discuss their attitudes and evaluate why and how people with disabilities function in society, they offer their

opinions regarding effective instructional practices, attitudes about students with disabilities, and ideas about inclusion efforts. Ultimately, understanding the two prominent models of disability could help deepen inquiry into how and why teachers feel the way they do about their experiences with disability inclusion.

One of the most common structural reasons given for the absence of inclusion in all public schools is that teachers do not feel they have adequate training to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Mader, 2017). Horne and Timmons (2009) found teachers consistently faced barriers to inclusive education, such as a lack of teacher development opportunities as to how to meet the needs of all students. Horne and Timmons' qualitative study surveyed 20 teachers for their study on dealing with attitudes, perceptions, and incentives for encouraging inclusion. From the 20 participants, five teachers were randomly chosen for interviews. Horne and Timmons found that some of the teachers' primary concerns were planning time, meeting the needs of all students, and ongoing professional development to respond effectively to the increasingly diverse needs of students in the classroom. Despite these concerns, preservice teacher training programs in disability studies are not completely absent. Many teacher credentialing programs require courses on diversity and inclusion. Interestingly, what effect those courses have on teachers' inclusion attitudes and practices have seemingly been undocumented. Moreover, teacher credential courses aim to expose teacher candidates to inclusive practices in some general education classrooms (Phillips, 2016; Will, 2018). Though again, to what extent those courses are affecting positive teacher inclusion practices seems to be unknown.

Teachers cannot necessarily be blamed for feeling underprepared to teach students with disabilities. Teachers often have multiple students with a disability in class, but little to no

support as to how to best instruct those students. Some underprepared teachers are speaking up about the issue, though it seems little has been done to systematically support them in the environments in which they are teaching (Phillips, 2016). Phillips interviewed teachers in urban environments and showed, like Baglieri et al. (2011) and Malhotra (2017), that external factors outside the K-12 classroom, such as opportunities to learn more about disability in a teacher credentialing program, have been missing. The research suggests that teachers' attitudes toward inclusion must be studied as possible reasons for why teachers feel the way they do about their inclusive practices.

Phillips (2016) found general education teachers, regardless of gender, number of years teaching, and number of special education courses taken were not willing to accept the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms. Their reluctance was primarily due to a lack of support and training on how to educate students in an inclusive setting. In a national online survey of 1,088 K-12 science teachers, Kahn and Lewis (2014) found the teachers felt they received little teacher training and were underprepared to teach students with disabilities. Furthermore, Phillips (2016) and Kahn and Lewis (2014) found teachers' lack of understanding of disability and its relationship to inclusive practices also affects their preparedness to implement effective inclusive teaching practices. Some general education teachers indicate that they lack the preservice education that could have changed their attitudes toward including students with learning disabilities (Mader, 2017).

In Hernandez et al.'s (2016) study, researchers found special education teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were significantly more positive than those of general education teachers. In their earlier study, Hernandez et al. (2016) found higher levels of self-efficacy were associated with more positive attitudes toward inclusion suggesting that preparation matters in constructing

attitudes toward inclusion. Without training, teachers do not feel they have the capacity to teach students with disabilities. The study also found a shift in teacher attitudes may be achieved if school district administrators implement teacher training and professional development to improve teacher self-efficacy in inclusive practices. The researchers of the study found some general education teachers never expect to teach students with a disability, and therefore never developed much knowledge about students with a disability or examined the benefits of inclusion. Some general education teachers have challenged inclusion because they felt underprepared to work with students with disabilities. While learning how to become a teacher, they were not given sufficient related professional development (Phillips, 2016; Shealey et al., 2009).

With the continual support by many for inclusion in the United States, it is important for teachers to feel they can effectively facilitate inclusion. Most general education teachers in the United States have students with disabilities in their classes daily. Because of that, educators need to understand how to generate and support positive disability inclusion attitudes so teachers can be better informed about how and why effective disability inclusion support is necessary. During preservice teacher credential programs, if general education teachers are not being trained on how to produce and support positive disability inclusion attitudes, inservice professional development could be provided to further support teachers' disability inclusion efforts.

Professional Development Models Focusing on Attitudes about Disability and Inclusion

On-going professional development, which is the learning that takes place once teachers are teaching at a school, has been a common strategy for building teacher capacity to work with disabled students. This kind of training can address teachers' attitudes and practices. Professional

development is a vital aspect of improving the quality of education (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Coe et al., 2014; Desimone, 2009; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Professional development allows the opportunity to refine teaching practices inside the classroom and the ever-changing and busy work environment of a classroom teacher.

Some studies have reported the following characteristics of effective professional development: a focus on increasing understanding of pedagogical content knowledge (Ainscow et al., 2017), opportunities for teachers to work together with their colleagues (Van Veen et al., 2012) and longitudinal engagement in learning and the continual reevaluating of teacher professional development (Desimone, 2009). In developing effective professional development models on attitudes about disability, cultural elements, such as symbols, language, norms, values, and artifacts may be important (Klein, 2007). Furthermore, Cook et al. (2016) explained that educators need to have the space to learn about and reflect on their beliefs, exposure to, and experiences with disability. Professional development can provide the space to discuss teacher attitudes so they can personalize their rationale for inclusion.

At times, teachers' reflections on their attitudes can happen most effectively when collaborating with trusted teacher colleagues (McCall et al., 2014). Studies have noted some success when teachers' attitudes about disability are discussed in teacher-driven collaboration sessions (Ankrum, 2016; Lambert, 2006; Sanocki, 2013; Silva et al., 2000). This success could be attributed in part to teachers' ability to build upon peers' existing work and because it supports continuous learning (Margolis, 2008).

Finally, research on teacher professional development around the lack of teacher training on inclusive practices is important to note. Studies by Allan (2003), Horne and Timmons (2009), and Mader (2017) looked at general education teachers and their lack of teacher training on

inclusive practices, a factor that has shown to be a vital aspect of shaping attitudes toward disability. Although teachers were not willing to accept the inclusion of students with disabilities in their general education classrooms, a practice that could be seen as unethical and going against IDEA's guidelines, it is possible they did not feel they had the skills necessary to modify instruction. Changing teachers' beliefs about the need for supporting inclusion may only be possible if efforts are made to build their capacity. Past exposure to and experience with disability are important factors in how teachers perceive and implement their training into practice (Cook et al., 2016). Cook et al. indicated teacher professional development programs tend to focus more on what inclusion looks like and less on effectively getting teachers on board with implementing inclusion. If we know teachers, self-admittingly at times, reject inclusion based on a lack of support or lack of knowledge on effective disability inclusion practices, professional development must consider those barriers to better help teachers place value on effective disability inclusion practices.

Summary

This literature review shows that multiple stakeholders' attitudes and practices affect inclusion for students with disabilities. Legislation, such as IDEA, is in place to support the success of students with disabilities and the inclusion efforts of educators. Arguments have been made addressing the effectiveness and implementation of that legislation. Furthermore, school leaders who are at the forefront of upholding the IDEA have been studied and still there is ambiguity around how they effectively implement and uphold effective disability inclusion as part of a whole school culture. Also, parents of students with and without a disability have been researched and conflicting attitudes continue to exist regarding their support for disability inclusion; their conflicting attitudes do not translate to students' attitudes on disability inclusion.

Research has shown that not all, but many students, regardless of disability status, seem to support inclusion to some extent. In the end, all stakeholders' attitudes, and beliefs as well as all of the structures, legislative and school policies and mandates impact the potential for an inclusive environment.

Teachers are directly responsible for implementing and supporting disability inclusion. They are in charge of implementing daily instruction and support, and yet, according to the research reviewed, we do not know enough about why some teachers feel unprepared to teach students with disabilities. We know little of how their past experiences with disability, their preservice teacher training, or their current school structures. This study intends to determine what factors contribute to teachers' willingness or reluctance to sufficiently understand, value support, and practice inclusive education.

In the chapters ahead, I discuss my methodology and then details of my findings from 173 teacher surveys and 19 follow-up interviews with teachers. I discuss teachers' views on disability, inclusion, and their prior experiences with both. In Chapter 5, I discuss the implications of their beliefs and attitudes on inclusion and what it means for educators and policymakers to better support students with a disability.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The primary question guiding this research study is: In what ways do high school teachers' personal and professional attitudes toward and knowledge about students with a disability affect their attitudes toward inclusive education? As a reminder, in Chapter 7 I outlined the rationale for choosing high school teachers for my study due to their unique place in the educational timeline of students with disabilities in the K-12 U.S. educational system. In this chapter, I describe the explanatory sequential mixed methods design of this study, which I used to understand the relationship between teacher attitudes and inclusive education. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2018) allowed me to identify constructs from the quantitative findings needing further qualitative inquiry. In the first phase, I collected and analyzed quantitative data from survey responses. The quantitative analysis helped inform the strategic selection of survey respondents who volunteered to be interviewed and also supported the creation of interview questions for the qualitative phase of the study. In the second phase of the study, I collected data through semi-structured interviews and analyzed the data in relation to the outcomes of the first phase of survey data collection.

This research was designed to explore the relationship between teacher attitudes and their support of inclusive education. The following questions guided this study:

1. To what extent, if any, can variation in high school teacher attitudes toward disability be explained by demographics, exposure and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support?
2. What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education and

what factors have supported those attitudes?

Research Design

The design of my research study initially aimed to incorporate the perspectives of as many general education high school teachers as possible in San Diego County, given I had access to those teachers within the time constraints of the study. Upon going through the solicitation process for participants, I was pleasantly surprised by the number of respondents. Although factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and school district research protocols likely limited the number of teachers who did respond, I did not have to change my research design to accommodate the number of participants. The following is an explanation of my research design.

Participants

Participants of this study included high school general education teachers across two public school districts in San Diego County. Approximately 1,752 teachers were solicited with the help of district research office personnel. Of those 1,752 teachers, 173 opted to take my survey. Teachers ranged from 22-69 years of age and their teaching spanned an array of different subjects. They included teaching math, science, English, and social studies classes, as well as electives such as music and/or language classes, and these teachers taught across a variety of high school grade levels. Participants were from schools of all socioeconomic types. Schools within the two districts had a range of 8-100 teachers per school depending on student enrollment (San Diego County Office of Education, 2020). Unfortunately, accessible data on the number of general education teachers at each school site was not available. Access to these teachers was through direct email solicitation.

The first phase of my study included a survey and the second phase included semi-structured interviews with some of the survey respondents. Nineteen survey respondents opted to

be interviewed for the study. The 19 interviewees closely represented demographically both the overall survey sample of San Diego County teachers and California teachers as most respondents identified as female and White (California Department of Education, 2022). Interviewees also closely represented my overall survey sample as it pertained to their teaching experience. Most teachers had 10+ years of teaching and they had prior exposure/experience with disability or at least some exposure/experience. The following is a table describing the survey participants who were interviewed.

Table 2

Interview Participant Information

Name	Age	Gender	Childhood socioeconomic class	Race	Area raised in childhood	Years teaching	Subjects taught	Prior experience with disability
Ashley	30	Female	Middle	White	Urban	3	English	Some
Barb	27	Female	Middle	Black or African American	Urban	4	English, U.S. History, World History, AVID	Some
Chris	29	Male	Middle	White	Suburban	1	Biology, Chemistry	Regularly
Dawn	NA	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	9	College Prep Chemistry, Honors Chemistry, AP Chemistry	Regularly
Esther	69	Female	Middle	White	Rural	10+	Culinary Arts	Regularly
Farah	55	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	10+	Government, Economics, English, Psychology	Regularly

Name	Age	Gender	Childhood socioeconomic class	Race	Area raised in childhood	Years teaching	Subjects taught	Prior experience with disability
Gwen	25	Female	Low	Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin	Urban	2	Physics, Advanced Physics	Regularly
Henry	28	Male	Low	Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	Urban	3	Chemistry	Some
Isabel	60	Female	Middle	Other	Urban	10+	Biology, Advanced Biology, AP Biology, Earth Science, Physics, Geometry, Algebra 1, Pre-Algebra, Computer Coding (Basic).	Regularly
Julie	35	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	10+	English 9, English 10, American Literature, IB Literature, AP Literature	None
Kent	NA	Male		White		10+	English, AVID, Film Arts	Some
Laura	57	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	10+	English, Theatre, Drama	Some
Mary	NA	Female	Middle	White		10+	Math, History, English	Regularly

Name	Age	Gender	Childhood socioeconomic class	Race	Area raised in childhood	Years teaching	Subjects taught	Prior experience with disability
Nancy	58	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	10+		some
Olivia	39	Female	Middle	White		10+	Spanish, History	some
Pam	49	Female	Middle	White	urban	10+	English, Social Science	some
Qiana	NA	Female	Middle	White	suburban	7	AVID, 2D Art, and Digital Arts	regularly
Rachel	29	Female	Middle	White	suburban	6	English grades 9-12, Sheltered English 9-12, Honors English 9, English Language Development 2-Advanced, Journalism	regularly
Stacy	46	Female	Middle	White	Suburban	10+	English ESL	None

Information on the procedures to obtain teacher participation in both phases of the study will be described in the procedures section. Furthermore, specific demographic information on all participants will be further discussed in Chapter 4.

Procedures

To recruit general education high school teacher participants for the study, I first reached out to public school districts in San Diego County that had at least one high school. I either emailed or called district offices to obtain protocols pertaining to research being done within

their districts. There are 42 school districts in San Diego County, not all of which have high schools. Of the approximately 20 districts having high schools, two districts accepted my application process to conduct research within their district. The submission guidelines needed by each district varied. Districts that did not accept my application/solicitation either did not respond or said they were not accepting research at the time of solicitation. All the districts that were not accepting research applications informed me that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, outside research opportunities were put on hold. Finally, because I was able to gain access to two large school districts within San Diego County, I refrained from individually soliciting teachers from other San Diego County school districts due to the inability to access teacher email addresses.

Table 3 below shows a brief comparison of the two districts that accepted my application for research. Note, the two districts differed substantially in size as one of the districts was a high-school-only district.

Table 3

District Comparison

Student information	District A	District B
Approximate Enrollment 2021-2022	20,000+	103,000+
Approximate Amount of Free & Reduced Lunch (family low-income marker)	60%	60%
Approximate Amount of English Language Learners	12%	20%
Hispanic	38	47
White	22	23
African American	5	10
Asian	4	3
Native American	1	1
Pacific Islander	1	1

Multiple Race/Ethnicity	5	5
Other Race	24	10

San Diego County Office of Education, 2020

Once my application for research was accepted in February of 2022, I sent an email participation letter through the districts' research offices that included the link to the survey and an option to be interviewed. This email letter was sent to all high school general education teachers within the two districts. A sample of this letter can be found in Appendix C. Before the initial solicitation emails were sent out, I contacted high school site principals to inform them of my district approval and asked them to inform their general education teaching staff of the study. Although district contacts had informed me that principal approval was not necessary for district-wide data collection, I thought communicating with principals before emailing my survey would yield a greater participant response rate and a level of buy-in from principals.

After following up with principals throughout the first 2 months of survey distribution and learning that some had advocated for their staff to participate in the study, I was optimistic the support of principals helped obtain more participants. In total, solicitation efforts from district personnel to teachers took place over a five-month period. The solicitations occurred on two separate occasions - one month and three months after the initial solicitation letter was sent. Survey responses were coming in until May 2022. I received a total of 173 surveys. I followed up by conducting 19 interviews between June and August 2022.

Quantitative Phase 1: Survey

The initial instrument I created was an online survey. Participants were assured that survey results would be anonymous and, once completed, the survey would be sent directly to me and no one else (e.g., principals, or other administrative members). The survey also informed participants that if they chose to do a follow-up interview after survey completion, their personal

information, and responses would be kept confidential. Results from the Qualtrics survey were directly uploaded into a Qualtrics survey database. I gave participants three weeks to complete the survey, and for those who did not complete it, I followed up with them twice, approximately one month and two months after the initial survey distribution.

The constructs in the survey were informed by my personal experience as an educator in general education and special education settings. Going further back, Shapiro (1998) brings up an important point that people form negative attitudes toward disability early in life from influences at school and the media. I certainly agree with that. Although the internet presence was not as abundant in 1998 as it is today, the shifting of media to an online format that drives so much of the beliefs and attitudes people form today can be scary at times. Because of that, as Biklen et.al. (1989) notes, it is important to examine and understand the meaning(s) of disability in today's world to better understand the issues of disability inclusion in schools.

Additionally, the survey content was informed by literature on teachers and other educational stakeholders' attitudes toward disability, inclusion, and legislation and policies pertaining to teachers' inclusion efforts for students with disabilities (Hsien, 2007; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2022a; Wright & Wright, 2023). In addition to basic demographic information, the constructs measured teachers' experiences with disability prior to teaching, teachers' experiences with learning about inclusion and disability in preservice teacher credentialing programs, and teachers' experiences with disability and inclusion while teaching. The following is an overview of the demographic information and each of the three constructs:

- **Demographic Information:** The survey consisted of 14 multiple-choice questions on personal and basic occupational information about the participants (i.e., age, years of teaching, and subjects taught throughout their teaching career).

- Experience with Disability Prior to Teaching: This construct consisted of four Likert-scale questions and one multiple-choice question on the extent to which participants experienced disability and other aspects of diversity prior to teaching.
- Preservice Teacher Credential Program: The second construct consisted of four multiple-choice questions focusing on the extent to which and the specific ways participants learned about disability during their preservice teacher training experience.
- Experience as a Teacher: The final construct consisted of 30 Likert-scale questions focused on participants' experiences with teaching students with disabilities. This section also included six true/false questions on teachers' attitudes toward disability and inclusion.

Qualitative Phase 2: Semi-structured Interview

After the survey data was collected, I communicated with the 25 participants who were willing to be interviewed, 19 of whom followed through with the interviews. I worked around teachers' schedules to arrange the interviews which were most notably conducted when they were off for the summer, after summer school teaching sessions, on their breaks throughout the day, during summer school teaching sessions, and during their classroom breaks once they were back in school teaching during the beginning of the 2022-2023 school year. On average, each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. Interviews were recorded and I also took notes. Being able to go back to my video interviews supported coding efforts and allowed me to cross-reference my initial interview notes with the recorded transcripts and prepare for the analysis of the interviews. Furthermore, conducting interviews over ZOOM allowed for transcription and accurate coding, as revisiting the interviews was easily accessible.

After I received contact information for the 25 survey respondents willing to be interviewed, I used judgment sampling to identify 20 potential interview participants, 19 of whom ended up going through with the interview. Judgment sampling is a type of non-random sample that is used based on the opinion of an expert (Marshall, 1996, p. 523). Results obtained from a judgment sample are subject to some degree of bias, due to the frame and population not being identical, yet judgment sampling increased the relevance of my sample to the population of interest as only individuals that fit the teacher demographic criteria were included in the sample (Alchemer.com, 2018). Furthermore, I used judgment sampling because I was not able to interview many of the survey respondents. Otherwise, I would have used random sampling to choose my interviewees. Judgment sampling was also used because the initial survey yielded responses from teachers with varying years of experience, school settings, experiences with disability, and degrees of understanding of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices in the classroom. Although I hesitate to use the word “expert,” I feel my experience in the field of education combined with my research experience in the field of education for over a decade justifies my interview sample decisions.

The next section describes the data analysis procedures of the survey and interview portions of the study. As a reference, table 4 shows a few examples of constructs and the survey and semi-structured interview questions that informed those constructs.

Table 4

Corresponding Construct, Survey, and Interview Question Breakdown

Construct	Example of Phase 1 survey question	Example of Phase 2 semi-structured interview question
Experience with disability prior to teaching	My childhood K-12 school experience was diverse in incorporating people from all ability levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly agree 	I noticed in your survey you stated that you had x-amount/type of exposure/experience with

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Somewhat agree ● Neither agree nor disagree ● Somewhat disagree ● Strongly disagree 	disability. Can you explain what that looked like?
Experience as a teacher	<p>If you have received support for working with students with disabilities, how much are you being supported?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Always ● Most of the time ● About half the time ● Sometimes ● Never 	I noticed in your survey you stated receiving x-amount/type of support for working with students with disabilities. Can you explain what that looked like?

Data Analysis

In this section, I describe the analytic techniques used to analyze the data I gathered in both phases of the study, including descriptive statistics, multiple regression analysis, and thematic analysis.

What Matters in Forming Attitudes Toward Inclusion?

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to summarize the survey data collected in the first phase. The summary included all individual questions, demographic information, and the three constructs previously discussed: teachers' knowledge and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, teachers' attitudes toward disability and inclusion during teacher training, and teachers' attitudes toward disability inclusion as a practicing credentialed teacher. These constructs were formed by constructing an index composed of the average score for each question contained in the construct. Because some of the constructs had a mix of Likert- and non-Likert-scale questions, the non-Likert-scale questions were mapped onto a 1-5 scoring system used for the Likert-scale questions. As a result, each of the constructs had an average score between 1 and 5, with higher scores signaling more of what the construct measured.

After survey data was initially analyzed, I used multiple regression analysis to address this research question, with teacher attitudes as the dependent variable. Teacher demographics, preservice training, and inservice training and experiences were the independent variables. Further information on all variables is outlined in Chapter 4. Because the goal of this analysis was to explain the variation in teachers' attitudes, any statistically significant variables informed the construction of semi-structured interview questions used to address the second research question. Throughout the analysis, I used a significance level of $p < .05$ to determine the statistical significance of independent variables.

How do Attitudes Dictate Your Practice?

Although individuals were selected for a variety of reasons, the main intent was for them to illuminate the quantitative findings from the first research question. For example, if years of experience as a teacher positively correlated with teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities, I considered interviewing participants with few, some, and many years of experience to provide a more nuanced understanding of this finding. Similarly, if preservice training was positively correlated with teachers' attitudes toward disability, I wanted to talk to teachers to find out what parts of the training seemed to matter the most. In general, data collected through my survey instrument informed the semi-structured interviews. These interviews allowed respondents the opportunity to reveal a greater understanding of how their personal and professional experiences influence their attitudes toward inclusion.

Interview questions were focused on disability and the inclusion experiences of teachers. Most follow-up questions were dedicated to asking interviewees how they felt about their experiences with disability. I wanted to get a sense of where teachers' attitudes about disability may have come from, how those attitudes shape their practice, and what factors, internal and/or

external, attributed to their attitudes toward inclusion. At times, I shifted focus from the interviewee's detailed descriptions of what disability inclusion looked like in their life, for instance, to questions that probed more deeply into how that inclusion affected them in the past and how it affects them today. I was able to tailor follow-up inquiries from the interviewee responses to the following four semi-structured interview questions:

1. I noticed in your survey you stated that you had x-amount/type of exposure/experience with disability – can you explain your experience with disability and people having disabilities?
2. I noticed in your survey you stated that you received x-amount/type of training in your credentialing program on disability and/or inclusion in the classroom – can you explain the effect that had/has on you as a teacher? An example is how your teacher training has affected or has not affected your willingness to teach in an inclusive classroom.
3. I noticed in your survey you stated receiving x-amount/type of support with students with disabilities – can you explain how you experienced that? An example could be the type of support received from the administration at your school(s) and/or teacher peer groups on campus, and/or support from special education staff.
4. Can you elaborate on your thoughts about disability and teaching those who are disabled? What factors do you think influence teaching students with disabilities? How and why do you feel those factors influence your teaching practice?

For example, during interviews with teachers that were seemingly having issues with disability inclusion support, I asked them what systematic barriers were possible reasons for the lack of support for inclusion. I was able to reference the factors that they responded to on the

survey such as lack of school culture toward inclusion or lack of accountable and/or available staff. Being able to reference survey answers pertaining to the types of support they had or had not received, including professional development, administrative support, special education staff support, etc., allowed me to question interviewees and dive deeper more effectively into their attitudes about the support they were or were not receiving. I used survey responses pertaining to their attitudes about disability and inclusion to dig deeper during interviews into how they attribute or do not attribute prior to teaching experience with disability to current positive and negative attitudes toward disability inclusion.

After the interviews were complete, I used a grounded theory methodology to look for emerging themes and engage in thematic analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The thematic analysis included a 6-step approach, including (a) familiarizing myself with the interview data, (b) coding interview data to more definitively describe the data, (c) generating themes from the codes, (d) reviewing themes and comparing them to the initial interview data to make sure I was not missing anything and that the themes authentically explained the data, (e) defining and naming the themes, and finally, (f) integrating the thematic analysis data with the quantitative data from the survey (Clarke et al., 2015).

My data analysis process revolved around the notion that coding is a “cyclical” process (Saldana 2010, p. 8). Multiple rounds of coding were necessary, hence adhering to multiple coding types outlined by Saldana (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016; Saldana, 2010). The coding process throughout this research study included initial structural coding using such codes as “attitude definition,” “positive attitude,” and “negative attitude,” followed by later rounds of structural coding which included “characteristics of practice,” “characteristics of attitude,” and “external or internal factor to attitude development.” Structural coding guided my efforts to categorize data

and allowed for an analysis of similarities and differences present throughout the interviews. Similarities and differences effectively helped generate themes.

In later rounds of coding, simultaneous coding was used as I was noticing multiple codes coinciding with one another. Simultaneous coding, sometimes referred to as “double coding” in qualitative research, is a method of qualitative coding where a single passage of data are coded with multiple codes (Delvetool.com, 2022; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2016). This occurs when the data can be categorized in multiple ways. An example of simultaneous coding took place when interviewees were discussing inclusion supports. I had codes for the reference point in the transcript labeled as “open communication with teaching peers/support staff,” “structure,” and “comfort.” Those codes linked to how the teacher(s) were describing inclusion support they were receiving from support staff and how that support affected their teaching practice. Alternatively, I was simultaneously coding “low communication with staff” with “frustration” and “uncertainty” as it pertains to expectations of inclusion obligations.

After I analyzed the interview data, I integrated the quantitative and qualitative data. As stated above, qualitative data pertaining to the second research question that I gathered from the interviews was supported by the regression data findings from the survey. It was important to integrate single-participant interview responses with both the survey data and the themes generated from the thematic analysis. When each interview transcript was analyzed in comparison with other participant stories and with the survey data, the data ended up supporting a more nuanced understanding of the extent to which attitudes of teachers affect the inclusion of students with disabilities and the factors that contributed to those attitudes. Ultimately, all the semi-structured research questions in Appendix B are linked to the three construct areas that guided the analysis of the research study: teachers’ knowledge and/or experience with disability

prior to teaching, teachers' attitudes toward disability and inclusion when being trained as a teacher, and teachers' attitudes toward disability as a practicing credentialed teacher.

Positionality

I am a special education teacher in one of the districts from where I drew the participant samples for this study. I have advised and taught new teachers in both districts of this study since 2016, though none were permitted to participate in my research. With over a decade of teaching experience in one of the districts, mostly at a district-affiliated charter school, I have a vested interest in the opportunities this study may present for future efforts to understand teachers' attitudes about disability in San Diego County and beyond and how those attitudes and other factors contribute to effective inclusive education.

I do not identify as having a diagnosed disability, though I am skeptical of disability diagnosis in the educational system—most notably because I am around students with a diagnosed disability daily. I had a middle-class upbringing and have spent most of my teaching career in low socioeconomic areas of southern California. I made every attempt to ensure, to the extent possible, that my positionality did not influence participant responses and study results. To ensure my positionality did not interfere with my analysis of the interview data, after each interview I wrote short analytic memos describing my thoughts and feelings on how I “showed up” throughout the research process.

I also recognize that research is never neutral and that just posing the questions that I have posed suggests some influence or potential bias in the study. Also, especially important to note is the strategy for securing participants' feedback, how interviewees interpret the data about themselves, and how I understood and interpreted the interviewees' stories about the ways they were making sense of the moment (Glesne, 2016). I took Glesne's inquiry about interview

strategies into great consideration during the creation of my post-interview analytic memos. Being able to physically see the interviews replayed helped with my interpretations of what interviewees were going through emotionally at the time of the interviews.

I also wanted to be sensitive to my district colleagues and their views on the questions I asked them. A focus of my interviewing technique was to be transparent and not to hide that I am a teacher colleague in a county where these participants teach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 161). I also wanted to be mindful of participants' experiences and allow them to understand that their experiences matter for the greater purpose of understanding how to improve opportunities for successful inclusion efforts and better support students with a disability.

Limitations

The survey used in this study, although objective in its aim, ultimately incorporates some subjectivity. The geographic and demographic makeup of the districts studied are unique, not only due to the two locations in the country but also their location in the state. Southern California is one of the more densely populated and diverse areas of the state and country with over 115 school districts in Los Angeles County and San Diego County alone (California Department of Education, 2022). Therefore, survey questions pertaining to teachers' attitudes toward disability and their experiences with disability prior to and during teaching are not intended to represent the U.S. educational system as a whole. Furthermore, the survey used in this study gathered data from only two school districts in a county of 42 school districts (San Diego County Office of Education, 2020). Although the demographic makeup of the schools that participated in the survey spanned a wide range of socioeconomic statuses as shown in Table 3 in the procedures section and the participating schools do somewhat compare demographically to the other schools and districts in San Diego County, the findings do not fully encapsulate all the

issues Southern California teachers or teachers across the country experience regarding teaching students with disabilities and efforts addressing inclusion.

The semi-structured interview participants represented only a small percentage of the survey respondents and were selected purposely rather than randomly. Also, external factors such as the global COVID-19 pandemic and changes in school operational structures required participants to not be interviewed in person. Instead, virtual interviews were the mode of data collection and as such, the intimacy, trust, and openness of participants could have been affected. The semi-structured interviews also took place during a school year like no other, as the pandemic placed all participants in virtual learning environments, followed by a one-of-a-kind reentrance to in-person teaching. As such, new issues among teachers may have surfaced with school inclusion efforts, and therefore the resulting data may be more reflective of these unique times than the typical in-class experiences teachers faced daily prior to the pandemic. Despite these limitations, gaining insight into teachers' attitudes toward disability can help all educational systems better understand why disability inclusion is important.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Chapter 4 provides the results of this study. The chapter begins with survey results from the quantitative portion of the study followed by interview results from the qualitative portion of the study. As a reference point, the following research questions are guiding both portions of the data collection:

1. To what extent, if any, can variation in high school teacher attitudes toward disability be explained by demographics, exposure and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support?
2. What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education and what factors have supported those attitudes?

Survey Results

The survey used in this study was composed of 55 questions and can be found in Appendix A. The questions were broken up into four sections, highlighting demographics and constructs of the study which include: exposure and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support. As a reminder, multiple regression analysis of the survey data was used to find if there is a significant relationship between two or more variables. Furthermore, regression analysis was used to find the strength and direction, if any, of the variable relationships and how well does the analysis predict the values of the dependent variable(s). More information on the significance of the variables is to follow.

Approximately 1,752 teachers received the survey. These teachers were high school general education teachers recruited from two public school districts in San Diego County. Due to time constraints regarding the completion of this study, data analysis needed to begin after two months of initial participant solicitation. Chapters 3 and 5 of this dissertation provide further insight into my methodology as it pertains to participant solicitation efforts, which provided theories about future research on the topic of teachers' attitudes about disability and inclusion.

After two months and four teacher solicitation attempts, I received 200 surveys to analyze. Of those 200 surveys, 173 were complete and participants could be identified as teachers in San Diego County. Due to the nature of the answers of the other 27 responders, those responders were likely from San Diego County public schools and not computer-generated bots or people from outside the district. However, upon cross-reference efforts, and for the sake of scientific validity, I could not conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that the 27 responders met the criteria for participation in the study. As such, the following section provides participant demographic information and survey responses for the 173 respondents to help shed light on furthering my understanding of the two research questions of this study and any practical significance that surfaced with the data. This section will conclude with an inferential analysis of the statistical significances of the survey data.

Demographic Information

Teacher respondents ranged between 22-69 years of age and their years of teaching experience ranged from being in their first year of teaching to those having over 27 years of teaching experience. A total of 64.7% of respondents had over 10 years of teaching experience, 64.2% of which identified as female teachers, 34.1% identified as male teachers and 1.7% did not identify by gender. Of the 173 respondents, 83.2% spent most of their life in a middle

socioeconomic class, whereas 12.7% spent most of their life in a low socioeconomic class. In total, 72% of respondents identified as White, while 16% identified as Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish origin, 3% identified as Black or African American, and approximately 8% identified as another race. Table 5 outlines respondents' demographic information.

Table 5

Demographic Statistics of Survey Respondents

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age	159	43.36	10.91
Male: 0; Female: 1	173	0.65	0.48
Low socioeconomic class	172	0.13	0.33
Middle socioeconomic class	172	0.84	0.37
High socioeconomic class	172	0.01	0.08
White	173	0.72	0.45
Hispanic	173	0.16	0.36
Black	173	0.03	0.18
Other race	173	0.08	0.26
Years teaching	173	8.20	2.90

Prior Experience with Disability

Two key survey questions indicated teachers' experience with disability. Those questions included: "which of the following best describes any prior experience you have had with a person(s) with a disability," and "my childhood K-12 school experience was disability-diverse." Most respondents reported experience with or identified as a person having a disability. Approximately 90% of respondents had either some or regular experience with a person with a

disability. Of this group, a little less than half, 45.1%, reported having at least some experience with and/or exposure to disability prior to teaching. Some prior experience included respondents having a friend or family member with a disability, a former colleague with a disability prior to teaching, and/or a classmate with a disability.

In terms of the 44.5% of respondents who stated that they have regular experience with and/or exposure to disability, eight reported personally having a disability. Regular experience with and/or exposure to disability included respondents having a disability, having a family member or friend with a disability, and/or having a classmate with a disability. In total, 8.7% of survey respondents reported having no experience with disability. In the qualitative interview results section described later in this chapter, more data will be provided on how interviewees explained their prior experience with disability before teaching. Finally, 1.7% of the respondents did not answer if they had any type of experience with and/or exposure to disability prior to teaching. Table 6 outlines prior respondents' exposure/experience with disability prior to teaching.

Table 6

Disability Exposure/Experience Prior to Teaching

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personally disabled	173	0.46	0.21
Family member	173	0.40	0.49
Friend	173	0.33	0.47
Colleague	173	0.17	0.38
Mentor	173	0.01	0.11
Teacher	173	0.08	0.27

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Other types of experience	173	0.26	0.44

Aside from experience with and/or exposure to disability prior to teaching, another key issue was to measure the level of disability respondents reported experiencing during their own K-12 education. The survey options respondents were presented with were on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from strongly disagreeing that their K-12 school experience was disability-diverse to strongly agreeing that their K-12 school experience was disability-diverse. The data seems to indicate most respondents, 64.7%, did not have a disability-diverse K-12 experience growing up. Table 7 outlines respondents' level of disability diversity experienced in their own K-12 schooling while growing up.

Table 7

Childhood K-12 Disability Diverse School Experience

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Personally disabled	170	2.80	1.21

Preservice Teacher Training

Three survey questions revealed findings about preservice teacher training and how that relates to disability inclusion practices. Those questions included: “Was disability defined in your preservice teacher credential program,” “To what extent was disability discussed in your preservice teacher credential program,” and “During your teacher credential program, how much opportunity did you have to observe inclusion efforts in K-12 classrooms?” At the end of this preservice teacher training section, Table 8 outlines participants' responses discussed below.

Data seem to support that disability was defined in the majority of respondents' preservice teacher credential program. A total of 79.2% of respondents reported this. To understand the depth of experience that teachers had in their preservice training, I asked to what extent was disability discussed in teachers' preservice credential program. Interestingly, although most respondents stated that disability was defined in their preservice teacher credential program, most respondents stated that disability was discussed less than half the time during their preservice teacher credential program. Respondents had the option to choose from a five-point Likert Scale with answer options ranging from disability never being discussed to disability always being discussed. A total of 5.8% of respondents reported disability never being discussed during their credential program and 46.8% of respondents reported disability only sometimes being discussed during their credential program.

Another aspect of preservice teacher disability inclusion training is providing opportunities for preservice teachers to observe disability inclusion. This can be a helpful strategy in preparing teachers for supporting all types of learning levels once they have a class of their own. I asked participants the extent to which they had the opportunity to observe disability inclusion efforts within a K-12 classroom(s). It is interesting that although disability is seemingly defined in most preservice teacher credential programs, further investigation and observation into disability and inclusion within classrooms seems to be lacking within preservice teacher credential programs. Respondents had the option to choose from a four-point Likert Scale with answer options ranging from teachers never having the opportunity to observe inclusion to often have the opportunity to observe inclusion efforts in a K-12 classroom setting. A total of 17.3% of respondents reported never having the opportunity to observe inclusion efforts in the K-12 classroom setting and 28.9% of respondents reported having a minimal amount of opportunity to

observe inclusion efforts in the K-12 classroom setting. Data indicates almost half of the respondents had minimal-to-no opportunity to observe inclusive practices in a K-12 environment. Table 8 outlines respondents' preservice credential experience responses discussed above.

Table 8

Preservice Teacher Credential Program Experiences

<i>Type of Experience</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Disability defined in program	164	4.34	1.49
Disability discussed in program	165	2.82	1.17
K-12 disability inclusion observation opportunities	164	2.73	1..33

Inservice Teacher Training/Learning/Support

Two key survey questions helped to explain how much support teachers are currently receiving to help them best support students with disabilities. Those questions included: "To what extent are you receiving support with students with disabilities in your class," and "With the exception of IEP meetings, how often are you in communication with case managers of students with IEPs." For the latter of the two questions, a reminder that IEP(s) refers to students' individualized education plan, which identifies the in-depth procedures and services for students with a disability to succeed to the best of their abilities at school. At the end of this inservice teacher training/learning/support section, Table 9 outlines participants' responses discussed below.

In reference to "What extent are you receiving support with students with disabilities in your class," respondents had the option to choose from a five-point Likert Scale with answer

options ranging from teachers never being supported to teachers always being supported. Data shows that most respondents are receiving support with students with disabilities only about half the time they need it or less than half the time they need support. Respondents reported support in the form of check-ins from students' credentialed case managers (oversee student IEPs, occasionally pull students from general education classes for further academic instructional support and spend varying amounts of time checking in on students and students' teachers), paraeducator support (uncredentialed staff working with students with disabilities), and check in from other teacher peers. The qualitative interview section as well as the discussion of findings in Chapter 5 will dive deeper into the data and inquiry behind answers given around teacher support. With that in mind, almost half of the respondents, 48.6%, reported receiving support for students with disabilities in their classes only half the time they needed it or less.

Secondly, respondents were asked, "With the exception of IEP meetings, how often are you in communication with case managers of students with IEPs?" Respondents had the option to choose from a four-point Likert Scale with answer options ranging from never to daily. Over half of the teachers noted that they are in communication with case managers of students with disabilities only monthly or never at all. That statistic is notable considering case managers are the overseer of IEP implementation of students with a disability. That lapse in communication time between case managers and teachers leaves a significant opportunity gap contributing to the possibility of student academic and social regression. Table 9 outlines participants' inservice teacher training/learning/support responses discussed above.

Table 9*Teacher Support*

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Frequency of support received	138	2.98	1.17
Communication with special education case managers	138	2.16	0.87

Attitudes about Disability and Inclusion

Data on survey respondents' prior teaching exposures/experiences with disability and inclusion coupled with their preservice and inservice teaching experiences suggested the need to inquire further into how those teachers facilitate and navigate inclusive education. With that, the survey also asked teachers general attitudes about disability questions to help support diving deeper into understanding why teachers practice disability inclusion the way that they do.

Although previous research has indicated that teacher attitudes can most effectively occur when professional development about inclusion, among other things, is available and when collaboration efforts with trusted teacher colleagues take place, that is not always the case (Borko & Putnam, 1995; Coe et al., 2014; Desimone, 2009; McCall et al., 2014; Putnam & Borko, 2000). Because those learning opportunities and data on the outcomes of those learning opportunities are not always available, my study aimed to gather teacher attitude data directly from the source. As the focus of this research study pertains to teacher attitudes, thirteen key survey questions are highlighted below. Each question was given to measure the level of awareness and attitude(s) toward disability. Important to note is that all thirteen questions below, two of which were on a three-point scale and eleven of which were true/false questions, were

recoded into a five-point Likert Scale to better analyze the data and compare with other five-point Likert Scale variables throughout the survey.

First, the survey asked teachers if they view disability from the medical model of disability (this model of disability limits understanding of disability to biology and focuses on the individual's limitations and ways to reduce those limitations or how to use adaptive technology to adapt them to society). If teachers are viewing disability from the medical model, environmental adaptations to accommodate students with disabilities is not typically at the forefront of support for those students in need of accommodations to succeed to the best of their ability. Ultimately, the medical model highlights student limitations as opposed to more proactive ideologies such as the social model of disability, which is discussed in the next paragraph. Respondents had the option to choose from a three-point Likert Scale with answer options ranging from teachers rarely or never viewing disability from the medical model of disability to viewing disability from the medical model of disability most of the time. In total, well over half of the respondents, 67.1%, noted viewing disability from the medical model of disability at least sometimes.

Second, the survey asked teachers if they view disability from the social model of disability (this model of disability identifies systematic barriers, derogatory attitudes, and social exclusion, intentional or inadvertent, which make it difficult or impossible for individuals with disabilities to attain their desired outcomes). While the data showed that most respondents view disability from the medical model of disability, some respondents viewed disability from both the medical and social model of disability. The point here is that both models and ideologies about disability are and can be present in an individual teacher. More insight into multiple views of disability will be discussed later in Chapter 5 of this study. Respondents had the option to

choose from a three-point Likert Scale with answer options ranging from teachers rarely or never viewing disability from the social model of disability to viewing disability from the social model of disability most of the time. A total of 65.9% of respondents reported viewing disability from the social model of disability at least sometimes. Table 10 outlines survey results from the medical and social model questions.

Table 10

Disability Model Comparison

<i>Disability Model</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Medical model of disability	138	2.88	1.27
Social model of disability	137	3.34	1.38

The last eleven survey items highlighted in this section about teacher attitudes provided teachers with true/false attitudes about disability statements. Table 11 below outlines the survey results from the eleven true/false statements. Important to note is that the more positive disability-minded viewpoints were coded as a 5, whereas the more negative disability-minded viewpoints were coded as a 1. Interestingly, data found that most respondents trended toward more positive disability-minded attitudes on all eleven statements.

Table 11

Teacher Attitudes About Disability

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Most people have some type of disability	137	2.55	1.96
Students with disabilities often cannot keep up with their peers	138	3.93	1.78
Teachers need to treat students with disabilities as if they are fragile	138	4.91	0.59

<i>Attitude</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Life with a disability is often tragic	138	4.83	0.82
Sometimes, it's best for students with disabilities to go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained for that	137	3.48	1.95
People with disabilities have a lot to teach us	138	4.83	0.82
I tend to focus more on the ability of what a person can do versus what a person cannot do	138	4.77	0.94
If access is available, then disability does not exist	137	4.04	1.72
It is usually apparent when someone has a disability	138	4.83	0.82
People with disabilities achieve less than those without disabilities	138	4.77	0.94
I use person-first language more than I use identity-first language (i.e., I use the phrase "student with a disability" more than the phrase "disabled student")	135	4.76	0.95

Overall, the survey results provided key participant demographic information along with teacher attitude and practice information to assist with my regression analysis of the data. To conclude, below is an inferential analysis of the survey data which used IBM's Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software to support with the regression analysis. While using SPSS, I incorporated a technique called Stepwise Linear Regression which is a method of regressing multiple variables while simultaneously eliminating those that are not important. The Stepwise regression technique assisted with computing multiple regression several times, each time removing the weakest correlated variable(s). The next section will sum up the statistical significances of the survey data.

Inferential Analysis

In summary, I used multiple regression analysis and a significance level of $p < .05$ to determine the statistical significance of the independent variables in my survey. The tables below outline the following six recurring independent variables showing statistical significance as they relate to a number of the thirteen attitudes about disability-dependent variables: teachers making modifications for students with a disability, teachers providing a safe space for disability to be discussed, teachers who had disability defined in their preservice teacher credential program, teachers implementing positive behavior supports in class (PBS), teachers noting Hispanic race, and teachers noting other race.

Teachers Making Modifications for Students with a Disability

Tables 12 and 13 highlight both the attitude of adapting to the medical model of disability as well as using person-first language versus identity-first language. Data suggests that the more teachers view disability as a medical impairment, the more modifications teachers are likely to make. And the more teachers address a person with a disability by using person-first language such as “I have a student with a disability,” as opposed to “I have a disabled student,” the less likely they are to make modifications to the assignment.

Table 12

Dependent Variable: Medical Model of Disability

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Making modifications	0.34	0.04

Table 13

Dependent Variable: I Use Person-first Language More Than I Use Identity-first Language

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Making Modifications	-0.32	0.03

Teachers Providing a Safe Space for Disability to be Discussed

Tables 14 and 15 highlight both the attitude of adapting to the social model of disability as well as the attitude that it is usually apparent when someone has a disability. Data suggests that the more teachers view disability inclusion as an issue caused by systematic barriers and derogatory attitudes, the more teachers are likely to provide a safe space for students with disabilities to discuss their experiences with disability. Also, the more teachers feel that it is apparent when students have a disability, the less likely teachers are providing a safe space for students with disabilities to discuss their experiences with disability.

Table 14

Dependent Variable: Social Model of Disability

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Providing A Safe Space to Discuss Disability	0.34	<0.00

Table 15*Dependent Variable: It Is Usually Apparent when Someone has a Disability*

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Providing A Safe Space to Discuss Disability	-0.14	0.01

Teachers Who Had Disability Defined in Their Preservice Teacher Credential Program

Table 16, 17, and 18 highlight the attitudes of adapting to the social model of disability, viewing life with a disability as tragic, and the attitude that sometimes it is best for students with disabilities to go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained to support them. Data suggests that teachers who view disability inclusion as an issue caused by systematic barriers and derogatory attitudes are more likely to have had disability defined in their preservice teacher credential program. Furthermore, the more teachers view living with a disability as often tragic, the more likely disability was defined in their preservice teacher credential program. Finally, data suggest that teachers who feel that sometimes students with disabilities should go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained to support those students, the less likely teachers had disability defined in their preservice teacher credential program.

Table 16*Dependent Variable: Social Model of Disability*

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Disability Defined in Preservice Teacher Credential Program	0.25	0.00

Table 17

Dependent Variable: Life with a Disability is Often Tragic

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Disability Defined in Preservice Teacher Credential Program	0.12	0.02

Table 18

*Dependent Variable: Sometimes it's Best for Students with a Disability to go to Special
Classrooms with Staff who are Better Trained to Support Them*

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Disability Defined in Preservice Teacher Credential Program	-0.28	0.02

Teachers Implementing Positive Behavior Supports in Class (PBS)

Tables 19 and 20 highlight the attitudes that teachers need to treat students with a disability as if they are fragile and that it is usually apparent when a student has a disability. The more teachers feel the need to treat students with a disability as if they are fragile, the more they are likely to implement positive behavior supports for those students in class. Also, the more teachers feel that it is usually apparent when a student has a disability, the more they are likely to implement positive behavior supports in class.

Table 19

Dependent Variable: Teachers Need to Treat students with a Disability as if they are Fragile

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Implement Positive Behavior Supports in Class	0.12	0.01

Table 20

Dependent Variable: It is Usually Apparent when Someone has a Disability

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Implement Positive Behavior Supports in Class	0.16	0.04

Teachers Identifying as Hispanic

Tables 21 and 22 highlight the attitudes that students with a disability often cannot keep up with their peers and that sometimes students with a disability should go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained to support those students. Data suggests that teachers identifying as Hispanic are less likely to feel that students with disabilities often cannot keep up with their peers. Also, teachers identifying as Hispanic are more likely to feel that sometimes students with disabilities should go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained for that.

Table 21

Dependent Variable: Students with Disabilities Often Cannot Keep up with Their Peers

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Teachers that Identify as Hispanic	-1.10	0.01

Table 22

Dependent Variable: Sometimes it's Best for Students with a Disability to go to Special Classrooms with Staff who are Better Trained to Support Them

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Teachers that Identify as Hispanic	1.30	0.01

Teachers Identifying as Other Race

Tables 23 and 24 highlight the attitudes that most people have some type of disability and teachers need to treat students with a disability as if they are fragile. Data suggests that teachers identifying as “other race” are more likely to feel that most people have some type of disability. And teachers identifying as “other race” are less likely to treat students with a disability as if they are fragile.

Table 23

Dependent Variable: Most People Have Some Type of Disability

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Teachers that Identify as Other Race	2.61	0.00

Table 24

Dependent Variable: Teachers Need to Treat Students with Disabilities as if they are Fragile

	Unstandardized B	Significance
Teachers that Identify as Other Race	-0.51	0.03

Overall, the survey findings and significances were interesting as to how teachers not only view disability and inclusion both separately and as a part of educating students, but also how isolating variables lead to further inquiry more thoroughly discussed in interviews and in Chapter 5. Ultimately, the significances of the survey findings were an important tool used to member check during the interview portion of my study. The qualitative findings of the interviews are outlined below.

Interview Results

To begin to understand the meaning behind what general education high school teachers believe and are feeling as it pertains to servicing students with disabilities in their classrooms, I conducted interviews with survey respondents who indicated they would be willing to support further discussion around inclusive education. Each semi-structured interview ranged from 15–55 minutes in length. The interview questions were designed to investigate more deeply the survey results as they relate to teachers' attitudes about disability inclusion and to what extent, if any, the amount, and type of experience teachers had with disability prior to teaching. The interviews were also designed to understand the training they received in preparing them to teach students with disabilities, and to determine the amount and type of support(s) they currently receive from the administration and others to support them, and to determine how these factors affected their attitudes toward students with a disability. A full description of the interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

Nineteen teachers from two school districts in San Diego County were interviewed. Interviewees ranged from 25–69 years in age with 16 female general education high school teachers along with three male general education high school teachers. Of the 19 participants, 15 identified as White, one identified as Black or African American, one identified as Hispanic or

Latino, one identified as Native Hawaiian, and one identified as other/unlisted race. Six teachers grew up in an urban environment, nine teachers grew up in a suburban environment, one teacher grew up in a rural environment, and three teachers did not identify a type of environment.

Participants ranged from being 1st-year teachers to teachers having 10+ years of experience teaching. They indicated that they teach a variety of subjects and classes including English classes across grades 9–12, U.S. history, world history, multiple levels of biology, chemistry, physics, college-specific preparation classes, culinary arts, government, AVID, film arts, theater, social studies, foreign language, and a variety of art classes.

In this section I discuss the teachers' comments as they relate to the following research questions:

1. To what extent, if any, can variation in high school teacher attitudes toward disability be explained by demographics, exposure and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support?
2. What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education and what factors have supported those attitudes?

Respondents were forthcoming about multiple issues pertaining to their overall exposure and experiences with disability and disability inclusion. The themes that surfaced from the interviews included:

- Prior exposure and experience with disability comes in many forms and attributes to a variety of attitudes toward disability.
- Although there are specific requirements in preservice teacher credential programs, those requirements vary in the ways they provide access for preservice teachers to build

knowledge and understanding of disability and inclusion.

- Current practicing general education teachers received varying types of support in learning how to better work with students with a disability.

In this section, each theme will be discussed followed by supporting interview data. As a reminder, interviewees' personal information was highlighted in the qualitative methods section of Chapter 3.

Theme 1: Prior Exposure and Experience with Disability Comes in Many Forms

In an attempt to answer Research Question 1, inquiry centered around teacher stories pertaining to the extent to which, if any, variation in their attitudes toward disability can be explained by exposure and experience with disability prior to becoming a teacher. The range of stories included: no exposure or experience to disability prior to teaching, respondents having a disability themselves, having a family member with a disability, and having experiences with disability outside of the family setting, such as having a friend or former colleague with a disability. Furthermore, respondents noted how these prior exposures and experiences impacted their attitudes relating to their teaching practices.

No Exposure or Experience with Disability

Initially, from my own anecdotal data from working with preservice teachers having no exposure or experience with disability for over 4 years, combined with over 14 years teaching in the K–12 setting in San Diego County, I hypothesized that a lack of exposure or experience would have a negative effect on interviewees' attitudes around disability inclusion. Two interviewees had no exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching. The following interview data combined with survey results from the other 13 survey respondents having no exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching resulted in inconclusive evidence to

support the theory that having no exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching negatively or positively affected teachers' attitudes about disability inclusion. I explain the attitudes of each of the two interviewees (Julie and Stacy) below who had no exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching.

Julie is a 35-year-old female teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience. Julie stated that prior to her teaching career in the US, she had teaching experience in Japan though did not come across disability there. Furthermore, she could not remember peers having a disability in her classrooms when growing up. Julie explained, "There was no interaction with disabled people that I can remember Before teaching in the states, I taught in Japan and even there, there was no inclusion taking place and no students with a disability" Yet, Julie asserted support for inclusion: "[I am] supporting inclusion programs on my campus . . . [I was] aware of the shortage of special education staff . . . I tried to provide support for special education support staff assigned to [my] room." Although not experiencing inclusion to any meaningful extent when growing up, Julie's reflection on the matter unveiled a belief that the division of students labeled disabled and those not labeled disabled when she was growing up was not beneficial to her overall school experience. She explained how she places value on continuing to provide "individualized instruction" throughout the week for her students with a disability. Julie also noted not having exposure to individuals with disabilities during her work experiences or outside of her K-12 schooling prior to teaching but, she seemed very comfortable with her disability inclusion efforts and even went as far to note her understanding that external classroom factors such as "special education staff shortages," as noted above, and lack of prior experience with disability should not deter teachers from the fact that "all students" have the

ability learn. Her attitude around disability inclusion suggested that teachers' efforts can and should support all students in their classes.

The second interviewee with no prior to teaching exposure or experience with disability was Stacy. She had a less positive attitude on disability inclusion efforts. Stacy is a 46-year-old female teacher with 10+ years of teaching experience. When asked about how no exposure or experience with disability growing up affected her attitudes around disability, she stated, "Growing up there was no inclusion . . . I saw [students with disability] in the hallways but had no interaction with them . . . The first couple years of teaching in 1998, inclusive education was still not happening." She seemed to view disability as something that a person can see. Although on her survey Stacy noted viewing disability sometimes from the medical model and sometimes from the social model, after analyzing the interview it was clear that she adhered more to the medical model of disability viewpoint.

Furthermore, Stacy's survey responses around attitudes about disability noted that at times students with a disability should be in separate classrooms, away from general education classrooms. Current public-school models in the United States do indeed practice segregating students with disabilities, at times, in an effort to provide more intensive modified instruction. As Stacy was in favor of that situational segregation practice, she was also the only interviewee who noted that "if access is available, then disability does not exist." Stacy's belief about accessibility suggested a possible lack of knowledge on how disability affects individuals regardless of the amount of access they may or may not have. If access is indeed available, that does not necessarily mean an impairment goes away.

Stacy's current experience in teaching students with a disability seemed to lead her to suggest that teaching "them" should be addressed in a few specific ways. She stated, "teachers

have three options when dealing with kids with a disability: give up, water down assignments, or hold the line and try to help keep the standard high, but then you are alienating the ones who need more support.” She went on to note that she was frustrated with trying to uphold state standards while simultaneously attempting to differentiate instruction for all students. In trying to better support her students in her inclusion efforts, she explained that “staffing is a major issue.”

Stacy’s attitudes toward current disability inclusion practices seem to revolve around the hardships she is involved with teaching students with disabilities and the feeling of being lost as she attempts to uphold state standards where all students are evaluated on reaching certain standards or not reaching those standards. She did not mention differentiating instruction and was not optimistic about inclusion. Stacy did not have prior experience with students with a disability. She did point more specifically to the current systematic accountability mandates, such as state standards. She believes in holding “all high school students to those standards” and noted frustration toward not being able to support students with disabilities to meet those standards. California has state standard resources specifically in place for students with a disability, but she suggests they are not adequate.

In conclusion, Julie and Stacy noted very different attitudes around disability inclusion. Julie seemed to be more focused on individual student achievement versus Stacy who was seemingly more focused on meeting state standards and feeling frustrated in having the ability to raise academic achievement for all students. The differences related to disability inclusion attitudes between Julie and Stacy do not allow me to conclude that positive or negative disability inclusion attitudes are due to having no prior exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching. Previous exposure or experience with disability may not matter in forming disability

inclusion attitudes of teachers and there may be other factors that matter more in forming those attitudes.

Experience with Personally Having a Disability

Only one survey participant out of eight in the survey who identified as having a disability agreed to be interviewed. Isabel is a 60-year-old female teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience. Isabel has a cardiac condition and noted that when she was growing up, due to her disability, she was “in a special physical education (PE) group and socialized with other people who had impairments in class.” When asked about how the experience of having a disability affected her attitudes toward disability as a teacher, Isabel said that she is “more aware of what is in reach or not in reach for students with physical impairments.” She made it clear that she experienced very early on in her schooling what was obtainable and accessible to her, and what was not. Isabel also explained some of the modifications that she needed in the past such as “shortened assignments and modified tests.” When speaking about students with disabilities in her class, she was adamant about the importance of identifying the level of “effort” all her students put into her assignments. She explained an example of having “gifted and talented education (GATE) students” who may not do as well, due to lack of effort, as opposed to “students with disabilities” who show optimal effort and are rewarded for their effort. Ultimately, Isabel seemed to adhere to the attitude of first supporting the potential ability level and effort(s) put forth by a student as opposed to only teaching to the state standard requirement or some label that the student has been given such as GATE or disabled.

Isabel went on to state that because of her experiences with disability, she is “more aware of the classroom set up, mindful of students with a disability needing more time on tasks . . . and modifying assignments.” She noted some strategies she uses such as “spacing her classroom

chairs and desks accordingly . . . shortening assignments . . . modifying tests,” and allowing time to focus on “study skills.” Having a disability herself, she felt gave her a greater appreciation for the supports that are needed to help all students.

Overall, Isabel’s story is important in understanding how and why exposure or experience with disability growing up can create positive attitudes toward disability inclusion practices. Although her story is only one respondent’s perspective, it does suggest the positive teacher beliefs and teaching strategies that may result when teachers have a more positive attitude toward disability inclusion. When cross referencing Isabel’s story with the survey data on attitudes of the other six respondents who noted having a disability and answered all the attitude questions on the survey, positive attitudes toward disability were frequently noted and in line with her story. For example, all survey respondents having a disability noted that they focus more on the ability of what a person can do versus what a person cannot do. And all survey respondents having a disability believed that people with a disability have a lot to teach others.

Exposure or Experience with Disability in the Family

The third category of exposure or experience with disability included teachers who had exposure to disability in their family. Family members with a disability included having: a brother and/or sister, a niece, an aunt, grandparents, an uncle, and a great uncle. Disabilities of those family members included: schizophrenia, processing disorders such as attention deficit disorder, autism, Parkinson’s, and physical disabilities such as polio and spine-related impairments, and multiple sclerosis. Three male and six female interviewees, which is nine out of 19 interviewees in this study, ranged from 25–60 years of age with 1–10+ years of teaching experience. Interviewees noted seeing some of the struggles their family members with disabilities faced as they navigated school and society. Although interviewees noted their

disabled family members struggling with “socializing”, “communicating”, “making friends”, “accessing school assignments”, and “being pushed along from grade to grade without having their needs met”, interviewees also noted the resiliency of their family member(s) with a disability to adapt to their environment as a major factor that shaped their own teaching practice, specifically, their inclusion efforts as current teachers. According to those nine respondents, it was the nondisabled family members’ efforts to include the family member with a disability that served as inspiration for their own actions toward disability and inclusion. In the next section, I provide examples of how interviewees’ exposures and experiences played out in their classrooms as it relates to their attitudes about disability inclusion.

Teaching Practice. Interviewees reported the following teaching practices they directly attributed to having a family member with a disability: patience with all students regardless of their ability levels, differentiating lessons for students with disabilities in their classes, placing high value on incorporating students with disabilities into class discussion, placing high value on partnering students with disabilities with students that do not have an identified disability, feeling comfortable with having all types of students at different learning levels in class, placing high value on inclusion of all students at all times during class, placing high value on taking extra time to check for understanding among students with a disability, and placing high value on the importance of socialization between all students in class regardless of student ability levels.

The following are quotes from interviews that further explain the factors that affect current practice with disability inclusion. Ashley, a 30-year-old woman with 3 years of teaching experience worries about students like her niece who are disabled but do not get the support she needs. He said,

Having a niece [with a disability] that has lived with me and my sister for most of her life, I think about inclusion a lot in my class. Differentiating instruction is important . . . seeing my niece pushed through the system and now being at the point of being so behind, that is hurting her now that she has to pass classes to move on.

Furthermore, Ashley stated “I think inclusion is really important, though not every teacher is good at differentiation as it relates to students being pushed through the system.”

Chris, a 29-year-old male with 1 year of teaching experience, said that “being patient is very important . . . inclusion is important . . . especially seeing my family with my uncle, including him in family activities was important.” Dawn, a woman with 9 years of teaching experience noted that her experience with her great uncle taught her about the importance of communication and respecting boundaries – two practices she uses with her own students. She explained how her past experience with disability affects her teaching practice:

My great uncle is high functioning autistic . . . [my] family focused on his abilities versus disability . . . the family expectation of communicating with him was important . . . I respected his boundaries . . . and I think about that in my class . . . I feel fortunate that I had that experience as not everyone is able to be close to someone with a disability and not everyone knows how to respect boundaries and needs of a person with a disability.

Allowing the necessary time for students with a disability to complete tasks, differentiating instruction, and focusing on abilities versus disabilities are all factors that these respondents who had exposure or experience to individuals with disability when growing up noted are effective disability inclusion practices among teachers. All nine interviewees with family experience/exposure to disability when growing up explained that their exposures and

experiences positively affected them not only as a child, but as a teacher as well – especially with their attitudes around disability inclusion

Attitudes Toward Disability. Interviewees reported the following attitudes about disability they directly linked to having a family member with a disability: being patient when interacting with a person with a disability, the importance of placing value on the needs of people with a disability, and the understanding that society has both positive and negative views of the ability levels of people with a disability. In reference to seeing her mom work with disabled students when growing up and her aunt having Multiple Sclerosis, Qiana, a woman with 7 years of teaching experience stated:

Having that exposure at an early age affected me by acknowledging the differences people have . . . that someone may need help with one thing but be completely independent on another. Ultimately [it's about] being more empathetic to people with disabilities.

In reference to her uncle with a traumatic brain injury, Rachel, 29-year-old female with 6 years of teaching experience, said

I experienced many people judging and mistreating him based on his visible disabilities. I think this is probably the reason why I have a deep sense of compassion and fondness for anyone I meet with disabilities. It's made a huge impact on my inclusion efforts as a teacher. I do everything I can to include all students because I've seen what it's like to be excluded. No one deserves that. The worst thing we can do as educators is underestimate and alienate our students.

Interviewees who had experiences with family members with a disability were all cognizant of the needs of students with disabilities and the “promising potential” those students

have “just as students without a disability” have. That cognizance confirms the survey responses that focused on attitudes about disability. All nine interviewees noted on their survey that they did not feel people with disabilities should be looked at as fragile nor are they living a tragic life. People with disabilities have a lot to teach teachers, and just because access is provided does not mean a disability does not exist.

In conclusion, data from this group of respondents seems conclusive that family exposure or experience with disability positively affected the creation and implementation of teachers’ attitudes about disability and disability inclusion practices in a positive way in that they create their teaching practices to support these students. Although my interview sample size may be considered low in relation to the overall number of survey respondents with family exposure or experience with disability, positive attitudes about disability survey responses overwhelmingly outnumbered negative attitudes about disability responses. The fact that all nine interviewees with family exposure or experience with disability went into detail about their exposures and experiences and how that had a lifelong effect on them was insightful. That lifelong effect seems to be present when having exposures and experiences to disability outside the family as well.

Exposure or experience with Disability Outside the Family

Twelve interviewees, two men, 10 women, ranging from 27–69 years of age with 3–10+ years of teaching experience, noted having had exposure or experience with disability outside the family prior to teaching. Intriguingly, there was a great deal of overlap between exposures and experiences with having a family member with a disability and those having exposures and experiences with disability outside the family as it pertains to attitudes around disability and disability inclusion. The commonality of course is that these respondents had some experience

with disability which contributed to their attitudes and instructional practices when they became teachers.

Interview participants' exposures and experiences with disability outside the family prior to teaching included: having a friend with a disability, having a peer with a disability in school, having a teacher with a disability, having a colleague with a disability, working with children with a disability, participating in a college-related practicum in a hospital setting, having a parent as a teacher who worked with students with a disability, and/or having a child that had or currently has a friend with a disability. Interviewees noted the following types of disabilities of people outside their family unit: processing disorders, autism, emotional disorders (e.g., continual, or heightened anxiety, bipolar disorder), deaf or hard of hearing disorders, traumatic brain injuries, and physical impairments (e.g., spina bifida or cerebral palsy). In the next section I provide examples of how interviewees' exposures and experiences informed instructional practices in their classrooms as it relates to their attitudes about disability inclusion.

Teaching Practice. Interviewees reported the following teaching practices that they directly linked to having exposure or experience with someone with a disability outside their family prior to teaching: (a) the importance of giving all students the opportunity to succeed regardless of one's ability level; (b) understanding and placing value on the level of support students with a disability need at times; (c) the importance of modifying assignments and differentiating instruction; and (d) being sure they were aware of who has a disability in their classroom. Below are three quotes that are representative of the sentiments from this group of respondents. They explain how exposure or experience with someone with a disability outside the family prior to teaching did affect their teacher practice:

Esther, a 69-year-old woman with 10+ years of teaching experience stated:

When I was in college going more toward the social work route, my practicum took place at university hospitals where I was with children who were disabled . . . something as small as eating lunch with 4-year-old cerebral palsy kids . . . I was taking teenagers into the community . . . I noticed these kids were never really [allowed] to make a decision on their own. It struck me that they didn't have that opportunity before this . . . helping them develop those independent skills helped me as a teacher.

Esther explained that the experience helped her be more mindful of students' individual needs and abilities and how she could provide a working environment for them. She believed teachers can work with students with disabilities by, among other things, modifying their environment and making learning more accessible— a position very different from those who see disability from a medical model perspective – a view that disability is more an individual problem. Esther was steadfast in explaining how her exposure and experiences with disability shaped her teaching practice. She noted the experience of seeing “inadequacies” taking place in school and feeling compelled to address those issues. Hence, making the effort to have lunch with kids, which was not a requirement of her program.

Olivia, a 39-year-old woman with 10+ years of teaching experience noted, “I had students with disabilities mainstreamed in my classes when growing up . . . [I] noticed their needs were different than mine,” which led her to believe in the importance of “differentiating instruction”. Olivia, as with Esther and other interviewees, noted the importance of seeing how the needs of a person(s) with a disability differed from theirs, the importance of holding attitudes that support students with disabilities in school, and determining what is needed for them to thrive to the best of their abilities. As many interviewees noted the importance of the disability-inclusive environments and not segregating them from inclusion opportunities.

In reference to his childhood classroom experiences, Kent, a man with 10+ years of teaching experience explained that seeing disabled kids not being serviced properly made him aware of disability. He stated, “as a teacher I make an effort to be aware of students with an IEP in my class.” Being aware that students with a disability have not been properly served, he tries to attend to their needs.

It appears that any type of exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching can have some positive influence on current teacher practice. All 12 interviewees with exposure or experience with disability outside the family prior to teaching noted that regardless of negative or positive experiences, the exposure to those experiences bettered their awareness of the needs of persons with a disability and made them more favorable toward inclusive practice(s) as a teacher. And even when these teachers had negative experiences, like that of Esther, where she saw the lack of decision-making opportunities children with disabilities were allowed to have, teachers tended to use these experiences to interpret how best to better their current practice. They have developed attitudes before they enter the world of teaching that support inclusive teacher practices.

Attitudes about disability. The 12 interviewees having exposures and experiences with disability outside the family prior to teaching noted some key factors as it related to their development of attitudes about disability which guided their practice. Those factors included: seeing the level of support people with disabilities needed at times, having a negative feeling about seeing disabled peers struggling with socializing, noticing nondisabled peers not interacting with other peers who had a disability, witnessing the lack of support in schools for students with learning disabilities, and seeing friends physically struggle through navigating everyday life with impairments such those who had scoliosis. Below are a few quotes that further

explain how exposure or experience with someone with a disability outside the family prior to teaching can affect teachers' attitudes around disability inclusion:

Laura, a 57-year-old woman with 10+ years of teaching experience, in reference to the fact that there was little to no mainstreaming of students with disability in general education classes, explained how her attitude changed once she had some experiences with students with a disability. She said,

Back then, I remember the surprise and shock of being exposed to it (disability among classmates) . . . I needed to get used to it . . . I learned to value humans no matter what. . . I ended up writing a speech on the importance of that in 8th grade.

Similarly, Farah, a 55-year-old woman with 10+ years of teaching experience, explained how she was first exposed to someone with a disability and the change it made on her. She noted,

a good friend of mine has a son who has a processing disorder . . . I noticed the need to keep directions short . . . I've seen him his whole life and seeing his struggles made me start to understand the hardship for people like that processing information. He was capable but overwhelmed when given a series of directions.

In conclusion, the comments made by the teachers in this study indicate that exposure or experience with disability outside the family prior to teaching positively affects the creation and implementation of teachers' attitudes about disability and practices. As with the teachers who had a disability themselves or had a family member with a disability, it appears teachers with exposures and experiences with disability are affected by those exposures and experiences.

Having examined if childhood and prior to teaching disability experiences have impacted teachers' attitudes and practices, I now turn to examining how and to what affect going through

preservice teacher training and inservice teacher support influence teachers' attitudes and practices around disability.

Theme 2: Preservice Teacher Programs' Disability Inclusion Observational Requirements

Survey respondents were asked four questions pertaining to their preservice teacher credential training:

1. Was disability defined in your preservice teacher credential program?
2. To what extent was disability discussed in your preservice teacher credential program classes?
3. If instruction on supporting students with a disability was offered in your credential program, what form did it take?
4. During your teacher credential program, how much opportunity did you have to observe inclusion efforts in K–12 classrooms?

These four preservice training survey questions were also addressed during the interview phase of my study to further inquire about Research Question 1. Inquiry centered around teacher stories pertaining to the extent of which, if any, variation in their attitudes toward disability can be explained by their preservice teacher credential program experiences.

In reference to how preservice training on disability supported their knowledge about disability, during the interviews, all 19 interviewees were able to recall the amount of discussion time on disability that took place and the type of discussion that took place. However, interviewees, for the most, were unable to give in-depth details about their observational experiences with disability in the classroom during their teacher training programs. Seeing as only 20% of overall survey respondents noted having regular opportunities to observe disability inclusion during their credential program, the lack of recall interviewees had regarding their

inclusion observation opportunities was not surprising. Many interviewees noted the lack of importance placed on inclusion observation opportunities was a missing proponent of credential program requirements that could have supported their teacher readiness when they eventually started teaching.

Frequent Classroom Observations of Disability Inclusion

During the interview process, only two of 19 respondents Ashley and Gwen, noted frequently having the opportunity to observe inclusion efforts in K–12 classrooms. Ashley is a 30-year-old woman with 3 years of teaching experience. Gwen is a 25-year-old woman with 2 years of teaching experience. Both Ashley and Gwen spoke highly on how those observations positively affected their attitudes around inclusive education. Ashley stated having,

around 20 hours of required in-class (K–12) observations with classrooms having students that are disabled . . . course work structured around those observations and looking at the differentiating of instruction taking place . . . having to do it (observe students with disabilities in class) in my credential program helped.

And in reference to how that experience translated to her teaching in an inclusive environment, Ashley said, “I felt it really prepared me once I started teaching.”

Gwen also had observational opportunities and agreed that it was very helpful for her teaching. She noted in reference to disability inclusion observation opportunities during her program “observations pertaining to inclusion were part of the program and class discussion . . . and class assignments relating to the observations were very helpful” as it prepared her to teach students with varying degrees of ability levels.

Ashley and Gwen noted that disability was not only defined in their credential program but was also discussed on a regular basis. Ashley is an English teacher and Gwen is a physics

teacher and both referenced that because inclusion was continually “part of the curriculum,” including “continual observation” requirements, teaching to all ability levels was and is important. Both Ashley and Gwen seemed readily prepared to teach because of their credential programs’ focus on preparing them for inclusive teaching, regardless of their subject matter.

The lack of disability inclusion classroom observation opportunities may be thought to correlate with teachers who were credentialed 10+ years ago, but these respondents’ comments suggest that the experience is more program related and not necessarily a factor of when they went through their teacher credential program. Participants Barb with 4 years of teaching experience, and Henry with 3 years of teaching experience both noted minimal preservice disability inclusion observation opportunities through their credential program. Furthermore, multiple survey respondents with 10+ years of teaching experience noted having frequent disability inclusion observation opportunities where disability was also regularly discussed in their credential programs. Also, positive attitudes around disability inclusion were present among the majority of survey respondents who experienced regular inclusion observation opportunities during their credential programs along with interviewees Ashley and Gwen. Ultimately, regular credential program disability inclusion observation requirements/opportunities seem to lead to more positive attitudes about disability when teaching.

Few Classroom Observations of Disability Inclusion

Survey data confirms that preservice teacher credential program requirements around observations focusing on disability inclusion in public schools varies. During the interview process, 17 of 19 respondents noted having only few or even no opportunities to observe inclusion efforts in K–12 classrooms. The lack of observational opportunities among the majority of interviewees is consistent with survey data which showed that 80% of all teachers

did not have regular opportunities to observe disability inclusion efforts. How the lack of observational opportunities affected interviewees' attitudes around disability will be discussed below. The following are a sample of interviewee quotes from interviewees with few to no preservice credential program classroom observation opportunities. The interviews indicate support for the idea of how a lack of disability inclusion observation time affects developing attitudes of preservice teachers who were soon to be active teachers.

Farah in reference to preservice teacher training and having few impactful disability inclusion K-12 classroom observational opportunities on different teaching models, stated "there needs to be some serious focus on the coteaching model . . . seeing how effective coteaching works." Note, coteaching in this case refers to having a subject-specific general education teacher coteaching with a special education teacher. That design of learning is in place to, in theory, better service students with disabilities.

Julie said she had "some in person field experience . . . [but for the most part] I was just thrown into student teaching . . . scaffolding wasn't a big priority." Student teaching is a preservice requirement where preservice teachers are practicing under the supervision of specific teachers at school sites. Student teaching structures vary, sometimes preservice teachers are allowed to create lessons and lead classes, and at other times the experience is working with the teacher and/or observing. In reference to student teaching, Julie noted there were "never any specific examples of inclusive teaching . . . more focus on how inclusion looks would have been helpful."

Kent stated having "some field experience," and in reference to observation structure there were "no specific requirements." He went on to note that although his credential program

classes did an “ok job” with introducing disability and inclusion as factors when teaching, no observation specifics around those factors were referenced nor observed.

Another interviewee, Laura, had no preservice credential program classroom observation opportunities. Laura has been teaching over 10 years. She has daily experiences with students with disability in her classes and had experiences with disability spanning throughout her entire childhood. And even with all that exposure or experience with disability, she explained that exposure or experience with disability “in my credential program” would have been helpful. When asked why, Laura explained “the program did not support my comfort level of having students with disabilities in class.” When asked about her developing attitudes about teaching in an inclusive environment and how the lack of preservice credential program observation opportunities she experienced, she referenced the importance of preservice teachers developing “some type of comfort” with inclusion before starting out as a teacher.

Recurring feelings and attitudes around disability inclusion among the 17 interviewees with few-to-no credential program disability inclusion observation requirements included (a) feeling lost as a new teacher in respect to teaching to all ability levels, (b) having an attitude geared toward having to fend for themselves when seeking out inclusive observation opportunities, (c) missing opportunities to build on their preconceived attitudes about what disability support should look like in a classroom, and (d) when having opportunities to observe, feeling lost about what they were supposed to be looking for as it relates to servicing all types of students regardless of ability levels. Even with interviewees who referenced having continual lectures and conversations on disability inclusion during their credential programs, there was no connection to what disability and disability inclusion could look like. Interviewees noted how the lack of instructional support during their credential program impacted their attitudes on disability

inclusion and their ability to be ready for differentiating instruction for multiple student learning levels. Although some interviewees had very positive attitudes toward disability seemingly because of their experiences with disability when growing up, many advocated for more opportunity to experience disability inclusion “as an adult” before “ever stepping foot into a classroom” as the lead teacher.

These teachers offered insightful comments regarding disability inclusion opportunities. When regular opportunities to observe disability inclusion are included in a preservice credential program, these respondents feel that it is supportive of positive teacher attitudes and builds knowledge that helps new teachers be more comfortable teaching to all student learning levels. It places value on supporting instructional differentiation needed for students with a disability, and overall supports teacher preparedness when in the beginning years of teaching. Not having regular opportunities to observe disability inclusion during a preservice credential program seems to hinder teachers’ development of positive attitudes around disability inclusion. Fear, uncertainty, having to “go at alone,” feeling lost, feeling “unprepared,” and “not understanding” the needs of students with disabilities are all attitudes that surfaced when interviewees described their feelings due to a lack of regular disability inclusion observation opportunities.

Of all the 17 interviewees lacking regular observation opportunities, 15 of the 17 had at least some exposure or experience with disability growing up. Interestingly, all 15 agreed that preservice credential programs are a vital space to continue developing attitudes around disability inclusion. Furthermore, interviewees agreed that regular credential program observations focused on disability inclusion effectively supports the continual development of attitudes about disability. And finally, interviewees noted that preservice teacher credential

program classes incorporating K–12 observation opportunities would even further impact preservice teachers' attitudes and understanding of effective disability inclusion.

Theme 3: Support Provided to General Education Teachers While Teaching Varies

After collecting information from interviewees about their exposure or experience with disability prior to becoming a teacher and in their preservice teacher preparation programs, they were asked to provide their experiences with disability inclusion while teaching. Those stories were to help further inquire about Research Question 2: What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education and what factors have supported those attitudes? Important to note is that students with a disability, for the most part, have an IEP that specifically states the services/time needed for staff to support those students. That is important as schools are mandated to uphold those IEP requirements.

With that said, only 31% of survey respondents noted receiving support with students with disabilities in their class more than half the time they needed it. Only 26% of interviewees noted receiving support more than half the time they needed it. Of the 26% of interviewees noting receiving support more than half the time they needed it, not one reported receiving support all the times they needed it. Alarming is not that teachers are lacking support every time they need it, but that such a high percentage are receiving support with disability inclusion at such a low rate. Data outlined below aims to show evidence that regular support for disability inclusion promotes positive teacher attitudes about disability inclusion, where lack of support creates negative teacher attitudes about disability inclusion – specifically with the systematic barriers in place which will be outlined below.

There are varying types and levels of support general education teachers receive as it relates to disability inclusion and supporting their students with a disability. Interviewees reported receiving support in the following forms: support from special education case managers, coteaching support provided by a special education case manager, support from special education support staff, professional development at their school site, and support from their teacher peers/colleagues. Interviewees reported those supports being provided in the following ways: communicating with special education case managers about the progress of students in their classes (amount of communication varied), coteaching with special education case managers, student academic and student social support for those with disabilities provided by special education support staff, professional development on differentiating instruction, and support from their teacher-colleagues in the form of conversations about issues they were having around differentiating instruction for and communicating with students with disabilities in their class(es).

What did the Support Look Like and Attitudes About the Support?

As noted above, 5 of 19 interviewees reported receiving support with students with disabilities in their class most of the time they needed it. Interviewees receiving enough support, identified “enough support” as the following: continual communication with special education case managers who in turn make the initiative to reach out to teachers, and having a special education support staff colleague in class that is “actively engaged with students”, “showing up on time,” “asking clarifying questions when there are misunderstandings,” and are “caring” as it relates to interactions with students. Interviewees also noted the benefit of this ongoing support in contributing to “feeling comfortable bringing student and staff issues to the principal.” Continual communication with teacher-peers about student issues in class as it relates to

disability inclusion efforts also supported teachers' ongoing support needs. Interviewees receiving enough support described the following experiences:

Ashley, a 33-year-old female teacher with 3 years of teaching experience explained the benefit of "coteaching" with a special education teacher as "a wonderful experience . . . able to [help me] support more student needs." Henry, a 28-year-old male teacher with 3 years of teaching experience explained having "over 10 kids with an IEP in my classes . . . collaboration with support staff allows me to better support curriculum." Henry went on to explain that he pays close attention to create a positive "dynamic" between himself and the support staff member to "better support" students with an IEP through simply reaching more students as opposed to doing it alone. And Laura, a 57-year-old woman with over 10 years of teaching experience also valued the ongoing support staff. However, she stated having support staff with different types of personalities "it's a mixed bag . . . their help is needed" but there are some complications that arise. She attributes her positive attitudes about disability to inclusion support. As with Henry, there are times of, "just needing more help via having another adult educator in class – most notably when classes start to have higher percentages of students with an IEP".

All five interviewees having regular support in their classes noted positive attitudes toward disability inclusion because of seeing first-hand what proper support looks like. Of note, interviewees acknowledged the unfortunate shortage of staff in many education fields, especially in K–12 special education and thus, ongoing support was not always available. All interviewees had prior experience with a lack of support for students with disabilities in the past, but their attitudes remained positive that the students needed inclusive education. Finally, all five interviewees receiving regular support felt that because of that support, they were given the opportunity to more efficiently affect the learning of all students.

Ultimately, it seemed that any negative attitudes around support were superseded by interviewees' continual references to the importance of having "extra adult support" in class. Interviewees explained that at times teachers are 'not able to handle properly teaching students at a variety of learning levels, "especially those students with disabilities who are needing supplemental support in the form of a special education support staff member". Having "another adult" in class can be a "huge" help when teachers are feeling overwhelmed when having to "support students with IEPs in class" that are falling behind.

Of the 14 interviewees who reported not receiving enough or any inclusive education support, interview data shows that teacher attitudes toward the effectiveness of supports being provided to students with disabilities are not sufficient. Also, most of the attitudes of interviewees about the effectiveness of special education support provided by support staff and managing that help were negative. Dawn, a female teacher with 9 years of teaching experience explained negative experiences with support staff "occasionally showing up," and "only focusing on behavior issues," as opposed to also supporting students with curriculum comprehension. Dawn made it clear that if given the proper time needed with the support staff, they offer effective help with students and the collaboration experience can be positive.

Furthermore, Gwen, a 25-year-old female teacher with 2 years of teaching explained her experience with support staff as follows: "it is unclear" at times "what support staff is supporting [us] with. Some support staff have little to no experience with kids with disabilities." Gwen spoke about how she is "supposed to have support in class" but that it is not happening all the time. Gwen also expressed concern about the structure of the support she receives. Gwen felt that not having enough time with adult support in class can lead to ambiguity about how that support then translates to supporting students with an IEP.

Kent concurred that support staff support is “very inconsistent”. This male teacher with over 10 years of teaching experience noted “Support varies . . . this is a district wide problem . . . more focus is needed on the seriousness people put on supporting students.” He went on to explain that more value needs to be put on “master scheduling as well” due to the fact that a lot of students with an IEP are being placed in classes that are not equipped to support them.” Interview data pertaining to teachers’ attitudes of not having enough inclusive education support shows not only the frustration around staffing issues, but also the preparedness of special education support staff members. Furthermore, it seems conclusive that although attitudes about having students in class with IEPs are positive and the support that is needed is known, implementing that support on a regular basis is where teachers without regular support struggle.

Teachers in this study also noted other kinds of support that was happening on a less frequent basis, support from special education case managers, professional development, and teacher-peer interactions. Interestingly, interviewees did not mention support from administration, district support (or lack thereof), service provider support (e.g., speech services, occupational therapy, counseling), or support from the family of students. Survey data showed that interviewees rarely communicated with parents, and most rarely communicate with administration, district, and service providers as well.

While some effective coteaching and special education support staff models are present and work with supporting students with a disability, negative attitudes about disability inclusion among current teachers links closely to the amount of time teachers either receive or do not receive support. This is especially important because all students with a disability in these teachers’ classes have an IEP that legally states the amount and type of supports that are needed. And even though laws are in place to fulfill those IEP requirements, accountability measures are

not in place to best support the teachers needing to carry out the requirements to allow for students with a disability to learn to the best of their ability.

In the next Chapter, I provide a summary of my study and a discussion about the findings outlined in Chapter 4. Quantitative survey data combined with qualitative data taken from interviews will be used to further inquiry into both research questions and highlight significant findings. Chapter 5 will also outline limitations of the study and provide suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Overall, this study has continued to support the refining of my own definition of what the inclusion of students with a disability in general education settings is. I define disability inclusion as identifying the individual needs of students with disabilities, removing barriers to access, and providing appropriate accommodations. I also ascribe to the notion that inclusion can take on various forms, including access to learning opportunities outside of the general education classroom, which may require support from specialized service providers. This research has also indicated that teachers need more training in the intricate areas of teaching and programming for students with disabilities, both in and out of schools, to promote inclusive education for all students through the lens of the social model of disability. This conceptualization of inclusion is supported by and incorporates the social model of disability, disability studies in education ideologies, as well as personal and professional experiences with disability, and as important background information learned about disability inclusion, in part, during the process of my study.

Previous research has shown more empirical evidence is needed to better understand the factors that continue to challenge inclusion in general education classrooms. Some research specifically points out that teachers' attitudes and dispositions toward students with disabilities may factor into decisions about inclusion (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Phillips, 2016). With legislation in place, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms and, with the efforts of educational stakeholders to challenge, refine and uphold IDEA, this study has shown that many teachers continue to challenge the merits of inclusion in their classrooms. The purpose of this explanatory

sequential mixed methods study was to examine the effects, if any, of San Diego County general education high school teacher's personal and professional attitudes and knowledge about educating students with disabilities on their willingness or ability to create an inclusive learning environment.

This research study has shown through a review of literature on inclusive education for students with disabilities, and data collected on high school teachers in San Diego County, effective inclusive practices are not always being adopted in schools. The absence of inclusion occurs for many reasons, one of which is related to teacher attitudes about disability. Effective inclusion practices used by study participants seemed to be siloed across not only schools but teachers within those schools as well. Some teachers reported feeling positive about inclusion, while others questioned the benefits and implementation of inclusion and were more likely to point out the challenges. This study, backed by the specific time, unique space, and the specific experiences of the participants in this study, has motivated not only more scholarly discussion around the issue of inclusion practices of teachers but also discussions among school districts across California and beyond on how to better support students and teachers with inclusion.

To follow is an interpretation and synthesis of the significant findings of both the survey and interview results of my study. Following the interpretation section will be a conclusion and discussion of the implications of the study. Finally, the limitations of the study and future recommendations for research will be discussed, ending with final reflections.

Interpretation of the Findings

As the findings of this research made clear in Chapter 4, teachers' experiences with disability both prior to and during teacher preservice credentialing programs, their area of teaching specialty, demographic differences, and inservice teacher training differences affected

participants' attitudes and dispositions toward inclusion. Three common themes emerged from the survey and interview data:

- Teachers had a variety of prior exposure and experience with disability, and it was correlated with differences in teachers' attitudes toward disability and inclusion.
- Although there are specific requirements in preservice teacher credential programs, those requirements vary in terms of the strategies teachers learn and teachers felt differentially prepared for teaching students with a disability.
- Current practicing general education teachers receive varying types of support in learning how to better work with students with a disability and this affected their attitudes toward inclusion.

Interview and survey results responded to the primary research questions that guided this study:

1. To what extent, if any, can variation in high school teacher attitudes toward disability be explained by demographics, exposure and/or experience with disability prior to teaching, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher training/learning/support?
2. What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education, and what factors have supported those attitudes?

Two sections of analysis will outline each research question individually and provide significant findings that support answering those research questions.

Analysis One: What Matters in Forming Attitudes Toward Inclusion?

To answer the first research question, data pertaining to specific demographics of participants, prior knowledge of disability, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher practice and support was gathered through a survey administered to 173 general education high

school teachers in two large school districts in San Diego County. Survey data was interpreted through multiple regression analysis. Findings from the survey suggest that certain areas of demographics, preservice teacher training, and inservice teacher support significantly affected teachers' attitudes about disability and therefore shaped their disability inclusion efforts in class.

Demographics

There was a wide range of demographic differences among teachers in this study. Those differences included participant age, gender, race, socioeconomic status, and years of teaching. However, the multiple regression analysis showed only one area related to demographics. Participants' gender was somewhat related to teacher attitudes about disability and inclusion and this was also confirmed by interviewee data.

My survey yielded 65% female teachers and 35% male teachers. Survey participants opting to be interviewed were 85% female and 15% male. Coincidentally, the participants' gender in this study closely represented the gender of teachers both in the state of California and in San Diego County. The California Department of Education (2022) for the 2020-2021 school year estimated that approximately 75% of all public-school teachers in California were female and 25% were male. Furthermore, the California Department of Education (2022) for the 2020-2021 academic year estimated about 77% of all public-school teachers in San Diego County were female, while about 23% were male. Ultimately, it was not surprising that my study yielded more female teacher participants.

With that said, important to note is that although no statistical significance was present in relation to gender and participants' attitudes about disability, it was interesting to note that female teachers' attitudes about disability were consistently higher than males in terms of being more positive toward inclusion. If females are reporting a higher rate of positivity, regardless of

race, years of teaching, and other identifying variables, then further inquiry into why that is happening needs to be examined. As discussed in Chapter 4, interview data did not indicate gender differences toward disability. However, survey data did indicate a minor discrepancy between genders that could be investigated further to better understand gender specific attitudes about disability and inclusion.

Preservice Teacher Training

There was a range of preservice teacher training experiences among teachers in this study. Although some teachers were educated from outside of California, most teachers completed their preservice teacher training in California or through some type of online affiliate school. In further inquiring about preservice teacher training, the four survey questions that were asked and discussed during interviews were:

- Was disability defined - given a statement of meaning - in your preservice teacher credential program?
- To what extent was disability discussed in your preservice teacher credential program classes?
- If instruction on supporting students with a disability was offered in your program, what form did it take?
- During your teacher credential program, how much opportunity did you have to observe inclusion efforts in K-12 classrooms?

Through multiple regression analysis, data showed two areas of significance which were supported by follow up interviews with participants. First, if teachers viewed disability from a social model, they were more likely to have had disability defined, though not discussed, in their preservice teacher credentialing program. Second, if teachers had the opportunity to observe

inclusion efforts in K-12 classrooms during their preservice training, they were more likely to have positive attitudes toward disability inclusion.

Disability Defined and/or Discussed in Teacher Credential Program. Significant survey data from this study suggests that teachers who view disability inclusion from a social model of disability - that is, the belief that disability is related to systematic barriers and derogatory attitudes rather than disability is a problem within a student - were more likely to have had disability defined in their preservice teacher credential program. Important to note is that in the survey, the question about disability being defined in teachers' preservice program was directly followed by a question about disability being discussed in their preservice program. Having disability defined referred to preservice credential programs providing a clear explanation of what disability is. Having disability discussed referred to preservice credential programs providing opportunities for discussion around the various contexts and experiences that disability encompasses, both inside and outside the classroom.

Interviewees who viewed disability from a social model seemed to believe that systematic barriers were in place, at times, that hindered their inclusion efforts. These were also the teachers who had disability defined in their programs and were consequently practicing effective disability inclusion in their classrooms to a greater extent than teachers who did not have disability defined in their program. This data suggests that purposefully including definition(s) of disability could better support teachers in putting into practice supports for students with a disability – something that was not routinely experienced among study participants. And, as most interviewees stated, discussions about disability definitions and the experiences they had with disability could also better support teacher preparedness around

effective inclusion efforts especially during the first few years of entering the teaching profession.

Although I believe that defining disability has its importance in learning about and understanding disability inclusion in schools, I strongly support interview data that noted the need for continual and more indepth discussions around disability inclusion. These discussions should be combined with K-12 preservice disability inclusion opportunities so that they can have the support they need to form more positive attitudes and have the skills they need to support inclusive teaching practices. Even though this study indicated that a majority of interviewees were unhappy having missed out on effective preservice learning around disability and inclusion, it did find that there are programs in place where pedagogy is taught and proves to be positively readying general education teachers to include students with disabilities in their classrooms. And as some interviewees noted, having disability defined, discussed, and having the opportunity to observe inclusion was highly beneficial in shaping their attitudes around inclusion.

Survey and interview data also indicated that preservice teacher credential programs may have varying definitions and discussions about disability. Those varying definitions could potentially contribute to uncertainty among teachers' understanding of what disability is, looks like, and to their understanding of how to effectively support inclusion in classrooms. If teachers are learning about disability to some extent from both the social *and* medical models of disability, for instance, as noted in survey and interview data, then further inquiry into how preservice programs are addressing those models may need to take place in order to better understand the relationship of learning about these models to teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Findings from this research did not suggest a direct correlation between teachers' attitudes and the particular model they learned about.

However, survey and interview data did show that not understanding disability when entering the teaching profession attributed to uncertainty around supporting students with a disability. It is important to note that the overarching theme here – defining and discussing what disability inclusion looks like and entails can be vital to the success of preservice teachers understanding and developing positive attitudes about disability. That understanding and development, in turn, should support their teaching practices – regardless of if they are able to fully support all students with a disability in their classes or if they are in need of further help to best support those students.

Opportunity to Observe Inclusion in K-12 Classrooms. Overall, study data showed that when inclusion observation opportunities were included in preservice teacher training, positive attitudes around disability inclusion were present. When survey respondents experienced regular inclusion observation opportunities during their credential programs, they held positive attitudes toward disability inclusion. And although only two interviewees had regular observation opportunities, both noted how those experiences helped shape their view on disability inclusion as well as how to better teach to a student’s ability level. Again, there are implications for credential programs. Recognizing the small sample size, it does suggest the possibility that if teacher credential programs included inclusion observation requirements/opportunities, it may lead to more positive attitudes toward disability and inclusion. Teachers may feel better able to support students with a disability. Furthermore, continual research on and revisiting of preservice program K-12 inclusion observation opportunities seems warranted in all teacher credential institutions and the entities overseeing those institutions.

Conversely, significant survey and meaningful interview data described in Chapter 4 has shown that not having regular opportunities to observe disability inclusion during a preservice

credential program appears to be negatively affecting teachers' attitudes around disability inclusion. Although not statistically significant when regressions were run on survey data, interviews suggest that teachers feel fearful, uncertain, lost, unprepared, and not understanding the needs of students with disabilities. These attitudes surfaced when teachers described their feelings and the lack of regular disability inclusion observation opportunities that they had. Of the 17/19 interviewees lacking regular observation opportunities, 15 of those interviewees had at least some exposure or experience with disability prior to teaching though noted that it was not necessarily enough when it came to understanding what disability inclusion in schools looks like – especially from the lens of a teacher.

Interestingly, all 15 agreed that preservice credential programs are a vital space to continue developing positive attitudes about disability inclusion – regardless of prior experiences with disability when growing up. In Analysis 2, I explain how previous exposure or experience with disability was important in forming teachers' attitudes toward disability. Moreover, regularly observing disability inclusion in the K-12 setting may be a necessary component to better supporting general education high school teachers' classroom inclusion readiness. All in all, data showed that multiple factors played a significant role in the development of attitudes about disability and the ways in which multiple factors can affect the inclusive practices of teachers.

Inservice Teacher Practice and Support

As teachers transition from preservice training to being a credentialed teacher, at times, they can feel underprepared to support students with disabilities. Survey data showed a significance between teachers feeling the need to treat students with a disability as if they are fragile and being inclined to implement positive behavior supports for students with disabilities

in their class and support inclusion. Though beneficial at times, behaviorist approaches to teaching, such as implementing positive behavior supports, have been argued against. The behaviorist approach to teaching focuses on a behavior(s) that can be modified through external reinforcements and punishments. Interviewees noted on multiple occasions that external reinforcements were part of their daily practice when servicing students with disabilities.

Scholars argue that the behaviorist approach to teaching does not acknowledge the intricacies of learning (DiCerbo, 2017), and can at times focus on external rewards and punishments rather than personal levels of aspiration (Ashman, 2015). Teachers should be careful relying only on external support factors, if for no other reason than to not exclude the fact that internal motivation exists within students with a disability. Data found in this study around teachers implementing what at times scholars are arguing are questionable practices, shows that more inquiry is needed into how attitudes about disability of teachers are guiding their inclusion efforts.

Building on the topic of teachers' viewpoints of students with a disability, survey data also showed a significant correlation with teachers feeling that when it is apparent that a student has a disability, the more they are likely to implement positive behavior supports in class. And during interviews, 18/19 interviewees noted being at least somewhat knowledgeable about and implementing positive behavior supports in the classroom. All 18 interviewees noted that using positive behavior supports helped to some extent with inclusion efforts pertaining to student socialization and focusing on students' ability to succeed versus focusing on what they were unable to achieve. Study data indicating that positive behavior supports can directly affect students in positive ways, suggests more inquiry into this practice is warranted. The data around

student supports found in this study further support the notion that continual efforts need to be made to track how teacher inclusion practices affect student achievement and outcomes.

Ultimately, the importance of supporting students starts with teachers knowing which students have a disability in their classes and what practices can support those students. Survey data showed and interviewees shared that, at times, they were unaware of which students had a disability in their class - that is a problem. Overall, schools need to make sure teachers are equipped with the information they need to engage in best practices that will support all students. As this study aimed to address an underrepresented aspect of scholarly research around disability inclusion – teachers’ attitudes about disability – further information has surfaced which points to just how intricate and layered it can be in figuring out what effective disability inclusion is and how best to prepare teachers for the work. If teachers are underprepared before entering the classroom, not knowing which students have a disability in their classroom, and they are lacking professional development around bettering their inclusive practices, then scholars must take into account how the attitudes of those teachers are playing out.

Analysis Two: How Do Attitudes Dictate Your Practice?

The second research question in this study states: What attitudes do some public high school general education teachers from San Diego County, California have regarding disability inclusion in K-12 education, and what factors have supported those attitudes? Research question two was generated as a follow-up question to help better support survey data through qualitative interviews with 19 survey respondents in an effort to obtain and uncover the meanings and perspectives of participants. Although the information in Analysis One incorporated interview data to support teacher survey data around demographics, preservice training, and inservice teacher practice and support, this analysis focused on specific attitudes about disability among

participants. As a reminder, the semi-structured interview questions guiding this research included:

1. I noticed in your survey you stated that you had x-amount/type of exposure/experience with disability – can you explain your experience with disability and people having disabilities?
2. I noticed in your survey you stated that you received x-amount/type of training in your credentialing program on disability and/or inclusion in the classroom - can you explain the effect that had/has on you as a teacher? An example being how your teacher training has affected or has not affected your willingness to teach in an inclusive classroom.
3. I noticed in your survey you stated receiving x-amount/type of support with students with disabilities – can you explain how you experienced that? An example could be the type of support received from administration at your school(s) and/or teacher peer groups on campus, and/or support from special education staff.
4. Can you elaborate on your thoughts about disability and teaching those who are disabled? What factors do you think influence teaching students with disabilities? How and why do you feel those factors influence your teaching practice?

Meaningful findings pertaining to research question two were related to disability and inclusion attitudes developed prior to teaching, viewing disability from the medical model of disability, and viewing disability from the social model of disability. I describe each below.

Attitudes About Disability Developed Prior to Teaching

Participants of this study had the option to disclose not only if they had a disability themselves, but also to what extent they experienced disability prior to teaching. Participants

were given the option to disclose where and how they experienced disability such as at home, in the family, at school, with peers, having a mentor, and at previous work locations. Participants were also asked with what regularity those experiences took place.

Teachers With a Disability. This study showed that teachers with a disability had not only a rich understanding of positive inclusion practices, but also a keen awareness as to how disability inclusion, or the lack thereof, can affect or hinder a student's social and academic outcomes. As noted in Chapter 4, one interviewee, Isabel, told her story highlighting how her experience with having a disability growing up created positive attitudes toward her disability inclusion practices as a teacher. Isabel's story suggests that positive beliefs experienced as a child are related to having a positive experience with disability inclusion. Referencing the survey data on attitudes of the other six respondents who noted having a disability and who answered all the attitude questions, positive attitudes were recurrent. All survey respondents having a disability noted that they focus more on the ability of what a person can do versus what a person cannot do. And all survey respondents having a disability believed that people with a disability have a lot to teach others. Survey responses of those teachers having a disability combined with the story of the one interviewee who has a disability leads to implications that having a disability leads to a unique and rich understanding of how and why growing up with a disability can create positive attitudes toward disability inclusion practices. Learning from those unique sets of teachers with a disability could help preservice and inservice teachers better understand what it means to take inclusion seriously and how beneficial it can be to their students with disabilities.

Early Exposure to Disability. Data gathered from those participants having a family member with a disability showed an effect on the following disability inclusion teaching practices: allowing the necessary time for students with a disability to complete tasks,

differentiating instruction, and focusing on abilities versus disabilities. The nine interviewees who had experience with a family member with a disability when growing up explained that their experiences positively affected them not only as a child but also as a teacher. Most notably, their experiences positively shaped their attitudes around inclusion.

Data from these nine interviewees seem to show that family exposure or experience with disability positively affects the creation and implementation of attitudes toward disability in a positive way. In this case, teachers' experiences created attitudes which in turn formed teaching practices, such as having more patience and teaching to the ability level of a student, that supported inclusion. The responses from the nine interviewees were supported by the survey data. Survey respondents who had family experiences with disability and had positive attitudes about disability far outnumbered negative attitudes about disability responses of survey respondents who also had family experiences with disability.

Clearly all aspiring teachers are not going to have experience with a family member who has a disability, but it does alert us to the importance of experiencing disability early on, as a child or in preservice training before individuals become teachers to create positive attitudes toward supporting students with a disability. Those experiences, such as seeing how people and the environment support or hinder those with a disability and how being comfortable with the fact that all people are different and that should not prevent one from supporting another, need to be part of preservice and inservice teacher training. And as interviewees noted, the importance of learning that loved ones, family members, and friends with a disability have struggled with being accepted, were and are discriminated against, neglected friendships, not supported properly in school, and lacked self-confidence because of the feeling that society was defining them because

of their disability and not their ability(ies) helped in shaping their attitudes about disability and should not be overlooked.

Of the 19 interviewees in this study, 12 noted having an early exposure to disability outside the family. Interestingly, all 12 of them stated that regardless of negative or positive experiences with disability outside the family, the exposure to those experiences bettered their awareness of the needs of persons with a disability and made them more favorable toward inclusive practice(s) as a teacher. Most notably, interviewees with exposure to disability outside the family explained how they were more prone to exercising patience, supporting, and encouraging more socialization opportunities, and differentiating instruction for students with a disability in their classes. The comments made by the teachers in this study indicate that exposure or experience with disability outside the family prior to teaching positively affects the creation and implementation of attitudes and practices toward students with a disability.

Unlike the interview data, the survey data as measured through multiple regression analysis was inconclusive in support of the 12 interviewees' beliefs about the effect of early exposure to disability. However, survey data did indicate that regardless of gender, race, or socioeconomic background, exposure to disability inside or outside the family showed some practical significance as it related to teachers' positive attitudes about disability and inclusion. Survey data indicated that the majority of teachers with some exposure to disability prior to teaching had more positive attitudes toward disability and inclusion in that they responded favorably when asked about their inclusion model practices and attitudes about disability questions on the survey. Furthermore, the majority of teachers with at least some exposure to disability prior to teaching viewed disability to some extent through the lens of the social model

as indicated by their responses to the survey question that asked them to what extent they viewed disability through the lens of the social model and medical model of disability.

Those findings are important in supporting interviewees' stories pertaining to how exposure and experience with disability prior to teaching, especially when growing up, can help shape attitudes around inclusion and the importance of teacher preparation programs to address how attitudes about disability directly affect their inclusion practices. And although the survey data was not conclusive in this area, the comments of the 12 interviewees, as well as data from previous research (Kahn & Lewis, 2014; Phillips, 2016), suggest that there is merit in exposing teachers early on in their preservice teacher training program to a curriculum that defines disability and offers best practices to support students with a disability.

Viewing Disability From the Medical Model and/or Social Model of Disability

As data has shown there were a multitude of reasons how and why study participants view disability inclusion as they do. Moreover, a final discussion around the medical and social models of disability is necessary. Data suggests that in general teachers are more prone to making modifications for students, if they feel that those students are at a disadvantage because of their disability (a perspective that leans towards the medical model (the belief that disability is solely biological). This study did not investigate the particular modifications that these teachers made to support students with a disability and no conclusive evidence was found as to why the teachers made modifications, specifically if the modifications were related to their belief in a medical model of disability. The medical model has been the predominant model of disability in education for decades (Miles, 2003) despite the many challenges that have been made. If teachers are making modifications for students just because they have a disability, that does not necessarily mean that those students are benefitting from those modifications.

At times, the teachers in this study seemed to view disability from both the social and medical model. Their perspective did not correlate to their attitudes toward inclusion. Additional studies need to be conducted to more adequately assess how perspectives of disability influence attitudes toward inclusion.

As for the social model of disability, survey data showed that among those teachers that view disability inclusion from the social model of disability, they were more likely to provide a safe space for students with disabilities to discuss their experiences with disability – an important aspect of effective inclusion. If teachers who are adhering to the social model of disability are also allowing safe spaces for discussions around disability in their classrooms, then at the very least, some efforts are being made to support students with a disability. Preservice programs, inservice teacher training, and school culture-building efforts should consider incorporating discussions of the social model of disability. That in turn could better support students with a disability and their right to have the opportunity to be acknowledged as having a valuable perspective.

Viewing disability from the social model highlights external, environmental factors that come into play with how people experience disability. Survey data shows that teachers with a social model belief are giving students with a disability room to open up about their own experiences. Unfortunately, survey data showed that most respondents view disability more often from the medical model of disability than the social model of disability. And, if data are showing that ascribing to the social model way of disability supports students with disabilities in feeling comfortable in inclusive environments, then that practice needs to be continually replicated within all school environments.

In closing, data from this study has shown the need for models of disability to continue to be taken into consideration when discussing how teachers' attitudes about disability are formed but further, an understanding of what those models may be lacking may better support a more nuanced creation of a model of disability that captures not only disability perspectives from a non-ableist viewpoint, but also note that more ability-driven language and practice may better support inclusion efforts of teachers.

Conclusions and Implications

The data presented in this study support the importance of determining the existing attitudes toward inclusion among teachers, how those attitudes were formed, and how those attitudes affected or inclusionary practices with students with a disability. The findings of this study suggest that early teacher experiences with disability attribute to the creation of positive attitudes towards inclusion. Conversely, insufficient preservice training and the absence of inservice support seem to construct attitudes that do not support inclusion. Those negative attitudes hinder the implementation of inclusive education practices in K-12 schools, arguably affecting students with disabilities and their ability to reach their social, emotional, and academic potential. Practical and theoretical implications of those findings are to follow.

Prior Experience Matters

The findings of this study suggest that a majority of participants had some prior experience with disability, including firsthand, familial, or outside the family experience. That experience seemed to impact their attitudes and behaviors toward students with disabilities in their classrooms. Additionally, survey data supported by interview discussions regarding the extent of interaction that teachers had with peers with a disability while in school indicated that many did not have regular interaction during their own K-12 education. Interviewees noted that

this lack of interaction definitely had an initial effect on their ability to best support inclusion as a new teacher. It is important for preservice teacher credential programs and K-12 schools to recognize the significance of prior experience with and exposure to disability in shaping teacher attitudes and practices towards students with disabilities. As noted during interviews and discussed in Chapter 4, regular collaboration among students of all ability levels is supportive for the development of attitudes about disability among all students. To improve the disability inclusion experiences of all students regardless of ability level, efforts should be made to increase disability inclusion awareness.

Supporting, Educating and Keeping Teacher Credential Programs Accountable

The findings of this study showed that disability was given some type of definition – statement of meaning - in most of the respondents' preservice teacher credential programs. However, most respondents stated that disability was only sometimes discussed during their preservice teacher credential program, and almost half of them had minimal-to-no opportunity to observe inclusive practices in a K-12 environment – let alone a chance to discuss those observational opportunities. As the analysis section on “What Matters in Forming Attitudes Toward Inclusion” pointed out, it can be inferred that there is a gap between what preservice teacher credential programs purport to do and teachers ability to support disability inclusion practices. Data suggests that frequent observation opportunities and regular discussions about disability and inclusion can positively affect a teacher’s attitude toward inclusive education and prepare them for teaching students with varying abilities.

Inclusion is not taking place across all schools. Teachers continue to struggle to support students with disabilities. The U.S. educational system should take note of this. There should be expanded guidelines in place for all general education teacher preservice credential programs to

incorporate disability studies into their curriculum. There should be accountability and data tracking systems in place to support those general education teacher preservice credential programs in their efforts to implement their curriculum. And finally, there should be support systems in place before teachers enter the classroom as credentialed teachers. Hopefully, practices stemming from data of preservice programs that have effectively implemented a disability studies curriculum can assist preservice programs that are failing to support teachers in their efforts and understanding of disability inclusion.

Inservice Teacher Support

The data suggest that a high percentage of general education teachers in San Diego County are not receiving adequate support with disability inclusion in their classrooms, which can negatively impact their attitudes towards disability inclusion. Teachers reported receiving varying types and levels of support, including support from special education case managers, coteaching support, professional development, and support from colleagues. Those who received support reported positive attitudes toward disability inclusion and saw first-hand what effective support with disability inclusion looks like. However, most interviewees reported insufficient support, and those who did not receive enough support had, at times, negative attitudes toward disability inclusion. Therefore, it is crucial to provide regular support for disability inclusion to promote positive attitudes among teachers and to ensure the proper education of students with disabilities.

The data suggests that there are significant implications for better supporting teachers with disability inclusion. One of the main barriers to disability inclusion is attitudes about disability and the inclusive practices of teachers. Teachers who adhere to the medical model of disability view disability as a defect within the individual, and they may believe that intelligence

and abilities are fixed. The findings from this study indicate that the majority of respondents ascribe at a higher rate to the medical model versus the social model of disability and therefore may be less prone to support their students with disabilities in reaching their full participation in society. In contrast, the social model of disability views disability as a consequence of environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers. Teachers who adopt the social model perspective seem somewhat more likely to focus on the environmental factors that impact students with disabilities, and the structural arrangements that exclude or hinder them.

Gaining a better understanding of the distinction between the two models is more likely to further support teachers' development of positive attitudes around disability inclusion which, if nothing else, could support the belief that students with a disability should have the opportunity to reach their potential just as every other student. It is important to note that by focusing on social and environmental factors, teachers adhering to the social model of disability recognize that disability is not just an individual issue but a social justice issue that may continually require changes within the educational system and beyond.

The data indicates that many teachers do not feel adequately trained to support students with disabilities in their classrooms. Teachers face barriers to inclusive education, such as a lack of teacher development opportunities, planning time, and ongoing professional development to meet the needs of all students. Although many teacher credentialing programs require courses on diversity and inclusion, the effect of these courses on teachers' inclusion attitudes and practices seems to be unknown. Moreover, teachers' lack of understanding of disability and its relationship to inclusive practices affects their preparedness to implement effective inclusive teaching practices. Without training, general education teachers may not feel they have the capacity to teach students with disabilities.

Therefore, to better support teachers with disability inclusion, there is a need for teacher training and professional development programs that one, improve teacher self-efficacy in inclusive practices, two, support the understanding of what about attitudes around disability and inclusion affect students, and three, what disability model(s) best promote the development of teachers' inclusion practices. School district administrators should implement teacher training and professional development to address teacher attitudes toward inclusion. This study shows that when teachers received preservice training on disability, they have more positive attitudes toward disability inclusion and were more likely to create inclusive learning environments. However, the data revealed that many teachers did not have access to adequate training or support to implement inclusive practices, which led to feeling underprepared when teaching, not knowing what supports were available to them, questioning the need for inclusion, and having negative attitudes about disability inclusion.

Limitations

While the survey used in this study aimed for objectivity, it inevitably incorporated some subjectivity. First, there are more than two models of disability, though due to the medical model and social model seemingly being the most documented and discussed models that I have come across in research, those two models were used as reference points for the survey and interviews. Secondly, the unique geographic and demographic makeup of the two school districts studied, located in Southern California, makes it difficult to generalize the survey findings to the broader U.S. educational system. Specifically, the survey only gathered data from two school districts out of 115 in Los Angeles County and San Diego County, which limits the scope of the study. And thirdly, while the participating schools did vary in socioeconomic status, the findings do not fully

represent all issues that Southern California teachers, or teachers across the country, face when teaching students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with a small percentage of survey respondents, and participants were purposely selected rather than randomly. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted virtually, which may have affected the intimacy, trust, and openness of the participants. Additionally, the interviews were conducted during a unique school year, where teachers were experiencing virtual learning environments and a one-of-a-kind re-entrance to in-person teaching. As a result, new issues related to school inclusion efforts may have emerged, which could have influenced the resulting data more than typical in-class experiences.

There were also limitations to the study's access to more districts. Some districts did not respond, while others were focused on other COVID-related priorities. Finally, some districts, schools, and teachers were not supported by their administration to participate in the study – even though district research departments cleared me to do research in the first place. Despite these limitations, this study offers valuable insights into teachers' attitudes toward disability, the importance of disability inclusion in education, and future research recommendations.

Recommendations for Future Research

Based on the implications of this study, there are several recommendations for future research that could contribute to a better understanding of effective teacher disability inclusion support models and the factors that shape teachers' attitudes toward disability inclusion. First, future studies could focus on investigating and comparing various inservice teacher disability inclusion support models to identify which models are most effective in promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms. Secondly, building on the focus of this

study, which looked at factors that shape teachers' attitudes towards disability inclusion, such as their prior experiences with students with disabilities, their training and professional development opportunities, and their personal beliefs and values, a broader scope of research across more districts, counties, and states could be conducted to further substantiate the claims of this study.

Thirdly, future studies could incorporate a larger sample size of school districts with a wider variety of demographic make-up, particularly those that have successful disability inclusion practices in place and those that do not. This could help to ensure that the findings of the study are generalizable to a wider range of school settings. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to explore the long-term impacts of teacher disability inclusion support models and to identify any potential barriers to the continual implementation of those models.

Moreover, it would be beneficial to investigate why some school districts are more supportive of research taking place than others. That could inform strategies for building stronger partnerships between researchers and school districts. Finally, future research could focus on the logistics of accessing school districts for research purposes, as this would enable researchers to conduct more robust studies as opposed to if they were limited to randomly selecting individual teachers to investigate – something I did not want to do in an effort to yield as many teachers as possible for this research under the time constraints of the study. Overall, it is also recommended that future research around teachers' attitudes towards disability inclusion be integrated into teacher credential programs to ensure that preservice teachers are prepared to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Final Reflections

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of inclusive education for students with disabilities and the role of general education high school teachers in creating inclusive environments. The findings demonstrate that prior experience with and exposure to disability significantly shapes teacher attitudes and practices toward students with disabilities. The study also suggests that there is a gap between preservice teacher credential programs and disability inclusion practices, which affects teacher readiness to support all types of learning levels, including students with disabilities. Furthermore, the data indicates that a high percentage of general education teachers are not receiving adequate support with disability inclusion in their classrooms, which negatively impacts their attitudes toward disability inclusion.

Therefore, to improve the disability inclusion experiences of all students, regardless of ability level, efforts should be made to increase disability inclusion awareness. Preservice teacher credential programs and K-12 schools should recognize the significance of prior experience with and exposure to disability in shaping teacher attitudes and practices toward students with disabilities. There is a need for teacher training and professional development programs that improve teacher self-efficacy in inclusive practices. School district administrators should implement teacher training and professional development to improve teacher attitudes toward inclusion, which may help shift teacher attitudes toward disability inclusion.

It is crucial to provide regular support for disability inclusion to promote positive attitudes among teachers and to ensure the proper education of students with disabilities. Finally, the study highlights the need for accountability and data tracking systems to support general education teacher preservice credential programs in their efforts to implement effective disability studies curricula. The U.S. educational system should have guidelines in place for all general

education teacher preservice credential programs to incorporate disability studies into their curriculum. There should also be support systems in place, based on data from preservice programs that effectively implement disability studies curriculum, to assist preservice programs that are failing to support preservice teachers in their efforts and understanding of disability inclusion before they enter the classroom as credentialed teacher. With that said, I applaud the decades of progress that has been made where today, states, school systems, and teachers in the U.S. are being held accountable, at least to some degree, for their actions or inactions toward inclusion and where many teachers are trying their best to support students with disabilities even though they make lack the knowledge and support to do so.

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APPENDIX A

Survey

CONSTRUCT 1 = DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. What is your age?

2. What is your gender?

Male

Female

Nonbinary

3. What socioeconomic class have you spent most of your life in?

Low

Middle

High

4. What race do you most identify with?

Alaska Native

American Indian

Asian

Black or African American

Hispanic, Latino, or of Spanish Origin

Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander

White

Other

5. Growing up, what type of area were you raised in?

Urban

Suburban

Rural

6. What type of teaching credential(s) do you hold (list all that apply)?

- Single subject
- Multiple subject
- Special education
- Administrative
- Other

7. If you have a single subject teaching credential(s), what is the subject(s) (list all that apply)?

- Art Education
- English Education
- Health Science Education
- World Languages
- Mathematics Education
- Music Education
- Physical Education
- Science Education
- Other

8. At which institution(s) did you complete your teacher credentialing program?

9. How many years have you been teaching?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 or more

10. How many periods do you teach total in a day and how many of those periods have students with IEPs in your classes?

(e.g.: 5 total, 4 of which have students with IEP or 5/4)

11. What subjects do you currently teach? (please list all that apply)

12. What subjects have you taught in the past? (please list all that apply)

13. What grade level(s) do you currently teach? (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Elementary School
- Middle School
- High School
- Post High School

14. What school level(s) have you taught in the past? (please check all that apply)

- Preschool
- Elementary
- Middle School
- High School
- Post High School

CONSTRUCT 2 = EXPERIENCE WITH DISABILITY PRIOR TO TEACHING

15. Which of the following best describes any prior experience you have had with persons with a disability:

- None
- Some
- Regularly

.....from question above, if some or regularly is checked, check all that apply below =

16.CHECK ALL THAT APPLY

- I have a disability
- I have had a family member with a disability
- I have had a friend with a disability
- I have had a colleague with a disability
- I have had a mentor with a disability
- I have had a teacher with a disability
- other not listed

17.My childhood K-12 school experience was racially diverse:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

18.My childhood K-12 school experience was gender diverse:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

19.My childhood K-12 school experience was disability diverse:

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

CONSTRUCT 3 = PRESERVICE TEACHER CREDENTIAL PROGRAM

20. Was disability defined in your preservice teacher credential program?

- Yes
- No

21. To what extent was disability discussed in your preservice teacher credential program classes?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

22. If instruction on supporting students with a disability was offered in your program, what form did it take? (please check all that apply)

- Teacher lecture
- Class assigned reading(s)
- Class discussion or debate
- Journaling
- Learning from individuals with disabilities
- Other

23. During your teacher credential program, how much opportunity did you have to observe inclusion efforts in K-12 classrooms?

- Often
- Some
- Minimal
- None

CONSTRUCT 4 = EXPERIENCE AS A TEACHER

24. How often are you aware of students with a disability in your class?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

25. How proficient are you in Response to Intervention (RTI)?

(Definition = A multi-tier approach to the early identification and support of students with learning and behavior needs. The RTI process begins with high-quality instruction and universal screening of all children in the general education classroom.)

- Far above average
- Somewhat above average
- Average
- Somewhat below average
- Far below average

26. How proficient are you in Universal Design for Learning (UDL)?

(Definition = An educational framework that guides the development of flexible learning environments that can accommodate individual learning differences.)

- Far above average
- Somewhat above average
- Average
- Somewhat below average
- Far below average

27.How proficient are you in Positive Behavior Support (PBS)?

(Definition = A behavior management system used to understand what maintains an individual's challenging behavior. People's inappropriate behaviors are difficult to change because they are functional; they serve a purpose for them. These behaviors are supported by reinforcement in the environment.)

- Far above average
- Somewhat above average
- Average
- Somewhat below average
- Far below average

28.How proficient are you in navigating cultural aspects of disability (language used to talk about disability, representations of disability in curriculum, and expectations for students with disabilities)?

- Far above average
- Somewhat above average
- Average

- Somewhat below average
- Far below average

29. To what extent are teachers responsible for providing students with disabilities a safe space to discuss their experiences with disability:

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

30. To what extent are teachers responsible for changing their teacher peers' negative attitudes about disability:

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

31. To what extent are you receiving adequate support for working with students with disabilities in your classes:

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

32.If you have received support with students with disabilities, what type of support have you received? (please check all that apply)

- Professional development at your school site
- Professional development outside of your school site
- Teacher-peer interaction
- Special education staff support
- Other

33.If you have received support for working with students with disabilities, how much are you being supported?

- Always
- Most of the time
- About half the time
- Sometimes
- Never

34.To what extent do you feel comfortable talking about disability:

- Extremely comfortable
- Somewhat comfortable
- Neither comfortable nor uncomfortable
- Somewhat uncomfortable
- Extremely uncomfortable

35.With the exception of IEP meetings, how often are you in communication with case managers of students with IEPs?

- Daily

- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

36. How often are you in communication with parents of students with an IEP?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Monthly
- Never

37. To what extent are you offering accommodations for students with IEPs?

(Definition = An accommodation helps a student with learning gaps experience the same curriculum as his or her peers. For an accommodation, one gives strategies, but does not alter the curriculum and the learning outcomes remain the same.)

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely or never

38. To what extent are you offering modifications for students with IEPs?

(Definition = A modification helps a student with a more significant learning need to experience the same curriculum as his or her peers, but with different learning outcomes.)

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely or never

39. To what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Parent support effectively assists in your teaching of students with IEPs.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

40.To what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Behavior issues are difficult for teachers to handle in class.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

41.To what extent you agree or disagree with the following statement:

Teacher attitudes about disability change with exposure to disability.

- Strongly agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

42.Do you view disability with the medical model?

(Definition = The medical model of disability focuses on the individual's limitations and ways to reduce those limitations or use adaptive technology to adapt them to society.)

- Most of the time

- Sometimes
- Rarely or never

43. Do you view disability with the social model of disability?

(Definition = The social model of disability identifies systemic barriers, derogatory attitudes, and social exclusion (intentional or inadvertent), which make it difficult or impossible for individuals with impairments to attain their desired outcomes.)

- Most of the time
- Sometimes
- Rarely or never

44. Please list what teaching strategies you use that best support students with a disability in your class?

True or False

45. Most people have some type of disability.
46. Students with disabilities often cannot keep up with their peers.
47. Teachers need to treat students with disabilities as if they are fragile.
48. Life with a disability is often tragic.
49. Sometimes, it's best for students with disabilities to go to special classrooms with staff who are better trained for that.
50. People with disabilities have a lot to teach us.
51. I tend to focus more on the ability of what a person can do versus what a person cannot do.
52. If access is available, then disability does not exist.
53. It is usually apparent when someone has a disability.

54. People with disabilities achieve less than those without disabilities.
55. I use person-first language more than I use identity-first language (i.e., I use the phrase “student with a disability” more than the phrase “disabled student”).

APPENDIX B

Semistructured Interview Template

1. I noticed in your survey you stated that you had x-amount/type of exposure/experience with disability – can you explain your experience with disability and people having disabilities?
2. I noticed in your survey you stated that you received x-amount/type of training in your credentialing program on disability and/or inclusion in the classroom - can you explain the effect that had/has on you as a teacher? An example being how your teacher training has affected or has not affected your willingness to teach in an inclusive classroom.
3. I noticed in your survey you stated receiving x-amount/type of support with students with disabilities – can you explain how you experienced that? An example could be the type of support received from administration at your school(s) and/or teacher peer groups on campus, and/or support from special education staff.
4. Can you elaborate on your thoughts about disability and teaching those who are disabled? What factors do you think influence teaching students with disabilities? How and why do you feel those factors influence your teaching practice?

APPENDIX C

Solicitation Letter to Prospective Teacher Participants

Hello,

My name is Erik Brault and I am doctoral candidate in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego, San Diego, CA. I am conducting a research study about general education high school teachers' attitudes about disability and inclusion and would like to invite you to participate.

The purpose of my research is to study to what effect, if any, general education high school teachers' personal and professional attitudes and knowledge about educating students with disabilities have on their willingness and/or ability to create an inclusive learning environment. You are being asked to participate because you are a general education high school teacher.

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a one-time online survey that takes about 15 minutes to complete. You will be asked things like: "Which of the following best describes any prior experience you have had with persons with a disability," "To what extent was disability discussed in your preservice teacher credential program classes," and "To what extent are you receiving adequate support for working with students with disabilities in your classes?"

You will also be asked a few questions about yourself, such as your age, gender, which socioeconomic class you have you spent most of your life in, and race.

You will have the option to participate in a follow-up semi structured interview pertaining to your survey answers, which will take place via zoom and lasts approximately 20 minutes. The option to participate in the interview process will be available via the survey.

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life. Your responses will be kept confidential, though not anonymous. Although I will do my best to mask your identity, there could be a minimal risk the data could be connected back to you through some kind of breach. If you choose not to participate in the interview process, your survey data will still be used in this study and will be kept confidential. All your information will be coded with a number/letter. Your email or IP address will automatically be deleted, and nobody will know your identity. I will keep the study data for a minimum of 5 years.

Taking part in this study is entirely optional. ***Choosing not to participate will have no effect on your employment status, grades, or any other benefits to which you are entitled.*** You may also quit being in the study at any time or decide not to answer any specific questions. Should you decide to participate, ***please print out a copy of this page for future reference.***

I will be happy to answer any questions you have about the study. You may contact me at ebrault@sandiego.edu. You can also contact research advisor Dr. Lea Hubbard at lhubbard@sandiego.edu

Thank you for your consideration,

Erik Brault

If you would like to participate, please click on this link to begin the study:

http://usd.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_eX8wu7YHiRw6q1f

Date: 5-7-2023

IRB #: IRB-2022-130

Title: Special Education Students: Inclusion and Exclusion in the K-12 U. S. Educational System

Creation Date: 11-4-2021

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Erik Brault

Review Board: USD IRB

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Expedited	Decision Approved
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Key Study Contacts

Member Erik Brault	Role Principal Investigator	Contact ebrault@sandiego.edu
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Member Fred Galloway	Role Primary Contact	Contact galloway@SanDiego.edu
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