PRAXIS CONVERGENCE: HOW SPECIAL EDUCATORS IN ONE TEXAS DISTRICT REIMAGINED INCLUSION THROUGH REFLECTIVE ACTION

A Dissertation

by

KRISTIN KISTNER HALL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Chair of Committee,	Marlon James
Co-Chair of Committee,	Patrick Slattery
Committee Members,	Laura Stough
	Gwendolyn Webb-Hassan
Head of Department,	Lynn Burlbaw

August 2016

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

ABSTRACT

Beginning in the 2014-15 school year, Texas schools could no longer use a modified standardized test for students labeled with disabilities due to the loss of a federal waiver. The US Department of Education rescinded the waiver that had allowed Texas to give two percent of the students, specifically those labeled with disabilities, a modified high-stakes exam. Through the lens of Disability Studies and the use of phenomenological methods, the researcher explored the lived experiences of special education teachers and administrators who are making changes to their pedagogical practices and philosophical beliefs to provide students labeled with disabilities the knowledge they need to be successful with the general curriculum and standardized test.

Through analysis of the data collected, an analytical framework emerged, the Praxis Convergence framework. This framework consists of three cyclical moments that reflect the shared realities of teachers and administrators during the implementation of the new policy directive examined in this study. The Praxis Convergence framework consists of three moments: Political Catalyst, Practice Collision, and Praxis Convergence. The first moment was the Political Catalyst, or the policy directive, that provided the impetus to make changes in the education of students labeled with disabilities. These changes collided with the current operations within the district which gave rise to the second moment of the framework, Practice Collision. Practice Collision was signified by local shifts in the place, people, pedagogy, and philosophy of education regarding the instruction of students labeled with disabilities. These collisions gradually

gave way to Praxis Convergence, or a set of newly developed normative praxes, which were actualized through professional development, personal transformation, and the vision of possibilities.

This framework will be useful to researchers, school districts, schools, departments, and even teachers to provide a description of the various aspects that should be considered when conflict arises during the implementation of a new policy and to illustrate how reflection can lead to positive changes which should ultimately advance the goals of a more equitable and democratic public education.

DEDICATION

"Much of educational research tends to pulverize life into minute abstracted fragments and particles that are of little use to practitioners" (Van Manen, 1990, p.7). It was not until I began my doctoral program that I realized how much educational research never makes it into the hands of the classroom teachers. When I was accepted into this program, my husband had one request: be sure that the research you do gets to the classroom to help kids. I have not forgotten that request.

I am dedicating this work to my husband, Joe, and my sons, Tommy and Cody. While it has been Joe and Tommy whose daily lives have continued through my absence during my long nights in class, my travel to conferences, and my hours of reading and writing, the scarce income has affected us all.

Joe, without the physical and financial, but most importantly, emotional support and the belief that the work I am doing is important for teachers and children, I could not have completed this project. I hope that you are proud of the work I have produced.

I am one of the very fortunate people who has a large and loving family to which I am proud to say that I belong. To my uncles and aunts, my many cousins, my sisters and brother and their spouses, my many nieces and nephews, dad and step-mother, I say thank you for your prayers and support for me and my husband and sons. I love you all.

Finally, to my mother who gave me the gift of faith and who left me with this little voice in my head always telling me that I can do anything that I set my mind to. As I am so glad that I told her before she passed away, I thank her for that little voice that remains with me today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the professors in the College of Education and Human Development who took a personal interest in me and my education. I want to name a few people who were especially influential in this new phase of my education and teaching. First, Dr. Norvella Carter, thank you for believing in me and encouraging me to stretch myself as an educator and a researcher. Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hassan, thank you for pushing me to make a strong and clear statement for social justice. Dr. Laura Stough, thank you for helping me see how to bridge my curriculum studies with disability studies to bring inclusion to reality for me in my scholarly work. To my Chair, Dr. Marlon James, thank you for helping me find clarity in my data to provide a focus for my analysis, demonstrating to me how to remain true to the focus of my study. To my Co-Chair, Dr. Patrick Slattery, thank you for providing a sound philosophical foundation to my work and for helping me understand that the social justice changes I seek for public education must be grounded in and guided by a clearly articulated philosophy of education.

The past four years studying Curriculum and Instruction has allowed me to step away from the hurried world of teaching in this accountability era that focuses on the presentation of numerous skills to students without allowing any time for reflection by the student or the teacher. This time has allowed me to reflect on my own early education before the overreliance on standardized tests. I feel fortunate to be of a generation that was educated before this current accountability era, but the best fortune that I have had is that my life partner, my husband Joe, understands the importance of

education. Not only is he a former public school teacher and coach who recognizes the potential in each child who walks into a classroom, he recognized the importance of me being able to focus solely on my doctoral program. Without his encouragement and willingness to keep the house running and our son fed, I would not have had time for my own reflection. This precious gift of time has given my professional life new focus and purpose. Once again, thank you Joe.

I want to thank the special education teachers and administrators who agreed to share with me their lived experiences regarding educating students labeled with disabilities. Your dedication to students and your fellow educators is inspiring. I believe our joint efforts in this study will make a positive contribution to the education of students labeled with disabilities.

Finally, I would like to thank the students whom I have been fortunate to teach over my career, especially those students labeled with disabilities. You taught me how inappropriate it is to attach a label to a child. You taught me to see the whole person, not to rely on the label or the immediate situation. You taught me that just like every other student your future is full of possibilities.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Act in 1975, more commonly known at that time as PL 94-142, public schools have been required to educate students labeled with disabilities. This law, passed by the federal government, required that local school districts provide an education to all students regardless of the students' physical or mental abilities. The law passed in 1975, and was a breakthrough for students who were considered to have a disability and for their advocates as the students could now receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE). After the passage of the law in 1975, many parents exercised their right to challenge the Individual Education Program (IEP) that the school had developed for their child. One such challenge was decided in 1982 when the Supreme Court ruled in *Board of Education v. Rowley* that students labeled with disabilities had to be provided with some "educational benefit", but the schools had no responsibility to "maximize the student's learning" (Eyer, 1998-1999, p. 623). When I began teaching students labeled with disabilities in 1996, I was instructed to write *reasonable* educational goals on the students' IEPs. The students should be able to reach their IEP goals, but the IEPs were not contracts and as such we, the teachers and the school, provided no guarantee to the parents of their child's educational growth. This undercurrent of an adversarial attitude between parents and schools due to the minimum expectations for students' educational progress was

expressed in a palpable tension. I understood the parents' desire for their children to learn, and I understood the school district's fear of being sued. The special education teacher was the focus of this tension from both the parents and the district administration.

In reauthorizations in 1997 and 2004, P.L 94-142 came to be known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). When Congress passed the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA, the changes addressed the parents' concerns of the limited educational opportunities for their children (Eyer, 1998-1999). Congress required that all students labeled with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) which meant that the students spend as much time as possible in general education classes and in contact with students *not* labeled with disabilities. After implementation of IDEA, many students labeled with disabilities were receiving their instruction in the general education classroom with a special education teacher or paraprofessional in that classroom to make the necessary modifications and accommodations. The time that the special education teacher was present in the classroom varied depending on the needs of the student. The inclusion of students labeled with disabilities in general education classrooms presented a new tension that I felt from general education teachers. Not only did the general education teacher have students with IEPs who needed specific modifications and accommodations to learn in his or her room, but s/he had to share her or his class with another teacher.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 sought to align this special education law with the legislative goals of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) passed in 2001.

While the State of Texas had implemented an accountability system of high-stakes testing before the passage of NCLB, the students labeled with disabilities had not been required to take the standardized test with the attached high-stakes consequences. When NCLB passed, I was pleased that the schools and districts would no longer be able to ignore the education of certain students (i.e. students labeled with disabilities, students of color, students living in poverty, students learning English) while focusing the bulk of their efforts on *mainstream* students. Since 2002, much has changed regarding the delivery of instruction for students labeled with disabilities. Most of these students are no longer isolated in separate classrooms, but are in many general education classrooms. Due to the threats of punitive actions[1] against schools for low passing rates, many people, including the general education teachers, administrators, and even some in the community, feared that the scores of the students labeled with disabilities will bring the rating of the whole school down. Again, I felt this tension as a special education teacher having to justify the presence of students labeled with disabilities in the general education classroom and whether or not I was being successful in providing the necessary accommodations and modifications to ensure the success of *my students* on the high-stakes test.

[1] "For example, after 2 years of failure to make AYP [Annual Yearly Progress], parents have the right to transfer their children to a better performing school; after 3 years of failing to make AYP, parents have the right to supplemental educational services for their child; after 4 years of failing to meet AYP goals, the district must take corrective measures, such as replacing staff or implementing a new curriculum; and after 5 years of failing to make AYP the school may be reorganized by the state (including state takeover), converted to a charter school, or subject to some other drastic measure (O'Neill,2003; Rowe,2004)" (As cited in Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan & Jones, 2007, pgs. 160-161).

It is with the understanding of my lived experience as a special education teacher of working with the pressure directed at me and still believing in and advocating for my students labeled with disabilities that I begin this study to understand the most recent policy change under which the special education teacher now works.

Statement of the Problem

The daily operation of public schools in the U.S. have been increasingly directed by federal legislation, specifically the legislation that has been enacted since 2001 – the No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. These two laws and the subsequent regulations that have followed have made significant changes to the operation of schools and to the meanings of the labels that some students are given. One decision made at the US Department of Education can and does have real consequences in the education of individual students and their teachers. According to a letter from the Texas Commissioner of Education, Michael Williams, dated August 2, 2013, "The USDE has informed states that assessments based on modified standards for students served by special education cannot be used for accountability purposes after the 2013–2014 school year." This decision to not allow students labeled with disabilities in Texas to take a modified high-stakes test based on a modified curriculum (an Alternative Assessment on Modified Academic Achievement Standards) (Texas Education Agency, 2014-2015) and the lived experiences of the special education teachers and administrators enacting that decision is the topic of this study.

A decision made in 1973, similarly produced real consequences for many students and their teachers. In 1973,

> the 'official' definition of mental retardation was changed by lowering the IQ score that was needed to qualify (Grossman, 1973). As the story goes, with a stroke of Herbert Grossman's pen, thousands of people became normal; 'cured', as it were, not by changing *things* or *facts*, but by changing the socially agreed-upon rules that identify some people as mentally retarded and others as not. (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995, p. 113)

This decision had real implications in the daily lives of individuals who received assistance or benefits based on that label of mentally retarded and no longer could. Their lives were changed not due to any material change of their person, but due to the change of a definition.

The societal acceptance of changes of the definition of disability such that one day a person is considered disabled and the next day he is not exemplifies the social nature, not biological nature, of disability. "The interpretivist perspective teaches us that the social construction of disability, in this case, is more than just the social rule. It is the actions of applying the rule. What is important about the Grossman story is the 'stroke of the pen'. With that *act*, people became normal" (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995, p. 114). A similar policy shift for students labeled with disabilities in Texas, as noted above, has occurred recently. The US Department of Education (USDE) rescinded the waiver, ESEA Federal regulation (§ 200.1(e)) which permitted the use of a modified high-stakes test that Texas had been granted, would no longer be allowed. Student labeled with disabilities who had been taught from a modified curriculum and assessed with a modified test, beginning in the school year 2014-2015 will now be held accountable for

learning and taking assessments based on the general curriculum for their grade level. At a speech to the American Association of People with Disabilities in March of 2011, Education Secretary Arne Duncan stated, "I just want to say—here and now—for the record- we are moving away from the 2 percent rule. We will not issue another policy that allows districts to disguise the educational performance of 2 percent of students" (Bradshaw, 2011).

In Texas many students labeled with a disability have been receiving a modified curriculum and tested with a modified assessment. With the USDE's decision to not allow modified assessments beginning with the 2014-2015 school year, many students whose IEP provided them with a modified curriculum over their school career are now required to take the same test, based on the complete curriculum, as students who are not labeled with a disability. The special education teachers who have been teaching from a modified curriculum are now responsible for preparing these students labeled with disabilities for the test that covers the entire curriculum. How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in an effort to prepare students labeled with disabilities the general test? How has this change in policy affected special educators' beliefs about what a student labeled with a disability is capable of learning?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to describe the philosophies and pedagogical actions of teachers and administrators who provide the instruction and support for students labeled with a disability. The researcher explored the lived experiences of special education teachers and administrators who are making changes to their pedagogical

practices and philosophical beliefs to provide students labeled with disabilities the knowledge they need to be successful with the general curriculum and standardized test.

Significance of Study

Due to the USDE's recent decision to not allow a modified assessment for Texas students labeled with disabilities, in theory, the curriculum and pedagogy of special education teachers will have to change. The researcher examined how teachers are understanding their new roles as special education teachers responsible for teaching the general curriculum and how that understanding has changed their teaching practices. Additionally, the researcher examined the practices of special education administrators to understand how they have prepared and supported the special education teachers through this change generated by a governmental regulation. The information gathered in this study will benefit schools and school districts to understand how a change in policy affects not only pedagogical choices, but also philosophical beliefs and how best to prepare and lead the transformation of teachers, administrators, and their students.

Moreover, with the nearly 50 years of studies documenting public schools disproportionately labeling students of color with disabilities (Chin & Hughes, 1987; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Dunn, 1968; Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982; Meier, Stewart, & England, 1989; Reschly, 2009), the issue of the education that students labeled with disabilities receive is of great importance to scholars concerned with urban education. Beyond traditionally defined urban districts, recent research in states like Texas is recognizing new challenges associated with educating diverse learners in suburban districts (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). The challenges faced by educators

that have been traditionally considered realities for schools in large urban centers, due to changes in demographics, are now challenges facing educators in districts in diversifying suburban settings. Research supports that beyond traditionally defined urban districts, states like Texas is recognizing new challenges associated with educating diverse learners in suburban districts (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014). As these demographic shifts continue to accelerate, studies such as this can help inform proactive policies and pedagogical remedies.

Research Questions

1. How do special education professionals in Texas describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test within the context of their local district?
2. How has this recension of the ESEA Federal Regulation § 200.1(e) waiver affected the educators' practice and philosophy regarding student learning?
3. How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in schools throughout the district?

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This literature review begins with a description of the literature that inform the researcher's philosophical perspective, then explains the theoretical framework employed in this research project. Later in the chapter, a description of the history and current state of special education and standardized testing in the United States and specifically in Texas is provided. Finally, the researcher will provide a survey of scholarly articles related to the philosophical and pedagogical practices of special educators and how and why those philosophies and practices change. This review of the literature will start with a broad view to end with the information that points to the specific phenomenon studied.

Phenomenology

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a research methodology. The phenomenological research methods will be discussed in Chapter III. An explanation of the philosophy of phenomenology is provided to ground this study with a clear epistemological and ontological foundation.

A phenomenological view of understanding human beings is a more descriptive view of the *world* than the explanatory attempt by researchers who follow a positivistic view of identifying or discovering causal relationships. The overwhelming majority of research in the field of special education follows the quantitative, "what works" paradigm. A phenomenological view of special educators and their attitudes, perceptions, and actions will provide the readers of this research project with a rich

understanding of the lived experiences of these teachers and administrators and the contexts in which they work. Phenomenology is a school of philosophy as well as a type of qualitative research (Merriam, 2009, p. 24). The following is a brief background of the philosophy of phenomenology with a focus on the work of Merleau-Ponty.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) was a French philosopher who was a friend and colleague of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. His philosophy was influenced greatly by Edmund Husserl, Rene Descartes, and Martin Heidegger. Husserl's work guided Merleau-Ponty to phenomenology as a tool "to set aside the objectivist assumptions of the natural attitude, and concentrate on our own subjective consciousness of how the things referred to *appear* to us" (Matthews, 2006, p. 6). Descartes' influence is evident with Merleau-Ponty's focus on and ultimate rejection of the mind/body duality. Merleau-Ponty believed that all human knowledge comes through our experiences, the experiences that we can only have as embodied beings. Matthews (2006) explains, "The world, Merleau-Ponty says, is not something we merely think about, but the place in which we live our lives, the world we act in, have feelings and hopes about, as well as the world we try to know about" (p. 20). To understand how phenomenology can be an effective tool for educational researchers, some terms must be understood.

Merleau-Ponty utilized the ideas of *Being-in-the-world, intentionality of consciousness, epoche* or *bracketing, lived experience with prereflective knowledge* and *reduction*. Merleau-Ponty furthered his understanding of phenomenology by reading Husserl's student, Heidegger. Heidegger believed that humans experienced what he

called *Being-in-the-world*, meaning that no person is able to be purely objective observer. "We experience the world…not as detached subjects or pure reason, but as actual human beings who exist at a particular time and place, and who interact with their surrounding world from that position in space and time" (Matthews, 2006, p.12). Heidegger understood that humans have a particular kind of being-in-the-world, that of being conscious about the world. In fact, there is a particular kind of consciousness, the *intentionality of consciousness*. Intentionality recognizes that "all consciousness is consciousness *of* something" [emphasis added] (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2008, p. 414).

Merleau-Ponty clarified that the human consciousness of this Being-in-the-world, or embodiment, comes after we have already been raised in a particular situation and have made connections and understandings about the objects that inhabit our world through our material embodiment. As mentioned earlier, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea of a separation between the cognition of the mind and the experiences of the body. The mind and body exist and construct reality together, not separately. He explained that our consciousness of our lived world is not without prejudice. He understood that "to be embodied means that living in the world comes before *conscious* thought about the world: experience is 'pre-reflective' at base, and reflection concerns what is pre-reflectively given" (Matthews, 2006, p. 56). It is the task of the phenomenological researcher to put aside, or *bracket*, one's personal beliefs and understanding of a particular situation. Husserl used the term *epoche*, a Greek word meaning "holding back" (Matthews, p. 10). As a human being, one cannot shed all of what he or she knows

of the world. It is not necessary, nor is it even possible for a researcher to reduce her knowledge of the world to nothing in order to observe, interpret, and describe everything. Matthews explains that

> The phenomenological *reduction,* in [Merleau-Ponty's] interpretation of it, is a matter of changing our way of seeing the world. When we practice the reduction, we no longer see the world as the comfortable place we have made it by the scientific and other concepts which we have built up, precisely in order to make it easier to handle intellectually and practically. (p. 17)

Unlike the positivists, Merleau-Ponty rejects the idea that the researcher can be an objective observer who simply conducts an experiment to uncover or reveal the truth that exists separate and apart from the researcher. He recognizes that "we have to be in the world before we can begin to reflect about it" (Matthews, 2006, p. 90), and thus, we are understanding what we research through our subjectivity. Contrary to the positivist notion, this subjectivity does not weaken the research. In fact, Merleau-Ponty believed that "the truth in subjectivism or idealism is that the concept of an experience without a subject, and without a perspective, is meaningless" (p. 93). Much of the research regarding students labeled with disabilities and how best to teach them follows the positivistic pattern of pre-test and post-test to see if a particular program or teaching method made a gain in student *learning* by identifying a statistical significance (Ferri, Gallagher, & Connor, 2011; Klingner & Boardman, 2011; Trainor, 2011). This positivist perspective adopts the Cartesian dualism of the mind and body. When making this distinction, the mind was prioritized. This priority of the mind, and thus the devaluation

of the body, leads to research that attempts to isolate processes of the mind without regard to the contextual reality of body.

The idea in education research that the cognitive processes of students can be isolated and explained in a positivistic experimental manner ignores the individual whose cognition occurs simultaneously to the embodied experiences of that particular person. Hubert Dreyfus (2005) describes the shortcomings of research which prioritizes mind over body,

> the body-dependence of shared generalizations puts disembodied neural networks at a serious disadvantage when it comes to learning to cope in the human world. Nothing is more alien to our form of life than a network with no varying degrees of access, no up-down, front-back orientation, no preferred way of moving, such as moving forward more easily than back ward, and no emotional response to its failures and successes. (as cited in Lee, 2014, p.3)

When studying special education with the idea of improving the lives of the students labeled with disabilities, focusing on cognitive processes without consideration of the embodied perspectives and experiences of the student is insufficient. With a focus on social justice and a desire to improve the lives of students labeled with disabilities, the researcher has chosen to understand the lived experiences of special educators and their philosophies and practices.

Disability Studies in Education

There are many critical theories in educational research. These theories look through a lens other than the dominant middle/upper class, White, male perspective.

These theories in education function to disrupt what appears to be the *normal*, natural, and orderly operations of schools in the United States. Critical theorists seek to find more equitable and just ways to operate public schools. Critical theorists want to uncover and clearly examine the current situation as it is, then imagine, propose, and provide a guide to what could be. The critical theories in education were spawned from a critical examination of the legal system, specifically the work of Derrick Bell and critical race theory (CRT). After Gloria Ladson-Billings and William Tate began to apply CRT to education in 1995 (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 2011), many other theorists also began critically examining the educational system through varied ways of knowing and understanding the world. In addition to critically examining the role of race in the structure of the US educational system, theorists also examined the role of gender, class, and sexuality to identify the systematic and unjust treatment of individuals who are members of those groups (i.e. non-White, female, low socioeconomic status, and homosexual). There is another group, which intersects with all of the previously mentioned groups, which also is systematically and unjustly treated by the educational system: those individuals labeled with disabilities. Yet "despite the material reality of [the] oppressive conditions experienced by disabled people,…theorists of difference (e.g., antiracists, feminists, Marxists, queer theorists) have consistently avoided any critical discussion of the social category of disability" (Erevelles, 2005, p. 66). The theoretical framework for this research is Disability Studies in Education (DSE).

History of Disability Studies

To understand the history of the Disability Studies in Education (DSE), it is first necessary to understand the social and historical creation of disability. Davis (2006) explained that until the mid-nineteenth century there had not been discussions about the "normal" human being. In ancient Greece the gods and goddesses were carved and painted to display the "ideal", but the Greeks understood that the ideal was not attainable by humans, just the gods. The nineteenth century brought the birth of the middle class by way of the industrial revolution and a shift in the Western world from understanding the world through religion to understanding the world through science. These middle class recipients of the industry profits, derived from the exploitation of Others, were looking for reassurance that this new economy, and the money they were making, was natural and just. They found that validation beginning with the French statistician Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1847) and the mathematical normal curve which he used to describe the "average man" (Davis, p. 4). This normal curve was then championed by the eugenicists Sir Francis Galton and Karl Pearson who furthered that research *identifying* the "normal" and the "deviant" individuals in society. These new statistical developments provided the "bourgeois hegemony… [the] scientific justification for moderation and middle-class ideology" (p. 5). It is this *scientific normalcy* that was the foundation for the labeling of individuals as abnormal, deviant, and disabled.

Because it is the utilization of statistics that created the notion of disability, Disability Studies in Education (DSE) is epistemologically opposed to positivism. Identifying aspects of human behavior and reducing those aspects to numbers to be

compared and manipulated provided some *scientific order* to what was once considered random. Gallagher (2010) explained that according to the eugenicists' statistics "those [individuals] conforming to the central tendency were 'normal' while those who did not were thought 'pathological'" (p. 26). Through an understanding of the development of statistics and probability to describe the natural as well as the social world, one can identify the origin "of the normal versus the abnormal binary, the medical model of disability, and the pathologizing of difference" (p. 27). Recognizing that the results of statistical research are value-laden, the ideology of statistical neutrality is challenged. Understanding this socio-historical creation of the *ideology of normal* researchers utilizing DSE began their challenge to the status quo.

Just as Critical Race Theory challenges institutional racism, DSE challenges institutional *ableism*. Smith (2013) refers to ableism as "the ideological spawn of the dominating discourse of modernist, positivist Cartesian, Eurocentric culture and science" (p.6). A definition of ableism that provides a less research-oriented and more daily life-oriented definition is from

> Thomas Heir, former director of the US Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs, former Associate Superintendent for the Chicago Public Schools, and former Director of Special Education in the Boston Public Schools, [who] claims that ableism in education is, "The devaluation of disability" that "results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for people to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled students as

opposed to other disabled students" (Hehir, 2002, ¶ 7). (as cited in Gabel, 2005, p.4)

This definition illustrates the fact that the construction of disability has many social implications. The view that one has to be fully-abled in order to be considered a full member of society obviously privileges one group of people over another. This social construction of disability by people in society is challenged by DSE scholars. The challenge states that "disability is not a characteristic that exists in the person so defined, but a construct that finds its meaning in social and cultural context" (Taylor, 2006, p. xiv). DSE challenges the way special education researchers and practitioners view disability. Special education employs the medical model that diagnoses then treats the student with the disability in an effort to remediate the problem. But DSE's epistemology views disability not as a "condition to be cured but rather as a difference to be accepted and accommodated. It is a social phenomenon through and through" (p. xx).

The movement to demand that society accept individuals with disabilities as whole members of society formally began in 1972 in the United Kingdom with the organization of the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), and then ten years later with the formation of the Society of Disability Studies (SDS) in the United States. Joseph P. Shapiro (1993) chronicled the disability rights movement in the U.S. which saw the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. The disability rights movement championed "the new thinking by disabled people that there is no pity or tragedy in disability, and that it is society's myths, fears, and stereotypes that most make being disabled difficult" (p. 5). It was not until 1999, that educational

researchers founded the Disability Studies in Education special interest group (SIG) of the American Education Research Association (AERA) (Gabel, 2005, p.1). In the first five years, this SIG grew "over 400%...as curriculum theorists, special educators, educational technologists, policy researchers, educational historians" (Danforth & Gabel, 2006, p. 3) and other researchers found that this line of study is necessary.

Scholars of Disability Studies in Education

Susan L. Gabel from National-Louis University and Scot Danforth from Ohio State University were the first co-chairs of the Disability Studies in Education SIG. They along with other members of the SIG (Linda Ware, Nirmala Erevelles, Beth Ferri, David J. Connor, and Ellen Brantlinger) have written extensively on disability in education. Gabel and Danforth are the general editors of the Disability Studies in Education series published by Peter Lang. This series began in 2006, with the publication of *Reading Resistance: Discourses of Exclusion in Desegregation & Inclusion Debates* by Beth Ferri and David Connor. Seventeen books have been published with the most recent coming out in 2015, *Practicing Disability Studies in Education: Acting Toward Social Change*, edited by David Connor, Jan Valle, and Chris Hale. The field is interdisciplinary, so DSE research has been published in a variety of education journals.

Disability Studies in Education Theory and Research

The Disability Studies in Education SIG's web page on the AERA site identifies the SIG's approaches to theorizing and research. DSE scholars seek to disrupt the medical model of disability utilized by special education researchers and practitioners.

DSE scholars focus on understanding the cultural and political aspects of disability. DSE scholars strive to utilize an emancipatory approach by including individuals with disabilities not as subjects of their research but as participants and when possible partners in the theorizing. DSE scholars seek to shed light on the damage that labeling and pathologizing disability does to individuals with disabilities. This research, that is respectful of the person with disabilities, stands as an alternative to the traditional research methodologies that "objectify, marginalize, and oppress people with disabilities" (Disability Studies in Education SIG 143, 2016, para. 5). Danforth and Gabel (2006) explain that "although critique has been a basic characteristic of disability studies in education, a recent trend has been to explore new ways of thinking and talking about, as well as enacting, practice" (p. 6). DSE scholars look for ways to understand the phenomenon of the lived experience of disability through an interdisciplinary approach. DSE research addresses issues of "social justice, equitable and inclusive educational opportunities, and full and meaningful access to all aspects of society for people labeled with a disability" (Disability Studies in Education SIG 143, 2016, para. 2).

Efforts to make changes in an education system, that has many people with vested interests in maintaining the status quo as well as federal, state, and local laws and regulations with case law to solidify the procedures, must be thoughtful and written in practical language to attract a large audience. Making significant changes in the way administrators, teachers, parents, and the public views students with disabilities, and the way these students view themselves, demand a broader perspective of epistemologies

and research methodologies to be utilized other than relying solely on the traditional statistical methods.

History of Special Education in the United States

With the aim of understanding the current policy changes that require students with disabilities be assessed without modifications on standardized tests, one needs to understand the historical struggle for education fought for by the families of students who were not afforded an equitable public education due to their race, ethnicity, language proficiency, or disability. It is in the complexities of the intersection of race and disability that the institutional segregation in the United States (U.S.) public schools becomes apparent.

Even though all states in the U.S. had compulsory education laws by the second decade of the twentieth century, children with disabilities were often not allowed to attend public schools (Yell, Rogers, & Rogers, 1998, p. 220). Some parents legally challenged the school districts' decisions to exclude their disabled children only to find that the states' Supreme Courts upheld those exclusionary efforts. In 1893, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that a school could expel any student who was "weak in mind" because he could not benefit from instruction (*Watson v. City of Cambridge*, 1893). In 1919, the Supreme Court of Wisconsin ruled that the school could deny the right to attend to a fifth grade student who had a condition which caused him to drool and contort his facial muscles. This child's condition was distracting and nauseating to the teachers and other students, and he just took up too much of the teacher's time (*Beattie v. Board of Education*, 1919). Almost fifteen years later in 1934,

an appeals court in the state of Ohio ruled that districts could exclude students with disabilities, even as it recognized the conflict between the compulsory attendance law and its ruling. As late as 1969, the State of North Carolina passed a law that made it a crime for parents to persistently advocate for their child with disabilities to attend public school (Yell, et al., 1998).

But by the mid-1900s, most states had started to provide some sort of education for the children with disabilities. For example, the State of Texas began to provide and education for students with physical disabilities and speech impairments in 1945. Over the next twenty years the Texas legislature provided for the education of students labeled "educable mentally retarded," "blind," "deaf," "trainable mentally retarded," "emotionally disturbed," and "brain injured" (Texas Education Agency, 1965).

The 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown*) ruling set the precedent that no group of students could be segregated to separate schools. The parents and advocates of students labeled with disabilities used *Brown* to argue that segregating students according to disability status was unconstitutional (Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005). Two Supreme Court decisions, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania* (1972) and *Mills v. Board of Education* (1972), ruled that the states had to provide an education to students with intellectual disabilities and provide rules of due process for the students and their families. The stage had been set and within three years federal legislation regarding the education of students with disabilities, P.L. 94-142, Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975, was passed. A 1990 reauthorization of this act changed the name to Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA). Later reauthorizations of IDEA, 1997 and 2004, addressed the issue of disproportionality of students of color in special education, and the amount of time that students labeled with disabilities were removed from the general education setting. The evolution of the overrepresentation of students of color in special education illustrates the history of the "racialization of ability" (Artilles, 2011, p. 431) in the United States.

A closer examination of the legal challenges to the education that many African American students and other students of color have faced in the U.S. is necessary to understand the historical context of the inequities of the U.S. educational system continuing into the second decade of the twenty-first century. As a review of court cases listed in Table 1 demonstrates, segregated schools were deemed legal for many years throughout the nation despite many challenges. Before the *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown,* 1954) decision that stated "separate is not equal" which ruled racially segregated schools illegal, the country's schools were segregated based on race. Despite the *Brown* ruling, Ferri and Connor (2005) argued that segregation has continued but has been justified based on *disability.* As Artilles (2011) has argued, "the historical intertwining of race and disability has created tensions and paradoxes" (p. 431) in the educational system that will not be relieved until this complexity is understood.

Harris, Brown, Ford, and Richardson (2004) pointed to cases that created the "separate but equal" doctrine that defended segregating students based on their race. In the city of Boston, five year old Sarah Roberts was denied admission to a White school close to her home which had better facilities than the school for African Americans because she was African American (*Roberts v. City of Boston,* 1850*).* After the Civil

War and the freeing of all slaves, Homer Adolph Plessy, who was seven-eighths white, challenged the segregation of public transportation. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that as long as equal facilities were provided, "segregation of the races" was not discriminatory (*Plessy v. Ferguson, (Plessy)* 1896). The *Plessy* decision spread segregation to all public places including schools. The school segregation not only separated African Americans from attending schools with White students, but in *Gong Lum v. Rice* (1927) a child with Chinese heritage was denied admission to a White school.

Eventually the Supreme Court, for a variety of socio-historical reasons, slowly began to unravel the separate but equal doctrine. In 1938, the Court decided that since the State of Missouri had a law school for White students, it had to provide a legal education for African American students. In 1950, the Court ruled on two separate cases that separate was not equal for graduate and professional schools (*McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents, Sweatt v. Painter*). The Justices stopped short of reversing *Plessy* though. That ruling would come in 1954, when the Supreme Court ruled that "separate is *not* equal," and that African American children should attend schools which were previously designated as White schools. While the Court found segregation of the basis of race to be unconstitutional, this ruling did not remove the privileged position of White people in American society. The Supreme Court provided no time frame for desegregation with little, if any, federal monitoring of the process. The desegregation that did occur in schools caused much social and political upheaval, and many would

argue that special education has been used to resegregate schools (Blanchett, 2006; Blanchett, Mumford, & Beachum, 2005; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Harris, et al., 2004).

Ferri and Connor (2005) examined newspaper articles in Tennessee over the first few years after *Brown*. They found, that while the schools were desegregating, there was a discourse developing that associated cognitive ability with race. While districts were integrating their schools, the classrooms in those schools were being segregated by intellectual ability. The intellectual ability of an individual student was influenced largely by the color of a student's skin. Between 1948 and 1966, U.S. public schools saw a 400% increase in students labeled mentally retarded (Mackie, 1969). In a number of court cases that were heard in the 1970s, the courts ruled that students of color could not be assessed with tests that were normed on White, middle class students, and that students must be assessed and given instruction in their primary language. The advocates for African American students were able to demonstrate racial bias in IQ tests, and that the subsequent decisions tracking or placing students in classes those with intellectual disabilities was unwarranted (*Hobson v. Hansen,* 1972; *Larry P. v. Wilson Riles,* 1972, 1974, 1979, 1984). Cases were also brought in an effort to stop states from testing children, who were not proficient in English, with IQ tests in English and administrators who speak English (*Diana v. California State Board of Education,* 1973). The courts agreed that students whose primary language was not English should be offered English instruction (*Lau v. Nichols,* 1974) and not be penalized with a placement in special education when the barrier to success in school is speaking a language other than English.

These practices of labeling students with disabilities based on biased testing practices seem antithetical to providing an equal opportunity for education. This practice provides more evidence of the social nature of the disabled designation. The sense of confusion and disappointment for the apparent callous disregard for the individual student is eloquently expressed by Sullivan (2011),

> For a field built on the principle of fairness, formed in the wake of Brown V. Board of Education, and grounded in the rhetoric of the civil rights movement (Blanchett, 2006), ongoing disproportionality strongly indicates systemic problems of inequity, prejudice, and marginalization within the education system. (p. 318)

The Evolution of Special Education Law

Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Act of 1975, provided access for children labeled with disabilities to public school. The law mandated that all children be provided a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE). Each child labeled with a disability would have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) written to address his/her specific needs. The child and the parents of the child were guaranteed due process rights. Every child had the right to receive her/his education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). The last major provision of the law was that the federal government would financially assist state governments to educate children labeled with disabilities (Education for All Handicapped Act, 1975).

This law was reauthorized in 1990, and renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA was written with a focus on the child, not the "handicap";

the language throughout the law emphasized the individual, not the disability. The changes in 1990 expanded the eligibility categories of disability to include autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) and required the IEP include a transition plan beginning at age 14 (later to be required by age 16) to address services available after high school (IDEA, 1990).

In 1997, another reauthorization of IDEA outlined more procedural safeguards, the composition of the IEP committee, and the components of the IEP. The law focused on granting students labeled with disabilities access to the general curriculum and that they be able to participate in state assessments (IDEA, 1997). The participation in state assessments meant that schools must provide appropriate accommodations, and states and districts must develop and implement alternative assessment for those students who cannot participate in regular testing programs (Goertz, McLaughlin, Roach, Raber, 2000).

IDEA was reauthorized again in 2004. Included in the law were provisions to change eligibility procedures, provide early intervention services, make IEPs more relevant to student progress and to reduce paperwork, mandate all special education teachers be highly qualified, and address discipline procedures for students labeled with a disability (IDEA, 2004). IDEA 2004 also "strengthened provisions to reduce disproportionate representation of students from diverse cultures in special education" (Council for Exceptional Children, 2016a).

History of Special Education in Texas

In 1856, the Texas legislature passed legislation to establish a school for students labeled deaf and one for students labeled blind. The doors of the Texas Deaf and Dumb Asylum opened in January of 1857 in Austin. While the school has had a variety of name changes and campuses, it is still in operation. Even during the Civil War when the legislature could not pay the teachers, the school survived by the teachers and students farming and making their own clothes (Smyrl, 2010). In 1857, the Asylum for the Blind opened located also in Austin (Markham & Delahoussaye, 2010). By the early 1950s, both schools were placed under the jurisdiction of the Texas Education Agency (TEA). The Texas Legislature established the Deaf, Dumb, and Blind Institute for Colored Youth in 1887. In 1943, the State Colored Orphans Home was combined with the segregated school changing the name to the Texas Blind, Deaf, and Orphan school (Markham, 2010). It was not until 10 years after *Brown*, in 1965, when TEA was given jurisdiction over that school, that the school was dissolved and the students of color began attending the schools now known as the Texas School for the Deaf and the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (Markham & Delahoussaye, 2010; Smyrl, 2010). Both schools still operate as residential schools in Austin. As mentioned earlier, the State of Texas began providing a public education to students with speech impairments and physical disabilities in local districts by 1945. Over the next twenty years, services were offered for students who were labeled as "educable mentally retarded," "blind," "deaf," "trainable mentally retarded," "emotionally disturbed," and "brain injured" (TEA, 1965).

History of Standardized Testing in Texas

The State of Texas began assessing students on their mastery of basic skills in 1980 with the introduction of the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills. That year students in the third, fifth, and ninth grades were tested in math, reading, and writing. Six years later in 1986, TEA implemented a new test, the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimum Skills (TEAMS). The TEAMS was the first test that required students to pass to be eligible to graduate from high school. TEA began to write a standard curriculum of skills for the students in Texas, and in 1990, the State implemented the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). TAAS changed the focus from minimum skills to academic skills. From 1990 until 2002, the grade level and subjects that were assessed changed periodically, but reading, math, and writing were tested at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. The introduction of TAAS also brought testing in Spanish for English language learners. In 2001, students labeled with disabilities took the State Developed Alternative Assessment (SDAA) which tested students who met the requirements to be tested on their instructional level and not their grade level. This was the first statewide assessment administered to students receiving special education services.

Beginning in 2003, the Test of Academic Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) was given to student to assess their learning of the recently adopted state-mandated curriculum, the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TAKS was administered at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. This year began the Student Success Initiative which required students in the 3rd (reading only), 5th, and 8th

grades to pass the reading and math tests in order to be promoted to the next grade. The 5th and 8th grade promotion requirements were phased in over the next four years. High school students had to pass TAKS tests in the four core courses in order to graduate from high school.

Beginning in 2008, the state produced TAKS tests to be able to assess students labeled with disabilities to meet their various academic needs. TAKS Accommodated was based on the general test with some format changes and no field test questions. TAKS Modified was an alternative test based on modified academic achievement standards. The TAKS Alternative was an alternative test based on alternative academic achievement standards for students who had significant intellectual disabilities.

In 2012, the latest iteration of the standardized test in Texas was administered. The State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness or STAAR test was given at the elementary and middle school levels. At the high school level STAAR test consists of End of Course (EOC) exams. For students labeled with disabilities STAAR M and STAAR Alt were created. In 2015, the STAAR A was provided as an online assessment with embedded accommodations to assist students labeled with disabilities to replace the STAAR M which was discontinued that year. STAAR Alternative 2 was introduced (Texas Education Agency, 2014-2015, pp. 1-9).

This long history of standardized testing includes new test development to assess changes in the curriculum and college readiness. Some changes were made to meet the requirements of NCLB. All of these assessments are used by the State and the USDE to

determine if the school's students are making adequate progress. The discontinuation of the STAAR M exam is the subject of this study.

Standardized Testing and Students Labeled with Disabilities

One of the reasons for IDEA to be reauthorized in 2004, was to address the accountability requirements mandated by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. NCLB required each state to develop standards, to assess basic skills, and to show that their students had met Annual Yearly Progress (AYP). The scores of the students had to be reported in a disaggregated manner. All sub-groups of students' scores were evaluated and the schools and districts were given a rating by the state. The reporting of the "seven federally required student groups (African American, White, Hispanic, English Language Learner, (ELL), Special Education, Economically Disadvantaged, and All Students)" (TEA, 3/24/2015) ensured that no group of students could be educationally pushed aside. IDEA (2004) had included a provision that allowed for 1% of students, who had severe intellectual disabilities, be assessed with an alternative assessment. There were many concerns directed to the USDE regarding the fact that there were other special education students who were not able to master their grade level content, and as a result should not be made to take the grade level test. To address these concerns, the USDE developed the 2% rule.

> On May 10, 2005, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced new "common sense" guidelines in providing states additional flexibility in implementing the No Child Left Behind Act. On April 7, Spellings announced that states will be allowed to test up to 2% of students who still do not meet

> grade-level standards, even with high quality instruction. This new 2% subgroup of students is in addition to the separate 1% group of student with the most significant cognitive disabilities who are permitted to take alternate assessments aligned to alternate achievement standards. In the most recent announcement, Spellings stated that the Department of Education will allow schools to adjust their adequate yearly progress (AYP) for the 2005-2006 school year based on modified assessments it could have given to this 2 percent of students in the 2004-2005 school year under these new guidelines. (Council for Exceptional Children, 2016b, p. 1)

On April 7, 2005, Secretary Spellings was interviewed by Ray Suarez on National Public Radio. Spellings stated that because she had worked in education at the local, state, and federal level, she understood the concerns regarding NCLB from people across the country. Since the law was three years old, the USDE recognized some changes were needed. One of those changes discussed in the interview was the 2% rule. Suarez asked if this new rule was a way for schools to abuse the system and just place weak students in this category. Spellings assure him that:

> This additional flexibility is based on our sound science, and is based on what practitioners tell us are the number of kids who actually need much more intensive instruction, more, a different kind of assessment, and a different approach in order to meet their needs. For too long, actually, we have either said you're this or that. (Suarez, 2005)

Four years later, the next Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan would have a different opinion. At a Washington D.C. gala for the American Association for People with Disabilities he announced that the USDE would be moving away from the 2% rule and that "We will not issue another policy that allows districts to disguise the educational performance of 2 percent of students" (Bradshaw, 2011). In August of 2013, the Texas Education Commissioner, Michael Williams, sent a letter to district superintendents stating that

> The USDE has informed states that assessments based on modified standards for students served by special education cannot be used for accountability purposes after the 2013–2014 school year. Therefore, all STAAR Modified assessments will be administered for the final time during the 2013–2014 assessment cycle. Further information regarding plans for the inclusion of this population of students in the general assessment program beginning with the 2014–2015 school year will be forthcoming. (Williams, 2013)

As the Commissioner stated, the last exam given to students labeled with disabilities based on modified academic achievement standards was given in the spring of 2014. The Texas Education Agency spent the next year developing the assessment that is now known as STAAR A, or the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness.

Implementing Education Legislation, Regulations, and Policies

With the increasing involvement of the federal government in public education over the past 50 years, state departments of education and local school districts have been implementing legislation, regulations, and policies imposed from outside of their

districts. This current study examined the lived experiences of teachers and administrators from a school district in Texas over the first two years of implementing a policy that required students labeled with disabilities to be assessed over the entire grade level curriculum. This policy required a change of place, people, pedagogy, and philosophy.

Ware's (2014) article, "Changing Policy, Legislation and Its Effects on Inclusive and Special Education: A Perspective from Wales," only studied changes, including those to the special education program that the United Kingdom (UK) was implementing in their education system. She examined how the UK's special education policies and the Welsh bilingual policies were creating conflicts Welsh educational system. Her discussion regarding special education revolved around the limited choices of schools and programs. Her research focused on the macro-level policies of England and Wales, not the actual classroom implementation.

A study conducted by Heilig and Darling-Hammond (2008) is more closely related to the current study in that it examined the implementation of the high-stakes standardized testing policies in Texas. Their longitudinal mixed methods study examined whether the rewards and punishments given to schools in the accountability testing system improved education for students or encouraged school officials to "game the system. Their study revealed that many students were pushed out of school or into special education. During the period for which their data was collected, the standardized tests given to students labeled with disabilities were not counted towards the school's accountability rating.

Olsen and Sexton (2009) conducted a qualitative study related to a school implementing policies mandated from the federal and state levels. They interviewed six teachers from one school in California to understand what effects school reforms have on teachers and in turn how do teachers affect the school reforms. Olsen and Sexton found that the teachers felt threatened by the number of changes being made and the fact that the school administration did not respect their professionalism as teachers. The directives were top down with little communication between the teachers and the principals. At the end of that school year the principal and all of the assistant principals had retired or left the school.

Studies related to the inclusion of students labeled with disabilities in the general education classroom rarely examine the special educators' perspective. Jamgochian and Ketterlin-Geller (2015) provided guidance for IEP committees to decide upon appropriate accommodations to the general standardized test now that the two percent rule has been abolished. Although the participants in Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry, and McGinley's (2011) study were special education teachers, their study focused on the consultation-collaborative method of delivering instruction to students labeled with disabilities in the general education classroom. Their study differs from the current study in that this Texas district does not utilize this method of instruction.

Naraian (2010) conducted an ethnographic study of one special education teachers teaching in an inclusive setting. The author analyzed the experiences of the teacher through her making sense of including students labeled with disabilities into the general education classroom through the critical lens of DSE. This study discussed how

critical educators trouble the issue of "normalcy" in schools and ask the question of "inclusion into what" (p. 1685). This informative study is distinguished from the current study in that the perspective of only one teacher was examined, and her experiences were in a first grade classroom.

Social Justice Pedagogy

Approaching this study through the lens of the critical theory Disability Studies in Education (DSE), the following tenets were utilized: a) "the object of remediation [is shifted] away from the individual with an 'impairment' to the larger classroom and school context," b) "inclusion is as much a moral and political issue as it is an instructional one," c) "critical analysis of teacher education as informed by deficit model and the need to adopt a more critical stance towards school reform efforts that have deleterious effects on students with disabilities," d) "dabbling at the edges of our discipline or working incrementally will not lead to real change, but using the tools of DSE to question the most foundational assumptions of the field can," and e) "both normalcy and impairment are socially constructed" (Gallagher, Connor, & Ferri, 2014, pgs. 18-19). From a new branch of DSE which incorporates Critical Race Theory (CRT), Disability Critical Race Theory, this study also f) "privileges voices of marginalized populations," and recognizes g) "whiteness and Ability as Property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of white, middle class citizens" (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013, p. 11).

In an effort to understand the changes that teachers must make pedagogically, and often philosophically, to implement a change mandated by either a federal or state

agency, literature regarding deficit ideology, interest convergence, and teacher transformation, will be explored.

Deficit Ideology

Inclusion is not merely placing students labeled with disabilities in the general education classroom. Teachers have to shed their deficit thinking (Valencia, 1997) in order to see students labeled with disabilities as capable learners in their classrooms. If a teacher holds low expectations for students based on a label, then the opportunities for academic growth are limited. Graham and Slee (2008) argue that "such cosmetic adjustments to traditional schooling (Slee & Allan, 2001) simply work to (re)secure an invisible centre from which constructions of Otherness and the designation of marginal positions becomes possible (Ferguson, 1990)" (p. 278). Without teachers challenging and replacing deficit thinking regarding students labeled with disabilities, they will continue to be marginalized in school; they just might happen to be sitting in a general education classroom.

Interest Convergence

Interest convergence is a tenet of Disability Critical Race Theory (DisCRiT) which originated in critical race theory (CRT). This idea states that "the interest of blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interests of whites" (Bell, 1980, p. 22). In this statement Derrick Bell, one of the founders of CRT, "contends that progress toward racial equality for blacks (and all people of color) is contingent upon the degree to which whites are calculated to benefit from that progress" (Jackson, 2011, p. 437). When applied to DSE, interest convergence

describes the situation of students labeled with disabilities improving only when the interests of the non-disabled in the education system are benefitted. An example for the interest convergence in the larger community is that "of curb cuts and wider sidewalks, which were useful for parents with baby strollers and people pulling wheeled suitcases, helped to justify the time and expense of making sidewalks accessible for people in wheelchairs" (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013, p.17). For an example relating to this study, now that the general test is the only option and that the scores of students labeled with disabilities will count towards the whole school, then students labeled with disabilities can join the general education classroom.

Teacher Transformation/Transformational Change

The Coherence Framework developed by the Public Education Leadership Project at Harvard University informs the framework developed in this project as it recognizes the layers of governmental entities and the different stakeholders that all need to be considered when implementing policy. Specifically, the Coherence Framework recognizes "Putting a district-wide strategy into practice requires building a coherent organization that connects to teachers' work in classrooms and enables people at all levels to carry out their part of the strategy" (Public Education Leadership Project, n.d.).

A district can require the implementation of any new policy or strategy, but unless the thoughtful professional development of teachers is central to the implementation, no real or lasting change will occur. Not only do teachers and the realities in which they work have to be considered, in order for teacher *transformation* to occur the school district must view teachers as individuals capable of such

transformation. Kennedy (2014) addressed the perspective of a school district regarding the professional autonomy of its teachers and how that perspective affects the professional development that teachers are provided. She explained "that autonomy is both an individual construct that can contribute to teacher agency and a profession-wide construct that shapes the ways in which teachers are governed, regulated, trusted and respected as a professional group" (p. 694). Kennedy borrows from the work of Sachs (2001) to describe educational systems' perspectives of teachers which provide the "ideological and political driving forces" (p. 694) behind the choice for professional development.

> Sachs claims that, 'values of managerialism have been promoted as being universal: management is inherently good, managers are the heroes, managers should be given the room and autonomy to manage and other groups should accept their authority', going on to suggest that, 'These ideologies have found themselves to be prevalent in education bureaucracies as well as in schools themselves, especially in the management practices found in schools' (2001, p. 151). This managerial perspective on professionalism privileges efficiency and compliance, and externally imposed accountability features highly. Democratic professionalism, on the other hand, positions teachers as change agents and, 'seeks to demystify professional work and build alliances between teachers and excluded constituencies of students, parts and members of the community on whose behalf decisions have traditionally been made either by professions or by

> the state' (2001, p. 152). This perspective privileges collaboration, openness, teacher agency and an overt commitment to social justice. (pgs. 694-695)

Kennedy provides a framework by which the administrators of a district can compare their professional development choices to the amount of autonomy provided to the teachers. The continuum on her framework runs from "transmissive, training models" to "transformative, collaborative professional inquiry models" (p. 693).

Training teachers with the goal of developing more autonomous individuals with a sense of agency to plan and create lessons to meet the education needs of all of their students requires a recognition that the act of teaching is much more "messy" than simply following the published scope and sequence. Keck (2015) asserted that

> Teachers are abandoned by education, or by the institutions of education, at the point where the idealizations and simplifications that constitute the institution's intended rationality require that all experiences which question this rationality be ignored or marginalized. Attention to teachers' narratives often reveals the struggle of these teachers against the exclusion of their real experience and their voice by the structures, theories and systems of the institution. (pp. 22-23)

Keck would support Kennedy's (2014) assertion that professional development that simply trains teachers to follow the proscribed, standardized curriculum encourages teachers to deny their real experiences in the classroom. On the other hand, professional development that focuses more on the personal agency of teachers, provides the teachers an opportunity to improve their practice through a recognition of the reality of their classrooms. Providing the environment to develop "conscious attention is more than an

activity; rather, once cultivated it has a transformative and curative capacity, offering teachers an ethical tool to help them determine their best course of action in any particular circumstance" (Keck, 2015, p. 44).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Over the past five decades, the federal government has become increasingly involved in the operation of public schools. From the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA) in 1965, which, in chapter VI of the legislation, provided some monetary support to districts teaching students labeled with disabilities, to its later reauthorization of the act now referred to as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001, the US Department of Education (USDE) now provides mandates regarding instruction in the public schools. Similarly, the law governing the education of students labeled with disabilities first passed in 1975 (94-142) and has had multiple reauthorizations (IDEA) with one in 1997 and again in 2004. The most recent mandate from the USDE regarding students in Texas stated that students labeled with disabilities will no longer be allowed to take a modified high-stakes exam. This mandate required that students labeled with disabilities, whose IEP committees "are reasonably certain that the students will not achieve grade-level proficiency within the year covered by the students' IEPs" (USDE, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2007), were now required to master the general curriculum and take the high-stakes test without any modification of the content. This change not only affects the amount of instructional material that the students are required to master, but also dismisses the logic of the IEP (Individual Education Plan) committee members who decided that a modified curriculum was warranted for certain students.

The researcher chose phenomenology as the method for this study. Through phenomenology one studies the selected phenomenon, i.e. implementing the general

curriculum to students labeled with disabilities, with an "attitude [that] is a radical and disciplined way of seeing with fresh, curious eyes" (Finlay, 2014, p. 122). It is understanding the everyday, seemingly mundane, actions and interactions of teachers and the individuals with whom they work that provides the opportunities for children to learn or not. The researcher "[engaged] in the minutiae" of the teachers' experiences in a "systematic, intensive, and intuitive" way to provide an analysis to ultimately "[describe] and [evoke] the phenomenon in all its subtlety and rich layers" (p. 122). All of the policies and *best practices* directed at teaching students labeled with disabilities are only meaningful when embodied in the actions of individual teachers. The lived experiences of the special educators and students should be considered by school districts and legislatures when policies are developed.

Research Design

The researcher conducted a phenomenological, interpretive study (Merriam, 2009; Van Manen, 1990, 2014) to understand how secondary, special education teachers have experienced implementing the general, or un-modified, curriculum to their students labeled with disabilities who will no longer be able to take a modified STAAR exam at the end of the year. The researcher explored the lived experiences of special education teachers, and the special education administrators who trained them, in Texas who are adapting their curriculum and pedagogy to provide students labeled with disabilities the knowledge they need to be successful with the general curriculum and high-stakes test since the USDE rescinded Texas's waiver, ESEA Federal regulation (§ 200.1(e)) and

stated that the modified high-stakes test would no longer be counted towards the accountability rating.

In order to conduct an interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher designed research questions that elicited the "lived meaning of a human phenomenon" (Van Manen, 2014, p. 297) but did not ask for "people's opinions, views, perceptions or interpretations of an issue or phenomenon" (p. 298). The questions that asked for the lived experience prompted responses that included specific experiences that contain "detail, concreteness, vividness, and lived-throughness" (p. 297) to provide the researcher the material with which she conducted a phenomenological analysis.

The original design of this study called for the research to take place over the summer immediately following the first school year that the modified STAAR test was not available to Texas students labeled with disabilities. This timing would have allowed the detailed memories of the specific experiences of the special education teachers to be fresh in their minds. The realities of securing IRB approval from the university, securing approval from the school district, and the special education administration sending my invitation to the teachers to participate meant that my first interview did not occur until October. The teacher interviews were conducted from October of 2015, through January of 2016. The interviews taking place in the second school year with no modified exam made it challenging for the teachers to isolate their lived experience to only the first year of preparing all students for the grade level standardized exam.

While the delay in conducting interviews complicated the collection of the data the researcher had originally intended to collect, it presented her with new data that gave

the research a new focus. As a novice researcher, the researcher's concerns about this change in direction were alleviated with Van Manen's (1990) suggestion that "a certain openness is required in human science research that allows for choosing directions and exploring techniques, procedures and sources that are not always foreseeable at the outset of a research project" (p. 162). With the teachers having experienced not only the first year of this change, but the subsequent summer and before school training as well as a second year of teaching students to prepare them for the general education exam, the researcher broadened the focus of this study. This change was necessary for two reasons: a) the teachers had a difficult time not including the lived experiences they were having the second year, and b) the teachers had opinions and a perspective regarding the implementation of the new policy based on the training that they had received. The researcher also realized that she did not have enough data collected to sufficiently answer the third research question: How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in schools throughout the district? To rectify this lack of data and in keeping with qualitative and phenomenological practice, the researcher was led to collect additional data to understand the contextual factors that influenced the lived experiences of the teachers. These contextual factors included the district's professional development, directives from administration regarding student placement, and the patterns of teacher-special education administrator interactions. An amendment to the original IRB application and district permission was granted to include special education administrator interviews to this study.

While phenomenology was still the methodological approach I used for my study, I expanded my research to include interviews with district level special education administrators to understand their lived experiences with this change as well as the training and the directives that the teachers received related to the change. Freeman (2014) offered that "reminding ourselves that the hermeneutic task is to help the topic of our interest say something new, the process needs to be one where we are flexible and able to switch approaches when needed" (p. 829).

Phenomenological methods, including question development, interviewing technique, and data analysis were used throughout the study. To examine how special education teachers experienced preparing students labeled with disabilities for the STAAR test without modifications, the researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with both special education teachers and administrators to seek insight into the following research questions:

1. How do special education professionals in Texas describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test within the context of their local district?
2. How has this recension of the ESEA Federal Regulation § 200.1(e) waiver affected the educators' practice and philosophy regarding student learning?
3. How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in schools throughout the district?

Participants

In this qualitative research study, secondary special education teachers who teach students labeled with high incidence disabilities (i.e. Learning Disability, Emotional Disturbance, and Other Health Impairment) and the administrators who provide the professional development and support to these teachers were asked to participate in interviews. To answer these research questions, the researcher followed the methods of interpretive phenomenology. The researcher was interested in how special education teachers and administrators experienced the transition from teaching a modified curriculum to teaching the general curriculum to students labeled with disabilities. This phenomenological method was chosen because, as Van Manen (1990) so eloquently explains:

> Phenomenological research reintegrates part and whole, the contingent and the essential, value and desire. It encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives. It make us thoughtfully aware of the consequential in the inconsequential, the significant in the taken-for-granted. (p.8)

The researcher conducted a purposeful sample, specifically a criterion sample (Creswell, 2013). As Vagle (2009) described, this purposeful sampling followed "Polkinghorne's (1989) participant selection requirements for phenomenological research. First, the participants had to have *experienced the phenomenon under investigation*…Second, *the participant have the capacity to provide full and sensitive descriptions of the experience*" (emphasis in original, p. 586). The researcher contacted the district to find

certified secondary special education teachers who teach students labeled with high incidence disabilities (learning disability (LD), emotional disturbance (ED), and other health impairment (OHI)) who are required to take the STAAR test. The teacher participants previously taught students to prepare them for a modified standardized test (STAAR M) for at least two years prior to 2014-2015. The teachers have taught students labeled with disabilities in either a resource (small class with only student labeled with disabilities) or co-teach (inclusion) setting for the 2014-2015 school year. Secondary teachers were necessary for this study because the students they teach have had multiple years in school being taught a modified curriculum, but are now expected to be assessed with their grade level general assessment. The researcher interviewed five teachers from both the middle and high school settings, with follow up questions to each to clarify emergent themes, to collect data that expresses a variety of lived experiences of special education teachers. In addition to the five teachers, the researcher interviewed four district level special education administrators, who provided the training and support to the special education teachers previously interviewed.

To identify teachers willing to participate in this study, the school district's special education director sent an email to all appropriate secondary special education teachers in the district. The email included a paragraph from the researcher as well as a statement from the special education director inviting teachers to participate in the study. The recruitment letter describing the purpose of the study, participant involvement, and participant rights with attached informed consent forms (see Appendix A) were sent as attachments to the email. The teachers who responded to the request were asked the

questions on the Criteria Checklist (Appendix B). Once the researcher determined that the criteria was met then an interview was scheduled for a mutually agreed upon time at a public library that was convenient for the participant. The researcher also employed the snowballing technique asking interviewees to recommend another colleague to be interviewed. One teacher who was recommended did not fit the criteria and thus was not interviewed. The special education administrators were contacted directly through email to ask for their participation. This direct request was necessary as there were specific administrators who provided the professional development and support for the teachers with whom interviews had been conducted. The researcher sent the informed consent as an attachment to the email requesting the interview (see Appendix D). With the consent of the participants, all of the interviews were audio recorded and notes were taken.

To ensure the confidentiality of the participants, the researcher did not meet with any teacher on school district property. After the initial email contact from the participant, the researcher contacted the teachers through personal email addresses and on personal phones. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher asked the teachers to choose a pseudonym to be used throughout the interview. To protect the identity of the special education administrators, they too chose a pseudonym, but the interviews were conducted during business hours at their office for their convenience.

The following table, Table 1, provides the participants information including their pseudonym, current position, range of years that they have spent as a teacher and administrator, and the individuals' racial category.

Table 1 Participant Description.

Participant Pseudonym	Position in Special Education	Years of Teaching	Years in Administration	Race
Alice	Teacher	11-15 years	0 years	White
Betty	Teacher	21-25 years	0 years	White
Catherine	Teacher	16-20 years	0 years	Black
Delilah	Teacher	11-15 years	0 years	White
Essence	Teacher	11-15 years	0 years	Black
Frances	Administrator	16-20 years	16-20 years	White
Gia	Administrator	11-15 years	16-20 years	White
Hannah	Administrator	6-10 years	1-5 years	White
Riley	Administrator	1-5 yeas	21-25 years	White

As a researcher concerned with issues of social justice and equity within the public school system, the researcher is concerned with the increasingly diverse suburban districts (Holme, Diem, & Welton, 2014; Milner, 2008; Reardon, Yun, & Chmielewski, 2012), and the issues of marginalization related to students of color, students living in low socioeconomic households, and students learning English, many of whom are also students labeled with disabilities attending these suburban districts. According to Wells, Ready, Duran, Grzesikowski, Hill, Roda, Warner, and White (2012), the "traditional paradigms of 'cities' versus 'suburbs' are rapidly evolving…in terms not only

demographics but also economic transformations" (p. 128). Wells, et al. go on to explain, "Indeed it is increasingly clear that contemporary urban and suburban communities *each* contain pockets of poverty and affluence, often functioning as racially and ethnically distinct spaces" (p. 128). The district chosen for this study is a diverse, suburban district outside of a large city in Texas.

According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA), the district that participated in this research is classified as a Major Suburban district (Texas Education Agency, 2013-2014, ¶ 3). The district began in the late 1930s in the middle of a farming community. The population began growing at the end of the 20th century. In 1987, the district served nearly 25,000 students, and less than 20% were African American, Hispanic, Asian, or Native American. In less than 30 years, the district has almost doubled in size with close to 48,000 students in 2015. Yet, this growth is largely due to the influx of culturally diverse families, who presently constitute close to 65% of students enrolled in local schools. Table 2 lists the demographic changes in the district specifically identifying the years 1987, 2004, and 2015.

Table 2 School District Demographics over Time. Data obtained from Texas Education Agency, 1987, 2004, 2015.

	1987		**2004**		**2015**	
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Total Student Population	~25,000		~33,000		~48,000	
African American	1,837	7.7%	4,849	13.7%	6,923	14.1%
Hispanic	1,448	6.07%	8,430	23.8%	18,985	38.6%
White	19,293	80.88%	19,286	54.4%	17,471	35.5%
Asian*	1,241	5.2%	2,792	7.9%	4,162	8.5%
Pacific Islander*					50	0.1%
Native American	34	0.14%	117	0.3%	205	0.4%
Economically Disadvantaged			8,159	23%	21,154	43.0%
English Language Learner			3,508	9.9%	6,954	14.1%
At Risk**					20,345	41.4%
Special Education***			3,647	10.3%	4,028	8.2%

*data combined in one category-Asian/Pacific Islander in 2002
**category not available in 2002 or earlier
***data not available in 1987

Data Collection

In order to understand the experiences of teachers enacting a change in educational policy, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. In order to understand the context of the teachers' and administrators' lived experiences (Weiss, 2015), at the beginning of all of the interviews some demographic information was gathered by asking a few structured questions. The rest of the interview was semi-

structured. Semi-structured interviews contained open-ended questions that allowed the participant to expand on his/her experiences. “This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the [participant], and to new ideas on the topic” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this phenomenological, interpretive study as Merriam explained that “the researcher attempts to uncover the essence of an individual’s experience; such an interview ‘focuses on the deep, lived meanings that events have for individuals, assuming that these meanings guide actions and interactions’ (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 105)” (p. 93). The interview questions (see Appendix C for teachers; Appendix E for administrators) were used as a guide for the researcher. In order to answer the research questions, all of the interview questions were asked of the participants, but the participants’ responses facilitated the order in which the questions were asked. Some responses prompted the researcher to ask additional probing questions. To understand the lived experiences of these teachers and administrators, the researcher actively listened to the participants to accurately document their experiences.

In an effort to produce a *good* phenomenological study, the researcher must be sure to elicit rich descriptions of experiences, incidents, or anecdotes, and to lead the participants away from providing their “views, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, and explanations of [their] experiences” (Van Manen, 2014, p. 299). As stated earlier, the timing of the interviews, being the middle of the school year currently preparing students for the general exam, made it difficult for the teachers and administrators to only reflect on their experiences and not voice their views, opinions,

beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, and explanations. The inherent political nature of educating students labeled with disabilities came through in each interview.

The teacher interviews lasted between one and one half hours. The administrator interviews lasted between 30 minutes to one hour. As the interviews were coming to a close, the researcher asked if there was any additional information that the interviewee would like to provide. The researcher informed the participant that she would type up the interview and send a copy by email for the participant to review. The researcher asked the participant to check the transcription and to communicate any changes that the participant felt were necessary to make the transcription as accurate as possible. The researcher also encouraged the participant to contact her if the participant has any other information that they would like to share later (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 271).

Immediately following the interview, the researcher made field notes relating to the physical demeanor of the participant, logistical ideas for the next interview, and other comments to provide rich understandings of the interviews. In a separate, reflexive journal, the personal reflections of the researcher were written to *bracket* her experiences, and accompanying biases, regarding special education, testing, and special education teacher perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009).

To address the confidentiality of the participants, the initial information containing the participants name and contact information are maintained on a password protected flash memory drive. The audio files recorded during the interviews do not have the participants' name written on them nor stated during the interview. The researcher only used the pseudonym when referring to the participant during the

interview. These audio files were converted to text files, both stored on the password protected flash memory drive. The original audio files will be deleted six months after the defense of the researcher's dissertation.

In order to prepare for the semi-structured interviews, the researcher contacted a previous special education teacher colleague to pilot the interview questions. The pilot interview helped the researcher understand the pacing of the questions and allowed her to become proficient with the recording device. The colleague reminded her to maintain a supportive and non-judgmental tone.

Data Analysis

"The problem of phenomenological inquiry is not always that we know too little about the phenomenon we wish to investigate, but that we know too much" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 46). This comment by Van Manen identifies the necessary step for the researcher to *bracket* her personal experiences and biases and come to the data gathered in the interviews with an openness to discovering the themes that are present in the teachers' experiences. Van Manen (2014) explains that not only bracketing, but phenomenological reduction is necessary.

> In the reduction one needs to overcome one's subjective or private feelings, preferences, inclinations, or expectations, that may seduce or tempt one to come to premature, wishful, or one-sided understanding of an experience that would prevent one from coming to terms with a phenomenon as it is lived through. (p. 224)

Prior to conducting the first interview, the researcher wrote in her reflexive journal "making a list of [her] assumptions, expectations, and hopes for the findings" (Finlay, 2014, p. 136) of her research. The researcher assumed that preparing students for the general standardized exam would necessitate changes in teaching practices. She assumed that there would be some resistance to the change from both teachers and students. She hoped to be able to give voice to the special education teacher and to contribute to changing the field of special education. Throughout the interviews, she found herself trying to place the teacher or administrator in one of two categories: one who either believes in the a) medical model, or the b) social model of disability (Weiss, 2015). During the first interview, the participant asked the researcher a question that prompted her to discuss the two models of, or perspectives on, disability. During the rest of the interviews, she briefly described the two models and allowed the participants to discuss their thoughts regarding the models.

The data collected from the interviews have been maintained in both digital audio and written forms. Using the audio recorded interviews, the researcher transcribed the interviews using a word processing program. Through the transcription process the researcher spent much time replaying the recording to be sure that the words and the feelings of the participant were captured in the transcription. The transcribed interviews were uploaded into a web based program called Dedoose (Weisner & Lieber, 2013). Dedoose is an online, collaborative qualitative data analysis tool.

Dedoose is a program designed to organize data. The program does not conduct any analysis or coding of information. The researcher did all of the coding and analysis.

Dedoose provided a platform onto which digital data can be organized and viewed in different charts to help the researcher conduct her analysis (Dedoose: Great Research Made Easy, 2016). The experiences and information described in the interviews were examined in a detailed manner looking at "every single sentence or sentence cluster and ask[ing the question], *What does this sentence or sentence cluster reveal about the phenomenon or experience being described?*" (emphasis in original, Van Manen, 1990, p. 93). Examining the experience sentence-by-sentence allows the researcher to discover what each sentence might "reveal about the nature" (p. 95) of the experience described. These digital transcriptions were used to discover essential and thematic statements, and those statements were assigned codes.

The researcher read the transcription and applied one or multiple codes to a selected sentence or phrase. After all of the teacher interviews were coded, there were 159 initial codes. The researcher ran a Code Application chart. That Chart demonstrated which codes were applied to which interviews and how often those codes were used. The excerpts of the codes that were only used once or twice were included in codes that were better descriptions. The process reduced the codes to 125. Those 125 codes were organized into 13 main codes. The administrator transcriptions were coded using the 13 main codes. After coding the administrators, there were five new codes that had to be organized into the 13 main codes. In addition to coding the descriptions of the direct experiences of the special education teachers and administrators, the additional information (their views, opinions, beliefs, perceptions, interpretations, and explanations) provided in the interviews was also coded by sentence or sentence cluster.

While the researcher is aware that, as Van Manen (1990) cautioned, "One should not confuse phenomenological-hermeneutical analysis of texts as a mere variation of well-known techniques of content analysis, or as identical to analytic-coding, taxonomic, and data-organizing practices common to ethnography or grounded theory method" (p. 29), the data gathered in the interviews led to coding from two different perspectives. In addition to the phenomenological analysis of teachers' and administrators' lived experiences, there was additional information gathered that allowed for analysis of the recursive process of policy implementation.

The process of identifying emerging themes as well as adjusting interview questions to better gather needed information began with the first interview and continued after each subsequent interview. Memos were written throughout the data collection and analysis to document the emergence and the identification of themes (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; personal communication Lincoln, 2014). The researcher's memos also revealed the necessity to add the administrator interviews to this research project.

The iterative process of "reading, writing, re-reading, and re-writing" (Giles, 2010, p. 1513), then "dwelling, explicating, and languaging…to transform analysis into *engaging* language capable of describing and evoking the phenomenon in all its subtlety and rich layers" (emphasis in original, Finlay, 2014, p. 122) has been interspersed with discussions of the researchers interpretations with her chair and co-chair. The researcher then engaged the literature to "shed more light on the possible meaning inherent in the phenomenon" (Giles, p. 1513). The reading and writing continued with the feedback

from the participants. The goal was to produce a complex, interesting, and meaningful interpretation of the lived experiences of special education teachers and administrators in Texas teaching students labeled with disabilities for the first time without the option of a modified curriculum and test. A framework to understand the process of how special education school and district personnel adopt, implement, and reflect on federal and state mandates was developed from the data.

Trustworthiness

In order for this study and its findings to be considered credible, the researcher employed the following strategies. To provide for the trustworthiness of the data gathered from the interviews, *member checks* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with each participant were conducted. A brief discussion at the end of the interview allowed the researcher to check that the participant had an opportunity to add any information that she felt was important. After the interview was transcribed, the researcher provided the document to the participant to check for the accuracy of the transcription. Finally, the participants were provided an opportunity to review and comment on the researcher's interpretations of their experiences in the findings of the study (Merriam, 2009). The researcher reflected on the participants' feedback and made appropriate changes or additions before the final draft was written. Additionally, the *reflexive journal* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) kept by the researcher provides the reader with an understanding of the researcher's worldview, theoretical orientation, and any assumptions or biases (Merriam, 2009) that she brought to the study. This information is provided as an *audit trail* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) to provide

transparency to the research process. Finally, in an effort to provide the reader an understanding of applicability to her/his situation, the researcher provided a *rich, thick description* that brings the lived experiences of the participants to life to reveal something new about the phenomenon of implementing the general curriculum with students labeled with disabilities.

Positionality

As a special education teacher for 17 years, I believed in the educational system that identified students with special needs, labeled those students, and then segregated them from the general education classes. I did not question the ranking and ordering of students who did not find educational success in the "mainstream" classrooms at the school. I believed that the testing and labeling of students were necessary to "get *those kids* (or from a paternalistic view *my kids*) the help they needed." While I never challenged the special education paradigm of different levels of intelligence that require segregated classes and reduced curriculum, I did change, or deviate from the expectations/policies/rules, when I felt was necessary to meet the needs of the specific students whom I taught. Yet, I unquestioningly fell in line with the idea that children who learn differently should be in a different setting. I rarely challenged the special education paradigm as a whole, until I met a student that I felt did not need to be in a segregated classroom. As a secondary teacher, the students labeled with disabilities that I taught had typically spent many years in special education classrooms after at least two years of failure in the general education classroom.

As a former special education teacher, I am well aware of the political nature of public education, especially special education. The politics not only include the passing of education laws and changing of regulations, but the politics at the local level. The politics at the school and district level involve discussions of how much money is spent to educate students labeled with disabilities. Individual schools face the politics of which teachers *have* to have *those* students with IEPs in their general education classes. The politics of two teachers sharing one classroom. The politics of implementing accommodations and modifications. Although it had been ten years since I left, I did teach in the district where the study was conducted, so I was aware of their particular situation.

When the researcher is sensitive to the nuances of the interview topic, this sensitivity can guide the interviewer to "probe more intensively into the meaning" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 30) of the interview statements. This sensitivity and probing does not negate the researcher bracketing her own experience and her openness "to new and unexpected phenomena" (p. 30). This does suggest that the interviewer should approach the interview with an air of "qualified naiveté" (p. 31). To borrow the concept of the "outsider-within" from Hill Collins (2000), I have a deep understanding of what it means to be a special education teacher. I have many experiences of my own implementing policies generated at the federal and state levels of government, and having taught in this particular district, which gives me the status of "within". I am currently a researcher who has not taught students labeled with disabilities in secondary school for the past four years. I have also never experienced teaching students labeled

with disabilities without the option of that student taking a modified standardized exam which provides me the status of "outsider". Thus I acknowledge my subjectivity as a special educator, but have been away from the classroom for enough time to be open to following the data where it takes me.

When I left the special education classroom and the educational world of high stakes accountability, I began to challenge the premise of the system. I was exposed to curriculum theorists such as Paulo Freire, William Pinar, Maxine Greene, Madeline Grumet, and many others who did not accept the status quo in public education. I was also introduced to scholars who challenged the organization and implementation of special education such as Linda Ware, Nirmala Erevelles, Beth Ferri, and David J. Connor, and many others. Through this new lens, I desired to understand the lived experiences of the professionals still working in the US public education system to begin to make significant, sustained, and meaningful changes to benefit all educators and most importantly their students.

So I come to this topic through wrestling with my own contradictory thoughts – I do not like the federal intrusion into public education, but in the case of Texas losing the waiver that intrusion created a disruption in schooling that I believe can be positive for students. I also believe that without this federal intrusion, this change would not have been generated from within. My experience informs me that all students will not be able to meet the same benchmarks, nor should they have to. Through the lens of DSE, I recognize the audacity of that assumption that limits students based on their label placed on them by teachers, like me.

My status as a novice researcher and an unskilled interviewer allowed the multifaceted world of the teacher to be exposed. While I set out to only gather lived experiences told in the form of stories by teachers, my limited interviewing experience and question development left the teachers unable to tell their story without deviating from my description of the format I desired.

Fortunately for me and my research project, my training as a qualitative researcher and the guidance from my dissertation committee chair and co-chair allowed me to attend to the data as it existed, not as I wished it was. Rejecting the positivist notion that as the researcher I control the data, that it is mine to manipulate as I see fit, I took a step back from my initial design to see what in fact my participants had provided me. It is in that partnership of researcher and participant, and the constructivist stance of knowledge building (Lincoln & Guba, 2013), teacher as learner, that I found the participants provided for me the framework of Praxis Convergence.

CHAPTER IV

THE PROCESS OF PRAXIS CONVERGENCE

Introduction

The district where I conducted this research is a district with 48,000 students being taught in four high schools, nine intermediate schools, and 28 elementary schools. This district is located just outside of a large city in Texas. Forty years ago the area was mostly farmland, but as the city has grown and some large companies moved to the area, the community has become more of a major suburban area with the cultural, economic, and linguistic diversity of a major city. As Frances, who has worked in the district for 38 years, described the change, "Despite the growth in the community, the district continues their progressive educational work while preserving the district's heritage." Because of the changes in demographics described in the previous chapter, this district has multiple layers of diversity that could be the focus of a study. The changes in the ethnicity and racial identification of the students as well as their families' income status and home language all could be factors into how the district implements federally and state directed policies. These demographic changes could also influence the identification and labeling of students with disabilities. While recognizing the rapid diversification of this district, the specific issues of race, ethnicity, family income, and home language will be examined in future studies. The current study focused on the broader distinction between students served in special education and those served by general education and how this change in policy affected secondary education through the lived experiences of both special education teachers and administrators.

When designing this research, I took note of the cautions to novice researchers regarding the difficulty of conducting a true phenomenological study. I undertook an ongoing effort to guard against allowing the findings to stray from providing the meaning of the *lived experience* (Van Manen, 1990, pgs. 26-27.). During the interviews teachers and administrators related their experiences to me, but they also discussed their opinions, their motivations, and their perspectives, which are not their *lived experiences* but what they think and feel about their *lived experiences*, regarding the loss of the waiver to provide students a modified exam. The following analysis is based on the experiences of the teachers and administrators when implementing policy directives from the federal and state government. Initially it was my intent to remain faithful to the methodology of phenomenology and focus only on the lived experiences of the teachers. Yet after doing the work of interviewing, writing, and reflecting, I found that the story was not complete without an understanding of the larger educational systems and context that places outside pressure on teachers which affects their daily interactions with their students, the parents, and other professionals. Unlike the traditional phenomenological perspective of understanding the lived experiences of individuals (teachers) who had lived a particular experience, I chose to interview a second group of individuals (administrators) to provide a more complete understanding of the experience of implementing a federal policy directive.

By including both the lived experiences of special education teachers and special education administrators in their efforts to implement the policy directive, I follow Ted Aoki's (2005) model of "curriculum implementation as situational praxis" (p.116). Aoki,

a curriculum scholar who studied phenomenology in education, chose to view implementation as "grounded in human experiences within a classroom situation" (p. 116). Although Aoki focused on teachers and students, in this study the focus on the policy implementation directed my examination to the lived experiences of teachers and administrators.

> Teachers and [administrators] can be seen as co-actors acting with and on [the policy directive], as they dialectically shape the reality of classroom experiences [through professional development training] embedded in a crucible of the classroom [, school, and district] culture of which they are a part and in which they have inserted themselves. This reality is the situation meaning that the teacher and the [administrators] cocreate, guided as they are by their personal and group intentionalities. (p. 121)

With this greater insight into the context in which teachers and administrators work to educate students in a dynamic policy environment, an understanding of the journey that education professionals take when implementing new policy from the state or federal government developed. This wider policy context and implementation processes created a period of struggle within the district which eventually led to a transformation of educator beliefs and practices.

As Rocha (2015) discussed in his work on a phenomenological description of education, he recognized the realities of the "politics of schooling" and the "psychology of teaching." I examined the tension that exists between the two while also recognizing that the "difference between the politics of the school and the psychology of teaching

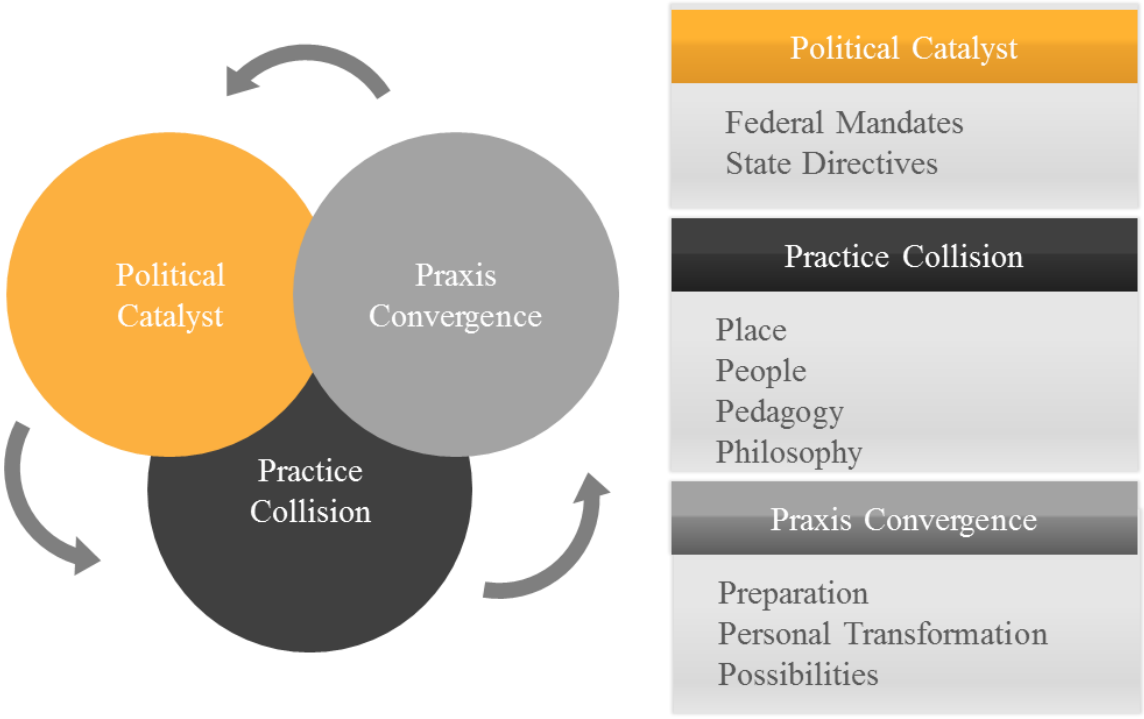
points to a profound synergy between them" (p. 62). The decisions that teachers make regarding subject material, pacing, assessments, and other pedagogical matters are always made in the context of the demands and pressures placed on them by their peers, administrators, parents, and policy-makers. In this way their lived experiences are partly their own, but also a shared reality within which personal experiences are crafted. During my interviews with teachers, even though I was asking questions to elicit stories of lived experiences of their interactions with students, parents, and administrators (see Appendices C and E), the discussion of politics driving the school policy was a recurring topic. I sought to develop an understanding of this intrusion of law makers into the classroom and how that intrusion was reconciled by the special education professionals.

The analysis process developed an analytical framework with three cyclical moments that reflect the shared realities of teachers' and administrators' during the implementation of the new policy directive in question. The first moment was the Political Catalyst, or the new policy directive, that provided the impetus to make changes in the education of students labeled with disabilities. The change in the federal law, and as I learned through interviews with administrators a directive from the State of Texas,

required changes in practice. These changes collided with the current operations within the district which gave rise to the second moment of the framework, Practice Collision. Practice Collision was signified by local shifts in the place, people, pedagogy, and philosophy of education regarding the instruction of students labeled with disabilities. These collisions gradually gave way to Praxis Convergence, or a set of newly developed normative praxes, which were actualized through professional development, personal transformation, and the vision of possibilities.

The Praxis Convergence framework emerged from a synthesis of the shared experiences of participants. First, I will provide an illustration of the Praxis Convergence framework in Figure 1 and outline the framework in further detail. Then I will provide data from teachers and administrators to provide voices to explain how this framework was *lived through* by the individuals in their respective positions. Finally, I will summarize how one district's special education personnel enacted the policy change that is the focus of this study — the loss of the federal waiver to provide some students with a modified exam.

Figure 1: Praxis Convergence Framework



The Political Catalyst, usually in the form of a change in education law or policy emanating from the federal or state level, may collide with the current practices in the classroom. A law or policy directive will require some changes in multiple levels of instructional practice. Some changes affect the setting in which students receive their instruction; some affect who is instructing the students. Often times the change will address some pedagogical aspect of the teaching. And occasionally, the change will challenge the philosophy under which the state, district, school, and individual teacher operate. After the collision of the new law or policy and the current classroom practices,

necessary changes are implemented, potentially resulting in educational innovation, praxis convergence. As the change is implemented, if appropriate and effective professional development is provided, individuals within the school system begin to transform their own praxes. With progressive policies and good professional development, new possibilities for students and their education begin to emerge, which may initiate another iterative catalysis, collision and convergence cycle. The term praxis is used for the third wave in this framework to identify that it is not only the *actions* of the teachers and administrators, but their *reflection* on their practices and philosophy that will provide students with the best possible education. The forthcoming sections will address the specific findings relative to my research questions, which are 1) How do special education teachers and administrators describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test within the context of their local district?; 2) How has the recension of ESEA Federal Regulation § 200.1(e) waiver affected the educators' practice and philosophy regarding student learning?; and 3) How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in schools throughout the district?

Political Catalyst

As public education is regulated by the State (Texas Education Agency) and special education is regulated by federal law (IDEA), changes in how schools operate are often the result of legislation at the state or federal level. As I began this study, I sought to understand the effects of the US Department of Education (USDE) rescinding the waiver, Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Federal regulation (§

200.1(e)). Specifically, I wanted to gain insights into 1) the lived experiences of teachers and administrators, 2) the changes to individuals' pedagogical practices and philosophies, and 3) the changes to the larger educational practices of schools and districts.

The USDE provided states an opportunity to apply for a waiver to allow the state flexibility in meeting certain provisions of the ESEA. The rescinded waiver that is the subject of this study specifically related to testing students labeled with disabilities with a modified assessment. During the interviews with administrators, I learned that changes in placement of students labeled with disabilities had been seriously undertaken within the district four years before the loss of the waiver. As Gia (Administrator) related to me,

> Well, I don't know that [moving more students labeled with disabilities] to [a general education classroom] is because of the waiver. We did realize that, OK, these kids are going to be taking the STAAR test; they need to be exposed to the curriculum.

I inquired if the district was being proactive after learning from the state that the federal waiver might be rescinded, and she informed me that

> Part of what we are expected to do in [this district] is to increase our inclusion. The State inclusion rate is 80% for special ed kids, and [this district] is like 55% maybe. So every year we're increasing the students that we have in gen ed classes. (Gia, Administrator)

I asked another administrator, Riley (Administrator), if the Texas Education Agency (TEA) had told the district to include more students labeled with disabilities into the general education setting. She replied,

> Oh, yes that's why we are doing this. It is the PBMAS, the Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System.

In the state of Texas there are multiple monitoring and accountability systems to document student progress and to identify areas that require improvement in districts and schools. One of the main reporting systems for special education is the Performance Based Monitoring Analysis System (PBMAS). The PBMAS report is sent to the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Program Monitoring and Interventions Division. According to the TEA website, "The Program Monitoring and Interventions Division develops and implements statewide review processes for special education (SPED). These processes promote program effectiveness, improve student performance, and monitor compliance for all students served through SPED programs" (Texas Education Agency, 2016, para. 1, Accessed on April 14, 2016). Through PBMAS, TEA determined that this district's percentage (55%) of students who spend over fifty percent of their day in the general education setting was below the state average (80%). In 2012, TEA directed the district to create a plan to increase the percentage of students labeled with disabilities in the general education setting. When asked how she felt about the directives to change coming from an outside agency, Riley (Administrator) explained:

> When you look at what the requirements are for the PDMAS, and then how the school district operates, it is certainly something that needs to be brought to our

> attention if we are not up to where we should be. It helps to have an outside entity come in because sometimes you can get so insulated in what you are doing, you think you are doing really well. Then someone comes in with data from all different districts, some that are similar to ours and you realize maybe not.

Riley revealed that although the mandates from the state have caused her and the other special educators more work, she recognized that the district needed to make changes.

Frances, another administrator, agreed that big changes in the special education practices in the district happened because of pressure from the government.

> I really think it is federal. There are federal changes in the IEP in that the IEPs are standard based.

Even though the federal mandates required significant changes in how Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were written, and where students labeled with disabilities receive their instruction, Frances recognized the benefits that the students gained from the change.

> But I think it is a good thing because that accountability is pushing up the expectations for the students. Because if your expectation is here [holding her hand horizontally close to the table], and it could be here [holding her hand horizontally high above the table], you are not going to close that gap. Because the gap gets bigger. So you put the expectation here [high above the table] with the appropriate instructional and learning conditions the chances of closing the gap are much greater. So the feds are right.

Both the teachers and the administrators that I interviewed understood that the changes on a policy level could be good for students, but putting the new policy into practice can be difficult. As Gia (Administrator) pointed out,

> Special ed is based on individual needs, and when you are saying that no student needs a modified test, that just doesn't make sense.

Betty, a teacher, discussed how these changes in practice have affected her secondary students. As a classroom teacher, she witnesses the ongoing implications of the changes in the accountability standards felt by her students and their parents. She related a conversation she had with a parent at open house regarding the loss of the modified test:

> She [the parent] said, "It just seems wrong." And I said, "Yeah it is wrong, I personally think it is not fair to the child because you are setting them up failure and you are focusing on the test and not the child. It is not child centered. And everything is data driven, but our saving grace is that we are looking for growth, so that's what I tell the students.

While Betty honestly shared her personal skepticism regarding the federal law, she implemented the changes and helped her students see the positive outcomes of the increased expectations. Betty also commented on the accountability aspect of the No Child Left Behind Act and the practical realities of the requirements when she said:

> So to me, No Child Left Behind is really kind of leaving everyone behind. Because there is so much focus on, I mean on the lower ends and on ESL, that the higher students are not really being challenged and teachers are being spread

> so thin on trying to create miracles on… I mean we can, but it takes time. You know, and so I think it is spread too thin.

Her frustration with NCLB is not the mandate of higher expectations for students, but that the schools have not been provided enough staff to have a reasonable opportunity to reach those goals.

While both teachers and administrators might have negative opinions regarding the policies and laws that come from the state and federal level, there is an understanding that the changes *are* happening, and the district, schools, teachers, and students will adjust to meet the new requirements. Frances (Administrator) described the training she provided for the teachers regarding the loss of the waiver.

> Once they have gone through [the training], they all like it. They come away with, "OK this makes sense." My main thing was to get the word out there that *I* am not making the change. It is a federal change, a state change, it aligns with the curriculum. It aligns with state assessment. No longer are we doing [the IEPs and assessments] on a functional level, it has to be standards based.

Examining the differences in Frances's and Betty's views of implementing these changes exemplifies the tension that can exist between new policy and current practice. Linda Ware (2004) explained this tension as a result of two commonly, and simultaneously, held ideologies. A belief in "social hierarchies" and communal ideals"; the first valuing "personal competition and stratifying practices" that reward individual, hard work, and the latter valuing "human dignity, commonality, equality, and reciprocity" (p. 20). Ware continued to explain the tension between the policy ideal and

the practical implementation. “The extensiveness of strong feelings about reciprocal morality among humans is heartening. Laws, regulations, and codes are often based on this ethical positioning. Nevertheless, their enforcement tends to be impeded due to the prevalence of hierarchical ideology” (p. 22). So the Political Catalyst is the impetus for the Praxis Convergence framework.

Practice Collision

As Gia’s (Administrator) and Betty’s (Teacher) earlier comments reflected, policy changes sometimes collide with current educational practices. Instead of districts confronting this collision, many chose to ignore the conflict that teachers feel. “Teachers are abandoned by education, or by the institutions of education, at the point where the idealizations and simplifications that constitute the institution’s intended rationality require that all experiences which question this rationality be ignored or marginalized” (Keck, 2015, p. 22). Many times policy changes are made with little or no recognition of the inner conflict, both professional and often personal, that occur in the real lives of teachers and administrators experiencing the change. This space, Practice Collision, recognizes that educators need the opportunity to express their discomfort and then reflect on their practice. This expression and reflection, if acknowledged, can lead to transformation. Ignoring or marginalizing the educators’ expressions of their feelings prevents the growth that can come from dialogue and reflection. Practice Collision gives voice to the uneasiness of change.

Through the data, I found that these collisions disrupt the teachers’ and administrators’ ideas about a) place, b) people, c) pedagogy, and d) philosophy. The first

challenge to the practices of this Texas district is place, where the students labeled with disabilities are being educated.

Place

With ninety-nine percent of the students[2] required to take their grade level standardized test at the end of the year, these students need to be in the general education classroom exposed to the entire curriculum to prepare for their grade level test.

> The struggle for the teachers is how to have a classroom full of 25 to 30 students who have a wide variety of students, not just special ed, but the ESL and GT and every need in there and trying to think about how to plan for the classroom. (Riley, Administrator)

Not only are students labeled with disabilities taught in the general education classroom, but as Riley mentioned there are students who are learning English, students ready for a deeper understanding of the concept, students who are tired, and students with many other specific needs. In addition to the varied levels of students' needs and abilities, the general education teacher is sharing a room with a special education teacher. Most special education teachers discussed having good experiences with coteaching, but one teacher felt that she was not welcome in the coteach space.

> And the coteach situation causes a lot of resentment because people have to share their home. (Catherine, Teacher)

[2] According to the US Department of Education only 1% of students in a district are permitted to take an alternative standardized exam. In Texas that exam is the STAAR Alt 2. "This 1 percent rule applies to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (approximately 10 percent of all students with disabilities or 1 percent of all students)" (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, 2009, p. xi).

While Catherine described typically having good relationships with her coteachers, she also said,

> On the other hand, I can name a few teachers who did not want me around. They did not feel the kids were special ed; they were lazy.

So not only are students labeled with disabilities physically located in a new place, but that place has to change to meet their needs. Because the modified exam is no longer an option, how the instruction is delivered also must change. Teachers must plan to prevent what can become "a 'class within a class' where students with learning and behavioral challenges are sometimes unintentionally segregated into study groups or small group instruction while the larger class moves ahead in the curriculum" (Vannest, Soares, Smith, & Williams, 2012, p. 67). Coteach classrooms are not simply places where two classes coexist in one room. The organization of the classroom and the lessons are changed. The focus is not on labels but on students' needs.

> Whoever needs that concept or skill that is being covered then regardless of what their label is, they go [to the small group]. [You] will just have more accommodations that come with you to help you to help you access it and give it back. So there is not the isolation. Coteach does not isolate kids. Now with the stakes being higher...it is really a good thing because the kids really feel like they are a part of that class. I think it is more respectful to kids to put them out there [in the coteach setting]. (Frances, Administrator)

Frances understands that while placing students with more academic needs in the general education classroom causes the teachers more work, it is the best placement for the students.

For the students who still have skills that are years below grade level, there are computer based programs that the district utilizes to assist in improving those skills. Those computer programs had been loaded only on the computers located in the designated special education resource rooms. Now these computer programs are used in the general education classroom. Instead of the special education teacher pulling students out of their general education class to supplement their learning,

> I would call it push-in because we are pushing them in there because you are giving them what they need in small groups. And you group the kids differently [not based on labels, but] according to abilities, according to strengths and needs, depending on what those are. (Frances)

Most of the elementary and secondary schools in this district have time set aside, either multiple times during the week or a certain time every day, for an intervention class. As Hannah (Administrator) stated:

> I encourage campuses to use that intervention time, because [all] students [in the school attend an intervention class], for resource time. And then we stop looking at pull out as, "I am going to yank you out of your ELA class and after 40 minutes of instruction and drop you back where you are sure to be completely confused by what has transpired in the classroom."

Special education administrators are recognizing that students labeled with disabilities lose more instruction in pulling them out of general education than they gained in a resource class. Not only would students labeled with disabilities be pulled out of their classroom for specific instruction during the general education instructional time, but often students would be required to get their instructions from the special education teacher when the rest of the class was having some sort of enrichment or reward. Pulling students to *help* them often put them further behind in the classwork or it negatively affected their motivation and their feeling of belonging to their class. Blomgren (1993) explained that students who left the general education class to receive instruction in a resource class "felt most intensely alienated from the teachers" because of the students "being a structural problem in terms of causing an interruption…to the [class] routine" (p.234-235). One of Blomgren's participants revealed her feeling regarding being pulled out of the general education class: "I felt dumb that I had to go to special class. I didn't want anyone to know, or to miss out on something in class and have to catch up" (p. 237). Addressing the educational needs of students labeled with disabilities should be able to occur without creating a situation where the student feels negatively and finds themselves behind on class work.

It is not only the general education teachers who were forced to give up their autonomy and share a classroom, but some special education teachers felt that the small classroom setting was the best place to give the intensive instruction that the students need. But that separate instruction led to problems.

> Because when special ed teachers taught in their own classrooms, and did not have to worry about the grade level standards, it was like [they had] a separate curriculum that wasn't even connected to what the other kids were doing. So there have been some good things to come out of this [change], but obviously it is not perfect. (Gia, Administrator)

As mentioned earlier, the district began to move more students labeled with disabilities to the coteach setting four years ago. Hannah (Administrator) recognized that simply changing schedules and housing students with and without a labeled disability in the same classroom is not enough.

> I think [this district] has embraced for a while the idea that putting these kids back in general education will work. It is just a question of if we are going to do that then we need to give teachers the tools and the permission to come at this a little differently.

Understanding the needs of the teachers and meeting those needs will determine whether or not the people delivering the instruction in the coteach classrooms will be successful. Recognizing that many teachers did not receive specific pre-service training regarding teaching in a coteaching setting (Fuchs, 2010; Maccini & Gagnon, 2006), school districts should provide training to ensure that the teachers have the instructional and classroom management strategies to be successful (Cook & Friend, 2010; Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Pindiprolu, Peterson, & Bergloff, 2007). The research also described that teachers who will be working together in a collaborative classroom benefit from

attending the training together (Friend, Cook, Hurley-Chamberlain, & Shamberger, 2010).

People

While the loss of the waiver to provide a modified test has caused worry and stress to both the parents of students labeled with disabilities and the special education administrators, it is the students, who are suddenly required to master the general curriculum and take the general test, and their teachers who bear the stress and the burden of this decision. Standardized tests have been difficult for many students labeled with disabilities (Katsiyannis, Zhang, Ryan, & Jones, 2007, p. 161). While parents and administrators are affected by changes in laws and policies governing education, when these changes collide with the practices in the classroom, thus the students and their teachers are the ones who most intensely feel the impact through their daily interactions.

Students

School is a place that values reading, writing, and doing math computations. Virtually every classroom that a student enters each day, s/he is asked to either read something, write something, or complete a math problem. If a student has some difficulty with reading, writing, or computing at the same level as their *normal* peers, then school can be a stressful and demoralizing place. Those students who are "unable or unwilling to conform to dominant expectations are relegated to the margins" (Ferri & Connor, 2006, p. 130). Students who have a marked level of difficulty are typically tested, diagnosed, and labeled with some form of federally approved disability. Then those labeled students who are "positioned outside of the mainstream maintain a

devalued status, and their removal makes them all but invisible" (p. 130). Throughout their interviews, the special education teachers commented on their students' feelings regarding being labeled with a disability and having problems academically.

> Yes. They are, and they are really hurt by that. "Yeah, you know, I'm special ed", so they have no self-image because they have been labeled. It's very, very sad. (Alice, Teacher)

Catherine, a teacher, described how her students said they felt prepared for the STAAR A test last year. She said that they left the testing room feeling like they had passed the test. She described how her students reacted when they learned that they did not pass the test.

> It was, what do they call it? The agony of defeat? Because [the teachers] take the kids individually and tell them their results. Every person in the building does [tell the students privately], they come back crying. They feel horrible because they worked hard.

She also commented on her students sharing their scores with other students and getting made fun of.

> You know, you tell them, "Keep it quiet." But, of course, they don't. Because kids giving each other all of that, and they come back crying. And it is very painful. Very, very painful. (Catherine, Teacher)

In these comments Catherine demonstrated the emotional toll that the tests take on the students and the teachers.

Essence, who has been teaching math to high school students labeled with disabilities for the past 15 years, described the changes in the standardized tests over the years and hers her students' reactions to those changes. The challenge for the teachers and students to prepare for a secondary level standardized test in math is daunting.

> They went from the SDAA [a test based on the individual students functional grade level] which they had never seen any of [the grade level curriculum] straight to grade level test. So I just felt that the kids were lost, it was frustrating to the teachers because you had to try and go back teach them something [the students] had never seen. So I know it has to be frustrating to the kid. And it is frustrating to me because I felt it was unfair to the student because you are expecting them to accomplish something that they have never been exposed to. So now you have taken all of the modifications from them and, you know, modifying the test and giving them fewer questions, fewer answers, that a person in regular gen ed classes has been doing all along, that is not fair. I mean [the student's perspective is], "how are you going to compare me to them and I have never really been exposed to it, or had the opportunity because I didn't get it?"

Essence (Teacher) goes on to point out that the loss of the modified test is exceptionally difficult for students in middle and high school because they have been taught and tested on a modified curriculum for many years.

> I'm not going to say they set them up for failure, but in a sense you have watered everything down for them, you made it so that they didn't have to do this, they didn't have to do that, so now all of a sudden they have to do everything. So

> how do you expect them to go from zero to one hundred? So it is kind of like culture shock for them. And then they get frustrated and they shut down. Then what do you have?

Delilah (Teacher) also talked about the change to push students labeled with disabilities to accomplish more academically in one school year than had been expected of them in past years. She discussed a particular group of students, the bubble kids. In this district a bubble kid is a student who scored a few points either above or below the passing score. These students are identified by the administration for teachers to target. The idea is that the students who scored well above the passing score will not have a problem passing this year. The students who scored many points below the passing score probably won't pass again this year. It is the students close to the passing score who could pass or fail this year that are given the most attention. There are a particular group of students labeled with disabilities who were on the bubble to pass the *Modified exam*, but that test is no longer available. These students do not qualify to take the STAAR Alternative test because their academic functioning is too high. Delilah told me,

> We have those bubble kids, we have kids if we are pushing them to STAAR they are going to do it. They are going to rise to it. Then those bubble kids, some of those kids that are really ID [Intellectually Disabled]. We have quite a few who are ID, they are not going to pass STAAR. They could barely pass M, but they do not need STAAR Alt either.

I asked Delilah more about the bubble kids, and how she decides what test to recommend for those students to take, STAAR Accommodated, which is administered on the computer with imbedded academic supports, or regular STAAR with accommodations, which is the traditional paper test.

> KH: So the bubble kids now, who used to be the fall through the cracks kids, is the crack bigger now for them that they are going to fall through?
>
> Delilah: Yeah, I think so. We have three kids in the 8th grade now who are ID and are in coteach. It is like pulling teeth. You *know* that it is ID.
>
> KH: It [the reason they are not learning the material] is not behavior.
>
> Delilah: It is not behavior. It is not Learning Disability. So you are not going to get what you might be able to get from someone with an LD who you can manipulate some of their behaviors and learning. So that is like, [sigh] that is the hardest decision.
>
> KH: Because there is no good option…
>
> Delilah: No, and they, for as many tests in three years, they haven't passed a test, but it is not for a lack of trying. Or they get the questions right that you would expect them to get right. But those level II level III questions are multistep questions, especially for the chemistry and force.

Again, the teachers showed their frustration with the lack of options for secondary students who have spent many years in resource classes.

The teachers have described the students who have been caught in this collision of policy and practice. The past practices of removing students labeled with disabilities

from general education and educating them in isolated, resource classrooms have left many students with skills years behind their grade level peers. Brantlinger (2006) identified " a long-term myth of special education…that classified and placed children receive individualized instruction by expert teachers so they catch up with peers and are subsequently successful in school and postschool life" (p. 58). While this move to educate students in the general education setting is difficult for the secondary students, the earlier "reliance on special education disadvantages students with disabilities" (Connor & Ferri, 2007). This move towards more inclusion is also challenging for these students' teachers.

Teachers

Teachers are the other group of people for whom these changes in the laws and policies impact their daily lives. Since the passage of P.L. 94-142, special education and general education teachers have had separate responsibilities and two separate spaces in which to teach. For many years there have been some students labeled with disabilities receiving their instruction in the general education setting, but the option to separate some students has been available and widely utilized. There were a variety of reasons (i.e. intellectual ability, behavior, social skills) that students labeled with disabilities would be educated in classes separate from the general education student. These separate classrooms for students functioning academically years behind their peers or for students with severe disabilities were the domain of the special education teacher. In Texas with the loss of the waiver to assess students labeled with disabilities with a modified test, the distinctions between special and general education teachers are no longer as clear. As

mentioned in the previous section, more classrooms are shared. While some resource rooms still exist, many of the former resource students receive their instruction in the general education classroom with the general education teacher as the teacher of record. There are fewer classes designated as resource taught by a special education teacher. It is not just the students who have been resistant to this change, both special and general educators have had to face this challenge.

The special education administrators I interviewed recognized the pressure that teachers are under to implement the changes to best prepare all students for the general test. Frances (Administrator) shared with me that the

> Teachers are stressed, of course, and administration. But anytime there is something like this, [there is the resistance], "Oh no we're not. They can't do this." But as they work with [the students], they know *this is what it is*. And they care about the kids, so they move forward. It has been good because they have found other ways to approach teaching certain skills to the kids.

Hannah (Administrator) discussed this collision of policy and practice for the general education teacher.

> In terms of the secondary experiences, you have teachers who are very focused on delivering their content. And so there may be, not unwillingness, but a reticence to have to restructure things a lot because there are always the curricular demands, the pacing that sort of thing.

Hannah revealed that the reluctance to change on the part of the special education teacher comes from a different perspective.

> There are people who are just [resistant to change], and some of them are special educators. I know I have been one of them my whole career. They are very much, "Oh, he is my baby. I need to sit with him to make sure that he gets this." I understand that; I respect that. I know that [sentiment] comes from a place of caring and wanting what is right for the kid, but I think that even though this might be a little more dramatic sometimes, [this change] really might be the better thing for the student. It really is. And so it is just to help the teachers [she tells them], "It is going to be challenging, but you are going to be there. Ultimately they are going to be better served."

Hannah explained to the teachers that the change is better for the students and their education in the long run.

For Betty, a special education teacher with nearly 25 years of experience, the loss of the waiver is just one more change in the larger high-stakes testing, accountability system. She describes the many ways that the laws and policies have collided with her teaching practice. She first discussed how the focus on the high-stakes exam has derailed what she knows to be the learning process.

> The focus of basic of skills has just gone to the way side and the focus [towards] of all this teaching to think through the question. Well, how can you think through the question when they can't read it, and they don't know how to read it? You don't give them time to process and consolidate their thoughts; you're not giving them time to explore and build their prior knowledge. So how can they even anchor anything to what they read? It's impossible.

It is not that Betty has not been successful teaching students labeled with disabilities within the current accountability system. She told me,

> Yeah, I had some who passed STAAR. Really I don't think that it is a result of them having higher standards. I don't think that this movement is [cleared throat], I don't think this [accountability] movement is really helping anyone at this point. At the beginning when I started teaching, I was truly a teacher.

Like other special education teachers, Betty is more concerned with the educational development of the student, and personally does not want to focus on the high-stakes test (Stough & Palmer, 2003). Even though she is a teacher with many years of experience and does not agree with the direction the accountability system is taking public education, she is still a part of the system and has to operate within its boundaries. She explained to me how that conflict affects her:

> KH: You said you feel stressed with the new rules.
>
> Betty: Well the stress is that I want them to pass. I want them to do really well, and I want to do a good job.

But…

> I want them to benefit from good teaching, and I want them to improve. But still underneath it all is what you are dealing with. You know you have lower IQs. You have lack of engagement, and you have poor self-esteem. There is a lot of factors that are built in to [teaching students labeled with disabilities]. So even if you are an amazing... (Betty, Teacher)

Betty stopped speaking in mid-sentence. Her body language was communicating her frustration. She is a teacher with many years of experience, but the focus on the high-stakes testing has forced her to expose her students to the list of skills that will be covered on the test, not the curriculum that she feels will most benefit her students. She no longer feels that she can utilize "good teaching" because she is no longer "truly a teacher." She no longer feels connected to the curriculum, so neither do the students.

This district has been operating with some form of coteaching in the classrooms for many years. The loss of the waiver to test students with a modified exam forced most students labeled with disabilities, who used to be educated in a resource room, into the coteach classroom. Essence (Teacher) describes the collision of the general education class and the resource class:

> [The general education teachers] were worried about the scores [of the students labeled with disabilities] and how it was going to affect [the teachers'] scores. Which I knew too. But we did all of the strategies to try and get [the students ready for the test]. But there again it is hard when a student didn't get it the first time and you have to go back and try to catch them up. The teacher is moving on because the gen ed teacher is not going to slow it down like I would for my resource [class].

The practice collision for the teachers is felt by both the general and special education teachers. The general education teachers find themselves held *accountable* for the scores of the students who have spent many years separated from their grade level peers and not being exposed to their grade level curriculum. The special education

teachers are struggling to implement the strategies that they have used in the resource setting, recognizing that the general education teacher cannot slow the pace of instruction for those students who are behind. “Ultimately, the requirements of NCLB have resulted in high levels of frustration for the students with disabilities and have displaced a meaningful curriculum in favor of a less valuable test-driven one” (Harvey-Koelpin, 2006, p. 142). The needs of the students are not the priority, but rather the presentation of the standardized curriculum on a pre-ordained schedule is the driving force (Valli & Buese, 2007).

Administrators

The special education administrators, while not involved with the daily instruction of students, are working to provide support to the teachers and spending hours collecting the accountability data required by the state and federal government.

For over 26 years, Riley has been a special educator spending many years on a school campus, but now she is a district level special education administrator. She described how the implementation of new laws, policies, and directives from the federal and state level affects administrators. The district level administration trains and supports the campus level personnel and has the responsibility of reporting back to the state and federal government.

> The level of response that is required, especially with the PBMAS, as far as the writing and the steps you have to go through to address the PBMAS is overwhelming. And that is where you have some new directives, you know that you need to take care of it and implement with your staff, but you are stuck in

> [planning meetings and report writing], but I have to get all of this paperwork done for the state to address all of these concerns. So it is a balancing act between responding to the state and then being able to put something in place.

Riley (Administrator) explained that the district level special education administrators will attend ARDs (Admission, Review, Dismissal meeting, Texas's name for an IEP meeting) when the school and the parents are not able to agree on an individual education plan for a student. With this latest change, the loss of the waiver, there have been problems not only with the parents not agreeing to the plan, but at times the special education teachers have had real concerns regarding the proposed IEPs.

> When anyone from the district office gets invited to an ARD it is because there is some contested issue that [the school personnel] are not able to resolve. A lot of times it has to do with both the anxiety on the parents' part and the school's part, so it is a dual threat [to a successful resolution of the ARD] when you go out there.

Riley went on to describe that the administrators have to be diplomatic and creative to help all parties agree on a plan.

> For the teachers, there is no modified test. For the parents, now [their kids] have to go out into general ed. So you have that [resistance to the change] coming from both sides. So you have to come up with a plan to saywhat can be done in that classroom to so that you can give the teachers the strategies and the parents the confidence that their child will be taken care of.

Gia (Administrator) also commented on the difficulties that the teachers are having implementing this change. She described her confidence in the district level administration supporting and assisting the teachers through this transition.

> I do have to say that I think [this district] does a pretty good job with all of this that is happening with teachers being uneasy, of course, with the waiver issue. I think that the message to teachers is that, "We are in this with you. We will provide the support. We are in this together." So I do think that [sentiment] made a difference. It is not just them in the trenches, by themselves, with nobody there to support. So we have increased support for teachers.

During this practice collision period, the administrators have begun reflecting on what type of support they need to provide the teachers in order to successfully transition more students labeled with disabilities into the general education classroom. The last group of people that are feeling the effects of this practice collision are the parents. Both the teachers and administrators described some of their interactions with parents.

Parents

While teachers must weather the changes thrust into their classrooms through changes in legislation and policy, they also have to deal with consider how these changes impact the parents of their students. Parents are not only a legally required member of an ARD committee (IDEA), but parental support is beneficial to the successful education of their children (Ishimaru, 2014; Murray & Naranjo, 2008; Okpala, Okpala, & Smith, 2001; Van Voorhis, 2003). In Texas, parents of students labeled with disabilities were informed about the loss of the waiver for the modified exam at their child's ARD

meeting. The special education teachers and administrators related the concerns that the parents shared with them about the increased academic expectations suddenly placed on their children. Essence (Teacher) recalled:

> I can remember one parent that was scared because she did not feel that her child was going to do well because she knew that he was so far behind. But it wasn't so much that he wasn't being taught, it was just the fact of his disability. And she was really worried about it. So we just reassured her that we were going to do everything we could to help him get what he needed to get. We gave them extra resources to do at home.

Frances (Administrator) described the mixed feelings about the change that some parents have had:

> When talking to parents, I think they are happy to a point that their children are being treated like everybody else [by moving into general education], but they are also scared. [For example, a parent has said], "What do you mean? He can't add, and he's doing algebra?

For some parents, it is not just the increased academic expectations, but they are worried about the size of the general education classroom. As Gia (Administrator) told me:

> I have had a couple of situations where I have had to attend ARD meetings with parents whose students have been in modified or resource classes with modified instruction for a lot of years. They have had a lot of accommodations and modifications (not that they needed all of those necessarily). I have been in

> meetings where the parents want students to continue in [the resource] setting because the child is not comfortable in [the larger] setting after being excluded [from general education] for so long. So that has been difficult where parents want their child in, what they think is, a protective environment. And their child does too, and I understand that. So that has been difficult in a few cases.

Gia and other administrators and teachers find themselves in the position of convincing parents that their child will be better educated in the larger, general education setting after these educators have spent many years convincing these same parents that a smaller, resource setting was the most appropriate placement for their child. This practice collision had to be difficult for the parents to reconcile.

Catherine (Teacher) described an ARD meeting where the parents had a difficult time accepting this change for their child. These parents have a child who has been labeled with an Intellectual Disability, and he had been educated in a resource setting where teachers were using a modified curriculum. He had been struggling with the STAAR Modified exam for the past few years. Catherine described how the parents reacted when they learned that the modified exam was no longer available.

> Well, first there came the box of Kleenex from the middle of the table in the ARD meeting. There are three questions that they ask [regarding which] test is appropriate, and [the facilitator of the meeting] said, "The test is going away that the only test options are these right here. And your child really doesn't qualify for [the STAAR Alternative], so this is the only option that your child has." Then comes the father using expletives. The mom sat quietly, and then she started

> crying. He was saying, “That it wasn't fair.” And it wasn't, but it was the only option we had to offer him.

Just like their children, the parents are caught in the bureaucratic system changing. Every year the school had recommended and the parents had agreed that the best learning environment for this student was a resource setting which only prepared the student for a modified exam. Then the system changed and all of the people have to adjust, or for some suffer, through that change.

Pedagogy

Throughout this discussion of the ways that the loss of the waiver has collided with the teaching practices in this district, issues surrounding pedagogy have been mentioned. Through my years as a special educator, my experiences with pedagogy align with that idea that “pedagogy is a form of interactive relationship rather than a bag of tricks to be assembled in the teaching process” (Slattery, 2013, p. 23). That interactive relationship was much easier to develop as a special education teacher with eight to 12 students in a resource class than when I taught general education high school English to classes of 25 to 33 students. Additionally, this interactive relationship was easier to develop before the focus on skills and objectives to meet the high stakes testing requirements. My experiences in both general and special education helped illuminate the pedagogical frustrations that the teachers related. The following comments from the teachers illustrate a tension between how they want to teach their students and what they feel they must do to meet the mandates of the new policy. Betty (Teacher) explains:

> For example, you're teaching them to read. You have a student that has a Lexile of 300, so you're thinking we want Johnny to be a solid 500 by Christmas. That would be wonderful, but instead of focusing on that pinpoint thinking if I can get him from 300 to 500, then he is reading. Nope, that's not the way were doing it. That's not the way I'm doing it because I'm thinking you don't have enough time to really and truly [sighs]… it's kind of like hitting the panic button because you don't have time. It's like telling a baby, "OK yeah, you crawled a couple of times and you walked a couple of times, but you know what by tomorrow I want you running." It's really like that. You really don't have time to solidify those skills. So, I do a lot of spiraling of the lessons, and a lot of true exposure to grade level content, but more practice of it.

Betty feels the pressure of putting product ahead of process. Valli and Buese (2007) described that "high-stakes policy directives promote an environment in which teachers are asked to relate to their students differently, enact pedagogies that are often at odds with their vision of best practice, and experience high levels of stress" (p. 520). Betty continued telling me how the changes she has made make her feel.

> I felt very stressed out, so I just had to immerse [my students] as much as possible. My approach is now, immerse them in regular curriculum and enhance it with repetition as much as possible.

Essence teaches math and feels the pressure of covering new material before her students grasp the prior concept. Like Betty, Essence said that:

> I am one of those that repeat, repeat, repeat, until we get it. I know that we are supposed to be moving on. I'm like, "How can you expect me to move on, and they don't get it? But you are expecting them to do well on the test? How are they going to do well on the test if they don't get it?" So in order to keep up with what I am supposed to keep up with, every day I would just do warm ups over the stuff that I know we didn't get, and then introduce them to the new stuff. But I never left the stuff that they didn't get until they get it. So it is just…repetition, repetition.

Catherine (Teacher) told me how her lesson planning has changed since the loss of the waiver:

> You have to follow the lesson plans of the regular teacher. We have to go to PLCs [Professional Learning Communities] according to grade level, so I go to the grade level that I teach and they do the lesson plans and then I have to take them and put accommodations in. No sense in modifying, but accommodating, so I may chunk it, but it is still the same 20 questions. They may get 10 today and 10 tomorrow, so they have to do it all that the other kids have to do. You cannot modify anymore because, well you can modify if you want to, but when it comes test time they have to take the [general] test.

Alice (Teacher) agreed that the high-stakes test plays a large role in her lesson planning.

> We really have to be focused. We have to teach them how to write, and we have to teach them how to do the open ended questions because that's a big process. So, yes, it does impact us a lot.

Alice's comment described that the kind of writing that she teaches her students is a particular format needed to successfully answer the questions on the standardized test. She revealed that her "focus" is not on her students, but on the testing format.

Delilah (Teacher) detailed for me how the test now dictates much of what she teaches to her students. She explained to me that:

> Now I am teaching them how to test more than I ever did beforehand. So, "Let's underline, there is so much to read here." Usually there is a long reading passage, you know they don't read it, they just pick an answer. "Find me the question, let's practice those test taking skills. Find the question, circle it, and highlight it." I'm making them mark a lot on their test and their papers more than I ever did before.

Not only does the high stakes test require that content be sidelined by test-taking skills and strategies, but the students' test-taking skill proficiency influences the teacher when deciding which version of the test the student should take. For example, when Delilah is considering whether one of her students with disabilities should take the STAAR Accommodated on the computer or take the regular STAAR exam in paper format with minimal accommodations, the mastery of test-taking skills is more important than the mastery of content.

> KH: Do you think that the decision about which test she takes is for you a matter of how much content she has learned or she can learn, or is it how the test are presented [computer or paper format]?

> Delilah: Whew…it's probably more, it's probably not the content. It's more how she would be at test taking.

The fact that teaching test taking skills can take priority over content material is not new in this accountability era (Koretz, 2008, pp. 254-259). But that teachers feel the pressure to leave their subject material with students who are already academically behind their grade level peers is especially disheartening.

As Vannest, et al. (2012) sought to avoid a situation where there exists a class of special education students within a larger general education class, Frances (Administrator) envisions that the teachers in a coteach setting will create small groups based on students strengths and weaknesses and not on their label.

> The sped kids are coming into general ed, so then in those small groups when they have the tiered instruction or lots of small group instruction, then our sped kids, as well as ESL or whoever, are mixed into those groups. So in a gen ed classroom you are not going to have groups that are all high level kids, and they are only general ed. We have high resource kids that can go into that group, so they are grouped according to their strengths and weaknesses

During the interview with Betty (Teacher), I asked her if she thought that the loss of the modified test would force schools and districts to structure special education in a different way. She told me,

> Yeah probably. It should any way. But whether it will be right or not, who knows? I think it has to be flexible, and you have to have a well thought out

> targets and benchmarks that address specific things. You know one size fits all just doesn't work.

Betty's uncertainty about the future direction of special education is grounded in her experience with policies and directives that focus on the scores of the high-stakes tests as the primary measure of student learning.

Philosophy

Legislated changes directed towards education do not just collide with current practices in schools, but often collide with and challenge teachers' philosophy of education. The loss of the waiver to allow a modified test in Texas has challenged some teachers' fundamental beliefs about their role and the education of students labeled with a disability. Some of the deeply held beliefs that have been recently called into question are that

> People tend to equate not being able to read and write with not being able to think. (Hannah, Administrator)

Another belief had been that students labeled with disabilities just need someone to be there to give assistance and help them get through school, but now

> The focus is on equipping our kids with the accommodations, so that we are empowering versus enabling. (Gia, Administrator)

Betty (Teacher) described how the perspective of some educators have had to change because all students are now required to take *and pass* the same standardized test. She related her experiences with teachers who have seen their role as presenters of instruction, leaving the responsibility of mastery of the concepts to the students. Betty

gave one example of a teacher who was made aware that some of her students did not master the concept that the teacher had just taught,

> The teacher was still very complacent, wasn't concerned. She was of the mindset, like I've seen some older teachers that some people have got it [the intellect to understand the material] and some people don't. But now it is not digested that way. Now it is like, "Yep, there are some that have it and some that don't, but what are you going to do to fix the ones that don't?"

This changing perspective regarding students labeled with disabilities did not just happen for general education teachers. The following special education teachers shared the questioning of their philosophical beliefs. Catherine (Teacher) described her shift in philosophy after she had experience coteaching in a class with students who used to be in resource classes.

> When I did resource versus being out there [in the coteach setting], I limited [my students] even though I got what the [general education] teacher was doing. [Now that I am] seeing them with the [general ed] kids, they can do more when you put them with their peers. It can be a two way street, it can help them grow or shut them down. It helps them grow a little bit. They may not become a full blown tree, but they can have branches. I think it's important, and even for the ones that just sit there.

Gia (Administrator) echoed this viewpoint when she stated:

> But I will tell you one of those things that has come out of this [change in policy] is that we have a number, I don't know the exact numbers, but I know that we have a lot of kiddos who have done more than what we expected.

Essence (Teacher) says that she sees the value of exposing students labeled with disabilities to the whole curriculum, but does not believe that this implementation has been fair to the secondary students.

> I feel like they need to be exposed to it because it is just life period. You know they need the exposure, but I don't think they should be held accountable for mastering tests that they have not been exposed to and that they don't really understand. But I think the exposure in the general ed setting is good for them, they need that. But in order for them to do that, you need to start that in the lower grades. You know, don't baby them and then when they get to the 9th grade say, "You got to take this regular test." "Well, you didn't tell me that in the 6th grade." So if they would prepare them for that then, yes, it would be OK.

The loss of the waiver has had some teachers questioning their beliefs in the philosophy behind special education. In the following comment, Essence is struggling with the point of labeling students with a disability when the accountability system seems to focus on the end product over the process of learning.

> What is the point of giving them these different labels if they are going to be doing the regular stuff? What's the point? You are giving them these labels, so you are supposed to be able to help them, but they don't really get those accommodations and modifications like they really used to. I mean [the Texas

> Education Agency] has cut back on those. So really, what is the point? So really everybody is the same now, really. Because of what they are expecting them to do on this test.

It is not only teachers who are working through these challenges to their philosophy of education to reconcile their beliefs and the new requirements that have been legislatively thrust upon them. Even the guidance from the district administration regarding the appropriate placement for students labeled with disabilities seems to be influx.

> If the students need to be in [the resource class], they need to be there. But if you leave them there, then they are not exposed to the general ed curriculum which they need in order to have a chance to be successful with the test. But we know that we have to be conscious that everything isn't geared around the test. You have to be conscious about the child. (Riley, Administrator)

While there are teachers and administrators who are still working on this shift in the philosophy of educating students labeled with disabilities, Hannah, an administrator, shared with me that this change supports her philosophy regarding the education of students labeled with disabilities.

> I have to be honest with you. I might be one of the few people in special education, or maybe not, who is celebrating the demise of the modified assessment because I believe, and this is coming from somebody who has spent the past 10 years as a special ed department chair in this district before getting this position, I saw the end product that years of resource and pull-out generated. And to me that isn't what I really wanted for those kids. I saw a lot of

> dependence on teachers. I saw a lot of mixed bag of skills and abilities dependent on how good their resource teachers were. Resource teachers, mind you, that sometimes had absolutely no eye on what the regular curriculum was doing. I saw a lot of learned helplessness among the students. I saw a lot of maladaptive behaviors among those resource students, and I just feel like we are all better served trying to get through this together. That has always been my emphasis as a special education person to try to get those kids into the classroom and remove the barriers to their learning within the general education classroom.

Hannah articulated the reasons why moving students labeled with disabilities into the general education classroom is a progressive move that should happen. The fact that she felt the need to qualify her comments and that she felt that she "might be one of the few people in special ed who is celebrating the demise of the modified assessment" demonstrates the philosophical shift in the organization of special education.

This Practice Collision initiated by the state and federal mandates pushed the educators into a lived experience that forced them to examine their former practices and beliefs about how to educate students labeled with disabilities. This reflection would not have occurred without the Practice Collision according to the phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty because "we have to be in the world before we can begin to reflect about it" (Matthews, 2006, p. 90). This is not to imply that this framework follows a linear progression. Different teachers and administrators will experience a variety of conflicts over time that will require them to reconsider their practice and philosophy. This

framework is fluid, for individuals can engage Praxis Convergence once each new challenge has been experienced and reflected on.

Praxis Convergence

According to Paulo Freire (2000), praxis includes both action and reflection (p. 87). When a federal education law changes or the state creates a new policy, the new directive could require significant changes in the teachers' current practices. This was the case in Texas when the USDE rescinded the waiver allowing some students labeled with disabilities to take a modified exam. In order to have successful and productive adoption of the legislated change, teachers must be *prepared* through professional development to begin the process of reflection in order to *transform* their practices, and beliefs, to then assist their students to achieve new *possibilities*. Therefore Praxis Convergence is the institutional and individual reorganization of educational thought and practice initiated by an external catalyst. This study identifies Praxis Convergence in the case of how one Texas school district sought to transform district policies and individual philosophies and practices to best meet the needs of students labeled with disabilities required to take the general standardized test.

Preparation

> I think everybody wants to do better, they just sometimes don't know. It is that fear of not wanting to do harm. It's the Hippocratic Oath with an educational slant. (Hannah, Administrator)

As Hannah revealed in this quote, teachers are willing to make changes to help their students learn, but they want to know that the changes they make will be beneficial. When asking teachers to implement a new policy, especially when that policy changes the organization of their classrooms, school districts must prepare their teachers with quality professional development that considering the specific needs of teachers and the district as a whole. In addition to the specific professional development program, the district's view on teacher professionalism impacts the possibility of teacher transformation. In her model of Continuous Professional Development (CPD), Kennedy (2014) described a continuum from transmissive to transformative professional development with the latter placing a higher value on professional autonomy (p. 693). Kennedy recognized the challenge for administrators deciding on a CPD program that

> in order to make real progress, teachers do need to have autonomy and the ability and space to exert agency. However, the more common policy approach to the development of 'sophisticated' CPD systems and programmes has been to tie them up in bureaucratic, managerial knots that squeeze out autonomy and instead seek and reward compliance and uniformity. (p.691)

The administrators reflecting on the type of professional development to provide teachers is equally as important as the work of the teachers to reflect on their pedagogical and philosophical beliefs about what students labeled with disabilities can learn.

As mentioned earlier, this district had been directed by the State to increase the number of students labeled with a disability in the general education setting a few years

before the loss of the modified exam. The administration understood that to meet the needs of the students in the general education classroom teacher training was necessary. And once the state of Texas lost the waiver requiring all students to take the same standardized test, the administrators became even more focused. Riley (Administrator) described to me that she thinks

> it puts everybody in the state of looking critically at what are we doing. We were looking at the students in this district and keeping them in general education and exposing them to the general curriculum as much as feasible considering their disabilities. Then everybody was checking to see what we can do more in the classroom to help the teachers understand how to differentiate for the kids, how to provide them lessons at their level, but still get the content.

Hannah (Administrator) discussed the fact that teachers needed training to provide them with new tools to effectively teach all students. I asked her which teachers were in need of the training. She explained,

> Well, special ed and general ed. There are general education teachers who want to do the right thing, but they are not sure what that is and what that looks like. There are also special educators who are resistant to the notion that they can't have their little group of four people around the kidney shaped table down the hall anymore.

These administrators had also reflected on and recognized that training presented by the special education department had often been considered only for special education students and teachers. In the following comments the special education

administrators, discussed the sometimes strained relationship between special education needs and general education needs. This recognition led these administrators secure the money to bring in an outside consulting firm that could help reorganize long held priorities in scheduling and classroom organization.

Deciding on the appropriate professional development requires that one have an understanding of not only the needs of the district, but an understanding of the culture as well. This district has traditionally valued site-based management over a strong, directive central office. Frances (Administrator) and I discussed how the culture is changing.

KH: The culture of this district is that the campuses are…

Frances: The decision makers. Well, it's changed.

KH: I remember being a special ed department chair and walking in to the administration say, "According to IDEA, this *has* to be done."

Frances: Correct. It is tighter now.

KH: There was a real tension between…

Frances: gen ed and sped.

Understanding the culture and history of the district, led the administration to hire an outside consulting firm to conduct some of the needed professional development. Gia (Administrator) cited a couple of reasons for this decision.

Gia: They are very reputable number 1. Number 2, having someone come in with that broad perspective because they work all over Texas and the nation, but having them come in with that broad perspective and their areas of expertise.

> Responsible scheduling, that is their main thing. Part of it is just that insight. They continually do the research. I think that having someone with a name, like theirs, coming in with research and studies done comparatively with other districts and states. I think that it just brought some…
>
> KH: Credibility?
>
> Gia: Credibility, yeah.
>
> KH: To which group do you think? To principals, general ed, special ed?
>
> Gia: I think to all stakeholders…principals.

Knowing the history of tension between special and general education and the significant changes that were needed, Gia explained:

> Five years ago we had [the company] come in and train all of the counselors, all of the case managers, and all of the principals, it was a pretty big endeavor. We did responsible scheduling training. It was an effort to go through and focus on the scheduling. The whole premise behind it is that you take your most at-risk groups of students and you plug them and their needs into the master schedule and build the master schedule around their needs.

Hannah (Administrator) recognized that these fundamental changes are more widely accepted when the district and school administration spearhead the training because

> Initiatives that are perceived solely as special ed initiatives tend to be perceived as for special education students only.

When the teachers were trained to implement the new policy, the inclusive nature of the professional development continued.

> All of the teachers that are in gen ed and special ed that are involved in collaborative partnerships [coteach classes] are trained at the beginning of the year. It is a three hour training where everyone hears the same thing, does the same thing. And every campus gets at least one day of support with either me or a [consultant] that I work with. (Gia, Administrator)

This commitment of both time and resources by the district leadership

> is helping everybody to understand how to work with kids because anything that we show them about differentiation or behavior or accommodations, it will benefit all of the kids in the class, not just the special ed kids. So it truly is a training issue and a paradigm shift. (Riley, Administrator)

From the perspective of the administrators, the professional development program appeared to be successful. I sent follow up questions to the teachers (see Appendix F) to see how this training translated to practice. Overall, the teachers shared positive experiences with the training as well as the effects of the training in the classroom. Betty (Teacher) has seen the benefits of the coteach training in the classroom. She said:

> The positive is that it forced reluctant teachers to collaborate more with special education teachers. I think generally teachers are very receptive. They want help, and they want a special education teacher that is effective.

As Riley mentioned, the district has experienced a paradigm shift regarding professional development. Professional development is no longer divided along strict lines separating special education training from general education training. These *inclusive* trainings do indeed constitute a fundamental change in the way teachers are

provided their ongoing training (Stough, 2006). A brief explanation of the historical development of the professionalism of teachers and administrators is helpful.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there was a move in the US to develop "bureaucratic professionalism and…specialization of expertise" (Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006, p. 2). In the public schools this move brought about specialized training for school administrators and teachers. As Danforth, et al. described "the Progressive Era was a time when the programmatic solutions to complex social problems were built on the promises of social science, efficiency, and the expertise of new helping professions…that we know well today—special educators, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and others" (p.10). This specialized, professional training is still highly valued in US society today. It is evident in colleges of education that have separate academic departments to prepare teachers to teach either special or general education. To train both general and special education teachers together, each group has had to acquiesce some of their professional expertise. Special educators have had to relinquish their "specialized discourse that effectively denies effective participation in the planning by general education teachers" (p.22), and general education teachers have to accept that one does not need a particular degree to gain the "specialized knowledge particularly suited to teach specific types of children" (p. 20). The traditional territorial lines are blurred. All teachers teach all students.

Not only does the district include general education teachers in the training specifically regarding coteach and inclusion topics, but the special education teachers are

included in the subject specific professional development. Alice (Teacher) explained to me that she receives training from the district English department.

> Yes, now that we all take the same test. All my trainings really, almost all my trainings are with regular English because I do teach the STAAR test and I have to do the STAAR trainings. And every year we do the expository and the persuasive essay writing. We do all of the trainings together.

This school district, understanding the effort it was going to take to successfully integrate most of the students labeled with a disability into the general education classroom, committed to repeated years of teacher, counselor, and campus administrator training. Gia (Administrator) explained to me that she was not certain that the School Board would include the money for the consulting firm in next year's budget, yet with or without the assistance of the consulting company, she will continue to provide the scheduling and coteach trainings to prepare teachers to best meet the needs of all students. Hannah (Administrator) commented about the time the district has invested in preparing school personnel to meet the needs of the students labeled with disabilities accessing the general curriculum.

> So it is an educational process, transitional process, it is a paradigm shift. Those things take time. This is a big place with lots of people in it with lots of different ideas. So the turn radius is not as tight as we would like it to be sometimes.

Hannah has plans to train teachers on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a program that she is convinced will help the teachers and students in the classroom, but she plans

to wait to introduce UDL to the entire faculty. Hannah demonstrated her reflection on professional development when she explained that next year

> there are going to be so many things going on at the district level. You have to worry about how many things you rollout at one time, so that the teachers do not get overwhelmed. We are about to go to a new attendance system. We are about to go to a new appraisal system. These are big initiatives to roll out. And I don't want people to reject something [like UDL] just because it is the *6th thing* to roll down the pike. It might be something that has inherent value, but it gets thrown out just because it is one of *4 million* things to do. So I really want to be sensitive to that issue too. I really think [UDL] is important, and I want it to survive.

Respecting the daily realities of teachers helped Hannah recognize that she should wait to introduce UDL. Forcing too many changes at once can lead to teacher frustration and rejection of a new program (Olsen & Sexton, 2009).

The professional development instituted to prepare the schools for the federally mandated policy change appeared to be planned with cooperation and support of the school district leadership. The superintendent and assistant superintendents understood that the change would take time to implement on each campus and the financial resources to support multiple years of training were made available. The professional respect shown to the campus administrators and the teachers was apparent. The reflective actions taken by the special education administrators allowed for teachers and administrators to be prepared for this change.

Personal Transformation

After the district has spent money to hire an outside consulting firm to provide professional development for the past four years, the principals and counselors *should* be creating master schedules to meet the academic requirements of all students, giving priority to the most academically needy students. Coteach partners, general education and special education teachers, *should* be planning and instructing side-by-side. Not all of the teachers interviewed said that these things were happening on their campuses, but like Hannah (Administrator) said, this is an "educational process, transition process; it is a paradigm shift." The Praxis Convergence framework recognizes this change process is not linear, and there are differing rates at which individuals will move through the process.

After the years of administrator and teacher training, there is evidence that both special educators and general education teachers are transforming their professional identities and even their personal perspectives. Special and general education teachers are recognizing their shared responsibility in educating students labeled with disabilities.

> The thing is with policies and curriculum, they've already been doing so many required curriculum trainings that they have to go to. They have required ESL trainings. With the coteach that has helped tremendously, so we are not in isolation. We are working together for all kids. So the strategies that we have to use and there are the strategies for ELL are special ed strategies. Everything is good for all kids. You pick what is best. (Frances, Administrator)

Riley (Administrator) noticed that "there is a cooperative spirit between special and general education teachers." She stated that during the special education department meetings much of the "discussion centers around what can we do to assist the general ed teachers in working with our kids." From the administrators' perspective the teachers are beginning to work to benefit all students in the classroom regardless of label.

Essence (Teacher) found that the general education teachers with whom she works are receptive to her suggestions about how to present their lessons to help more students grasp the concepts. When she notices that students are not engaged with her coteacher's instruction, she told me that:

> I have talked to them about it. And let them know, "You have inclusion…you have kids that are not as fast as others. Can you kind of break it down?" Then they would ask me, "OK, you show me how you would do it." So I would show them how *I* would do if they were in my resource class.

Essence's comment displayed her focus during instruction is on how individual students were following the lesson presented by the general education teacher. Stough and Palmer (2003) found that

> Although effective teachers in general education settings also have extensive pedagogical and content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), they appear to channel this information into the design of instruction for the class as a whole. In contrast, the objective of the special educators in this study was to design instructional and behavioral modifications for individual students.

> What we have learned from this study suggests that what is central to effective special education instruction is the knowledgeable, reflective, and concerned responsiveness of teachers to individual students. (p.220)

Catherine (Teacher) described how opinions from general education teachers have changed over the years. She said that she has had general education teachers say to her, "You must be a special person to work with those *special* kids." She told me that she does not hear comments like that much anymore "because now people understand what [special education] is better than they used to." While she admitted that she has had negative coteaching experiences in the past, lately she has been paired with general education teachers who were committed to teaching all of the students and have treated her as a peer. She explained the experience she had with a recent coteacher.

> It was wonderful. The kids learned. They were happy, and they did not know who was special ed and who was not. Because she would take some, I would take some. We would mix them up. When it came to test taking time, you know you pull them out for test, we would take some regular kids. Sometimes she would take the sped and a couple of regular. So it was really good, and it was really cool.

One of the most positive changes that Catherine has noticed with more coteach classes is that general education teachers are getting to know students labeled with disabilities, "And they are realizing, those kids are smart. There are different kinds of smart."

Another way that special education teachers described their changing role in the school is that they feel more included in the core departments in which they teach. Delilah (Teacher) shared:

> We are going to trainings together as science, so it is really interesting as a sped teacher to be in a department to live and experience a general ed department, science, and then being in sped as well too.

Alice (Teacher) also appreciated the fact that she is included in the district-wide English training. Just like English teachers throughout the district, a substitute teacher is provided for her to attend ongoing content training.

> We have a pull out every 6 weeks to try to help us with creative suggestions, and I love their stuff. They have really good ideas and all kinds of little projects, and things to help us.

While the district has made big strides towards creating schedules that provide the best opportunity to support students and meet all of their needs, there are some schools that still do not consider the schedules for students labeled with disabilities when designing the master schedule. As Delilah shared, her schedule changed weeks after school had started, and she had to begin teaching classes in a subject that she had never taught before. She told me how she is adjusting to the change.

> Well it is so new. It is harder because I have to learn the content. That adds an extra layer because I want to learn it, so that I don't teach it wrong. I am having to learn it as if I am a general ed teacher. I'm not, and I don't want to [introduce a new concept to the class] because I am not the math person, so it is challenging.

> But, um, it is hard. It is hard switching because I having two such different subjects between math and social studies, it makes my job very…there is a whole other piece because I teach three classes then I jump to social studies and then I go back to math. I feel very disconnected sometimes because my social studies class is in the middle of my day.

Not only is this a difficult schedule for a teacher, but to be given this schedule in the middle of the year and to have to learn new content, her ability to function as an equal teaching partner in the classroom has been diminished. She shared her feelings about her schedule.

> So between all of the different subjects and layers, I feel like I am being pulled in so many different directions. I don't feel like I can commit to any group completely like especially my social studies kids like I need to be, I am so disjointed with them. We only have one class of social studies and all of the coteach kids are in there.

As Delilah recognized, when a teacher has a schedule that is pieced together from different departments, the students' education suffers. Delilah is teaching at a school in the district where the principal has not yet implemented the new scheduling priorities. This principal has not adopted the training that shifts the master schedule priority to the students with the greatest academic needs, thus Delilah is given a teaching schedule well after school began that neither recognized her subject area strengths as a teacher nor respected the needs of her students.

While the general and special education teachers and other school and district personnel are making adjustments in their professional lives, and adjusting to the paradigm through which they make pedagogical decisions, by far the biggest transition has had to be made by the secondary students labeled with disabilities. For many years these students have been provided a modified, or "watered down curriculum" (Essence, Teacher) accompanied by expectations of less rigorous work production (Hannah, Administrator) compared to their peers in the general education class. Essence explained her frustration with the change in policy that required her high schools students to have to take grade level math without having the prerequisite skills.

> The kids didn't even have a transition period or a time to be brought up to where they are supposed to be to be able to be successful on this test. Even the modified test was hard still. And I feel like it was frustrating for the kids as well as the teachers because now you have to go back and try to catch these kids up and bring them up to this standard to meet this test in order for them to pass and be successful.

Not surprisingly, then, the transformation of the students who are functioning below grade level will be a longer process. Even though Essence recognizes her students' frustration, she is still motivated to teach students labeled with disabilities.

> I feel like, "OK if I can reach one, then I have done something." So there is always that one that helps keep me coming back, saying, "OK, I'm making a difference." I like to show them that you can if you really try. There are still those that are challenging that helps keep me going, and they make me go back

> because I want to say, “You can do this.” And they feel that self-rewarding sense, and they say, “So, you know, Ms. Essence was right, I *can* do this.”

Like Essence, Alice (Teacher) recognizes her students’ frustration and explains that building a relationship with the students goes a long way to motivate them to work.

> You get to know the student. In my room I get to know these students and they talk to me all the time. That's the biggest thing, it’s a relationship that we try to build up. Get to know them, let them tell their stories as much as they can.

Alice described a student who was opposed to making any efforts towards reading.

> He said that he had never read a book, and he did not want to read. He didn’t read for a long time. It took a very long time to get him to read; he was very angry. He resisted not only the reading but any kind of correction. "Oh this is the way I talk Miss. This is the way I am Miss.” I said, "Well we have a formal way of doing our work in here.” I got him a good book that he [could relate to]. So he did venture into the book himself after a long, long time and plowed through and finished the book. He was *so, so proud of himself*. He was just like, “I read a book! I read a book this year!” And it was amazing for me. It was just an amazing experience to have this kid who was just *so* belligerent turn himself around, and he became successful.

By taking the time to learn the specific interests and the background of this student, Alice was able to provide content material that the student found interesting and that spoke to his life experiences. By recognizing her student as an individual, both Alice and her student had the opportunity to celebrate his accomplishment in reading the book.

In addition to building relationships with students, the teachers recognized that continued exposure to the general curriculum is working. Catherine (Teacher) described how she works with her students in a coteach classroom.

> We take baby steps. We get into small groups and work with them. We may coteach. We take some lower kids, some higher kids, and some kids that don't get it, and do smaller bits of the same thing. But they still ultimately have to do all of it.

Through the perseverance of the teachers and students, the students with disabilities, who would have taken the modified exam, are learning the grade level curriculum. Catherine continued:

> Some of it is working. One of my kids took the [district generated] benchmark [test] and made a 100. I mean I was so proud of him, I made him call his mom in class. So some of it is working, and he is not one of the higher kids.

As many teachers have alluded to, the students who have been educated in a resource setting have not had the same academic demands required of them as their peers in general education classes have had (Eisenman, Pleet, Wandry & McGinley, 2011; Powell, 2006; Thurlow & Quenemoen, 2011). So while many secondary students labeled with disabilities are lagging behind in content knowledge, they also have not developed the stamina and level of focus necessary to be successful on the high-stakes tests. Alice shared with me that not many of her students passed the STAAR test at the end of last year. She said that the most of the students had demonstrated knowledge of the skills that were to be tested, but

> It just comes down to the experience of the test, and length of the test, and the rigor of the test. After two hours, the first two hours they were plugging right along. They were working, and you know after a few hours they got tired. And before, well, before the end, they gave up.

Building the stamina in the coteach setting is crucial for students labeled with disabilities to be able to successfully demonstrate the knowledge they have gained. Hannah (Administrator) is convinced

> That our kids, if they are used to the level of challenge and used to the level of production that has to happen, they are very capable of functioning in a general education classroom.

Gia (Administrator) also shared:

> I will tell you one of those things that has come out of this is that we have a number, I don't know the exact numbers, but I know that we have a lot of kiddos who have done more than what we expected.

For students labeled with disabilities to have their specific needs met, the district has recognized that the master schedule must consider the students with most academic needs first and build the schedule around them. As mentioned before, the district has invested a lot of money and time to bring an outside consulting company to train principals and counselors on how to build a master schedule. Even though the district has made master scheduling a priority, not all campus administrators have made that transition. Betty (Teacher) shared her experience on her campus.

> Master schedules are still put in place with AP, GT and regular classes going in first, and special ed worked around that schedule. Therefore, is not effective. The effect of that schedule is special education students continue to be in the same frame, same group all day. These most needy students are together ALL day in elementary and middle school. They have the same disabled peers traveling with them from class to class all day long. In my mind, not good for anyone. If the idea is to grow students, then target the most needed and listen to what [the consulting company] said to do, but that has not happened.

There was more than one campus that was not setting new priorities for their master schedule. Since this district has had a culture of strong site-based management, the district level administration has also gone through some transition. Because the loss of the modified standardized test demanded a shift in pedagogical practices, philosophy, and required that students labeled with disabilities learn in a different place and with different people, the district had to transform the culture. As Gia (Administrator) reported,

> [The district administration] doesn't make all of [the campus decisions] but because of the situation now with STAAR, there have been some mandates. "Hey, you really need to do it this way." [For example] the scheduling; there were 9 campuses that were told that we [,the special education coordinators,] had to go work with them on their schedule [to help implement the new scheduling priorities].

Gia explained to me that she, as a district special education administrator, has transformed the way she works with campus administrators.

> So I have learned over the years, and I think that last year and this year was my best as far as getting buy in and principals really want to work with me even when we don't agree on something, being able to discuss it. I think that with the support we have provided it has made a big difference because of all of the fear that came about…
>
> KH: Because of the loss of the waiver?
>
> Gia: Yes.
>
> KH: "Now all of these kids are taking the regular test, and it is counting against me and my campus."
>
> Gia: Yes.

Not only has the loss of the waiver, the Political Catalyst, transformed administrators ideas about master scheduling, but the campus administrators are spending more time focused on the instruction provided by the special education teacher. Frances (Administrator) explained to me that the principals are taking a more active role in understanding and guiding the instruction that students labeled with disabilities are receiving.

> So it is much more working together than working in isolation, and then coming to blame [the special education teacher]. Because it is based in progress, if [the student] has made a little bit of progress, no that is not what [the principals] want,

> but they are very encouraging and supportive of the teachers. It's a very different day and time that we are in.

Before the loss of the waiver to give a modified exam, some principals took a *hands off* approach to the special education department and students labeled with disabilities. Riley (Administrator) commented that:

> I think they take more ownership because of [the change]. Whereas before they would say, "Well, that is a special ed issue." Now that special ed is going to be counted, [the scores] are going to show up [on the school's monitoring report], "Well then, they are my kids."

Educators outside of special education recognizing that students labeled with disabilities are members of the larger school community and thus are their responsibility has begun for many of the general educators, due to interest convergence (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013; Bell, 1980). Because the majority of students labeled with disabilities are taking the general test, it is in the best interest of all educators at the school to participate in the education of all of the students on campus. Due to the loss of the waiver to give students labeled with disabilities a modified test, the opportunity to segregate the scores of these students is gone. The administrators and teachers have had to accept that the school's accountability rating is based on how well all students are prepared for the STAAR test. This is an example of interest convergence as students labeled with disabilities were not included in the mainstream operations of the school until their scores counted significantly against the schools' ratings. This recognition and acceptance

of students labeled with disabilities into the *mainstream* consciousness of the school can open many new possibilities for all students.

Possibilities

The last component of Praxis Convergence are the Possibilities that could come from the Personal Transformations of the individuals within the organization. “It is within this critical turn, a precious moment in praxis, that there exist possibilities for empowerment that can nourish transformation of the self and the curriculum reality” (Aoki, 2005, p. 121). The special education teachers and administrators who participated in this study shared with me some of the changes that are happening in the district that are beneficial for all stake-holders. From the teachers, there has been evidence of improved collaboration and shared expertise. From the administrators, a more comfortable and open dialogue between campus principals and special education administration. For the parents, knowledge that their child, who has been labeled with a disability, is receiving access to the general curriculum and will have more educational opportunities during his/her years in school which should lead to better opportunities after s/he graduates from high school. And for the students labeled with disabilities, the opportunity to be educated with their peers by both special and general education teachers who recognize the strengths and support the weaknesses of all students has arisen. No longer will teachers settle for preparing some students to learn just a part of the curriculum. As one of the tenets of Disability Studies in Education states, it is important that educators believe in their students: “[Presume] competence is the least dangerous assumption that we can make – to presume competence, you are basically

setting forth a new Hippocratic Oath for teachers (Biklen 2006)" (Gallagher, Connor, & Ferri, 2014, p.18). The following examples illustrate what can be accomplished when teachers think that their students can learn.

The participants described some of the successes that they are seeing in the district with the inclusion of more students labeled with disabilities in general education classrooms. Hannah (Administrator) related a situation in an elementary classroom:

> An example of how successful inclusion can be. I went to a classroom where there were 7 boys and one girl on the [autism] spectrum in a coteach classroom with the Making Connections [social skills] teacher. There was just a lot of consternation on the part of the general education teachers, who were a team teaching, and the Making Connections teacher who was following this little cadre of 8 people around. So I went in and watched, and they said, "These kids can't do it. They are having a lot of trouble keeping up." I got them to take a step back, and I asked them, "What is your learning objective here? What is you want the kids to get in this particular segment?" "I want them to be able to correct the grammar that I put up on the document camera. They have to copy the sentences and correct them." These kids are not neuro-typical kids, typically writing is not a thing they enjoy. Several of these students had a huge writing field, and it is a very laborious process to get the sentences copied. They were getting very frustrated because, of course, everyone is done and they are still trying to get the sentences on the paper. So [the writing] was a very minor point. I said, "The learning objective here to be able to correct the grammar, so why not write out

the sentences for them. While everybody else is writing, give them a colored pen and they are going through and correcting what they think needs to be fixed. Take out the writing portion because that is not the learning objective here." And they said, "Is that OK?" "Yeah, absolutely, it's fine. You have to think about what [skills] you want the kid to walk away with from this exercise." Well, they did that. There were a couple of other things that were going on that we just tweaked and looked at. Now all of those kids are doing great. The students are better integrated into the classroom now. They were all sitting with the [special education] teacher at one point. I said, "Let's break that up. They need to be sitting with their neuro-typical peers. Find people who are willing to give them a little guidance and redirect their attention, that kind of thing, and create less teacher dependence and create more peer dependence. That is what these kids are typically lacking is to be able to imitate and do what their peers are doing. So let's just force the issue." I went back a few months later and it was just a remarkable change in the classroom. The kids were integrated, they were following teacher directions. They didn't stop being ASD, but they were just much more independent. I feel like it was a great team who was really willing to work with the kids, but the fact that they did what the recommendations were, and they saw the success that is going to fuel much more than just that situation because they are going to talk to other teachers.

Hannah mentioned that the success these teachers had including these students labeled as autistic into their classrooms would be an example to other teachers. She went on to say

that this situation made an impression not only on the teachers, but on every person in that classroom:

> There are people that now have an understanding about what it is like to be different and to see somebody as a combination of their strengths and weaknesses, not just as a function of their disability. For me I feel that that is a total win/win, not just for the kids with ASD [Autism Spectrum Disorder] but for the neuro-typical kids also.

As Stough and Palmer (2003) found, effective special education teachers "constantly monitored the performance of their students and implemented strategies to maximize performance" (p.220). Because of the change to educate more students in the general education classroom, Delilah (Teacher) spends most of her day teaching in the coteach setting. She described how she has been

> Thinking of a lot more of those tools that I can create. Can I create a graphic organizer out of this? Can I create a mnemonics device out of this? What tools can I give them to think about? Because they are going to have the same number of questions, how can I get them to stop and read the questions, to stop and think about it and get them to process? It is a lot more about process, teaching them how to process.

As both Riley and Frances (Administrators) mentioned earlier, the strategies that are good for students labeled with disabilities are actually good strategies for any student to use to increase their learning. Not only do special education teachers have more instructional contact with students who do not have a label, but general education

teachers are taking on more instruction of students labeled with disabilities. Frances described how the teachers identify the academic needs of the students without concern about the label. She related a typical conversation that she has observed when teachers get together to plan.

> So when they come to the PLC they see the scores, and they say, "Yeah I'm doing this. Well we can do this. Or maybe you can take this student, and I'll take these other students, and I will do this. Or our intervention time is here that won't work for these, but it will work for these. So why don't we pull them together? Instead of us all doing the same thing with different students, why don't we just lump them together and do it?" So there has been a lot of cohesiveness all over and working together.

Summary

The collaboration and willingness of teachers to work with all students regardless of label has been one of the most positive effects of the loss of the waiver. The understanding that students should be recognized as individuals, not grouped by a label, allows for true inclusion and acceptance to occur. Blomgren (1993) reminds us that "the task of facing those who come before us is one of recognizing and beholding them as valued and cherished human beings" (p. 243). The possibilities are many for students who are accepted and given the same high expectations as every other students.

The loss of the federal waiver to utilize a modified assessment has forced the school districts in Texas to make changes to provide students labeled with disabilities access to the general curriculum. In the Texas district which was the focus of this study,

this move has seen not only the students labeled with disabilities finding more acceptance in the general education setting, but that acceptance has been extended to the special education teachers and administrators. With the *full inclusion* of the special education department by the administration and faculty, all students, both with and without a label, will benefit from the pedagogical expertise of the general and special educators.

This framework of Praxis Convergence emerged from the analysis of the lived experiences of both special education teachers and administrators who are on the front lines of implementing a federal policy change. Listening to these collective voices discuss their experiences with students, parents, and other educators illuminated for me the process that has occurred in this district. It is important to recognize the Praxis Convergence framework is not a model of steps and stages. One does not arrive at school one day to find that the process is complete. This framework is fluid, not static. While the Praxis Convergence of teachers in a department, or at a school, is evident by their reflective action, other teachers in a different department or at a different school might be facing the challenge of Practice Collision. Because schools consist of people, schools are dynamic. The Praxis Convergence of administrators is evident by their reflective action as well. Not all administrators, even if they are in the same department, such as special education, are acting within the same component of the Praxis Convergence framework. As individual teachers and administrators are implementing policy with a reflective attitude, their pedagogical practices, and even philosophical perspective, might be challenged or changing. The process of implementing a change

described in this framework is responsive to internal stimuli as well as recursive as the framework can be instituted again with another Political Catalyst. The examination of both teachers' and administrators' lived experiences through the implementation of a policy directive, while not traditional phenomenology, was necessary. Aoki (2005) related the importance of understanding the interaction between two groups who have different perspectives on the same implementation. He states, "competence in implementation is seen as competence in communicative action and reflection, and reality [of policy implementation] is constituted or reconstituted within a community of actors" (Aoki, 2005, p. 122). Recognizing the interdependence of teachers and administrators during the successful implementation of a policy change demanded that the *lived experiences* of both groups of special educators be examined and understood. The experiences of both groups were equally necessary and informative to the development of the Praxis Convergence framework.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

> In doing research we question the world's very secrets and intimacies which are constitutive of the world, and which bring the world as world into being for us and in us. Then research is a caring act: we want to know that which is most essential to being. (Van Manen, 1990, p.5)

In Rocha's (2015) phenomenological examination of education, he explained that while his study would explore education, he would not ignore schools. He states, "Inside these schools – and outside of them, too – there are people, real people, women and men of flesh and bone, and an endangered species of the human person: the teacher" (p.7). My study sought to learn from the real people, the educators, specifically special education teachers and administrators. What are the lived experiences of the professionals who are responsible for the education of the students to whom the school system has attached a label of disability? In Texas, for many of those students that label justified their removal from general education (Brantlinger, 2004; Gallagher, 2005). Many of the special educators taught in these separate classrooms until the US Department of Education (USDE) decided that all but one percent of the students in the state, the "students with the most significant cognitive disabilities" (USDE, 2009, p. xi), must have access to the general curriculum and take the general standardized test. What are the experiences of these special educators moving with their students into the general education classrooms? From the experiences and understandings of the special education teachers and administrators emerged what I believe is the process that this district

followed to implement the change. That process I described in a framework that I called Praxis Convergence. The Praxis Convergence framework recognizes people and their efforts, both through action and reflection, which they must extend in order to make substantive changes.

I asked three questions that guided this research. The first question was how do special education professionals in Texas describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test within the context of their local district? The special education teachers described their experiences in seemingly contradictory ways. Their experiences can be described as feeling as frustrated yet motivated by the challenge, hopeful yet emotionally drained. Because they care for their individual students, they felt stressed due to their perception that the implementation of the policy was unfair to the students labeled with disabilities. Looking at the teachers' experiences through the Praxis Convergence framework, the negative descriptions were generally found during the Practice Collision moments and the more positive descriptions revealed their efforts at reflection in the Praxis Convergence iteration of the framework.

The special education administrators' description of their lived experiences in implementing the change in policy revealed a sense of resignation to the law. As the administrators, they have to not only explain the new policy to the teachers, but they need to encourage and motivate teachers to provide students with the best possible environment in which to learn. Through their descriptions of their experiences, I found that the special education administrators felt that the change was difficult, but necessary;

that they understood the teachers' concerns, but that the change was best for students; and that they were constantly juggling the competing demands of completing the compliance paperwork and providing support to teachers.

The second question guiding this research was how had this recension of the ESEA Federal Regulation § 200.1(e) waiver affected the educators' practice and philosophy regarding student learning? The data provided by the special education administrators revealed that they began to recognize that a larger group of students labeled with disabilities can be successful in the general education class. They also communicated an acceptance that strategies designed to teach English Language Learners (ELLs), or other special populations, can be effective with students labeled with disabilities. The administrators have begun to encourage teachers, both special and general education, to use any strategy they feel appropriate for any and all of their students.

The teachers' practice and philosophy has changed because they have witnessed students labeled with disabilities meet the academic demands in the general education classroom. The teachers have begun to believe that students who had in previous years been taught in a resource class setting can in fact learn the course material on grade level. The teachers described spiraling their lessons and using much repetition. The teachers are now focused on how to the make the curriculum accessible to students labeled with disabilities rather than modifying the curriculum. Special education and general education teachers are working together as partners each asking the other for their expertise when teaching. Most importantly, there now exists an expectation that

teachers will find a way to teach the grade level curriculum to all students because they cannot fall back on the option of a modified curriculum for students labeled with disabilities. Presenting the grade level curriculum to students labeled with disabilities in a way that they can access it is requiring teachers to grow and challenge themselves. Not only are teachers presenting the entire grade level curriculum to all of their students, but they have the added pressure of teaching test taking strategies to prepare students for the high-stakes, standardized test.

This current classroom environment focused on the high-stakes test was explored through the final research question: How has this change in policy influenced educational practices in schools throughout the district? Because the change of placement for many students, from the special education resource room to the general education classroom, has been made due to the loss of the waiver, the pressures of the high-stakes test have influenced the teachers' practice. Teachers described that their focus is no longer on the student and how s/he is learning, but instead their instructional decisions and lesson planning is focused on the pacing of the curriculum. The teachers described teaching more test taking skills which takes time away from the curriculum content. One teacher even felt like she was not truly teaching.

The education of children is an inherently political act (Bernstein, 2000; Freire, 2000; Greene, 2007; hooks, 1994; Macedo, 1994; Ware, 2004). Education can either maintain the status quo, or education can create change within society. I agree with John Dewey (1897/1972) "that education is the fundamental method of social progress and reform" (p.93). Looking through a critical lens offers a view of the educational endeavor

not simply to show what it is, but what it could be. Through the critical lens of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), the curriculum and pedagogical practices utilized by a district, school, or teacher either support the normative view of society, or they challenge the idea that human variations must be identified, labeled, and segregated. DSE challenges the assumption that some humans are less normal than others and thus less deserving of full membership in society.

Just as Herbert Grossman changed the definition of mental retardation with a "stroke of his pen" (Ferguson & Ferguson, 1995, p. 114) in 1973, so to, in 2013, did Arne Duncan dismiss the rationale for students labeled with disabilities to be assessed with modified academic standards. These two examples demonstrate the DSE tenet that asserts that who is considered normal and who is not normal is a product of social construction. This loss of the modified assessment, while forced on Texas by the federal government, provided many positive changes for students labeled with disabilities when viewed through the DSE lens. This change in policy required, not slow, incremental changes, but a fundamental change that required the district to focus on remediating the school, not the student. This change was accomplished with the shift in master scheduling priorities, and the classroom by creating a more thoughtful and organized coteaching environment. This change exemplified the political as well as the instructional nature of inclusion. The acceptance of students labeled with disabilities into the general education classroom demonstrated the idea of interest convergence—now that these students have to take the general exam and their scores will be counted in the schools' accountability rating, then they are allowed to join the rest of the student body

in the mainstream classrooms. An additional DSE tenet central to my design of this research was to give voice to the marginalized special educators in research relating to inclusion (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Graham & Slee, 2008; King, 2003; Pugach, Blanton, & Correa, 2011).

Including students into the general education setting, thus providing them experiences in the "general" world that they will live in once they leave high school, is a progressive move (Graham & Slee, 2008). The education of the students not only academically, but socially, will improve by being educated in the general education setting. The fact that this progressive move is predicated on those students taking a standardized test to comply with accountability rules is concerning to me and deserves a comment. Standardized, high-stakes testing should be under more scrutiny and deserves a closer look. Daniel Koretz (2008) in his book titled, *Measuring Up*, explains

> Achievement testing seems reassuringly straightforward and commonsensical: we give students tasks to perform, see how they do on them, and thereby judge how successful they or their schools are.
>
> This apparent simplicity, however, is misleading. Achievement testing is a very complex enterprise, and as a result, test scores are widely misunderstood and misused. And precisely because of the importance given to test scores in our society, those mistakes can have serious consequences. (p.1)

Not only is standardized testing an extremely complicated, and arguably ineffective (Koretz, 2008, p. 282) way to measure student learning, especially students who have been labeled with a disability, high-stakes standardized testing required by

NCLB has done tremendous damage to public education as a whole. As Au and Apple (2010) explain:

> NCLB's myopic focus on the results of high-stakes testing has corrupted the processes of teaching and learning as nontested subjects have been subtracted out of the curriculum and teachers have been compelled to focus on rote memorization, decontextualized knowledge, and more surface-level learning due to either administrative edict or out of a sense of self-preservation (Au, 2007; CEP, 2007; Renter et al., 2006). (421-422)

Having said that, it was the USDE's refusal to allow a modified assessment to meet the reporting requirements for NCLB that forced Texas and this district to move towards more inclusion. "Laws, regulations, and codes are often based on ethical positioning. Nevertheless, their enforcement tends to be impeded due to the prevalence of hierarchical ideology" (Brantlinger, 2004, p. 22). Just as individuals who prefer to think about the "big picture" might not be as skilled in the organizing details and one might complain about the distance between theory and practice, it might be that law-makers are more driven by the ethical choice without regards to the practical implementation of that choice. Dewey (1897/1972) recognized that "reforms which rest simply upon the enactment of law, or the threatening of certain penalties, or upon changes in mechanical or outward arrangements, are transitory and futile" (p. 93). What must follow is a thoughtful, reflective implementation of the reforms directed to advancing the "social consciousness" (p. 93).

I have come to believe that inclusion is the more socially just way to educate the overwhelming majority of students. But since our society is focused on ranking and ordering people, providing opportunities for every student to learn in the classroom can be challenging. Not only do we have students competing with each other for grades to eventually win the ultimate prize of valedictorian, but we rank and order whole schools based on their students' standardized test scores. In order for teachers to have the freedom to teach and for students to have the freedom to learn, high-stakes standardized testing must be replaced with a more pedagogically valid instrument to make educational judgements and decisions.

Despite the continued reliance on standardized testing, I turn to the positive aspects of this policy change. As Frances stated, the students in the coteach classroom are "not isolated." Not only are more students labeled with disabilities being *included* in the general education setting, but it appears that the teachers have developed a more *inclusive* philosophy. From the comments of the teachers and the administrators, it appears that students labeled with disabilities are not simply placed in the class in some "tokenistic attempts to 'include' the marginalised Other" (Graham & Slee, 2008). There appears to be a willingness and a commitment to reflecting on pedagogical practices to meet the needs of all students. But again, I find myself circling back to the accountability movement because without the Political Catalyst of the waiver being rescinded, it appears that this Praxis Convergence process regarding the inclusion of student labeled with disabilities into the general education setting would not have been attempted. I am not making the argument that the ends justify the means. I would prefer to think that the

educators are making lemonade out of the sour lemons that abound during this current accountability era.

If this Political Catalyst has, in fact, facilitated changes in Place, People, Pedagogy, and Philosophy, then the reflection that occurred during that unsettling period of Practice Collision has resulted in a Praxis Convergence, the most progressive result would be that teachers put aside labels and focus on students as whole and capable human beings. Pushing aside labels that rank and order children, that identify the abnormal so we can feel comfortable with the normal, and that provide for us the winners and losers in order to maintain the status quo, could break down the ideology of a social hierarchy. If we continue on this path, we could create a *post-normal* society.

Limitations

This study is the result of data collected from five teachers and four administrators. The four administrators included all of those special education administrators who are responsible from training and supporting the special education teachers who implementing the policy change. Only having five teachers could be a limitation to this study. Yet, I do believe that the many years of experience that each teacher possessed provided for their deep understanding of teaching students labeled with disabilities and their rich and layered description of implementing this change.

Another limitation could be that I chose to conduct this study in a district where I had been employed as a special education teacher. As my initial research design included interviewing only teachers, I was confident that after not working in the district for ten years I would be able to interview teachers that I did not personally know. That

in fact was the case. I had never met these five teachers before the interviews were conducted. Only after collecting the teacher data did I decide that I needed the information from administrators to complete this study. Of the four special education administrators that I interviewed, I personally knew two of them. While my status of former employee of this district probably opened doors for my research in this district, I also must recognize that it had some influence on my perspective of the individuals that I knew and my perspective of the district as a whole.

Finally, the Praxis Convergence framework is the result of the data collected from one Texas school district. I believe that more districts should be studied to strengthen the components of this framework.

Implications for Future Research

In order to view the Praxis Convergence framework through the whole school perspective, the current study should be expanded to include interviews of general education teachers, those who are and who are not coteachers. Campus level administrators as well as district level general education administrators also need to be interviewed. The lived experiences of the general educators who implemented the changes after the loss of the waiver are important to understand how the inclusion of more students labeled with disabilities into general education has affected *their* philosophy of education. The data gained from interviewing general education teachers and administrators are vital to exploring how educators outside of special education are understanding the idea of a *normal* student. How do general educators reflect on the inclusion of students with disabilities into the general education classrooms? How does

this reflection inform their perspective of a *normal* student? And as I mentioned in the limitations, this research should be conducted in other districts to strengthen the framework.

An issue that was discussed in the literature review, but not in the analysis of this research is the fact that racism and ableism are closely related in the United States. The disability rights advocates followed the legal logic of *Brown v. Board of Education* to argue to students labeled with disabilities should be fully included in the public education system. After the P.L. 94-142, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was passed in 1975, the education system has been using special education to justify segregating students of color. This fact recognizes the intersectionality of race and disability in schools as well as society-at-large. In future studies additional questions and discussion of race and labeling and the inclusion of students of color labeled with disabilities in the general education classroom need to be explicitly addressed. Particularly, in the district for this study such an analysis would be revealing. In the past two decades, this district became culturally and linguistically diverse. An analysis of the link between race and disability is warranted given the diversification of the community, and would like add a great deal to the proposed framework in this study.

Yet in the current study, race was not explicitly explored due to the particular demographics of this district. While this district's student body is currently 65% students of color, there are certain schools that have a high concentration of students of color. The nature of segregation across schools and then intra-school segregation of

students labeled with disabilities is warranted. During the present analysis, I did not find that the race of the teacher affected their experiences in the district (although the small simple size makes generalizations unreasonable), but there was some indication that the race of the students did affect how the new policies were implemented. As I have the responsibility to maintain my participants' anonymity, I felt I could not explore that issue without possibly breaching that duty. The segregated nature of schooling in this district would make the teachers identifiable. Repeating this study in a larger district with more participants could allow for an intersectional approach to understanding the Praxis Convergence of inclusion.

More research is needed to understand the relationships between teachers and students labeled with disabilities. Research that captures the lived experiences of classroom interactions conducted through observations in the coteach classroom settings is warranted. Focusing specifically on the teacher-student interaction between the former resource students and their special and general education teachers would provide insight into this changing educational relationship. Turning towards the experiences of individuals in a more descriptive and less interpretive mode can help teachers gain insight into the most fundamental parts of the teacher-student relationship. The Praxis Convergence framework provides researchers with the components to consider when approaching the relationships between teachers and students labeled with disabilities. This framework can guide the question formation by addressing the multiple facets of the teaching experience.

The most important marginalized voice that continues even in this study to not be heard is that of the student labeled with disabilities. The voices of the students who have endured a system that has labeled and segregated them just to one day thrust them back into the mainstream classroom deserve to be heard.

DSE supports the students labeled with disabilities being in the general education classes and having all of the opportunities that students *not* labeled with disabilities have. The USDE rescinded the waiver that had allowed the State of Texas to give two percent of the students specifically those labeled with disabilities a modified high-stakes exam. This recension demanded changes from nearly all levels of professionals in Texas public education. Changes are not always easy for people to make. Changes that involve not merely action, but also reflection, are not linear in nature. No education professionals will follow the same path nor timeline in the process of transforming their beliefs about the education of students in public schools. The framework of Praxis Convergence is recursive; it is an ongoing process that individuals within the same district, school, department, and even classroom could be experiencing different components simultaneously. This framework is useful to the district, school, department, and even the teachers to provide an explanation of the conflict when implementing a new policy then how reflection can lead to positive changes advancing the goals of democratic public education.

Understanding this framework through phenomenological practice is appropriate, and Van Manen (2007) explains why more phenomenological research is needed:

> Now, it is much easier for us to teach concepts and informational knowledge than it is to bring about pathic understandings. But herein lies the strength of a phenomenology of practice. It is through pathic significations and images, accessible through phenomenological texts that speak to us and make a demand on us, that the more noncognitive dimensions of our professional practice may be communicated, internalized and reflected on. For this we need to develop a phenomenology that is sensitive to the thoughtfulness required in contingent, moral, and relational situations. (p.21)

This research began with the idea that it is important to understand the effects of the intrusion of state and federal policies on classroom teachers. To give a voice to the professionals that educate students labeled with disabilities, so that the policy-makers many of whom have never been a teacher would listen to real conflicts between their laws and actual practice. As the lived experiences of the teachers and administrators were collected, the story of the possibilities of a post-normal future began to emerge. The genuine care and concern that these special educators communicated for their students, the parents, their fellow teachers, and the future was evident. This loss of the waiver to administer a modified exam has created, at least in this district, a reflective process through which substantial change in the way students labeled with disabilities are educated. As a former special educator, I realize that

> Our good intention as expressed in our educational desire to help has degenerated into the practice of sorting, labeling and tracking special education students so that we can provide them with what we refer to, from an unexamined position, as

> being the most appropriate and specialized instruction. This must be revealed as the dignity-denying and alienating process that it is. (Blomgren, 1993, p. 240)

The reflective practices that occur in the Praxis Convergence framework can move educators to provide for their students the environment that respects and affirms their dignity.

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APPENDIX A

TEACHER RECRUITMENT LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Klein ISD Special Education Teacher,

My name is Kristin Hall, and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas A&M University studying Curriculum & Instruction. As a former special education teacher who taught for 17 years, I am interested in the lived experiences of teachers. I am conducting a research study titled, *Living Without Modifications: A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teachers*, and I am writing to request your voluntary participation. This letter will explain the purpose of the *Living without Modifications* research, detail how you can be involved, and review key federal protections of which all research participants should be aware.

The purpose of this study is two-fold:

1. To understand teacher implementation of policy changes – How do special education teachers in Texas describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test?
2. To understand effects of policy on teachers' philosophy of learning - How has this policy change affected the teachers' philosophy regarding student learning?

I am conducting this research to understand how special education teachers in Texas have implemented the general curriculum to students who in past years have received a modified curriculum. I want to understand the daily interactions of special education teachers with students, parents, general education teachers, staff, and administrators. The findings from this research will be used to inform school districts and teacher education programs, which train both special and general education teachers, how to prepare and support teachers implementing grade level curriculum to students labeled with disabilities.

Your potential involvement includes:

1. You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview to last about 1 to 1 ½ hours.
2. You will be asked to check the interview transcript as well as the findings of the research to be sure that the information you shared is represented accurately.

Your Federal Rights includes:

1. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw participation at any point during the study with no penalty. Your participation and/or withdrawal from the study will not negatively impact your relationship with Klein Independent School District. During the interview you may decline to answer any of the interview questions or stop the interview at any time without penalty.
2. Information shared during interviews is confidential (not made public in a manner that will allow you to be identified). All data collected will be anonymous (your name will not be linked to data). Quotations from the interviews may be used in reports but will not include your name or identifiers linked with quotes.
3. With your written permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into text for analysis. The audio files will not have your name written on them nor stated during the interview. These audio files will be converted to text files, stored on a secured Loyola server and the original audio files deleted after the defense of my dissertation.

4. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study, but you are asked to refrain from disclosing what you share during your interviews with others because it reduces your confidentiality and anonymity.
5. Please contact Texas A&M University's Compliance Office at (979) 845-8585 and/or Dr. Marlon James (Faculty Advisor) at (832) 952-7322 or mjames1@tamu.edu should you have questions about your rights as research participants.

If you would like to participate in the interview, have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (832) 651-5595 or email at kristinhall@tamu.edu.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Kristin Kistner Hall, PhD Candidate

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the *Living without Modifications: A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teachers* study conducted by Kristin K. Hall from Texas A&M University.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in any dissertation and/or publication to come from this research with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact Texas A&M University's Compliance Office at (979) 845-8585 and/or Dr. Marlon James at (832) 952-7322 or mjames1@tamu.edu.

I will retain a copy of my signed consent form for my records.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis and/or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Educator Consent Form (Keep this signed copy for your records)

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the *Living without Modifications: A Phenomenological Study of Special Education Teachers* study conducted by Kristin K. Hall from Texas A&M University.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.

I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in any dissertation and/or publication to come from this research with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.

I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact Texas A&M University's Compliance Office at (979) 845-8585 and/or Dr. Marlon James at (832) 952-7322 or mjames1@tamu.edu.

I will retain a copy of my signed consent form for my records.

With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis and/or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please sign, date and return to a member of the research team.

Educator Consent Form

APPENDIX B

CRITERION CHECK FOR INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Name _____

1. Are you a secondary teacher certified in special education? What is your second certification (required to be considered highly qualified)?

[yes] [any second certification is acceptable]

2. Did you teach students labeled with disabilities who took the STAAR A test for the first time in the spring of 2015 (i.e. but for the change in policy, your students would have taken the STAAR M)?

[yes]

3. Before the school year 2014-2015, have you taught students whose IEPs required that they receive a modified curriculum for at least two years?

[yes]

4. Have you been the teacher of record in a resource, AB, or developmental class with the responsibility of implementing a modified curriculum to prepare students to take the STAAR M?

[must answer yes to either 4 or 5 or both]

5. Have you been a co-teacher in a class with the responsibility of implementing a modified curriculum to prepare students to take the STAAR M?

[must answer yes to either 4 or 5 or both]

Interview yes / no

Place _____

Date _____ Time _____

APPENDIX C

TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. How did you come to teach in this district?
2. Why did you decide to become a special education teacher?
3. How has this year been different as a special education teacher?
    a. Tell me how the loss of the waiver that allowed students labeled with disabilities to take a modified test affect your day-to-day teaching and case management duties; can you give me some examples?
4. Tell me about a good experience you had this past year relating to the transition from the modified to the standard curriculum. Think about experiences with students, other teachers, administrators, and parents. Any others?
5. Tell me about a difficult experience you had this past year relating to the transition from the modified to the standard curriculum. Think about experiences with students, other teachers, administrators, and parents. Any others?
6. Can you describe how this new approach to teaching children labeled with disabilities impacted on thinking about how to approach providing an appropriate education?
7. "Is there anything that you would like to bring up, or ask about, before we finish the interview?" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 129).

APPENDIX D

ADMINISTRATOR RECRUITMENT LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Klein ISD Special Education Administrator,

My name is Kristin Hall, and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas A&M University studying Curriculum & Instruction. As a former special education teacher who taught for 17 years, I am interested in the lived experiences of teachers. I am conducting a research study titled, *Living Without Modifications: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Special Education Professionals Transitioning to the General Curriculum*, and I am writing to request your voluntary participation. This letter will explain the purpose of the *Living without Modifications* research, detail how you can be involved, and review key federal protections of which all research participants should be aware.

The purpose of this study is two-fold:

1. To understand teacher implementation of policy changes – How do special education administrators and teachers in Texas describe their lived experiences of preparing their students labeled with disabilities for the general standardized test?
2. To understand effects of policy on teachers' philosophy of learning - How has this policy change affected the teachers' philosophy regarding student learning?
3.

I am conducting this research to understand how special education administrators and teachers in Texas have implemented the general curriculum to students who in past years have received a modified curriculum. I want to understand the daily interactions of five special education administrators and five teachers with students, parents, general education teachers, staff, and administrators. The findings from this research will be used to inform school districts and teacher education programs, which train both special and general education teachers, how to prepare and support teachers implementing grade level curriculum to students labeled with disabilities.

Your potential involvement includes:

1. You will be asked to answer questions in a one-on-one interview to last about 30 minutes to 1 hour. (You will not be paid for this time.)
2. You will be asked to check the interview transcript as well as the findings of the research to be sure that the information you shared is represented accurately.

Your Federal Rights include:

1. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw participation at any point during the study with no penalty. Your participation and/or withdrawal from the study will not negatively impact your relationship with Klein Independent School District. During the interview you may decline to answer any of the interview questions or stop the interview at any time without penalty.

2. Information shared during interviews is confidential (not made public in a manner that will allow you to be identified). All data collected will be anonymous (your name will not be linked to data). Quotations from the interviews may be used in reports but will not include your name or identifiers linked with quotes.
3. With your written permission, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed into text for analysis. The audio files will not have your name written on them nor stated during the interview. These audio files will be converted to text files, stored on a secured flash drive at Texas A&M University and the original audio files deleted after the defense of my dissertation.
4. There are no known or anticipated risks to participants in this study, but you are asked to refrain from disclosing what you share during your interviews with others because it reduces your confidentiality and anonymity.
5. For questions about your rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if you have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, you may call the Texas A&M University Human Research Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.

If you would like to participate in the interview, have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (832) 651-5595 or email at kristinhall@tamu.edu.

I look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,
Kristin Kistner Hall, PhD Candidate
I have read the information presented in the information letter about the *Living Without Modifications: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Special Education Professionals Transitioning to the General Curriculum* study conducted by Kristin K. Hall from Texas A&M University.

I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in any dissertation and/or publication to come from this research with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.
I was informed that if I have questions about my rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if I have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, I may call the Texas A&M University Human Research Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.
I will retain a copy of my signed consent form for my records.
With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study.
□ YES □ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis and/or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Administrator Consent Form (Keep this signed copy for your records)

I have read the information presented in the information letter about the *Living Without Modifications:*
Understanding the Lived Experiences of Special Education Professionals Transitioning to the General Curriculum study conducted by Kristin K. Hall from Texas A&M University.
I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.

I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in any dissertation and/or publication to come from this research with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.

I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.
I was informed that if I have questions about my rights as a research participant, to provide input regarding research, or if I have questions, complaints, or concerns about the research, I may call the Texas A&M University Human Research Protection Program office by phone at 1-979-458-4067, toll free at 1-855-795-8636, or by email at irb@tamu.edu.
I will retain a copy of my signed consent form for my records.
With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.

I agree to participate in this study.
□ YES □ NO

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

□ YES □ NO

I agree to the use of anonymous quotations in any thesis and/or publication that comes of this research.

□ YES □ NO

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

Please sign, date and return to the researcher.
Administrator Consent Form

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

1. How did you come to work in this district?
2. Why did you decide to become a special education administrator?
3. How has this year been different as a special education administrator?
    a. Tell me how the loss of the waiver that allowed students labeled with disabilities to take a modified test affect your day-to-day duties and professional development that you provide to the teachers; can you give me some examples?
4. Tell me about a good experience you had this past year relating to the transition from the modified to the general curriculum. Think about experiences with students, teachers, other administrators, and parents. Any others?
5. Tell me about a difficult experience you had this past year relating to the transition from the modified to the general curriculum. Think about experiences with students, teachers, other administrators, and parents. Any others?
6. Can you describe how this new approach to teaching children labeled with disabilities impacted your thinking about how to approach providing an appropriate education?
7. What changes were made to the district's policy and curriculum because of the loss of the waiver to provide students with a modified exam?
8. "Is there anything that you would like to bring up, or ask about, before we finish the interview?" (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009, p. 129).

APPENDIX F

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. Tell me about your experience with the consultation company's coteach training. How has the training impacted your coteaching experience?
2. How receptive have the general education teachers been to the consultation company's coteach training?
3. Tell me about the changes in your school's schedule due to the consultation company's master schedule training.

APPENDIX G

LEGAL CHALLENGES TO THE INEQUITABLE EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

Case	Effect
*Roberts v. City of Boston (Roberts) (*1850*)*	Freed black child was denied access to a White school. Court stated that there was separate but equal education in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
Watson v. City of Cambridge (1893)	Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled that schools could deny attendance to any student they deemed as "weak in mind".
Plessy v. Ferguson (Plessy) (1896)	The Supreme Court concluded the segregation did not constitute discrimination as long as there were separate but equal facilities available.
Beattie v. Board of Education (1919)	Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled that schools could deny an education to any student whose condition was disruptive and who would demand too much of the teacher's attention.
Gong Lum v. Rice (1927)	*Plessy* was cited to deny a child of Chinese heritage admission to a White school in Louisiana.
Ohio (1934)	Cuyahoga County Court of Appeals ruled that school districts could exclude "certain students" even though that ruling contradicted the compulsory education law.
Missouri ex. rel.Gaines v. Canada (1938)	Because Missouri provides a legal education for white students, black students must also receive that right. The Court struck down segregation by exclusion, but not *Plessy.*
Sweatt v. Painter (1950)	Herman M. Sweatt was denied admission to UT Law School. The legislature established a law school for black students at TSU. Supreme Court

	said that the "separate school failed to qualify." In 2005, the Travis County Commissioners renamed the courthouse in Mr. Sweatt's honor.
McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents (1950)	Decided on the same day as *Sweatt*, the Court ordered the state of Oklahoma to remove all restrictions to graduate education.
Brown v. Board of Education (1954)	The Supreme Court reversed its *Plessy* decision by stating that separate is inherently not equal.
Hobson v. Hansen (1972)	DC Court of Appeals ruled that IQ tests could not be used for tracking black students as the tests were normed on white, middle class students
Diana v. California State Board of Education (1973)	The Court ruled that LEP students must be tested in their primary language. LEP students had been tested in English, and their low scores labeled them EMR.
Lau v. Nichols (1974)	The Supreme Court decided that children who do not speak English must be given remedial English language instruction in public schools.
Larry P. v. Wilson Riles (1972, 1974, 1979, 1984)	The Court found that California was using IQ tests as the sole measure to place black students in classes for the Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH). The Court ruled that IQ tests could not be the only consideration for determining eligibility for the category EMH.
Board of Education v. Rowley (Rowley) (1982)	The Supreme Court ruled that the school does not have to maximize a student's potential for learning.