EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS ESTABLISHING SPECIAL EDUCATION

PROGRAMS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

by

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Liberty University

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Of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

Gary Cookson. THE EXPERIENCES OF PRINCIPALS IN ESTABLISHING SPECIAL
EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS. (Under the direction of Dr.
Samuel J. Smith) School of Education, June, 2010.

As public school principals articulate policies and implement procedures for the
establishment of special education programs, the same programs are not always provided
in Christian schools. The question is raised as to why Christian schools do not provide
these services. This phenomenological study investigated the experiences of Christian
school principals who have implemented special education programs in their schools.
Through the use of interviews, the principals indicated the efforts involved in
implementing changes in the school and noted challenges in dealing with reluctant staff
members. Principals described the academic and social rewards of providing these
services, as well as the satisfaction of parents who could now send their children with
special needs to a Christian school. One theme evidenced in this study was the spiritual
change in the school as all students interacted and cared for each other. The most
prominent themes expressed by principals were the personal rewards of establishing the
new programs and the belief that they were fulfilling a God-given duty to provide a
Christian education for all students.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my heavenly Father who has guided me

through this arduous task. Without the constant leading of God, I would never have been

able to achieve this goal. "As you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did

it to me." Matthew 25:40

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Many others have encouraged and assisted me during my dissertation and I give them the thanks for reminding me to center all on God.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Christian schools provide an education for students whose parents desire a Christ-centered education with Christian teachers and a Christian curriculum. Christian schools exemplify their special nature by providing for the academic and spiritual needs of students. When parents search for a Christian school for normal-achieving children, they uncover many schools that provide the desired academic and spiritual experiences for their children. However, finding a Christian educational program can be a difficult endeavor for parents of children with disabilities (Bello, 2006; Eigenbrood, 2005).

According to Pudlas (2004), Christian schools should provide a welcoming community for all students, including those with disabilities. Pudlas advocated the need for Christian schools to provide a community of belonging and commitment that would encompass all students. The ancient Greek writer, Xenophon, wrote that people who care for their brothers will also care for themselves (Stavropoulos, 2005). The commitment to caring for others was a value expounded by this author in the Greek culture, and the same commitment should be identifiable in Christian schools (Pudlas, 2004). Coulter (2003) wrote that Christian schools should place a consideration for others at the forefront of their thinking. According to Coulter and Pudlas, proper consideration for all students, those with disabilities and those without, is a component of caring that should be a defining characteristic of a loving and caring Christian school community. The academic community described by Pudlas and Coulter would assist Christian schools in equipping all God's servants for His service.

The reasons that Christian schools do not provide special education services vary from school to school (Eigenbrood, 2005). Some reasons for the absence of special education programs include the lack of perceived need for special education, funds, qualified faculty, or space. This research study will gather information from Christian school principals in order to understand the experiences they have undergone as they have completed the process of establishing special education programs in their schools. The epistemological basis of this study is grounded on the biblical view that knowing God and His purpose will aid humanity in understanding how to live with and care for fellow man.

Statement of the Problem

This study—noting the roles of Christian school principals as instructional and change leaders—will research and describe the experiences of Christian school principals who have established special education programs to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities (Conderman & Pedersen, 2003; Idol, 2006; Lasky & Karge, 2006). Principals are a key component in bridging and solidifying a school's special education needs (Bays & Crockett, 2007). Some Christian schools are equipped to educate children with disabilities—whether in traditional, self-contained, or inclusive programs—while others are not able to educate children with disabilities. Christian school principals, in their roles as instructional leaders, should work to promote the educational needs of all children in the school, including those with special education needs (Conderman & Pederesen, 2003; Idol, 2006).

Background to the Problem

Historical

Since the United States Congress passed laws to ensure the education of children with disabilities, public schools have been mandated to comply with federal laws requiring the implementation of special education programs (Wright & Wright, 2007). Public Law 94-142 passed in 1975, its supplemental amendments, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) have become formidable educational challenges for public schools to manage, implement, and supervise (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). ADA ensures nondiscriminatory treatment and civil rights for people with disabilities (Hallaham & Kauffman, 2006). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) were enacted to grant educational rights and services to students with disabilities.

As school principals grapple with the dictates of the federal legislation, the intricacies of the laws become more apparent, but solutions to the legal issues become more complex (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Hehir, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006). Providing special education services involves the work of principals who both understand the law and work to assist schools in providing necessary services to fulfill the demands of the law (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Taylor, 2005). Continued effort by principals to implement and manage special education programs enables schools to provide needed educational benefits for all students.

Public school principals have exerted great effort to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the same educational benefits provided to normal-achieving students (Hyatt & Filler, 2007; Weber, 2007). The continued progress of public school principals to provide special education services has benefited students with disabilities (Hyatt & Filler, 2007; McCain & Antia, 2005; Roach & Elliot, 2006). With the passage of these federal laws, more students with disabilities are able to attend public schools (Special Education, 2004). Public schools provide hearing therapists, speech therapists, resource teachers, special education teachers, and other services for the benefit of students with disabilities (Eigenbrood, 2005; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Idol, 2006). Limited studies are available on Christian school special education programs. Eigenbrood (2005) noted that Christian schools do provide limited resource programs and one-on-one assistance indicating the variances of services by these schools.

Social

Initially, people with disabilities were removed from society through institutionalization as a treatment method. Hallahan and Kauffman (2006) chronicled provisions for special education during the time when states relegated students with disabilities to asylum care. According to Hallahan and Kauffman, as reformers attempted to remove inhumane treatment of people with disabilities, the search for alternative locations and methods for treatment of those people was the driving force in the creation of special education programs and services in schools. Both the government and society have realized that asylum care is not the proper method for treating people with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007).

The United States government, through the passage of legislation, has attempted to solve educational injustices relegated on persons with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007). This legislation has made positive strides in granting access to students with disabilities in public school education. Greater numbers of students with disabilities receiving services at public schools have increased the social interaction of students with and without disabilities (McCain & Antia, 2005; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007).

Legal

As previously stated, public schools are required to abide by federal special education legislation. Christian schools are not required to abide by the dictates of IDEA, IDEA 2004, and NCLB (Weber, 2007). For this reason Christian schools are not mandated to implement special education programs. Anderson (2003), Hoeksema (2007), and Pudlas (2004) challenged Christian schools to re-examine Scripture to determine if special education programs fit the biblical model of caring, and to decide if special education programs should be integrated into the Christian school setting. Anderson, Hoeksema, and Pudlas also encouraged Christian schools to follow the dictates of biblical law over federal and state law and include students with disabilities in their educational programs.

Purpose of the Study

Focus and Intent

The focus of this study is to research the experiences of Christian school principals in weighing, establishing, and supporting special education in Christian

schools. This research investigation includes understanding the considerations, thoughts, and opinions school principals examine in determining whether to provide special education in Christian schools. This study will seek to gain insights into the experiences of Christian school principals who have implemented special education programs. Because few Christian schools with special education programs exist, this study will acquire information for principals who are considering these programs. The value of this study will be in the information given by principals to add to the knowledge base and the information about Christian schools and their special education programs.

Research Questions

The questions to be researched in this study involve the experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of Christian school principals after the development of special education programs in their schools and will seek to discover the heart of the considerations and experiences involved in the implementation of these special education programs. The research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question #1: What were the experiences of Christian school principals, as they were involved in considering and implementing special education programs?

Research Question #2: What factors or events were influential in the principals' experiences?

Research Question #3: Were there any biblical considerations that were influential when considering the implementation of a special education program?

Research Question #4: Were there any legal considerations that were influential when considering the implementation of a special education program?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is founded on constructivist theories of Vygotsky. Vygotsky proposed a theory of learning based on the student or learner's active and essential role in creating and establishing personal knowledge (Gordon, 2009). The learner, with an active role in the building of knowledge, constructs meaning based on personal experiences (Huitt, 2003). Huitt further wrote that Vygotsky described the individual's role as one of receiving and processing information to form personal knowledge. Furthermore, according to Huitt, students bring knowledge, behaviors, and experiences to classrooms where they build on this knowledge. The involvement in construction develops a deeper personal meaning for students (Hein, 1991).

Archer (1998) described Christian constructivism as a structured philosophy that entails truth. Archer united the constructivist theory of individual or objective truth with the Christian belief of actual truth by explaining how sinful man seeks truth. Because sinful man sees the world without true clarity, man cannot form a clear and accurate picture of the world and truth. As people seek to learn about creation through the use of the Bible, knowledge and insight about how God expects His creation to acknowledge Him is gained. The role of a Christian teacher and principal involves leading students to construct a greater understanding of the truth as articulated in biblical truth (Archer, 2002).

The constructivist theory provides a basis for the phenomenological approach in research because the constructivist theory is based on personal experiences (Huitt, 2003; Murphy, 1997). Huitt wrote that the experiences of learners are important in constructing

personal knowledge. Phenomenology builds on this theory, as it seeks to describe experiences of the learner (van Manen, 1990). Constructivism and phenomenology both relate to experiences and are complementary in focus and intent. These ideas form a natural basis for conducting research on the experiences of principals in special education programs.

Phenomenology begins with the learner or participant and seeks the articulation of the lived experiences of the learner (van Manen, 1990). According to Laverty (2008), phenomenology requires an intentional focus on experiences in order to describe them. This focus, according to Laverty, allows the researcher to focus on the principles that give meaning to the experience.

The combination of constructivism and phenomenology form the basis for the methodology of this study. This study will base its theoretical foundations on the roles of principals in creating knowledge through personal lived experiences. These foundations will allow the researcher to delve into the experiences of principals who have lived through the special education process to share these experiences and the meaning derived from them. Phenomenology will aid the researcher in gaining understanding from principals who have experienced the implementation of special education programs (Rapport & Wainwright, 2006; Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008).

The philosophical foundations of this study do not rest only on constructivism and phenomenology, but also on principles found in the Bible. The biblical epistemological basis of this study is grounded on the biblical view that knowing God and His purpose will aid humanity in understanding how to live with and care for fellow man.

Biblical Worldview

Christians have a biblical command to apply the teachings of Christ to daily living (1 Cor. 4:6). As Christians walk the journey of life, they seek to confront cultural challenges and respond to conflicts or spiritual dilemmas that arise (Bolt, 1993). According to Bolt, having a well-defined biblical worldview is a key component of the Christian's decision-making process. Bolt emphasized the need for Christians to have and act on biblical worldviews. Christian school principals will encounter school situations that will force them to employ their worldview, which will guide their thinking and actions (Bolt, 1993). Basing decisions on biblical principles enables principals to maintain a consistency of both actions and thoughts (Bolt).

Deckard and Dewitt (2003) defined a worldview with mental, physical, and spiritual components—each constructed on the truth of the Word of God. These three components comprise a complete foundation for biblical worldviews, encompassing the gamut of the Christian's being and existence. They postulated that secular man bases a worldview on a faith in senses, a faith in reason, and a faith in knowledge. Instead of these human-derived elements, Deckard and Dewitt challenged Christians to build a worldview based on biblical truth and absolutes with scripturally-based mental, physical, and spiritual components. Christian school principals—with a well-constructed, biblical worldview—will be equipped to base decisions on biblical foundations that seek to glorify God (Bolt, 1993; 2 Thess. 2:10). Christian school principals' worldview and biblical decision-making process regarding special education considerations should be the basis for their actions (Deckard & Dewitt).

Interview Process

The research questions were answered by conducting interviews with Christian school principals who have implemented special education programs. A predetermined list of questions will form the guideline for interviews, but questions that are not part of the questionnaire may be asked as part of the interview session (Appendix A). The writer will be free to ask questions as needs arise during the interviews.

Definition of Terms

A wide variety of terms is used in describing special education programs.   For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as noted.

Special Education - specially designed instruction that is provided to meet the needs of a child with a disability (Wright & Wright, 2007, p. 21). The term *special education* will be used in this study according to the following definition: "Education that is modified or particularized for those having singular needs or disabilities, as handicapped or maladjusted people or [the] slow learner" (Nichols, Stebbins, Bunning et al., 2001).

Inclusive Education - the return of children with mild disabilities to a general education classroom for a part of each school day because students are entitled to an instructional program which meets individual needs and learning characteristics (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006).

Christian Schools - those schools of an evangelical, protestant background, that have been founded by churches or Christian parents to train children in the fear of the Lord academically, emotionally, physically and spiritually.

Disability - a physical or mental problem that prevents someone from functioning at a normal rate (Special Education Dictionary, n.d.).

Experiences - the observing, encountering, or undergoing of things generally as they occur in the course of time.

Individualized Education Programs (IEP) - the written plan teachers and parents have devised to meet the educational needs of students with special needs and/or learning disabilities (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2006).

Phenomenology – the study of lived experiences of individuals with the intent to understand the world as lived by the person (Laverty, 2008).

Constructivism - an educational theory postulating that learners construct knowledge on an individual basis based on personal experiences (Gordon, 2009; Hein, 1991).

Resource Room - a classroom with a special education teacher who works with a small number of students usually on reading, mathematics, or language arts (Slavin, 2006).

Christian Schools International (CSI) - a Christian school organization serving schools in North America and the world for over 80 years. CSI is founded on the reformed tradition of theology and provides support, products, and advice for teachers, schools, and administrators.

Significance of the Study

The results of this study will allow Christian school principals who are considering special education programs to learn from the experiences of others who have

already implemented such programs. If Christian schools have existent special education programs, the principals will relate to the struggles of other schools. If Christian schools do not have special education programs, this study will cause the principals to examine opinions or beliefs on special education and the possibility of establishing special education programs in those schools.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

Chapter 2 disseminates and analyzes the literature on the topic of special education. Included in the Review of Literature will be a brief review of federal laws that dictate special education requirements, the public schools' roles in special education, the Christian schools' roles in special education, the roles of public school principals in special education, and the roles of Christian school principals in special education. Chapter 3 will elucidate the processes of purposive sampling, interviews, and coding procedures that the researcher used to discover the experiences of Christian school principals. Chapter 4 will describe the results of the research. Chapter 5 will summarize the data and give the conclusions and recommendations of the study.

Summary

Establishing special education programs in Christian schools can be a difficult task. Christian school principals who have established special education programs can provide valuable insights to other Christian school principals who may be considering these programs. Through phenomenology the researcher will interview Christian school principals, asking them to describe their experiences of establishing these programs. Furthermore, the biblical experiences of Christian school principals in establishing

special education programs will enable the researcher to discover the worldview

considerations and experiences that guide these principals.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The review of literature uncovered few descriptions of Christian school special education programs. Without descriptions of Christian school special education programs, the researcher was unable to determine the scope and extent of Christian school educational opportunities for students with special needs. Hence, the researcher was unable to discover the roles principals perform in Christian special education. This study will begin with an explanation of federal laws regulating special education and how special education programs affect curriculum, teachers, students, and parents. Further, the study will discuss the roles of principals in both public and Christian school special education programs.

Principals possess a comprehensive role in the implementation and maintenance of special education programs (Taylor, 2005). The tasks of principals include the humanitarian aspect of special education, that of considering the concerns of parents, students, and teachers. Other aspects of special education include the educational elements of curriculum, instruction, legal constraints, and related special education services (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Weighing legal and community concerns—balanced with faculty, student and curricular concerns—creates new tasks and obstacles for principals to administer in special education programs (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Hehir, 2007).

Federal Laws and Special Education

Federal laws state the need for special education programs and dictate the necessity for programs and related services in public schools. These laws guide policies of public schools in special education and mandate how public schools should meet special education standards (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). The passage of IDEA, IDEA 2004, and NCLB has influenced the comprehensive nature of special education programs and has been the guiding force behind the programs implemented by schools.

History of IDEA

In 1965 the federal government passed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) providing states with funding for special education students (Yell, 2006). The Education of the Handicapped Act (EHA) was passed in 1970 to incorporate previous federal special education laws under one piece of legislation and provided for teacher training programs, research into special education practices, and implementation of pilot educational programs in order to discover improved special education practices. Amendments were added to EHA that would require full educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007). Changes in EHA in 1974 required the federal government to provide states with added educational funding, parents with procedural safeguards in handling disputes, and students with the least restrictive environment.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), passed in 1975, provided additional funding for states to educate students with disabilities. A state-submitted and approved plan to the federal government—including the promise of a free

and appropriate public education for students with disabilities—enabled states to receive federal funding for special education programs. EAHCA required states to adhere to federal mandates requiring the least restrictive environment (LRE), testing and evaluation procedures, and due process for parental grievances (Yell, 2006; Wright & Wright, 2007).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was an outgrowth and nomenclature change of EAHCA. The purpose of IDEA was to provide federal funding to the states to educate students with disabilities (Yell, 2006). IDEA defined student disability categories, state grant programs, and infant and toddler programs. IDEA was amended in 1997 to enact changes in IEP goal setting, to establish discipline parameters, to make placement determinations, and to solve dispute resolution.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 2004

IDEA 2004 was enacted to align the standards of NCLB with the regulations of IDEA (Yell, 2006). Elements of IDEA 2004 that aligned with NCLB include the need for highly-qualified special education teachers, research-based teaching practices, high expectations for students with disabilities, access by special education students to the general education curriculum, professional development for teachers, preservice training for teachers, improvements in Individualized Education Programs (IEP), and discipline procedures for students in special education (Yell, 2006). Least restricted environment (LRE) remains an important component of special education law, and ensuing federal legislation has not diminished the need for LRE (Wright & Wright, 2007).

No Child Left Behind

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)—fulfilling the educational role to provide special education programs with accountability standards—incorporated components of IDEA and IDEA 2004 to complete the tasks of synchronizing federal laws on special education, to improve the educational performance of students with disabilities, and to require additional accountability standards (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). The components addressed in NCLB include the education of children of low socio-economic background, minority children, children with disabilities, and non-English speaking children. Other elements of the law include the following: 1) proficiency in reading, math, and science by the year 2014; 2) annual proficiency testing; 3) highly qualified teachers; 4) research-based instruction; 5) parental rights; 6) school choice; 7) district report cards; 8) access to academic content/curriculum; 9) adequate yearly progress; and 10) accountability procedures.

For students with disabilities NCLB requires schools and school districts to provide a high-quality education, challenging state academic achievement standards, and state academic assessments (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). IDEA 2004 requires accommodations and modifications to attain student achievement levels, state academic standards, and content (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). These requirements add to principals' involvement in special education laws and services to maintain the rigorous standards sanctioned by federal laws (Wright & Wright, 2007).

Legal Ramifications for Public Schools

Changes in the placement of students with disabilities based on NCLB, IDEA, and IDEA 2004, and how states have responded to these laws, have increased the number of special education students placed in general education classrooms (Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006; Wischnowski, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004). The additional number of students in special education and in general education classrooms in public schools has expanded the responsibilities of principals in special education administration (Bays & Crockett, 2007).

Public school principals are required to establish and implement special education programs to ensure proper services for special education students as guaranteed by law (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Wright & Wright, 2007). Employing competent principals to oversee and implement special education policies to ensure federal compliance is an important element in providing successful special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Mostert & Crockett, 2000; Taylor, 2005; Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007).

Christian Schools

Principals of Christian schools are not required to operate under the same federal guidelines when deciding issues about special education services, but are excluded from these regulations (Eigenbrood, 2004 & 2005; Weber, 2007). Some reasons Christian schools do not provide special education services include the lack of quality faculty, funding constraints, and their usage of public school special education services (Eigenbrood, 2004 & 2005; Weber, 2007). Christian school principals typically only

abide by federal regulations when students from their school participate in public school special education programs (Eigenbrood).

Principals, Special Education, and Parents

To ensure that both parents understand the essential elements of the program, open communication between principals and parents is vital. Principal—to alleviate problems in advance—should provide communication avenues to promote awareness.

Communication with Parents

Principals are the communication link between parents, special education teachers, and special education programs. Bays and Crockett (2007), Crockett (2002), and DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walter-Thomas (2004) encouraged principals to communicate all elements of special education programs with parents. In the role of communicator the principal is called to unite the parents and the community in the common goals of special education (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas). Because the implementation of special education programs could create both positive and negative feelings in the school-wide community, principals' communication skills are essential characteristics when discussing change (Daniel & King, 1997; Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Initial communications with parents would involve the articulation of any impending school changes caused by these programs followed by other ramifications of these programs (Daniel & King, 1997; Sligh, 2007). Since parental support is important in successful special education programs, principal communication of the components of these programs is vital (Rainforth & England, 1997).

Parent Concerns

When principals begin special education programs, parents may have concerns about the services provided for their children (Nowell & Salem, 2007). Concerns highlighted by Nowell and Salem included negative attitudes toward special education programs, administration of programs and services, parental roles and responsibilities in the program, communication with school personnel, and assurances regarding special education rights and regulations. Daniel and King (1997) and Lake and Billingsley (2000) identified concerns—self-esteem issues, academic achievement, behavior problems, and the number of special education students in the school—from parents whose students were transferred from separated classrooms to general education classrooms.

Primary to parent's concerns, as noted by Lake and Billingsley, was a difference in the manner parents and teachers view children. According to these authors teachers see children for their inabilities, and parents see children for their abilities (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). The assistance of principals would be necessary to solidify support, effectiveness, and direction of special education programs, and to provide a cohesive and philosophical unity when working with parents (Taylor, 2005).

Further parental and administrative concerns involved the behavior of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Daniel and King, 1997). Principals would need to address these behavioral concerns when placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Bouck, 2007). Students with disabilities exhibiting behavior problems could be reacting to rejection by general education students and

thereby defeating the social element of incorporating all students in the general education

classroom (Gresham, MacMillan, Ferguson & Ferguson, 1997).

Parents expect principals to know and understand the needs and concerns of

special education students (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Parents—expecting a positive

general education classroom experience for their children—need the assurance of

knowledge from principals that their children are considerate of all children's needs.

Principals with a caring attitude toward students with disabilities would add to the

effectiveness and parental satisfaction of special education programs (Boscardin, 2005).

Grievance Procedures

Nowell and Salem (2007) described inevitable conflicts that arise between parents

of special education students and principals. These conflicts could lead to frustrations

with the special education programs and result in difficulties with the resolution process.

Nowell and Salem, Ingersoll and Dvortcsak (2006), and Goor and Schwenn (1997)

advocated providing parents with grievance procedures, giving parents the methods to

file or express complaints. Nowell and Salem also explained how grievance procedures

could be conducted between parents and teachers with principals as mediators ensuring

an open communication between all parties to diminish and ameliorate conflicts.

Parents, teachers, and school principals should cooperate to solve conflicts for the

success of special education programs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000). Any discrepancies

between schools and parents require immediate resolution. Using special techniques—

building rapport with parents, modeling special education techniques, giving feedback,

and assisting special education students in building independence to promote

cooperation—are important elements of conflict avoidance and resolution. Ingersoll & Dvortcsak (2006) indicated that parents and families could benefit from learning intervention strategies to aid in solving problems.

Parent Involvement

Taylor (2005) and Rainforth and England (1997) suggested active principal and parent involvement in special education programs for maximum academic success. Parental support of schools in the efforts to provide quality special education programs for students with disabilities compounded the success of a school's program (Lake & Billingsley, 2000; Rainforth & England, 1997). To add to student success, parents can be elicited in goal setting and planning for academic achievement (Kolb & Hanley-Maxwell, 2003).

Summary

Principals have important roles in working with parents in special education programs (Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Rice, 2006). The literature indicated cooperative roles between parents and principals to achieve maximum success of special education programs. This cooperative spirit would aid and improve the working relationship of special education programs and the personnel involved in those programs.

Principals, Special Education, and Teachers

Teachers—because of their direct daily contact with students in need of special education—possess important roles in the success of special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Coulter, 2003). Bays and Crockett (2007) described how teachers, with

the help of principals, coordinate activities, plan the curriculum, and prepare for instruction in special education assuring the smooth working of the program.

Quality Teaching Staff

Federal law mandates that highly qualified teachers must be present in special education programs (Wright and Wright, 2007). Principals should employ teachers with special education degrees in order to fulfill the legal requirements (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin, 2005; Goor & Schwenn, 1997). The laws further stipulate that special education degrees no longer enable special education teachers to teach content area classes (Browder, et al, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Yell, 2006). Instead, special education teachers are able to assist general education teachers in the general education classrooms, unless the special education teachers exhibit content knowledge in core curricular areas (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). These regulations require a greater role for principals in hiring practices of qualified teachers (Wright, Wright, & Heath).

Principals' evaluations should determine which of the general education teachers have the ability to instruct students with disabilities (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin, 2005; Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Sands, Adams, and Stout (1995) described the skills needed for effective teacher training in special education including curriculum development, curriculum modification, and classroom adaptations and modifications.

Changes in the educational practices of colleges and universities regarding teacher training programs may need to be modified to prepare teachers for special education and general education classroom assignments (Bouck, 2007; Taylor, 2005; Wright & Wright, 2007). Dieker (2001), DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas (2004), Goor

and Schwenn (1997), and Sands, Adams, and Stout (1995) advocated special education

courses for all candidates in teacher training programs. Changes in teacher education

courses should include more special education courses to prepare teachers for

experiences in all types of classrooms (Daane, Bierne-Smith, Latham, 2000; Sands,

Adams, & Stout, 1995). Abell, Bauder, and Simmons (2005), Wright, Wright, and Heath

(2007), Mostert & Crockett (1999), DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, and Walther-Thomas

(2004), and Patterson (2007) expressed the importance of teacher training programs,

which should include instructional methodologies and special education theory and

practice. These training programs would involve instruction in methodology evaluation,

remediation strategies, achieving academic standards, technology use, data-based

decision making for student progress, curriculum mapping, subject cohesiveness,

problem solving, and whole class and individual needs assessment procedures.

Teacher Attitudes

Some teachers may possess negative attitudes when students with disabilities are

assigned to general education classrooms (Milsom, 2006). Daane, Bierne-Smith, and

Latham (2000) described how negative teacher attitudes have the potential to envelop

school classrooms and limit academic success. Negative attitudes can be attributed to a

lack of teacher training and preparation for students with disabilities (Browder,

Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006; Daane, Bierne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Dieker, 2001;

Milsom, 2006; Paterson, 2007; Roach & Elliot, 2006; Schwarz, 2007; Sindelar, Shearer,

Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2000; Voltz & Fore III, 2006).

Another factor, according to Smith and Smith (2000), was the number of students with

disabilities placed in classrooms contributing to negative teacher attitudes. Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, and Liebert (2006) attributed teacher attitudes to a lack of contact with students with disabilities. Without the positive influences of teachers, the success of special education programs could be limited (Daane, Bierne-Smith, & Latham, 2000).

Daane, Bierne-Smith, and Latham discussed the roles principals fulfill in overcoming negative teacher attitudes. Principals working with teachers in adverse classroom situations would provide assistance in overcoming negative situations (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000). Voltz and Fore III (2006), Simpson (2004), and Carpenter and Dyal (2007) advocated the removal of negative expectations by implementing teacher-training seminars in positive attitudes toward special education students.

Because teachers have been faced with the additional duties of special education programs, teacher perceptions have changed regarding the achievements of students with disabilities. Teachers have realized that students with disabilities can achieve higher standards than originally perceived (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006). Students with disabilities placed in general education classrooms have received improved instruction based on access to the curriculum, instruction from general education teachers, appropriate and high standards, alignment of assessments to the curriculum, and curriculum augmentation (Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004; Browder, Wakeman, Flowers, Rickelman, Pugalee, & Karvonen, 2007).

Teaching Methods

Proven instructional methodologies are needed in special education programs (Heward, 2003; Milsom, 2006; Zigmond, 2003). Depending on the type and severity of disabilities, teachers may need a wide range of strategies to work with special education students in general education classrooms (Filler & Xu, 2007; McLeskey & Waldron, 2007; Zigmond, 2003). These studies highlighted the necessity of strategies to aid the instruction of students with disabilities including developing classroom activities, planning curricular modifications, setting instructional goals, supplying related services, providing classroom resources, hiring instructional aides, scheduling, and assuring an appropriate student-teacher ratio.

For student success in the general education classroom, a collaborative teaching plan would be profitable for both teachers and students. Co-teaching or team teaching is one avenue for the instruction of students with disabilities that contributes to a greater amount of success for those students in general education classrooms (Boscardin, 2005; Coulter, 2003; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Taylor, 2005). The collaboration of teachers often creates a positive learning environment (Dieker, 2001; Idol, 2006). Teacher-student interaction techniques would be important concepts to prepare teachers for special education instruction (Smoot, 2004). Planning time with special education professionals would assist general education teachers in the instruction of students with disabilities (Attfield & Williams, 2003; Coulter, 2003; Patterson, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000; Sutton, 2007; Taylor, 2005).

Special education programs require teachers to instruct students on greater and varying academic levels. Students with disabilities receive the most instruction time because they possess the greatest needs (Heward, 2003; Rainforth & England, 1997; Sands, Adams, & Stout, 1995; Zigmond, 2003). Teachers devote more instructional time to students with disabilities, which can limit time spent with general education students. General education students could become bored or disruptive because of the teachers' involvement with the other students (Daniel & King, 1997). The tasks of principals include assisting teachers' involvement in the education of students with disabilities by providing planning time, instructional aides, and curriculum (Salisbury, 2006; Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Professional development activities to assist teachers in instructing students with disabilities should be planned by principals (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). The roles of principals would involve assisting teachers in finding, developing, and implementing effective teaching methodologies—both individualized and whole class—to achieve academic goals (Lasky & Karge, 2006; Filler & Xu, 2007; Friend, 2007).

Scheduling, Planning, and Class Size

When principals added more special education students to general education classrooms, teacher concerns about instructing special education students and reaching government-mandated achievement levels increased (Friend, 2007; Voltz & Fore III, 2006). Friend (2007) and Rainforth and England (1997) indicated the need to assign a limited number of students with disabilities to general education classrooms for optimal

learning opportunities (Rainforth & England, 1997; Smith & Smith, 2000; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Friend, 2007). Smith and Smith (2000) described the positive relationships between class size, students with disabilities, and student achievement. To ensure achievement levels when students with disabilities were admitted to general education classrooms, a small class size was advocated (McLeskey and Waldron, 2007). Principals should provide for a manageable ratio of general education students to students with disabilities (Gresham et al., 1997; Rainforth & England, 1997; Wischnowski, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004).

Exercising caution to avoid overloading any one teacher with a large ratio of students with disabilities was an important issue for principals to consider when assigning students to classrooms (Friend, 2007; Hehir, 2007; Rainforth & England, 1997; Rice, 2006). Increased teacher workloads are created with the admission of special education students. The admission of these students furthered the concerns of principals in regulating class size (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000).

Summary

These studies illustrated important roles of principals in special education programs, as well as demonstrated how principals address teacher concerns and problems when implementing special education programs. Providing teachers with best teaching practices and proven research methods would aid in student success. Assisting teachers with improved classroom attitudes and addressing class size concerns would aid in achieving successful special education programs and teacher attitudes.

Principals, Special Education, and the Curriculum

Curriculum for the special education program enables the students to attain academic goals. In order for each student to reach the prescribed educational goals, establishing curricula to meet those goals is a necessary function for principals.

Curriculum

The implementation of special education programs could necessitate changes in the curriculum (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2000; Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004; Hehir, 2007; Hodkinson, 2006; Rice, 2006; Schwarz, 2007; Taylor, 2005; Voltz & Fore III, 2006). Since NCLB requires all students to gain access to the curriculum, principals have an important role in determining the curriculum for the schools' academic programs (Browder et al., 2007; Salisbury, 2006; Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007; Zigmond, 2003). Principals, assisting in curricular changes, would enable special education students not only to gain access to the general education curriculum, but also to achieve success in the general education classroom (Voltz & Fore III, 2006; Zigmond, 2003).

A curriculum that is too difficult or too challenging for students with disabilities could cause frustration and defeat to these students (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Mock & Kauffman, 2002). Principals should be involved in the search for curriculum and curricular materials that will enable students with disabilities to achieve both curricular and IEP goals (Browder, et al., 2007; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, Farmer, 2007; Heward, 2003; 2004; Hines, 2008; Voltz and Fore III, 2006).

Depending on the nature of their disabilities, students might have a difficult time adapting to the curriculum, classroom procedures, and workload of regular education

classrooms (Browder, Wakeman, & Flowers, 2006; Carolan & Guinn, 2007; Dieker, 2001; Hoover & Patton, 2004). Through the help of teachers, students with disabilities would learn to adapt to the teaching and learning styles of general education classrooms. Principals also need to provide the teaching staff with professional development activities on teaching styles and classroom supports to ensure success for all students including those with disabilities in their classrooms (Hehir, 2007).

General education classrooms should strive to provide a quality education to students with disabilities (McLesky & Waldron, 2007; Renzaglia et al., 2003; Salisbury, 2006; Yoder & Hoeksema, 2007; Zigmond, 2003). Studies have shown that academic success was achieved when changes in the curriculum were adopted to suit the needs of these students placed in general education classrooms. General education classrooms have provided greater access to the curriculum, greater access to state standards, and a greater ability to meet federal achievement standards (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Wright & Wright, 2007).

Instructional Goals

Towles-Reeves and Kleinert (2007) cautioned school principals to be alert to the dangers of limited instructional goals restricting the curriculum to only a few objectives, teaching specific outcomes, and instructing only based on state assessments. Limiting the curriculum to such narrow outcomes in order to meet minimum state standards hampers students. Heward (2003) and Towles-Reeves and Kleinert explained that teachers and principals should continue to promote strong academics, to provide complete curricular

access, and to insist on high standards for all students. The call to high standards would challenge all students to greater achievement

Evidence indicated that students with disabilities in general education classrooms work on general education curriculum more often than those students in special schools (Browder, Wakeman, Flowers, Rickelman, Pugalee, & Karvonen, 2007; Roach & Elliot, 2006; Soukup, Wehmeyer, Bashinski, & Bovaird, 2007; Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker, & Agran, 2003; Ysseldyke, Nelson, Christneson, Johnson, Dennison, Triezenberg, Sharpe, & Hawes, 2004). Several studies have reported that students with disabilities have not only improved academic opportunities but also improved achievement scores when challenged with the general education curriculum (Wehmeyer, Lattin, Lapp-Rincker, & Agran, 2003, Yysseldyke et al., 2004). Working on general education curriculum in general education classrooms confirmed the positive effects of general education for special education students (Ysseldyke et al.).

Summary

Principals maintain an important role in providing a challenging curriculum for all students in the school. A curriculum is needed that addresses the needs of all students in classrooms to propel students for academic success. Considering the curricular needs of special education students is a task principals must continue to contemplate when making curricular decisions.

Principals, Special Education, and Students with Disabilities

The addition of special education programs to schools broadens principals' duties to include the provision of services for students with disabilities (Burstein, Sears,

Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Salisbury, 2006). Assuring the success of special

education programs involves the work of principals in assisting teachers, parents, and

students with disabilities enrolled in school. Special education programs increase the

demands on principals to know and understand the students enrolled in the school.

Classroom Concerns

When students with disabilities attended general education classrooms,

educational opportunities that might have previously been available to special education

students were removed or became less available to these students (Mock & Kauffman,

2002; Zigmond, 2003). Instead of being educated in special education classrooms,

students with disabilities were educated with other children in general education

classrooms—classrooms with many students and diverse needs (Hehir, 2007). Assigning

special education students to general education classrooms might remove some of the

individual attention that students with disabilities were used to receiving (Mock &

Kauffman, Zigmond). The addition of students with disabilities to general education

classrooms caused the competition with general education students for teacher time and

assistance (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Norland, Berkeley, McDuffie, Tornquist, & Connors,

2006; Mock & Kauffman, 2002). In this situation, principals must ensure that the

education for students with disabilities would continue to be the best education the school

could provide (Berry, 2006; Conrad & Whitaker, 1997; Sutton, 2007).

Testing Procedures

Principals are responsible for assuring the proper testing and placement of special

education students (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997; Crockett, 2002; Lasky & Karge, 2006;

Wright & Wright, 2007). However, Ysseldyke et al. cautioned schools when using

testing procedures and interpreting the results of the testing measures for classification of

special education students because assessment of these students may indicate

misclassification. Ysseldyke et al. described the use of testing and assessment procedures

both for IEPs and for the classification of students with disabilities.

Principals possess the primary role in implementing state testing procedures for

special education students (Abell, Bauder, & Simons, 2005). Difficulties in testing

students with disabilities continue because these students have problems attaining proper

state levels (Schulte, Villwock, Whichard, & Stallings, 2001). Crawford and Tindal

(2006) advocated principals acquiring knowledge of state standards in assessment in

order to gain understanding of the assessment process.

IEP Requirements

According to federal law, the responsibilities of principals include IEP testing

procedures (Wright & Wright, 2007). Towles-Reeves & Kleinert (2006) advocated the

assessment of instructional practices for students with disabilities and assessments on

meeting IEP goals. Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) challenged school principals to maintain

correct IEPs and IEP placement standards. The IEP is an important element in a special

education student's entrance into the general education classroom. This element helps to

define services, supports, and accommodations to assist special education students'

academic progress.

In order to ensure proper procedural safeguards and student access to the

curriculum, classroom teachers and school principals must work together in the IEP

process (Clayton, Burdge, Denham, Kleinert, Kearns, 2006; Elliot, Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Erickson, 1998; Sands, Adams, & Stout, 1995). The IEP process involves assessing the curriculum for qualifying students with disabilities, determining student performance levels, discovering the extent of student participation in the general education curriculum, writing annual goals, and finding related services and alternate assessments (Clayton, Burdge, Denham, Kleinert, & Kearns, 2006).

Student Attitudes

Adding students with disabilities to general education classrooms could constitute benefits to the students with disabilities, but may be a negative factor for general education students (Bouck, 2007; Browder, Wakeman, Flowers, Rickelman, Pugalee, & Karvonen, 2007; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007). Studies have shown that negative student attitudes limit classroom interaction between students with and without disabilities. Negative and positive attitudes affect the school climate and student performance (Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, & Staub, 2001; Zigmond, 2003). However, positive support, encouragement, and instruction from principals assist students in improving negative attitudes (Milsom, 2006).

Pudlas (2004) believed that low self-concepts had been placed on students with disabilities through placement in general education classrooms. Low self-concepts could be a detriment to the academic achievement of these students. Principals, according to Pudlas, cannot assume that students with disabilities will receive unconditional acceptance in general education classrooms whether in public or private schools. Combating negative attitudes of parents, teachers, and students requires diligence from

principals (Siperstein et al., 2007). To assist in the removal of negative attitudes, principals must emphasize the positive effects of special education programs (Conderman & Pederson, 2005; Milsom, 2006).

Students with disabilities also may have difficulties interacting with teachers. Teacher acceptance of students with disabilities and teacher evaluation of cognitive abilities of these students are challenges in general education classrooms (Gresham, MacMillan, Ferguson, & Ferguson, 1997). This study found an academic disconnect when students with disabilities were placed in general education classrooms. A lack of teacher acceptance of the students is an area that may require principal intervention.

Access to General Education

Zaretsky (2005) suggested that special education would provide a superficial access to general education classrooms with little attention to the instructional needs of students with disabilities. Zaretsky noted that classroom placement alone did not denote success for special education students. Though proper placement of students with disabilities was the role of principals (Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Schwarz, 2007), Zaretsky explained that incorrect placement could lead to greater problems for the student with disabilities. The reasons for problems, according to Zaretsky, were based on individual student disabilities, classroom resources, instructional techniques, and educational opportunities outside of general education classrooms.

Reschly and Christenson (2000) wrote that not all students with disabilities receive the best education in general education classrooms. This study noted the lack of achievement by students with disabilities, attributing to larger dropout rates for students

with disabilities. Dropout rates were credited to the lack of relationships in school, the extent of disabilities, and graduation expectations too difficult to attain for students with disabilities.

Daniel and King (1997), Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, and Staub (2001), McLeskey and Waldron (2007), and Zaretsky (2005) found few noticeable achievement differences between classrooms with special education students and classes without special education students. These studies noted no real academic gains for students with disabilities in general education classrooms. Academic losses that were noted in these studies were attributed to the lack of teacher training, teacher ability, and the difficulty of instructing many academic levels in one classroom (Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, & Staub, 2001).

According to Daniel and King (1997) some aspects of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms removed academic options for these students. Daniel and King also noted that students with disabilities were no longer able to attend special classes, but that they became part of large groups of students receiving instruction in general education classrooms. These authors expressed doubts that the addition of these students to general education classrooms benefited all students with disabilities. Instead of placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms, other academic placements could be preferred placements for students with disabilities.

Student performance and success in meeting academic goals are dependent on principals with assistance from teachers (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Lewis, Cruzeiro, & Hall, 2007). Many general education classroom placements are based on the concept that all children can learn (Crawford & Tindal, 2006). Therefore, students

with disabilities should be able to learn in general education classrooms, but the extent to which they learn depends on the supports and instruction that classroom teachers have been given to perform instructional duties (Boscardin, 2005; Crockett, 2002; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Palmer, Wehmeyer, Gipson, & Agran, 2004; Schwarz, 2007). Principals would determine which students receive general education classroom placement and which students need to be separated into special education classrooms (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997).

Discipline Guidelines

Grenot-Scheyer, Fisher, and Staub (2001) noted that more behavior problems in students with disabilities occurred when these students were included in general education classrooms. If students with disabilities receive their education in general education classrooms, staff members should address behavioral concerns with principals (Wischnowski, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004). Federal legislation dictates disciplinary procedures to follow in cases involving students with disabilities (Wright & Wright, 2007). IDEA 2004 gives specific rules involving alternate placements, services provided during disciplinary episodes, manifest determination of incidents, and appeal procedures (Wright & Wright). Although McCarthy and Soodak (2007) advocated greater leniency for principals in discipline to ensure the proper school environment, laws regarding discipline are mandatory.

Principals, Special Education, and General Education Students

Principals have the role of providing for both general education students and for students with disabilities (Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Rice, 2006).

Pudlas (2004) indicated the challenges inherent in beginning special education programs, including school climate, greater access to learning, interaction of all students, competent teaching staff, and improved classroom atmosphere.

Student Attitudes

The impetus behind IDEA, IDEA 2004, and NCLB was on the surface academic, but an anticipated by-product of these laws included socialization improvements for students with disabilities (Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007). Siperstein et al. (2007) indicated that increased social interaction between students with disabilities and students without disabilities did not improve relationships between all students; in fact, little positive change in attitude was discovered. Negative attitudes were created between students when students with disabilities were placed in the general education classroom.

Students without disabilities showed few attempts and little desire to socialize with students with disabilities (Milsom, 2006; Siperstein et al., 2007). Researchers had hoped that special education programs would demonstrate social benefits for all students, both inside and outside the classroom (Milsom; Siperstein et al.). While studies showed that general education students associated with special education students at school or during class, they did not interact with the students with disabilities after school hours (Gresham, MacMillan, Ferguson, & Ferguson, 1997; Milsom, 2006; Siperstein et al., 2007).

Students without disabilities could choose to reject or neglect students with disabilities, due to perceptions that students with disabilities lack the ability to compete

on academic or social levels with regular education students (Siperstein, 2007). Another

perception of general education students concerned beliefs that students with disabilities

possessed a greater state of disability than the actual diagnosis of their disability

(Gresham, MacMillan, Ferguson, & Ferguson, 1997; Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, &

Widaman, 2007). This has caused the socialization gap to widen, causing difficulty in

mixed classrooms.

Studies have shown that having students with disabilities in classrooms make

studying and concentration more difficult for general education students. Also, students

without disabilities may harbor hostility toward students with disabilities based on the

belief that students with disabilities receive extra instruction time and teacher assistance

(Siperstein, Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007). Pudlas (2004) challenged teachers to

demonstrate love for fellow man to combat ill-feelings towards peers. Other studies cited

ways to integrate special education students in the classroom by providing teacher

training in cooperative learning techniques and instructional techniques, increased

principal support, and early integration of all students in the school (Daane, Bierne-Smith

& Latham, 2000; Fu & Shelton, 2007; Hyatt & Filler, 2007; Milsom, 2006; Sipersteinn,

Parker, Bardon, & Widaman, 2007)

The roles of principals involve working with the school culture to include all

students (Milsom, 2006; Pudlas, 2004). Browder, et al. (2007), Goor & Schwenn (1997),

Lasky & Karge (2006), Pudlas (2004), and Taylor (2005) encouraged principals to

provide a school culture of positive student interactions. The enculturation of students

with disabilities in the school family could be a difficult process, but principals are

important liaisons in emphasizing the positive effects of special education programs (Milsom, 2006). Concerns should be addressed by principals to increase the effective instruction and assimilation of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Principals, Special Education, and Instruction

Instructional Approach

The placement of students with disabilities into general education classrooms may cause general education teachers to change instructional methodologies to meet the needs of these students (Rice; 2006; Schwarz, 2007; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006). Varying instructional techniques should be included in teacher repertoires to assist in the instruction of a wide range of student abilities and learning styles in classrooms (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Carolan & Guinn, 2007; Sands, Adams, & Stout, 1995).

Teacher awareness of the differences between individual instruction versus individualized instruction is an important element to consider (Rainforth & England, 1997). Rainforth and England mentioned that special education students require more than individual instruction on classroom objectives and goals. Individual instruction requires spending extra time with students. Individualized instruction denotes tailoring instructional methods and outcomes to meet the needs of particular students. Students with disabilities would benefit from individualized instruction (Bays & Crockett, 2007). Bays and Crockett highlighted differences in instructional methods but the differences could be overcome with teacher professional development provided by principals (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Lewis, Cruzeiro, & Hall, 2007).

Principals should assist teachers in discovering new methodologies and acquiring research-based instructional strategies to aid in the academic success of students with disabilities (Boscardin, 2005; Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004; Carolan & Guinn, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Mock & Kauffman, 2002; Rice, 2006; Salisbury, 2006; Zaretsky, 2005). One way principals could do this is by providing teachers with professional development that instructs the teachers on proven and effective teaching strategies such as adapting the curriculum for students, student social interaction, and curriculum monitoring for quality (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Daane, Bierne-Smith & Latham, 2000).

Student Expectations

Heward (2003) postulated the need for teachers to maintain high expectations for students with disabilities. Heward wrote that students with disabilities need challenges and positive learning outcomes. He also suggested that relegating the curriculum to simplistic objectives would not challenge the students with disabilities to attain the highest possible achievement. Instead the curriculum and teacher assistance should be coordinated with students' ability to learn and accomplish tasks (Slavin, 2006). The concept of the zone of proximal development, postulated by Vygotsky, explains students' abilities to accomplish given tasks (Slavin). Slavin noted that with the necessary assistance and guidance students can achieve academic goals.

Principal Roles

Studies by Ysseldyke et al. (2004) and Browder et al. (2007) indicated positive results when principals provided instructional changes for students with disabilities,

enabling them to meet performance objectives in general education classrooms. Working

to align IEPs with the curriculum and instruction is an important component for

principals in the improved instruction (Conrad & Whitaker, 1997; Ysseldyke, et al,

2004). Other strategies mentioned that increased academic success were aligning the

curriculum with the assessments, increased access to the general education curriculum,

and state-required educational standards included in IEPs.

Public School Principals and Special Education

Principals have many roles in special education programs (Bays & Crockett,

2007; Crockett, 2007). Principals work to provide effective programs for students with

disabilities (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). Principals complete and coordinate

special education services, as well as hire staff and coordinate curriculum and

professional development seminars.

Legal Considerations

Public school principals are required by law to implement special education

programs (Wright & Wright, 2007). In order for principals to begin special education

programs in public schools, they need instruction on laws, district policies regarding

special education, funding needed to continue the programs, and related information for

the efficient workings of special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Goor &

Schwenn, 1997; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Taylor, 2005).

Recent federal legislation—NCLB and IDEA 2004—required schools to provide

access to the general education curriculum to students with disabilities (Browder et al.,

2007). This legislation involved providing high academic standards, assessments that

measure performance based on state standards, and accountability standards. Special education programs in schools became the method used to reach standards created by federal legislation. Difficulties have arisen because of the creation of alternate assessments and education of students with disabilities according to stricter requirements for schools.

Varied Roles of Principals

In both public and private schools, the tasks involved in implementing special education programs are arduous (Boscardin, 2005; Crockett, 2002; Rice, 2006). To satisfy the needs of the government, parents, students, teachers, or other parties, work on special education programs should be completed with diligence and care. The implementation of programs has dictated the need for qualified personnel in charge of special education programs, in order to oversee their value and worth. The literature espoused knowledge of the law, the tasks and roles of principals and teachers, and curriculum as important elements in establishing these programs. The roles of principals in special education programs are immense but not insurmountable.

To aid in special education programs, principals participate in many components of the implementation (Bays & Crockett, 2007). The roles of manager, administrator, and supervisor of special education programs are not only important tasks, but difficult ones. Choosing qualified leaders to fill leadership positions in special education programs would be an important task.

Goals

Principals are needed to set the goals of special education (Conderman & Pederson, 2005; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Smith & Smith, 2000). Though special education programs are based on government policy, presenting a comprehensive philosophical and goal-based program for the school and the students remains the task of the principal. Important elements described in these studies included the key roles of principals in providing accountability procedures, adherence to federal and district policies, classroom supports, qualified teachers, and professional development opportunities (Conderman & Pederson, 2005; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Smith & Smith, 2000).

Attitudes

The attitudes of principals regarding special education can affect special education programs (Daane, Bierne-Smith, & Latham, 2000). If principals have not committed to a special education program, the program may lose sustainability and effectiveness. The proper attitude toward special education has the ability to enhance the success of a program (Idol, 2006; McCarthy & Soodak, 2007; & Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2001).

Training and Knowledge

Knowledge of special education. The preparation for special education duties requires principals to possess knowledge of special education laws (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Crawford & Tindal, (2006); Lasky & Karge, 2006; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Taylor, 2005; Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley;

2003). Because federal laws mandate school compliance, principals' awareness of the laws are necessary (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Bonds, & Lindsey, 2001; Crockett, 2007). The active involvement and special education knowledge of principals is key in program success (Taylor, 2005). If the principals have the acquired knowledge of special education programs, they are able to better judge the quality of programs (Friend, 2007).

Training. Little training is given with regard to special education laws and practices (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Lasky and Karge wrote that principals with special education certifications are few in number, emphasizing the need for more principals with advanced degrees in special education and advocating additional professional development in special education. Because of the need for training and the lack of certification, there is a great need for principals to receive training and support through additional courses to learn the intricacies of special education programs, resources for special education, and the assistance of teachers involved (Lasky and Karge, 2006; Daane, Beirne-Smith, and Latham, 2000; Patterson, Marshall, and Bowling, 2000; and Smith and Smith, 2000).

Professional development. To prepare for special education programs, professional development is necessary to keep principals informed about the latest developments in special education (Conderman & Pederson, 2006; Crockett, 2002; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006: Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004; Powers, Raynor, & Gunter, 2001). To ensure compliance with special education program law, professional development should remain an ongoing process for principals (Mostert & Crockett, 2000).

As laws and programs for special education change, principals need to provide continual professional development for faculty members (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Powers, Rayner, & Gunter, 2001; Rice, 2006). Professional development will enable faculty to stay abreast of the latest information, laws, and resources appropriate for special education programs. Professional development also enables the principal to promote improvement and teach strategies, learning, and effective use of staff for program success (Cruzeiro and Morgan, 2006; Conderman and Pederson, 2006; Layton, 2005; Mastropieri et al., 2006; Rice, 2006; Sutton, 2007).

Instructional leadership. Instructional leadership can be beneficial for unifying educational programs (Bays and Crockett, 2007; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; and Conderman & Pederson, 2005). In fact, principal leadership may be the predicator of special education success (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran and Walther-Thomas; 2003). The comprehensive role for principals in providing special education leadership is one that requires constant supervision and involvement for student success (Rice, 2006). Principals are not only instructional leaders, but also special education leaders of schools. Promoting inclusive practices and supporting special education programs through classroom supports and curriculum is a strategic role of principals (Bonds and Lindsey, 2001).

Principals are needed to provide the staff with planning time to align curricular standards (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007, Wischnowski, Salmon, & Eaton, 2004). Without the alignment of curriculum with state standards, not only would general education students have difficulty attaining state standards, but students with disabilities would have a

difficult time attaining curricular goals (Bays & Crockett, 2007, Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). Making good curricular decisions ensures the alignment of standards and discovery of curriculum for students with disabilities. The alignment of the curriculum to state standards proved to increase access to general education curriculum by students with disabilities, permitted more students with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum, and enabled more students with disabilities to take state assessments and meet curricular goals (Ysseldyke et al.).

Experience. The previous experience of principals with special education programs is an asset and positive influence on the success of special education programs (Dymond, Renzaglia & Chun, 2007; Milsom, 2006). Previous experience may denote greater success and interest in special education programs. The support of experienced principals provided positive elements in the success of special education programs (Berry, 2003).

Principal Roles

Roles of principals in special education programs cannot be underestimated (Crockett, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006). Principal's complex roles in special education programs include providing access to general education curriculum, alternate assessments, high expectations for all students, aligning instruction to alternate assessments, and equal educational objectives for all students (Wakeman, Browder, Flowers, & Ahlgrim-Delzell, 2006).

Collaboration. Principals cannot accomplish special education implementation alone (Billingsley, 2007). Principals should elicit the aid of teacher leaders in the

accomplishment of special education programs (Billingsley). Both teachers and principals may need additional knowledge and training in special education procedures before beginning the change process (Layton, 2005; Rice, 2006; Taylor, 2005). Together teachers and principals can lead the effective operation of special education programs (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Idol, 2006; Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Principals need to offer assistance and collaboration to both general education teachers and special education teachers (Rainforth & England, 1997; Smith & Smith, 2000). Principal assistance and collaboration will aid in the requisite work of accomplishing special education goals for the benefit of students with disabilities (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin, 2005; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000; Rice, 2006; Smith & Smith, 2000; Taylor, 2005). Studies indicated the necessity of school personnel working together to promote strong and effective special education programs. Also important is the role of teacher collaboration for the smooth working of special education programs. Since both general education teachers and special education teachers work together, collaboration is necessary for the benefit of special education students (Rice, 2006).

Another important part of collaboration is involving the community in the establishment of special education programs (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Goor & Schwenn, 1997). Eliciting the assistance of community members is a means to assist principals in establishing and supporting the program. Community involvement also promotes acceptance of special education programs (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, Walther-Thomas, 2003; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Sligh,

2007). Because of community collaboration, principals are seen as leaders in the

coordination efforts of teachers and parents to gain the maximum benefit from programs

for students with disabilities (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Lake and Billingsley, 2000).

Responsibility. Principals are the focal point for success in providing the

implementation and continuation of special education programs (Taylor, 2005). The

strongest predictor of the success and effectiveness of special education programs is the

principal (Conderman & Pedersen, 2005; Smith & Smith, 2000). Because principals are

the natural leaders of special education programs, they provide influence and leadership

skills to advance these programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Bonds & Lindsey, 2001;

Crockett, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006). The responsibilities of principals are described as

roles that hold many factions and programs together to create a cohesive educational

bond of special education success (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001). The roles of principals

include aspects of community, parents, students, and related school services (Daane,

Bierne-Smith, and Latham, 2000; Washburn & Moses, 2006).

Policy. Once principals have gained an understanding of special education laws,

they must learn district rules and regulations (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000).

Principals need to know the school districts' guidelines for the implementation of special

education programs, in order to produce special education programs that meet those

guidelines (Hoover & Patton, 2004).

It is the task of principals hired to institute special education programs to establish

rules for those programs (Boscardin, 2005). After understanding federal and district

rules, principals will have to set guidelines for district or local special education programs

(DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Towles-Reeves & Kleinert, 2006, Wright & Wright).

These guidelines require strict adherence to federal law and to district policies.

Evaluation. Principals must evaluate all aspects of special education programs to determine the benefits of the programs and needs of students with disabilities (Boscardin, 2006; Renzaglia, Karvonen, Drasgow, & Stoxen, 2003; Rice (2006). Evaluation of special education programs enables the program to remain viable and effective (Boscardin, 2005; Rice, 2006).

Bonds and Lindsey (2001) and Goor and Schwenn (1997) advocated the need for principals to visit and monitor special education classrooms. Classroom visitations allow principals to stay abreast of classroom events and developments in special education programs (Bonds & Lindsey). They would also permit principals to evaluate and assess the needs and abilities of teachers (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Boscardin, 2005; Mostert & Crockett, 2000).

Crockett (2002) emphasized the need for ongoing principal evaluation of all aspects of special education programs to improve program effectiveness. Goor and Schwenn (1997) proposed a multi-pronged evaluation model to ensure effective programs with increased student performance in programs and services offered by schools.

Planning. Principals are required to perform the planning for special education programs (Goor & Schwenn; 1997). Their planning includes all the elements of special education programs to ensure the program meets federal, state, and district guidelines (Goor & Schwenn). Planning the curriculum, providing paraprofessionals, and providing

collaboration time give all involved in special education programs access to time to make the program successful.

    Communication. Whether the special education program is in its infant stage, implementation stage, or has had many years of existence, principals should maintain the role of communicator (Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Rainforth & England, 1997; Rice, 2006). Communicating the needs, concerns, and successes of special education programs is important. Proper communication skills keep all involved in special education programs informed on events in the programs and help to celebrate successes (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Conderman & Pedersen, 2005; Rainforth & England, 1997).

Principal Support Role

    With the proliferation of special education programs in public schools, fundamental changes in the operation and structure of schools required principals to be informed and proactive in the implementation of special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Rice, 2006). The activities of principals in support of special education programs ensure effectiveness (Idol, 2006; Berry, 2006). There is a need for principal support in special education programs that includes hiring dedicated and qualified special education teachers, professional development activities, curriculum and assessment planning, classroom resources, and classroom support (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004). Vision, commitment, and guidance by principals are essential to the success of special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Lasky & Karge, 2006).

Without the support of principals, programs would experience difficulties in implementation (Idol, 2006). Principals cannot leave special education programs alone once they have been implemented, but should be involved with and continue to lead the programs (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001). The principal's continual hands-on approach to the program, will guarantee its success (Powers, Bayner, & Gunter, 2001).

Leadership and Supervision

The leadership portrayed by principals requires directing all aspects of special education programs (Di Paola and Walther-Thomas, 2003; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006). Without the leadership of principals, changes in special education programs would occur at a slow pace (McCarthy & Soodak, 2007). Leadership of principals assists in providing services, direction, and guidance to special education programs (Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). Leadership is important for improving education for all students including those students with special needs (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Elements of this leadership include the improvement of the educational program and support of teachers and students.

Another aspect of the leadership role of principals is the communication of the school's mission, curriculum, instruction, supervision of teaching and student progress, and the establishment of positive and conducive learning climates (DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004). Principals need to have knowledge of learning disabilities, staff relationship skills, commitment to improvement, and ability to work with students, families, and community.

Principals are the primary force in leading, supervising, and managing the success of special education programs (Crockett, 2002; Powers, Rayner, & Gunter, 2001). Furthermore, leadership roles of principals establish quality education (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Conderman & Pedersen, 2005; Crockett, 2007; Goor & Schwenn, 1997; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Patterson, Marshall, & Bowling, 2000). Principals are school leaders who establish a vision, foster group goals, individualize support, and have high expectations for all students in effective programs (Quinn, 2002).

Teacher Considerations

Evaluation. Classroom visitations are a way to evaluate teachers involved in special education programs (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Consistent and methodical evaluation of the faculty involved in special education programs assists principals in evaluating special education programs to remain effective. Evaluation enables principals to improve the teaching staff (Crockett, 2007).

Principals should evaluate, observe and provide support for teachers (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Carpenter & Dyal, 2007; Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Daniel & King, 1997; DiPaola, Tschannen-Moran, & Walther-Thomas, 2004; Lasky & Karge, 1997; Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007; Smith & Smith, 2000; Washburn-Moses, 2006). These authors described the need to support teachers involved in special education with resources, encouragement, services, and other requirements for special education programs. Teachers and principals must collaborate for special education success (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Taylor, 2005).

Instructional methods are important elements to be considered. Evidence-based instruction ensures teachers that strategies being used are valuable and trustworthy (Boscardin, 2005; Mostert & Crockett, 1999). Principals must equip teachers with strategies, professional development, assessment, and curriculum for success.

The quality of special education programs involves preservice and inservice training for the teaching staff (Mostert & Crockett, 1999). Training teachers and keeping them informed and knowledgeable after being hired will maintain a high quality of teacher ability and knowledge of the latest developments in special education (Lewis, Cruzeiro, & Hall, 2007). Because of the many academic standards, principals must aid in keeping teachers up-to-date with those standards (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxen, Cabello, & Spagna, 2004).

High quality teachers provide high quality instruction and success. That is why schools need to attract and retain high quality teachers (Boscardin, 2005; Crockett, 2007; DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003; Goor and Schwenn, 1997). There is a specific relationship between quality teaching and student success. After the principals have hired special education staff, they need to use their staff and resources efficiently (Layton, 2005). Using the entire special education program staff and resources is an exercise in stewardship for the benefit of the students.

Student Concerns

Principals must introduce support for students including programs, curriculum, resources, and services (Crockett, 2002). Instructional techniques meet the educational needs of students (Heward, 2003). Dieker (2001) identified the need for classroom

supports in the form of strong content area knowledge, varied teacher scenarios, multiple evaluations, and appropriate accommodations.

Boscardin, (2005), Clayton, Burdge, Denham, Kleinert, and Kearns (2006), Crockett (2007), and Goor and Schwenn (1997) believed that giving students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum was important. Because principals are responsible for ensuring access to the curriculum, access to general education curriculum will give students with disabilities better academic gains (Crockett, 2007).

Principals have the role and responsibility of ensuring that all aspects of the IEP process are followed (Salisbury, 2006; Yell, Katsiyannis, & Bradley, 2003; Wright & Wright, 2007). IEPs, document that specify services for students with disabilities, must be followed by the school staff. Ensuring IEP compliance is a legal mandate for principals (Wright & Wright).

Christian Special Education Ministries

Some Christian organizations exist to aid children and adults with disabilities in school, community, and vocations. Select Christian ministry programs are highlighted explaining their genesis and ministry focus. Two schools and two organizations are mentioned to indicate some of the ways needs of students with disabilities can be met.

Hidden Treasure Christian School

Hidden Treasure Christian School (HTCS), located in Taylors, South Carolina, was founded after a terrible accident highlighted the need for special education services for Pastor and Mrs. John Vaughn's injured daughter Becky (Hidden Treasure, 2009). Because Becky needed special education services, the Vaughn family searched for a

special education program that was aligned with their spiritual beliefs and principles. Not finding Christian special education programs or schools in their area, the Vaughns began a school for their daughter.

HTCS was established based on the belief that all children are God's special children and that they have hidden talents to be developed to serve God. Since the founding of HTCS, the school has expanded its facility from one room to a remodeled grocery store with many classrooms. Hidden Treasure's philosophy is based on the belief that all children have unique talents. The role of Hidden Treasure Christian School involves uncovering the hidden talents of children with disabilities and allowing them to perform the will of God for their lives. HTCS also desired to develop spiritual and academic growth in students with disabilities.

HTCS began with two students and now serves 85 students, focusing on the physical and emotional needs of children with learning disabilities. Since the beginning of the school in 1981, the school has grown to include 94 students with room for more. HTCS accepts students with a wide-ranging number of special education classifications.

National Institute for Learning Development

The National Institute for Learning Development (NILD) was founded to assist students with learning disabilities (National Institute, 2009). Originally developed to assist students in private schools, NILD has sought to expand its focus to be a wider, community-based organization serving the needs of children in all parts of the community. Elements of the NILD program include educational therapy to treat learning difficulties, reading assistance programs, and testing and consulting services.

An important aspect of NILD is educational therapy. The therapy is designed to raise students' level of expectations of performance to enable them to become confident learners. Through weekly therapy sessions various techniques are used to meet students' needs of thinking, reasoning, and basic academic skills.

Educational therapists trained in NILD methodologies work with students who have academic needs. These therapists undergo 240 hours of training and receive NILD certification as they are learning to instruct students with learning disabilities. Trained educational therapists bring their skills to students in either private or public schools. Since its founding in 1982, NILD has trained 1500 therapists serving students in 46 countries (Openbook, n.d.).

More than tutoring, NILD educational therapy seeks to give the students tools to overcome learning difficulties. With therapy students are instructed to focus on the teacher, listen to teacher instruction, understand important concepts, and record information. The educational therapists individualize instruction based on student difficulties and assist students to maintain focus on the lessons. Parents assist children in homework and remain active participants in the instructional process. Together the therapists, students, and parents ensure structure and success of NILD's academic program.

Neuhaus Education Center

The Neuhaus Education Center (NEC) is a learning organization dedicated to providing professional development for teachers in literacy instruction (Neuhaus, 2009). Using a structured approach in teaching language skills, the Neuhaus Center provides

teachers with skills for the teaching of students with dyslexia. The NEC not only trains teachers in reading, writing, and spelling strategies, it also provides materials to aid in classroom instruction. The Neuhaus Center further assists parents whose children need individualized reading instruction. Founded in 1978, the Neuhaus Center has trained over 10,000 teachers and has been prominent in Texas dyslexia assistance programs.

Christian Learning Center Network

The Christian Learning Center Network (CLC) assists schools in providing educational experiences for all students (CLC Network, 2009). Located in West Michigan, the CLC has furnished educational services for students with disabilities since 1989. The CLC works with local schools and teachers to provide personal education programs for students with learning disabilities. The CLC helps schools plan and implement individualized programs for students with mild to moderate-significant needs including academic, behavioral, and socioeconomic concerns. Students under the auspices of CLC are included in both general and special education classrooms. CLC believes that students are members of the general education classroom and staff of CLC work with classroom teachers to tailor education to the students with special needs. The CLC operates under the Response to Intervention model assessing student progress and realigning educational programs as needed by the child.

<center>**Christian School Principals and Special Education**</center>

As previously established, private schools are not obliged to offer special education services. The roles of Christian school principals in this area are not generated from federal laws, but are generated from other circumstances and considerations of the

Christian school's needs and philosophy. Though opportunities exist for Christian

schools to implement special education programs, a limited number of Christian schools

offer them (Eigenbrood, 2004). Principals of Christian schools should examine their

mission statements and biblical considerations to determine their schools' role in

implementing special education programs (Anderson, 2003).

Legal Concerns

Because public school principals are required to be informed about special

education law and procedures (Wright & Wright, 2007), Eigenbrood (2004) encouraged

these principals to also be educated on the intricacies of special laws and how these laws

could be assimilated in Christian schools. Christian school principals should understand

the necessary services provided to begin a special education program in the Christian

school (Eigenbrood, 2004). A Christian school principal who desired to implement a

special education program would need to exert much work, have strong motives, and

possess positive attitudes to implement and achieve success (Anderson, 2003; Coulter,

2003; Eigenbrood, 2005).

Christian Schools and Federal Laws

Eigenbrood (2004) analyzed the effects of IDEA on private, Christian schools and

provided information for Christian school principals about the services provided by

public schools, and how they could acquire these services for Christian school students.

Information was included to assist Christian school principals in knowing how to

cooperate with public schools to ensure special education services.

The services, provided by public funds, would aid the instruction of students with disabilities enrolled in Christian schools. Services provided by public schools would allow students with disabilities to attain academic success. Christian schools could begin their own special education programs with the assistance of public schools.

Though federal laws mandate special education programs in public schools, these laws do not mandate special education programs in Christian schools (Wright & Wright, 2007). Biblical implications for dealing with persons with disabilities are not defined as specifically as United States laws define special education under NCLB, IDEA, and IDEA 2004 (Wright, Wright, & Heath, 2007). Though replete with stories of people with disabilities, the Bible does not mention students with disabilities in the context of education. The Bible does, however, provide implications for the treatment of individuals with disabilities.

Student Value

One role of principals is to ensure that students with disabilities are valued as human beings created by God (Taylor, 2005). The role of principals is to meet the physical, social, emotional, and intellectual needs of students with disabilities in their schools. In this role, principals assist students in achievement as valued participants and welcome all students into Christian schools (Pudlas, 2004).

Leadership Skills

Cooper (2005) described Christian school principals in terms of biblical and servant leadership. Cooper used Paul as an example of a leader who relied on Christ to

enable him to use his gifts to serve others in God's kingdom. By laying aside personal goals and agendas the servant leader will be able to lead and serve others.

Community Role

Van der Walt & Zecha (2004) wrote that principals should understand the role of Christian community and how community members can help each other. The community should seek to assist all of its members to achieve their greatest goals. Christian school principals should communicate that special education programs will benefit the entire school. Special education programs should also assist schools in honoring God through acceptance of special education students and achievement (Hoeksema, 2007; Paxton-Buursma, 2007; Pudlas, 2004; Witvoet, 2007). Pudlas called for the Christian community to be more active in following the dictates of biblical worldviews. Pudlas also challenged Christian educators to follow a theological basis when discussing special education programs and services.

Another aspect of communal interest, according to Van der Walt and Zecha, is helping to discover student gifts. Because students are disciples of Christ, schools become the means assisting them in understanding their role as Christ's disciples. Christian school training assists students in learning how to articulate and live their Christian worldview. Furthermore, students learn how to appreciate the contribution of all members of the body of Christ and understand how the concepts of sin, reconciliation, and restoration are important components of the Christian life. Other goals of Christian schools involve evaluating and discerning truth, stewardship, servanthood, and

experiencing God. With this information, excluding students with disabilities would be inconceivable.

Literature on the roles of principals in education, whether public or Christian, abounds with information to encourage principal responsibilities in supporting the needs of teachers, students, and parents (Bonds & Lindsey, 2001; Eigenbrood, 2004; Lasky & Karge, 2006; Pudlas, 2004). Principals have the difficulty of working with diverse school populations and pleasing the constituency. Hehir (2007), Daane, Bierne-Smith, and Latham (2000), and Rice (2006) advised principals to examine the needs of teachers, students, and parents to determine the greatest school needs. One the needs have been determined principals should work to meet those needs with appropriate programs and staff.

Vision, Goals, and Philosophy

Critical to the success of special education programs is vision (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Principals must set visions for special education programs, enabling all stakeholders to understand the direction and importance of Christian school special education programs and services (Lasky & Karge). Well-articulated goals would drive special education program's successes (Coulter, 2003; Lasky & Karge, 2006).

The philosophy of special education programs should be articulated by principals (Goor & Schwenn, 1997). The philosophy should comprise the underlying guidelines and provide cohesive explanations for the programs. Coulter (2003) described the role of leaders as providing a vision and philosophy for constituents, allowing principals to chart the philosophical direction of special education programs. Coulter postulated a

philosophical basis for special education in schools involving the consideration of people

first when making decisions about students with disabilities. Coulter wrote that the staff

associated with special education programs—with the principal as coordinator—should

act in connection with fellow personnel to complete special education goals.

Pudlas (2004) suggested that principals must manifest Christian love to all

students in both general and special education. He advocated that Christian schools

should integrate students into a welcoming community of love, belonging, and

ownership. Pudlas challenged principals to become proactive in preparing teachers and

students without disabilities for students with disabilities by promoting a spirit of love

and acceptance for all students.

Teachers in Christian schools should embrace students with disabilities (Pudlas,

2004). Pudlas advocated the need for teacher efficacy and ability to teach students with

disabilities. Principals should assist teachers in understanding their abilities to teach

students with disabilities. This knowledge would add to teacher perceptions of their

ability to instruct students with disabilities and remove negative perceptions about

teaching students with disabilities.

Beginning special education programs could be a transforming process for

Christian schools (Paxton-Buursma, 2007; Pudlas, 2004). The process could involve

forming the school mission, educating parents, hiring teachers, and purchasing

curriculum. Many could share in the responsibility and vision for newly-formed special

education programs (Cooper, 2005; Paxton-Buursma, 2007). Both Cooper and Paxton-

Buursma advocated a collaborative spirit in special education programs by developing a

Christian spirit of cooperation. Cooper reinforced the concept of leadership as the force needed to cause changes in schools.

Biblical Considerations

Anderson (2006) challenged Christian principals to re-evaluate the absence of special education programs in their schools. Anderson advocated the inclusion of biblical foundations as the basis for the school's special education programs. He wrote that separate education for students with and without disabilities did not conform to the sense of belonging and community that Christian schools should provide for special education students. Isolating students with disabilities defies biblical standards. Anderson described interdependence in Christian schools by the integration of students with and without disabilities. Following the guidelines Anderson proposed would result in a new understanding of the roles of students as image bearers of God. Classrooms of average-achieving students are not the model for the secular world, and should not be the model for Christian school classrooms either. Anderson believed classrooms should reflect the same diversity in and outside the classroom.

Anderson (2003) and Pudlas (2004) wrote that Christian schools practice exclusion through admittance procedures. Anderson and Pudlas wrote that exclusionary Christian schools do not meet biblical guidelines and directives to show Christian love. Christian schools that do not include students with disabilities could indicate that they do not follow foundational principles or guidelines. To fulfill the role outlined by Anderson and Cooper (2005), Christian school principals would need to implement Christian principles in the establishment of special education programs. Because Jesus interacted

with people with disabilities, Anderson wrote that Christian schools need to interact with students with disabilities. This interaction will enable schools to discover the gifts of students.

Cooper (2005) described how principals should work for the interests of and serve others. Cooper further noted how principals should depend on the power of Christ to assist in their role as they consider the needs of everyone in the school. This author challenged principals to be transformational and transactional as they guide the school to implement those programs that will benefit all.

Attitudes and Roles toward Students

Pudlas (2004) challenged Christian schools and principals to assist in the development of positive attitudes toward students with disabilities. The Bible tells Christians to treat each other with respect (Matt. 7:12). Students with disabilities are included in the directive to show respect to everyone. Pudlas advocated the expression of all-encompassing love of God toward all students.

Pudlas (2004) discussed the need to have students of all abilities feel valued in Christian schools. He described the desire by students with disabilities for peer acceptance and expected a positive feeling, when students with disabilities were enrolled in Christian schools. He noted that acceptance of students with disabilities was not better in Christian schools nor was the sense of Christian community improved. He stressed the need for a greater sense of Christian community and acceptance of each member of the community.

Witvoet (2007) wrote of the fallen nature of all men, both in persons with and without disabilities. Since all have fallen from perfection, acceptance should pervade Christian schools and Christian communities. Witvoet articulated the need to focus on abilities, not disabilities, and challenged Christians to base special education programs not only on compassion but also on justice.

Witvoet (2007) reminded Christians to focus on the gifts God has given to all of His children for kingdom use. According to Witvoet all people have received a gift from God and regardless of disability, the gift needs to be valued and used for God's purposes in the Christian community. Hoeksema (2007) expressed the concern that people described disabilities as defects or burdens. Hoeksema instead challenged Christians to view people with disabilities as a resource. The goal of Christians should be to find the gifts of students with disabilities and use those gifts for the glory of God.

Hoeksema (2007) wrote about the hopes, needs, desires, and disappointments of students with disabilities. Hoeksema described Christian schools' avoidance of educating students with disabilities as a rejection of Christ-like behaviors taught in the Bible. Hoeksema described Christian schools' avoidance of educating students with disabilities as a disabling practice resulting in isolation and segregation. Paxton-Buursma (2007) expressed the element of hope and dignity for students with disabilities and hoped for a spirit of collaboration to assist students with disabilities in gaining academic success in the school. According to these writers, Christian schools should manifest the love of Christ in how belonging is expressed to all people.

Tuition

If Christian schools are determined to be the best placement for students with disabilities, those placements could be paid by public schools (Wright & Wright, 2007). Church and school separation issues prevent Christian school placement from occurring on a frequent basis (Weber, 2007). In Florida, school choice programs allow parents of students with disabilities to find the best placement for their child whether in public or private schools (Florida Department, n.d.).

Christian schools can develop and fund their programs without public assistance. If the schools establish and fund their own programs, tuition will likely be increased to meet the financial aspects of the program.

Funding and Locations

One option to prevent any perceived misuse of government funds is to have public schools provide Christian school special education services on neutral or public school sites (Weber, 2007). Providing services in this manner may satisfy the need for services, but this methodology would constitute non-inclusive practices for Christian schools. Eigenbrood (2004) said that the funding problems between public and Christian schools involved church and state issues. If difficulties arise in the implementation of special education programs due to funding problems, principals would need to use leadership skills of encouragement and inspiration to promote special education programs in Christian schools (Cooper, 2003).

Admittance

Christian schools possess the authority to accept or deny admittance to students. This policy allows Christian schools to control which students attend Christian schools basing admittance on a variety of factors including ability to pay tuition, academics, available space, and religious stipulations. Students with disabilities may have difficulty meeting the rigorous academic admittance requirements established by Christian schools (Taylor, 2005). Therefore, some students with disabilities have difficulty finding placement in Christian schools, and/or are sometimes denied admission to Christian schools (Eigenbrood, 2005). Since many Christian schools do not admit students with disabilities, the need to establish special education programs becomes unnecessary.

Christian schools have fewer special education programs than public schools according to Eigenbrood (2005). Because fewer students with disabilities are admitted to Christian schools, Christian schools do not often implement special education programs. Also cited as reasons for not establishing special education programs in Christian schools includes teacher qualifications, the amount of class time designated to assist students with disabilities, and the severity of disabilities (Eigenbrood, 2005). If Christian schools discover a lack of teacher qualifications and difficulty in meeting student needs, the probability of admittance is reduced for students with disabilities (Eigenbrood, 2005). Eigenbrood noted inherent difficulties of accepting special education students when teacher qualifications were considered. Christian school principals should investigate hiring procedures to include special education qualifications or other special education credentials and endorsements (Eigenbrood, 2005).

Evaluation of Programs

The evaluation of special education programs is important in Christian schools, as Christian schools consider the stewardship of funds and time for special education students. Many have contributed resources to the educational funds of Christian schools. Principals must ensure that funds are used wisely, efficiently, and in a way that glorifies God. As Christian schools establish special education programs, they must reassure the parents of the quality of the education provided to all children.

Summary

The studies discussed indicate the important role of principals in leading and guiding special education programs which constitute effective programs. Principals who integrate the tasks mentioned will be important special education leaders in their school. Public school and Christian school principals have a great amount of work to establish successful special education programs. Noting any legal requirements and or biblical directives will drive principals to accomplish the tasks before them.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Chapter 3 explains the research perspective, the participants, selection of site, data collection methods, data and document review, and rigor of the study. The focus of this study is to research the experiences of Christian school principals in weighing, establishing, and implementing special education programs in Christian schools. This research investigation seeks to bring an understanding of the considerations and thoughts school principals examine in determining whether to provide special education in Christian schools.

Research Perspective

This study used a qualitative research methodology. The qualitative methodology suited this study because it enabled the researcher to gather data based on the lived experiences of principals who have established special education programs in Christian schools. Qualitative research uses situational understanding, multiple data sources, multiple perspectives, and emergent data collection in the information gathering process (Willis, 2007). These features of qualitative research, based in phenomenology, enabled the researcher to discover thoughts, beliefs, and experiences of participants. Qualitative methodology enabled the researcher to gain greater understanding of the experiences of principals whose lives have been impacted by the implementation of special education programs.

Phenomenology is the specific form of qualitative methodology used in this study because it seeks to discover and understand the experiences of research participants (Giorgi, 2010). According to Connelly (2010) and Moustakas (1994) phenomenology seeks to know and describe the experiences of the participants. These first-hand perspectives help the researcher to gain a true understanding of a person's experiences (Zahavi, 2003). Furthermore, phenomenology requires that the researcher set aside or bracket any preconceptions about the phenomena in order to describe the essential nature of the data (Flood, 2010).   Bracketing enables the researcher to study the experiences without preconceived ideas of the results of the study (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010).

A fundamental element of phenomenological inquiry involves understanding the individual's point of view (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Through interactions with people involved in experiences, the researcher can gain understanding and meaning about situations or experiences. Bogdan and Biklen propose that phenomenological interpretation of experiences will give meaning and understanding to those who read the study.

Participants

Participants in this study included a purposive sample of seven principals from Christian schools in Michigan who had implemented special education programs. Because schools were needed that had implemented special education programs, purposive sampling was a necessary component of this study. According to Leech (2005), making decisions about sampling is an important consideration in qualitative

research. Devers and Frankel (2000) noted that purposive sampling provides the avenue to investigate the research questions.

Principals were chosen based on the names supplied by the Christian Learning Center (CLC) in Michigan. They were selected from the list of those who responded to the initial contact letter or phone call, which had requested participation in this study. In order to conduct a thorough investigation of principal experiences, both large and small, Christian schools with special education programs were selected. Though no attempt was made to limit principals to a single gender, all principals in this study were male.

Once a principal had been selected as a possible participant, a letter was sent to the principal further explaining the purpose of the study. Follow-up contacts were conducted when principals indicated a willingness to be interviewed for the study. Principals who signified a willingness to participate in the study received a consent letter to sign indicating participation.

Selection of Site

Principals were selected from seven schools for the investigation of experiences in establishing special education programs. The goal was to interview one principal from each school. Each principal was from a Christian school in Michigan. The schools ranged in size from 175 to 920 students. Of the seven schools chosen for the study, four were grades P-8, one was P-6, and two were 9-12. The greatest differentiation among the schools was in student population. All of the schools in the study were located in suburban communities and were members of Christian Schools International (CSI).

The researcher anticipated that interviews would be conducted in the schools of principals. Interviewing school leaders in their own schools allowed them to stay relaxed in a safe surrounding. Three interviews were conducted in the morning before the school day began, further providing free-flowing dialogue without interruption from the work day. The other interviews occurred during the school day with principals blocking time for the interviews.

Research Questions

The questions to be researched in this study involved the experiences, thoughts, and perceptions of Christian school principals after the development and implementation of special education programs. The questions that drove this study sought to discover the heart of considerations and experiences involved in the implementation of special education programs in Christian schools. The research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question #1: What were the experiences of Christian school principals, as they were involved in considering and implementing special education programs?

Research Question #2: What factors or events were influential in the principals' experiences?

Research Question #3: Were there any biblical considerations that were influential when considering the implementation of a special education program?

Research Question #4: Were there any legal considerations that were influential when considering the implementation of a special education program?

Data Collection

Methodology

Data were collected through interviews. Principals were first contacted by letters regarding the research project's focus and intent. If they indicated a willingness to be involved in the study, an informed consent letter was sent to them. After the letter was signed and returned, principals were called and scheduled for interviews. The researcher conducted and tape recorded the interviews and subsequently provided the principals with a copy of the transcribed interview for verification.

Interviews. Interviews were conducted in the offices of the school principals. Personal interviews were the chosen method for the researcher to obtain a clear picture of the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of principals. Interview duration required one to two hours for initial completion. As needed, follow-up interviews or clarification of thoughts were scheduled to complete data collection. If little additional information was required, interviews or clarifications were done by phone calls or email.

Narrative data, obtained from the interviews and consisting of free-flowing dialogue, enables the researcher to understand the experiences of principals (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). Fieldnotes, added after the interviews, allowed the researcher to record nonverbal information (tone of voice, body language, distractions) inherent to the interview but not recordable with a tape recorder.

Before the interviews began, the principals were reminded of the purpose of the interviews. Interviews involved open-ended questions to allow participants to speak freely and thus avoid biased questioning by the interviewer. Additional questions were

prepared for possible usage during the interview process to stimulate the principals'

recollections of their experiences (see Appendix A). Principals were encouraged to relate

any information that was part of their program implementation, whether or not the

information pertained to the study. Notes were taken, but more importantly the

interviews were recorded on a digital recorder, which also provided a digital meter to

allow easy and accurate access to all sections of the interviews. After each interview had

been completed, the interviews were transcribed and any notes or possible follow-up

questions were inserted. A hard copy of the interview was printed and the interview was

saved digitally in two locations.

Saturation. The researcher concluded the interview when information reached its

saturation point, which was determined when the research questions and any follow-up

questions had been answered or the interviewee added no new information.

Member checking. Member checking ensured the rigor of interviews and

allowed the interviewees to examine the notes of the researcher and make corrections or

additions—an important element in adding rigor to qualitative studies (Ary, Jacobs,

Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Member checking or re-presenting allowed the

interviewees to correct or expound on the information given during the initial interviews.

Once the interviews had been transcribed, the researcher emailed each principal the

transcribed interview notes to enable the principal to check for accuracy and

completeness. Three principals responded to this request, but provided no additional or

corrected information.

Each principal was encouraged to submit further information that had not been given during the interview. The process of member checking allowed the interviewees to determine if the true intent of the interviewee's thoughts and experiences had been imparted to the researcher. Also, after the themes had been identified, each principal was emailed the themes for comments, corrections, and input. Four principals responded in agreement to the themes that were proposed. Only one principal suggested an additional theme, but this theme was not part of the research focus.

Document review. The principals were asked to provide documentation on the implementation process of the special education program. Some principals emailed pages from Student or Parent Handbooks that either described the program or gave the referral and acceptance process for admittance in the program. School websites were searched for any additional information about a school's special education program. In many of the schools the same information provided in the handbooks was also stated on the website. Mission statements and philosophy statements were reviewed for information about the programs. These statements could provide foundational rationale for a school's program.

Perspectives. Data collection focused on both emic and etic perspectives. Emic perspectives refer to the perspective of the person who has lived the experience (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Etic perspectives refer to the perspective of the person who is learning about the experiences (Ary, et al., 2006). The emic perspective of the participants of the study is vital to the data collection of the study. The etic perspective of the researcher will bring understanding and meaning to the study.

Data Review

Reflections and Familiarization

After the interview process was completed, the researcher read the transcribed text and reflected on the content. Through this process each part was aligned into the whole thus gaining an understanding of the texts and the relationship each text had with the other texts. After the data had been recorded, familiarization with the data began enabling each interview to be related to the whole of the data collected (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). The reading and re-reading of the data enabled the researcher to code the data for placement in appropriate categories. After familiarization with the data, a coding system was developed to determine categories for the data including a search for words, phrases, or themes that were repeated (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). Through the process of analyzing and aligning parts into the whole, the researcher gained an understanding of the interviews and the relationship the responses had with the other responses.

Data Analysis Procedures

Coding began with a thorough understanding and familiarity of the information that had been collected from each interview. This process involved transcribing, reading, and re-reading the interviews. The initial coding procedures—referred to as provisional coding—involved finding those words and phrases that appeared often throughout the interviews (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). To begin the coding process, all interviews were printed. Important words, phrases, and sentences from the transcribed interviews were highlighted. Additionally, the researcher re-read the data and important

words and phrases from the principals' responses were typed on separate documents.

Using the same color-coding format as the interviews, the typed lists of words and

phrases were highlighted. This dual process allowed the researcher to more readily code

and compare similarities in principal responses.

After the information was highlighted, it was categorized into 7 groups.

Subsequently, the 7 groups were combined into 5 groups which were principal, teacher,

parent, student, and board. Once these categories had been determined, the data were

grouped according to biblical considerations, principal perspectives, and parent or teacher

perspectives. This was determined to be the most effective method to discover themes.

The data were interpreted according to the value the researcher believed conformed to the

guiding questions. In the next step of the process, these coding and interpretation

procedures allowed for the emergence of themes.

Upon completion of categorization, the interpretation process began in order to

gain a thorough understanding and insight into the data. As reflections about the data

were made, the researcher began to write the thoughts and phrases that provided an

overall picture of the interviews. Generalizations about the information assisted in

making connections between the categories the researcher discovered during

familiarization and reflection. These generalizations allowed the formation of themes.

Once the themes were determined, the researcher substantiated the value of the themes by

comparing them with the data.

Based on the qualitative nature of the research design, the analysis of the information for this study was described in narrative form and was based on the following information:

The researcher became familiarized with the collected data. By analyzing the information based on emergent themes, subjects' ways of thinking, relationships, and biblical considerations, the researcher defined the appropriate method of synthesizing the information for usable consideration. The researcher sought to analyze actions principals had taken to address the needs of special education in Christian schools. Emergent themes indicated the considerations these principals had made in providing or not providing for the needs of special education students in their schools. Finally, this study was triangulated by using interviews, member checking, and document analysis.

Rigor

Credibility

Credibility refers to the truthfulness of the findings in a study (Ary et al., 2006). Because responses were based on lived experiences that were related anonymously, concerns over credibility were minimal in this study. The researcher believes the research represented accurate and honest views of the participants as they described their lived experiences. Interviewees' assistance helped in the analysis of the data and gave further direction and meaning to the findings. Collegial discussions of the data assisted in the referential or interpretive rigor.

By spending adequate time in field research, the researcher accumulated essential evidence to validate the findings. Spending too little time in field research would not

assist in the credibility of the findings (Ary et al., 2006). The researcher allowed each principal adequate time to relate the experiences of special education implementation.

The researcher used reflection to assist in the understanding of the text. Phenomenology uncovers the meaning of experiences based on personal experiences of the researcher (Laverty, 2003). Reflection allowed the researcher to take critical looks at the obtained information and to consider possible biases (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves).

Other methods to attain credibility included fieldwork, reflexivity or self-reflection, and rich description. Reflexivity refers to the process of analyzing personal bias (Ary et al., 2006). Rich description—detailed depiction of the event to enable the reader to understand the research—was used to illustrate the data and highlight its content and context (Ary, et al.; Bogdan & Biklen). Rich description enabled the reader to infer similar inferences and make comparisons of the data (Ary, et al.).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the generalization of research findings to other situations (Ary et al., 2006). This research study has transferability concerns because of variations from school to school. The researcher hoped to find patterns in the schools' policies and decisions in order to enhance transferability. Since the study included seven interviews, cross-case comparison provides transferability.

A further aspect of transferability was selection effect. Because schools had been selected for the study, the purposive selection could limit transferability. Depending on the schools selected for the study, they might not be representative of all Christian school principals.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency of information gathered through the research process (Ary et al., 2006). Because other researchers should be able to interview the principals obtaining similar data, this study should contain high levels of dependability. Following this study's outlined procedures should lead other researchers to the same conclusions.

Dependability would be enhanced through an audit trail, which provided the reader with the information on how the study was conducted and the decisions made in the study (Ary et al., 2006). Furthermore, to enhance dependability, the researcher described the study's procedures enabling replication.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the freedom from bias in a study (Ary et al., 2006). No field research could be completely neutral. All efforts were made to maintain neutrality in the procedures of the study and in the interpretation of the findings. As stated earlier in Chapter 3, member checking enabled the researcher to refrain from bias in writing and reporting data and to ensure that conclusions were confirmable.

An audit trail was used to guide the reader through the decision-making processes used by the writer (Ary et al.). This audit trail defined the procedures used, demonstrated their dependability, and attested to the conclusions. Based on previously described measures, the data provided confirmability because inconsistencies were examined, alternate explanations were considered, and accurate data recordings were maintained. Thus, with the use of the audit trail, confirmability was enhanced (Ary et al., 2006). By

following the steps outlined in the audit trail, other researchers would be able to replicate the study and reach the same conclusions.

Role of the Researcher

This section describes the researcher's personal experiences and perceived ideas about special education, so the reader can fully understand the predominant influences affecting the researcher. Writing in first person will enhance rigor by bracketing the researcher's personal thoughts and prejudices so to completely understand the experiences of others (Cohen, Kahn & Steeves, 2000). First person pronouns will be used for ease of writing to reflect the position of the researcher, thus providing a more natural description of the study. Through this process, the reader will be able to understand the personal feelings that have influenced my educational career. I have taught in five different Christian schools—none having provided special education. Parents have approached me asking why my school did not have a special programs as well as parents and teachers telling me not to begin a program. This study allowed me to talk to Christian school principals who have implemented special education programs and then learn from their experiences.

I entered the pre-interview stage with preconceived ideas regarding the value or necessity of implementing special education programs in Christian schools. First, realizing the cost of Christian education, I had been acutely aware of meeting budgetary requirements without implementing a special education program. Burdening all parents with additional budget items could create an economic burden on families with already

strained tuition payments. Special education programs, with their funding needs, could

produce undue burdens on financially strapped parents.

   Secondly, I understand that a school might not be able to provide for the

academic needs of special education students. Providing curriculum and staff to teach the

curriculum, could still not ensure the academic gains to validate the program's

effectiveness. Enrollment of these students could produce minimal academic gains and

thus negate the funding of the program. A corollary of this belief would be the school's

inability to assist these students. Having these students attend special schools more fully

equipped to provide for students with special needs would be more beneficial for them.

Lastly, I have concerns about the disruptive influence an influx of students with

special needs could create in the classroom. Students with emotional disorders, Tourette

syndrome, or wheelchair-bound could disrupt the academic progress of the general

education students. Thus, in the attempt to provide an education for students with special

needs, the school could impede the academic progress of the general education students.

Because of these considerations, I had not advocated students with special needs in the

general education classroom. Researching the experiences of Christian school principals

who have instituted these programs could provide personal insights thus altering my

opinion of special education programs in Christian schools.

Summary

The phenomenological approach guided the researcher into a greater

understanding of how principals have experienced the phenomenon of special education

implementation. By interviewing principals and analyzing the data provided by them,

common themes were found to aid the reader in understanding the experiences. Through

the study of the information received from the principals, categories and themes were

determined to guide the research model. The researcher was able to understand

experiences that led principals to implement special education programs in Christian

schools. The results of this study will enable the reader to become familiarized with the

experiences of Christian school principals in their quest to implement special education

programs.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS OF THE STUDY

This study researched the experiences of Christian school principals who established special education programs in their schools. Hermeneutic phenomenology was used as the research method to guide the researcher to an understanding of the experiences. Through the use of this phenomenology, Heidegger believed the researcher could "get his reader inside the actual world" of another (Steiner, 1989).   The data resulting from this study will provide information to those Christian schools without these programs as well as providing encouragement to these schools to offer educational programs for all students (Paxton-Buursma, 2007; Pudlas, 2004).

This study will describe the experiences that principals of some Christian schools have faced, as they worked to implement special education programs. Helping principals realize that a leader's goal is to focus on what students can do is a positive step in convincing principals to provide for all students (Witvoet, 2007). This study will help principals realize the value of each student and develop the model Christian community at school (Pudlas, 2004).

The participants were principals in Michigan. Interviews took place in the respective principals' offices. In each interview, the purpose of the interview and the topics to be covered were explained. Once each principal understood the intent of the interview, the conversation began. After the completion of the interview, participants were asked if the content of the transcribed information was accurate. Follow-up questions were asked immediately to clarify any comments. Expressive comments were

added to the printed documents to record facial expressions and emotions not part of the recorded data. All information about the special education programs was derived from the interviews or school documents.

This chapter will first describe the documents reviewed for the study, the results of the interviews according to categories, the results according to the responses of each principal, and finally according to emergent themes.

Document Review

Documents received from principals explaining the implementation process, the special education program, and policies regarding the programs were reviewed. Documentation included pages from Student or Parent Handbooks that described the program or gave the referral and acceptance process for admittance to the program. Information available on websites was read for information that was not discussed during interviews. Mission and philosophy statements were read to determine how this information could correspond to the principals' interview statements.

These documents indicated a deeply religious nature in the philosophy that guided the foundation of special education programs. Meeting the spiritual needs of all students was evident in each school's philosophical statement. In addition to the religious nature of the special education, these documents expressed a desire to assist students with special needs academically, socially, and behaviorally. Preparing students to participate in society to the best of their ability, to accomplish real work independently, and to develop their talents are examples of the goals of these programs.

The documents, along with the interviews, indicated the extent of services provided by each school. For the purpose of this study the minimal services for a special education program included a Resource Room, reading remediation, and inclusive education opportunities during the school day. As stated in Chapter 2, the Christian Learning Center (CLC) assisted schools in providing services. Each school in this study was a member of CLC. The National Institute for Learning Development (NILD)—with ties to one of the schools—trains educational therapists who then provide services at schools. Along with the services provided, state-certified special education teachers were employed by each school in this study.

Table 1 delineates services available at each school. According to Table 1 each school provided minimal studies as well as a variety of other services. Those schools which offered a greater variety of services were larger schools with a diverse special needs student population. The table also indicates that the Christian schools in this study do not have specific guidelines on what services they need to provide. Services are based on local need or teacher availability. Furthermore, this table shows that Christian schools are not legally bound to offer the same special education services that public schools offer.

Table 1

Summary of Services Provided by Christian Schools

Schools	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Resource Room	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Reading Remediation	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Inclusive Education	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
Emotional Disabled Services	√		√	√			
NILD Member Services		√					
Tutoring	√			√	√	√	√
Mental Retardation Services			√	√			
Learning Strategies		√	√			√	√

Summary of Responses by Category

This section describes the categories that arose during the familiarization with the data. As principals explained their experiences with the special education programs, the categories of principal considerations, board mandates, parental concerns, teacher input, student issues, and religious considerations arose. Each subsection will indicate the varied nature of concerns expressed by those involved in special education.

Principal Considerations

The principal's role in the implementation process is of utmost importance. This was reinforced repeatedly by five of the interviewed principals. One principal remarked that strong leadership was needed to implement a special education program. Another said that the principal was the key element to the program's success. The literature supported the views of the principal's integral role in the success of special education programs.

Before a program could be implemented, the principal must perform fundamental tasks. Each principal began with a list of initial responsibilities to lay the foundation for the program. Developing a philosophy was of utmost importance. The principals commented that, without an underlying philosophy of special education, the program would flounder. Without a strong basis, the groundwork would not provide the necessary framework on which to build a successful program.

The principal needed both passion and ownership of the program, as one principal commented. Without passion for the program, he did not believe that the program could achieve success. He said a principal's passion must be deep and personal in order to

provide the "missionary zeal" for the program. Included in this passion was a vision for the program. He advocated the direct enunciation of the vision without apologies for his or the school's position. He said once the vision had been formulated, it was important to share it.

Another principal mentioned the need to grapple with the concept of what it meant to be a Christian school. This foundational belief drove the principal to consider the purpose of the school and to think deeply about his God-given task to lead the school.

Another initiating task for principals included the investigation of special education programs. Three principals expressed the value of visiting schools with special education programs. Information gathered from visiting schools with operational programs was invaluable as they formulated plans for their programs. The principals observed programs in action which provided insight as well as time to questions those involved in a program.

Each principal expressed the value of the CLC—a special education organization—which provided necessary implementation assistance. The principals valued the advice received from this organization and the use of their special education teachers. Though the schools had to pay for the teachers, these highly-qualified teachers greatly benefited their programs. Because these teachers were so beneficial to the programs, each principal later hired staff from CLC.

Since the principals were under a governing school board, they were required to obtain board approval before adding a new program. To begin the process of board approval, the principals informed the boards of the initial groundwork and kept them

informed through each stage of implementation. As the principals informed their

respective boards of the implementation progress, they were given approval to continue

implementation.

An important step in board approval involved presenting the board with the

program's budget. Though board members controlled the budgets in these schools,

principals were expected to provide a cost estimate of the program. Board approval of

the project could depend on budget issues, so the task of providing a practical budget

demanded time to structure.

As the implementation process proceeded, the principals informed the teachers of

the planning schedule and asked for input. One principal emphasized the need to listen to

the teachers so they would not sabotage the program. This principal believed that

teachers needed to provide input to illustrate that school authorities were involving

everyone in the change process.

Likewise, the parents and school community need to be informed. A principal

noted that his role included "leading the community through the issues" by giving them

the necessary information about the program. To assist in the information process

principals suggested conducting parental meetings to inform them about the program.

Three principals emphasized the need for collaboration in special education,

which involved working with the school board, teachers, and parents. One principal

described his "passion for collaboration" and cautioned not to proceed without it. His

statements indicated the importance of involving a wide-range of people in

implementation. One principal explained, "the principal must establish a relationship

with the community, teachers, and board." Providing a concerted effort for the implementation of the program was primary in his estimation. This effort would enable everyone to "buy into the philosophy and the program."

Principals varied on their experiences with funding special education programs. One principal explained that his school required the parents to pay extra tuition for the program. Because additional tuition could cause a burden for a family, parents could be granted tuition reduction. More preferably, he encouraged parents to find auxiliary sources for tuition assistance. This principal believed that the program should be self-sustainable. He believed that the program should survive on its own merits and that parents should find the money. In the early years these programs functioned well under this policy. However, after a few years the financial aspect of the program changed; it was no longer separated from the regular school's budget, and parents no longer had to pay extra tuition for services. Though this principal advocated these alternative funding options, other principals did not believe the program should have its own budget. They believed that because the students with special needs were wholly part of the school, the funding should function similarly.

To limit a rapidly increasing budget, one principal advocated starting the program on a small scale. In this way he hoped for only small budget increases thus easing tuition burdens. The gradual implementation would also assist the staff in becoming accustomed to the program.

Three principals noted that time was needed to implement the program. Two principals spoke of the extra meetings that occurred during the fact-finding and

informational stages, with the time commitment becoming a predominant factor in the

principals' work.   Though one principal spoke of the time that it took from his schedule,

he thought it was worth it.

As one principal spoke of his experiences, he recalled that implementing the

program was not always easy. "It doesn't always work out like you want it to work," he

commented, yet he expressed the joy of the outcome of his labors. No principal

expressed regrets having implemented the program.

Four principals expressed personal benefits of the program. Two mentioned how

they believed they would provide a great benefit to special education students, when

instead the students provided a benefit to them. The principals spoke of the joys received

from interacting with students with special needs.   One principal said the program

broadened his horizons as a teacher, as a person, and as a Christian. Another principal

remarked how he had grown as a person from the experience.

Six principals spoke of the biblical factors of implementation. One believed that

the families and their children the opportunity to learn in the Christian school. Another

explained the need to tell families what God had done because of the program. Passion

was evident in principals' voice as they spoke of the program. The principals explained

their deep-seated passion to teach all children from a Christian worldview. Through the

implementation of the program, the principals explained their increased appreciation for

these children of God.

Table 2 indicates specific information about the principals and their schools. As

the table shows, five of these principals are from large Christian schools. Also, these

principals have served many years in education and have been involved with special education for 13 years or more.

Table 3 notes the themes that emerged from the interview process. As indicated on the table, all but one of the principals mentioned biblical concerns as an important consideration in the implementation of special education programs. It is noteworthy that few principals mentioned the amount of time needed to begin a program. Finally, the topics relating to the education of students were the ones most discussed by the principals, thus illustrating the main concern of the principals.

Table 2

Principal Details

Principal	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Student Population	175	360	710	920	900	900	760
School Grades	P-6	P-8	9-12	P-8	P-8	P-8	9-12
Years in Education	33	41	37	42	31	33	37
Years as Principal	24	30	26	13	22	27	28
Years in Special Education	19	23	15	13	21	22	28
Highest Education Degree	MS	MA	MA	MA	MA	MS	MA

Note: MS is Master of Science and MA is Master of Arts.

Table 3

Emergent Topics

Principal	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Vision	√	√	√			√	√
Community	√	√	√	√			
Time	√	√			√		√
Biblical Concerns	√		√	√	√	√	√
Passion for Students	√	√	√		√		√
Collaboration	√	√	√	√	√		√
Leadership Skills		√	√		√		√
Principal Growth	√		√	√		√	√
Educate All Students	√	√	√	√	√		√
Inclusive Education	√	√	√	√	√	√	

School Board Directives

The principals acknowledged their responsibility to the school board. The principals' tasks include preparing budgets for board and eventually for school society approval. Although some boards were in favor of the special education program, funding and budgets were still important matters for consideration. Principals were required to submit financial plans to the board. In the fact-finding stage of the program, half of the principals reported that some board members took part in the committee work involved in discovering the intricacies of special programs.

Three principals expressed the idea that funding the special education program was a covenantal responsibility that should be borne by all school families. A covenantal tuition policy reflects the belief that all Christian families share the burden of all aspects of tuition (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993). One principal experimented with having parents of children with special needs pay additional tuition costs; however, the principal indicated that the additional tuition concept was soon discarded and replaced by a program of equal tuition for all families enrolled in the school. Another principal explained how his school initially used tithed tuition money to create a fund to help defray the cost of the tuition for families interested in the school's special education program but were unable to pay the cost. The principals, committed to the concept of education for all of God's children, indicated initial struggles with discovering the optimal method for funding special education.

Two principals added that once the school implemented the special education program and more students with special needs became part of the school academic

program, the siblings of those students also enrolled in the school, thereby increasing the school's population. Additional students put fewer, if any, strains on the school's budget, instead contributing to and increasing cash flow.

Parental Concerns

All schools visited were founded by parents who continue to hold ownership and final authority of the school. Any fundamental changes in these schools operation would require the proposed change to be placed on the agenda of the annual society meeting. Since the school societies consisted of parents as the predominant voting members of the meetings, the principals' next task was to convince parents of the need for special education services. Principals reported that they worked with parents of students with disabilities and parents of students without disabilities. Both groups of parents had separate concerns about the special education program.

Some parents in the school societies had already been asking principals about the possibility of enrolling their children with special needs in the Christian school. These parents did not require convincing about the value or need of implementing a program. According to three of the principals these parents were part of the impetus to begin a program. In one case, a parent asked the principal, "Who made you the one to determine whether my child attends this Christian school?" The question ignited some soul searching in the principal, because he did not have a response at that time.

Four principals voiced concerns about the need to prepare parents regarding new programs. One principal spoke of the need to obtain parental support and cautioned not

to proceed without this support. To become supporters of the program, parents must understand the rationale and vision for a special education program.

As one principal stated, "The parents at the school had the heart's desire to serve the special needs student." Another principal said, "The community was ripe for the program." These comments indicate the level of commitment from the parents before the programs began. Therefore, when these parents had the opportunity to vote about a program, they voted in favor of implementation.

Three of the principals described their experiences with special education in Christian schools from starting resource or pull out programs. Afterthoughts and reflections helped these principals realize that resource and pull out programs were inadequate for the needs of their students and not sufficient as special education programs. For parents, these options did not satisfy the needs of their students. These principals then worked on adding more services as part of their programs including reading remediation, speech services, and inclusive education.

Parents of students with special needs did not need to be convinced to support a program in the Christian school and were enthusiastic to enroll their children. One principal expressed the elation from a parent who would finally be able to send her child with special needs to a Christian high school. In order to keep parents well-informed, parents were given clear expectations of the program to be implemented as well as an explanation of the resources and accommodations that would be part of each student's academic program, e.g., tutoring, pull-out programs, special teacher assistance, teacher aides, and special classes.

Concerns from parents of general education students posed few questions for the principals. One principal related a concern from a parent who had misgivings about students with special needs in the general education classroom. This parent was afraid her child would not receive an adequate education with the addition of students with special needs. The principal assured the parent that a program of strong academics would continue in the school. Since the implementation of the program, this principal has heard no further complaints or concerns.

Another principal spoke of a parent's concern regarding safety in a case of misconduct of a student with special needs. The school worked with the student, but behavioral problems continued, and ultimately the student was removed from the school. Parents who are worried about safety have legitimate concerns, according to this principal, and such concerns need to be addressed for the benefit of all students.

All principals spoke of the satisfaction and appreciation parents experienced once a special education program was implemented. Any concerns that may have been presented during the initial stages of the program were alleviated once the program began. Three principals said that many parents felt that their general education students benefited from having attended school with students with special needs. Parents expressed satisfaction with the school's academic program after the addition of students with special needs. No principal reported negative parental comments about a program.

One principal, in describing his experience with the implementation, was reminded of the resourcefulness of parents. In some cases the school would be unable to fund a special education program without asking for additional tuition. He spoke of the

ability of parents to find alternative funding for their student. He remarked that parents may surprise them with the ability to procure additional tuition monies to enroll a student in the program.

Teacher Input

No principal underestimated the need to include and inform teachers throughout the entire process. Teachers, a vital element of the learning process, were important fixtures in the lives of new students as well as in the lives of general education students. The principals were unanimous in understanding the need to keep the teachers informed throughout the process.

One principal explained how he had spoken to the teachers before beginning the implementation process to ascertain the reaction of the teachers. With his staff he found no opposition to the program. Other principals had a laborious process of convincing veteran teachers of the need for special education. These principals explained that the younger teachers were more willing to accept the idea of special education; and these teachers were more willing to instruct special education students than veteran staff members. Though none of them could explain this anomaly, they seemed unsurprised that the veteran teachers voiced more opposition to special education.

Two other principals spoke of divisions among their staff over special education students. They indicated instances where teachers were even hostile to changing a teaching style or making an accommodation for any student in special education programs. In order to set the groundwork for the program, these principals advocated promoting the vision, working with the teachers, and continuing with the program.

Principals speculated on reasons why teachers were not willing to accept the program. One thought the unwillingness was due to a lack of knowledge about the program and the students. Another described this feeling as "hesitancy for the unknown." Once again, information provided to teachers who are reticent about the program could alleviate these concerns. Still another stated that his task was to open the eyes of the teachers who have been resistant of change.

One principal indicated that some teachers did not believe that special education students belonged in the general education classroom. Though this principal was not able to explain any reasons for this teacher's belief, he said that his job was to work with those staff members to help them see the need to educate all children in the same classroom setting. Helping teachers see the value of each student was how another described his role in implementing the program.

A majority of the principals noted that teacher training and inservice opportunities were needed to prepare teachers for a new program and new students. Inservices would provide information on teaching methods, accommodations, and curricular modifications. One of these remarked that teachers needed to learn how to handle students with special needs. These sessions would provide not only teaching methods but also realistic student expectations.

Principals told their staff that the school had adopted a special education policy that the staff was required to accept. Those teachers that remained against the policy were eventually told to leave the school. No principal expressed the desire to terminate teachers who were not receptive to the special education program but the possibility of

termination was mentioned. Staff members against special education eventually did leave and staff hired to fill these positions favored the program helping with program acceptance.

Three principals indicated that program approval would occur when a core group of teachers accepted the program. One found that a change in programs at the school produced a transformation in his teachers. He remembered that some of his most ardent antagonists later became his top supporters after they were able to accept the program changes. In fact, he related that an initial program detractor later traveled to other schools to proclaim the positive aspects of special education. Though this principal reveled in the change of attitude, he noted that time was needed to change both the attitudes and school culture for special education acceptance.

Student Considerations

When describing special education students, each principal related stories that illustrated the joys and trials of enrolling the students. Most of the stories showed the satisfaction that comes with enrolling special education students. Though stories of limited success were few in number, the principals did indicate that hardships, such as behavior and staffing, occurred during some years of special education implementation.

Principals mostly related success stories since the enrollment of students with special needs. The over-arching theme of each principal's story was the reaction of general education students to the new students. Principals spoke of the positive social aspects of having students with special needs in the building. With the enrollment of

these students, many general education students could now interact with them for the first time. The principals gave only positive feedback about this student interaction.

Two principals noted the reluctance of middle school students to relate to students with special needs. These principals believed that the changing world coupled with early teenage years prohibited many middle students from active involvement with special education students. Even though most middle school students were not reluctant to intermingle, the principals noted that this age group was more likely to avoid students with special needs. In no way did this cause the principals to rethink their special education programs. One of these principals mentioned that when students were involved with students with special needs from kindergarten and first grade, they were more likely to associate with special education students. Growing up with students with special needs contributed to acceptance.

Another positive aspect of including special education students was the change in the school culture. Four principals sensed the change in the general education students, noticing that they became more caring and sensitive to the needs of others. The change was noticed between the general and special education students, as well as in relationships among general education students. The principals expressed the joys and rewards received from implementing a special education program—ones that had not been expected.

Three principals advocated the necessity of preparing general education students for special education students. They noted that simply adding these students to the school population, without preparing general education students, would be a mistake.

Inservices for students were needed for programs to work smoothly. One principal mentioned a certain special education student who had not been a complete program success. This principal reflected that insufficient pre-enrollment preparation, for both the new student and the general student body, caused all students to suffer. General education students were not prepared well for an extreme special needs case, which, unfortunately, had negative repercussions for the school. Based on this student's enrollment, the principal became a strong advocate for preparing the general education students for students with special needs.

One method principals used to enable students to interact with special education students was through a program called "circle of friends." The program elicited the assistance of general education students in tandem with the special education students. Using student volunteers, the program placed three to five general education students as helpers for one student with special needs. If a special education student needed help in the lunch line, carrying items, or assistance in the restroom, this student's "circle of friends" was called upon to provide the necessary assistance. If the circle of friends noticed that their friend was having a difficult time in chapel or class, they were instructed to remove their friend from the situation and help calm the friend as much as possible. Once the student regained composure, the circle of friends would return the student to the class or assembly.

One principal remembered when classmates of a student with special needs— disappointed with her behavior—told the girl that fifth grade students did not act the way she was acting. The girl immediately changed her behavior and joined her friends. The

principal said that neither he nor his teachers were able to change this girl's attitude and behavior, even after an hour of coaxing. Her circle of friends accomplished the task in a few minutes.

Circle of friends serves to help students with homework or tutoring where extra help is needed. Mentoring during the school day was done by some of the students. Two principals explained that academic assistance was helpful to both the general education and students with special needs—because it provided academic and social connections.

As previously mentioned, the circle of friends program was voluntary, no general education student was required to participate in the program. The students who volunteered received training from special education teachers on needs and behaviors as well as requirements and expectations of a volunteer in the program. Students who participated were rewarded each month with a pizza party.

Two principals mentioned that the circle of friends concept extended past the school day to include after school events. Students were encouraged to take students with special needs to school sporting activities and even to gatherings at their homes. These principals indicated that the students with special needs were invited to social events outside of the school. They reported that this camaraderie not only improved the school culture but also aided the alacrity of acceptance of both the special education students and program.

All principals spoke highly of the circle of friends program. They expressed the value of the volunteer work done by the general education students and the mature attitudes and service components that had previously not been part of the children's

repertoire. This kinship through circle of friends was a benefit that principals had not expected.

A concern of principals had been student relationships. Two principals feared that the students with special needs would be targets of harassment. Students in these schools were warned about the school's anti-bullying policy and that no bullying would be tolerated. Once the special education program was established in the school's culture, one of the principals doubted that the student body would allow the bullying of a student with special needs any longer. As one principal noted this attitude shows that the special education students were accepted by their fellow students.

Religious Considerations

As the principals spoke of their experiences, their deeply-seated commitment to follow biblical teachings was evident. Each principal desired to have children with special needs attend Christian schools instead of public school. The principals believed that each child was God's child and the role of the Christian school was to teach them. Three principals used the phrase "created in God's image" when describing their thinking on special education. They believed that all children were created in God's image; therefore education in a Christian school is necessary.

These principals described their schools as Bible-based schools with the goal of educating all God's children. One principal spoke about 1 Corinthians 15 which describes the various parts of the spiritual body. He likened the general education students and the special education students as different parts of the body. He felt called to honor all parts of this body. One principal mentioned his school's theme—God's

Mosaic. He described the theme as understanding the body of Christ, our uniqueness, and our requirement to become more attuned to the kingdom of God and how the kingdom of God works through each of us. He spoke about how special education helps students understand the body of Christ and the care required by each part. He said that Christians need to care for the weaker ones among us. Establishing a special education program was his way of helping the weaker members of the body of Christ.

Another principal spoke of cultural diversity and its association with color and religion. He noted that in God's kingdom diversity included more than color or religion—it also included ability. He said Christians were required to appreciate the diversity of the body of Christ. Since students with special needs are included in God's diversity, he did not believe they should be excluded from the Christian school.

Summary of Individual Principal Responses

Principal A

Principal A has been principal of three Christian schools and has implemented special education programs in two of those schools. He has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master of Science in Educational Administration. His 24 years of principal experience including 19 years of special education experience have provided him with insights into a program's needs. When he accepted the position at this current school, he remarked that the school board and school community were eager to implement a special education program. With the mandate to implement a program, he began the implementation process his second year at his current school. Special education in his school consists of one-on-one tutoring, pull-out programs, and inclusive

education. Reading Recovery and Response to Intervention (RTI) are additional

elements of the program. He deems his program to be successful in meeting the needs of

the students with special needs in his school.

Principal A described his experiences by explaining the mandate he received from

the school board. The board decided that a special education program had to be

implemented, and as the new principal, he was in charge of its implementation. The

board's mandate was based on the philosophy that all children are God's children

regardless of ability. Therefore, this school's mandate was to ensure that all children

could be educated on its campus. Previously, parents had to enroll their students with

special needs in the public school—an option the board considered unacceptable.

With the board's mandate, Principal A organized a committee to investigate other

programs by visiting schools with special education programs. Teachers, parents, and

school board members comprised the committee. The committee investigated other

schools, wrote a rationale and vision, and devised a budget for the program. As

committee work continued, the principal informed the board, parents, and staff about

their progress. Once the committee finished its work, the final proposal was given to the

parents for a vote.

With the help of the CLC, Principal A obtained valuable information to help in

the program's implementation. He appreciated the role this organization provided in

answering questions and filling staffing needs. Furthermore, when problems occurred

with students with special needs, he could rely on the assistance of this organization.

Principal A began his program with a resource room. This was the first stage of the program but did not provide enough assistance for the students with greater needs. Also, the resource room did not meet the mandate established by the board. Adding more staff and academic opportunities to establish a full inclusionary program was still necessary.

Teachers expressed concerns during the investigation process that included managing disruptive students and the logistics of educating the students with special needs alongside general education students. Principal A took into account some staff contentions about the wisdom of implementing the program. As the program was implemented, Principal A remarked that some of the most ardent detractors became his most ardent supporters. In fact, some of the initial detractors later went to other schools to praise special education programs.

Parent issues were also important factors in beginning the program. Principal A remarked that the parents and community were ready for the program because they were not satisfied with sending their students with special needs to public schools. Based on religious principles he explained that many of the families attended the same churches as those families with children with special needs. Attending church with these students and then sending them to the public school was difficult for the parents to reconcile biblically.

Principal A explained that he possessed an important role in the process of leading the community through special education issues. Conducting informational meetings, alleviating fears, and understanding the biblical mandate of the program were

included in his leading. His leadership role in regard to the board, staff, and parents was a central task for this principal.

Principal A emphasized the need to support teachers. The support involved assigning aides to the classrooms or having students removed from the classroom during certain academic subjects. Some students would be removed from the classroom to attend remedial classes. When students were removed because the academics were deemed to difficult, teachers could focus their instruction on the remaining students. Though sometimes students were temporarily removed from the classroom, he said his program emphasized "push in instead of pull out"—allowing students with special needs to learn in the general classroom as often as possible. Professional development opportunities to instruct teachers in special education methods were also included in teacher support.

Principal A expressed remorse when describing one particular situation with a special education student. After approximately three years in the school, the student had to be removed. He was not able to control himself; he threw a chair at students, and hit one of his adult aides on two occasions. This student's circle of friends was not able to assist him. Even though the principal favored special education, he had to provide a safe environment for all students. The principal was saddened because he could not provide the services this child needed, and therefore had to remove the child from school.

The principal's analysis of this student's behavior and subsequent dismissal stemmed from a lack of proper preparatory student training. He also noted that the late start of the circle of friends program could also have attributed to the lack of training.

Hindsight indicated the need for earlier student preparation for special education students. Had the circle of friends started earlier, Principal A reasoned that the students would have become more quickly accustomed to students with special needs and more sensitive to their needs.

Principal A prayed often for the special education program. When he did not experience success with a student, as in one of the extreme cases, he became distraught. Though one difficult student remained clear in his mind, he continued to pray for more special education students. He commented on the Lord's generosity in providing the students. With the students deemed a gift from God, Principal A could not accept failure only greater resolve for success.

According to Principal A, a good deal of time was involved to begin and maintain the program. When a special education teacher or teacher aide was not available, the principal became the substitute teacher or caregiver. The circle of friends would also assist with problems, but at times this group was either unavailable or unable to assist. Once the program was operating, sustaining and supporting the program still required great efforts.

The principal expressed the joy of having the program. When he observed the changes in the school and how the program helped children understand the body of Christ, he was even more satisfied with the program. He could not imagine his school without the program and was grateful to have participated and benefited from all aspects of it.

Principal A remarked that his school's theme was "God's Mosaic" based on 1 Corinthians 15. The theme was chosen to highlight the diverse needs and gifts among Christians. He believed that understanding human diversity, helped students learn more about themselves and how students are used in the Kingdom of God. In the case of special education in his school, students learned that the stronger vessel helped the weaker one.

Principal B

Principal B worked in one school that had a special education program in place when he arrived. At his current school he initiated the program seven years ago. He had experience with NILD and with the organization located in his city. His 25 years of experiences have helped to cement his love and dedication for students with special needs. Principal B's educational career consists of a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership. His school benefits from the special education services of a national organization and a local agency. The school also employs an educational therapist for assessment and intervention purposes. Along with a Resource Room, this school has developed a "search and teach" program to identify and serve special students at the earliest time possible. Principal B, especially because of the CLC and NILD, has found his program to be very beneficial.

Principal B discussed his first experiences with special education at a school that involved a Resource Room. As this school grew, so did the special education program. After hiring a qualified director, the principal assisted the director and acted as an

advocate and liaison to the board, community, parents, and financial supporters. He mentioned that this support he gave as principal was crucial to the program's success.

Funding the program evolved to include ways to assist parents with tuition payments. Initially the board tithed tuition payments from enrolled parents and used the tithe to provide tuition assistance for needy special education students. Principal B emphasized the importance of providing financial support for the program to ensure its viability. Unlike other principals in this study, he believed the program should survive on its own merits and funding. He believed that if parents desired the program, they would fund it and take responsibility for its success. He did not believe principals and boards should eliminate the program based on financial concerns.

Because parents paid tuition to send their children to this school, this principal believed that offering a quality program with highly-trained and highly-committed staff was essential. In fact, he believed the program should meet higher standards than public school programs and that mediocrity should not define the program.

Principal B served on the board of the NILD—a national organization which assisted schools in special education services. When this principal changed administrative positions, he brought his previous school experiences as well as his experiences with this organization. As he began his new position, he recognized the need for NILD's services in his new school, but was wary of impugning the current program. Implementing a new program could cause resentment from those involved in the school's current program.

Before adding the services of NILD, he discussed his concerns with the head of the local special education organization. He explained his concerns about the school's current program and the need for additional services. After this conversation he talked to his staff about an additional program. His tactic was to plant a seed while learning the thoughts and feelings of the staff. With positive feedback from the staff, he searched for a director for the new services. When a staff member expressed interest in learning about the program, she was sent to a convention to learn more about the organization.

He then discussed the possibilities with the school board. He explained the program to them under the conditions that the program would be budget neutral—it would cost the school no money. The success of the program was up to the parents because if additional funding was required, funding would be the parent's responsibility. Because the program was passed on a budget-neutral concept, the board allowed him to continue with his investigation and planning.

A member of NILD conducted professional development sessions with staff to introduce them to the organization's philosophy and services. The representative also conducted parent meetings to explain the organization's role with students. To alleviate any concerns the principal explained how both programs could operate smoothly in the school.

Principal B's school offered the new special education program but also continued with the previous program. With the implementation of the new program, he exercised caution to maintain a complimentary relationship between the programs. With both programs operating, the principal adopted a "search and teach" program with the

intent of assessing students and identifying those students who would be better served with NILD techniques.

Principal B described a student who struggled in school. He worked with the boy's parents many hours to help him learn. As Principal B reflected on the experiences with this student, he realized that the boy needed services his school could not provide. This frustration with the inability to assist a needy student was instrumental in kindling a passion for special education. He concluded by emphasizing the need for passion for special education and especially for the students.

Principal C

Principal C has been a principal for 26 years. He has a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master of Arts in Educational Administration. He has also completed over 20 hours of course work in Community Leadership. When parents approached him about 15 years ago with the desire to send their children with special needs to his school, he and his school board began a serious consideration of the question. As they reflected on their school, their constituency, and their mission, they could not produce a biblical reason to deny admission to these special education students. He and his board began the process to implement the new program in their school.

Special education services in his school could involve self-contained special education classroom, inclusive education, or some of each depending on student need. This school assists students by providing a skills center for any student to learn the art of studying. Depending on the need, a tutor is provided for the classroom. The principal noted that these services have proven to be very beneficial in meeting student needs.

Principal C described a conversation with parents who asked him about Christian education for their child with special needs because the student was currently attending public school. This principal said his heart was broken because the child was not receiving Christian nurturing at the public school. This request caused the principal to rethink his position on Christian education with regard to special education. In talking to interested parents, he could not furnish a biblical response for the lack of special education services. Principal C said his school offered courses for the top 10% of the student body, so he believed an education should be offered to students on the other end of the educational spectrum. He believed his biblical and Christian task was to educate all God's children; therefore, the school began a special education program.

Although the program started out small, students and staff were continually added. The program began with the students attending a self-contained classroom, but soon blossomed into part time self-contained classroom and part time general education classroom. Today, the school has a special needs classroom and a study skills room for any child who needs assistance. As the program has expanded, more staff were hired to provide for the students enrolled in the program.

Principal C expected the program to be a great service to the students and parents, but instead the program became a blessing to the staff and students. The change in the student body was profound. He noted that the school became a more caring institution, because both the general and special education students interacted with each other. He also believed the school became more spiritual because the students found new ways to share Christian love.

One element essential to the change in the caring nature of the school was a caring network he called "connections." Connections was established to pair special education students with general education students for mentoring, sports activities, or friendly gatherings at homes. The first day students were able to enroll in Connections, he and the special education teacher did not expect many volunteers, but so many students enlisted that a rotation was established to allow all students to participate. The program became so much a part of the school that he could not imagine the school without it.

The teachers voiced initial concerns about the program. They were concerned about the extremes in classroom ability levels and meeting all needs. Also, many of the teachers had never worked with students with special needs and were fearful in their thinking. In order to alleviate concerns, the students began in self-contained, special education classrooms, allowing the teachers to become comfortable with the students at school. Inservices, professional growth seminars, and educational experts assisted in preparing staff for the students. Assurances from the principal that teachers would be supported in the classroom further calmed any fears.

Monetary concerns about the cost of the program were included in initial considerations. Principal C reflected on the money spent for band, sports, and AP classes—expenditures not questioned by the board. If the school spent money on these programs, the special education program would be worthwhile expenditures for God's children. This principal desired that the school should love, respect, and accept students with severe disabilities by providing a Christian education.

Principal D

Principal D has been involved with special education programs in two Christian schools. His education training includes a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master of Arts in Education. He also has over 20 hours of credits in Educational Leadership beyond his Master's degree. In his first school he was the principal of a middle school with a special education program—a position he held for 14 years. He has been the principal at his current elementary school for 13 years and began the implementation process his first year there. His school provides psychological testing to identify students with needs. Though his school enrolls less than 200 students, he has three full-time special education teachers and a speech teacher. His school provides early intervention services in Kindergarten, pull-out programs, and a Resource Room. His goal is inclusivity as much as possible. He has experienced a successful program.

At the outset, this school charged the parents more for the special education services. After only a few years, the school determined that charging extra was not a biblical policy. The school then amended their tuition schedule and students in the special education program paid the same tuition as other students.

Principal D noted that public perceptions of Christian school special education programs have changed. He said communities had perceived public schools as having the money, resources, and staff to provide special education programs but Christian schools had not been perceived similarly. Now, with the services and programs offered by this Christian school, more parents were learning what Christian schools can offer. A

full-time speech teacher, paid for by the public funds, was included in this school's services.

Principal D expressed the challenge of providing for students with emotional needs. He stated that the program provided the learning opportunities for students with most disabilities, but providing for emotional needs required greater efforts. His school enrolled some students with emotional needs creating management difficulties for the teachers. One of his students with emotional needs had to leave the school because of a change in medication, but later returned to school, and graduated from it.

This principal mentioned parental concerns about children with special needs in the classroom. These parents wondered if special education students would require too much teacher time, and therefore the general education students would not receive the teacher instruction they deserved. The principal alleviated fears by explaining how the program worked and how instruction would not be compromised through teacher aides and resource time. Since the implementation of the program, few parental concerns have ever been voiced.

A special Kindergarten was an important component of this school's services for students with special needs. Principal D's Kindergarten consisted of a half day in the general classroom and then an afternoon session for students with special needs. He said this intervention program was successful when students with special needs were identified and enrolled at an early age.

Teacher objections were another concern for this principal. The teachers were not accustomed to special education students in the classroom. Some staff members left the

school because they did not believe special education students should be instructed in the general education classroom. Principal D encountered passive resistance to the program, but noted that many teachers eventually appreciated the program. Providing necessary supports for classroom teachers aided in teacher acceptance of the students.

Though some teachers may not have believed in the program, others looked forward to having special education students. In fact, some teachers requested students with special needs. To accommodate teachers and needs, students were assigned to the classes to ensure the best possible academic fit.

The interview concluded with the principal's explanation of philosophy of special education. A philosophy based on serving all God's children, he said inclusion was part of the biblical model that children belong to the Lord and need to be educated in the Christian school.

Principal E

Principal E was part-time administrator and part-time teacher when his school began a special education program 21 years ago. His degrees are a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology and a Master of Arts in Guidance and Counseling. Not only was he in involved in the planning stages of the program, he was also involved in teaching some of the students with special needs. His perspective of the challenges or the program and of blessings of the program gave him special insights into what a program entails. His school's services consist of a pull-out program, a Resource Room, and teachers from the CLC. His positive feelings about the program are so deep-seated that tears well up in his eyes.

Principal E began the interview with an explanation of the personal benefits he received from the special education program. Because he also had teaching duties, he was involved with both the instructional and administrative aspects of the program—both of which increased his satisfaction with the program. He described the "broadening of experiences" that entailed the reward of students with special needs in school. He also noted a personal, spiritual growth as he wrestled with implementing a special education program.

His school's program began with enrolling high-functioning students to aid in school assimilation. Since the program began, the school enrolled more difficult cases that caused greater principal workload and additional problems. Along with the enrollment of students with special needs, the school enrolled additional general education students—siblings of the special education students. All new students had been both a monetary and spiritual benefit to the school—monetary because of tuition and spiritual because of opportunities to serve the family of God. Because of its program, families had moved from various parts of the United States to attend the school.

Principal E commented that the staff—both general and special education teachers—needed assistance in adapting programs to provide maximum benefit for students with disabilities. He introduced classroom aides and curricular modifications to aid classroom instruction. These measures reduced classroom stress for both teachers and students.

Principal F

Having been principal in two other schools before coming to this current school, Principal F maintained the "typical Christian school administrative attitude—if we can provides services that is great, or we have to be honest enough to admit that we can't and the child needs to go somewhere else." When he arrived at his current school and was confronted with the need for a special education program, he accepted the challenge and began an inclusive Christian school. The services provided in Principal F's school include teachers from the local special education agency, Reading Recovery, a Resource Room, and pull-out programs as needed. He believes so strongly in his program, that he considers his school to be a model for other Christian schools to follow. He has earned a Bachelor of Arts in Education and a Master of Science in School Administration.

Principal F first described his experiences in a previous Christian school that did not have special education. In this school he was challenged by a parent to rethink his belief system regarding the training of students with special needs. The parent told him that if a child is created in God's image and is one of God's children, a principal should not refuse the provision of a Christian education. These challenges caused the principal to reconsider his previous beliefs and paved the way for his role in implementing a special education program now in existence for 22 years.

When the principal moved to this school, the school was already laying the groundwork for a special education program. With the help of the CLC, he explained that his school became the first inclusive school in the United States. He said that the

school made a commitment to educate students with special needs, but and a commitment to follow biblical guidelines regarding the education of God's children.

This principal mentioned two initial concerns about the program, the number of students to enroll and classroom space. The actual special education enrollment doubled the predictions the first year. Also, the decision was made to assign the students to the general education classroom. With teacher supports in place, the students were educated along with the general education students.

He explained that the school was blessed to have special education students. Initially, he thought the school would be doing these students a favor, but instead, the students blessed the school and him. The change in the school's educational philosophy illustrated that the school would educate any student with special needs who desired a Christian education without regard to tuition ability.

Concern about the cost of the program was also alleviated early in the implementation, because siblings of the special education students also enrolled in the school added to the school population and eased budget woes. Furthermore, this principal explained that the public school sent students with special needs to his school, because the school was able to provide services. The increased cooperation between public and private school was an additional program benefit to the school.

Principal F noted that parents had not complained about the program. He expected some complaints about the cost of the program or a lowering of academic standards. However, in the over 20 years of the program, he never received parental complaints. Instead, he received praises for the program, based mostly on the interaction

of general and special education students. The experience of being in an inclusive classroom made each child a more caring person.

Principal F's educational philosophy was that children learn better from children than they learn from adults. He believed that placing a student with special needs in a classroom with peers increased the success rate of learning. Not only would learning increase but acceptance would also increase. He noted that general education students, after a generation of education with students with special needs, didn't have fear of students with disabilities. He said that students understand everyone is created in God's image and desires acceptance.

He believed his greatest administrative task was sharing the vision of special education with a missionary zeal. The incidents over the years became stories to share with others to describe the amazing things God was doing at school. He noted that sharing the vision was a method to promote the rewards of special education.

Principal G

Principal G has been at his school for 38 years. His educational training consists of a Bachelor of Arts in Education, a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership, and over 100 hours of course work since his Master's degree. In the second year of his term at the school he began a rudimentary special education program—one half time teacher. On a more personal level, this principal had two brothers and two sisters that had special needs. These siblings received little academic assistance from the school. When he became principal, Principal G initiated special education programs to train those that needed the extra help. The services provided in his school involve one-one-one

instruction according to need, accommodations, and student mentors. A Resource Room, special study period for those having difficulties, and a learning strategies class are also part of his school's offerings. In his setting he believes he has provided the best program that can be offered and that through it students have benefited greatly.

Principal G began the interview with personal descriptions of his siblings' learning difficulties. Some of his siblings had huge struggles in school and was considered either "dumb" or "lazy." One of his siblings played with toys during math because the teacher told the parents he was not intelligent enough to understand the subject. This child, later diagnosed with a form of dyslexia, failed two grades because he was considered dumb. Because of these incidents, Principal G said later in life his brother lost a positive attitude toward the Christian school.

Principal G's sister suffered with similar problems, and yet another brother had Down syndrome. The brother with Down syndrome was denied services because his parents accepted a diploma for him—the diploma indicating an end to services. These incidents greatly affected this principal and strengthened his passion for students who have a difficult time in school.

According to this principal, Christian schools without special education programs and Christian schools without teachers to specialize in these services were a form of excommunication. He said the practices of the Christian school hurt the school's spiritual witness. This principal equated the practice of banishing students with special needs to public school to calling the students less than adequate children of God.

To help the teachers with both general and special education students, Principal G provided the teachers with supports for more all students. Paraprofessionals were an integral part of this school's staff. Class periods were arranged to allow any student who needed extra assistance to attend a help session conducted by the paraprofessionals. The paraprofessionals also assisted in rewriting tests to meet student accommodations. They also read tests to students with reading difficulties. Students helping students was a further asset to this school's assistance program. Finally, teachers used open class periods to assist students who needed help.

To continue a strong academic influence at the school, a director of instruction was hired. They directed instructional practices to insure accountability in meeting academic goals. This principal believed that the director of instruction solidified the school's goals and kept academics strong for all students.

Principal G believed the two biggest obstacles to the program were funding and staffing. Finances would restrict the program's implementation and a lack of qualified staff would lead to program failure. He believed that these two elements could provide success and his role was to meet those needs.

Prevalent Themes

Moustakas (1994) described the themes of phenomenological research as those that change personal perception, affect core feelings, integrate new identity, refocus personal values, and incorporate new learning. The following themes were those that indicated a change in the life of principals as they considered special education programs.

Biblical Influences Affecting Principals

The most prevalent factor influencing these Christian school principals was the necessity of providing a Christian education for students. Six of the principals expressed a biblical conviction which led to implementing a special education program. The principals described careers that initially did not include special education. When challenged by parents regarding the lack of special education services at their respective schools, the principals could not biblically articulate why the school did not provide services. As time progressed and more parents challenged the widely-held belief that Christian schools could not afford special education, principals were unable to explain the lack of services.

These challenges forced the principals to reconsider why biblical grounds for establishing a Christian school were invalidated and replaced with economic factors. As principals weighed the biblical considerations, they were convicted that a policy excluding students with special needs was unacceptable and that implementing special education services was needed.

Principals explained a newly-formulated realization that all children are created in the image of God and that the Christian school is responsible for training these children. When considering the fundamental philosophy of a Christian school, the principals were challenged to consider the purpose of a Christian school. The principals reconsidered the basic purpose of Christian education and analyzed the needs of the Christian community they served. In conclusion they decided that special education was the only God-honoring decision that could be made.

One principal added a very personal element to his consideration of special education when he explained his siblings' experiences in a Christian school. One sibling had a very difficult time in school and received very little assistance from his teachers. He described a second sibling who was unable to enroll in the Christian school because of severe learning disabilities. This principal witnessed the mistreatment of his siblings in school. Now, as a principal of a Christian school, he did not want to deny a Christian education to any student. Personal experiences ignited his passions for a Christian school that would educate all of God's children.

Spiritual Growth at Christian Schools

Another emergent theme involved school-wide benefits received from the program. The principals believed they were benefitting the parents of students with special needs and providing the community a service by offering these services. Instead, school-wide benefits emerged including a more caring and sensitive student body. Students attended classes with special education students formerly enrolled at the public schools or other institutions. The intermixing of students enabled students to learn about others and the love and caring that developed caused a systemic change in the entire school.

Secondly, the principals received personal benefits. Not only did the students in the school grow spiritually, the principals grew spiritually as they were blessed by these students. Working with the special education students, seeing the joy of being at school, and noting the elation of the parents enhanced the personal experiences of the principals.

They received the rewards of helping others and in turn were rewarded by each new life enrolled in school.

Staff Relationship Understanding

Principals became more aware of staff members and their philosophical beliefs. Opposition to special education surprised these principals. In retrospect the opposition may have been expected, but the principals had to endure problems of staff relations. Working with the staff in special education instruction and accommodation helped the principal understand the staff and see problems that needed to be solved.

Vision to Establish Christian Community

These principals realized the importance of their task to ensure that the Christian school was truly a Christian community. Establishing this community at the school involved working with parents, students, and teachers to understand the worldview of the Christian school, the academic purpose of the school, and the caring community that is fostered at the school. The principals, whether during the consideration stage of the program or the implementation of the program, did not always experience cooperation with the school community. The principals grappled with the dissatisfaction expressed by teachers and students. These impediments to the implementation of the program demanded dedicated principals who were willing to stand firm in providing for the education of students with disabilities.

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Summary

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Each principal spoke with passion and conviction about their dealings with special education programs. Although the principals reached conclusions on special

education through diverse circumstances, their conclusions were similar, that all of God's children must be educated in the Christian school. Working to make sure their schools served God and His children—no matter the ability—was their fundamental goal.

The themes that emerged pointed to a deep-seated biblical foundation providing the impetus for these programs. The principals shared their experiences that exhibited a strong desire to follow God's leading as academics were considered at their schools. Based on the biblical principles of the programs, staff relationships, Christian community, and spiritual growth emerged at the schools. A school-wide effort to follow the teachings of the Bible more closely became the norm for the school instead of the exception. The experiences were cathartic for the principals, because the outcome of implementation enhanced the Christian education provided by the school.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study's focus and intent was to research the experiences of Christian school principals who had implemented special education programs. A summary of the results will be presented followed by a discussion of those results. The next sections will include the implications of the study and its limitations. The final section will be the recommendations for further research.

Summary of Results

Principals expressed concerns about changing school policy to enroll students with special needs because they knew parents, teachers, boards, and students would be affected by the change. With board approval, principals made those changes to accommodate students with special needs. As policy changes brought school changes, principals noted that few parents questioned the effects of the program on the school.

For the principals in this study, parents were an important element in restructuring the program's considerations. Initially, the principals seemed comfortable with the status of their schools; they were satisfied with educating normal achieving students. When confronted by parents to expand the school's academic program by providing special education services, the principals were not able to articulate a biblical or philosophical response. According to the principals, parents acted as the catalyst which prompted the reconsideration of the admission policies regarding special education students. The principals were challenged to rethink long-held opinions about special education to determine if their beliefs were aligned with biblical teachings.

Principals discovered more about staff opinions regarding special education during the implementation process. Working with staff to understand philosophical changes and assist in classroom procedures proved to be time-consuming for principals. Principals commented that teacher aides, paraprofessionals, and classroom modifications were instrumental in the transition process to instruct students with special needs in general education classrooms. With these changes in place principals helped to assimilate students with special needs into the classroom and to provide quality instruction.

Principals were initially concerned with how general education students would handle the addition of students with special needs, but those fears were eased as principals observed student interactions. Principals noted that only a few students exhibited adverse reactions; most readily accepted and welcomed the special education students. Assimilation programs—an integral part of the principals' implementation process—encouraged students to participate in assisting and even tutoring students with special needs during the school day, as well as inviting these students to after school events or home activities.

The benefit principals most appreciated was an increased attitude of caring that permeated their schools. As general and special education students interacted, principals noted that students developed warm feelings for each other. Principals witnessed a greater sense of Christian love and responsibility throughout the school.

Discussion

The role of the principal was extremely important in establishing special education programs. According to the principals, discussions with board members, parents, and teachers, were the motivational factors behind implementation, though without the principal's dedication to the task, the programs would not have started. A dedicated principal was needed to propel the program from philosophy to fruition. The principal's vision for the program provided further impetus for the programs implementation and success.

The spiritual blessings of special education programs were an unforeseen byproduct. Though principals firmly believed in the need to educate these students, they were not prepared to receive the blessings that occurred both personally and in their schools. As explained by these principals, the benefits the general education students received from assisting students with special needs enabled the general education students to experience the joys of helping others in the body of Christ.

Principals expressed satisfaction from the personal benefits received from the program. Although their intended purpose was to provide a Christian education to students with special needs, principals benefited from relationships with the students with special needs. Principal benefited by participating in educational activities with students with special needs and in care-giving for them. Through these contacts the principals also learned how they could serve others in their schools. They experienced love from the students with special needs and satisfaction from serving God through service to His children.

Factors that were influential in principal implementation rested on a biblical desire to do God's will. In the role as Christian principals, each focused on the need to be a servant of God to all students. With service to God as their first responsibility, the principals recognized that current admission policies did not comply with their newly-articulated educational philosophy. Restricting admissions to general education students did not comply with God's instructions to educate all children. With a restructuring of personal philosophy, each principal concluded that his Christian school needed fundamental changes. The changes, implementing a special education program, provided the school with an educational philosophy more aligned with the teachings of Christ. This resulted in principals who believed that they were more closely following the Bible. They rejoiced in helping students receive a Christian education, no matter the ability level.

After interviewing the principals and reflecting on their responses, I did develop an admiration for these principals who implemented the programs. Though the task may have been at times arduous, they worked diligently to provide the services that, in their estimation, would enhance the biblical mandates of their schools. It was evident that the satisfaction they received from the implementation process affected them greatly. As a principal who has not implemented special education programs, I have been convicted to make the necessary changes in my school to admit students with disabilities and do all I can to provide for their educational needs.

At the onset of my study, I did not expect to discover the dedication and spiritual blessings articulated by these principals. My initial considerations were the extra work

involved to implement services. When the principals expressed the spiritual satisfaction and blessings of the programs, I was encouraged and energized. These principals worked diligently to provide services for a group of students who had, for many years, been ignored in Christian schools These principals brought me to the realization that I have a void in my leadership in special education—a void that I must fill.

Though much of the literature review focused on the role of the public school principal and special education, the findings are applicable to Christian school principals. Studies into the role of the principal noted the importance of leadership. In fact, one study noted that leadership is second only to the classroom teacher in the success of the program. Not only implementing but also improving the special education program required the leadership skills of the principal.

Furthermore, the literature highlighted the need for the principal to maintain a proper attitude toward the students with special needs. Without a positive attitude, principals could restrict learning opportunities for these students. Principals must realize that a positive attitude toward the program indicates a belief that all children can learn. Realizing the responsibility for each child's education will add to the success of special education.

Finally, the literature suggested the importance of including the students with special needs in the school community. Pudlas (2004) challenged Christian schools to ensure that students with special needs were part of the school community. The process of forming community in the Christian school will provide each student a sense of belonging and will enable them to feel included in all aspects of the school's programs.

Implications

I encourage all principals in Christian schools without special education programs to rethink their policy and philosophy. Instead of dwelling on budgetary concerns inherent in implementing a new program, principals should focus on Christian service and biblical mandates. Although each principal in this study initially had concerns about funding, those concerns were lessened when funding was appropriated and the budget was spared negative cash flow.

Furthermore, principals should focus on the school's Christian witness to its parents and community. Christian schools should provide an education for all children. By limiting enrollment to those of prescribed academic abilities, the school's role in the community is limited. Parents also need reassurances that Christian schools care for all children. Principals should disregard their fears of the program and instead consider how best to follow biblical mandates of showing love to all of God's children. Focusing on a Christ-centered educational philosophy should be more important than budgetary items.

Christian school principals must also focus on how biblical principles influence their decision-making. From interviewing these principals, I understood that they had not considered their biblical role in regard to implementing special education programs. When challenged by parents to implement programs, principals were forced to rethink their ideas on Christian schools and special education programs. I believe all Christian school principals should reflect on biblical truths to determine if they are truly following God's commands. As models for the entire school, principals must put biblical truths

into action. By rethinking biblical directives, principals could realize that they are not completely fulfilling their biblical mandate to serve all of God's children.

Once they have reflected on their biblical role, principals may be convicted to rethink the scope of the Christian school. As noted by some of the principals in this study, before they implemented the program, they had to reconsider the role of the Christian school in the Christian community and which students they should educate. The implementation of a program indicated their desire to serve the entire body of Christ—the body of Christ which has many members with many gifts.

I was surprised to discover that the school culture was changed when special education programs were implemented. Principals, who may consider implementing a special education program, could realize even greater benefits to the school than a new education program. They could also realize a more sensitive and caring student body. A student body that is more willing to serve its peers, is a body that is more willing to serve its Lord. This more caring and sensitive school climate change illustrated a Christian school willing to abide by the Lord's commands to serve others. The benefits of the program are not just the special education services but also a Christ-like student body.

In order to promote a Christian school as one with a special education program, a Christian school should hire certified special education teachers. In my study, each school hired certified teachers. I believe this practice indicates the level of commitment each school has to the program and the desire to promote a valid program to the community. Without the hiring of certified teachers, the Christian school diminishes its witness to community as having a viable special education program.

At the onset of the programs, some teachers registered negative responses to the program. As the teachers were instructed about the direction of the school and the biblical need to provide services for these children, the attitudes of the teachers changed. I believe these changes indicate the level of leadership provided by the principal. Principals who desire to implement the programs will need to be focused on the vision and biblical basis for the program. With a grounded biblical basis, the teachers will embrace the program.

Parents also expressed some concerns about the implementation of the program. Once again, with a biblical basis to guide the program, principals can lead the school community to accept the program. Convincing parents may not always be the easiest of tasks, but once the program has begun, and the effects of the program are experienced by all in the school, the parents will realize the value of having a Christian program in their school.

Based on the results of my interviews, the principals were happy with the assistance of the Christian Learning Center (CLC). This organization was valuable in providing support, suggestions, and staff to the schools. Not all areas of the country may have an organization to provide this type of assistance. The schools in Michigan have an advantage because of this educational group, but a school should not refrain from implementing a program because a local organization is unavailable. Researching all resources in the school's state and outside of the school's state would assist any Christian school principal considering the implementation of a program.

I have also learned and have been convicted by studying this topic. For the past 30 years, as principal of Christian schools without special education programs, I have dismissed special education programs when confronted about them. It has been easy to reply that the public school offers programs or that the cost is prohibitive. After interviewing these principals, I have learned that Christian schools can offer effective programs to students with disabilities.

Also, I need to look beyond the initial concern of tuition and realize the additional benefits a special education program can provide for the school. Cost cannot be the only factor that I should consider. As some of the principals in the study indicated, with the enrollment of students with special needs, siblings in the general education population were also enrolled. These additional students paid for any increased costs of the program. God truly provides when His people follow Him.

This study showed me that leadership is extremely important in establishing a special education program. Instead of allowing the negatives to influence me, I need to study closely how God wants to me lead my school. By looking to God as He tells me to see each of His children as special, as made in His image, and as different parts of the body with unique gifts, I will fulfill my duties as principal to provide an education for all children.

Limitations

It is assumed that the principals interviewed in this study were accurate in expressing their experiences. The possibility exists that the principals enhanced their responses to appear more intelligent or introspective. Because the information was

received from principals in a private setting, the information was not confirmed with other school employees who may also understand the situation.

Principals may not have included all responses or experiences. Information that is left out could skew the narrative. Since the data were not confirmed beyond principal interviews, the researcher relied on the information provided by each principal to be accurate.

The principals interviewed were principals in Michigan. The possibility exists that other principals could have similar experiences. Furthermore, each school was assisted by the Christian Learning Center (CLC). Based on principal consensus, this center provided excellent resources and staff for each school. Without such a resource in the community, other Christian schools may not have similar results. Implementing special education programs under these excellent circumstances may be difficult to replicate by other schools.

All principals were extremely open in discussing the implementation process with me. As they reflected on past experiences, they spoke freely of their work in the implementation process and also spoke of some of the trials along the way. With a few exceptions and hurdles throughout implementation, the principals had only high praise for their programs. Even though I am gratified to discover their elation with the programs, I wonder if the programs developed as smoothly as they indicated.

As a principal, I commend their successes, but the question arises how all aspects of the program initially worked as efficiently as was stated. I would wonder if the students—those labeled with learning disabilities—do not possess any stigmas based on

their academic struggles. Secondly, I would hope that the students with special needs did not experience any negative feelings considering they must move from general education classroom to special education to resource room. Thirdly, I am interested in parental satisfaction with the program. Finally, the questions arise about the teachers' dedication to the program. Though probably no longer important to these principals, these concerns highlight aspects of the program that the principals did not discuss during the interviews.

Recommendations for Further Research

This researcher would advise any Christian school that has not implemented a special education program to research the possibility of establishing a program. The benefits outlined by each principal in this study highlighted the joys and rewards of special education in their Christian schools. Any Christian school could benefit from the establishment of a program, which according to the principals in this study, not only educates special education students but also educates teachers, principals, and general education students by fostering a spirit of caring for everyone.

As part of this implementation process, I would recommend that principals form committees to visit schools with special education programs to witness the love and caring that permeates these schools. Since the greatest goal of a Christian school is to prepare students spiritually, allowing students with special needs to experience the benefits of Christian instruction would be a rewarding endeavor for all involved in the school.

Other research possibilities would be to speak with principals in other states about their experiences to determine if those experiences are similar. Talking to parents,

students, and teachers about their experiences in the formative years of a special education program would enhance this study with alternate views and experiences.

I would like to visit Christian schools that do not have special education. Negative cases would help in the consideration of the rigor of the information already collected. These cases could then provide information on why principals did not implement programs in contrast with my study's focus and intent. Negative cases could also describe schools that at one time had programs and then canceled those programs. Together, these instances could highlight the reverse side of principals' experiences with special education programs.

Summary

Principals play an important role in ensuring the appropriate education of each student. The literature and principal interviews seem to solidify this conclusion. In establishing special education programs Christian school principals ensure that an appropriate education is provided and maintained for each student. This study indicated that special education programs can be established in Christian schools. Though initial preparations to implement the program may be arduous, the benefits to parents, students, staff, and principals outweigh any obstacles principals meet while implementing these new programs. Christian school principals, with the help of dedicated staff and almighty God, can provide an education for students with disabilities.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A: Principal Questionnaire

The following questions were prepared for use during the interview, but were not used in order to prevent biased or leading questions.

1. Why did your school elect to begin a special education program?

2. What spiritual or biblical concerns were discussed as your school considered a special education program?

3. What kept your school from implementing a special education program many years ago?

4. What did the teachers say about your special education program before it began?

5. What do the teachers say now that the program has been implemented in your school?

6. What reasons finally convinced your school to implement this program?

7. What financial/funding concerns were considered?

8. What problems have arisen because of the special education program? (from principals, teachers, parents, etc?)

9. What did parents with special education students say about starting this program?

10. What did parents without special education students say about this program?

11. Explain how this program has been a blessing for you and for your school. Give some positive and if necessary negative outcomes of the program.

12. What do you think kept your school from implementing a special education program before this time?

13. Did the school assess needs for a special education program before implementation?

14. Describe your experiences with the special education program's implementation in your school.

15. Are there any other practical considerations you could tell me?

16. Were they any legal considerations in your deliberations?

17. Were there any influential people in your decision process?

APPENDIX B: Participation Letter

Dear _____,

      As part of my doctoral dissertation on inclusive education, I am seeking schools that would be willing to be part of my survey, questionnaire, interview, or observation process.

      This letter is to inform you of my intentions and, I am asking for your response, if you will allow me to discuss some of the issues of inclusive education with your, your staff, your parents, or other interested parties.

      Please respond by _____ to this letter by emailing me at mrcookson1@gmail.com or calling me at 559-583-8973.

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent

Special Education
The Christian School Principal's Role in Special Education
Gary Cookson
Liberty University
Doctoral Education Department

Dear _____,

You are invited to be in a research study on the experiences of principals in implementing special education programs. You were selected as a possible participant because your school has implemented a special education program. I ask that you read this letter and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Gary Cookson, Doctoral student at the Doctoral Education Department of Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of Christian school principals in establishing special education program at the Christian school.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to allow me to interview you regarding your experiences in establishing a special education program at your school.

Risk and Benefits of being in the Study

The risks of this study are minimal. You will be interviewed and you and your school will be assigned pseudonyms to protect and insure confidentiality.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Pseudonyms will be used. Research records will be stored securely and only this researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to answer or not answer any questions or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contact and Questions

The researcher conducting this study is Gary Cookson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact him at East Martin Christian High School 269-672-7673, at home 269-350-1237, or mrcookson1@gmail.com.

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

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____