BE WHO YOU ARE: SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL DISABILITY AS EXPERIENCED BY 6TH GRADE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES EDUCATED IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Kimberly P. Johnson

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of 6th grade students with learning disabilities educated in their least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate sitting next to their non-disabled peers. Two theories guided this study, social identity theory and the social model of disability. Social identity (Tajfel, 1970) addresses individuals' self-worth and self-esteem based on the group they associate with and their rank in the group. Oliver's (1990) social model of disability addresses disability as a social problem rather than a personal problem. The central research question is as follows: what are the lived experiences of 6th grade students with learning disabilities educated in their LRE, specifically, the co-taught model. This study sought to understand how the social identity of students with learning disabilities are affected when teachers have lower academic expectations and when their non-disabled peers do not view students with disabilities as equal partners in the school community. The study utilized three data collections. The first data collection method was a visual representation. The second was an interview, which allowed 13 sixth grade students with learning disabilities to describe their perceptions of their learning experiences in their LRE. The third data collection was document analysis, which examined each participant's grades in their core content classes for the academic year 2021-2022. After reviewing all data, five themes and two subthemes emerged. The themes revealed the 13 participants did not perceive themselves any differently from their non-disabled peers; however, it is uncertain how the COVID-19 pandemic school closures have altered the lived experiences of SWLD.

Keywords: Special education, LRE, IEP, social identity, social disability.

Copyright Page

Dedication

This study is dedicated to all students with disabilities who do not realize they have a voice. The class of 2028 will always hold a special place in my heart because you taught me so much, and you are genuinely the VOICES OF SUCCESS! STAY DETERMINED, STAY CONFIDENT, STAY UNIQUE and never forget I believe in you!

We are the Voices of Success because We are the Students with Determination

We are building Confidence

We are Developing character

We appreciate our Unique diversity

We are making strides to Achieve our goals

We are finding our Strength through learning

We are using our Voice to be Successful

Voices of Success is a mentality, a movement, and a position dedicated to the life-long success of those who often are not heard or seen. It provides a platform for their voices to be heard, acknowledged, and responded to. It is a Mentality of recognizing those with unique diversity are important and have a right to know about the resources they need to succeed. It is a Movement of changing the perspective of educational professionals and broader society toward those who learn differently. It is a Position of self-advocacy en-route to achieving the impossible!

WE ARE THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2028

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Ms. B. Mitchell-Smith, Thank you for all the support!

Edwin, Brant, and Kimberly Thank you for constantly pushing me to be the best mom and teaching me as much as I have taught you. I love you.

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List of Abbreviations

Common Core State (CCSS)

Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA)

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Learning Disability (LD)

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

Students with Learning Disabilities (SWLD)

Students with Disabilities (SWD)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In the United States, public school systems guarantee students with learning disabilities an education provided in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) according to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2019). Despite the changes to federal and state educational policies, some general education teachers across content areas who are selected to educate students with learning disabilities in the LRE have negative attitudes about educating that population of students in their classrooms (Wienen et al., 2019). Additionally, parents worry about the validity of education in the LRE for their students with learning disabilities (Cavendish et al., 2018; Kurth et al., 2020). Furthermore, students with learning disabilities are dropping out at alarming rates, thus not permitting students with learning disabilities the opportunity to obtain higher education nor enter the workforce at the same rate as their non-disabled peers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Gilmour, 2018; Saloviita, 2020).

This study aims to describe the lived experiences of 6th grade students with learning disabilities educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate. The LRE can potentially affect students with disabilities' social identity from the societal-preconceived notion of failure, an inferior way of being, and insufficient educational opportunities (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018). This chapter provides the problem and purpose statements along with historical, social, and theoretical significance. Also included is the situation to self, and a page of definitions, followed by a summary.

Background

A Nation at Risk explicitly described students who were not proficient in math, reading, and writing, causing students the inability to be college/career ready and unable to participate

fully in life (Bell, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* reported the United States has "the widespread public perception that something is seriously remiss in our educational system" (Bell, 1983, p. 7). Consequently, *A Nation at Risk* did not specifically address students with learning disabilities (Bell, 1983). However, the federal government deemed it necessary that students with learning disabilities have the opportunity to participate fully in life without the stigmas brought on by labels (EAHCA, 1975, Bell, 1983). Accordingly, the federal government reauthorized the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) to the Individuals with Disabilities Act removing handicapped and inserting disability (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, n.d.).

The name change prompted societal views and opinions to shift, causing parents and activist groups to advocate even harder for students with learning disabilities (Francisco et al., 2020). The federal government responded to the shift by reauthorizing IDEA on two separate occasions as a way to ensure students with learning disabilities would have the same opportunities to reach their full potential just as students who were non-disabled (Francisco et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.; Bell, 1983). The reauthorizations to IDEA (n.d.) advanced the rights of students with learning disabilities by providing access to the general education curriculum, and parents became a significant part of the IEP team. Additionally, local schools received guidance on the LRE, a FAPE, and the IEP process (IDEA, n.d.). Moving forward, students with learning disabilities throughout this study have the following acronym: SWLD.

The National Center for Educational Statistics reported, during the 2019-2020 school year, 37% of students identified fall into the eligibility category of SLD, which makes up the largest group of students with disabilities in K-12 schools (National Center for Educational Statistics, [NCES], 2020). Nationally, SWLD spend 66% of their day sitting next to their non-disabled peers in the LRE; therefore, IDEA has increased the ability for SWLD to be included

(NCES, 2020). SWLD are not highly regarded in the school community as "33% of classroom teachers and other educators think learning or attention issues is really just laziness" (Weiss, 2018, p. 13). Therefore, "43% of parents would not want others to know that their child has a learning disability" (Weiss, 2018, p. 13). Students presumed to have learning disabilities must undergo a process that maybe modified through the delegated authority of the federal government (Kanaya et al., 2019). Affording students their rights under IDEA, the following steps begin the process for students suspected of having learning disabilities at the research site (IDEA, n.d.). Students require a referral to the schools' special education department. For the student to qualify, a set of psychological tests must occur, evaluation of work samples are completed, and an initial IEP meeting is conducted (IDEA, n.d.). The students' results must prove the student has a deficit and meets the eligibility criteria for one or more of the13 categories as defined by IDEA, to receive services in the educational setting (IDEA, n.d.). According to American Psychiatric Association, school psychologists may use LD and SLD in their diagnosis of a student (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Psychologists perform the testing and evaluations of students at the research site. Therefore, any student who receives special education services with a LD or SLD eligibility received an invitation to participate in this research. The general definition of Specific Learning Disability is a disorder that affects the basic process of auditory and verbal languages. It involves disrupting the students' ability to read, write, and effectively do math computations (IDEA, n.d.).

Consideration for placement in the LRE occurs using a continuum with varying educational settings (IDEA, n.d.; Anderson & Brock, 2020). For example, the IEP team must consider the general education classroom with no supports, the general education classroom with two teachers, defined as the co-taught model, better known as team-taught, general education

classroom with paraprofessional support defined as the supportive model, or the self-contained setting, better known as small group (IDEA, n.d.; Anderson & Brock, 2020). When determining the LRE for students with disabilities, the IEP is the primary document used for placement; however, students with disabilities should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.; Kauffman et al., 2021). Ultimately, the IEP team must decide the LRE for SWLD based on the individual needs using the continuum for placement (Anderson & Brock, 2020). The IEP team meets annually to discuss progress, placement, and to develop annual goals, supports, and accommodations. Special Education teachers monitor the goals, report the progress, and ensure students with disabilities meet their learning outcomes in the LRE (Yaoying & Kuti, 2021).

Researchers and parents question the validity of educational outcomes, the LRE, along with the social and emotional well-being of SWLD (Akçamete & Dagli Gökbulut, 2018; Kauffman et al., 2021; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). Additionally, the provided guidelines by IDEA enhanced the opportunity for social injustice, victimization, and questions surrounding the morality of educating SWLD because of the emphasis on placing SWLD in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.; McMenamin, 2018; Merry, 2020; Schwab et al., 2018). In fact, higher dropout rates and lower academic success is common for SWLD compared to their non-disabled peers, stemming from the environmental impact (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Kauffman et al., 2021; Kirby, 2017). Nationally, 47% of students with disabilities exited high school with a regular high school diploma in the 2018-2019 school year compared to 89% of their non-disabled peers (43rd Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, [43AR], 2021; NCES, 2021). To put it differently, 16% of the 7.3 million students who receive special education rights, such

as being educated in the LRE, dropped out of high school in the 2019-2020 school year (NCES, 2021). To clarify, out of the 16% dropping out, SWLD as of fall 2019 made up 37% of that total, and more than half of SWLD who drop out of school have been involved with the justice system (43AR, 2021). Students without disabilities obtain undergraduate and postgraduate degrees at much higher rates than SWLD (Wilson et al., 2020). Additionally, SWLD are not entering the workforce at the same rate as their non-disabled peers; for example, in 2019 only 19% of individuals identified with disabilities had employment versus the 86% of non-disabled individuals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022). In other words, 80% of the individuals with disabilities were not in the labor force compared to 13% of non-disabled individuals (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022).

IDEA mandates SWLD should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate in the LRE, sitting among their non-disabled peers, who often do not socially accept some SWLD due the constructed label of disabled (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2019). Although non-disabled peers can be less accepting, along with the occurrences of higher dropout rates, lower college, and workforce entrance, there appears to be a lack of research on hearing the lived experiences through the voices of SWLD (Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Therefore, to undertake this study of investigating 6th grade SWLD lived experiences of being educated in their LRE is much needed research (Bureau of Statistics, 2019; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Roos, 2019).

Historical Context

As the civil rights movement focused on promoting equality for persons of color, Brown v. Board of Education promoted equality for persons of color in the educational setting (Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). Brown v. Board of Education (1954) is a historical

decision that encouraged parents of students with disabilities to fight for equal education, which ultimately leads to the enactment of the EAHCA in 1975, focusing on equal access to education in exchange for federal funds (EAHCA, 1975; Brown v. Board of Education, 1954). The EAHCA enabled SWLD to have educational rights by permitting SWLD opportunities to receive an education in the same schools with their non-disabled peers (EAHCA, 1975). However, some twenty years after EAHCA, the underutilization of equal access to education was still present, as over one million students with disabilities in the United States remained excluded entirely from obtaining an equal education (EAHCA, 1975). In addition, millions of students missed the opportunity to receive an adequate education (Kanaya et al., 2019).

The IDEA has an overall goal to provide SWLD the same education as their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). Local schools must provide SWLD the following five mandates per IDEA; however, the ambiguity of the mandates continues to concern local schools (Sayeski et al., 2019; Kauffman et al., 2021):

1. IDEA requires SWLD education to occur in the classroom with their non-disabled peers; however, IDEA lacked providing a clear definition which leaves maximum extent appropriate open to interruption (IDEA, n.d.).
2. SWLD have a right to access and progress in the general education curriculum for the current grade level just as their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.).
3. SWLD have a right to specialized instruction while in their LRE to enable the SWLD to achieve academic success using the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.)
4. IEP teams will include the parents or guardians, a special educator, a regular educator, a school district representative, at each annual IEP meeting (IDEA, n.d.).

5. An IEP will include all supports and accommodations needed to educate the SWLD, cost cannot be a factor; and all required services, should occur sitting next to their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate in the LRE (Kanaya et al., 2019).

The values of special education and IDEA became a way to appeal to humanity and social justice; the LRE, in the beginning, was a concept pushed through legislation as a way to provide a FAPE for SWLD (Kauffman et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). However, IDEA has become a bill to fund local schools by affording both parents and SWLD mandates (Kauffman et al., 2021; Stone, 2019). Parents question the effectiveness of the supports and accommodations in the LRE and if SWLD are properly receiving a FAPE (Kauffman et al., 2021; Stone, 2019). Occasionally, parents disagree with schools regarding a SWLD FAPE, which lead to judicial interventions. While the judicial interventions outcomes lead to lawsuits, which have favored schools that appropriately provide a FAPE, in the LRE, with a reasonably calculated IEP, there are numerous lawsuits where the outcomes were not in favor of the schools (Endrew v. Douglas County School District, [EDCS], 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). When lawsuits occur questioning the accuracy of a FAPE, federal education policies do not change reflecting the verdicts of such judicial interventions. Nevertheless, local schools must comply with the new case law on educating SWLD (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). For instance, the court ruled, schools have a required obligation under IDEA that each IEP developed for students with disabilities will have established goals. The IEP team should carefully consider demanding yet suitable realistic objectives, thus allowing students with disabilities to access and progress in the general education curriculum regardless of the students' conditions (EDCS, 2017; Sayeski et al., 2019). Local schools perceive the case law, which favors parents complicating matters as what constitutes a FAPE in the LRE,

and a reasonably calculated IEP (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). Case law assures that SWLD should make educational progress utilizing an IEP. The continuum of placements that, when used, as intended flexibility is possible even with the words maximum extent appropriate, which is the catalyst of the IDEA placement provision. Unfortunately, it is often sorely misinterpreted to categorize disabled children placing them in regular classrooms inappropriately (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Sayeski et al., 2019; Stone, 2019).

The history of litigation and federal policies proves changes have occurred in educating SWLD in the LRE (EDCS, 2017; Francisco et al., 2020; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). However, with ideologies of social justice, students' rights, and education equality that is driven by funding rather than educating, local school districts may take the "cheapest and easiest way out" (Stone, 2019, p. 533). Although “the cost of special services may be an unexpressed criterion in many decisions made by school districts nowhere does the IDEA explicitly allow cost to be considered” (Martin et al., 1996, p. 25) yet, some SWLD placements are motivated by funding (Martin et al., 1996). Lower academic achievement may occur from disabling learning environments that can cause negative self-concept which will continue to widen rather than narrow the achievement gap causing disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers' dropout rates, entrance rates into college, and the workforce (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Francisco et al., 2020; Kirby, 2017; Tajfel, 1970). Thus, further entrenching the notion that SWLD are "lost and forgotten" (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Stone, 2019, p. 534). Exploring the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE is essential, so SWLD have a voice to help promote change in the school community (Browne II, 2012; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Francisco et al., 2020; Schwab et al., 2018).

Social Context

The federal government sets the educational agenda, but states and local educational systems have delegated authority with the primary function of providing SWLD a FAPE in the LRE (Kauffman et al., 2021; IDEA, n.d.; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). The delegated authority naturally leads to the debate of the LRE in special education, which is a well-researched phenomenon that applies to over 7.3 million SWD, or 14% of all students in the public school setting for the 2020-2021 school year (NCES, 2021). The ideology among stakeholders and policymakers is SWLD who receive an education in the LRE sitting next to their non-disabled peers, acquire academic growth, friendships, positive behavior outcomes, and a FAPE (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, n.d.; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019).

Research proves a disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers. Integrating SWLD into the LRE merely produces an illusion that SWLD show growth academically with increased emotional development (Browne II, 2012; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Gilmour (2018) argues that research has yielded weak evidence that SWLD have achieved academic growth or SWLD have fewer behavioral problems while educated in the LRE. Furthermore, minimal research has taken into account the effects of negative social attitudes on SWLD social identity, which is the nucleus of who they are (Browne II, 2012; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Kanaya et al., 2019; Zagona et al., 2019). Likewise, Stone (2019) suggests that a constructed label of disability leaves one feeling unaccepted and unconnected to society; therefore, seeking acceptance and connections within society is a vital endeavor. As SWLD transitions from elementary to middle school, social acceptance and making connections is

critical (Borman et al., 2019). However, the acceptance and connections in sixth grade diminish because SWLD have a more challenging time establishing social relationships because of peer problems and the lack of social acceptance in the LRE (Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019). Specifically, social acceptance is minimal since SWLD struggle with the general education curriculum because of the complexity and pace, which does not allow SWLD to answer questions, read the material, and conceptually understand the standards (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2019). Therefore, the transition to middle school leaves SWLD lost and struggling to find emotional and social support along with making friends and having the same life experiences as their non-disabled peers (Borman et al., 2019; Mamas et al., 2020). Downplaying peer problems for SWLD may be due to motivational and emotional variables to protect their self-image (Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019). The downplaying of peer problems has a direct correlation to the socially desirable effect or the need for social approval (Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019). The correlation between the socially desirable effect for social approval and social identity manifests in SWLD because the perception is one of the in-group; however, the self-esteem and self-worth of SWLD declines because their non-disabled peers associate SWLD with the out-group (Borman et al., 2019; Tajfel, 1970).

Special education focuses on control, guided through legislation, which prioritizes cost over benefit (Kauffman et al., 2021; Lee-St. John et al., 2018). Federal Education policies legally and financially bind schools to educate SWLD in the LRE; therefore, the individual interpretation of the provided guidelines inadvertently allows the IEP team to place SWLD in the LRE, which provides the largest monetary benefit for the school (IDEA Full Funding Act, 2021). The focus changes to SWLD rights over academic success and social relationships, causing missed opportunities for student growth (Kauffman, et al., 2021; Gilmour et al., 2018).

Therefore, regardless of cost classrooms, which provide the necessary time to ensure SWLD, are receiving an educational benefit is paramount (Anderson & Brock, 2020; Lim, 2020). Hence arriving at separate can be equal (Anderson & Brock, 2020; Lim, 2020).

The government pursued developing educational standards to prepare all students, including SWLD, to be college and career-ready (Thompson et al., 2005). Although the national graduation rate, which includes a regular high school diploma and alternate diploma for students with disabilities, including SWLD, has been on an upward trend since 2014 (43AR, 2021), the college and career readiness for SWLD is unappealing. Only 19% of students with disabilities go on to college to receive an undergrad degree compared to 81% of students without disabilities; likewise, 11% go on to receive a postgraduate degree compared to 88% of their non-disabled peers (NCES, 2019; Wilson et al., 2020). Additionally, the 2018-2019 school year reported 7.3% of high school students with disabilities as being proficient in math, and 13.3% proficient in reading (43AR, 2021).

Therefore, investigating the academic success of SWLD should provide insight to the low grade-level academic achievement standards proficiency levels in math and reading which causes the lack of college and career readiness for SWLD (43AR, 2021). Additionally, hearing the voices of 6th grade SWLD perception on their education in the LRE and the effects on their social identity should provide a first-hand view of their lived experiences (Browne II, 2012.; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Francisco et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d., Schwab et al., 2018).

Theoretical Context

Pennsylvania association for Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania (1971) was a historical decision that began the free public education for SWD. PARC was the foundation that established EAHCA that gave access to free public education

(PARC v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971). Subsequently, a reauthorization occurred for EACHA changing the name to IDEA as a way of dispelling the stigma that is associated with names, providing SWLD a FAPE, and the ability to be educated in the LRE (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, n.d.). IDEA underwent another reauthorization providing parents more rights to be involved in the IEP process and holding local schools accountable and responsible for improving educational outcomes for SWLD (IDEA, n.d.). Unfortunately, local schools only received guidelines mandating the LRE rather than a definitive definition, which allows for individual interpretation to the meaning of the maximum extent appropriate, which has promoted inconsistency with the placement of SWLD in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.; Zagona et al., 2019). Therefore, as educational systems report, the benefits of LRE skewed information could result for SWLD and students without disabilities (Lim, 2020). Additionally, the inconsistent placement of SWLD in the LRE and skewed outcomes is a point of contention between parents and local schools, which causes lawsuits and leaves the judicial system interpreting educational policies (EDCS, 2017; IDEA, n.d.; Lim, 2020; Zagona et al., 2019). The judicial systems decisions have required local schools to rethink how SWLD are receiving a FAPE in the LRE, however with the mandates of IDEA being ambiguous and misinterpreted, local schools have continued concerns with the practical and conceptual implementation of a FAPE in the LRE (EDCS, 2017; Felder, 2018; IDEA, n.d.).

A theory behind educating SWLD in the LRE is to promote a mindset shift that SWLD are not different from their non-disabled peers, thus increasing normalization as well as closing the achievement gap between SWLD and their non-disabled peers (Francisco et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.). In reality, the theory behind the LRE does not promote normalization, nor is it reducing the achievement gap as envisioned (Walker et al., 2018). First, some SWLD educated in the LRE

self-esteem and self-concept are negatively affected as some SWLD are unaccepted and not viewed as equals by their non-disabled peers (Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Tajfel, 1970; Walker et al., 2018). Second, some general education teachers' are unaccepting of some SWLD in their classrooms, lack patience for SWLD who disrupt the flow of instruction and have lower expectations of SWLD **(**Parey, 2021). Third, educators lack adequate time in the LRE to address SWLD and other students with disabilities across the varying academic, social, and behavioral domains to provide an equal education in the LRE to SWLD (Walker et al., 2018). Finally, even as SWLD receive supports and accommodations, as written in their IEP, SWLD do not always access and progress in the general education curriculum (Walker et al., 2018).

Equally, SWLD are looking for social acceptance, self-confidence, and self-worth when entering middle school (Borman et al., 2020). As SWLD move through middle school, being educated in an environment so effective learning can transpire and having positive social outcomes will prepare SWLD to participate fully in life (Borman et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.). Therefore, hearing the voices of the 6th grade SWLD lived experiences on being educated in their LRE is necessary.

Situation to Self

The researchers' philosophical assumptions drive the research. Before education, I was a Deputy Sheriff. One day while helping an inmate write a letter, it occurred to me that my son could end up with this outcome as he was diagnosed with ADD/ADHD, a learning disability, making his educational experience challenging; thus he was issued an IEP during 1st grade. I conducted the research where I have a connection to and a relationship with the school district and students. I feel the connection and relationship with the school district and students played a

role in bringing out data that provides rich and thick information, indicative of qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Understanding different perspectives of individuals, while trying to make sense of the world I decided to guide this study using a constructivist paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2016). As a special education teacher acknowledging how SWLD feel and think about their teachers, peers and being educated in their LRE is necessary so an understanding can begin to form on how SWLD view the world from their perspective. Viewing this study through the constructivist lens enables me to teach SWLD how to use their voice to be empowered through knowledge, affirmation, and the grace of God. SWLD voices and newfound empowerment will show SWLD intrinsically, they can defy all challenges they may encounter regardless of educational placement and constructed labels. Unequivocally SWLD can graduate high school and accomplish all their hopes, dreams, and aspirations while using their voices for advocating purposes. By conducting this study using the constructivist assumption, SWLD will speak freely and openly as SWLD describe their lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Therefore, as a special education teacher and a parent of a student who received the label of LD, I undertook this study to acknowledge and comprehend the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE and any effect it may have on SWLD social identity.

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions deal with multiple perceptions of reality; however, there is only one truth. The multiple perceptions of reality derive from different experiences individuals encounter in and through various situations. When participants provided their answers, it was essential to remember each participant had a unique viewpoint because participants have their own perception of reality. Using the words or perceptions of the individuals who one may

encounter allows an opportunity to gain the insight of multiple perceptions of reality in the physical world. Absolute truth is something I strongly believe. Absolute truth is derived from biblical principles, "And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Creswell & Poth, 2016; John 8:32 English Standard Version). Therefore, the assumption is the participants will be honest when providing answers to the research questions, given the phenomenon occurs through the SWLD lived experiences.

Epistemological Assumptions

Epistemological assumptions in research are for the researcher to gain knowledge and a way to give voice to the unheard (Bridwell, 2020). This knowledge comes from the participants in the study. Two things must occur when knowledge is involved. First, the belief must be adequate, and second, the belief must be legitimate (Ahmed, 2008). The adequate and legitimate belief as a special education teacher is observing SWLD in the LRE, struggling to access the educational standards due to deficiencies, and SWLD lack of socialization among their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.; Wilson et al., 2020). Therefore, my belief is SWLD receiving their education in the LRE affects their social identity. Providing SWLD a voice to explain their lived experiences will offer stakeholders newfound knowledge to consider when making placement decisions for SWLD. My concerns of the LRE have the presumption to be legitimate, as I have observed adverse effects that SWLD face later in life. I also know that having personal experiences addressing the challenges that SWLD face while in the LRE, maintaining an open-mind, being patient, and reviewing all the data thoroughly and accurately, so new knowledge is found and reported to all stakeholders for the benefit of SWLD (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Axiological Assumptions

The United States value system is questionable in the choices made concerning the educational system, for all particular purposes, decisions focus on promoting equality. However, everyone does not necessarily start in the same place and therefore, the outcome often results in inequality (McMenamin, 2018). Axiological assumptions is the philosophical study of values related to ethical decisions within varying societies (Crewell & Poth, 2018). Values underpin the decisions made in the educational environment, specifically related to decisions about SWLD. At the very least, these values stayed in mind throughout the progression of this research. Furthermore, challenging the values of the local educational system in the decisions made for SWLD is necessary for adequate improvement of SWLD outcomes. My values are deeply rooted in helping others who may lack the ability to help themselves; therefore, living by biblical principles such as Philippians 2:3-4, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. However, in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his interests but also to the interests of others." With that in mind and the significance of this study, ethical conduct will guide this study to help alter the views of local school districts' implementation of the LRE through morally correct decisions rather than monetary based decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Problem Statement

The problem this study seeks to address is the lived experiences of 6th-grade SWLD educated in their LRE (IDEA, n.d.). Borman et al. (2019) described the importance of adolescents finding "their place [. . .] in an expanding social world and at the same time forming meaningful and long-lasting relationships and connections to important institutions like schools" (p.161). The transition into 6th grade for SWLD becomes critical, as SWLD look for acceptance

by the in-group (Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019; Tajfel, 1970). However, SWLD become more self-aware of their disability label (Mueller 2019). Moreover, SWLD begin to make sense of who they are in the world, which often has negative social attitudes and marginalization towards SWLD (Borman et al., 2019; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Stone, 2019). Although much research has investigated the LRE, the emotional and social outcomes rarely receive the necessary attention (Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Currently, SWLD have higher graduation rates; however, the decline in proficiency levels for math and reading still leaves SWLD unprepared for college or the workforce (43AR, 2021). Therefore, many political figures, stakeholders, and parents have difficulty agreeing that being included will also mean being excluded (Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). For that reason, it is imperative to receive first-hand knowledge from SWLD lived experiences on the emotional effects, and the intricate role the LRE has on SWLD social identity (Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers at an urban middle school in Georgia (IDEA, n.d.). At this stage in the research, the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers will be generally defined as any student who receives special education services with the eligibility category of LD or SLD as the site of the research uses LD as an eligibility category to educate SWLD in the LRE. SWLD must be educated in their LRE sitting amongst their non-disabled peers, who do not socially accept some SWLD due to the characteristics of the bestowed label of disability (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2019).

Learning disability (LD) was a recognized eligibility category in 1969 with the passing of the Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act (EHA, 1970). Upon the reauthorization of IDEA in 1994, LD changed to Specific learning disability (SLD) as the new eligibility category (IDEA, n.d.). Nevertheless, various institutions have utilized the two terms interchangeably, such as the American Psychiatric Association, which notes, "Specific learning disorder is a medical term used for diagnosis (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). School psychologists may use LD and SLD in their diagnosis of a student. The two theories guiding this study are Social Identity Theory and Social Model of Disability Theory. First, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1970) addresses an individual's self-worth and self-esteem based on the group they identify with and their rank or placement within the group. Second, Social Model of Disability Theory (Oliver, 1990) addresses disability as a social problem rather than a personal one. These theories will assist in arriving at the 6th grade SWLD lived experiences about their education in the LRE and the effects to the SWLD social identity.

Significance of the Study

This study will add to the current body of literature by giving 6th grade SWLD a voice to describe their lived experiences being educated in their LRE. This information is significant because the transition into 6th grade for SWLD is one that brings self-awareness of the disability label that carries a stigma (Mueller, 2019). Sixth grade is the time SWLD begin to make sense of who they are in the world, which has negative social attitudes and marginalization towards SWLD (Borman et al., 2019; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Stone, 2019). This study will help all stakeholders understand the experiences of SWLD and the effects on their social identity since the school community, as a whole does not view SWLD as equal members (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018;).

SWLD arrive at the intersection of social identity and social disability where non-disabled peers do not accept some SWLD, from the result of the educational policies, and a constructed label of disability (IDEA, n.d.; Mueller, 2019). SWLD become isolated, with limited peer interaction, causing SWLD to feel lonely, and that population of students' intrinsic motivation begins to decline (Borman et al., 2019; Wilson et al., 2020). The placement of SWLD in the LRE can develop the perception of belonging to the out-group, which causes negative results (Borman et al., 2019; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Stone, 2019; Tajfel, 1970). This research seeks to challenge this framework.

This study may reveal SWLD lack the opportunity of a FAPE while placed in their LRE, per IDEA mandates, due to the inconsistent interpretation of the maximum extent appropriate or the usage of varying placements for SWLD across states and districts (Cosier et al., 2020). For example, although SWLD have deficits in learning, even if placements are available specific to the disability, local schools cannot place those students in that classroom. Students with disabilities are unique individuals, thus allowing students with disabilities the right to sit next to their non-disabled peers as appropriate. Furthermore, schools cannot use staff shortages, lack of funding, or convenience to decide placement (De Vries et al., 2018; Francisco et al., 2020). Consequently, local schools have a tough decision of choosing cost over benefit, which may leave some SWLD struggling to receive an equable education (De Vries et al., 2018; Francisco et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.). Furthermore, this study will illuminate the concerns that SWLD need additional support to help change their self-perception to one of being predestined to do great things since SWLD are not valued equally in the school community (Borman et al., 2019).

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study aims to describe the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). The problem this study seeks to address is the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE and the effects on SWLD social identity (Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). One central research question (CRQ) and three sub-questions guided this study. The questions are generalized so, participants can share their experiences, and the researcher has a starting point to understand how their LRE affects the social identity of SWLD.

CRQ: What are the lived experiences of 6th grade students with learning disabilities educated in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?

The central research question will hear the lived experiences of SWLD education in their LRE specifically the co-taught model (IDEA, n.d.). The participants' lived experiences will help identify the phenomenon of the study (Moustakas, 1994). The sub-questions provide a way to explore the lived experiences of the participants educated in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model (IDEA, n.d.).

Sub-Questions:

1. How are 6th grade students with learning disabilities identities affected by the interactions with their teachers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?

   General education teachers are not always receptive to having SWLD in their classrooms (Akcamete & Dagi Gokbulut; 2018; Gilmour, 2018; Hind et al., 2019). When SWLD realize their general education teachers know they have a disability, it negatively

affects the relationship (Mueller, 2019). This question seeks to find the relationship between the SWLD and their general education teacher.

2. How are 6th grade students with learning disabilities identities affected by the interactions with their non-disabled peers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?

    SWLD educated in the LRE sit amongst their non-disabled peers, who often do not socially accept some SWLD since some SWLD exhibit learning disabilities such as not answering questions, reading the material, and do not conceptually understand the curriculum (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2019). However, SWLD strive to be a member of the in-group, but their non-disabled peers associate SWLD with the out-group, which negatively affects the SWLD self-esteem and self-worth (Borman et al., 2019; IDEA, n.d.; Tajfel, 1970). This question seeks to understand how SWLD perceive their peers in their LRE.

3. How are 6th grade students with learning disabilities educated in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model identities, affected by the lived experiences of their academic success?

The exposure to the general education curriculum in the LRE, specifically the co-taught model, even with supports and accommodations provided in the SWLD IEP conceptually understanding and applying the grade-level academic standards, will still be a struggle (Gilmour, 2018). Therefore, many SWLD currently read below the proficiency level and score even lower using the more rigorous academic standards (Gilmour, 2018). The question seeks to understand how SWLD perceive their academic success in their LRE.

Definitions

The definitions provided below can provide clarity for the words or phrases used in this study.

1. *Free Appropriate Public Education*: An educational right that all students are guaranteed in the United States by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (IDEA, n.d.).
2. *General Education Curriculum*: The curriculum for the student's current grade level with established standards for all students to have access to and progress in (IDEA, n.d.).
3. *Individualized Education Program*: A guiding document that describes a student with disabilities academic and behavioral strengths and weaknesses. The IEP also provides supports and accommodations for students with disabilities to access and progress in the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.).
4. *Least Restrictive Environment*: The classroom where the SWLD will be educated after reviewing the continuum of placements during the annual IEP meeting (IDEA, n.d.).
5. *Specialized Instruction*: The instruction the SWD receives from the appropriate educator while in their LRE to enable the SWD to have the same opportunities to achieve academic success using the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.).
6. *Specific Learning Disability*: A disorder affecting how students learn and understand reading, writing, thinking, and speaking across all content areas (IDEA, n.d.).

Summary

The debate concerning the LRE in special education is a well-researched phenomenon that applies to over 7.3 million SWD, or 14% of all students in the public school setting (NCES, 2019). During the 2019-2020 school year, 37% of students identified fell into the eligibility category of SLD, which makes up the largest group of students with disabilities in K-12 schools

(43AR, 2021). Nationally, SWLD spends more than 66% of their day sitting next to their non-disabled peers in the LRE (NCES, 2019). Unfortunately, the impact of being educated in the LRE has limited first-hand knowledge from the voices of SWLD (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Therefore, this study seeks to investigate further 6th grade SWLD lived experiences on being educated in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee-St. John et al., 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of chapter two is to provide the theoretical framework and an overview of current literature. The overall goal of the federal education law IDEA guarantees SWLD an equitable education just as their non-disabled peers receive (IDEA, n.d.). Therefore, IDEA has undergone several reauthorizations, which provides SWLD rights that include access to the general education curriculum, specialized instruction, an IEP, and being educated in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.). Parents became members of the IEP team, placement decisions would be a collaborative effort, and SWLD would take the same assessments are their non-disabled peers (Cavendish et al., 2018; Kurth et al., 2020).

In chapter two, the review synthesizes a wide span of literature on various topics related to 6th grade SWLD who are educated in the LRE. The social identity theory and the social model of disability theory helped to examine the lived experiences of SWLD educated in the LRE. This literature review will focus on the phenomenon of social identity theory and the "three key cognitive components: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Additionally, the literature will review what Oliver (1981) described as the new paradigm of the social model of disability theory as "Switching away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environments impose limitations on specific categories of people" (p. 28). Hence, making disability a social problem rather than a personal problem (Oliver, 1981). Chapter Two is relevant in two ways: first, to provide stakeholders with information about the adverse long-term effects, which may occur for some SWLD educated in their LRE; two, this literature is an intricate part of context necessary for collecting qualitative data.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study used the social identity theory and the social model of disability theory, which comprises theoretical constructs and laws of theory. According to Gall et al. (2007), theoretical constructs allow researchers the ability to "identify the universals of experience so we can make sense of the experience, while the laws of theory enable us to make predictions and control phenomena" (p. 8). The two theories discussed which helped develop the theoretical framework and will guide this study, are Henri Tajfel's social identity theory and Mike Oliver's social model of disability theory.

Theory of Social Identity

Coser (1957) studied *The Functions of Social Conflict*, which revealed that social and psychological differences between groups cause conflict. Although the Western world held a philosophical thought, which maintained that for society to be valid, it must run smoothly without discard or disruption (Coser, 1957). However, Coser (1957) contended that social conflict was unavoidable, which could help solve mounting issues within a society that promoted social change. Tajfel and Turner (1979) agreed that social change could not occur without investigating social conflict. Wanting to understand social conflict and discrimination Tajfel (1970) conducted a study explicitly targeting discrimination; Tajfel developed the social identity theory through his research. Tajfel (1970) discusses that the lack of conformity of societal expectations and social norms was a reason for discrimination. The lack of conformity of societal expectations and social norms is present today, which has the potential for discrimination. For example, when immigrants come to America, they attempt to adapt to the American way of life and American identity, which has favorability versus remaining true to their own identity, which comes with consequences since immigrants' social norms are not customary in the United States

(Mangum & Block, 2018). Additionally, discriminatory experiences occur in the LRE from the very individuals who should be up lifting SWLD (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education). Tajfel explored that if all in-group members come from similar backgrounds, whether economic, cultural, or political, the learned social behaviors cause discrimination to exist. Despite previous studies discussing discrimination as an attitude, Tajfel wanted to confirm that discrimination was a behavior derived from social, economic, and demographic objectives, proving discrimination was learned socially (Tajfel, 1970).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) argued that social identity is a crucial aspect that explains how one views themselves strictly upon the association of a group. Therefore, it is human nature to categorize individuals into groups (Tajfel, 1970). Categorization in the social world becomes a division of in-groups and out-groups, accentuating or maximizing individuals' differences by the groups one is affiliated with (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), providing individuals the ability to understand who they are or who they are not (Benassi et al., 2022). Social categorization is the need for humans to belong to a group, have acceptance by the group, and show differences from groups that the individual refuses to affiliate with, thereby increasing how individuals identify with the affiliated group (Jugert et al., 2018). For that reason, social identity is the theory that an individual's self-worth and self-esteem derive from the group they identify with and their rank or placement within that group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Consequently, self-esteem is the favorable judgment received for one's achievements and contributions to the group, which comes from other group members' for the value added to the group (Sirlopu & Renger, 2020). Social constructions of reality occur once individuals decide on their affiliated group (Tajfel, 1970).

As individuals begin to associate with groups, the mentality forms as "we" and "they," causing one's self-esteem to rise, pre-judging those who do not belong to the group, which leads

to forming stereotypes (Desombre et al., 2018; Jugert et al., 2018). The social construction of reality causes the groups identified as "we" and "they" to begin forming reciprocal roles (Felder, 2018; Tajfel, 1970). For instance, the "we" group behaviors have discrimination towards the out-group reflecting a normal behavior (Felder, 2018; Tajfel, 1970). Applying the social constraints of reality to the LRE as the "we" group are students without disabilities who do not socially accept the "they" group SWLD (Felder, 2018; Tajfel, 1970).

Students without disabilities show discriminating behaviors towards SWLD due to the constructed label of disability and lower academic achievement (Felder, 2018; Kirby 2017; Koutsouris et al., 2020; Tajfel, 1970). Tajfel (1970), a Holocaust survivor and social psychologist, focused on human behaviors, which resulted in stereotypes and prejudice. Turner and Tajfel (1979) began investigating how individuals' social contexts affect their perceptions, leading to social categorization, which in turn produces stereotyping through society's preconceived notions of incompetence, unproductiveness, and dependency towards SWLD that become a self fully prophecy (Desombre et al., 2018; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Jugert et al., 2018). Some educators can easily carry those stereotypes into the classroom, causing negative attitudes, lower expectations, and a disparity in treatment between SWLD and their non-disabled peers (Desombre et al., 2018; Kirby, 2017; Tajfel, 1970). The question then becomes how are the social identities of SWLD affected while being educated in the LRE from experiencing the continued negative interactions from their non-disabled peers and teachers (Felder, 2018; Kirby 2017; Koutsouris et al., 2020; Tajfel, 1970).

Tajfel and Turner (1979) conducted a study of in-group and out-group behaviors, verifying that in-group members do not cross over to be part of the out-group, nor does the in-group allow the out-group to become a member. Students who have learning and behavior

problems become social outcasts, leading to neglect, preventing SWLD from joining the perceived in-group (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Tajfel, 1970). The rejection and neglect that SWLD experience justifies the conclusion of the Tajfel study that SWLD rarely move from the out-group to the in-group without learning strategies and understanding social mobility (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Tajfel, 1970). Social mobility emphasizes that any member of an in-group or out-group can change their membership, which may suit them better (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Change can occur through luck, hard work, or necessary means to prompt the shift (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). However, social mobility presents challenges due to societal stigmas that occur with the changing of groups, because the group member that leaves receives the label of a deserter or trader; therefore, group members believe changing groups is virtually impossible (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Social identity exists at both the individual and group level simultaneously therefore, SWLD can mentally move from an out-group to an in-group (Abbink & Harris, 2019). However, SWLD must acquire strategies to understand movement comes from within through a mindset shift that affirms they can be successful by finding and using the necessary tools to make themselves successful (Felder, 2018; Jugert et al., 2018; Kirby, 2017; Koutsouris et al., 2020; Tajfel, 1970). The argument becomes that SWLD perceptions about themselves must change, allowing SWLD to realize that social mobility is available. SWLD must be taught not to let any group or society define who they are or what they can achieve (Tajfel & Turner 1979). On that account, when educators are teaching, SWLD applying biblical principles such as Romans 12:2, “Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person

by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect."

There is an abundance of research on social identity to examine and expand on; however, this phenomenon has limited research on the lived experiences of SWLD who are educated in their LRE and the effects on SWLD social identity.

Social Model of Disability Theory

In the eighties, advancements for the disabled began prompted by legislation changes (Oliver, 1981). A disabled activist and lecturer, Mike Oliver, essentially coined the phrase "social model of disability" (Oliver, 1981), causing the pendulum of disability to sway in a different direction. Therefore, Oliver (1981) argues disability is a problem, not a personal problem but a societal problem; the problem lies within societal views shaped by economics, political, and ideological forces. The social model of disability will help find ways to distribute goods, and power, while lifting the barriers of limited opportunities' and stop stigmatizing individuals due to their differences (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Kilinc, 2019; Oliver, 1990). Oliver (1990) supports the social model of disability, agreeing that a political agenda would lift economic hurdles and collapse the obstacles of superiority that divide individuals with disabilities from their non-disabled peers. Kilinc (2019) explains exclusion occurs when a group or individuals display a belief, lifestyle or difference that mainstream groups or individuals would not consider the norm. Groups may include but are not limited to SWLD, poor, women, and minorities (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Kilinc, 2019). Currently, society uses the words impairment and disability interchangeably; however, there is a need to have a clear distinction between impairment and disability (Oliver, 1990).

Impairments usually apply to an individual, generally not disclosed, while society views disabilities in a systemized manner and discusses disabilities openly (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). Consequently, societal changes will occur when society accepts impairment and dismisses disability. For instance, SWLD that struggle in math who receive uplifting, positive words versus negative language will help create a shift in society toward viewing individuals with disabilities as equal community members (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Roos, 2019).

Researchers argue there should be distinct differences between the medical model of disability and the social model of disability (Felder, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). First, the social model of disability would focus on accepting disabled individuals rather than society focusing on their perceptions of individuals with a disability (Felder, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Oliver & Barnes, 2012). Second, the social model would dispel the medical model myth emphasizing individuals with disabilities as a recipient of bad luck, causing undue hardships on individuals preventing individuals with disabilities from living an ordinary life (Felder, 2018; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Kilinc, 2019; Kirby, 2017; Oliver, 1990). Third, the social model would help society realize the limited treatment for specific intellectual disabilities; however, intellectual disability has no identified cure; therefore, SWLD education will always be affected (Denton et al., 2020; Oliver, 1990). For instance, intellectual disability concerns for students who exhibit reading deficiencies combined with other health impairments (OHI) have an increased risk as that student population lacks research and has limited working strategies (Denton et al., 2020).

The distinctions of the medical model of disability suggest doctors can enter the lives of SWLD with an agenda to cure SWLD of their deficiencies (Oliver, 1990). However, there is no cure for neurological disorders; therefore, doctors cannot restore SWLD to societal expectations

(Kirby, 2017; Oliver, 1990). On the contrary, doctors have the potential ability to make choices for SWLD, which could prove beneficial to increasing SWLD educational outcomes (Oliver, 1990). For example, 33% of the education field perception has been students are lazy rather than lacking the ability to learn and focus (Weiss, 2018). Doctors can change societal views, and the school community views through clarifying SWLD are not lazy, which could help streamline the appropriate place to educate SWLD (Kirby, 2017; Oliver, 1990).

According to Oliver (1990), the limitations that individuals with disabilities have do not prevent them from reaching success; society fails to provide all the necessary support needed for individuals with disabilities to succeed in their environment. Research indicates that SWLD in the LRE have access to the general education curriculum; the assumption is that SWLD will receive a FAPE in the LRE, which offers specialized instruction, supports, and accommodations through a reasonably calculated IEP (IDEA, n.d.; Gilmour, 2018). However, SWLD academic achievement scores are not showing an educational benefit from the exposure to the general education curriculum in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.; Gilmour, 2018).

The importance of this study is exploring the lived experiences of SWLD who are educated in their LRE and the effects on their social identity when SWLD receive a constructed label of disability, which prevents the school community as viewing SWLD as equal members (Felder, 2018; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Kilinc, 2019; Kirby, 2017; Oliver, 1990).

Related Literature

The Government and the LRE

The upholding of laws is a way to promote equality within society (Merry, 2020; McMenamin, 2018; Sayeski et al., 2019). Promoting equality in education is no different; therefore, special education laws govern how SWLD will be educated (IDEA, n.d.). EAHCA

provided access to public education; subsequently, IDEA was a way to afford SWLD the right to obtain a FAPE in the LRE (EAHCA, 1975, IDEA, n.d.). The LRE has become synonymous with terms such as mainstreaming, co-taught/team-taught, and inclusion (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Legislation continued providing SWLD educational equality that led to the reauthorization of IDEA, which focused on SWLD having access to the general education curriculum with supports and accommodations through a reasonably calculated IEP (IDEA, n.d.). The IEP must entail a set of measurable annual goals, which the SWLD will make progress on through the academic school year while in the LRE (Cavendish & Conner, 2018; Kurth et al., 2020). Furthermore, IDEA specifically outlines students with disabilities will receive instruction by a special education teacher who will utilize specialized instruction. The specialized instruction ensures students with disabilities' unique needs have content delivered so access to the general education curriculum occurs and progress transpires. Comparatively, McMahon (2018) describes educational systems, specifically local schools, as an avenue to affect social change through experiences. Additionally, the LRE should be a place for positive outcomes and mutual respect between SWLD, their non-disabled peers, and teachers (Koutsouris et al., 2019). Furthermore, with social change occurring, parents' attitudes towards the LRE show positive long-term effects for changing society's mindset towards SWLD and disabled individuals as a whole (Browne II, 2012).

A *Nation at Risk* raised concerns about the educational standards (Bell, 1983). Students were not accountable to an expectation of high academic standards, instead the educational system held students to minimum standards (Bell, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* indicated accepting minimum educational standards was no longer acceptable (Bell, 1983). The minimum standards were producing students for the "first time in the history of our country a generation of students

that will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents" (Bell, 1983, p. 13). Previous generations had outperformed their parents in education and economical attainment (Bell, 1983). *A Nation at Risk* confirmed deploying a set of higher academic standards in the educational system would place the United States in a position to compete on an international level educationally with other countries and prepare students for college and career readiness (Bell, 1983). Therefore, a major educational reform took place, introducing a set of rigorous academic standards commonly known as Common Core State Standards (Common Core State Standard [CCSS], 2022). The new state academic standards would allow all states to be uniform in what students should know entering each grade level and what students should know leaving each grade level (CCSS, 2022).

The philosophy behind the development of the CCSS was advancing the educational system to the next level (CCSS, 2022). Consequently, in the development of CCSS, leaving SWLD out was not an option therefore, the government specifically addressed SWLD in a one and half page letter entitled, application to students with disabilities. The letter insists that students with disabilities, which includes SWLD, need to be equipped for college and/or career readiness through attaining access and progressing in the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.; Thompson et al., 2005). Students with disabilities have an overarching commonality of their disability drastically affecting students with disabilities capacity to succeed in the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.; Thompson et al., 2005). Therefore, SWLD will receive a reasonable calculated IEP to guarantee the ability to access the new rigors academic standards (CCSS, 2022; IDEA, n.d.; Thompson et al., 2005). SWLD IEP will provide specialized instruction, supports, and accommodations, which are required to assist in the achievement of academic success while in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.; Thompson et al., 2005) (see Appendix A).

The assertion is when SWLD receive an IEP; the playing field becomes leveled, enabling SWLD to learn to their fullest potential (Kirby, 2017; Polikoff et al., 2020). Thus, a question arises: how can supports, an IEP, and specialized instruction help SWLD meet the rigorous standards of their grade level and increase learning (Deas, 2018; Polikoff et al., 2020). With the mere exposure or "access" to the general education curriculum with supports and accommodations provided in an IEP, many of the SWLD would not be able to advance using the grade-level academic standards (Deas, 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019; Polikoff et al., 2020). The reauthorization of IDEA and the implementation of Common Core Standards required SWLD to take the same assessments and master the same academic standards as their non-disabled peers. However, some SWLD continually academically underperform their non-disabled peers even with the assistance of supports and accommodations provided in an IEP (Deas, 2018; ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d.; Kirby, 2017; NCES, 2019; Polikoff et al., 2020). To clarify, the NCES reports the reading and math proficiency for students with disabilities, including SWLD, was 10-12% for reading and 6-8% for math (Barrett et al., 2020; NCES, 1992-2017). To put it differently, a study conducted by Gilmour and colleagues (2019) estimated that SWD, which includes SWLD, "score 1.2 standard deviations below their non-disabled peers in reading, a gap that translates to more than three years of academic growth" (p. 11). The Center on Standards, Alignment, Instruction, and Learning (C-SAIL) conducted a study to determine how well the Common Core Standards have helped close the achievement gap plus increase learning for students (Deas, 2018; Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020). Unfortunately, the results have disclosed Common Core had not produced the results as initially thought, and the study results have shown declines have occurred in 4th-grade Math and 8th-grade reading (Deas, 2018; Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020).

Although some SWLD receive intensive reading connections outside of the co-taught setting, limited research provides strategies on effectively implementing forms of specialized reading instruction in the co-taught settings (King-Sears et al., 2019). However, Grigorenko and colleagues (2020) reported that SWLD who received reading interventions in the first or second grade were twice as effective as intervention received in later grades. Even high-quality intensive interventions are less effective after the 2nd grade (Grigorenko et al., 2020). Therefore, SWLD who currently read below the proficiency level score even lower using the more rigorous CCSSI (Deans, 2018; Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020). Essentially, eight years after implementing the CCSS and IDEA requiring SWLD to have access to the general education curriculum and to take the same state assessments, the effects of increased learning and the closure of the academic gap between SWLD and their non-disabled peers is minimal at best (CCSS, 2022; Deans, 2018; IDEA, n.d.; Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020).

Federal policies such as the EACHA, and IDEA, have demonstrated educational social change by including SWLD in their LRE (EACHA, 1975; IDEA, n.d.). Despite making laws advancing opportunities for SWLD, the injustices from the laws are having adverse effects on SWLD and should not go unmentioned (Merry, 2020; McMenamin, 2018; Sayeski et al., 2019). For instance, the rationale for the LRE is the ability for SWLD to be included; however, to be included, SWLD will also be excluded (Koutsouris et al., 2020). Unfortunately, SWLD have not experienced a positive social change in the educational systems since the constructed label of disability comes with stigmas (Johnston & Bradford, 2019; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Research has indicated there are deliberate educational benefits for SWLD in the LRE as well as adverse effects from the individual interpretation of the various federal educational policies intended for SWLD (Johnston & Bradford, 2019; Kilinc, 2018). The deliberate and adverse

effects stemming from the federal educational policies require examining along with seeking SWLD individual lived experiences due to the present and long-term consequences such as academic performance, proficiency levels in reading and math, as well as graduation rates (Johnston & Bradford, 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Research indicates that the victimization of SWLD creates struggles to develop friendships, and face social exclusion due to academic and behavioral differences while educated in LRE (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017). Additionally, when free time arises, some SWLD do not acquire the same social participation status as their non-disabled peers, which causes isolation and marginalization (Mamas et al., 2020). When exclusion occurs for SWLD in the LRE from peer interactions, it has negative consequences that last well past sixth grade (Boreman et al., 2019; Koutsouris et al., 2020). Therefore, the SWLD lowered self-esteem, and social participation in school diminishes (Borman et al., 2019). Special education has lifted the barriers to be included yet imposed a barrier for equal education differently for SWLD (Felder, 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019). For example, SWLD in the LRE have exposure to the general education curriculum. Gaining access to the general education curriculum should provide an opportunity for SWLD to achieve full participation in the educational setting, a means to increase knowledge, which should prompt independent living plus being economically self-sufficient or college-ready upon graduation from high school (IDEA, n.d.). However, IDEA has failed SWLD by constructing the label of disabled that comes with lower expectations from some teachers, which lessens student engagement, causing a feeling of hopelessness (Kirby, 2017, Merry, 2020). Therefore, the lowering of SWLD self-esteem and social participation in school diminishes (Borman et al., 2019; Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). It should be recognized SWLD lose sight of why school is essential in the first place, which is to gain an

education and participate fully in life (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Bell, 1983).

Addressing the disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers can occur through stakeholders examining morality over monetary considerations that should provide SWLD the same advantages as their non-disabled peers (Felder, 2018; Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019; Kirby, 2017). Specifically, being educated in an environment where SWLD can access and progress in the general education curriculum in a way that SWLD can comprehend and begin to master the required standards. Therefore, the achievement gap and the differences in increased learning should start to close between SWLD and their non-disabled peers (Felder, 2018; Gilmour, et al., 2019; Kirby, 2017; McMenamin, 2018). However, making the argument to improve results all members involved in the school community would have to share the same set of values (Koutsouris et al., 2019). Educating Georgia's Future report indicated that graduation rates and achievement gaps are generally lower for SWD, including SWLD (Educating Georgia's Future: Georgia's State ESSA Plan, 2018). Therefore, a need to address the underperformance of this sub-group has become vital for the state of Georgia to prepare SWLD life beyond high school (Educating Georgia's Future: Georgia's State ESSA Plan, 2018). Therefore, the reauthorization of federal education policies have afforded SWLD to be educated in the LRE, however controversy and worldwide debate continues (IDEA, n.d.; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

According to the United States Department of Education 43rd Annual report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2021 state assessments taken in the 2018-2019 school year show a decline in the median proficient levels. For example, SWD, which includes SWLD the median proficient levels for reading in third grade report 18.8% however, in high school the median proficient level for reading declines to 13.3%. The decline in

math is devastating with the third grade median proficient level reporting 24.4% yet the math state assessment in high school reports the median proficient level at 7.3% (43AR, 2021). When students with disabilities are required to take the state assessments like their non-disabled peers, which includes SWLD the IEP specifies accommodations for testing purposes (43AR, 2021; Buzick, 2019). The 43rd Annual report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2021 report indicated approximately 51% of students with disabilities, used accommodations for the math portion of the assessment and 53% of students with disabilities used accommodations on the reading portion of the assessment across the 50 states (43AR, 2021; Buzick, 2019). More specifically Georgia reported that 74% of students with disabilities, IEP listed accommodations for the ELA portion of the assessment and 77% of students with disabilities IEP listed accommodations on the mathematics portion of the assessment (NCES, 2019). Buzick (2019) indicated 45% to 55% of students with accommodations had a category eligibility of SLD.

Growth for SWLD has always been a priority, and increased understanding of what causes growth and how to analyze growth data in the 21st century is still a looming concern (Floden et al., 2020; Gilmour et al., 2019). Although, assessment literacy has improved since the introduction of CCSSI (Floden et al., 2020; Gilmour et al., 2019). Analyzing data as well as providing the correct accommodations yearly for SWLD is the focal point that establishes equitable opportunities for SWLD to participate in all formal and summative assessments (Buzick 2019; Yaoying & Kuti 2021). IEP teams must remember that disabilities can cause barriers for SWLD to demonstrate knowledge; therefore, the purpose of accommodations is not to hide a disability, nor should the accommodations increase the capabilities of SWLD; it is merely affording the SWLD to access and participate in the assessments like non-disabled

students (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). However, discrepancies are still ever-present, which become apparent at annual IEP meetings through the SWLD present level of academic achievements and functional performance during the reporting of scores for formal and summative assessments (Buzick 2019; IDEA, n.d.; Yaoying & Kuti 2021).

Researchers examined average growth, which includes SWLD, who had access to the general education curriculum and accommodations listed in the SWLD IEP (Buzick 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019). Losing accommodations is a factor to consider regarding low growth among SWLD during assessments as well as the premise that SWLD who access the general education curriculum in the LRE with the use of supports and accommodations should show growth; however, it is not fundamentally working as perceived by stakeholders (Buzick 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019). For example, students without disabilities in reading are exhibiting below grade level scores, which are unacceptable. With that in mind, students with disabilities, which includes SWLD, are reading even worse (Gilmour et al., 2019). Another point to consider, which may produce lower academic performance is determining what the accommodations actually does on the assessment (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). For example, the allowable accommodation may include assistive technology, which only reads the answer choices for the SWLD as the SWLD may be required to read the passage independently so the reading ability can be measured (Georgia Department of Education, 2021). Nonetheless, access to the general education curriculum and accommodations for testing purposes need further investigating since state assessments are used in present levels of performance on SWLD IEP to help guide placement (Georgia Department of Education, 2021; Buzick, 2019; Gilmour et al., 2019).

Public policies are continually changing for SWLD; for instance, in 2015, the ESSA became the new law as a replacement for No Child Left Behind (ESSA, 2015). ESSA required

the implementation of academic-based standards; however, SWLD IEP goals were not currently aligning with the new academic-based standards (ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d.). Therefore, aligning the ESSA and IDEA become necessary because the ultimate goal of ESSA is to guarantee all children appropriate opportunities to receive a fair, equitable and high-quality education and to close educational gaps between SWLD and their non-disabled peers (ESSA, 2015; IDEA n.d.). Although the enactment of federal policies continually change to close the achievement gap and increase learning for SWLD in the LRE using supports, accommodations, an IEP, and specialized instruction. However, SWLD are experiencing lower graduation rates; academically, they are lower than their non-disabled peers are and SWLD experience negative emotional effects being educated in the LRE (Gilmour et al., 2019; Kirby 2017).

Parents have questioned the validity of a FAPE, the adequacy of the SWLD education while in the LRE and as a result, the legal system plays a significant role in deciding what constitutes a FAPE in the LRE (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018). The ripple affect across the country's K-12 educational systems came at the deciding verdict of Endrew v. Douglas county School District, 2017 that required educators to add challenging objectives to the goals of students with disabilities IEP that met the unique needs of each individual student (EDCS, 2017). For example, increasing writing as a goal will follow with objectives as intermediate steps to reach the goal. However, the goals and objectives should change from year to year thus showing the SWLD are gaining an educational benefit from the writing goal listed in the IEP (EDCS, 2017; IDEA, n.d.; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018).

Federal and state reports indicate that SWLD academic performance, graduate rates, and achievement gaps are not sufficient compared to their non-disabled peers (Educating Georgia's

Future: Georgia's State ESSA Plan, 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). This study is essential as it provides stakeholders information that the LRE may not allow SWLD access to the general education curriculum even with a reasonably calculated IEP. Therefore, educating SWLD in small group settings reduce the pace during instructional time while providing adequate opportunities for SWLD to master the required educational standards, which equates to separate is equal (Barrett et al., 2020).

Teachers and the LRE

In 1997, when IDEA announced SWLD would be educated in the LRE and immediately some general education teachers began voicing concerns (Wienen et al., 2018). Some general education teachers were apprehensive about educating SWLD since required training was needed, which some general education teachers lacked; therefore, some general education teachers felt inadequately prepared to education SWLD in the LRE (Hind et al., 2019; Wienen et al., 2018). Additionally, some general education teachers worried about the disparity of achievement levels between SWLD and their non-disabled peers and the ability for SWLD to access the general education curriculum in the LRE (Hind et al., 2019; IDEA, n.d.; Wienen et al., 2018). General education teachers' woes continued in 2002; President Bush signed NCLB into law, granting SWLD the right to the same state assessments as their non-disabled peers (NCLB, 2002). The passing of NCLB held general education teachers accountable for the academic growth of SWLD who were educated in the LRE (NCLB, 2002).

Although the intent for creating NCLB was good, the devastation, which occurred over time to student and school engagement, and the outcry from the communities, parents, and teachers, caused a replacement of the law in 2015 from NCLB to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA 2015; Markowitz, 2018; NCLB, 2002). The ESSA primary goal is to increase SWLD

academic achievement through a set of state standards that provide SWLD an opportunity to learn and master the required state standards at each grade level (ESSA, 2015). Nevertheless, general education teachers are still accountable for the academic growth of SWLD who are educated in the LRE (ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d.). General education teaches are aware of classroom practices including the fully embedding of special education in the classroom; unfortunately, many general education teachers are unaware how to purvey IDEA (Francisco et al., 2020).

SWLD have been educated in the LRE since the passing of NCLB (NCLB, 2002). The opinions and attitudes of general educations teachers remain the same general education teachers are either undecided or have a negative view of SWLD experience from their being educated in the LRE (Kirby, 2017). General education teachers expressed concern for the adverse effects that SWLD experience from their non-disabled peers while being educated in the LRE (Akcamete & Dagli Gokbulut, 2018; Gilmour, 2018; Hind et al., 2018). For this reason, general education teachers have the ability to facilitate positive interactions between SWLD and their non-disabled peers; however, due to general education teachers own basis against SWLD, positive interactions may be covertly or overtly missed (Schwab et al., 2018). At the same time, some general education teachers are not receptive to having SWLD in their classrooms (Akcamete & Dagli Gokbulut, 2018; Gilmour, 2018; Hind et al., 2018). In fact, Hernández-Saca & Cannon, (2019) explain that SWLD educated in their LRE comes with the constructed label of disabled, which carries a stigma and lower expectations from teachers. This lessens SWLD engagement causing a feeling of hopelessness (Kirby, 2017). Labels become so salient that general education teachers see only the label and lose focus on the SWLD (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019). Therefore,

marginalization begins, leading to injustice starting in the classroom, which may carry into society (Hernández-Saca & Cannon, 2019).

Research shows that some general education teachers have lower educational expectations for SWLD (Akcamete & Dagli Gokbulut, 2018; Gilmour, 2018; Hind et al., 2018). Therefore, some general education teachers are concerned that SWLD will not receive an equal education or learn the rigorous academic standards since SWLD currently perform lower compared to their non-disabled peers (King-Spears et al., 2019; Stiefel et al., 2018). SWLD who are also diagnosed with social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties experience resentment from their general education teachers (Hind et al., 2018). Furthermore, general education teachers view SWLD negatively, even when their non-disabled peers display the same behaviors (Hind et al., 2018). Although this may be true, SWLD have a desire to fit in the school community (Borman et al., 2018). Fitting in the school community is building social networks and engaging in positive interactions between SWLD, their non-disabled peers and their teachers (Borman et al., 2018; Mamas et al., 2020). However, as SWLD transition into middle school, relationships between SWLD and their general education teachers decline as SWLD think general education teachers are less accepting of them compared to their non-disabled peers (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). Therefore, some general education teachers generally have less positive relationships with SWLD; the long-term effects from the negative relationships can affect student teachers' relationships well into the future (Hind et al., 2019).

In the LRE, general education teachers and special education teachers have specific roles (IDEA, n.d.). For example, general education teachers hold the responsibility to deliver academic content; special education teachers hold the responsibility to provide specialized instruction, which should allow SWLD the ability to progress on their annual goals listed in the SWLD IEP

(IDEA, n.d.). A chief complaint echoed among all educators who teach in the LRE is the lack of time for collaboration (Francisco et al., 2020; Hind et al., 2019; Saloviita, 2020). Research shows without effective collaboration; good teaching cannot take place in the LRE, which equates to a missed opportunity for growth (Francisco et al., 2020; Gilmour et al., 2019; Hind et al., 2019; Saloviita, 2020).

The word appropriate in FAPE has recently come under fire, raising questions from local schools questioning what actually constitutes a FAPE for SWLD in the LRE (EDCS, 2017). Therefore, in 2017, the Supreme Court delivered the latest guidance on a FAPE (EDCS, 2017). The Supreme Court delivered a new standard, ruling, that every student with a disability should have the opportunity to receive challenging objectives, which require high expectations. The goals require an agreement among the IEP team concluding the student with disabilities can progress towards achieving the goals regardless of the students' disability, which is no different from students without disabilities passing from grade to grade each year (EDCS, 2017). The Supreme Court decisions added to special education teachers' concerns who are required to provide specialized instruction to SWLD while in the LRE (EDCS, 2017; IDEA, n.d.).

When SWLD who are reading below grade level standards SWLD require "explicit instruction in phonics, integrated with instruction in word recognition, phonics instruction, and comprehension" (Denton et al., 2020, p. 73). Delivering this type of intensive reading strategies may have better outcomes if the SWLD were educated in a small group environment (Denton et al., 2020). However, when SWLD are reading below grade level in the LRE SWLD should receive specialized instruction according to case law (EDCS, 2017). Nevertheless, special education teachers have voiced their concern about the lack of information on what exactly constitutes specialized instruction and how to meet the unique needs of all the students with

disabilities while in the LRE, that equates to measurable progress on IEP goals (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018).

Educators are the most valuable resource schools can have; therefore, educators' perceptions affect student achievement (Griffin, 2009). However, educators who teach special education have a higher attrition rate, which may arise from burnout and stress; therefore, direct and indirect adverse circumstances can affect teaching quality, students' engagement, and IEP outcomes (Parey, 2021). Through the years, changes to federal and state educational policies such as ESSA, IDEA, along with the implementation of CCSS, have caused special education and general education teachers to take on added responsibilities (CCSS, 2022; ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d.). Due to policy changes to close the academic gap or legal outcomes, all have attributed to teachers experiencing burnout and stress faster during teachers' tenure of educating SWLD in the LRE (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Parey, 2021). The adverse effects of the added stress or reaching a point of burnout may have long-term consequences for SWLD (Markowitz, 2018; Parey, 2021). For example, research indicates that students with low school engagement levels were 19 percentage points more likely to drop out of school (Markowitz, 2018; Parey, 2021). Additionally, SWLD progress may be limited on their IEP goals if educators have reached the point of experiencing burnout and stress during the school year (Markowitz, 2018; Parey, 2021).

Educational laws have established the right for SWLD to receive a FAPE and have access and progress in the general education curriculum while in the LRE sitting next to their non-disabled peers (Hind et al., 2019; Kirby, 2017). However, SWLD who have access to the general education curriculum, specialized instruction, along with a well-calculated IEP with supports and accommodations, has only proved minimal growth for SWLD (Deas, 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019;

Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020). Therefore, the environment or access to the general education curriculum should not be the focus or the priority but relative sound teaching, which can occur in a separate environment (Hind et al., 2019; Kirby, 2017). When considering the post-school lives, including college and career readiness for SWLD, taking into account the SWLD emotional well-being and the adverse effects on SWLD social identity from poor social interactions with teachers and peers is vital information that could change the trajectory for SWLD (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Therefore, listening to the voices of SWLD lived experiences from being educated in the LRE is necessary to determine if SWLD social identity has been negatively affected, which could have a bearing on SWLD overall academic success (Browne II, 2012; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Roos, 2019; Schwab et al., 2018).

Parents and the LRE

Parents fought for equal education rights for their SWLD; therefore, research articles reported on the thoughts and opinions of parents with SWLD who may or may not receive instruction in the LRE at the parents' request (Bannink et al., 2020; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). It became a priority for the federal government to provide SWLD a FAPE sitting next to their non-disabled peers, which the government defined as the LRE (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, n.d.). Additional reauthorizations to educational policies have included SWLD gaining access to the general education curriculum, and a set of academic standards that SWLD must master at each grade level (CCSS, n.d.; ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d.). IDEA requires SWLD will receive an IEP detailing the supports and accommodations along with receiving specialized instruction while in the LRE to access and progress in the general education curriculum (CCSSI; 2022; ESSA 2015; IDEA, n.d.; Thompson et al., 2005). Additionally, IDEA mandates the parents or guardians, a

special education teacher, a regular education teacher, a representative of the school district, and any other appropriate individuals are part of the IEP team, which develops the SWLD IEP on an annual basis (IDEA, n.d.).

Although, educational laws are a way to promote social change; the educational laws have flaws, which can be identified (Felder, 2018; Koutsouris et al., 2019; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The constructed label of disability carries a stigma by societal views, causing SWLD, time in the LRE to be one with negative experiences (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Zagona et al., 2019). Giving SWLD access to the general education curriculum does not equate to increase learning (Deas, 2018; Gilmour et al., 2019; Loveless, 2020; Polikoff et al., 2020). Therefore, parents discuss the class size and the teachers' attitudes as driving the atmosphere of the LRE, which produces the negative experiences (Gilmour 2018; Schwab et al., 2018). Parents also question if the supports and accommodations listed in the SWLD IEP actually produces meaningful access to the general education curriculum, which equates to high-quality education for SWLD in the LRE (Merry, 2020; Schwab et al., 2018). Additionally, parents' question whether SWLD are reaching goal attainment year-to-year therefore many parent of SWLD have continued concerns (Kurth et al., 2020; Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019).

IEP meetings and the placement of SWLD continue to be a point of contention between parents, administrators, and teachers (Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). Parents have indicated more times that segregation might serve the SWLD better than the LRE (Barrett et al., 2020). However, the concerns go unaddressed as parents explained that the IEP process is overwhelming and teacher-driven, and when parents voice concerns during the meeting, they are rarely heard (Kurth et al., 2020; Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). Some parents argue that their voices are unheard during IEP meetings regarding placement due to funding rather than what

provides an appropriate education for the student (Zagona et al., 2019). Expressly, in research conducted by Zagona et al (2019), a parent indicated schools lack funding; consequently, funds fluctuate based upon the disability and the LRE placement, which is a way for schools to increase their funding. State Full Time Equivalent (FTE) refers to the Georgia system for funding predicated upon students with disabilities, which includes students with learning disabilities, enrollment and the educational environment the local school system provides for the students with disabilities (Seay, 2019). There is an extensive mathematical formula utilized by the state to determine FTE and subsequently the amount of funding a school receives per student with a disability, including students with learning disability, dependent upon their LRE as indicated in the IEP. Therefore, the LRE continues to be a conversational debate among parents and local schools (Bannink et al., 2020; Seay, 2019).

Although the establishment of educational policies and laws occurred for the betterment of SWLD, essentially, the government enacted policies and laws to provide civil rights to SWLD, in exchange for federal funding to local schools (EAHCA, 1975; ESSA, 2015; IDEA, n.d). When IDEA included the LRE in the mandates with no clear definition, it left the guidelines open to individual interpretation (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The lack of clarity concerning the definition of the LRE and precisely how SWLD are educated in the LRE as it pertains to curriculum and instruction causes a grave concern among parents of SWLD (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Walker et al., 2018). Local schools rarely view the LRE as a place, but rather a thing that federal policies guide through funding and force SWLD to take part in, leaving the social area misunderstood (Felder, 2018; IDEA, n.d.; Koutsouris et al., 2019; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). The overall academic achievement is lower for SWLD for example; if the rigor of the academic standards is so that a legal document is required, how

valuable is the LRE for SWLD who are already performing two to three years behind their non-disabled peers (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Merry, 2020; Zagona et al., 2019). Parents also expressed a concern that SWLD may lack the background knowledge to follow the academic standards from year to year if SWLD are not fully mastering the academic standards each year (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

There is a plethora of research citing increases in academic achievement, behavioral and social growth for SWLD educated in the LRE (Gilmour, 2018; Kurth, 2020). However, when researchers seek the perceptions of parents to discuss growth for students with disabilities, the observations are generally by individual deficit categories; for example, parents of students with autism explained social growth occurred while the student with autism was in the LRE (Kurth, 2020). Additionally, research indicates that parents with students diagnosed with Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) described their student showed more on-task behavior while on medication **(**Boudreau et al., 2020). Parents worry about the lack of training that general education teachers have educating SWLD since some general education teachers do not fully understand how to address the needs of SWLD in the LRE (Kurth et al., 2020; Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). A study conducted by Zagona and colleagues explained parents who had a child diagnosed with Intellect and Development Disability (IDD) experienced negative interactions with teachers and teachers' assistant. The negative experience arises due to a lack of training to educate students with IDD, thus causing difficulty when parents asked for self-contained placement (Zagona et al., 2019). Furthermore, parents of students diagnosed with Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) lack faith and trust in the general education teachers' ability, thereby questioning the adequacy of their teaching abilities for students' with cognitive disabilities while in the LRE (Kurth et al., 2020).

The disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers as it relates to dropping out of school, entering the workforce, and obtaining higher education are devastating (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; Kirby, 2017; NCES, 2019). For example, the dropout rate for students with disabilities is a combined total of 16% and 33% of the dropouts are SWLD (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; NCES, 2018). Additionally, 80% of the individuals with disabilities were not in the labor (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022), and only 26% of all students with disabilities go on to college to obtain an undergrad degree (NCES, 2019).

Studies show weak evidence, minimal growth, or no growth academically and socially when describing SWLD educated in the LRE (Gilmour, 2018; Schwab et al., 2018). Therefore, parents argued teachers' attitudes towards SWLD were negative, thus harming any yearly academic achievement, which might occur for SWLD educated in the LRE (Teixeira et al., 2018). Although IDEA provides layers of protection for SWLD, the truth is becoming the bare minimum is being provided to SWLD in the LRE (Merry, 2020). A valid concern for parents is the stigma associated with being labeled disabled and SWLD sense of belonging in the LRE (Merry 2020). Research indicates that SWLD have "a lower academic self-concept than their non-disabled peers" (Schwab et al., 2018, p. 32). Unfortunately, the lower academic abilities have brought on victimization from non-disabled peers while SWLD are educated in the LRE (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Research on parents' perceptions regarding the LRE is abundant in nature; studies have indicated both positive and negative effects related to academic achievement, placement, and teacher training (Kurth et al., 2020; Rizvi, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). However, there is a lack of literature on SWLD who are educated in the LRE and the effects on their social identity. Schwab et al., (2018) eloquently stated, "Students with disabilities

are hidden voices that rarely have any attention paid to what they have to say about their education", hence justifying the importance of this study.

SWLD in their LRE

Adolescence and entering middle school coincide for SWLD; therefore, SWLD want acceptance from their non-disabled peers and teachers (Borman et al., 2019; Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). Furthermore, SWLD have a desire to fit in the school community (Borman et al., 2018; Schwartz et al., 2018). Fitting in the school community is building social networks and the engagement through positive interactions between SWLD, their non-disabled peers, and their teachers (Borman et al., 2018; Mamas et al., 2020). During the transition to middle school, SWLD start becoming aware of who they are and who they want to be (Borman et al., 2019; Mueller, 2019). Entering middle school for SWLD comes with the overarching presence of lower academic achievement, behavioral differences, and the constructed label of disabled (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). The disability label is furthered illustrated not in the physical body of the SWLD, but the interaction from teachers, non-disabled peers, IEP meetings, and the additional help in the classroom (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2019).

The process of SWLD becoming more self-ware with the identity of disabled, hearing the lived experiences of SWLD is vital (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). For example, stakeholders should want to understand how federal policies such as IDEA, the stigma, the negative teacher interactions, and lower acceptance from their non-disabled peers is affecting SWLD social identity in their LRE (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019;

Schwartz et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). However, researchers argue the known effects of each individual is one that may never occur (Kirby, 2017).

Researchers show a clear disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers, in academic and career attainment (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2022; NCES, 2019). The treatment and acceptance of SWLD is one of "incompetent and dependent" (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018, p. 1303), which arises from the constructed label of disabled which carries a stigma as society is not accepting of SWLD differences (Koster et al., 2009; McMahon, 2018; and Schwab et al., 2018). Furthermore, educational policies that provide funding based on the SWLD LRE is inadvertently allowing the achievement gap to continually grow given that some SWLD have difficulty accessing the general education even with the provided supports, and accommodations (Gilmour, 2018). SWLD may feel powerless upon receiving a diagnosis, which affects their self-perception, but SWLD have to learn the importance of having a voice (Felder, 2018; Kirby, 2017).

As SWLD obtain a voice, finding ways to use their voice will begin to change society's views towards SWLD (Felder, 2018; Kirby, 2017). Notably, Lopez et al. (2020) explains the importance of high school students learning to advocate as a form of empowerment. However, Kilinc (2019) describes the treatment of disabled individuals' effects the ability to advocate for themselves, which decreases their ability to obtain an equal education. Therefore, teaching advocacy and empowerment will help develop a smooth transition for SWLD future goals, but advocacy should begin much sooner than high school for SWLD (Lopez et al., 2020). Mueller (2019) conducted a study of ninth and tenth grade high school students educated in the LRE, who bear the label disabled, and had an IEP with the eligibility category of LD. The question Muller sought to answer was "how do students with disabilities take the knowledge of the stigma

of their label and integrate it into their sense of who they are in the world" (Bannink et al., 2020; Mueller, 2019, p. l265). All four students were aware of their disability, which caused them anxiety in the classroom, and the students tried to distance themselves from the label, as the students thought of the disability negatively (Mueller, 2019).

Holzberg et al. (2019) examined the effects of the Self-Advocacy and Conflict Resolution, a program of direct instruction for college students with LD to advocate for themselves. The findings of the program suggested an increase in students requesting accommodations, thus self-advocating (Holzberg et al., 2019). A similar program, Active Student Participation Inspires Real Engagement (ASPIRE), is a Georgia Department of Education and The Georgia Council on Developmental Disabilities collaboration program that engages the participation of students in their educational success. A focus of the program is the student-led IEP wherein students are encouraged to have a greater role in the development and implementation of their IEP. The goal of the student led IEP meetings is teaching students with disabilities, which includes SWLD to have self-determination, which teaches SWLD to make plans, how to achieve the plans, thus providing students with disabilities to have a better way of life (Georgia Department of Education, 2019).

Self-advocacy comprises the action of representing oneself to articulate needs, wants, and desires (Oxford Dictionary, 2020). Communication between students and general education teachers is important (Mueller, 2019). For instance, when students realize their general education teacher knew they had a disability; it negatively affected the relationship (Mueller, 2019; Lopez et al., 2020). The impact could have been avoided if the general education teacher had communicated to the student she was aware reading aloud caused anxiety; therefore, the student would not be called on to read aloud (Mueller, 2019). "Student-centered discussion of disability

is not only possible but essential towards building the understanding of the impact of adult perceptions and societal stigma on students' lives" (Mueller, 2019, p. 279). Furthermore, changing the mindsets of special education teachers, in particular, "to understand disability as a social phenomenon, not an individual pathology" (p. 278). Furthermore, in the case of SWLD, self-advocacy entails the ability to speak-up, as a way to express, their needs for learning, as well as SWLD required accommodations in the LRE. Encouraging ASPIRE or at the very least some of the aspects of ASPIRE consistently can start to provide SWLD knowledge of their accommodations and goals to be successful in the LRE (Georgia Department of Education, 2019).

Federal policies, teachers, and parents themselves all have views on what constitutes a FAPE in the LRE for SWLD. Federal policies have established guidelines to level the playing field for SWLD to access the general education curriculum. However, SWLD rarely have an opportunity to express how their education and identity are affected by the policies, IEP, teachers, non-disabled peers, and being educated in the LRE. Therefore, the importance of this study is justified, as hearing the voices of SWLD is essential, which researchers described overtime through various comments. "Students with disabilities and other diversities are hidden voices" (Schwab et al., 2018, p. 33). There is a research gap as "Students perspectives of inclusion are rarely considered, therefore, bringing students' voice to the fore front in future research should be considered" (Roos, 2019, p. 36).

Summary

Since 1975, SWLD received educational rights that should provide SWLD a FAPE in the LRE sitting next to their peers. As SWLD transitions to sixth grade, making connections and social acceptance is imperative for SWLD (Borman et al., 2019). However, some teachers treat

SWLD differently and SWLD are sometimes unaccepted by their non-disabled peers, from a constructed label of disability, and some SWLD are academically still underachieving their non-disabled peers (Gilmour, 2018; IDEA, n.d.; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Walker et al., 2018). Social identity is the theory that an individuals' self-worth and self-esteem derives from the group they identify with and their rank or placement within the group (Tajfel, 1970). Therefore, as local schools place SWLD in the LRE, which is plagued with social injustice, victimization, and SWLD being view as "incompetent and dependent" (Dirth & Branscombe, 2018, p. 1303) what affect does this have on SWLD social identity. Therefore, hearing the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD who are educated in their LRE is essential to understand how SWLD social identity is affected.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

This transcendental phenomenological study aims to describe the perceptions of sixth-grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers, specifically the co-taught model (IDEA, n.d.). Literature is abundant on the LRE (Gilmour, 2018; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018; Walker et al., 2018); however, limited research exists on how SWLD educated in their LRE affects SWLD social identity. Current research on the LRE comes from federal policies, teachers' and parents' points of view (Bannink et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.). In contrast, hearing the voices of SWLD who are educated in their LRE requires consideration. Studying SWLD that are educated in their LRE and the effects on the SWLD social identity will provide stakeholders the first-hand viewpoint from SWLD and their experiences interacting with their teachers and from sitting next to their non-disabled peers. Typically, some teachers and non-disabled students do not view SWLD as equal members of the school community, which lessens SWLD engagement, causing a feeling of hopelessness (Kirby, 2017).

Analyzing data using Moustakas' (1994) design is appropriate for qualitative transcendental phenomenological studies. Chapter three will also describe the setting, participants, and procedures used to employ this study. This chapter also provides the researcher's role, data collection methods, and data analysis.

Design

This qualitative study used a transcendental phenomenological design because it will describe the perceptions of sixth-grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers, specifically the co-taught model. Qualitative research

methods can help the researcher understand the context, navigate new phenomena, develop research questions, and implement change (Kegler et al., 2018). Additionally, qualitative methods describe the experiences that stimulate researchers to challenge their consciousness (Lemon & Hayes, 2020) along with the researcher seeking to understand a social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Qualitative research includes listening, understanding, concluding, and determining (Busetto et al., 2020), which leads us back to a new way (Moustakas, 1994) to interpret the experience. The descriptions of the lived experiences are the heart of phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994); therefore, as described by Gall et al. (2007), researchers should explore the experience in the induction process, which requires a view of participants in their everyday setting. Collecting data in the natural setting through the voices of sixth-grade SWLD who are educated in the co-taught model and not the researcher's vantage point will provide the ability to receive precise data (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994), which supports qualitative research for this study.

Understanding participants' perceptions through the phenomenological research method focused on a shared lived experience (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants' gave a description of their lived experiences and the effects through their perceptions as sixth-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model (Creswell and Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). The purpose of phenomenological research is to examine the lived experiences of SWLD from their perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Moustakas (1994) described phenomenology as dedicated to the view of the contextual experience. Therefore, when deploying a transcendental phenomenological study, the researcher's first step is the epoché reduction process. The epoché process allows the researcher to remove any bias related to the phenomenon and merely focus on the participants' views (Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing out the researchers' views and opinions

permits the researcher the ability for the phenomenon's essence to emerge by describing what the participants have experienced and how they experienced it (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994).

The transcendental phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study because it allowed the descriptions of the lived experiences of sixth-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model. A phenomenological approach will also provide the opportunity for the phenomenon's essence to emerge. By interviewing SWLD educated in the LRE, lessons were learned from SWLD and how being educated in the co-taught model affected SWLD social identity.

Research Questions

CRQ: What are the lived experiences of sixth-grade students with learning disabilities educated in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model?

Sub-Questions:

1. How are sixth-grade students with learning disabilities identities affected by the interactions with their teachers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?
2. How are sixth-grade students with learning disabilities identities affected by the interactions with their non-disabled peers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?
3. How are sixth-grade students with learning disabilities who are educated in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model identities affected by the perceptions of their academic success?

Setting

The setting used for this study is a middle school located in an urban area 30 minutes outside of Atlanta, Georgia. There are currently 736 students and 60.4% of the student population is eligible to receive free and reduced lunch. The student body is comprised of 39.3% Hispanic, 36.3% African American, 18.1% White, 3.6% two or more races, 2.2% Asian, 0.3% American Indian, and 0.1% Pacific Islander. The middle school organization is teams that have the primary four content subjects: math, English, science, and social studies. Currently, the breakdown for the co-taught model is as follows: two different teams offer math, ELA, and science. One team offers social studies. Additionally, a special education teacher conducts the remedial reading program, and four special education teachers split time between the separate classroom setting and the co-taught model for their appropriate content area.

Purposefully selecting this setting had three reasons. First, it has 6th-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model, comprised of different teachers and four different content areas. It will be essential to pick different content teachers from the four different content areas to determine if SWLD experience the central phenomenon across the four content teachers and the four content classes. Second, the middle school selected for the study has SWLD educated in the co-taught model, thus providing adequate participants who can fulfill the purposeful sampling requirements. Third, the researcher has a rapport with participants, which according to Creswell & Poth (2016) "the researcher and the participant approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting" (p. 173), which will help the participants feel comfortable providing rich and thick descriptive details about how SWLD view themselves and their lived experiences surrounding their education in the co-taught model.

Participants

Purposeful sampling guided the selection of the participants for this study. Choosing purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to find participants, which have firsthand knowledge of the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2016). According to Creswell & Poth (2016), the participants chosen in purposeful sampling should have experience of the phenomenon, so the participants can "purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study" (p. 178), thus providing rich and thick data. The participants for this study had to meet the following three criteria. First, the SWLD must be in sixth grade. Second, the SWLD must have an eligibility category on their IEP of LD or SLD. As previously mentioned, this site uses LD and/or SLD based upon the psychologist's assessment. The third criteria for participants' is SWLD IEP services tab must display one or more of the four content classes listed under the Instruction/Related Services in General Education Classroom/Early Childhood Setting as the co-taught model with the provider as a certified special education teacher. Using maximum variation allowed varying participants, reflecting differences or different perceptions, which is necessary for qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

Receiving permission to conduct the study allowed the researcher to contact a designated official from the study site who had the ability to identify individuals who met my study criteria and the designated official forwarded my recruitment documents directly to potential candidates via email using my recruitment letter. Although there is no way to make a projection of available participants, any participant meeting the criteria received an invitation to participate in the study. In phenomenology, one to 325 participants may be selected (Creswell & Poth, 2016) for this study; a sample size of 13 SWLD participated. The participants had to be in sixth-grade, have an

IEP with an eligibility category of LD or SLD, and have at least one of the core content class considered the co-taught model. Next, the potential participants received a pseudonym. During the interview, the participants answered the interview questions related to their randomly picked co-taught environment, hence providing the researcher with different content teachers and different content areas.

Procedures

The researcher sought approval from the International Review Board (IRB) from Liberty University (see Appendix B). The researcher received permission from the school district's site principal and the school district's superintendent through the application process where the research took place. After receiving IRB, the site, and the district permission, the researcher contacted a designated official from the study site to forward my recruitment documents directly to potential candidates via email using my recruitment letter. The school-designated official received information that participants must have the category eligibility LD or SLD, as well as being educated in at least one content class considered the co-taught model. Therefore, the designated official identified individuals who meet my study criteria and the designated official forwarded my recruitment documents directly to potential candidates via email (see Appendix C).

The site has a high population of Hispanic students; therefore, the researcher transcribed the email in Spanish for that population of students (see Appendix D). The researcher provided the parent permission in English (see Appendix E) as well as transcribing it in Spanish for that population of students (see Appendix F). The completion of The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act release for External Providers form allowed the researcher to have access to students' records specifically grades (see Appendix G). The Family Educational Rights and

Privacy Act release for External Providers required transcription for the Spanish population of participants (see Appendix H). After gaining the parents' permission, the researcher sought the students' permission to participate (see Appendix I). Any parent and student who provides the researcher a signed consent and assent form received the study's expectations.

Following obtaining signed consent and assent forms, participants received a list of questions; the participants will select images from the internet that answers the questions (see Appendix J). After the participants selected their images the participants and researcher established a time for the images to be pick up so the researcher could place the images in an envelope with each SWLD pseudonym. The selected images will permit SWLD to visualize how SWLD see themselves, their teachers and peers, and their academic success in the co-taught model. Each envelope will be stored in a locked cabinet in an undisclosed location until the interview. The images will permit the SWLD to speak about themselves, their teachers and peers, and SWLD academic success during the interview process; as SWLD speak about themselves, therefore allowing the SWLD to feel comfortable as the interview process begins. See further details about this selected process in the Data Collection section of this chapter.

Next, the researcher established a time for the interviews to take place. The interview consisted of open-ended interview questions focusing on SWLD educated in the co-taught model (see Appendix K). The site chosen for the research is conducting classes both face-to-face and virtually. Therefore, the virtual participants had their interview video and audio recorded, and participants that can participate in a face-to-face interview will only be audio recorded. The recordings were used later for transcription purposes to ensure the maximum amount of information can be obtained from the interview process (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants received a copy of the transcription to check for accuracy.

The Researcher's Role

Transcendental phenomenology research includes the human instrument as the primary source. Therefore, epoché started at the beginning of the research to set aside personal views regarding the phenomenon and focus solely on the participants' perception (Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests looking for what is there, staying away from pre-judgments, and having no preconceived notions. When trying to achieve epoché, the researcher must "invalidate," "inhibit," and "disqualify" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85) all previous knowledge and experiences looking at the phenomenon from a fresh viewpoint (Moustakas, 1994). Inexperienced researchers must understand the bias they bring and remove preconceived notions in their consciousness to focus on the participants' experiences and perceptions (Moustakas, 1994).

As a researcher who teaches special education, I obtained an education specialist certificate in Special Education and endured the journey with my son, who received the constructed label of LD, which influenced my decision on obtaining Doctoral degree. Before becoming an educator, I spent ten years in the justice system, encountering many young men and women receive prison sentences who lacked goals, dreams, and ambitions. Two things influenced my perspective on this research; first, the young men and women I encountered in the prison system second, my own experience with my son who received the diagnosis LD in first grade, received an IEP, and I watched him struggle for his entire educational experience. As the number of young men kept growing in the prison system, I realized I wanted to make a change, and my son's outcome may be the same from the loss of intrinsic motivation declining because of his struggles in the school community. Watching my son struggle through school has made me

determined to reach SWLD and provide them with a strong sense of who they are and what they are capable of accomplishing.

I have taught special education for seven years, in self-contained, separate classes, and in the co-taught model. Students arrive in the classroom reading and writing significantly below grade level, although intensive reading connections is received in the separate classroom, students have the co-taught model for math, English, science, and social studies with limited supports, or no supports and are asked to perform at grade level in reading and writing on state assessments. The time spent working with SWLD, my own son, and the justice system has developed my listening skills, that allowed me to be objective when listening to the participants. While collecting data, bracketing provided me the ability to move past my own opinions and thoughts, thus not influencing the participant's stories (Creswell & Poth, 2016), and the epoché process allowed me to hear the voices of the participants and their perceptions by listening with an open mind thus arriving at new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, I have no grading authority over the participants in this research.

Daily journaling helped minimize basis. Daily journaling will help bracket my bias as data begins to be gathered (Moustakas, 1994). As I review each day's journal entry, I separated my thoughts from the participants' thoughts (Tomaszewski, et al., 2020). Validity is significant; therefore, I must always continue to bracket my feelings and allow the participants to tell their experiences, as they are (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The participants experience the phenomenon in everyday life, so I will begin to understand the phenomenon from their viewpoint (Moustakas, 1994).

Data Collection

The types of data collection used for a transcendental phenomenology studies are interviews, observations, focus groups, document analysis; however, creating creative wasy to collect data is encouraged (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). The specific data collection methods used for this study included visual representation, interviews, and data analysis to gather rich and thick data from the participants.

Visual Representation

After I received approval from IRB and the designated official from the study site received feedback from the recruitment letter expressing interest in the study. I then forwarded all documents necessary to participate in the study. Upon receiving signed consent and student assents forms. I asked each participant to follow the visual representation prompts for the study. The participants were able to email their selected images if they are unable to print them according to the provided prompts or the researcher would retrieve the selected images at an agreed upon time. Art is a stimulator that when used can improve neurological functions, increase self-esteem, self-awareness, and improve emotional resilience (Van Lith, & Bullock, 2018). Additionally, mental stimulation has a way to evoke positive and negative feelings; therefore, the visual representation chosen by the participants evoked feelings of how the participates identify with themselves, their teachers, and their non-disabled peers, permitting the interview to occur using verbalization through visualization (Anderson, & Valero, 2020). Moreover, art helps transform information from the participants' "inner world to the outer world or vice versa" (Fletcher, & Lawrence, 2018, p. 35). Although art does not necessarily affect identity, it allowed the participants to verbalize how they perceive the world and show emotion

(Fletcher & Lawrence, 2018). Below is the list of prompts used for the visual representation discussion during the interview process.

Prompts for a visual representation:

1. Find one image that shows how you view yourself.
2. Find one image that shows how you feel about school.
3. Find one image that shows how you feel when you are in class.
4. Find one image that shows how you think your friends at school see you.
5. Find one image that shows how you think your teachers see you.
6. Find one image that shows your favorite subject.
7. Find one image that shows your least favorite subject.
8. Find one image that shows how you view your grades in math, science, social studies, and English.
9. Find one image that represents your best friend.
10. Find two images that represent two more friends.

The researcher chose the visual representation questions for the participants to communicate through visualizing their perceptions of emotional and social inclusion and academic self-concept. The first visual representation is how the participants view themselves. The way the participants view themselves has relevance with social mobility. The participants must remember never to let any group, society, or individual define who they are or what they may achieve (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). SWLD have a higher dropout rate than their non-disabled peers, driven by things in their educational environment and lower academic achievement (Kirby, 2017). Additionally, SWLD non-disabled peers do not generally socially accept SWLD, and some teachers have a lower expectation of SWLD (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2018). Questions two and three explore emotional inclusion, four and five explore social inclusion, and

questions six, seven, and eight explored the participants academic self-concept. The researcher chose questions nine and ten to explore if the participants in-group was located in the school or home setting, as the school community does not view SWLD as equal members. (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019).

After receiving the visual representations, the researcher asked each participant to schedule an interview. During the interview, I asked follow-up questions for each visual representation to gain the participant's perception of being educated in the co-taught model. Follow-up questions for the visual representation:

1. Can you tell me why you chose this image to represent yourself?
2. Can you tell me why you chose this image for school, class, teachers, subjects, grades and friends?

Interviews

The interview process took place after discussing the participant's visual representation since the participant interview process did have open-ended questions and comments in a natural transition (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, this study deployed an interview with semi-structured open-ended questions, focusing on the participants' lived experiences of SWLD educated in the co-taught model. Additionally, the interviews occurred in a comfortable location, where only the participant and researcher are present so the participants felt relaxed, trusting, and not hesitant to speak and share ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). After discussing the participant's visual representation, the interview process occurred; the participants' interview process had open-ended questions and comments (Moustakas, 1994).

Interview Questions:

1. Please tell me who teaches you English, science, math, or social studies.

Stress and burnout, directly and indirectly, affect teaching quality, students' engagement, and IEP outcomes (Parey, 2021). Stress and burnout can be gauged by teacher's communication; interaction with students and teaching quality. SWLD answers will help correlate if teachers are experiencing stress and burnout through how often they communicate, interact and respond to SWLD questions related to course content (Parey, 2021). This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ3.

2. Will you describe how you feel when you are in English, science, math, or social studies?

   Akcamete & Dagli Gokbulut (2018), Gilmor (2019), Hind et al. (2018) suggest teachers are not receptive to having SWLD in their classrooms. SWLD come with labels; therefore, teachers marginalize SWLD (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). Although teachers do not openly degrade SWLD, the teacher's lack of social and emotional support can cause academic performance to decline and a loss of social belonging (Borman, et al., 2019). This interview question seeks to understand if teachers are not receptive to having SWLD in class can SWLD sense that from the teachers' actions toward the SWLD. This question will provide evidence for the CQ, SQ2, and SQ3.

3. Will you tell me what type of interaction you had with the teacher (s) today?

   As SWLD enter middle school, forming a relationship is important; however, as SWLD transition into middle school, relationships between SWLD and their general educations decline as SWLD think general education teachers are less accepting than their non-disabled peers (Desombre et al., 2020). Furthermore, as SWLD discover the general education is aware of their disabilities the relationship is affected negatively (Mueller, 2019). This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ3.

4. Will you tell me a time when you felt that your teacher(s) in English, science, or social studies treated you differently from other students?

   SWLD education in the LRE comes with a label. Labels become so salient, which causes educators to see only the label and loses focus on the SWLD (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). Therefore, if student achievement is affected by educators' perspectives (Desombre et al., 2018), and SWLD bare a label, injustice in the classroom starts and can carry into society (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019). This question's rationale is to understand how general education treat SWLD in the LRE because Hind et al., 2018 describe teachers resenting SWLD. This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ3.

5. Will you describe how your classmates treat you?

   Desombre et al. (2018) explained that individuals with disabilities are stereotyped, which comes with pre-convinced notions of incompetence, unproductiveness. As the "we" group does not socially accept the "they" group because of differences, labels, or lower academic abilities, classmates will treat SWLD differently (Felder, 2018; Kirby 2017; Koutsouris et al., 2020; Tajfel, 1970). The transition from elementary to middle school is a time when SWLD are looking to "fit in, have positive connections, and a sense of belonging" (Borman et al., 2019). Nevertheless, parents reported the victimization of SWLD in the inclusion classroom, indicates the LRE does not promote positive social change (McMahon, 2018). The question seeks to understand how classmates in the LRE treat SWLD, as social categorization is the human need to belong to a group, have acceptance by the group, and gain approval from the group, increasing how one identifies

with the group (Jugert et al., 2018). This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ1.

6. Can you tell me what type of interaction you had with your peers today in class?

   Social identity is the theory that an individual's self-worth and self-esteem will rise or fall depending on how the individual identifies with the group or their placement within the group (Tajfel, 1970). Research indicates that bullying occurs for SWLD; experience less peer interaction, and have a more challenging time forming friendships (Bannink et al., 2020; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). This question will help the researcher understand if SWD actually perceive that they have friends at school. This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ1.

7. Will you tell me a time when peers did not let you join their group and how that made you feel?

   Although benefits exist for SWLD in the LRE, there is lower social status participation (Mamas et al., 2020). Sirlopu and Renger (2020) explain that self-esteem is the favorable judgment received for one's achievements and contributions, which comes from others, valuing them to contribute to the group. Therefore, the researcher asked this question to understand better, how SWLD felt when they were not included in a group. This question will provide evidence for the CQ, SQ1, and SQ2.

8. Will you tell me a time when you were asked to join a group in English, science, math, or social studies and how that made you feel?

   Kirby (2017) explains that SWLD are dropping out of school at much higher rates compared to their non-disabled peers, driven by "environmental impact and academic achievement." (p. 25). Yuan et al., (2018) describes SWLD at the college level facing

barriers and adversity through their entire educational journey; students generally remain silenced; therefore, allowing SWLD to have their voices heard is necessary to provide a new perspective. This question's rationale was to understand if SWLD feel they belong to an outgroup; if so, can social mobility be taught sooner rather than later to achieve better outcomes for SWLD (Tajfel, 1974). This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ2.

9. Will you describe the challenges you faced when working in the group and how that made you feel?

   General education educators questioned the possibility of SWLD receiving an equable education that increased SWLD educational achievement in the LRE (Stiefel et al., 2018); since SWLD already performs lower than their non-disabled peers (King-Spears et al. 2019). If teachers perceive SWLD as not receiving an adequate education, what are the SWLD feeling; therefore, the researcher asked this question to determine if SWLD have a similar perception to their learning as general education teachers. This question will provide evidence for the SQ2.

10. Will you describe a time when the teacher in English, science, or social studies explained something, and you did not understand it?

    Kirby (2017) described SWLD dropping out of school at higher rates compared to their non-disabled peers. Suppose SWLD have the expectancy to make adequate progress allowing SWLD to become proactive members of society by entering the workforce or post-secondary education. Why do local schools place SWLD in a setting that provides more funding rather than an equal education? (IDEA, n.d.; Seay, 2019). The researcher asked this question to validate the assertions of Gilmour et al. (2018). SWLD receive a

beneficial education, not through the environment they are in, but from sound teaching, which can occur in a separate environment. This question will provide evidence for the CQ and SQ2.

11. Will you tell me how are your grades are associated to your academic success? Research conducted describes the challenges parents face concerning academic achievement, placement, and the lack of training teachers have to understand how to teach SWLD in the LRE (Kurth et al., 2020; Rizvi, 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). Parents and teachers have lower expectations of SWLD (Borman et al., 2019) therefore; grades may be less of a concern. Asking this research question will provide insight regarding how SWLD view their grades that can lead to how SWLD view academic success. This question also ties back to sub-question two how do SWLD identify with their academic success. This question will provide evidence for SQ2.

Document Analysis

The purpose of using document analysis provides participants the ability to provide data without having their personal space invaded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). The analysis informed the researcher of possibly discrepancies between the SWLD perceptions of their grades and the actual grades (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Specifically, I examined the grades of the four content classes to determine if grading variances exist between teachers and content areas. Although artifacts are subjective in qualitative research, the documents provided insight into what has occurred within the setting (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). I viewed the content grades of the participant's sixth grade school year for first and second quarter to determine if SWLD grades correlate with perceptions of their academic success. Finally, I reviewed any documents that the site uses for placement related to how many participants each period will contain, is the

participants' eligibility category a factor, or any other viable information regarding placement of the participants in the co-taught model. I reviewed the documents, looking for commonalities, frequency count, including graphs and trends or patterns (Claxton & Michael, 2020). After analyzing all the data, a chart displayed the placement of the participants' LRE. Additionally, another chart displays the participants' grades for quarter one and two (Claxton & Michael, 2020). Analyzing the artifacts for commonalities will provide a written commentary, while the graph will provide a visual representation of the commonalities, which lends to providing information for future research (Claxton & Michael, 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2017).

Data Analysis

The procedures that were followed to complete the data analysis for this study are Moustakas's (1994) guidelines developed for transcendental phenomenological research, including epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. Conducting phenomenological research through interviews is acceptable; therefore, I conducted interviews with open-ended questions. The participants for this study have documented learning disabilities; writing the research questions in a manner so the participants can comprehend the information is essential. I fully anticipate that varying the questions or giving further explanation may arise during the interview process (Moustakas, 1994).

Arriving at what Moustakas (1994) refers to as structural descriptions; the researcher can find the "how," which reveals the "what" of the experience (p.98). To ensure the "how" and "what" becomes known, I used data analysis software so the structural descriptions were identifiable, leading to the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). I listened intently with an open mind during the interviews (Moustakas, 1994). I intently looked at the transcriptions, which began the data analysis using horizonalization (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell

& Poth, 2016). Once the transcriptions were completed, I personally went over each participant's transcription, check for accuracy, and complete member checking by providing the participants a copy so they may check for accuracy.

Horizonalization completion happens by looking for statements, phrases, or words that divulge information about the phenomenon or experience; therefore, all relevant information received an equal value marking a step in the horizonalization process (Moustakas, 1994). During the horizonalization process, I looked for words and statements that had similarities or differences; were non-repetitive; and were not overlapping (Moustakas, 1994). Removing all irrelevant data is necessary because it leaves the researcher with the participants' textual meanings, thus equaling the relevant data. (Moustakas, 1994). I then carefully examined the relevant data for noteworthy statements by clustering or grouping the data into meanings, hence arriving at the phenomenon's theme(s) (Moustakas, 1994). The themes and their meanings proved useful when writing the perception of the lived experiences of sixth grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model. The data is rich and thick when presenting the phenomenon’s essence (Moustakas, 1994). The final step in analyzing the data is the synthesis or what Moustakas (1994) refers to as "intuitive integration" (p. 100). Intuitive integration allows the researcher to see the actual "essence" of the participants' experience (Moustakas, 1994) through thick and rich written descriptions.

During data analysis, I continued to remind myself of the importance of bracketing so unbiased thoughts would not enter my mind so I can clearly receive the participants' perception and describe the phenomenon as it is and not how I want to perceive it (Gall et al., 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Bracketing and epoché started at the beginning of the research, so I was able to set aside personal views regarding the phenomenon and focus solely on the participants'

perception (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas (1994) suggests looking for what is there, staying away from pre-judgments, and having no preconceived notions. When trying to achieve epoché, the researcher must "invalidate," "inhibit," and "disqualify" all previous knowledge and experiences (Moustakas, 1994, p. 85). Looking at the phenomenon from a fresh viewpoint, I had to remove any preconceived notions from my consciousness to focus on the participants' experiences and perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). The epoché process aims to move from the natural world to the essence through new knowledge (Moustakas, 1994).

Wanting the data strengthened, performing triangulation by incorporating three different collection methods, visual representation, interviews and data analysis. This process produced similarities, allowing the researcher to arrive at themes, demonstrating consistency from the three different data collection methods (Creswell & Poth, 2016). A transcendental phenomenological approach was appropriate for this study because it sought to describe the lived experiences of SWLD educated in the co-taught model. Moustakas (1994) explains that researchers must set aside their basis; therefore, keeping a journal since the start of the doctoral process. I continued to use the journal to keep my thoughts and opinions from interfering in any part of this journey, specifically in the data collection process.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is important in research. Merriam & Tisdell (2017) emphasize without trustworthiness, stakeholders will disregard outcomes due to a lack of confidence in trying something new with no assurance it will work. Furthermore, trustworthiness implies rigor, although qualitative studies are generally associated with validity and reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). This study will establish trustworthiness with data triangulation, member checking, and rich and thick data descriptions.

Credibility

Performing credibility in research includes member checking, triangulation, and rich and thick descriptions (Busetto et al., 2020). This study used member checking to help establish creditability; however, since the participants have documented learning disabilities, the participants may approve their parents to obtain a copy of their interview transcription. If the participants do not want their parents to receive a copy, then making audio records for the participants will occur or the participants could elect someone to read the transcription to them. Therefore, providing the participants a copy of the transcription in an acceptable form will take place. The participants checked the transcriptions for accuracy, reflecting the information to be true and accurate regarding their perceptions of being a student with a learning disability educated in the co-taught model.

Additionally, defining triangulation as "a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources" (Lemon & Hayes, 2020, p. 605). Triangulation from multiple sources only reinforces the study's credibility and dependability (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Using triangulation is a way to deepen the findings and enhance the phenomenon; therefore, this study used triangulation for collecting data from three different sources to help demonstrate the credibility of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lemon & Hayes, 2020).

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability occurs by accurately reporting the participants' information with rich and thick descriptions (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) emphasize the importance of the researcher describing the study in substantial detail so other researchers have the opportunity to replicate the study, which permits the transfer of information

to other places or people. Although dependability is important, confirmability is ultimately, what the researcher wants to obtain. Confirmability permits the participants the flexibility to talk through their experiences providing rich and thick descriptions regarding the phenomenon rather than the researcher injecting their thoughts and opinions (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

According to Creswell & Poth (2016), completing an audit trail is a significant part of validating how the research process concludes. Creswell & Poth (2016) describe writing notes in the margins; this immediately resonated as annotating. To establish an audit trail for this study, annotating will occur on the transcripts' margins as a reminder to separate my thoughts from the data as I am analyzing the data.

Transferability

Transferability is a significant part of phenomenology research, which provides the ability to determine if the findings from one set of participants are the same for other participants in different locations by using the same method to gather the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2017). Transferability is the researcher's responsibility to provide enough relevant data regarding the study and findings so a judgment of transferability can occur and is applicable in other settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability is the ability to transfer information from one setting to another through the rich and thick descriptions permitting others to formulate a conclusion whether the findings may be applied elsewhere (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study provided rich and thick descriptions; therefore, reporting the intricate parts of the interview, and other relevant data is necessary so anyone reading this study can conclude if the findings apply to other research settings with similar situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The researcher maintained an ethical posture throughout the entire study. Following the methods described in chapter three explicitly ensured this study's validity and reliability. Before collecting any data, the researcher received IRB approval. Once the researcher received IRB approval, since all participants are under 18, parents received implied consent. The participants received an assent consent to sign and return before any information pertaining to this study was distributed nor any interviews conducted.

The assurance to parents and participants was the site would not receive any information gathered in this study, except the published findings. Using Zoom transcription software provided the researcher the means to transcribe the interviews and the researcher thoroughly verified for the data's accuracy. All locations and participants received pseudonyms to protect their identity. The risk to the human subjects who were included in this study will be minimal; however, protecting the location and participants' identities is not something to take lightly. Therefore, locked cabinets, password-protected computers, and an undisclosed location housed all interview recordings, images, transcripts, and any other materials related to this study to protect the site and participants' identity who aided in this study.

Summary

The purpose of chapter three is to explain the methods, processes, and procedures that used to research SWLD who are educated in the co-taught model. The chapter also provides data collection, the researcher's role, analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. A transcendental phenomenology methodology used to find the essence of the lived experiences of sixth-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model (Moustakas, 1994). Using Moustakas (1994), outlining the process for analyzing data and exploring the participants' lived experiences

will guide this study. Using multiple sources to collect data included visual representation, interviews using open-end questions, and data analysis offered triangulated by using three different data collection methods, and answered the central research question. Before conducting an interview, I used epoché or bracketing to receive the data, focusing solely on the participants' perception (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Moustakas, 1994). Methods explained in detail establishes trustworthiness using qualitative characteristics that align with credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Furthermore, maintaining ethical consideration throughout this study transpired to protect the site and participants' identities.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study is to describe the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD educated in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model, to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). Qualitative research methods can help the researcher understand the context, navigate new phenomena, develop research questions, and implement change (Kegler et al., 2018). The researcher sought to understand a social problem (Creswell & Poth, 2016) through the lived experiences of 6th grade SWLD that included listening, understanding, concluding, and determining, which leads us back to a new way to interpret the experience (Busetto et al., 2020; Moustakas, 1994). Chapter four will reveal the data results that used rich and thick descriptions allowing the voices of 13 SWLD to be heard loud and clear. Using phenomenological reduction enables the researcher to decipher the data to arrive at themes (Moustakas, 1994). Participants picked images to express their self-image, friends, and a snapshot of their overall academic success. The semi-structured face-to-face interviews allowed the participants to tell their stories and share their lived experiences in the LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Finally, the researcher triangulated the data by comparing the participants' grades, visual representations, and responses to the interview questions.

Participants

The district, which currently employs the researcher, has a list of specific topics vital to the ongoing improvement of student success. One of the topic areas is how IDEA affects students with disabilities within the district; therefore, the subject of this research is within the scope of the district's specific topics. After receiving IRB approval, the researcher filled out the

district application to receive district-level and specific site approval. Once the district approved the application, the researcher contacted the designated site official and provided a recruitment letter that the potential participants' parents received. After parents received the recruitment letter and expressed interest in their student participating in the study, the designated official received notification. The researcher then provided the designated official sealed envelopes with all the required documents to participate in the study. Once the parents filled out and signed the necessary documents, participants returned the documents to the designated official, teachers, and/or the researcher. The researcher verified all documents and immediately assigned a pseudonym to the participants. The researcher explained the expectations to the participants and gave the participants a copy of the visual representation prompts. Upon receiving the images from the participants, a time for the face-to-face interview was scheduled.

A diverse population of 13 middle school students with learning disabilities participated in this study. The participants are enrolled in sixth grade, had an eligibility category on their IEP of LD or SLD, and the IEP services tab displayed one or more of the four content classes listed under the Instruction/Related Services in General Education Classroom/Early Childhood Setting as the co-taught model with the provider as a certified special education teacher.

Kevin

Kevin is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Kevin has a positive self-image as he describes himself as being funny and his friends like him. Kevin enjoys doing group work because of the ability to socialize with friends who do not have devices to communicate outside of school. Kevin’s favorite social media is Tik Toc. Math is his least favorite subject. Kevin’s favorite subject is band, although he currently does not have band this school year, he hopes to play in the jazz band one year.

Lucia

Lucia is currently a sixth-grade female educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Lucia describes herself as an animal lover because she wants to become a veterinarian. Lucia describes school as boring. Lucia's least favorite subject is math. Lucia has a good relationship with her peers and teachers. Outside of the school setting, Lucia uses social media to communicate.

George

George is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. George selected emoji's to represent that he is very happy. George is happy being in school and enjoys being in his reading connections class because the reading program helps him learn English words because the first language at home is Spanish. George has good interactions with his peers and teachers. George does not like social studies because he is not familiar with history.

Emma

Emma is currently a sixth-grade female, educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Emma described herself as very honest. Emma does not tell her friends what they want to hear; rather, she tells them her honest opinion. Emma gets along with her peers and teachers in school. Sometimes when Emma is in school, she feels as if her brain is going to explode due to the amount of information. Emma feels her teachers describe her as learning. She likes social studies because she learns about history. Emma does not like math. Emma is always surprised when she sees her grades.

Christopher

Christopher is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Christopher finds school boring; he would rather be at home playing video games. Christopher wonders if his friends get annoyed because he talks in class. Christopher enjoys math and does not like English. Christopher is unsure of what he wants to do after high school.

Alma

Alma is currently a sixth-grade female, educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Somedays, Alma finds school boring. Other days when Alma works in groups, she finds school interesting because she socializes. Alma was very nervous about starting sixth grade, but as the school year has continued, the nervousness has subsided. She is unsure about her opinion on her grades. Alma has many sisters whom she has watched graduate, and therefore, she believes she will be able to do the same. Alma does not like math and becomes very nervous about math work.

Julia

Julia is currently a sixth-grade female, educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Julia finds school to be boring. She talks to most of her friends after school because she does not have the same classes. Julia's least favorite subject is math, but her favorite subject is ELA. Julia becomes very excited when she sees her friends sign online. Julia's overall view of school is to do what you have to until you can do what you want to.

Danielle

Danielle is currently a sixth-grade female, educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Danielle is fully aware of being dyslexic and describes herself as a weirdo, but it takes her a long time to read. Math is her least favorite subject, and science is her favorite subject.

Danielle's overall feeling about school and class is good morning; “let the stress begin.” The sixth-grade girls are very dramatic, and she has no time for them. Danielle's best friend is very serious, like herself. Danielle describes her grades as being shocking.

Kurt

Kurt is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Kurt describes himself as the class clown. Kurt generally gets along with everyone, including peers and teachers. Kurt desires to go to college. Kurt's favorite subject is math, while his least favorite subject is science. Kurt feels that his grades are decent, but his mom always has a different opinion. Kurt's friends remind him that he is so funny.

Emmanuel

Emmanuel is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Emmanuel describes himself as funny. Typically, he feels ok about school. Emmanuel's favorite subject is math, with his least favorite class being social studies. Emmanuel views his grades with a thumb down because Emmanuel does not feel that he is trying his hardest. Currently, Emmanuel has no plans about what he wants to do in the future.

Anthony

Anthony is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Anthony gets along with his teachers and peers. However, he often thinks he is confused in class. Anthony’s least favorite subject is math. Anthony enjoys school for socialization, and his friends find him funny because he gets to make jokes in school.

Elvis

Elvis is currently a sixth-grade male, educated in his LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Elvis was glad to return to face-to-face learning to socialize, but Elvis finds school

boring. Elvis would rather play video games than do schoolwork or be in class. Math is Elvis's favorite subject, while English is his least favorite subject. Elvis views his grades as not being good. Elvis described his best friend as kind and his other friends as nice.

Yvette

Yvette is currently a sixth-grade female, educated in her LRE, specifically the co-taught model. Yvette described herself as a troubled kid because she talks in class. Yvette has been getting in a lot of trouble this year for talking. Yvette likes school because she talks to her friends in certain classes. However, Yvette finds classes boring. Yvette likes her reading connections class because her teacher lets them talk. Her least favorite class is math. She believes that grades are important; however, she is not concerned about her grades. The majority of her communication transpires through social media with her friends.

The participants represented one school; however, the co-taught models' general education and special education teachers represent different genders and ethnicities across the content classes. Table 1 displays the demographics of the 13 participants, and Table 2 shows the participants and teacher demographics for the specific co-taught course discussed in the interview for the study.

Table 1

Student Participants Demographics

Student Name*	Gender	Ethnicity	Grade
Kevin	Male	African American	6th
Lucia	Female	Hispanic	6th
George	Male	Hispanic	6th
Emma	Female	Hispanic	6th
Christopher	Male	Hispanic	6th
Alma	Female	Hispanic	6th
Julia	Female	African American	6th
Danielle	Female	African American	6th
Kurt	Male	African American	6th
Emmanuel	Male	African American	6th
Anthony	Male	Hispanic	6th
Elvis	Male	Hispanic	6th
Yvette	Female	Hispanic	6th

*Using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Table 2

Student and Teacher Demographics of Co-Taught Setting

*Student Name	Ethnicity	Co Taught Class	Regular Education Teacher	Ethnicity	Special Education Teacher	Ethnicity
Kevin	African American	Math	Male	African American	Female	African American
Lucia	Hispanic	Math	Female	African American	Female	Caucasian
George	Hispanic	Math	Male	African American	Female	African American
Emma	Hispanic	Math	Female	African American	Female	African American
Christopher	Hispanic	Social Studies	Male	Caucasian	Male	Caucasian
Alma	Hispanic	Social Studies	Male	Caucasian	Male	Caucasian
Danielle	African American	Social Studies	Male	Caucasian	Male	Caucasian
Julia	African American	Social Studies	Male	Caucasian	Male	Caucasian
Kurt	African American	Science	Female	African American	Female	Caucasian
Emmanuel	African American	Science	Female	African American	Female	Caucasian
Anthony	Hispanic	English Language Arts	Female	African American	Female	African American
Elvis	Hispanic	English Language Arts	Female	African American	Female	African American
Yvette	Hispanic	English Language Arts	Female	African American	Female	Caucasian

*Using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

Results

As a special education teacher and the parent of a student labeled learning disabled, setting aside preconceived notions and personal feelings were imperative during this phenomenological study's data collection and analysis process. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), focusing on a shared lived experience occurs best when the researcher accepts their own experiences and does not let that knowledge interfere or influence the interviews or interpretation of the study. Additionally, journaling before the interview and data analysis process allowed the deployment of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological reduction. Therefore, bracketing my personal feelings before analyzing the participant's data was an essential element of the phenomenological study. Once the researcher received the images, the researcher placed the images in an envelope and did not view the images again until the participants' face-to-face interview. The visual representation provided a way for the participants to "visually" show their lived experiences concerning their self-image, friends, and a snapshot of their overall academic success. The interviews started with the participants explaining why they chose the image to represent the answer to each of the 10 prompts, which allowed the researcher a transition into the

11 interview questions, thus allowing both components to provide rich and thick data for this phenomenological study. The participant interviews involved face-to-face interaction with the researcher and lasted between 40 and 45 minutes. The researcher started a zoom session on a personal laptop to audio record the interviews the researchers' backup source in case of technology failure was a personal cell phone. Although the researcher used a personal laptop, the laptop is equipped with a thumbprint locking mechanism and has been in an undisclosed location since conducting the interviews. The researcher immediately deleted the interviews off the personal cell phone after verifying that zoom had adequately recorded the participant's interviews. The researcher transcribed the interviews using zoom's built-in function. After transcribing each interview, the researcher went through the interviews line-by-line to ensure the accuracy of the recorded words that appeared incorrectly. Participants received a copy of line-by-line interview transcriptions for member checking to ensure the accuracy of the interview data after the researcher made the initial corrections.

The researcher read each transcript and looked for key terms used by each participant, which related to the phenomenon of this research, specifically the co-taught environment. The researcher highlighted the key terms, annotated the key terms on a whiteboard, and disregarded any overlapping terms. The researcher then reread the interview transcripts searching for key terms and common phrases related to the central research question and the three sub-questions. The researcher then began horizonalization by analyzing the key terms and common phrases to identify commonalities that the participants experienced in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model, thus allowing themes to emerge. The researcher then compared key terms and common phrases to the selected images, validating the emerged themes. The five themes that emerged were: (a) positive self-image, (b) school socialization, (c) group work decreases boredom, (d)

positive teacher and student interaction, (e) access alone may not equal academic success. Additionally, the participants disclosed information during the interview process allowing two sub-themes to emerge: inconsistent placement of participants in non-academic subjects and participants' not seeing themselves as any different from their peers.

Positive Self Image

Stakeholders and policymakers envisioned providing the opportunity for SWLD education to occur in the LRE sitting next to their non-disabled peers, which should allow multiple benefits to arise, such as academic growth and friendships. The participants' images consisted of smiling faces, individuals laughing, or various images that displayed individual interest, which equated to positive self-images. Specifically, George selected a giant smiling emoji, and when asked why he chose the emoji to represent how he perceived himself, he responded, "Because I am very happy." The researcher did not ask for further details explaining what caused George to be very happy. However, Elvis explained his stand on happiness without further prompting, indicating that the smiling faces represent the return to face-to-face social interaction with his peers. Although, the responses from all 13 participants provided insight into the ideology among stakeholders and policymakers that SWLD can experience positive outcomes from the co-taught model.

Participants' not Seeing Themselves as Any Different from Their Peers

During the interviews, the participants indicated they had not experienced any discomfort or referenced anything that made the participants feel different from their peers while in their LRE the co-taught model. Yvette stated, "Depending upon the class, some students know more than me, but in some classes, I know more than others except for in math, I don't do good in math." Emma indicated that group work was a time to socialize, and group work was not always

a priority. Emma's response confirms social acceptance. During the 13 individual interviews, none of the participants ever expressed anything that indicated their nondisabled peers or teachers made the participants feel incompetent, unproductive, or dependent since returning to face-to-face learning. The researcher discovered the lived experiences of all the participants while in their LRE was the participants viewed themselves on equal footing as their peers in the co-taught model. Although social categorization is a natural human process that often produces stereotyping (Turner & Tjfel, 1979) and with the participants having the constructed label of disabled, the participants have not encountered negative remarks or interactions regarding their academic ability in their LRE the co-taught model (Desombre et al., 2018; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Jugert et al., 2018).

School Socialization

Stakeholders' and policymakers' intentions were valid for wanting to educate SWLD in the LRE sitting next to their non-disabled peers as a way to promote social change. However, communication/socialization for most students in the 21st century has drastically changed (Twenge et al., 2019). The internet has provided students the ability to communicate/socialize at all times; therefore, the displacement of face-to-face communication/socialization has occurred (Twenge et al., 2019). Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused concerns for the social and emotional well-being of K-12 students. Although there is no way to confirm the COVID-19 pandemic altered the SWLD attitude towards face-to-face interaction; however, the participants in this study revealed little or no interaction with friends outside of the school setting.

When stakeholders and policymakers developed the LRE, technology was not in the hands of every student. Therefore, the idea of friendships in the 1990s is not the same as today; for instance, the participants also revealed that if socialization and communication occur outside

of the school setting, it takes place mainly through social media. Research shows "95% of adolescents had access to a smartphone in 2018" (Twenge et al., 2019, p. 1892). Julia described meeting her best friend four months earlier, and when school is out, communication occurs either on the phone or through social media. Kurt explained his best friend is leaving school; however, they live nearby, so sometimes they meet outside or use social media to socialize. Emanuel indicated using social media to communicate with his friends outside of school. Students who use social media as a form of socialization face a problem communicating/socializing with their friends who do not have cell phones. Christopher stated, "I don't see my best friend outside of school because I don't go outside. I don't talk to him through social media or on the phone because he doesn't have a phone." Therefore, Christopher's interaction with his best friend only occurs in school.

Inconsistent Placement of Participants in Nonacademic Subjects

When the researcher originally asked the participants to pick their favorite and least favorite subjects, it was merely to draw a connection between grades and teacher interactions. Interestingly, some participants articulated that their favorite subjects were nonacademic subjects; however, their schedule did not include the nonacademic subject for the 2021-2022 school year. Yvette explained emphasizing nonacademic courses was not an option when she told the researcher that she wanted to be an artist. The researcher asked Yvette how she enjoyed art; Yvette replied, “My schedule does not include Art class.” The researcher responded, “Do you know why you do not have art class?” Yvette shrugged her shoulders and could not verify why her schedule did not include art class for the 2021-2022 school year. As research suggests, missed opportunities for social relationships occur when SWLD do not participate in nonacademic subjects (Gilmour et al., 2019). Therefore, the argument is justifiable why the

concern of inconsistent placement of SWLD has always been a point of contention between parents and local schools (EDCS, 2017; L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018).

Group Work Decreases Boredom

In the social world, individuals choose groups with whom they will associate themselves. The association of groups enables individuals to understand who they are or who they are not (Benassi et al., 2022). Although teachers utilize group work for specific tasks as well as reinforcing concepts; however, the participants' associate group work with socializing. There is an ever preset disconnect between student learning and group socialization since the interviews divulged limited face-to-face socialization and communication takes place outside of the school setting. Therefore, the participants' use the school setting to make social and emotional connections throughout the day and have a limited interest when teachers explain academic concepts during instructional time. When participants had the opportunity to describe how they felt in their co-taught class, the first three participants responded using the word bored. Upon conducting the fourth interview, the researcher asked for further clarification when the participant responded with being uninterested in school. Danielle commented, "If I have done something for a long time, I will get bored of it and try and do something else." The researcher asked Danielle what she had been doing for a long time, and the response was work. The remaining SWLD interviewed had responded with the word bored. When asked for clarity, the responses ranged from Julia responding with "I want to talk to my friends, not listen to my teachers talk about math." Lucia described that she does not like groups that do not include her friends." However, when the groups do not have friends included, group work allows the SWLD

to move throughout the classroom to enter other groups to socialize with their friends, as stated by Alma.

Positive Teacher and Student Interaction

Since the early 1990s, general education teachers have been educating SWLD in the LRE (Wienen et al., 2018). Although some teachers have negative attitudes towards teaching SWLD, some general education teachers express they are not adequately trained to educate SWLD in the co-taught environment (Hind et al., 2019; Maximoff et al., 2017; Wienen et al., 2018). During the interview, SWLD regarded general education and special education teachers as helpful and adequately prepared to answer all their questions, as indicated by Anthony, who said, "Both of my teachers help me the same and answer my questions." Although special education teachers voice concerns, they have limited time in the LRE to address the needs of all the SWLD. Emmanuel described, "On different occasions, he received help from the special education teacher in math." The SWLD all indicated that both the general education teacher and special education never treated the SWLD any different from their peers or made any of the SWLD feel inadequate or unable to learn the required academic standards.

Access Alone may not Equal Academic Success

Although IDEA does not have a definitive definition of academic success, IDEA demands that SWLD who have an IEP receive the opportunity to access and progress in the same curriculum as their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). Providing access may not alone ensure academic success for SWLD (Gilmour et al., 2019). Therefore, the researcher wanted the SWLD to describe when their teacher(s) were explaining something they did not understand so the researcher could have a clearer picture of the lived experiences of SWLD while in their LRE and if the access to the general education curriculum helped promote academic success. Emma

described when her math teacher(s) explained something she did understand; she felt "nervous." When the researcher asked why she felt nervous, Emma responded, "We might get 10 or 20 minutes to solve a problem, and I literally can't solve it by myself, so that makes me nervous." The researcher then asked, “How does that make you feel when you have to take a test?” Emma said, "Frustrated because I don't understand the concept of what I am supposed to be doing." Since research indicates that SWLD have lower academic achievement than their non-disabled peers and the SWLD IEP should equal the playing field, the researcher asked Emma if she was using any of her supports and accommodations in her IEP. Emma responded, "What is an IEP?" The researcher explained that an IEP was a document with certain things listed so Emma would not feel nervous. For example, if the math was too hard, your IEP may allow you to use a calculator. Emma was unaware that she had an IEP or the supports and accommodations listed in the IEP. IDEA regards the IEP as the starting point for SWLD to close the achievement gap by increasing academic success (IDEA, n.d.). How can the achievement gap close or the rise of academic success when Emma and the other participants did not know they had an IEP? Research suggests that SWLD receive supports and accommodations, as written in their IEP, however SWLD do not always access and progress in the general education curriculum (Walker et al., 2018). Additionally, SWLD have educational rights to foster their academic success. Nevertheless, when the researcher asked the participants to describe how their grades are associated with their academic success, the participants needed further clarity on the meaning of academic success and how their grades associated with academic success. Table 3 represents the participants' grades for the first and second quarters of the 2021-2022 school year.

Table 3

Academic year 2021-2022 quarter one and quarter two participant grades

Student Name*	Gender	Ethnic	Co-Taught Model Class	1st Quarter Grades	2nd Quarter Grades
Kevin	Male	African American	Math	72 D	70 D
Lucia	Female	Hispanic	Math	74 C	66 F
George	Male	Hispanic	Math	73 C	65 F
Emma	Female	Hispanic	Math	73 C	77 C
Christopher	Male	Hispanic	Social Studies	85 B	80 B
Alma	Female	Hispanic	Social Studies	86 B	85 B
Julia	Female	African American	Social Studies	74 C	70 D
Danielle	Female	African American	Social Studies	70 D	59 F
Kurt	Male	African American	Science	76 C	73 C
Emmanuel	Male	African American	Science	82 B	71 D
Elvis	Male	Hispanic	English Language Arts	78 C	80 B
Anthony	Male	Hispanic	English Language Arts	73 C	81 B
Yvette	Female	Hispanic	English Language Arts	70 D	74 C

*Using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants.

All the participants indicated that their self-images were positive during the interview process. Lucia described herself as an animal lover; Danielle revealed herself as a weirdo because she has dyslexia, but since she knows that she has a problem reading, it was ok that it takes her longer to read. The participants had good interactions with their teachers and peers and were comfortable doing group activities; for instance, Kevin described his science teacher as coming to answer his questions when he raised his hand. The research determined the teacher Kevin spoke of happened to be his general education science teacher. Elvis described that in math, he instead asked his friends for help rather than the teachers, only because they explained it better. Nevertheless, 69% of the participants' grades declined in the second quarter. Although the participants were unaware of academic success and having an IEP to help close the achievement gap, Kevin stated, "he gets confused a lot; that is why I have a 35 in science." The researcher asked, "Do you use any of your accommodations?" Kevin responded, "What are accommodations?" Furthermore, participants could not connect their educational success, their grades, and future goals. For example, the researcher asked Kurt, "How do your grades associate with your academic success?" Kurt responded, "Not really." The researcher asked, "Do you want to go to college?" Kurt replied, "Yes." The researcher responded that a part of your academic

success would be the necessary grade point average (GPA) to get into the college you want to attend. If the school required a 3.0 GPA and you only had a 2.5 GPA that might be a problem for you to attend that particular college. Kurt responded, "I will just stay in high school until I get the GPA I need to get into college."

When Elvis and Christopher spoke about their academic success and grades, both responded that their parents did not care about their grades. Elvis and Christopher both described that they try to pass their classes because they do not want to lose their cell phones. Many factors may play a part in the participants' grades declining. For example, researchers have conducted numerous studies on the learning loss in the K-12 environment due to the COVID-19 pandemic school closures. Furthermore, most of the participants described their best friends as someone they met this year; the participants also disclosed that they did not have all their classes together. Therefore, as the participants' comfortability rises with other peers, school socialization may take precedence over learning. Additionally, after reviewing responses to questions six and seven of the visual representations related to the participants' favorite and least favorite subjects, there was no correlation between the responses and the participants' grades decreasing. Therefore, a definitive answer is unavailable to explain why 69% of the participants' grades decreased in the second quarter.

Central Research Question

What are the lived experiences of sixth-grade students with learning disabilities educated in their Least Restrictive Environment, specifically the co-taught model?

Elvis' lived experience of his LRE, specifically the co-taught model, allowed Elvis to experience happiness through social interaction with his peers in the educational setting, specifically his LRE. Additionally, completing group work in her LRE was not necessarily a bad

thing because Yvette stated, "Depending upon the class, some students know more than me, but in some classes, I know more than others except for in math, I don't do good in math." Furthermore, Emma indicated that group work was a time to socialize, and group work was not always a priority. Emma's LRE is a time to socialize. Friendships in the 1990s are not the same as today; for instance, socialization and communication occur outside of the school setting, mainly through social media. Since some students do not have cellphones, such as Christopher best friend, the LRE for Christopher is when he interacts with his best friend. However, all SWLD consensus was that the LRE is boring unless group work is part of instructional time as group work allows for socialization.

Sub-Question One

How are sixth-grade students with learning disabilities social identities affected by the interactions with their teachers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?

Since SWLD have a constructed label of disability, some educators can have a stereotype mindset that carries into the classroom, which causes negative attitudes, lower expectations, and a disparity in treatment between SWLD and their non-disabled peers. However, these stereotype attitudes do not occur at the research site. When the researcher asked the participants how they interact with their teachers, the participants reported having positive interactions with both of their teachers in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. As described by Elvis, "I didn't understand how to cite evidence, and my English Language Arts teacher answered my questions. It was a good interaction." When the researcher questioned Elvis about which teacher helped him, the researcher determined that the special education teacher was the one who assisted. Additionally, the LRE for the participants in social studies described the interactions equally

beneficial between teachers; for instance, Julia indicated, "that both my teachers help me and get mad when I do not do my work, especially the backside of my worksheets."

Sub-Question Two

How are sixth-grade students with learning disabilities social identities affected by the interactions with their non-disabled peers in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model?

Social acceptance is minimal for SWLD often in the LRE since SWLD academically struggle with the general education curriculum (Gilmour & Henry, 2018). This concept is now a double-edged sword, for example, the participants' have a constructed label of disabled, were unaware of having an IEP, and each SWLD did not know they were learning disabled. Furthermore, the participants lacked knowledge; the class even contained non-disabled peers. A recent study conducted by Gilmour et al. (2019) indicated that students without disabilities were performing below grade-level standards; therefore, SWLD were performing worse. With that in mind, due to the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns for academic loss, SWLD lower academic performance may not be as noticeable as noted by the participants reporting as getting along with their peers, and Emmanuel stating, "Everybody gets along, and everybody tries to help everybody."

Sub-Question Three

How are the social identities of sixth-grade students with learning disabilities educated in their least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model affected by the lived experiences of their academic success?

The participants needed further explanation regarding academic success. Upon the researcher explaining academic success as grades equating to learning, gaining skills, and trying

your best, the SWLD still could not articulate how academic success relates to their remaining school years and future endeavors. IDEA address challenging SWLD to excel within the general curriculum, preparing them for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers (Thompson et al., 2005). However, the participants do not appear challenged for success in middle-grade years or their post-school lives as the SWLD all lacked long-term goals. The SWLD could not describe a career choice and lacked college readiness knowledge.

Furthermore, due to the limited understanding of academic success, most SWLD did not view the school setting or their grades aligning with academic success. The SWLD merely view the school setting as a means to socialize. SWLD who have access to cell phones thought the importance of grades aligned only with the repercussions of poor grades, such as losing their devices, thus eliminating socializing outside the school setting. The limited knowledge of academic success is even more devastating when SWLD realize grades may hold no barriers to promotion since Lucia stated, “I don’t even know how I made it to 6th grade.” When the researcher asked Lucia to explain further, Lucia said, “I don’t understand how I got promoted because my report card had all Fs.”

Summary

Chapter 4 contains the analyzed data results that connect to the central research question and the three sub-questions. The data analyzed used a phenomenological approach. A diverse population of 13 6th grade SWLD participated in this phenomenological study. The SWLD had the opportunity to select an image that visually represented how they perceived themselves, friends, teachers and a snapshot of their overall academic success. The interviews conducted by the researcher allowed the SWLD to discuss their lived experiences using their voices so all stakeholders could hear them loud and clear through rich and thick data. The analysis of the data

permitted five themes and two subthemes to emerge. The researcher can conclude three significant findings from the study. First, the SWLD are unaware of academic success, IEPs, and accommodations. Second, SWLD does not see the school setting as more than a place to gather and socialize, as minimal face-to-face socialization occurs outside the school setting. Third, inconsistent placement of the SWLD causes a missed opportunity to experience nonacademic subjects with their nondisabled peers.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the lived experiences of sixth-grade SWLD educated in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). Chapter 5 contains the Discussion of the study that includes five sections: Interpretation of Findings, Implications for Policy or Practice, Theoretical and Empirical Implications, Limitations and Delimitations, and Recommendations for Future Research. The Interpretation of Findings section provides the researcher's perspective on the themes that emerged in this study. The Implications for Policy or Practice section will recommend policy changes as an outcome of this study. The Theoretical and Empirical Implications section connects to previous literature with the potential of advancing research. The Limitations and Delimitations section will address potential weaknesses of the study beyond the researcher's control. Finally, the Recommendations for Future Research section includes further questions raised for future research.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

This phenomenological study included a diverse population of 13 6th grade SWLD who shared their lived experiences. The SWLD had the opportunity to experience visual representation and participant in an interview. The researcher allowed the stakeholders to hear the voices of the SWLD loud and clear on their lived experiences about themselves, friends, teachers, and their overall academic success in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. The SWLD LRE is the co-taught model, which provides access and the ability to progress in the general education curriculum. The participants' IEP provides supports and accommodations that

level the playing field between the participants and their non-disabled peers. The analysis of the data allowed five themes and two subthemes to emerge. The five themes that emerged were: (a) positive self-image, (b) school socialization, (c) group work decreases boredom, (d) positive teacher and student interaction, (e) access alone may not equal academic success. Additionally, the participants disclosed information during the interview process allowing two sub-themes to emerge inconsistent placement of participants in non-academic subjects and SWLD not seeing themselves as any different from their peers.

Positive Self Image

The positive self-image theme emerged from the visual representation prompt number one, which stated, find one image that shows how you view yourself. When the researcher selected the visual representation prompt, there were no preconceived notions of how the participants viewed themselves. Although federal educational policies exist to help SWLD, the policies also bring the constructed label of disabled, which carries an emphasis on marginalization through the IEP meetings, additional help in the classroom, and the interactions between their teachers and non-disabled peers (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018; Zagona et al., 2019). Additionally, SWLD have lower academic achievement, behavioral differences, and a desire to be part of the in-group (Borman et al., 2019; Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Kirby, 2017; Mueller, 2019; Schwartz et al., 2018; Tajfel, 1970; Zagona et al., 2019). Research indicates the transition to middle school is significant for SWLD because meaningful and lasting relationships and forming connections in the school community are sufficient (Borman et al., 2020). As the SWLD move into a new environment, looking for self-confidence, self-worth, and social acceptance is critical as SWLD try to make sense of who they are in the world, which often has negative social attitudes and

marginalization towards SWLD (Borman et al., 2020). However, the SWLD were not lacking self-confidence, self-worth, or self-acceptance; all the SWLD picked images that displayed positivity and did not appear to have any self-esteem issues or preconceived notions of being different from their peers.

Julia's response of "I am a nice quiet girl," Alma's response of the word "Honest," Christopher's response of "Gamer," and Kurt's response of a funny video provides evidence of the SWLD having a positive self-image. After reviewing the key terms and common phrases, several sub-themes became apparent. Although the subthemes had some relevance, one particular subtheme stood out as it directly correlated with the framework of social identity. The correlating subtheme is SWLD do not see themselves as any different from their peers. While research indicated that the transition to middle grades brings about an awareness of a stigma of being learning disabled (Mueller, 2019), the SWLD are unaware of such stigmas. The subtheme arose from three interview questions related to doing group work in the co-taught model first, how the SWLD felt about being in groups. Second, how the SWLD felt if their peers would not allow the SWLD to join a group. Third what challenges do the SWLD encounter while in a group? These interview questions provided feedback expressing positive group interaction and the lack of experiencing any group rejection. The SWLD were confident and comfortable working with their peers in groups. The SWLD had not noted any immediate explicit differences and no one outwardly expressed any negative actions or words towards other group members. Nevertheless, the researcher could not make a definitive determination of who comprised the groups, whether the groups' existed of friends, non-disabled peers, learning disabled peers, or some combination of those previously mentioned.

Based on the SWLD responses, the researcher believes the SWLD may have positive self-images for several reasons. However, two significant reasons that stand out for the researcher are the COVID-19 pandemic school closures and the SWLD are unaware they have IEP, which carries the constructed label of disabled. Research indicates that SWLD lack behavioral control, which causes disharmony with their non-disabled peers. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, schools began closing in March of 2020 and remained closed until May 2020. As the 2020-2021 school year approached, many SWLD remained in the virtual environment, although face-to-face learning was available.

Nonetheless, there were still significant disruptions to the SWLD learning environment, as inconsistencies arose from contact tracing, which caused a back and forth of being virtual or face-to-face. Furthermore, most SWLD did not return to the school setting for face-to-face learning until January 2021, thus causing some SWLD to miss a significant amount of time in the school setting. Due to the potential extensive time that some of the SWLD, as well as their non-disabled peers, were out of the school setting the limited amount of face-to-face socialization, students have become more tolerable of each other, thus allowing a positive self-image to emerge for the SWLD as rejection does not appear to be a current issue.

School Socialization

This theme emerged from visual representation prompt number two, find one image that shows how you feel about school, number four, find an image that shows how you think your friends at school see you, and number nine, find one image that represents your best friend. Additionally, interview question number six, will you tell me what type of interaction you had with your peers today in the class contributed to the theme of school socialization. Initially, the researcher developed these questions to determine if the SWLD had more friends outside of

school where judgments might not be as critical. It never occurred to the researcher the SWLD would describe having little to no face-to-face socialization outside of the school setting.

Social identity theory addresses an individual's self-worth and self-esteem based on the group they identify with and their placement within the group (Tajefl, 1970). Research suggests that SLWD have a more challenging time establishing social relationships and peer problems during their educational experience (Roos, 2019; Schwab et al., 2018; Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019). Coincidentally, the SWLD do not have complications developing social relationships. As it turns out, the SWLD have no true definition of friendship or the ability to tie anything to a social relationship because the SWLD spoken words described a friend as anyone who talks to them or provides the SWLD a way to contact them through social media. The majority of participants indicated that their best friend was someone they met during the current 2021-2022 school year and the only reason the participants come to school is to interact with their friends. The participants voiced concerns about peer perceptions when Christopher stated, "I wonder if I am annoying because I talk all the time."

Inconsistent placement of SWLD in nonacademic subjects arose from visual representation question 6 and 7, “What are your favorite and least favorite subjects?” The values of special education and IDEA became a way to appeal to humanity and social justice; the LRE, in the beginning, was a concept pushed through legislation as a way to provide a FAPE for SWLD (Kauffman et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2020). Additionally, IDEA concludes that SWLD should be educated to the maximum extent appropriate sitting next to their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). During 1990, concerns of cost at the local school level became an issue at some point. Although "The cost of special services may be an unexpressed criterion in many decisions made by school districts nowhere does the IDEA explicitly allow the consideration of cost"

(Martin et al., 1996, p. 25) yet, some SWLD placements are motivated by funding (Martin et al., 1996). As SWLD enter 6th-grade social acceptance and making connections is vital; however, SWLD are lost and struggle to find emotional and social support, make friends, and have the same life experiences as their non-disabled peers (Kauffman et al., 2021). The study site has various non-academic courses that connect to social interaction beyond the school day. To illustrate, students who participate in band and chorus have rehearsals and concerts throughout the year, allowing for out-of-school interactions. Some participants described their interest in taking non-academic subjects; however, with inconsistent placement, the participants do not always receive the opportunity to have a non-academic subject. For instance, Kevin's image displayed several men playing musical instruments as his favorite subject. When the researcher asked Kevin what his favorite subject was, Kevin indicated his favorite subject was band. The researcher asked what Kevin liked about band, and he said, "Jazz." The researcher stated, "Oh, there is a jazz band in 6th grade? Kevin replied, "No" so the researcher asked, "Oh, what do you like about band then?" To which, Kevin responded, "Nothing because they said I could not have band because of my MAP scores." The researcher elected to proceed to the next question rather than pursue whom "they" might have been that told Kevin he was unable to participate in band. With ideologies of social justice, students' rights, and education equality driven by funding rather than education, local school districts may take the "cheapest and easiest way out" (Stone, 2019, p. 533). Thus, further entrenching the notion that SWLD are "lost and forgotten" (L. H. v. Hamilton County Department of Education, 2018; Stone, 2019, p. 534). Therefore, Kevin's response regarding a non-academic subject aligns with the 21st-century concerns about IDEA becoming a bill to fund local schools (Kauffman et al., 2021; Stone, 2019).

Group Work Decreases Boredom

This theme emerged from visual representation question number two find an image that shows how you feel when in your class. In addition, the following answers provided by the SWLD interview questions seven, eight, and nine added to the substance of the emerged theme. Interview question seven tell me a time when peers did not let you join in their group and how that made you feel. Interview question eight tell me a time when you were asked to join a group (the SWLD were asked about their respective LRE) and how that made you feel, and interview question nine describe the challenges you faced when working in the group and how that made you feel?

The researcher was curious to determine if a correlation existed between how the SWLD felt when they were in class versus the effect of group work. The researcher formulated the interview questions based on previously observed interactions between peer groups outside the school setting. The exchange was always intriguing; however, the researcher found literature describing the disparity among SWLD and their non-disabled in their school setting. The researcher always thought about how this notion truly affects SWLD identity and their lived experiences in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model (Koutsouris et al., 2019). Therefore, the researcher formulated the interview questions to contact the two very distinct settings within the same learning environment. The participants revealed surprising answers to all the questions, with each SWLD echoing the previous. First, each SWLD viewed school as boring and if the SWLD were in classes with friends' school became tolerable. After receiving these answers three times consecutively, the researcher decided to dig a little deeper if another SWLD responded using the same word or phrases during the other interviews. Each SWLD indicated school was boring, which consequently became 13; the research additionally asked to explain boring. After

compiling the data, the researcher attributes boredom to anything that does not include talking, texting, snap chatting, tick toking, or moving around within the classroom or group setting.

One participant had described a peer group that had rejected him when asked question number seven. When the researcher asked Christopher to explain further, Christopher indicated, "The group had grown too large, and the teacher moved him." When the researcher asked how he felt about moving, Christopher shrugged his shoulders, stating, "It was no big deal." The remaining answers from the 12 participants indicated rejection from joining a group never occurred. All participants in various words described group work "As being the best." When the researcher asked for further information, group work is a time for students to collaborate and seek different explanations about concepts from their peers, who explain it in a way the SWLD can better understand. However, one SWLD so gracefully illustrated group work as being "The time I get to talk about other stuff, and sometimes the work gets done." The responses immediately resonated with the researcher. The participants' idea of collaborating is face-to-face interaction with their peers. Still, it is imperative to socialize with peers who cannot access technology devices outside the school setting. Therefore, the SWLD only face-to-face interaction with some peers is during group work. The remaining interview question delivered compelling responses as most SWLD did not mention or allude to any struggles with working in a group setting. Another SWLD described not enjoying group work when the teachers compiled the groups, which usually separated the talkers. Although this poses an issue for the participants, articulation by varying SWLD emphasized teachers generally do not enforce "group rules." Therefore, departing the group, the teacher had initially assigned the SWLD to permits for intermingling with their friends assigned to other groups.

The group work questions disclosed the SWLD enjoyed group work and thought it was a fun activity. The researcher wondered was there a driving force behind SWLD enjoying group work. Based on the reactions throughout this study, the SWLD have lacked close face-to-face interactions with peers of the same age and intellect for a great length of time. Surprisingly, research indicated that everyone would need to think the same way for all peers in the school setting to be equals, it is apparent that time has come to pass (Koutsouries et al., 2019). The COVID-19 pandemic continually wreaked havoc on schools, but it has offered an opportunity to close the eyes that once saw differences or at least temporally. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought socialization to a new level of importance for the SWLD. Therefore, the SWLD may overlook or look through the once varying differences that previously caused separation among peers. The exciting part of this new phenomenon, which continues to cross the researcher's mind, is how long the differences will go unnoticed before the now-closed gap reopens to the previous perceptions of the school community or something far more significant.

Positive Teacher and Student Interaction

Although research depicts a grim reality for SWLD, as it relates to teacher interactions, the participants in this research have another side to tell regarding teacher interactions in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. In 1997, IDEA enforced the concept of the LRE, and in 2002, NCLB required SWLD to take the same assessments as their non-disabled peers (NCLB, 2002; Teixeira et al., 2018; Wienen et al., 2018). Immediately general education teachers held no punches on the excuses of why teachers did not feel SWLD should have the opportunity to be educated in their classroom, which becomes the LRE for many SWLD (IDEA, n.d.). The educators for general education started from the top, voicing the concerns of requiring adequate training to the bottom with stereotyping attitudes citing SWLD were already low achievers, so

what could a general education teacher possibly accomplish in a co-taught classroom (Hind et al., 2019; Wienen et al., 2018). There are varying studies that could fill the gaps in between; however, dwelling on negativity has never made anyone prosper; as the writer of Philippians states, "If anything is excellent or praiseworthy think about such things" (Philippians 4:8, NIV). The researcher had observed negative interactions between teachers and SWLD in the past, which left the researcher undeniable confused. Therefore, the only way to understand the interactions between SWLD and their teachers was to hear the voices of SWLD lived experiences of the phenomenon.

The researcher was intrigued to discover the interactions between SWLD and their teachers. The following visual representation prompt allowed the participants to describe their experiences; prompt number five, find one image showing how your teacher(s) view you and interview questions three and four. Interview question number three states tell me what type of interaction you had with your teacher(s) today, and question number four tell me a time when you felt that your teacher(s) treated you differently from other students. As the participants' discussed the selected image regarding their teacher(s), as the SWLD described their lived experiences, the researcher sought clarity to determine if the teacher specifically referenced was the general education teacher. During the interview, the researcher explicitly questioned the participants' about their LRE, specifically the co-taught model teacher(s). The consensus from the participants was that all teachers helped them equally when the SWLD needed assistance in the LRE. For example, Anthony said his "ELA teacher made things fun, especially the writing." (The researcher determined Anthony's general education teacher made it fun).

None of the participants alluded to any teacher(s) mistreating them or making them feel insignificant or incapable of learning while in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. The

chief complaint from the participants regarding their teacher(s) across all settings included teachers who did not let them socialize in the classroom during instructional time. The participants could not understand why the teacher(s) would require the SWLD to remain quiet even after completing instructional time. Some general education teachers have worried about the disparity of achievement levels between SWLD and their non-disabled peers and the ability for SWLD to access the general education curriculum in the LRE (Hind et al., 2019; IDEA, n.d.; Wienen et al., 2018). However, the participants' voiced the lack of understanding of why the teacher(s) would call on them to answer questions even if the SWLD did not raise their hand to answer any questions during instructional time. The teacher(s) calling on the participants to answer questions demonstrates the site teachers are facilitating positive interactions (Schwab et al., 2018) and show a genuine concern for the academic achievement of the participants in their classrooms. Therefore, the interactions described between the participants and the general education teachers in the LRE, specifically the co-taught environments, equates to positive and caring. Again, the researcher must consider the educational disruptions that have occurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic, possibly reducing the learning disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers. Several of the participants' described that in specific contain classes; all students are displaying similar academic struggles; therefore, teachers are more receptive to help SWLD.

Access Alone May Not Equal Academic Success

Federal educational policies aim to provide SWLD a FAPE, which should equal the same education as their non-disabled peers, which maximization occurs through their IEP in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.). IDEA presumed to provide SWLD the opportunity to have access and progress in the general education would achieve academic growth for SWLD hence closing the achievement gap (IDEA, n.d.). The researcher wanted to understand the participants' lived experiences of

their academic success. Therefore, visual prompts six, seven, and eight would afford that opportunity:

1. Prompt six find one image that shows your favorite subject.
2. Prompt seven find one image that shows your least favorite subject.
3. Prompt eight find one image that shows how you view your grades.

Furthermore, interview question eleven, will you tell me how your grades are associated with your academic success, intended to allow the researcher to gain firsthand knowledge if the participants understood how grades related to their academic success. Academic success is relevant as IDEA promotes by giving access to the general education curriculum progression in the general education should increase for each of the participants. However, the possibility of placement materializing for monetary gains for schools is highly probable (IDEA Full Funding ACT, 2021). The participants collectively needed a further explanation of academic success. After receiving different descriptions of academic success, the participants could not rationalize how their grades contribute to academic success. Therefore, does access alone to the general education curriculum increase academic achievement or success for SWLD (Gilmour et al., 2019) who do not understand or have a concept of academic success? Although the participants could not connect grades to academic success, therefore, the participants' overall lived experience contains no relative concern about their grades. However, the participants' who had cellphones appeared concerned about their grades. The fears of grades were not for themselves rather than the idea of not being acceptable to their parents, which may cause consequences for the participants equally a loss of cell phones, thus ultimately eliminating all outside of school communication or the participants' ideas of socialization.

Another grave concern for the participants was not understanding the association between grades and academic success; however, local schools receive funding for SWLD to help close the achievement gap. All participants were seemingly unaware the classes were considered their LRE. One of the two teachers was required to provide specialized instruction. Additionally, the participants do not realize the constructed label of disabled, unaware of having an IEP, which the participants confirmed with varying responses, including Emanuel, who questioned, "What are accommodations?" Anthony stated, "Accom who?" Emma said, "I don't know what accommodations are," and Kurt said, "IEP who?" Furthermore, each of the participants lacked knowledge they were learning disabled; and the class even contained non-disabled peers. Ironically, the participants all reported getting along with their peers, and Emmanuel stated, "Everybody gets along, and everybody tries to help everybody." Which ultimately eliminates the concerns of the participants not being socially accepted, which can lead to challenging times establishing social relationships (Borman et al., 2019; Stone, 2019).

Therefore, how can the achievement gap, academic success, or graduation rates truly be moving in an upward trend? Research depicts SWLD having growth academically and emotionally while educated in the LRE. However, it may be more an illusion than a fact, especially after the participants disclosed no knowledge of the very document meant to provide them access to the general education curriculum as a way to increase academic achievement (Browne II, 2012; Dirth & Branscombe, 2018; Lee St. John et al., 2018). This illusion occurs in multiple ways; specifically, Georgia FTE accounts for students with disabilities and fully certified special education teachers in the varying LRE. Yet, the participants has no idea of their IEP, which contains supports and accommodations, and should provide access and help for the participants to progress in the general education curriculum. Nevertheless, is academic and

emotional growth transpiring when looking from the outside it appears the only communication is for monetary gains? Distributing accountability must be done equally therefore, are parents withholding information such as the learning disability labels since “43% of parents would not want others to know that their child has a learning disability” (Weiss, 2018, p. 13).

Nonetheless, the illusion that increasing graduation rates equal academic success appears distorted. For example, according to the United States Department of Education, 43rd Annual report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2021 state assessments taken in the 2018-2019 school year shows a decline in the median proficient levels. SWD, which includes SWLD, report the median proficient levels for reading in third-grade as 18.8%; however, in high school, the median proficient level for reading declines to 13.3%. The decline in math is devastating; with the third-grade, median proficient level reporting 24.4%, yet the math state assessment in high school reports the median proficient level decreasing to 7.3% (43AR, 2021). Furthermore, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that the graduation rate for students with disabilities at 72%, compared to the 43rd annual report to Congress, which reports graduation rates for students with disabilities at 47%. The illusion for academic achievement and the higher graduation rates are twofold. First, the various reports do not publicly announce the declines in academic achievement, which creates overshadowing by the public announcement of increasing graduation rates. Second, educational statistics reports for graduation rates have included 25% of students who have exited IDEA B with the presumption continuing education elsewhere thus totaling a 72% graduation rate. However, the report to Congress only reports the students with disabilities who have walked across the stage with the starting cohort and received an actual diploma, not a presumed diploma.

Implications for Policy or Practice

The upholding of laws is a way to prompt equality within society (Merry, 2020; McMenamin, 2018; Sayeski et al., 2019). Encouraging equality in education is no different; therefore, special education laws govern how SWLD will be educated (IDEA, n.d.). The history of litigation and federal policies proves changes have occurred in educating SWLD in the LRE (Francisco et al., 2020; IDEA, n.d.). Although IDEA has an overall goal to provide SWLD the same education as their nondisabled peer (IDEA, n.d.), the LRE mandates have no clear definition, leaving the guidelines open to individual interpretation (Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). This study had 13 diverse SWLD who described situations, which prove the given policies meant to increase SWLD academic achievement has adverse effects on the participants' academic success and how individual interpretation is causing missed opportunities for growth through inconsistent placement. Since special education occurs through legislation, which prioritizes cost over benefit, changing policies becomes challenging; however, making the changes is necessary to ensure equal opportunities provide the participants an equitable education like their nondisabled peers.

Implications for Policy

The federal government deemed it necessary that SWLD have the opportunity to participate fully in life without the stigmas brought on by labels (EAHCA, 1975; Bell, 1983). Accordingly, the federal government reauthorized the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) to the Individuals with Disabilities Act removing handicapped and inserting disability (EAHCA, 1975; IDEA, 1990). Although the name change was an attempt to remove the stigma; however, parents are still concerned; therefore, "43% of parents would not want others to know that their child has a learning disability" (Weiss, 2018, p. 13). The first policy implication for this study is the stigma of the constructed label of disability. Currently, IDEA

(n.d.) does promote including SWD in an IEP meeting "whenever appropriate." However, IDEA mandates SWD must attend upon the IEP meeting focusing on transition planning, which generally occurs during 8th grade (IDEA, n.d.). The transition from elementary school to middle school leaves SWLD lost and struggling to make connections, find emotional and social support along with making friends, being accepted socially, and having the same life experiences as their non-disabled peers (Borman et al., 2019; Mamas et al., 2020). However, the acceptance and connections in sixth grade diminish because SWLD have more peer problems and lack social acceptance in the LRE among their non-disabled peers (Borman et al., 2019; Schwab et al., 2018; Stone, 2019). Therefore, it would make sense for SWLD who have an IEP to know much sooner than 14 or 8th grade since the IEP contains support and accommodations to increase the participants' academic success but especially during the major transition to the 6th grade.

Furthermore, SWLD being aware of having an IEP that contains supports and accommodations would allow the participants to begin learning to advocate for themselves. Learning to advocate will increase the participants' opportunities to receive all the supports and accommodations needed in the LRE, specifically the co-taught model to access and progress in the general education curriculum (IDEA, n.d.). Additionally, during the transition, SWLD are attempting to discern who they are and how they fit into the broader social groups identified as the in-groups, which begins to develop one's self–worth and self-esteem, which derives from the group one identifies with and their rank or placement within the group (Tajfel, 1979). IDEA has limited guidance in some areas and definitive guidance in others. Yet, the purpose of the IEP is to ensure SWLD have the same educational rights and an equitably education as their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). However, IDEA and state law have no checks and balances to make

sure the participants have the necessary information, and tools to succeed in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model.

IDEA has an overall goal to provide the participants the same education as their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the mandates concerns local schools (Sayeski et al., 2019). Additionally, when IDEA (n.d.) required SWLD placement in the LRE local schools only received guidelines rather than a definitive definition. The provided guidelines allow for individual interpretation of the meaning of the maximum extent appropriate, which has promoted inconsistency for SWLD placement in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.; Zagona et al., 2019). Furthermore, the individual interpretation does not lead to the allotted flexibility of the words maximum extent appropriate, which is inherent in the IDEA placement provision (Stone, 2019). Therefore, the individual missed interpretations often leads to pigeonholing disabled children inappropriately into the regular classroom (IDEA, n.d.; Sayeski et al., 2019; Stone, 2019). Thus, further entrenching the notion that SWLD, are "lost and forgotten" (Stone, 2019, p. 534).

The individual interpretation and ambiguous mandates lead to the second implication for policy after hearing the voices of the participants' who clearly articulated their lived experiences in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. When IEP teams sit down to establish a placement for SWLD, considering federal, state, and case laws is a requirement. Thus, an issue arises when judicial interventions occur and favor the parents, local schools must comply with the judicial intervention outcomes on educating SWLD (EDCS, 2017). The case law may contradict federal education policies that did not change, reflecting the results of such judicial intervention (EDCS, 2017). An IEP is only as good as the individual interpretation, which leads to the inconsistent placement of SWLD in the LRE and further inconsistencies in non-academic subjects due to the lack of not understanding exact stipulations related to SWLD having the

opportunity to participate in non-academic subjects. For example, the placement discussion within the IEP states, "To be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and non-disabled children in extracurricular and other non-academic activities" (IDEA, n.d.) The statement as mentioned above is a prime example of individual interpretation as the lack of clarity on the words "Non-academic activities" left some of the studies participants' unable to participate in desired non-academic subjects such as band and art. One might counter the statement by saying the participants receive non-academic activities since the participants schedule includes physical education, which is arguably an individual interpretation since Georgia requires a physical education credit to graduate high school. Therefore, a policy regarding the clarity of classification of what constitutes non-academic activities could ensure the participants receive the same opportunities as their non-disabled peers.

Implications for Practice

Although the Federal educational policies presume, SWLD will gain an equal education in the LRE maximized through an IEP (IDEA, n.d.). The participants in this study could not define academic success, even though each participant had an IEP, which should equate to an equal education like their non-disabled peers. Although IDEA promotes including SWLD in an IEP meeting "whenever appropriate" (IDEA, n.d.), including 6th-grade SWLD in their IEP meetings may present an opportunity for SWLD to learn advocacy skills, thus enhancing their educational journey to incorporate academic success at a greater level. The inclusivity of 6th grade SWLD in their IEP meetings should be a priority for this site, and it may be beneficial for other middle schools to incorporate. With the concern for learning loss among SWLD since the COVID-19 pandemic is looming, one could rationalize that any practice that promotes accountability for learning is a step in the right direction for the site and SWLD. Therefore, the

same step could be valuable in other middle school settings. Consequently, a practice of informing SWLD sooner rather than later that SWLD have an IEP, which contains supports and accommodations that would benefit the participants thus potentially closing the achievement gap for this site and possibly other middle schools. Additionally, providing a written copy of the supports and accommodations to the participants to begin using early in the school year may decrease some classroom struggles the participants discussed during this study.

The lack of clarity IDEA (n.d.) explaining “to the maximum extent appropriate” as well as “nonacademic activities” is a continued concern. The lack of clarity that permits every individual to interpret the meaning to his or her liking has caused inconsistent placement of the participants in the nonacademic course. Therefore, this site should seek to solidify unified terminology definitions to eliminate the participants as well as all other SWD from missing the opportunity to participate in nonacademic subjects, which may be a motivating factor for all SWD to excel in academic courses. Considering the same could prove beneficial to other schools since motivating all SWD to excel across academic areas is at a critical point due to the concerns of academic loss in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Theoretical Implications

The two theoretical frameworks for this study were social identity theory and the "three key cognitive components: social categorization, social identification, and social comparison" (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40). Additionally, the social model of disability theory is "Switching away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environments impose limitations on specific categories of people" (p. 28). Hence, making disability a social problem rather than a personal problem (Oliver, 1981). The social

identity theory discusses the lack of societal norms can cause discrimination (Tajfel, 1970). SWLD can display characteristics that society may not consider normal in the educational setting, thus causing discrimination. For example, lower academic achievement, behavioral differences, and lower expectations from teachers can cause discrimination (Kirby, 2017). However, the participants voiced the interactions with teachers as reasonable and fair, dismissing that discrimination occurs because of noted differences. For example, Alma indicated that in Social Studies, the teachers divide the room and equally help the students assigned to their side of the room. The social model of disability is a theory that illustrates labels or differences can cause marginalization. Each of the participants have a constructed label of disability, yet, none of the participants is aware of such labels. However, this can have a variety of pros and cons. For example, being unaware of the constructed label could prevent exclusion for the participants (Oliver, 1981). Yet, as described by Oliver, the con is society does not provide the participants everything they need to be successful. The participants provided adequate information proving the lack of essential information to make the participants successful in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model. For example, Federal educational policies aim to provide SWLD a FAPE, which should equal the same education as their non-disabled peers, which maximization occurs through their IEP in the LRE (IDEA, n.d.). IDEA presumed to provide SWLD the opportunity to have access and progress in the general education would achieve academic growth for SWLD hence closing the achievement gap (IDEA, n.d.). Nevertheless, none of the participants knew they had IEP, which could help increase their academic success. Every learning opportunity is significant, and when opportunities do not occur, the learning gap widens (Hernández-Saca, & Cannon, 2019; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018).

Therefore, the participants being unaware of their IEP may cause acting out behaviorally just a sheer means of work avoidance from missing necessary supports or accommodations to help access the general education curriculum. Yet, some of the participants sit in their LRE, the co-taught model, with a continued lack of understanding of the core content while entirely unaware of their IEP supports and accommodations, thus causing the participants to struggle to access and progress in the general education curriculum. As the researcher explained academic success and questions of accommodations arose, the mode of the participants changed. When the researcher explained supports and accommodations to the participants, the interpretation of facial expressions presented a sign of relief to hear words like a calculator for math problems, extra time to take tests, or knowing that a teacher in the room was specifically there to assist the participants

Empirical Implications

During the interview process, the researcher observed the participants laughing as they spoke of interactions about their LRE. Additionally, through observations, the participants never changed facial expressions, shifted in their chairs, or displayed any outward movements that would make the researcher think the participants were uncomfortable with the questions asked about their interactions. Furthermore, the social identity theory emphasizes the importance of in-group and out-group membership. Groups are insignificant in the world, other than boosting ones' ego; however, self-worth, and self-esteem derive from the status of ones' group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). During the interviews, the researcher observed the participants repeatedly voice their lived experiences of the LRE as one full of positive teacher and peer interactions that contained face to face socialization regularly while in the LRE. The researcher additionally, observed the participants expressing communication consistently occurred through various social

media platforms when the participants were away from school. Therefore, the participants' self-worth and self-esteem were intact and ultimately considered themselves as part of the in-group. Notably, the disruptions of the COVID-19 caused some of the participants to miss a significant amount of time in the school setting. With the limited amount of face-to-face socialization, students have become tolerable of each other. The absence of interaction has offered an opportunity to close the eyes that once saw differences or at least temporally. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought socialization to a new level of importance for the participants. Therefore, the school community may overlook or look through the once varying differences that previously caused separation among peers.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The limitations of this study are the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with some of the participants missing almost a calendar year of face-to-face learning and socialization with peers of the same age and intellect. Before the COVID-19 pandemic closed schools, the researcher observed interactions between teachers, the non-disabled peers, and SWLD, which left many unanswered questions regarding the negative social interactions and any effects these negative social interactions may have had on the SWLD identity. Therefore, the interactions described between the participants and the general education teachers in the LRE, specifically the co-taught environment, equates to positive and caring. Furthermore, the participants expressed positive social interactions with their peers in the LRE, specifically the co-taught model, along with an abundant amount of socialization. The researcher must consider the educational disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, possibly reducing the learning disparity between SWLD and their non-disabled peers. Several of the participants described that all students display similar

academic struggles; therefore, teachers are more receptive to help the participants. Although the participants were able to articulate responses to each of the researchers' prompts and interview questions, the researcher never observed any of the participants struggling to supply answers. Therefore, not overlooking that each of the participants has a learning deficit contributes to the study's limitations.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this research include the researcher purposefully selecting the site for three reasons. First, it has 6th-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model, comprised of different teachers and content areas. It will be essential to pick different content teachers from the varying content areas to determine if SWLD experience the central phenomenon across the four content teachers and the four content areas. Second, the middle school has adequate participants to fulfill the purposeful sampling requirements. Third, the researcher has a rapport with participants, which according to Creswell & Poth (2016), "The researcher and the participant approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting" (p. 173). The rapport helped the participants feel comfortable providing rich and thick descriptive details about how SWLD view themselves and their lived experiences in the LRE, specifically, the co-taught model.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research should include the long-term effects the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to participants' lived experiences reflecting they are no different from their peers. Future research may involve interviewing the participants entering high school to determine if the lived experiences have changed regarding teacher and peer interaction, academic achievement, and socialization. Additionally, future research may include missed opportunities

for non-academic courses and their long-term effects on SWLD identity. Finally, further research could identify if providing SWLD their IEP supports and accommodations earlier than 8th grade affects their academic success in high school, which increases proficient levels in math and reading on state assessments.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study intends to describe the lived experience of 6th-grade SWLD educated in their LRE to the maximum extent appropriate with their non-disabled peers (IDEA, n.d.). The participants of this research, who attend an urban middle school in Georgia, must be educated in their LRE sitting amongst their non-disabled peers, who do not socially accept some SWLD due to the characteristics of the bestowed label of disability (Gilmour & Henry, 2018; Roos, 2019; Schwab et al., 2018).

One central research question and three sub-questions guided this study. The participants' shared their lived experiences through generalized questions; therefore, the researcher had a starting point to understand how the participants' LRE, specifically the co-taught model, affects the participants' social identities. The researcher purposefully selected the site for three reasons. First, it has 6th-grade SWLD educated in the co-taught model, comprised of different teachers and content areas. It will be essential to pick different teachers and content areas to determine if the participants experience the central phenomenon across the different teachers' and content areas. Second, the middle school selected for the study has SWLD to fulfill the purposeful sampling requirements. Third, the researcher has a rapport with the participants, which according to Creswell & Poth (2016), "The researcher and the participant approach equality in questioning, interpreting, and reporting" (p. 173). The rapport will help the participants feel comfortable

providing rich and thick descriptive details about how the participants' view their lived experiences surrounding their education in their LRE, specifically the co-taught model.

The researcher used purposeful sampling to select this study's participants. The participants who met the criteria outlined in this study provided visual representations of 11 prompts indicating their lived experiences of their LRE, specifically the co-taught environment. Additionally, the researcher interviewed each of the participants to gain further insight into the lived experiences and to hear the voices of each of the participants loud and clear. To complete triangulation, the researcher reviewed the participants 2021-2022 grades from the first and second quarters to determine if the participants' lived experiences of their academic success aligned with their grades. Finally, reviewing the visual representations, interview transcripts, and grades leads to five prominent themes and two sub-themes. The researcher can conclude three significant findings from the study. First, the participants are unaware of academic success, having an IEP, which contains supports and accommodations. Second, the participants do not see the school setting as more than a place to gather and socialize, as minimal face-to-face socialization occurs outside the school setting. Third, inconsistent placement of the participants causes a missed opportunity to experience non-academic subjects with their nondisabled peers.

The overarching focus of future research should include the long-term effects the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to the participants' lived experiences reflecting they are no different from their peers. Future research may involve interviewing the participants entering high school to determine if the lived experiences have changed regarding teacher and peer interaction, academic achievement, and socialization. Additionally, future research may include missed opportunities for non-academic courses and their long-term effects on the participants' identity. Finally, further research could identify if providing the participants' their IEP supports

and accommodations earlier than 8th grade affects their academic success in high school, which increases proficient levels in math and reading on state assessments.

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APPENDIX A:

Application to Students with Disabilities

The Common Core State Standards articulate rigorous grade-level expectations in the areas of mathematics and English language arts. These standards identify the knowledge and skills students need in order to be successful in college and careers.

Students with disabilities ―students eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)―must be challenged to excel within the general curriculum and be prepared for success in their post-school lives, including college and/or careers. These common standards provide an historic opportunity to improve access to rigorous academic content standards for students with disabilities. The continued development of understanding about research-based instructional practices and a focus on their effective implementation will help improve access to mathematics and English language arts (ELA) standards for all students, including those with disabilities.

Students with disabilities are a heterogeneous group with one common characteristic: the presence of disabling conditions that significantly hinder their abilities to benefit from general education (IDEA 34 CFR §300.39, 2004). Therefore, how these high standards are taught and assessed is of the utmost importance in reaching this diverse group of students.

In order for students with disabilities to meet high academic standards and to fully demonstrate their conceptual and procedural knowledge and skills in mathematics, reading, writing, speaking and listening (English language arts), their instruction must incorporate supports and accommodations, including:

- supports and related services designed to meet the unique needs of these students and to enable their access to the general education curriculum (IDEA 34 CFR §300.34, 2004).
- An Individualized Education Program (IEP), which includes annual goals aligned with and chosen to facilitate their attainment of grade-level academic standards.
- Teachers and specialized instructional support personnel who are prepared and qualified to deliver high quality, evidence-based, individualized instruction and support services.

Promoting a culture of high expectations for all students is a fundamental goal of the Common Core State Standards. In order to participate with success in the general curriculum, students with disabilities, as appropriate, may be provided additional supports and services, such as:

- Instructional supports for learning— based on the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) —which foster student engagement by presenting information in multiple ways and allowing for diverse avenues of action and expression.
- Instructional accommodations (Thompson, Morse, Sharpe & Hall, 2005) changes in materials or procedures— which do not change the standards but allow students to learn within the framework of the Common Core.
- Assistive technology devices and services to ensure access to the general education curriculum and the Common Core State Standards.

Some students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to certain standards in both instruction and assessment, based on their communication and academic needs. These supports and

accommodations should ensure that students receive access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the Common Core State Standards.

APPENDIX B:

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

October 14, 2021

Kimberly Johnson
Matthew Ozolnieks

Re: IRB Approval - IRB-FY21-22-71 BE WHO YOU ARE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIAL DISABILITY AS EXPERIENCED BY 6TH GRADE STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITES EDUCATED IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

Dear Kimberly Johnson, Matthew Ozolnieks:

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB). This approval is extended to you for one year from the following date: October 14, 2021. If you need to make changes to the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit a modification to the IRB. Modifications can be completed through your Cayuse IRB account.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX C:

Recruitment Letter

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting researching as part of my doctoral degree requirements. The purpose of my research is to study sixth-grade students with learning disabilities who are educated in the LRE, specifically the co-taught model and I am writing to invite your child to participate in my study.

I am looking for sixth-grade students who have a learning disability and are educated in the LRE. The student's IEP must contain two things; first, one class on the service line must indicate the co-taught model in English, science, social studies, or math. Second, the IEP must have an eligibility category of Learning Disabled (LD) or Specific Learning Disability (SLD). If you are willing to allow your child to participate, he or she will be asked to compile 10 images (from the internet) from a provided list and participate in a one-on-one interview. The approximate time for compiling the images should be no more than one hour, if your child is unable to print the image, they may send it to my email, and I will print the images. Your child will also participate in a one-one interview that will last approximately 45 minutes to an hour. I am also asking permission to view your child's educational records, specifically their English, science, social studies, or math grades for the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school year.

As part of this study, your child's name will be requested as part of his or her participation, but the information will remain confidential. For your child to participate, please contact me via email at [redacted]. A parental consent document and a student assent form will be provided as attachments on a return email, along with parental consent to review your child's school records. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document, have your child sign the assent form, and return both to me at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your consideration

Kimberly Johnson

APPENDIX D:

Carta de reclutamiento

Como estudiante de posgrado en la Escuela de Educación de Liberty University, estoy realizando una investigacion como parte de los requisitos de mi doctorado. El propósito de mi investigación es estudiar a los estudiantes de sexto grado con discapacidades de aprendizaje que se educan en el LRE, específicamente el modelo co-enseñado y le escribo para invitar a su hijo(a) a participar en mi estudio.

Si está dispuesto a permitir que su hijo(a) participe, se le pedirá que recopile 10 imágenes (de Internet) de una lista proporcionada y participe en una entrevista individual. El tiempo aproximado para compilar las imágenes no debe ser más de una hora, si su hijo(a) no puede imprimir la imagen, puede enviarla a mi correo electrónico y yo imprimiré las imágenes. Su hijo(a) también participará en una entrevista individual que durará aproximadamente de 45 minutos a una hora. También solicito permiso para ver los registros educativos de su hijo(a), específicamente sus calificaciones de matemáticas, ciencias, estudios sociales y ELA para el año escolar 2021-2022.

Como parte de este estudio, se solicitará el nombre de su hijo como parte de su participación, pero la información se mantendrá confidencial. Para que su hijo participe, comuníquese conmigo por correo electrónico a [redacted].

Se proporcionará un documento de consentimiento de los padres y un formulario de consentimiento del estudiante como archivos adjuntos en un correo electrónico de retorno, junto con el consentimiento de los padres para revisar los registros escolares de su hijo. El documento de consentimiento contiene información adicional sobre mi investigación. Por favor, firme el documento de consentimiento, pídale a su hijo que firme el formulario de consentimiento y devuélvame ambos lo antes posible.

Gracias por su consideración.

Kimberly Johnson

APPENDIX E:

Parental/Guardian Consent

Title of the Project: Be Who You Are: A Phenomenological Study of the Intersection of Social Identity and Social Disability as Experienced by 6th Grade Students with Learning Disabilities Educated in the Least Restrictive Environment

Principal Investigator: Kimberly Johnson Liberty University School of Education

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study:

Your child is invited to participate in a research study. Participants must be in 6th grade, educated in the least restrictive environment, specifically the co-taught model, and have an eligibility category on their IEP of learning disability (LD) or specific learning disability (SLD). Lastly, your student's IEP services tab must display one or more of the four content classes listed under the Instruction/Related Services in General Education Classroom/Early Childhood Setting as the co-taught model with the provider as a certified special education teacher. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to allow him or her to be in this study.

What is the study about, and why are we doing it?

This study aims to understand the perceptions of sixth-grade students with learning disabilities who are educated in the LRE environment.

What will participants be asked to do in this study?

If you agree to allow your child to be in this study, I will ask him or her to do the following things:

1. Participate in verbalization through visualization. The participants will be given 10 prompts and asked to collect 1 image per prompt. The images will be selected from the internet and printed out. If a participant cannot print the image, she or he may email the image to me so that I can print it. (no more than one hour)

2. Participate in an 11-question interview about their experiences in the least restrictive environment. The interview will not last any longer than 45 minutes to 1 hour to keep their attention and engagement. The interview will be video and audio recorded for accuracy and transcribing purposes.

3. Participants will be asked if I may view their educational records, specifically their math, science, social studies, and ELA grades for the 2020-2021 school year.

How could participants or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Potential benefits to society are participants will be college and/or career ready. Additionally, increased awareness of the emotional struggles the participants face when placed in a learning environment that does not allow the time to master the required standards.

What risks might participants experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks your child would encounter in everyday life. As a mandated reporter in the state of Georgia, any information received related to child abuse, child neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm self or others will be reported.

How will personal information be protected?

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

- I will assign the images a pseudonym. The images will be stored in an envelope in a locked drawer until the interview.
- Interview participants will be assigned the same pseudonym from the images. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future research studies. After three years, I will delete all electronic records.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password-locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

What conflicts of interest exist in this study?

I, the researcher, serve as [redacted] but I have no direct grading authority over your child. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to allow your child to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on her or his decision to allow his or her child to participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to allow your child to participate will not affect his or her current or future relations with Liberty University or [redacted]. If you decide to allow your child to participate, she or he is free not to answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should be done if a participant wishes to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw your child from the study or if your child chooses to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next

paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw her or him or should your child choose to withdraw, data collected from your child will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Kimberly Johnson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [redacted] You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Ozolniek, at [redacted]

Whom do you contact if you have questions about rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to allow your child to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy for the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record/video-record my child as part of his/her participation in this study.

_____
Printed Child's/Student's Name

_____
Parent's Signature Date

Liberty University
IRB-FY21-22-71
Approved on 10-14-2021

APPENDIX F:

Consentimiento de los padres / tutores

Título del proyecto: Sé Quién Eres: Un Estudio Fenomenológico de la Intersección de la Identidad Social y la Discapacidad Social Según la Experiencia de Estudiantes de Sexto Grado con Discapacidades de Aprendizaje Educados en un Entorno con la Menor Restricción Posible.

Investigadora principal: Kimberly Johnson Liberty University School of Education

Invitación para ser parte de un estudio de investigación:

Se invita a su estudiante a participar en un estudio de investigación. Los participantes deben estar en sexto grado, educados en un ambiente con el menor restricto posible, conocido como modelo de co-enseñanza, y tener una categoría de elegibilidad en su IEP como discapacidad de aprendizaje (LD) o discapacidad de aprendizaje específica (SLD). La participación en este proyecto de investigación es voluntaria.

Tómese el tiempo para leer este formulario completo y hacer preguntas antes de decidir si le permitirá participar en este estudio.

¿De qué se trata el estudio y porquélo hacemos?

Este estudio tiene como objetivo comprender las percepciones de los estudiantes de sexto grado con discapacidades de aprendizaje que se educan en el entorno de LRE.

¿Qué se les pedirá a los participantes que hagan en este estudio?

Si acepta permitir que su estudiante participe en este estudio, se le pediría que haga lo siguiente:

1. Participar en la verbalización a través de la visualización. A los participantes se les darán 10 preguntas y se les pedirá que elija una imagen por cada pregunta. Las imágenes se seleccionarán del Internet y se imprimirán. Si el participante no puede imprimir la imagen, el participante puede enviar la imagen por correo electrónico para que yo pueda imprimir la imagen.

2. Participar en una entrevista de 11 preguntas sobre sus experiencias en el ambiente menos restrictivo. La entrevista durará de 45 minutos a 1 hora para mantener su atención y compromiso. La entrevista se grabará en video y audio para tener exactitud y poder transcribir.

3. A los participantes se les preguntará si puedo ver sus registros educativos específicamente sus calificaciones de matemáticas, ciencias, estudios sociales y ELA de los años escolares 2021-2022 y 2022-2023.

¿Cómo podrían los participantes u otras personas beneficiarse de este estudio?

Los participantes no deben esperar recibir ningún beneficio directo de participar en este estudio.

¿Qué riesgos podrían experimentar los participantes al participar en este estudio?

Los riesgos involucrados en este estudio son mínimos, lo que significa que son iguales a los riesgos que encontraría en la vida diaria. Como informante obligatorio en el estado de Georgia, se informará cualquier información recibida que se identifique con los requisitos obligatorios de denuncia de abuso infantil, negligencia infantil, abuso de ancianos o intención de hacerse daño a sí mismo o a otros.

¿Cómo se protegerá la información personal?

Los registros de este estudio se mantendrán privados. En cualquier informe que publique, no incluiré ninguna información que permita identificar a un sujeto. Los registros de investigación se almacenarán de forma segura y solo el investigador tendrá acceso a los registros.

Asignaré a las imágenes un seudónimo y un número. Las imágenes se guardarán en un sobre en un cajón cerrado con llave hasta la entrevista.

- Le asignaré un seudónimo a las imágenes. Las imágenes se guardarán en un sobre en un cajón cerrado con llave hasta la entrevista.

- A los participantes de la entrevista se les asignará el mismo seudónimo y número de las imágenes. Realizaré las entrevistas en un lugar donde otros no puedan escuchar la conversación.

- Los datos se almacenarán en una computadora bloqueada con contraseña y se pueden usar en estudios de investigación futuros. Después de tres años, eliminaré todos los registros electrónicos.

- Las entrevistas serán grabadas y transcritas. Las grabaciones se almacenarán en una computadora bloqueada con contraseña durante tres años y luego se borrarán. Solo el investigador tendrá acceso a estas grabaciones.

¿Qué conflictos de intereses existen en este estudio?

Yo, la investigadora, soy maestra [redacted], pero no tengo autoridad de calificación directa sobre su hijo(a). Esta aclaración se hace para que pueda decidir si esta relación afectará su voluntad de permitir que su hijo(a) participe en este estudio. No se tomarán medidas contra una persona en función de su decisión de permitir que su estudiante participe en este estudio.

¿Es la participación en el estudio voluntaria?

La participación en este estudio es voluntaria. Su decisión de permitir o no que su hijo(a) participe no afectará sus relaciones actuales o futuras con Liberty University ni las [redacted]. Si decide permitir que su estudiante participe, él o ella es libre de no responder a ninguna pregunta o retirarse en cualquier momento sin afectar esas relaciones.

¿Qué se debe hacer si un participante desea retirarse del estudio?

Si decide retirar a su estudiante del estudio o si su estudiante elige retirarse del estudio, comuníquese con la investigadora dirección de correo electrónico / número de teléfono que se incluye en el siguiente párrafo. Si decide retirarlo o si su estudiante decide retirarlo, los datos recopilados de su estudiante se destruirán de inmediato y no se incluirán en este estudio.

¿Con quién se comunica si tiene preguntas o inquietudes sobre el estudio?

La investigadora que realiza este estudio es Kimberly Johnson. Puede hacer cualquier pregunta que tenga ahora. Si tiene preguntas más adelante, le recomendamos que se comunique con ella al [redacted] También puede comunicarse con el patrocinador de la facultad del investigador, el Dr. Ozolniek, en [redacted]

¿Con quien se puede comunicar si tiene preguntas de sus derechos como participante de esta investigacion?

Si tiene alguna pregunta o inquietud con respecto a este estudio y le gustaría hablar con alguien que no sea el investigador, le recomendamos que se comunique con la Junta de Revisión Institucional, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 o envíe un correo electrónico a irb@liberty.edu.

Descargo de responsabilidad: La Junta de Revisión Institucional (IRB, por sus siglas en inglés) tiene la tarea de garantizar que la investigación en seres humanos se lleve a cabo de manera ética según lo definido y requerido por las regulaciones federales. Los temas cubiertos y los puntos de vista expresados o aludidos por estudiantes y profesores investigadores son los de los investigadores y no reflejan necesariamente las políticas o posiciones oficiales de Liberty University.

Tu consentimiento

Al firmar este documento, acepta que su estudiante participe en este estudio. Asegúrese de comprender de qué se trata el estudio antes de firmar. Se le entregará una copia de este documento para sus registros. El investigador conservará una copia para los registros del estudio. Si tiene alguna pregunta sobre el estudio después de firmar este documento, puede comunicarse con el equipo del estudio utilizando la información proporcionada anteriormente.

He leído y entendido la información anterior. He hecho preguntas y he recibido respuestas. Doy mi consentimiento para que mi estudiante participe en el estudio.

El investigador tiene mi permiso para grabar en audio / video a mi estudiante como parte de su participación en este estudio.

_____
Nombre impreso del niño / estudiante

_____
Firma del padre Fecha

_____
Firma del menor Fecha

APPENDIX G:

FERPA Release for External Providers

[redacted] is partnering with **Kimberly Johnson Liberty University PhD student** to provide Social Identity Research. **Kimberly Johnson Liberty University PhD student**, employees, agents or volunteers may request access to confidential student information as a part of this partnership. Please understand that parental consent to access is wholly voluntary. However, without permission it may not be possible for your student to fully benefit or otherwise participate in services offered by this partner.
Pursuant to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, parental consent is required before personally identifiable information from your child's education records may be disclosed to **Kimberly Johnson Liberty University PhD student**, absent a health or safety emergency or other exception to FERPA's general requirement of parental consent. If your child is age 18 or over, he or she is an "eligible student" and must sign to provide consent for disclosures of information from his or her education records.

I, _____ **[Parent/Guardian/Eligible Student]**, hereby agree to allow [redacted] to disclose the following selected records regarding _____ [Student Name] to **Kimberly Johnson Liberty University PhD student** for the purpose of **Social Identity Research** for the **2021-2022** school year.
Indicate all records that you consent to disclosure of:

☐ Class Schedule	☐ Registration	☐ IEPs (Individualized Education Plans)
☐ Attendance	☐ MAP/EOG Data	☐ Behavioral Documents
☐ Discipline	☐ Section 504 Plans	☐ Intervention Plans
☐ Grades	☐ Eligibility Reports	☐ Assessment/Evaluation
☐ Demographic	☐ Psychological Reports	☐ Other _____
☐ Immunization/Health	☐ Medical Documents	

You may withdraw your consent to share this information at any time. This request must be submitted in writing and signed.

Student Name	Student D.O.B.	Student Number

_____
Signature of Parent, Guardian, or Eligible Student

_____
Date

For Office Use Only
☐ Approved Principal Signature: _____
☐ Not Approved Date: _____

APPENDIX H:

FERPA Release for External Providers

[redacted] con Kimberly Johnson, la estudiante de doctorado de Liberty University para proporcionar la investigación de identidad social. Kimberly Johnson Liberty University estudiante de doctorado, los estudiantes, empleados, agentes o voluntarios pueden solicitar acceso a información confidencial del estudiante como parte de esta asociación. Por favor, comprenda que el consentimiento de los padres para acceder es totalmente voluntario. Sin embargo, sin permiso, es posible que su estudiante no se beneficie completamente o participe en los servicios ofrecidos por este socio.

De conformidad con la Ley de Privacidad y Derechos Educativos de la Familia (FERPA), 20 U.S.C. § 1232g, se requiere el consentimiento de los padres antes de que la información de identificación personal de los registros educativos de su hijo pueda ser revelada a Kimberly Johnson, estudiante de doctorado de Liberty University, a menos que hay una emergencia de salud o seguridad u otra excepción al requisito general de consentimiento de los padres de FERPA. Si su hijo tiene 18 años o más, es un "estudiante elegible" y debe firmar para dar su consentimiento para la divulgación de información de sus registros educativos.

_____

Yo, _____ [Padre / tutor / estudiante elegible], por la presente acepto permitir que las escuelas de la [redacted] registros seleccionados con respecto a _____ [Nombre del estudiante] a Kimberly Johnson estudiante de doctorado de Liberty University con el propósito de Investigación de identidad social para el año 2021-2022. año escolar.

Indique todos los registros a los que da su consentimiento para la divulgación de:
☐ Horario de clases ☐ Registro ☐ IEP (planes de educación individualizados)
☐ Asistencia ☐ Datos MAP / EOG ☐ Documentos de comportamiento ☐
Disciplina ☐ Planes de la Sección 504 ☐ Planes de intervención ☐
Calificaciones ☐ Informes de elegibilidad ☐ Valoración / Evaluación ☐
Demográficos ☐ Informes psicológicos ☐ Otro _____
☐ Inmunización / Salud ☐ Documentos medicos

Puede retirar su consentimiento para compartir esta información en cualquier momento. Esta solicitud debe presentarse por escrito y firmada.

_____

Nombre del estudiante Estudiante D.O.B. Número de estudiante

Firma del padre, tutor o estudiante elegible
Fecha

_____

Sólo para uso de oficina
☐ Aprobada Firma del director: _____
☐ No Aprobada Fetcha:_____

APPENDIX I

Child Assent to Participate in a Research Study

What is the name of the study and who is doing the study?
The name of the study is Be Who You Are: A Phenomenological Study of the Intersection of Social Identity and Social Disability as Experienced by 6th Grade Students with Learning Disabilities Educated in the Least Restrictive Environment. The study is being completed by Kimberly Johnson.

Why is Kimberly Johnson doing this study?
Kimberly Johnson wants to study how you view being in a classroom with two teachers.

Why am I being asked to be in this study?
You are being asked to be in this study because you are in sixth grade and taught by two teachers in either math, science, social studies, or English.

If I decide to be in the study, what will happen and how long will it take?
If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to answer 10 questions by finding images on the internet. You will print each image out or email me the image so I may print it out. This should take about 20 minutes. You will also be interviewed, which should take about an hour, with 11 questions about things in your class with two teachers

Do I have to be in this study?
No, you do not have to be in this study. If you want to be in this study, then tell the researcher. If you don't want to, it's OK to say no. The researcher will not be angry. You can say yes now and change your mind later. It's up to you.

What if I have a question?
You can ask questions any time. You can ask now. You can ask later. You can talk to the researcher. If you do not understand something, please ask the researcher to explain it to you again.

Signing your name below means that you want to be in the study.

Signature of Child Date

Kimberly Johnson
[redacted]

Faculty Chair: Dr. Ozolniek
[redacted]

Liberty University Institutional Review Board
1971 University Blvd, Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
irb@liberty.edu

Liberty University
IRB-FY21-22-71
Approved on 10-14-2021

APPENDIX J

Prompts for a visual representation

1. Find one image that shows how you view yourself.
2. Find one image that shows how you feel about school.
3. Find one image that shows how you feel when you are in class.
4. Find one image that shows how you think your friends at school see you.
5. Find one image that shows how you think your teachers see you.
6. Find one image that shows your favorite subject.
7. Find one image that shows your least favorite subject.
8. Find one image that shows how you view your grades in math, science, social studies, and English.
9. Find one image that represents your best friend.
10. Find two images that represent two more friends.

APPENDIX K

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me who teaches you English, science, math, or social studies?
2. Will you describe how you feel when you are in English, science, math, or social studies?
3. Will you tell me what type of interaction you had with the teacher (s) today?
4. Will you tell me a time when you felt that your teacher(s) in English, science, or social
5. Will you describe how your classmates treat you?
6. Can you tell me what type of interaction you had with your peers today in class?
7. Will you tell me a time when peers did not let you join their group and how that made you feel?
8. Will you tell me a time when you were asked to join a group in English, science, math, or social studies and how that made you feel?
9. Will you describe the challenges you faced when working in the group and how that made you feel?
10. Will you describe a time when the teacher in English, science, or social studies was explaining something, and you did not understand it?
11. Will you tell me how are your grades are associated to your academic success?