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DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION
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AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ROLE IN
DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION PROGRAMS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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by

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ABSTRACT

AN INVESTIGATION OF THE SECONDARY PRINCIPALS' ROLE IN DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION CLASSROOMS

Gabrielle Marie Meier

Utilizing a phenomenological approach, this dissertation explores how principals perceive and use their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs. Specifically, this study has examined principals' beliefs and ideals in decision-making to support inclusion in classrooms. Its goal is to provide insight into principals' perspectives on engaging and interacting with the community and school stakeholders for the success of inclusion programs. This study was conducted at several suburban high schools in the northeastern United States. The subjects were selected through purposeful and convenient sampling. The participants currently work in schools identified as having successful inclusion programs within the districts where the data was collected. This study has encapsulated data from individual interviews with eleven currently employed secondary principals and used open-ended questions to guide the discussion, examination, and analysis of artifacts. Today's secondary principals are tasked with many responsibilities. Understanding how principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs has informed this research and allowed it to extrapolate the role of the principal as it reflects Michael Fullan's Change Theory (Fullan, 2001) and thus how it correlates and applies to

other areas of school reform. The approach that the principals of these schools— deemed to have successful inclusion programs—could be used as models to help implement similar programs in underperforming districts. This research reinforces the fact that it is the responsibility of principals to demonstrate that they are supportive leaders. This can be achieved through collaboration with special education department chairpersons and open communication with staff and all stakeholders to understand the program’s needs and maintain the program through staff development.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Seth. Thank you for your support and for your unconditional love. To my sons, Brody and Payton, remember to take advantage of every learning opportunity that comes your way. Additionally, to my great aunts, your perseverance and grit have taught me that anything is possible. A special thank you to my parents, Pat and Tom. You were my first teachers in life, and I could not have asked for better parents. Thank you for believing in me and inspiring me to be better.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iii

LIST OF TABLES viii

CHAPTER 1 1

 Purpose of the Study 2

 Theoretical Basis of the Study 4

 Significance/Importance of the Study..... 6

 Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education 8

 Research Questions 9

 Definition of Terms..... 9

CHAPTER 2 11

 Theoretical Framework..... 11

 Review of Related Literature 16

 The History of Special Education Law and Policy 17

 Background of the Inclusion Classroom and the Inclusive Learning Environment 21

 Inclusion Program Models 23

 Effective Inclusive Program Practices 26

 The Impact of School Culture..... 27

 Principals’ Role..... 29

Current Data on Special Education.....	32
The Role of the Principal to Support the Special Education Environment.....	34
Conclusion	36
CHAPTER 3	38
Research Questions.....	38
Methods and Procedures	38
Phenomenological Approach	38
Potential Impact of Phenomenological Approach	40
Setting	40
Participants.....	42
Description of Principal Participants	44
Data Collection Procedures.....	47
Individual Interview Procedure.....	48
Artifacts Procedure	49
Trustworthiness of the Design	49
Research Ethics	52
Data Analysis Approach	53
Intake of Transcripts to Dedoose	53
Coding Procedures	53
Rounds of Data Coding.....	54

Validation of Data Analysis.....	54
Researcher Role	55
Conclusion	56
CHAPTER 4	57
Findings.....	57
Background.....	57
Themes	58
Theme 1: Supportive Leader.....	59
Collaboration.....	59
Communication.....	61
Theme 2: Instructional Leader	65
Data Collection	65
Co-Teacher Pairing	68
Professional Development	70
Theme 3: Cultural Leader	75
Tri-Level Engagement	75
Inclusiveness	78
Scheduling.....	81
Conclusion	83
CHAPTER 5	85

Discussion of Findings.....	86
Relationship of Themes to Research Questions.....	86
Relationship to Prior Research.....	89
Relationship to the Theoretical Framework.....	91
Implication of Findings.....	95
Principals’ Responses to the Research Questions.....	95
Implication for Future Research	102
Implication for Future Practice	102
Limitations of the Study.....	104
Conclusion	104
APPENDIX A LETTER OF SOLICIATION.....	106
APPENDIX B LETTER OF CONSENT.....	107
APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENER	108
APPENDIX D MATRIX OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	109
APPENDIX E INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	111
APPENDIX F WORD CLOUD.....	113
REFERENCES	114

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	A Demographic of Participating Secondary Schools	43
Table 2	Demographics of Participating Secondary Principals'.....	47

CHAPTER 1

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2021), 7.3 million students currently receive special education services, or 14% of students ages 3-21 years. While there is approximately 14% of students 3-21 years of age utilizing special education services (NCES, 2021), research notes ongoing concern about the efficacy of integrating classified students with non-classified students within “inclusion classroom” settings (Peck et al., 2004, Blaze et al., 2017). As a result of P.L 94-142 (IDEA Sec. 612 (5) (B), inclusion classrooms require that the general education teachers provide educational content while the special education teachers support the special education students within the classroom. Various approaches have been developed over the years to assess the effectiveness of what has become known as “inclusion classrooms.” Indeed, multiple models of inclusion have been utilized within the K-12 environment based on principals’ decisions due to building needs, staffing, and enrollment (DeMatthews et al., 2020). While these decisions are guided by stakeholder input, a principal’s role is crucial in understanding the success of inclusion programs. The success of inclusion will be impacted by the principal manageability of class ratio, class size, the pairing of teachers, and planning time together (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007).

There are certain elements needed to develop a successful inclusion classroom (Cook & Friend, 2007). One key element within the inclusion classroom is the concept of co-teaching (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). For inclusion classrooms to be successful, principals first must be educated themselves in the practice of coteaching (Walther-Thomas, 1997). Additionally, an initiative-taking principal who is both knowledgeable and supportive in developing inclusive teaching is critical to the success of implementing

the consultative model (Carpenter & Dyal, 20017). This initiative-taking leadership can allow for appropriate training and staff professional development. According to DeMatthews et al. (2020), effective inclusion schools have the support of the principal; the principal plays a pivotal role in listening to the teachers' concerns but also helping to respond to situations of teachers by providing professional development to help the teachers address their concerns and to meet the needs of the students. This will help improve the principal-teacher relationship, raise the quality of education, and support the academic success of all learners. Research on effective inclusive schools has also endorsed the principal's critical role in providing high-quality professional learning to better prepare teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities (DeMatthews et al., 2020). Given the complexity of developing and supporting successful inclusion classrooms, it is essential to explore how principals determine strategies to help their schools' special education programming, especially the role of inclusion classrooms (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013).

Purpose of the Study

Utilizing a phenomenological approach, this dissertation explores how principals perceive and use their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs. Specifically, this study has examined the beliefs and ideals principals possess within the decision-making process to support inclusion classrooms. Its goal is to provide insight into principals' perspectives related to engaging and interacting with the community and school stakeholders for the success of inclusion programs. As such, it is an exploration into principals' leadership skills in developing and supporting inclusion classrooms within their schools.

There were 4,782 principals in New York State during the 2019-2020 school year (New York Government, 2021). One key responsibility of the principal is to ensure that their school adheres to federal and state mandates related to maintaining a “Least Restrictive Environment” (LRE). According to O’Loughlin and Lindle (2015), the LRE occurs when special education students are integrated into the general education classroom. Additionally, principals’ comprehension and articulation of the LRE influence and impact how inclusion and special education services are implemented in their schools (O’Loughlin & Lindle, 2015). Furthermore, principals create co-teaching teams, create student rosters, and provide professional development to the staff to help create a successful inclusion program where all stakeholders are included, supported, and excelling academically according to the state assessments. Since the law’s initial implementation, advances in special education have created a need for school principals to develop a mission, vision, and core values that encompass all students by promoting each student's academic success and well-being (NPBEA Standard 1,2005). The National Policy Board for Educational Administration is a national organization that developed standards to help guide educational administrators in their leadership roles and decision-making. These standards are used in state licensing programs and their professional development programs for administrators (NPBES,2022). Within that context, inclusive models of special education can and do play a significant role. But that role may be limited or expanded based on the beliefs and ideals principals possess as they make decisions regarding how to support inclusive classrooms. With that perspective, Furney and colleagues (2005) found that schools with principals who were highly engaged in the inclusion programs had a shared vision with all stakeholders and created

collaborative learning environments to help support teachers and staff to create a successful inclusion program showed success (Furney et.al, 2005). Additionally, they also confirmed that the role of the principal is to foster school changes. Thus, this current research seeks to add knowledge of how the principal's beliefs and ideals, leadership skills, and knowledge base impact the development and support of inclusion programs.

Theoretical Basis of the Study

This investigation employed Michael Fullan's Change Theory (Fullan, 2002). As principals are required to adhere to evolving federal and state laws regarding inclusion, these administrators are to be open to change and respond appropriately to the changing needs of their school environment. The administrator will need to learn how to change and adapt for the inclusion program to succeed for all stakeholders.

For inclusion programs to be successful for all stakeholders who participate in inclusion classrooms, the implementation of how these changes will happen, i.e., the process of change, is of utmost importance for the success of the program (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2012). Principals are tasked with demonstrating that they know the appropriate laws and policies related to the needs of students with disabilities within the K-12 environment. Then, as leaders, they need to help provide the teachers who will become part of the inclusion model with the professional development necessary to implement the approach successfully (Hoppey & Mcleskey, 2012). Educational leaders must become examples of change they hope to implement for successful implementation. If teachers are provided with leaders who create a culture of change, then the general education teacher will facilitate those changes in modification for the special education student in their classrooms (Cobb, 2015).

Fullan (2006) describes how a new type of leadership needs to emerge to create fundamental changes that are successful. Leaders need to immerse themselves in the school and its culture (Fullan, 2006). That knowledge will help them make the changes the state or federal government requires and support teachers and students in adapting to new initiatives (DeMatthew, et al. 2020). To change school systems and education organization, both will require leaders to link all parts to the bigger picture. The principals must help develop the teachers as leaders of change with similar goals for change to occur and be successful (Hoppey & Mcleskey, 2012). This approach will provide a culture of change that, in a sense, will have a trickledown effect. Principals and teacher-leaders will help teachers incorporate inclusive practices in their classrooms. In turn, teachers will help every student, regardless of the academic label, be successful learners, and learners will support each other in the process.

Traditional classrooms were the domain of a single teacher. Traditional special education programs were taught by teachers who either took students out of their regular classroom for additional instruction in a resource room or taught them in self-contained classes of special needs learners. Thus, the implementation of successful inclusion programs involves a notable change in the perception of schooling and how it is conducted. Both school and community stakeholders are critical partners in the change process. Therefore, change theory is appropriate for the theoretical framework that supports this study involving principals' role in successful inclusion classrooms. Additionally, for schools to implement change and be successful, change theorist Michael Fullan states that principals must be equipped to manage the various demands that change

requires. Michael Fullan's Change Theory (2006) is the framework that will guide the research and design of this study (Fullan, 2006).

Significance/Importance of the Study

Currently, limited research exists on the role of the principal in developing and supporting inclusion classrooms within the K-12 environment. That is especially true regarding research on the part of secondary schools' principals and inclusion programs (Cobb, 2015). When such studies occur, they tend to be quantitative studies by design to show the success or failure of inclusion classrooms based on year-end summative assessment; however, they do not look at how administrators, especially at the secondary level, understand and create inclusion programs. While some studies have recognized the principal's role in terms of being an instrumental leader (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), providing support for teachers through training, and creating a positive school environment, most have ignored those aspects as well as the principals' role in developing a culture of change (Bays & Crockett, 2007; Crockett, 2004; Di Paola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). Engaging administrators and discussing their role in special education will help to determine how to provide or change preparation and professional development to create a successful special education program (Jacobs et al, 2014).

Typically research on the role of the principal in special education programs has been conducted from the perspective of the teacher. Bond and Lindsey (2001) exemplify this approach in their study, employing a brief ten-question survey, with responses given on a five-part Likert scale. Those researchers reported on data collected from 50 elementary schools and secondary teachers. In these results, teachers said the administrators' instructional leadership capacity to be their most outstanding

contribution, especially in offering suggestions for classroom arrangements for special education students, interpreting testing data, providing additional funding and materials of instruction, as well as informing parents of P.L. 94-142 provisions. This study inferred that further efforts on the part of principals should be focused on greater participation of principals in special education placement committees and more effective schedules for special needs students. Curiously, while principals were seen as quite effective in informing parents of the provisions of P.L. 94-142, teachers felt that they were not as proficient in keeping faculty informed. This study demonstrates the need for principals' voices to be heard to help understand the disparity between teachers' understanding of the administrator's role in creating a successful inclusion program (Bond & Lindsey, 2001).

Thus, the problem is that the school principals today are charged with not only placing children at the center of education but also for providing each student with equal opportunity for academic success and personal well-being. That applies to all students, to the best of their ability, and to the law (NPBEA, Standard 2, 2015). It is essential that the principal while making changes to promote the academic success of both general education students and special education students, ensure that all children are receiving an education that will engage, challenge, and provide them with skills for later in life. And so, it becomes the task of the principal to assure that teachers and staff are aware of the law and how to implement it into their classrooms.

Principals must ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success (NPBEA Standard 3, 2015). Crucial to their success is understanding the law and

how it can best be implemented. Within that context, they are charged with the responsibility to educate their staff through targeted professional development to develop programs that support the needs of the students and ensure compliance with all aspects of the law.

Additionally, the principal will need to ensure that curriculum instruction and assessments are appropriate for all students and that there is a community of care and support for all students (NPBEA Standard 4, 2015). This is important when implementing P.L. 94-142 that all children benefit from a curriculum that is appropriate and challenging for their needs. It is essential when the school district identifies an effective model of inclusion that is appropriate for both special education and general education students since the benefits of that model serve the needs of all students.

While several studies have been conducted regarding leadership and the role of the principal, there are relatively few research studies that focus on the principal's role in the development and maintenance of special education inclusion programs. A review of the literature confirms a gap in this field of research. Therefore, this study examined how secondary principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs. Additionally, this study analyzed how secondary principals engage and interact with the community and school stakeholders to create successful inclusion programs.

Connection with Social Justice and/or Vincentian Mission in Education

This research relates to the mission of St. John's University by addressing the issue of social equality in education. This is accomplished through an examination of the principal's role in the development and maintenance of the inclusion classrooms and

viewing leadership that interacts positively with school and community stakeholders.

Successful inclusion programs include underlying respect for individual diversity consistent with the Core Principles of St. John's University. Additionally, this research can help guide principal decisions in leadership with morals and values that align to the St. John's University values of educational philosophy.

Research Questions

1. How do secondary school principals perceive their role in the development and support of inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
2. How do secondary school principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
3. What leadership skills do secondary principals need to possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms within their school environment?

Definition of Terms

Inclusion classrooms: special education students receive services and instruction in general education for the majority of the time. (LeDoux et. al., 2012).

Professional Development: Schools provide both new teachers and veteran teachers time and resources to support continued learned of recent educational pedagogy (Admiraal et. al., 2021)

Instructional Leader: Principals guide curriculum, instructional strategies for teacher's professional development, and data collection on student progress (LeDoux, et. al., 2012).

Collaboration: General education teachers, special education teachers, and principals communicate curriculum and shared visions to create successful learning environments (Parker, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

The purpose of the study was to identify the role of the secondary level administrator in the development and maintenance of inclusion programs, moreover, their leadership style in supporting effective inclusion programs. The current role of the secondary administrator has developed over the years because of multiple factors, but this study was concerned specifically with special education inclusion programs, especially how increased knowledge in the field, federal and state legislation, and stakeholders' active involvement has helped shape administrative responsibilities.

This chapter will provide the reader with a history of special education, how it has evolved through state and federal mandates, and how schools have created and maintained inclusion programs to comply with such mandates. Specific focus will also be given to the status of such inclusion programs, the role of the secondary school administrator in terms of the creation, development, and administration of inclusion programs, and the administrator's use of various stakeholders in the school and community in the creation, development, and administration of such programs.

Theoretical Framework

This section will provide a background on change theory, focusing on Michael Fullan's Change Theory (Fullan, 2006). Additionally, it will demonstrate how change theory is most applicable to this research study. Change theories seek to explain how change works and are varied in their scope and depth. Some theories developed out of a need to understand and explain how change works in specific situations. These theories have emerged from a single context and thus are supported by limited evidence. Other theories are more complex and seek to be more general in their explanation of how

change occurs. In education, change theories have been developed to explain new laws and policies, while at other times researchers utilize preexisting theories to explain educational change (Reinholz et. al., 2020).

Currently, there is a limited amount of research connecting change theories to inclusion programs in the P-12 environment. While theories of limited scope have provided certain important knowledge, they are by nature decentralized, framed within a more traditional special needs perspective, and fail to explain how inclusive environments involving all pupils can be established. For example, the theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism have each been utilized by curriculum designers to create instructional strategies and techniques to facilitate learning and to implement inclusive education practices for students with special education needs in a general education setting (Al-Shammari et. al., 2019). Those theories do little to explain the process of change that is necessary to implement successful programs. Other theoretical research is so decentralized from actual practices, classroom situations, and conditions, so as to not be useful to practitioners (Nilholm, 2021). It is important to create research that effectively communicates how educational leaders can utilize change theory to develop successful inclusion programs.

When new groundbreaking federal and state laws are enacted, like Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), educational leaders must become examples of the change they hope to implement. Since the implementation of successful inclusion programs involves a significant change in the perception of schooling, it is appropriate that the theoretical framework that supports this study is Fullan's Change Theory.

Critical to understanding Fullan's perspective is how he views the differences and interrelationships between the constructs of theory of education and theory of change. Fullan explains the differences between the theory of education and the theory of change, and why both are necessary. In Fullan's view, the theory of education is at its core an explanation of how children learn. It includes pedagogy, learning theories, and developmental theories to understand and explain the dynamics of learning. At the same time, the theory of change is about how change unfolds and what part individual stakeholders have in the process. Fullan believes that for educational change to occur, reformers need those two sets of knowledge: leaders need to link to an educational theory, constructivism, learning style, or any theory they support. They also need to know about the management of change, how to change a culture, and respond to resistance, and how to understand the overload of changes and the political context in which they exist (Escobar-Arcay, 2009).

The complexity of that interrelationship is advanced in Fullan's writings and can be understood especially in the context of the evolving nature of special education, and specifically inclusion programs, in the United States today. For inclusion programs to be successful, the role of the administrator in the development and implementation, as well as maintenance, of special education programs, will require the basic components of what Michael Fullan describes as changed leadership (Fullan, 2001).

This approach provides an understanding of how a culture of change is possible and effective over time. Fullan's theory of change and leadership guides this research into how secondary school principals develop and maintain successful inclusion programs, as well as how those administrators engage and collaborate with school

stakeholders in support of such inclusion programs. Leaders who are cognizant of learning and change theories have the tools to help teachers incorporate inclusive practices in their classrooms. Teachers in turn help every student regardless of their academic labels to be successful learners, and learners will support each other. This lens will show the involvement and impact of all stakeholders.

Fullan defines seven core premises that underpin the use of change theory and serve to articulate its presence as a theory of action (Fullan, 2006). Those premises begin with a focus on motivation, which Fullan sees as something which cannot be achieved in short term but is built on certain key factors: moral purpose, capacity, resources, peer and leadership support, and identity. It is in Fullan's terms a combination of these that makes the motivational difference.

The first of these is capacity building, with a focus on results. Fullan defines capacity building as "any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning" (Fullan, 2006 p.9). This is the aspect of the seven premises that deals specifically with results, linking the strategies with a sense of accountability. In this view, when there is a correct relationship between capacity building and accountability the pressure resulting leads to motivation, which in turn leads to results.

Learning in context, in this next premise, relates to the opportunity for teachers to "engage in continuous and sustained learning about their practice in the settings in which they work, observing and being observed by their colleagues in their classrooms and classrooms of teachers in other school confronting similar problems"(Fullan, 2006 p.9).

Fullan sees the premise as promoting real changes in the very context of teaching, shifting the prevailing culture, not through mandate, but by changing existing norms.

Changing context connects to an aspect of the additional stakeholders beyond the context of individual schools, but the interaction of schools and potentially districts in the larger sense of the flow of knowledge and motivation. This premise recognized that there are institutional issues, collective bargaining, bureaucratic rigidity, systemic inefficiency, and other factors that need to be considered as change is implemented.

In the bias for reflective action premise, Fullan recognized the power of shared ownership and vision as being more an outcome of a quality process than a precondition. Additionally, the tri-level engagement premise speaks to Fullan's vision of "permeable connectivity" between school and community, district, and state. In his view developing strategies that promote mutual interactions and influence within and across the three levels is to be encouraged in all stakeholders to advance change.

Because the previous six premises must be developed over an extended period, the seventh premise, persistence, and flexibility in staying the course, is critical. Fullan anticipates that there will be inevitable cycles of difficulties, and therefore resilience, persistence, and flexibility will be needed to stay the course and produce the changes necessary. Furthermore, self-correction and refinement are built into the process because the theory is reflective and inquiry-based. Through these seven premises, administrative actions, based on change theory, can be observed and discussed within the context of theory and its implications for successful programs.

Additionally, for schools to implement change and be successful, Fullan (2002), indicates that it is important that principals are equipped to manage the various demands

that change requires (Fullan, 2002). To create changes that have been mandated by federal and state law in special education we need to understand the concepts and process of change. Principals who exhibit traits and support actions based on the seven premises will be effective change leaders. In that way change theory, as an underlying principle, can help bring positive and successful academic, social, and emotional results for all stakeholders.

Therefore, Fullan's Change Theory is appropriate to apply to this research because his theory focuses on the principal as a leader of cultural change, who has the skills to transform the school through people and teams. With clearly defined components and actions as guides, it is the most applicable construct in understanding the long-term process of reforming special education (Fullan, 2001, 2006).

Review of Related Literature

The intention of this literature review is twofold. First, this literature review will explore laws and policies related to special education. Second, the review of the literature will look at the responsibilities of the principal and how their function is important to the success of inclusion programs. The conclusion of the literature review will highlight how special education services are provided throughout the United States and its commonwealth territories with a closer look at New York State special education data since the study will be performed in New York. The review of the literature will come from a variety of sources: databases like EBSCOhost, JSTOR, and ProQuest. The articles, journals, and studies are peer-reviewed.

The History of Special Education Law and Policy

Since the creation of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142), educational leaders have turned to change theory to understand how to implement legislative reforms in schools to create successful inclusion programs. Public Law 94-142 is a federal law that requires education for handicapped students. This law has four major purposes:

The first purpose is to assure fairness and appropriateness in decision-making concerning providing special education programming to handicapped children and youth who require it. It established clear management and auditing requirements and procedures regarding special education at all levels of government.

Additionally, it financially assists the efforts of state and local government using federal funds (Ballard & Zettal, p.177).

If states are to receive federal funding tied to this law, they must make sure that Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for all handicapped children takes place, and that students are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Compliance with the mandates of the law require state departments of education, as well as school districts, to establish processes that implement the law at all levels and without bias.

Since its inception, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act has evolved to continue to fit the needs of students with disabilities. The law was created because of a further need for reforms in education. Such reforms were created to ensure that educational achievements were being advanced for both general education students and special education students. The purpose of the law was to create a structure to measure the success of both the teachers and students in meeting the goals intended. Additionally,

students with disabilities are also impacted by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 2004), enacted originally as the Education of All Handicapped Children's Act of 1975. IDEA as such requires that students with disabilities participate in the same assessments that are required of students without disabilities (Gandhi, 2007).

The Individual Disabilities Education Act is a continuation and reform of PL 94-142, The Education of All Handicapped Children Act. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires that: "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities ...are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling or another removal of children with disabilities from the regular environment occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactory" (IDEA Sec. 1412 (a) (5)).

Additionally, the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act are both federally funded programs that mirror the sentiments of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act. The objective of these federal laws is to measure the growth of students' achievement for both general education students and special education students. To that end, the hiring of certified and qualified teachers is under the purview of the law's enactment, and as such, this has a direct impact on the instructional model, and specifically the inclusion model.

According to McGovern (2015), the LRE provision requires children with disabilities to be educated "[t]o the maximum extent appropriate in the general education classroom with students who do not have disabilities" (McGovern, 2015, p.122). Restrictiveness in this context is defined by proximity to the regular classroom. School

districts must provide students with appropriate supplementary aids and services to enable satisfactory achievement in the general education classroom. Historically, special education teachers and general education teachers have trained separately, with a focus on area specialties in content and pedagogy which can produce varied perspectives in terms of curriculum appropriateness and instructional design. As a result, of the school district implementing changes to comply with IDEA, inclusion programs were developed that required collaboration between classroom teachers and special education teachers. McGovern further indicates that professional development and principals' attitudes will impact the outcome and success of such programs. This can be viewed as aligning with Fullan's theory's key factor, moral purpose. If leaders want to see change, they too need to believe in the changes they are implementing (Fullan, 2002).

Like McGovern (2025), Schuster (1985) states that the principal is the cornerstone of the organization between the district, the teachers, and the law. The impact that this law had on the school district leadership was far-reaching. The school principal and district leaders first had to learn what PL 94-142 was, and then they had to implement it in their buildings. To be successful, educational leaders have had to monitor the implementation of this law. Initially, students whose education would be impacted by this law needed to be identified. That evolved into an elaborate referral process geared to identify specific students with their needs and to further evaluate if they fit the criteria so that they can receive services.

It is the role of building administration to assure that those students who receive services under this law have in place what is referred to as an Individual Education Plan, or IEP. The IEP should include goals and learning objectives and must cater to that

specific student's needs. In addition, each identified student must receive services and/or supports that will help them learn in the LRE. It is critical that the building principal guarantees that the staff is educated in how to write and implement IEP's. If the staff does not follow the directives of the IEP, they are out of compliance and therefore breaking the law. The school district leaders and building leaders must monitor the system to make sure all elements of the IEP comply with the mandates of the law.

Maintaining compliance is a major task on top of the responsibilities already assigned to these school leaders. This requires the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in the process. The communication and interaction of special education staff, building and district leaders as well as general and special education teachers are essential to the success of the implementation of PL 94-192 (Schuster, 1985).

Administrators' awareness of the role they play in developing and implementing inclusion programs along with their involvement must be elevated. This awareness in their role will motivate and influence the staff and stakeholders to support implementation and change (Schuster, 1985). This too aligns with Fullan's premise of a focus on motivation.

Changes in federal mandates produced significant effects that not only demanded a system change but a change in culture and leadership. Not surprisingly, the principal is seen as the leader of this change. Therefore, this study will explore the principal as the change leader. It will do so in the context of Fullan's theory of how the principal as a lead learner, system player, and agent of change develops and maintains successful inclusion programs and engages and collaborates with school stakeholders in support of such programs.

Background of the Inclusion Classroom and the Inclusive Learning Environment

Having established that students have the right to be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE), schools moved to inclusion models, to facilitate compliance. “Inclusion is the principle and practice of considering general education as the placement of the first choice for all learners.” (Villa & Thousand, 2003 p.19). This was a departure from past practices where students with disabilities, whether severe or mild, were segregated into what is called self-contained classrooms. Before the introduction of the IDEA, schools practiced a method called mainstreaming. In this approach, students may be in a classroom part of the day or for certain subjects and then go to another room to receive special education services. According to Kavale, removing a student from the general education classroom to receive special education services was a violation of the LRE since they were segregated from the general population (Kavale, 2002).

Even though there are federal mandates to educate students in the LRE the law does not mention inclusion models or programs. Often it is case law, especially in terms of educational issues, which defines the meaning and sets the practice requirement, to implement the various acts of Congress. For example, in the case of *Hartmann v Loudoun County* (1997), the court ruled that mainstreaming is not required if a student does not benefit from a regular classroom setting. If the student would benefit more in a self-contained classroom, it would be permissible. Also, if the child is disruptive in the general education setting, a more restrictive environment would be acceptable (Yell, 1998).

Hartmann v Loudoun County established self-contained classrooms as the exception, rather than the rule for placement of students with special needs. General education students and students with disabilities should attend school together and be in the same classroom as one another. When students are integrated into general education classrooms, as LRE defined, this is the inclusion model.

The LRE and No Child Left Behind led to the creation of inclusion as an alternative. In this approach, students remain in the classroom and the special education teachers and services come to them. Brice and Miller (2002) summarized inclusion practices as followed:

The inclusive classroom setting is an integrated setting in which all children learn together. The inclusive classroom setting does not unduly label or identify students as special needs learners. The inclusive classroom maximizes educational benefits. The inclusive classroom minimizes the need for a separate curriculum (Brice & Miller, 2002, p.238).

The co-teaching model, or cooperative teaching, is based on special educators and content-specific general education teachers. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) imposed an assessment process that included teacher accountability, and in so doing, mandated teachers be highly qualified. Based on two federally funded studies, Study of State Implementation of Accountability and Teacher Quality Under NCLB and the National Longitudinal Study of NCLB, special education teachers were among a percentage deemed not highly qualified under NCLB. Most states after 2005-2006 have teacher programs designated to meet the standard of high-quality teachers. However, existing teachers must demonstrate this standard by either through a test of content areas or states

may choose the option of demonstrating a subject competency through High Objective Uniform State of Evaluation (HOUSE). Additionally, Title I Schools are mandated to spend 5% of their Title I funds toward professional development to ensure that all teachers are highly qualified (Teacher quality under NCLB: Interim Report, 2007). The school district principal was then delegated the role of organizing professional development and adhering to the teacher certification mandates. Thus, principals are responsible for developing, implementing, and maintaining inclusion programs that are in adherence to federal mandates.

Inclusion Program Models

As a result of the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act which are both federally funded programs that mirror the sentiments of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act, the objective of these federal laws is to measure the growth of students' achievement for both general education students and special education students. Additionally, the hiring of certified and qualified teachers is under the purview of the law's enactment, as such this has a direct impact on the instructional model, and specifically the inclusion model. The goal of the law was to promote accountability for instruction and assessment of students with disabilities. These requirements encouraged schools to move to an inclusion model.

Different models of inclusion have been developed to adhere to The Least Restrictive Environment. The predominant models of inclusive practices may be defined as: (a) One teach and one assisting. In this model one teacher leads the session while the other teacher provides support and assistance to individuals or small group. (b) Station teaching is another model of inclusion in which students are divided into two or more

learning stations and the teachers provide individual support at each station. (c) Alternating or commentary teaching is where one teacher enhances the instruction provided by the co-teacher. (e) Team teaching is another inclusive model wherein both co-teachers plan, teach, assess, and are responsible for the whole class. (f) parallel teaching is where the class is divided one group works with one teacher and the other group works with the other teacher learning the same content. (Strogilos & Traguolia, 2013; Friend & Cook, 2007). The success of this will also be impacted by class ratio, class size, the pairing of teachers, and planning time together (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007). These decisions will be the responsibility of the principal.

Though there are several models of inclusion when and how teachers decide which model to use will depend on their instructional outcomes, planning time, and knowledge of the model. This is linked directly to the principal's vision, district stakeholders, and the professional development that is provided for the co-teachers. (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016). In an exploratory study, "Teachers' experiences with co-teaching as a model for inclusive education," conducted by Pancsofar and Petroff, in the Mid-Atlantic region, spanning over five districts. Only the sixty-nine teachers who were currently co-teaching were included in the study. Of that sixty-nine, 42% were special education teachers and 58% were general education teachers. A survey called, *The Co-teaching Experiences and Attitudes Survey* was developed to measure multiple aspects of co-teaching as it is understood and experienced by teachers. The study reported that teachers worked with on average two different co-teachers and 61% of those co-teaching teams lasted more than one year together. Those co-teaching teams reported more frequently using co-planning and co-instructing approach to co-teaching. The same was

said for teachers who spend more time with their co-teacher daily. Also, reported were teachers who had positive attitudes, and frequently used a more collaborative approach compared to teachers with negative attitudes toward inclusion who tended to use the least collaborative approach, one teach one assist. Furthermore, this study also examined teacher professional development opportunities in relation to co-teaching. Teachers with more pre-service training on co-teaching reported more frequently used models that are more collaborative and shared responsibilities of planning, teaching, and assessing with their co-teacher (Pancsofar & Petroff, 2016).

According to Elliott and McKenney (1998), team teaching is an effective inclusive model. However, much like Pancsofar and Petroff, they too note that teachers with negative attitudes toward team teaching or co-teachers do not share the same belief, this model will not work because it is not comfortable for the teachers and will transcend students which could cause a negative impact of social, emotional and academic needs. Similarly, they note that compatible teams found success in this approach (Elliott & McKenney, 1998).

This supports the idea of this research that principals' role and leadership skills in developing and supporting inclusion classrooms through professional development is crucial for the success of inclusion programs as well as compliance with both state and federal laws. Furthermore, also demonstrates the role of the principal in terms of staffing and scheduling of co-teachers impacts the success of inclusion programs. It also highlights the impact of school culture on successful inclusion programs.

Effective Inclusive Program Practices

Evidence suggests that the best model of inclusion is the co-teaching model. That approach provides accountability to the general education teacher, as well as the special education teacher. Also, it is important to note that the success of the program begins with the building leader's ability to provide professional development, observe co-teachers and provide feedback. Additionally, the building leadership needs to properly pair the co-teachers and provide common preparation times for them. Such practices promote the success of the inclusion model. Murawski and Bernhardt caution building leaders to discuss with staff the pairing of co-teachers. Careful consideration and professional dialogue can help create the pairs. They suggest that questionnaires or surveys, whether formal or informal be used to help decide on the forming of co-teaching dyads. The principals should take time and consideration of teachers' personalities, attitudes, and philosophies when creating co-teaching teams (Murawski & Bernhardt, 2015).

Another effective inclusive practice for a principal to use and one that is also required through federal mandate is preparing meaningful professional development. When school leaders provide effective support and professional development to teachers, growth in student achievement can be seen (McMahon et. al, 2016). School leaders who help to develop staff by providing continuing professional development and encouraging collaborative organizational cultures are core practices of effective school management (MacIver et. al, 2018). Such leadership-driven practices enhance the school's culture of toleration and acceptance as well (Zollers et. al, 2010).

Another important aspect of the effectiveness of the inclusion program is the class balance of general education students and special education students. Murawski and Dieker provide guidance to administrators in terms of assigning students to inclusion classes. They warn administrators to avoid having more than 30 percent of general education classes designated as having special needs students (Murawski & Dieker, 2013). This is critical to consider because if more students with disabilities are placed in the classroom that will shift the responsibilities of the special education teacher. The special education teacher may need to spend more time with those students and certain models of co-teaching which may be highly effective otherwise, may not be as effective due to the needs of special education students and time restraints at the secondary level (Murawski & Dieker, 2013).

The secondary principal will be tasked with providing professional development that supports the model of inclusion that the district implements. Also, the principal has to oversee the pairing of co-teachers as well as classroom demographics. By examining the culture of the school, the secondary principal can make those decisions to help implement and maintain successful inclusion programs.

The Impact of School Culture

School culture is the driving force between parents, students, teachers, and administration. Each of these participants looks at the school culture to help understand the organization and its history. The culture that is established lays the framework for each person's role and responsibility within the school. The elements that make up the school culture are organizational values, beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, behaviors, rituals, traditions, norms, and artifacts. These elements are passed down through the

community but also change over time based on students, parents, and teachers' needs (Green, 2017). The person who is overseeing these changes, in this case, secondary principals, must be knowledgeable and aware of these elements (Green, 2017).

Understanding the elements that makeup school culture will help principals implement change. Thus, they become what Michael Fullan describes as leaders of cultural change. Similarly, researchers Zollers, Ramanathan, and Yu (2010), stated that school culture bears a significant impact on the success of inclusion programs. Since classrooms do not exist in isolation, school culture impacts directly the success of inclusion. Their 2010 study of highly successful elementary schools' inclusion programs provides insight into the notion that fostering a highly inclusive culture within a school community can greatly contribute to the success of an inclusion program (Zoller et al. 1999).

Maintaining compliance is a major task on top of the responsibilities already assigned to these school leaders. This requires the cooperation of all stakeholders involved in the process, and often a shift in the school's culture to become more inclusive. The communication and interaction of special education staff, building and district leaders as well as general and special education teachers are essential to the success of the implementation of PL 94-192 (Schuster, 1985).

Administrators' awareness of the role they play in developing and implementing inclusion programs along with their involvement must be elevated if this cultural shift is to become normalized. This awareness in their role will motivate and influence the staff and stakeholders to support implementation and change (Schuster, 1985). This too aligns with Fullan's premise of a focus on motivation.

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Principals' Role

Michael Fullan discussed his research in the field of change theory, identifying five key elements necessary for change to occur. Those five elements are nested learning communities, principal institutes, leadership for instruction, peer learning, and individual coaching. Additionally, for schools to implement change and be successful, he states that it is important that principals are equipped to manage the various demands that change requires (Fullan, 2002).

Primarily, building principals are responsible for implementing innovative programs that are geared to help students improve. Within that role, they are responsible for staff development, professional communities, and the planning of programs and materials. The principal is the agent of change. They are responsible for school capacity and as such have a duty to motivate the staff to buy into new programs as part of their role as instructional leaders. In Fullan's view, they are the initial step in student achievement, with the teacher being the next step, implementation. Teachers look to principals to create an environment of trust, high morale, and opportunities (Fullan, 2002).

The role of the principals should extend beyond test scores if they want to make a lasting impact. Principals should be, in Fullan's terms, "leaders of culture change." This construct has the potential for a long and lasting impact on the school, as opposed to simply seeing the principal's role as just improving test scores. It involves a change in the overall system of school operations. From this perspective, the Cultural Change Principal will organize a system change through five principles: moral purpose, understanding of the change process, the ability to improve relationships, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making (Fullan, 2002).

The Cultural Change Principal shows interest in the lives of students, staff and community can start help improve school culture as well academics. Moral purpose will change not only the school but ultimately also the district and community. To see real, long-lasting change, that sense of moral purpose has be evident throughout all stakeholders (Fullan, 2002).

Understanding change and the process of change is important for the Cultural Change Principal. Some stakeholders may be resistant and the principal needs to be ready to help guide and answer questions. The Cultural Change Principal needs to guide stakeholders to understand the collective goal and vision. The principal needs to motivate when changes do not show quick rapid results. The principal as manager of the change process seeks to improve teacher relationships through professional learning committees and build trust and assurance among himself and the school community (Fullan, 2002).

Critical to the change process, the principal should be an example of modeling lifelong learning. The principal's knowledge can help reassure staff that the change is

morally, academically, and scientifically based. Through direct actions and guidance, coherence can be achieved by incorporating the ideas of futurism in the process. Practically, this means not settling for easy and quick ideas to get results that are not long-lasting.

In order for the Cultural Change Principal to make changes, it is essential that external factors such as sustainability are also taken into consideration. It is not enough to lead the change in their building but change needs to happen in all schools of the district. Fullan states, "... if school leaders do not concern themselves with the development of the social and moral environment of the entire district (in addition to the development of the environment within their own school), then not only will the school system deteriorate, but eventually their own school will also fail." This is very powerful and breaks away from more insular notions of the role of the principal (Fullan, 2002).

It is important that the Cultural Change Principal in their context of learning creates processes that support the development of leadership at various levels. If change is to continue to occur after the Culture Change Principal, they will need to train and develop leaders from within to continue the process. Quality principals will only come with creating quality teachers.

To create changes that are mandated by federal and state law in special education, the concepts and process of change and how leaders guide changes need to be understood. When this is accomplished, it then becomes the role of the principal to disseminate the change. This should be done to help all stakeholders, teachers, parents, support staff both general education students and special education students to understand the process and guidance that the change will occur.

To determine if changes are being implemented the principal should become the Cultural Change Principal by discussing the shared moral responsibility the P.L. 94-142, and helping those stakeholders understand its ramifications in practice. That can be accomplished by providing and guiding professional development in ways that create learning communities to help with the transition of co-teaching models. This would additionally help improve relationships among principals and staff and contribute to sustainability. An additive effect of this approach would be to help improve teacher efficacy, and in doing so will help improve the learning environment and increase test scores for special education students (Fullan, 2006). By using the Cultural Change Principal ideas in conjunction with change theory, a cultural shift toward equity, improvement of scores, and closing the achievement gap will occur, not only in one building but potentially throughout the school district (Fullan, 2006).

Current Data on Special Education

According to NCES, in the 2019-2020 school year 14% or 7.3 million students ages 3-21 received special education services under IDEA. The learning disabled (LD) classification comprises 33% of all students identified as needing services. This is followed by speech or language impairment with 19%, then other health impairment with 15%, Autism with 11%, developmental delay at 7%, Intellectual disability with 6%, emotional disturbance at 5%, multiple disabilities 2%, hearing impairment 1%, and orthopedic impairment with 1% (NCES, 2021).

From the fall of 2009 to the fall of 2019 the number of students who were receiving special education services that spent 80% or more of their time inside general classes increased from 59% to 65%. Students who spent 40-79% of the time inside

general classes decreased from 21 to 18%. Additionally, students who spent less than 40% of their time inside general classes also decreased from 15% to 13% (NCES, 2021).

During the 2018-2019 school year, the percentage of those students ages 14-21 receiving special education services and who graduated with a regular high school diploma was 72%. Students who exited high school with an alternative certificate were 10% and it was noted that 16% dropped out of school (NCES).

The Education for All Handicapped Act, PL 94-142, states that children with disabilities have a right to free appropriate education (FAPE). Today, the IDEA ensures funding through grants for PL 94-142. Such funding is contingent upon FAPE being in place. In the 2018-2019 school year, by its reckoning, New York State had 498,436 school-age children receive special education services (NYSED.org). Of that total, the number of secondary students receiving special education serves ages 14-17, was 136,814 and for ages 18-21 the total was 21,811. The total number of students who graduated in New York State was 34,033. Of those students who graduated with Regents diplomas 1,208 (4%) attained Advanced Designation, a total of 10,324 students (30%) graduated with a regent's diploma, while 9,080 (27%) graduated with a local diploma, and 1,162 (3%) received non-diploma credit. Additionally, 8,055 (24%) are still enrolled and 412 (1%) transferred to GED and 3,763 (11%) dropped out. This has an impact on expenditures. The expenditures per pupil for special education is \$32,359 compared to expenditures per pupil for general education students in New York, which is \$13,367. Funding for IDEA comes from Federal, State, and Local government grants (NYSED, 2021).

This data represents the scope and complexity of the issues involved in special education that principals must be aware of and interact with. Additionally, it highlights the change that special education is going through and how that impacts the significance of the principal's role as the leader.

The Role of the Principal to Support the Special Education Environment

It is important to conduct studies to better understand how principals are successfully implementing these changes. Leaders must demonstrate that they know the law, especially in terms of inclusion, and how education is to be provided for all students. Then, those same leaders need to help the teachers, as part of the inclusion model, with professional development necessary to implement various instructional approaches successfully. If teachers have leaders who create a culture of change, then both the general education and special education teachers will facilitate those changes in modifications for the special education students in their classroom. Thus, the complex merger of a theory of education and theory of change that Fullan discussed comes directly into play in the professional lives of the teachers and their principals.

Earlier researchers have agreed on the pivotal role of the principal in terms of the effectiveness of program implementation, in general. As early as 1977, the RAND Agent Studies analyzed the effectiveness of federally funded education and useful to this current discussion, the role of the principal. Specifically, that study reported that projects with active rather than only verbal support of principals were more likely to succeed (Berman & McLaughlin, 1977). Nearly a decade later, a study of over four hundred schools, in 146 school districts, in 10 states involved in school improvement supported those findings. Relevant to this study, the authors concluded that forceful leadership with

competent assistance and support creates impetus and the wherewithal that are necessary for change. Formulating challenging goals and taking strides to meet them are important first steps even if adjustments must be made along the way (Crandall & Loucks, 1983).

The contemporary role of the principal has changed significantly since children with special education services are taught in inclusion classrooms, defined as the LRE. The secondary principal is responsible for the supervision and implementation of general education programs and a variety of advanced placement programs for the gifted, but also special education students, and the implementation of new inclusive programs (Boscardin, 2005).

According to Fullan (2002), a moral purpose is a social responsibility to others and the environment. School leaders with moral purposes seek to be effective in the lives of students. They are concerned about closing the gap between high-performing and lower-performing schools and raising the achievement of- and closing the gap between high-performing and lower-performing students.

The inclusion efforts in educational reforms require that general education teachers provide the content while the special education teacher is there to assist special education students. As consultative teachers, the special education certified teachers deliver services to special education students within the general education classroom. There is no prescribed way to achieve this requirement, and consequently, multiple teaching models of inclusion classrooms exist. But, regardless of the model implemented, Carpenter and Dyal, warn that the success of inclusion programs will be impacted by school leaders and district leaders' manageability of class ratio, class size, the pairing of teachers, and planning time together (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007).

The gap in research literature fails to demonstrate how secondary school principals plan and develop inclusion programs, and how they implement them while maintaining compliance with the various laws. Equally relevant, but also lacking is research into how administrators view their perception of their leadership style in supporting inclusion classroom teachers as well as how they engage and collaborate with school stakeholders for effective inclusion classrooms.

Conclusion

This review of the literature revealed an increasing reliance on administrative leadership in terms of the implementation of state and federal special education mandates. Also, research had indicated that the role of the principal has been redefined and changed from manager to instructional leader. This review has further exposed the paucity of studies focusing on how secondary principals perceive and implement their roles in terms of developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs.

The principal's role is crucial in preparing professional development that complies with state and federal laws. The literature does not indicate how secondary principals go about making decisions in creating successful programs. The literature fails to give the secondary principals' perspective on how they budget for special education programs, teacher training/professional development, staff perception of the principal role in assisting training, and how the principal creates an environment of tolerance and inclusiveness. Therefore, this study has examined the gap in the literature by interviewing secondary principals to determine how their role in implementing successful inclusion programs. Earlier studies have focused on change processes at the elementary

level; however, little was known about how secondary principal-initiated change and the processes that those principals use to implement change (Fullan & Newton, 1988).

Of the studies that have been conducted that include secondary principals, many are from the perspective of scholars in higher education or that of theorists. The few that have provided glimpses into the principal's role were set in elementary schools. This study is from the perspective of the secondary principal. In doing so, its goal is to help school leaders to view their own perception of their leadership style in supporting inclusion classroom teachers, and to understand how they engage and collaborate with school stakeholders for effective inclusion classrooms. Thus, achieving the goal of all the legislation, that is, to close the achievement gap between regular and special education students.

CHAPTER 3

This chapter discusses how the research was conducted by employing a qualitative study utilizing a phenomenological approach. The purpose of this study was to explore how principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining successful inclusive special education programs. Additionally, it examined the beliefs and ideals principals possess within the decision-making process to support inclusion programs. This inquiry explored insights into principals' perspectives related to engaging and interacting with the community and school stakeholders for the success of inclusion programs. Additionally, it looked at the leadership skills needed for developing and supporting inclusion programs.

Research Questions

1. How do secondary school principals perceive their role in the development and support of inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
2. How do secondary school principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
3. What leadership skills do secondary principals possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms within their school environment?

Methods and Procedures

Phenomenological Approach

This study has employed a phenomenological approach. The researcher focused on the experience of the secondary principals' in developing and implementing successful inclusion programs through the structure of the experience to reveal the meaning of events and perception or occurrence as it appears (Douglass & Moustakas,

1985). This study included the examination of principals overseeing inclusion classrooms within the secondary environment. Critical to this perspective in developing the current study was the researcher, Sadruddin Bahadur Qutoshi, who focused on the principals' lived experiences as they understood and related it (Qutoshi, 2018). As Qutoshi (2018) observes, because there are diverse styles of phenomenology, it is difficult to identify one distinct approach. Advocates of this type of study take the direct experience of the subject at face value and see behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience. Moustakas recommends trying to capture the experience of the subject by looking at detailed descriptions that summarize what the individual experienced and how they have experienced it (Moustakas, 1994). This has been central in phenomenological studies and critical in this one. Even though phenomenologists seem to have different views on issues, there is consensus on the use of this approach (Qutoshi, 2018).

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) identify four characteristics to make a clear distinction between the methodological nature of the phenomenological approach. In this perspective, the researchers use the four characteristics as a methodological framework to guide the structure of decoding to adhere to the phenomena as an approach. The four characteristics discussed by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) are description -openly reading, reduction then sorting of meaningful units, followed by the search for essences-reflecting on each meaningful unit, and intentionality- based on research question essential structures of phenomena. Therefore, based on Giorgi and Giorgi's perspective, principals' responses have led this inquiry to insights into how principals support inclusion programs, their best practices, and their leadership styles. Additionally, this

research provides additional awareness of professional practices that support students with disabilities within the secondary environment (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003).

Potential Impact of Phenomenological Approach

The phenomenological approach has the potential to create more successful inclusion programs and drive professional development. This researcher employed Moustakas's (1994) data analysis method because, "it has systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions" (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p. 78). The study was conducted at several high schools in the northeast. Its focus was on how secondary principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs. Additionally, it explored the examination of the principals' ideas and beliefs within the decision-making process to support inclusive special education programs and the leadership of the principal, and how they engage and interact with the community as well as other stakeholders in not only creating but maintaining successful inclusion programs.

Setting

The setting for this research was suburban secondary schools located on Long Island, New York which included both Nassau and Suffolk counties. The locations of each school depended on the individual principals who agreed to participate in the study. Descriptions of each school include demographic information regarding the general population and specific information about the special education programs provided. There were 11 schools that participated in this study.

The location of the interview was set at a time and place of the interviewee's convenience, free from disruption (McGrath et. al., 2009). Conducting the interviews in

a familiar setting serves to contribute to creating a relaxed ambiance. The researcher noted and included a description of each interview location. Based on participants' preferences, some interviews were conducted online/virtual, employing Zoom, Google Meet, or Facetime platforms. The participant determined which platform to be used based on their familiarity and comfort level with the platform. The limitation to using these platforms was not seeing the interviewee's body language. Some interviewees prefer to have their cameras off during the interview. This made it challenging to build a stronger connection/relationship with the interviewee. Additionally, it was harder to interpret a phrase or probe further into a subject matter without seeing facial expressions. Issues with the functioning of technology can cause frustration and distraction during the interview process. However, weighing all these concerns, and accommodating all of these principals' preferences in this post-Covid climate allowed them a degree of comfort and control that in this researcher's estimation outweighed potential limitations.

Initially, to facilitate the selection of participants data was collected and reviewed from the New York State Report Card website to identify secondary schools with successful inclusion programs ([data.nysed.gov], 2022). Specific data that was used for this study was the total population and identified relevant subgroups such as Special Education, Economically Disadvantaged, English Language Learners, and the Graduation rate for Special Education Students (Table 1). This website gives access to public records of school districts throughout New York State. Data on the website identifies different screeners and markers of demographics, students' academic results on state assessments, pupil personal, expenditures, special education, and so forth. This public data can be used to inform and help implement change. Schools with successful inclusion

programs were identified through a review of the New York State Report Card specifically identifying Students with Disabilities and the graduation rate of 50% or higher for that subgroup. This data supports the idea that their inclusion program is successful in measurable terms. Setting the standard for 50% or higher for that subgroup provided the basis for the selection of secondary principals for solicitation. For purposeful sampling, the researcher recruited a sample that is diverse enough to fulfill the stated purpose, as detailed in the discussion of this technique, the sample size can generally be considered adequate

Participants

This study was conducted at several suburban high schools in the northeastern United States. The subjects were selected through purposeful and convenience sampling. According to Creswell and Poth, the intentional sample of a group of people can best inform the research about the research question and topic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To that end, the participants were all secondary principals who are currently working in schools identified as having successful inclusion programs, within the districts where the data was collected. The sample was anticipated to be between 10-15 for the individual interviews, with 11 actual participants responding to the interview request. This is a robust size, as Polkinghorne recommends that researchers interview 5 to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (Creswell,2018). Additionally, Koerber and McMichael (2008) state that sample size can be considered adequate if the researcher recruits a sample size that is large enough to fulfill the stated purpose.

Using information available from the New York State Report Card website, the first contact with each participant was through email. Initial contacts were followed up

with phone calls and then written confirmation. To maximize time in the interview setting, as well as contribute to building rapport and trust, participants were provided with a summary of the research project. This informed the participants of the importance of the topic and the type of questions to expect (McGrath et. al., 2009).

A listing of each participant with descriptions of each school is provided in chart form (Table 1). Those descriptions include demographic information regarding the general population and specific information about the special education programs provided.

Table 1

A Demographic of Participating Secondary Schools

Participants School	Total Population	Special Education Population	Economically Disadvantaged	ELL Population	Special Education Graduation Rate
Mary	961	117	374	126	90%
Joseph	1,415	242	135	45	87%
Peter	703	91	70	19	100%
Jude	1,205	133	207	59	90%
Michael	1,985	324	1,029	310	78%
Augustine	424	67	170	57	93%
Luke	956	155	298	25	89%
Pio	2,053	312	607	-	78%
Sebastian	2,133	325	648	90	90%
Christopher	580	103	104	14	94%
Teresa	2,058	367	271	13	90%

Description of Principal Participants

Mary works in a suburban high school. Before becoming a principal, Mary was an English teacher for 13 years. Her first administrative position was as Dean, then as Assistant Principal. She is currently in her first year as principal. The interview took place over the phone.

Joseph has a Bachelor of Arts in History Education and a Master of Arts in Liberal Arts and Sciences/Liberal Studies. The participant was a former teacher and Assistant Principal at the New York City Department of Education from 1998 to 2006. He has been principal in his current position at a suburban high school for the last 12 years. This interview was in person.

Peter taught for four years in the Central African Republic as a mathematics teacher and curriculum developer. He was a founding member of a small public high school in New York City, as well as having taught mathematics and French. Peter also served as a Mathematics Chairperson in an Independent School in New York City. Peter served as an Assistant Principal in a suburban high school for five years and later as a suburban high school principal for two years. He then became principal in another suburban high school where he has been working for the past 13 years. Peter has a BA in International Relations, MA in Mathematics, MS in Mathematics Education, and Ph.D. in Mathematics Education. This interview was conducted over Zoom.

Jude was a math teacher in a New York City High School for 8.5 years, then an assistant principal in the same school for 3.5 years. He later served as a principal of a High School in New York City for seven years, then principal of a high school in Westchester for six years. For the past three years, he has been the co-principal in a Long

Island suburban high school. Jude has a master's degree in teaching mathematics and an additional master's degree in school administration. The interview was conducted by phone.

Michael served ten years in the military before becoming a social studies teacher in a suburban high school in New York. His first administrative role was as an assistant principal at a suburban high school on Long Island. For five years, he served as principal in a different Long Island school district and then another six years as a principal in another district. He is currently in his first year as principal in another Long Island suburban high school. Michael has a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and History, a Master of Science in Secondary Education Studies, and a second MA in Educational Science. This interview was conducted in person.

Augustine served one year as a teacher's assistant, six years as a middle school special education teacher, two years as a department chairperson of Special Education, two years as an Assistant Principal of Academics and Instruction, and four years as a Junior-Senior High School Principal in a suburban school district. This interview was performed over Zoom.

Luke was a social studies teacher for 13 years. During that time, he served in various leadership capacities. He then went to another district to serve as Assistant Principal for one year and is currently principal there. He holds a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Arts and advanced graduate degree certification in educational leadership. This was a telephone interview.

Pio has served in the current position for the last two years. Before that, he was an elementary teacher for eight years, then served as an administrator in that same district

at various levels, specifically, as an elementary principal for one-year, secondary assistant principal for nine years, and then Assistant Personnel Administrator for one year. Pio has a Master of Science and Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education. This interview was conducted by phone.

Sebastian has a bachelor's degree in economics and a master's degree in History. He began his career as a social studies teacher for five years, then Assistant Principal in the same suburban district for four years and has been Principal for the last nine years in that same district. This interview was by phone.

Christopher started as a science teacher for 18 years, then Vice-Principal for three years, and is currently serving as principal for the last ten years in the same suburban high school. He has a Bachelor of Science in Biology, Master of Science in Teaching in Biology Teaching, and Master of Science in Education in Education Leadership. This interview was conducted over the phone.

Teresa taught social studies and was a lead teacher for ten years. She later served as Assistant Principal in the same district for seven years and is currently completing his first year as principal in the same suburban community. Teresa has a bachelor's degree in Secondary Education and a master's degree in education; additionally, she has her certification in educational leadership. This interview was conducted over zoom.

A listing of each participant with descriptions of professional background is presented in chart form (Table 2). Those descriptions include years in their current role as secondary principal and previous professional experience.

Table 2*Demographics of Participating Secondary Principals'*

Participants	Years in Role	Professional Background
Mary	1	English Teacher 7-12, Dean, AP, Principal
Joseph	12	History Teacher, AP, Principal
Peter	13	Math Teacher, Department Chair, AP, Principal
Jude	3	Math Teacher, AP, Principal
Michael	1	History Teacher, AP, Principal
Augustine	4	Teacher Assistant, Special Ed. Teacher, Special Ed. Dept. Chair, AP, Principal
Luke	2	History Teacher, AP, Principal
Pio	2	Elementary Teacher, Elementary Principal, Secondary AP, Assistant Personnel Administrator, Secondary Principal
Sebastian	9	History Teacher, AP, Principal
Christopher	10	Science Teacher, AP, Principal
Teresa	1	History Teacher, Lead Teacher, AP, Principal

Data Collection Procedures

The following steps were developed for the solicitation process. As preciously explained, successful schools were identified through the criteria developed and applied to the New York State Report Card website. Principals of selected schools were contacted first by email then followed up by a phone call. Those principals who responded positively by the initial contact were sent a formal Letter of Solicitation (see

Appendix) and a Letter of Consent (see Appendix). This process yielded eleven participants.

This study has encapsulated data from individual interviews with eleven currently employed secondary principals and employed open-ended questions to guide the discussion. According to Kvale and Brinkmann, open-ended interviews can lead the participants as they are describing or answering their questions, they may discover relationships or patterns during the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Individual Interview Procedure

The individual interviews were conducted after school hours and at a place convenient for the participants, phone, or online/virtual. The individual interviews were recorded with written permission from each participant. Participants' responses were used to create additional open-ended questions to further elaborate their ideas and responses (see Appendices G). Critical to the success of this phenomenological based approach is a positive rapport between researcher and subject. Participants were made aware of all aspects of the interview process as well as how the data would be used. They understood that their collaboration would include final approval of the written transcript of their interview, this was built within specific processes used in the interview structure, such strategies as providing wait time, allowing for subjects to revisit previous questions, giving opportunities to clarify questions or expand upon responses all help to increase rapport. Allowing participants to choose their own interview platform that also established the researcher interest in establishing a positive experience for them as well as demonstrating the researcher's responsiveness to their needs. Further strategies to enhance rapport are discussed later as aspect of building trustworthiness.

Artifacts Procedure

Each participant was asked to provide artifacts such as emails, letters to the community, and data sources from the district as additional information to code. Artifacts provided additional explanation of the concepts explored in this study. The artifacts illustrated how the secondary principals communicated and engaged with various stakeholders to create successful inclusion programs. (Creswell & Poth, 2018). They were reviewed for any personal information such as names or addresses to be crossed out for privacy purposes, and then they were uploaded onto Dedoose to be coded.

Trustworthiness of the Design

Validity and reliability have been the cornerstones of quantitative research. In terms of qualitative studies, it has been established that “Reliability and validity are conceptualized as trustworthiness, rigor, and quality in qualitative paradigm” (Golafshani, 2015 p. 604). Trustworthiness is the standard for establishing confidence in the findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Rigor, in qualitative terms, is a way to establish trust or confidence in the findings of a research study. It allows the researcher to establish consistency in the methods used over time (Johnson, Adkins, and Chauvin, 2020). In this study, rigor was maintained through the coherence of the frameworks for methodological and conceptual design. Specifically, an example of rigor may be seen by the linking of theory to practice in the analysis of participants’ responses. This led to a greater understanding of the administrators’ view and their perception of their leadership style in supporting inclusion classroom teachers, as well as how they engage and collaborate with school stakeholders for effective inclusion classrooms. Thus, trustworthiness was attained through rigor.

Additionally, trustworthiness was established by providing a data screener to participants in advance of the interview session. This demonstrated the purpose and scope of the study and the nature of their role within it. By providing a Letter of Consent and by following up with a demographic screener, as a preliminary measure, all participants were informed as to why the study was being conducted and the reason the researcher is conducting the interview. The goal was to eliminate bias as to the reason for the interview and why they were chosen to participate. A log was used to record the observer's comments to improve the quality of the data collection. Also, the researcher considered outliers when coding the interviews (Miles, et. al, 2020).

Patton discusses quality in terms of the ability to generalize from the findings of the research. Specifically, comparing tests of validity in quantitative research to triangulation methods in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). Theory triangulation uses different theories to analyze and interpret data to better assist the researcher in supporting findings (Carter, et al, 2014). To that end, Fullan's seven core premises of change theory was used in this study not only as a conceptual basis but as a mode of triangulation (Fullan, 2006).

Such data derived from an analysis of participants' responses linked to Fullan's Change Theory, provided the researcher with greater confidence in generalizing the findings. Thus, establishing trustworthiness through this data source, allowed the researcher to better depict the type of leadership model, efficacy, and responsibilities of administrators so that future administrative personnel can continue the successful inclusion programs. Additionally, Creswell and Poth indicate that triangulation of data is used to establish credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Aside from theory triangulation,

this study also employed data from several sources, such as interviews, focus groups, and artifacts to further promote the trustworthiness, rigor, and quality of the research.

Establishing a rapport with participants should be built on trust (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). One of the ways that trust was established was through the utilization of a consent form. Through the consent form, participants understood that they were not bound to stay in the study. They were allowed to withdraw at any time, they were also informed that this would not impact their jobs or position. Before the interview, each participant received a summary of the research project to inform them of what to expect to discuss during the interview and why it is an important topic (McGrath, et. al., 2009). This step was not only time-saving and practical, but it served to increase trust and build rapport between the researcher and the participants.

The participants were notified in advance that they will be recorded during the interview and that after the completion of a check for accuracy in the transcribing, the file would then be deleted. They were also informed that their names would not be used in the study. Another way that trust was demonstrated was that they were informed that the computer used is password protected and that the software program employed to analyze the transcript, Dedoose, also has password protection.

Researchers have reported that self-disclosure during the interviews may create a less intimidating environment and to that end build trust (Elmir, et. al, 2011). The researcher is certified in Special Education, has taught in an inclusion classroom as a general education teacher, holds certification in both building and district administration, and is currently working on a doctorate in educational administration, the participants would consider the researcher as an indigenous insider.

According to Banks (1998) because of the researcher's position and background, the researcher embodies their values and beliefs, therefore, establishing legitimacy in the subject matter. This allowed the participants to feel more comfortable, knowing that the researcher understands the culture and the structure of the inclusion program. This also added trust that the researcher will not misinterpret the context of the culture they are speaking about. All data were recorded and recoded to ensure that there will be no unintentional bias in the analysis of the findings.

Research Ethics

St. John's University requires that projects that involve humans as research participants are submitted for review and approval by the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB), and that written consent be obtained from all participants. Neither participants' names nor the names of their affiliated schools were used to protect the identities of the participants. Additionally, participants were able to review the transcript of the interview to check for accuracy.

Ethical issues in educational research go beyond a matter of compliance with rules, codes, and principles to issues of ethical dilemmas that may arise out of the context of the discussions or the relationship of the interviewee to their staff. Therefore, researchers must develop a moral sensitivity towards their participants and research topic (Head, 2018). In this study, that was demonstrated through the nature of the interactions between the researcher, and participants and in the process of data analysis and dissemination.

Data Analysis Approach

This section provides an overview demonstrating how the researcher analyzed the data by uploading the transcripts from the individual interviews, focus groups, and artifacts to a computer software program called Dedoose. The process ensures that privacy and validity are taking place in the data analysis process.

Intake of Transcripts to Dedoose

Using the Dedoose program, various descriptors are created. Each principal, along with their transcript was identified by a specific ID. “For the protection of participants, it is essential that researchers mask participants’ name as soon as possible to avoid inclusion of identifiable information in the analysis files” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p.156). Also, descriptors identified background information for each participant, such as the number of years of experience as a principal, whether they hold special education certification, etc.

Coding Procedures

Once the descriptors were created, a start list of codes and definitions of the codes was generated, initially by coding research questions and then coding Michael Fullan’s core premises. The core premises support the theoretical framework of this research and link them to elements of change employed by the participants that allowed the researcher to understand in what way elements of theory guide the decision-making of principals. The seven-core premises provided a perspective on how principals engage and interact with the community and stakeholders for the success of inclusion programs (Fullan, 2006). Furthermore, the codes highlighted principals’ leadership skills in the development and support for inclusion programs within their schools.

Rounds of Data Coding

After coding for Fullan's seven core premises, all transcripts were reread. "Scanning the text allows the researcher to build a sense of the data as a whole without getting caught up in the details of coding" (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p.188). Then the transcripts were rescanned, and initial codes developed in that process yielded a total of seven codes. For the initial codes, the researcher expanded on the start list and then looked for other key codes that emerged throughout all transcripts, eight additional codes were created. Upon completion, the researcher recorded and applied expanded codes, created parent codes, and identified in vivo codes, which led to a total of 15 codes.

After that third round of coding, themes were developed. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), data is aggregated and analyzed to derive relevant themes and concepts. The themes that have been identified were derived from coding, the interviews, and the artifacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The tactic for generating themes according to Miles et al is for the researcher to look for common threads that tie together bits of data (Miles et al., 2018).

Validation of Data Analysis

To check codes and themes the researcher engaged in validation strategies. Critical to this process was reflection. The process of reflection that occurs throughout the phenomenological approach provides a coherent resource for carrying out the analysis needed to derive essential description of the principal's experiences (Moustakas, 1995). That analysis led to three themes emerging from the codes. As Eisner states, "We seek a confluence of evidence that breeds credibility, that allows us to feel confident about our observations, interpretations and conclusions" (Eisner, 1991 p.110). The transcripts and

data were reviewed by an independent university source, this established validation. Additionally, Angen (2000) states that validation is “a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research (Angen, 2000 p. 387).” According to Creswell and Poth (2018) “interpretive qualitative researcher, as a sociohistorical interpreter, interacts with the subject matter to co-create the interpretations derived” (Creswell & Poth, 2018 p.188).

The researcher employed validation protocols throughout the study by using van Manen’s way to assess the level of validation. His criteria for evaluation of phenomenological studies are as followed: heuristic questioning, descriptive richness, interpretive depth, distinctive rigor, strong and adessive meaning, experiential awaking, and conceptual epiphany.

Researcher Role

I am currently a High School Social Studies teacher. I have been working in the same district for 18 years. Throughout my tenure at my school district, I have taught grades 7-12 and I have taught various levels from inclusion classrooms to Advanced Placement (AP). I am not only certified in social studies but also in special education. Additionally, I have Building and District Leadership Certification as well.

I am a social studies teacher who has taught in inclusion classrooms in one of the schools the interviews have taken place in. I have attended professional development meetings and inclusion training programs that the principal has provided. As a school employee, I understand the expectations of the district inclusion policy. The type of researcher I consider myself, according to Banks, would be an indigenous insider (Banks, 1998).

It is important that as a researcher I acknowledge who I am in relationship to the subjects being interviewed and the data that I am collecting and analyzing. It is equally important to acknowledge one's history because experience shapes this study and may influence the interpretation of the data collected. In doing so, I hope to better understand the nature of objectivity in social science research. Objectivity must remain the focus of our role as a researcher. Therefore, the best way to mitigate bias is to acknowledge it (Banks, 2013).

Conclusion

This study was conducted in the Spring of 2022. The study provides insight into the role of the principal in developing and maintaining successful inclusion programs. The findings in the following chapter help to close the gap in the literature that fails to provide secondary principals' perspectives on leadership skills that are needed to create and maintain successful inclusion programs, as well as how secondary principals engage with the community and all stakeholders.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter describes the findings of the study. The participants' voices are heard, and their stories help uncover how secondary principals develop, implement, and maintain successful inclusion programs in their districts. Beginning with an overview of the participants, it looks at how the themes revealed through their discussions relate to the study's theoretical framework, Michael Fullan's Change Theory, in this study.

Findings

Background

This phenomenological study sought to determine how secondary school principals perceive their role in the development and support of inclusion programs, how secondary principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support successful inclusion classrooms, and the leadership skill secondary principals need to possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms. The story that emerged from the data offered insight into what makes a successful inclusion program for all stakeholders and the impact that secondary principals' have in the development, maintenance, and success of such programs. The participants shared their experiences and their perception of their role in creating and maintaining successful inclusion programs and how they foster change over time to help support success.

Three themes emerged based on data analysis: a) Supportive Leader, b.) Collaborative Coordination c.) Cultural Leadership. Throughout these findings, the participants' voices were used to help unpack and formulate the collected data. Artifacts that were collected also confirmed the themes. As previously stated, the interviews were conducted either in person, by phone, or online/virtual, employing Zoom, Google Meet,

or Facetime platforms. All meetings were conducted at the convenience of the participants due to covid concerns. Sessions lasted between 18 to 30 minutes in length.

Themes

Each interview was coded and analyzed following protocols based on Creswell and Poth (2018) and Miles (2018). Initially multiple themes appeared to surface, either they were not broadly apparent throughout the interviews, or they became subsumed into the larger themes which developed. An example of the previous was Sabastian's comments regarding the school district's lack of professional development for administrators. The concern was preeminent in his interview but did not emerge as a point otherwise. Therefore, it did not influence or become as a developed theme. Another example of a topic that was excluded was technology. Joseph expressed concerns regarding technology. Since only one other respondent gave voice to that topic, like administrative staff development it did not influence the themes derived. Such topics were situation specific to individual principals and not generalizable enough to be considered a theme. Correspondingly, the topics of listening, data analysis and PTA involvement appeared frequently, but it became apparent that each was a facet of a much larger theme as discussed in the following sections.

Thus, three distinctive themes emerged throughout as predominant strands. The three apparent themes were: a) Supportive Leader, b.) Collaborative Coordination c.) Cultural Leadership. In this study, each of these three themes will be defined and explained below as they derived from the coding and analysis of respondents' collective replies to the interview questions.

Theme 1: Supportive Leader

Phenological research by its nature emphasizes the participants lived experiences and how they interpret them (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, this study's theoretical framework highlights the administrative role in developing and maintaining successful inclusion programs, a nexus emerged through analysis created by the descriptions that led to the codes used in developing subsequent themes. In the case of the first theme, the codes were listening, collaboration, learning in context, communication, and coordination. These codes not only resonate with key comments shared by participants but also reflect aspects of the theoretical framework. Individual codes may become parent codes, for example, listening includes an administrator's ability to listen effectively to staff, students, and the community. Likewise, collaboration with the community may also be viewed as a child code of the mother code, collaboration. In this round, the coding terms derived from the interview context and Fullan's Seven Core Premises merge together under the theme which is referred to in this research as Supportive Leader.

Collaboration

All the principals talked in detail about how the relationship between themselves and their Department Chairs/coordinators/directors is critical to maximizing inclusion programs' effectiveness. Coding for listening, collaboration, and communication and Fullan's Learning in the context created this theme. Mary shared,

I am sort of blessed with a very proactive and involved special education coordinator. That person takes a very large look at the schedule of our inclusion classes and all specialists, along with the director for special education. That

person is responsible for the structure of our inclusion program. I worked with them if we were looking to change or evaluate the program. I work in concert with these two people.

Joseph had a similar response,

For the most part, the development of the inclusion program comes from the special education department, the director of special education for the secondary level, and the assistant superintendent for special education. They collaborate with the department chairs to create programs and classes that are successful.

Joseph said he shares decision-making with both coordinators and department chairpersons by maintaining open and continuous communication. He reported that if something “isn’t right” or if he is concerned about something or sees something in a classroom, he will go to their office, which is in the building or call him on the phone.

Peter discussed how the bulk of inclusion programs, the “nitty-gritty,” gets done through PPS (Pupil Personnel Services Department) and the special education department. However, that individual also stated, “If we need to add, say, an ICT class or if we need to add additional support in other courses, I’m typically part of that conversation.” Jude, much like Mary and Joseph, described collaborative leadership with regards to shared decision-making with the special education coordinator. In his opinion, it is within the nature of the school district’s structure that lends itself to collaborative leadership. In that structure, the curriculum associates have oversight over their specific departments. Still, he notes, “for that to work best in any one of our schools, the partnership that the curriculum associates have with building administrators become crucial.” As principal, he conducts monthly cabinet meetings but frequently meets

informally with all department chairpersons. He believes that a keen sense of partnership is built as they work together to plan and resolve issues.

Teresa stated that she collaborates regularly with her special education director and assistant director. For example, she stated that, “the other day, we have an inclusion partnership that is just not working very well, and I’ve been involved in trying to mediate and repair the relationship, but really define expectation of both teachers.”

Michael also described how he collaborates with his district’s Special Education Department Chair, by reviewing the teaching schedule and the pairing. Michael said, “For this year coming up, we sat down with our assistant principal for scheduling, and we looked at the pairing and the marriages of the ICT teachers, trying to make sure we have the right partnership.”

Pio related that he shares decision making through collaboration with his assistant principals and the department chairs. He says, “It’s a team approach.”

Throughout the various discussions with principals, each reflected on how they collaborated with other administrators in the development and maintenance of their inclusion programs. Furthermore, they each reiterated that collaboration with stakeholders was essential to understanding the needs and maintenance of the inclusion program.

Communication

Still falling within the theme of Supportive Leadership, Michael emphasized that he “oversees everything” while he leaves the professional development for inclusion programs to the special education department. He believes that it is through communication and a collaborative relationship with the special education chairperson

that a successful program has been built. For example, they discuss issues like scheduling and co-teaching partnership assignments together before decisions are made. Similarly, Augustine also emphasized shared responsibilities with the director of PPS, but ultimately, he assumes responsibility for the success or failure of the inclusion program. Meeting frequently with the director and staff both formally and informally and having “lots of conversations regarding scheduling, pairing, and professional development” is seen by this principal as the key to inclusion program success. Augustine also talked about shared decision making through communication with the department chair.

Augustine stated,

“I just ran from her office. We meet very frequently, unscheduled. It helps that I’m a former Special Education Director and Chairperson myself. We have a lot of conversation, and it always helps when you are doing everything in the best interest of the kids. We’ve been in agreement so far.”

Similarly, Luke specified that,

“In our district as being a principal and being a manager of the building, I don’t have an intimate role in developing those programs. That falls more along the lines of our director of special education and then our executive director for pupil personnel. They have the direct input on kind of building programs, providing support, and giving professional development. As far as we go, we certainly have input if we feel like there’s a pairing that is not working.”

Additionally, Luke explained how he communicates with the director of PPS if he feels change needs to occur with the partnership.

Pio reported that he communicates with the special education coordinators. He talked about how he relies on the assistant principals to communicate with the department chairpersons regarding the inclusion program, and they, in turn, articulate course content for the general education teachers. Pio said, “We all have to be involved and observe and listen to the conversations that are happening.” And then share knowledge and insights. Similarly, Sebastian also uses the assistant principal to articulate to chairpersons and communicate with the central district’s Office of Special Services to coordinate professional development and other programs. Likewise, Sebastian discussed how communication with department chairpersons is essential to the inclusion program’s success. Joseph discussed how he collaborates as well as communicates with the special education department chair as well as the Assistant Superintendent of Special Education to create inclusion programs and classes that are successful. Joseph said, “I speak with the department chair all of the time. He is right in the building, if he wasn’t here, I can get him on the phone in two seconds.”

Like Augustine, Christopher also stated that while a strong working partnership exists with the special education office, the ultimate decisions impacting inclusion classrooms, whether the number of students, general education, special education, or course content, come to him. He meets the special education department chairperson once a week with a “running agenda” to make the most informed decisions possible. They discuss both students, instruction, and teacher observations at those meetings. In that way, Christopher feels he is communicating and creating a supportive relationship.

Teresa said that she does not oversee the inclusion program directly but rather indirectly through the bi-weekly meetings with the special education director and

assistant directors. In that way, she feels that all administrators are working together to advance the program. She perceives herself as overseeing the program indirectly but says she participates in frequent discussions, especially with partnerships developed around individual students. She stated that she is in “constant communication regarding classified students” through a comprehensive committee that meets to discuss the needs of special education students. The committee comprises a teacher, a case manager, a psychologist, and/or social worker who meets with the student and the parent and guidance counselor.

Mary noted that she holds monthly coordinator’s meetings for all of the department chairs to attend. Mary says, “This would be an opportunity for the special education coordinator to bring anything from his teachers to my attention.” Mary also indicated that teachers could talk to her directly. Additionally, she states, “I largely over communicate with parents to keep them abreast of what’s going on with weekly updates.”

Thus, secondary principals reported that working collaboratively with Special Education Coordinators or Department chairpersons has created successful inclusion programs. These secondary principals have described how being a supportive leader means that you need to listen and communicate with the other administrative staff to make an informed decision that benefits students and staff. Regardless of the structure of the special education program set up, these secondary principals rely on communication and meetings to keep abreast of the program because, as many participants noted, the ultimate responsibility of the program falls to them as building principals. In their pursuit of closing the achievement gap and seeing that every student succeeds, they accept their responsibility for all students' growth, whether directly or indirectly.

Theme 2: Instructional Leader

Following the same protocol for code identification as previously discussed, this theme presented itself through coding for data, professional development, schedule, and capacity building. Principals reported using data to help understand where students excelled and areas that needed improvement. Additionally, principals also used the observation process to view students' levels of engagement and understanding. The use of data and observations helps the principal provide feedback to the teacher and then target meaningful professional development that will help improve student outcomes or capacity building.

Data Collection

The secondary principals are responsible for maintaining district and state requirements for professional development for teacher certification. Most respondents consider themselves instructional leaders who guide professional development or acknowledge they strive to be that. New York State Department of Education requires teachers who hold a professional certification to complete 175 hours of Continuing Teacher and Leader Education (CTLE) or professional development every five years (Fact Sheet 21-14: Registration and CTLE – Teachers, 2021). As instructional leaders, these principals use data, observations, and stakeholders' feedback to help them make decisions to utilize professional development to close the achievement gap.

The participants all shared a similar view that data and observation determined the success of their inclusion program. By evaluating the inclusion programs through various methods, the secondary principal understands what changes may need to occur to

maintain its success. Data collection and feedback help the principal drive professional development, teacher pairing, and capacity building.

Mary uses regents scores, formal evaluations, and anecdotal information in terms of feedback from students' parents and inclusion teachers to monitor the success of the inclusion program. Joseph shared that he viewed the success of his inclusion program by how students responded and interacted in class. He noted that when he observes levels of student engagement increasing among inclusion students, he equates that to the successful pairing of general and special education teachers.

Along with teacher feedback, Peter uses quarter grades and regents scores to reflect on whether students are getting the necessary support they need to be successful. Jude also uses grades and regents scores and CST meetings with counselors and support staff to discuss student achievement. He stated that he would communicate with curriculum associates at the end of each marking period to examine all underperforming students.

Michael views student academic growth in terms of skills development in students from one year to the next. He assesses how they retain the material, class participation, and apply what they learned. He states, "It's not just about what they score on an exam; it's what they've retained and how they can apply it." Augustine uses regents scores and observation of the rapport between the teachers and their students, valuing the quality of their interactions. Additionally, he evaluates the model of inclusion they use in the class, considering whether it is genuinely a co-teacher model or a reflection of one lead teacher and one assistant. This is congruent with the artifact of the participant, the district's mission statement, and vision. Those documents affirm the

significance of carefully planned instructional units, appropriate methodology, coordinated assessments, and examination of outcomes to grow student knowledge and skills.

Luke also uses quarter grades as an indicator, stating that his goal is to ensure that general and special education students succeed in quarter grades. He does not want general education students advancing in ICT and special education students doing poorly in ICT. Comparison of progress between groups indicates the program's success or failure. Additionally, Luke specified that regents scores and the culture within the classroom, observations, interactions among students, and the "chemistry of the co-teachers" contribute to his view of program success. Pio additionally uses teacher observation and evaluation of the teacher relationship. "I think that our most successful inclusion classes and our programs are based on relationships. I mean, obviously, you could stick anybody in the classroom that has the correct certification but if you don't have the right pairing and the right dynamic between the two teachers in the classroom, you're really at a loss."

Similarly, Sebastian uses formal teacher assessment and how co-teachers interact with one another during the lessons. For that principal, "the chemistry and their interaction usually correlate to better results for kids." Additionally, formative assessments to monitor student understanding of the course material are critical to that principal because he states that "not all students perform well on final assessments." Christopher reported that he uses year-end outcomes and whether those students with IEPs have met their annual goals. Teresa also measures the success of inclusion programs through teacher collaboration, the engagement of the students in the classroom

activities, and student outcomes, whether in grades or student advancement in programs in the future.

Co-Teacher Pairing

Co-teacher pairing emerged as a significant factor in successful inclusion programs and a critical aspect of the principals' leadership role. By collecting data both formally and informally on co-teacher pairing, these secondary administrators can then make modifications to create the change needed to maintain successful inclusion programs. For example, Joseph reported that he considers personalities when pairing co-teachers or teachers' requests to be placed in teams. He maintains flexibility, "if a pairing does not work out, then we will try a different pair the next year." Peter stated that teacher requests, volunteering, and annual evaluation are critical to co-teacher pairing. He reported that "sometimes two people may work great independently, but it's not a great mix together. And we've had to break up some partnerships because they haven't been as effective." He notes that he has had partnerships that have lasted 7-10 years. Peter looks for teachers that show collaboration outside of the classroom. He looks for people who naturally collaborate with their colleagues, to begin with. He looks for flexibility. He states, "It takes a great deal of flexibility to work with special needs population. So, I wouldn't necessarily want to pair up a really flexible teacher with someone who is incredibly rigid in their thinking."

Michael looks for willing participants and teachers who can collaborate and effectively communicate to share ideas for pairing co-teachers. He stated, "You need to have a collaborative person, an open-minded person, a flexible person as someone who is well versed on the needs of special education students." Augustine works in a small

district that actively seeks to hire teachers with dual certification. He reported that he tries to pair co-teachers based on their level of comfort with the content and willingness to collaborate.

Luke reports a holistic approach when pairing co-teachers. He wants to make sure that those teachers do not have personal issues with each other. He also looks at personalities, sensitive that the content teacher is not too much of an alpha personality or unwilling to share. Like Peter, Luke stated that sometimes you have two individuals that just work great with kids, but “they just don’t mix well together” in the classroom. He also reflected on observation and his communication with pairs and student grades. Pio determined pairing through several factors and emphasized scheduling, recognizing that “sometimes the schedule does not allow for variation.” Pio offered an additional insight, “Sometimes there is an expiration date on inclusion partnerships. And sometimes teachers don’t even see that themselves. Sometimes you have to make that decision because either they’ve maybe become a little stagnant or they might need some change, or they might have something going on in their lives that’s impacting their ability to work with someone else.” Sebastian also looks for teacher requests and volunteers. In his view, some content teachers might not realize that they could have an aptitude for teaching inclusion classes. Therefore, this principal takes the initiative to encourage those teachers to teach inclusion classes that he thinks “would be great at it.” Christopher looks at how teachers collaborate and if “they can play nice in the sandbox.” Teresa looks at personalities, the strengths of the teachers as well as improvements for other teachers. She says sometimes that could be a good partnership because they can

learn from each other. But despite everything else, she admits that sometimes the schedule dictates paring.

Professional Development

Through informal and formal data, the secondary principals measure the success of programs and then use that to either facilitate change or maintain successful co-teacher paring. Their responses demonstrate their knowledge of their staff helps them as instructional leaders to develop and maintain successful inclusion programs.

Additionally, such data will help to guide professional development. Mary sees herself as an instructional leader; however, she acknowledged that she did not provide additional inclusion/ professional development support due to the pandemic. She emphasized that in her circumstance, determining the content and frequency of professional development for inclusion teachers, special education, and general education relies on department chairpersons and the needs they decide based on what the data indicates and what inclusion classroom teachers report needing. Mary also showed that while the school district has provided teachers with professional development, it has not offered to address similar administrator needs. This comment is consistent with a metacognitive study of principals and special education that stated, “For principals to fulfill their responsibilities for the performance of all students, additional training in special education for principals in both leadership preparation programs, and professional development are necessary.” (Sumberaa, Pazeyb, and Lashleyca, 2014, p.318).

Joseph also would love to say he is an instructional leader, but he feels it has been a challenge because of the size of the school. His scope of responsibility is extensive, leaving less time for professional development concerns. His district gives him access to

go to professional development conferences. He stated that in cabinet meetings with assistant principals and the various directors, he gets the time to discuss instructional strategies and techniques about which he has learned. Joseph stated that he relies on the directors to disseminate ideas to their staff on all levels. But he also discussed using special education teachers to present inclusion strategies to the faculty. That approach is rooted in his belief that teachers learn best from other teachers.

Peter sees himself as an instructional leader. Although the school district hired a trainer/consultant for the inclusion program, Peter has provided professional development in multiple workshops to develop a greater understanding of IEPs to improve how student needs are met within the inclusion classroom. He does acknowledge he has not done specific PD on inclusion to the general staff. Peter states that he collaborates with the consultant to determine professional development, providing explicit content recommendations through reflection on classroom observations he has conducted. The artifact for Peter is a posting on his website that demonstrates how he works with the Special Education Council in his district to provide presenters on topics to help teachers, parents, and students better educate themselves on special education topics. This is an example of providing support for all stakeholders and collaboration with parents.

While Jude has a background as a staff developer and has presented workshops on social-emotional learning, he reports that he relies on curriculum associates for professional development. Currently, a consultant is collaborating with administrators regarding Danielson rubrics, and that consultant will also provide PD for the faculty. Michael believes as a building principal, "I am supposed to lead by example. I'm supposed to be the master teacher." He wants to move the district forward into the 21st

century, and in that regard, he anticipates conducting more PD next year regarding this philosophy. Additionally, he acknowledges the in-service professional development and out-of-service credit available for teachers regarding inclusion. He has provided additional support to inclusion teachers through BOCE's training in collaboration with special education teachers.

Augustine also sees himself as an instructional leader. He works with teachers to hear what they want or need in professional development. He discussed how he trusts their professionalism and opinion. Augustine's district office provided intensive coaching and professional development that included sessions on inclusivity to all inclusion partners. This principal also stated that adding to his professional development was a collegial rapport with local principals, including networking and shared experiences. This principal will directly assess professional development needs through check-ins, meetings, and informal conversations with inclusion co-teachers.

Luke reflected on his administrative classes and how his professors encouraged their students to become instructional leaders. He conveyed that he strives to get better at being an instructional leader. Augustine responded in a way that was like Joseph in that he described the school day as taking a "turn towards things you didn't plan for." Due to the covid pandemic, he has not participated in much professional development. He feels that as he moves away from restrictions, he will increase engagement in professional development. He has a strong partnership with the former principals in the district and a mentorship with the superintendent and assistant superintendent. He has provided professional development for his inclusion faculty, especially in digital instruction, with additional support to co-teachers from the building facilitator of special education. That

person is the liaison between the director of special education and the teachers and is directly tasked with providing support to inclusion co-teachers. He stated that there is also a director of special education, and teachers can reach out to any administrator. They will provide support or professional development the teacher feels they need.

Pio also shared the same sentiments with Joseph and Augustine that if he could get rid of “a lot of other hats,” he would see himself as an instructional leader. His support for the inclusion co-teachers is professional development both in-house and or in workshops. He observes the teachers through walkthroughs to determine professional development needs. His goal is to expose them to different strategies and approaches. Participant 9, with the Office of Student Services director, has formed collegial circles to discuss appropriate strategies for inclusion classrooms. He also described how teachers communicate what they want and need for professional development and admitted that sometimes PD topics come from the top-down. His approach is to identify a couple of valuable strategies during the summer before the opening of school when he has time to reflect, then at the start of the year to focus on those strategies with the staff.

Sebastian’s artifact is his mission statement. In it, he states that he wants to create a community that will educate and graduate young adults. By focusing on being an instructional leader and guiding teachers, he believes that he is working on his mission statement.

Christopher says that he considers himself to be an instructional leader; that is his role as building principal. At least three times a year, he has his staff run their professional development. He will ask his team what they feel they need professional development on, whether technology-based, mental health issues, pedagogical matters

relating to instructional design or curriculum, or state-imposed regulations. He will find staff members who can run one-hour sessions on whatever the faculty identifies.

Teachers are then given choices of workshop sessions they can attend. Christopher says there is always an inclusion or inclusion-like topic in that professional development. He also stated that while his own professional development consists of a one-day event in the summer, a collegial circle of district administrators meets once a month to discuss an educational book they are reading. He additionally supports his co-teachers by providing either in-service or out-of-district professional development. He has the director of special education meet with new co-teaching teams during planning times at the beginning of the school year for the first few weeks. He also assesses professional development needs through observations.

Teresa also views herself as an instructional leader. She stated that she is in her position because the district wanted the principal to be more instructional leader than a manager. She says her work with the directors and coordinators is instructional. She said, "I'm so privileged to have three assistant principals who really do a lot of the management aspect so that I can really focus on instruction and curriculum." Throughout the year, she provides professional development to support inclusion co-teachers. She comminates with directors of each of the content areas and the coordinator and director of special education to determine professional development in addition to using observation and listening to what the teachers need and want.

Secondary principals who use both informal and formal data become instructional leaders. The data they analyze helps them make changes in teacher pairing to help maintain their program's success or provide them with insights to help drive professional

development. Their communication and involvement determine how these principals know their students and staff. In that regard, they have a more significant potential to become in tune with the culture of their building.

Theme 3: Cultural Leader

The final round utilized the codes of inclusiveness, tri-level engagement (articulation from federal, state, and local school boards), communication with stakeholders, and focus on motivation and changing context. It was evident that principals who understood the needs of their building through an examination of the school culture that was based on communication with parents, teachers, and students, were better able to make changes to sustain the effectiveness of their inclusion program. Qualities inherent in those descriptors led to the theme of Cultural Leader.

This study defines cultural leadership as the secondary principal's knowledge of the teacher, student, and all stakeholders. It reflects the secondary principal's understanding of the stakeholders' shared beliefs, values, and norms and the way they are expressed through the interaction each stakeholder has with the other. The secondary principal has a pulse on the building. By understanding their school's culture, they can create an environment of motivation, support, and inclusiveness. This will help to improve not only academics but improve the overall capacity of the school.

Tri-Level Engagement

The role of cultural leadership can take many forms. Most secondary principals reported that collaboration with parents is crucial for creating successful inclusion programs. Mary said, "I largely over-communicate with them to keep them abreast of what is going on, with weekly updates." The artifact for Mary is from their school's

website. It is a description of the programs for students with disabilities. It provides the community with the goals of the special education program. It also encourages tri-level engagement by providing the reader with how they work with federal, state, and district stakeholders to provide appropriate education to fit students' needs. Furthermore, it states that parents and students are essential and vital members of the community and are invited to all CSE meetings.

Joseph stated that there is a good collaboration with Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA). Citing the size of his school district, he said that the system of communication coming from the office of the director of special education to the buildings was the most helpful form of communication. "You want one central focus to come down to give you all the information as opposed to splinter groups," he said. Consistency in communications with family and community and staff could best be maintained. The artifact of Joseph demonstrates his involvement with SEPTA, but as a cultural leader, it demonstrates his support for the shared common beliefs underlying their shared goals for the inclusion of students. His invitation for parents to join SEPTA not only supports the shared goal of providing information, resources, and support to parents, educators, and children, but also provides links and email addresses so that people have access to communicate with the organization.

This is similar to Jude's artifact and indicative of working with SEPTA and encouraging not only collaboration with parents but communication as well. This principal also reposts that he attends every first meeting of each Committee for Special Education (CSE) referral. This, he said, allows him to know what strategies have been used and why there is a need for an IEP. He is setting the tone as a Cultural Leader

modeling the importance of the nature of the committee's process and each stakeholder's role in it and thus reinforcing the beliefs, values, and norms inherent in special education law and practices.

Peter discussed when new integrated co-teaching classes (ICT) emerged some parents are concerned that their child who is in general education was placed in it. He discussed how he educates parents about ICT and how it benefits student learning. This aspect of being a cultural leader and promoting change could not be better articulated. Like Mary, the social responsibility that derives from a moral purpose that Fullan (2000) discussed is evident in their behaviors.

Michael attended a workshop to address parent communication and the issue of what parents want for their children. At that event, he asked participants, what could be done as a school district to be more inclusive with the special education population. Opening the dialog and seeking communication is a critical aspect of cultural leadership. Through this and other outreach activities, Michael is looking forward to continued dialogue with parents in the future. Augustine also echoed how parent communication is an ongoing conversation. Whether at pre-CSE meetings, the CSE itself, or at any informal or formal parent meetings, parents feel comfortable calling and being called upon for information.

Luke, consistent with his role as a cultural leader, created a shared decision-making team where he has groups of parents that meet once a month to talk about programs and goals they want to see set for the school. He also reports that he attends PTA meetings as well as SEPTA meetings and has an open line of communication with parents. Likewise, Participant 8 also formed parent committees. He states, "while

parents do not have a lot of say in how inclusion programs work but we do listen to feedback on their experiences as we move on, and that usually drives our decisions for partnerships and making changes year to year”. In a similar way, Christopher also reported that he communicates routinely with parents, uses the PTA to discuss issues, and forms committees with a parent representative. Through this process, he feels he is providing an opportunity for parental concerns to be aired and addressed. It is also a significant venue to promote the goals of inclusion and norms surrounding inclusivity.

Teresa, a first-year principal, stated she is trying to work on communication. She wants to keep parents informed of what is happening during the school day as well as keep open dialogue and communication. She also invites parents into the school to showcase various programs and encourages parents to call with questions. These initiatives demonstrate her understanding of her role as a cultural leader.

Inclusiveness

Most principals create a culture of inclusiveness by being aware of differences, not ignoring them. Many principals have developed clubs, sports, and activities for all groups to join. They try to provide opportunities and classes for all students despite their academic differences. That speaks to the values, a leader wishes to impart that is consistent with the special education law and the beliefs and practices associated with an inclusive school environment. In that regard, Mary reported unified sports and adaptive PE classes for general education students and life skills students. Joseph sends a letter home to honors and highest honors and life skills students. He affirms, “Everybody is a student here. Nobody knows who has an IEP and who doesn’t.”

Peter helps students to articulate their voices and make sure that all students are recognized, and their concerns can be heard. He reported that he recognizes their diversity and celebrates students through a variety of successes, not just “highflyers” but all students in a variety of subjects, both academic, co-curricular, and athletic, within the community as well as outside.

This is Michael’s first year in his school, although he has been a principal for eleven years in two different school districts prior to coming to this assignment. He has set as his focus and his main mission as a new principal, to create a culture of inclusiveness within the school. Currently, he sees his school as three schools in one building: English as a New Language (ENL), Special Education, and General Education. His goal clearly reflects Fullan’s notion of moral purpose in terms of his approach to cultural change. He wants all events, and activities to include and involve all students. Some initial steps he has taken to that end is the formation of an ambassador’s club, in which general education students work with special education students to foster and include special education students in all other activities and school events.

Augustine’s artifact of the district mission illustrates how he is aligning his school’s inclusion program with that mission by creating a culture of inquiry through teacher’s instructional routines by exploring and engaging in social, local, and global issues. Additionally, this principal valued the social and emotional supports that have been provided for all stakeholders and expressed his hope to foster a culture where all students are vested and see themselves as stakeholders as well.

Luke also focused on school clubs as an approach to promote greater inclusion outside of the classroom. He has student greeters in the morning to greet other students

as they walk in. He also has established grade-level assemblies to discuss with the student the vision of the building regarding culture and respect for one another. At those assemblies, he explained, speakers from different community groups show students how working together can promote more inclusion. This is similar to the artifact in which the principal shows how his conduct is identical to the district's statement. Their policy of non-discrimination includes the areas of job recruitment and appointment of positions, pay, counseling services for students, and educational programs for students. Additionally, the artifact states how they work in a tri-level engagement with federal, state, and district to adhere to laws to create a safe learning environment for all stakeholders. Luke's artifact also provides a step-by-step process for staff or students to file their concerns if they have a complaint or perceive a matter of discrimination.

In yet a different and perhaps more pragmatic approach, Pio discussed how he changed the hallways to promote inclusion. By redesigning the use of classrooms, that principal eliminated what was once a special education wing of the school building. All subject area teachers, whether general education, special education, or ICT, are in the same hallway. He also has the special education teachers attend content area department meetings to promote greater integration in inclusion classroom approaches. This supports the idea of inclusiveness. Pio's artifact from his website encourages parents to contact the school whenever they need it. On his website, he explains the ways parents can communicate with teachers and the process to follow.

Cultural Leadership to support diversity took many forms in these interviews. Sebastian discussed how the café, and every other activity are open to every student. They also have a diversity club at their school. Additionally, they started a life coaching

course for both staff and a course for students. Christopher also greets students as they enter the building. He makes sure that his team feels included by having a sunshine club. Christopher's artifact is the Student Rights and Responsibilities page in their school handbook. It correlates with how he is creating a culture of safety and a supportive school environment by stating all activities are free of discrimination and harassment in conjunction with the law. Teresa also has 60 clubs and honor societies in her building, plus athletics. She said there is a club for everybody. She seeks to create an environment of open-mindedness by making people feel supported and welcomed in any club they choose to belong to.

Scheduling

Many of the secondary principals noted that shared scheduling time for co-teachers is helpful to the program's success and creates an environment of collaboration and communication. Secondary principals also have said they try to schedule a common preparation period, but if the schedule does not lend itself to it, the co-teachers will plan on their own free time. This supports the idea of focusing on motivation and the culture of the building and is supported by the comments of the participating principals.

Mary says teachers do not have a scheduled time to plan, so they often work together in their free time. Joseph tries to organize a common prep period for the co-teachers to plan, but sometimes the schedule does not accommodate it. Hence, they try to schedule a common free period or lunch period. Peter also says that they do not have a common scheduled time; however, contractually, regular meetings are required at least once a month for curricular issues. He states that often the co-teachers use their own free

time within the day-to-day schedule to plan. Jude ideally would have one period of co-planning during the day. He tries to build it into the schedule.

Michael also tries to build a co-planning period into the schedule. He stated that his high school has a larger student body, “it’s very difficult to make sure that teachers have common planning. In smaller settings, in the middle school or in elementary setting it is more frequent and more common, but in high school, it’s very difficult to have common planning. Obtainable and achievable, but very difficult.”

Augustine agreed that it is more challenging in the master schedule to have built-in co-teacher planning periods at the high school level. He uses faculty meetings, professional development days, and conference days to accommodate co-teachers when he can. Luke’s school has a ninth-period day which is reserved for additional help with students or reserved for co-planning time. It is also used for professional development.

Pio also tries to give inclusion co-teachers a common prep time within the master schedule. He anticipates moving to a 9-period day next year, allowing for a common prep period. Sebastian tries to schedule a period or two where the co-teachers either have a common prep, free period, or lunch together. Additionally, teachers are required to stay for professional development either before or after school for 30 minutes, and they could use that time to also plan and prep. Sebastian’s mission statement serves as his artifact. In this mission statement, he expresses his commitment to educating and graduating students who become young adults that achieve success through the principles of respect, belonging, and security. This mission statement reflects the beliefs, values, and norms of the culture of this school and demonstrates the principal’s role as a cultural leader.

Christopher also has a 9-period school day, and when the master schedule is built, he tries to create a common prep period for co-teachers. He lamented that it has become more complicated when the special education co-teacher works with multiple general education teachers in the ICT setting. Teresa acknowledges that there needs to be improved scheduling time for co-teachers to plan. This is her first year as principal, and moving forward, she is looking to create a schedule with a common prep period for inclusion co-teachers to collaborate and plan together.

Many teachers have taken their own time to plan with co-teachers this is a testimony to the culture of the build as well as motivation for the improvement of student growth. The Cultural Leaders articulate vision through faculty meetings, professional development, and conversations with teachers and parents both formally and informally. This creates a culture of inclusiveness because all stakeholders are informed, have a shared vision, and creates focus on motivation.

The theme of cultural leader was developed because of the codes: inclusiveness, tri-level engagement, communication, and focus on motivation. Through various approaches, these secondary principals created a culture where inclusion students and the inclusion program could succeed.

Conclusion

The participants' interviews and artifacts lend their voices in this phenomenological study to articulate how secondary principals' role is critical in the development, implementation, and maintenance of successful inclusion programs. Their point of view and their actions help to give an understanding of how each has experienced the same occurrence in different schools and districts. The examination of

their lived experience through in-depth interviews and artifacts has helped to provide insights needed to create successful inclusion programs in districts currently classified as failing districts.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter will explore the findings that were collected as a result of this phenomenological-based research, additionally, this chapter relates the identified themes to the research question as well as the framework that was highlighted throughout the study. Moreover, this chapter will provide appropriate recommendations for future studies as well as implications for researchers and practitioners. Today's secondary principals are tasked with many responsibilities. Understanding how principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining inclusive special education programs has informed this research and allowed it to extrapolate the role of the principal as it reflects Michael Fullan's Change Theory (Fullan, 2001) and thus how it correlates and applies to other areas of school reform.

In an analysis of the relationship of the results of this study to the theoretical framework demonstrates Fullan's assertion that for educational change to occur reformers need two sets of knowledge: leaders need to link to an educational theory, constructivism, learning style, or any theory they support. It further illustrates that successful principals also need to know about the management of change, how to change a culture, and respond to resistance, and how to understand the overload of changes and the political context in which they exist (Escobar-Arcay, 2009). This balance of administrative competencies is reflected in the seven core principles of Change Theory and is illustrated in the remarks and responses of the data collected through interviews and artifact analysis.

Discussion of Findings

This section analyzes the results of the study by looking at how responses to each research question align with the premises inherent in the theoretical framework of Fullan's Change Theory. As previously discussed, topics which emerged during interviews were coded and reviewed for common threads and relevance. Some were discarded and others subsumed into the larger themes which emerged as characteristic and significant to the participants. The following section discusses those themes in relationship to each of the research questions.

Relationship of Themes to Research Questions

In response to the first research question, "How do secondary school principals perceive their role in developing and supporting the inclusion classroom?" the theme, Supportive Leader emerged. Throughout the various discussions with principals, each reflected on how they collaborated with other administrators in the development and maintenance of their inclusion programs. Furthermore, they each reiterated that collaboration with teachers was essential to understanding the needs and the maintenance of the inclusion program. Principals described how they were able to support their goals of inclusion programs by working in harmony with administrators, teachers, and parents to create successful programs.

Through a synthesis of participants' comments, it became clear that principals were able to support teachers and administrators because they were excellent communicators. Principals who communicated with teachers and other stakeholders developed a level of trust and respect. Since the principals discussed having both informal and formal meetings both of these styles helped to demonstrate that the principal

wanted to hear feedback to make changes to the program, help teachers improve pedagogy, and understand both teacher and student perspectives. Therefore, communication helped to create a supportive leader for all stakeholders. Secondary principals perceive their roles as supporting all stakeholders through collaboration and communication these skills were important to them in the development and maintenance of inclusion programs in their buildings.

The theme, Instructional Leader, emerged through an analysis of responses to the second research question, “How do secondary school principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support successful inclusion classrooms?” The principals all reported using data to help to drive the maintenance of both professional development as well as the success of the inclusion program. All of them also stated that success was not only measured by test scores or quarter grades but also by their observation of the classroom instruction and by the feedback of teachers, students, and other stakeholders. Interpreting, analyzing, and reflecting on both formal and informal data allowed these principals to stay the course or create change. It also helped to drive the type of professional development that was specific and targeted for both students and teachers. Therefore, the teachers saw that the principals were aware of the needs, they too were vested and were up to date on the current pedagogy. This created a level of trust and demonstrated Fullan’s idea of capacity building.

Additionally, principals were tasked with schedules and pairing of co-teachers. Creating successful pairings and building schedules that allowed for common prep periods also demonstrated how secondary principals engage with school stakeholders to create successful inclusion programs. Some principals did mention that though this is not

always possible they endeavor to try to the best of their ability to create pairings who work well together and provide them with time opportunities to plan and collaborate together. These reflections support the idea of how they see themselves as instructional leaders in their building.

The theme, Cultural Leader addressed the third research question, “What leadership skills do secondary principals need to possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms within their school environment?” The principals discussed creating an environment of inclusiveness. Upon reflection, this meant that all students regardless of ability had opportunities to be educated and participate in activities together. In order to create this environment, the principals explained through tri-level engagement, communication, and collaboration they were able to create clubs and classrooms where all students regardless of ability could participate. Creating an environment where students and staff feel respected and safe helps to improve academic success.

The principals discussed how they knew the personalities of teachers and students through communication which also helped with understanding the culture and history of the building. This helped to provide insight to the principals in deciding how to pair teachers of inclusion classes, which classes should be offered, and which clubs should be developed.

Thus, being a Cultural Leader implies being a change agent who is able to communicate goals, foster inclusiveness and diversity, focus on tri-level engagement, and support teachers in their efforts to focus on motivation, all with the goal of creating inclusion programs that are successful.

Relationship to Prior Research

This study looks to address the gap in the current research literature. Pancsofar and Petroff's (2016) study looks at teachers from preschool to 12 grade and found that those teachers who had a common planning period were likely to use different models of inclusion. Additionally, the study found that the length of time co-teachers taught together, teacher attitude, and professional development also impacted the different approaches that co-teachers used. The researchers suggested that administrators may potentially play a role in the outcome of teacher pairing, collaboration, and the different models that are used in the inclusion setting. The results of these findings aid in closing the gap in this research. The principal's role in teacher pairing helps to support a positive collaboration. Furthermore, the principals try to create planning periods so that teachers can collaborate on lessons. The principals of this study also address their vision of what inclusion should look like and provide teachers with professional development to support the goals of the district.

Murawski discusses five key steps to creating a successful co-teaching environment (Murawski et al., 2015). The suggestions presented align with the voices of the secondary principals in this study. For example, many of the principals' who were interviewed observed both formally and informally co-teaching pairs. The principals use the post-observation conference not only to discuss the instructional issues relevant to the observed lesson but also to explain the vision of inclusion for the teachers. The principals want to see either team teaching or stations when they observe classes. Ideally, whichever model is used in the observation, the observer should not be able to tell the general education teacher from the special education teacher. Furthermore, the

principals' collaborated with all stakeholders in developing, implementing and maintain successful programs. The principals also attest to trying, when possible, to keep partners together who are successful. And all the principals interviewed reported measuring success through various data collected, as Murawski and colleagues recommend (Murawski et al., 2015).

According to Carpenter and Dyal, (2007) it is important that teachers be flexible and change their teaching styles to accommodate the inclusion model. This article discussed how inclusion starts with collaboration, acceptance, and most importantly a proactive secondary principal who understands the importance of class size ratio. It also affirms that teachers need principals who can help establish a clear vision of what inclusion should be with professional development to understand it and planning time to implement it. The secondary principals in this current study addressed those issues directly. They stated that they adhere to state and federal law when it comes to the size/ratio of students in inclusion classes. Additionally, when possible, the principals' said to try to go below the mandate, if possible, because smaller classrooms to them are more successful. The principals collaborate with all stakeholders especially Special Education Administrators to maintain the success of the model that many of them inherited and to make changes to maintain the success. The voices of the secondary principals' that were used in this study reflected Carpenter and Dyal's sentiments regarding the importance of professional development and teacher planning time.

Boscardin (2005) discussed changes in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and mandates for the inclusion program in terms of the role of the principal as problem solvers and moral leaders and the shift from viewing themselves as managers to

becoming instructional leaders (2005). The principals that were interviewed for this current research expressed how when developing, implementing, and maintaining programs they look first to see if it benefits students. They felt a strong moral obligation to students. Additionally, they reported that they see themselves as instructional leaders guiding professional development. The principals reported that they all evaluate their professional development and use data to support maintaining or implementing changes.

Through an analysis of their own words, this current research focused on closing the gap in the research that failed to demonstrate how secondary school principals plan and develop inclusion programs and how they implement them while maintaining compliance with various laws. Furthermore, this research addressed how administrators view their perception of their leadership style in supporting inclusion classrooms teaches as well as how they engage and collaborate with stakeholders.

Relationship to the Theoretical Framework

Michal Fullan's Change Theory was the theoretical framework of this research, and his seven-core premises were used as deductive coding. All the principals discussed motivating the teachers in various ways. None specifically referenced Fullan or any other change theorist in describing how they plan their work, however analysis of their statements revealed that elements of Fullan's seven premises permeated their discussions and approaches, underlying their decision-making.

Fullan defines capacity building as "any strategy that increases the collective effectiveness of a group to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning (Fullan, 2006 p.9)." The principals all stated that they use data from the New York State Regents, Quarter grades, and observations to measure growth and evaluate programs, including the

success of the inclusion programs. Jude indicates, “So, there are indications along the way, similar to formative assessments, we want to know how students are progressing. So, we have a multitude of ways in our school that we are keeping track of student performance.” The principals then use that knowledge to either change teacher pairing or implement new professional development to help improve capacity building. Jude concludes that they are working with consultants as they transition to the Danielson rubric. He also said he created a program that he calls The Nested Program to help provide social and emotional learning. It is a period built into the schedule every three weeks where the steering committee and a group of teachers develop and model lessons for the staff. The staff then turnkeys those lessons in their classroom.

Principals also demonstrated Michael Fullan’s promises of Learning in Context by establishing helping to create collegial circles where teachers discuss their best teachers’ strategies. Pio will observe a team and if he notices a deficiency, he will then pair them up with another team who is stronger in that area to develop a collegial circle to not only help improve that area, but it fosters a culture of collaboration among staff. Christopher mentioned that through their observations they will select teachers to lead professional development sessions for other teachers.

The principals also reported that when they make a change what guides their thought process is what is best for the student. Teresa states, “What’s best for kids. And, really is who, what, when, where is going to be best for these kids in order for them to be successful because that’s our number one job and our number one priority. I think people say that all the time, but it’s definitely something that drives every decision that I make here.” Principals also reported if there is no growth in student performance that is an

indication that change needs to occur. Michael concludes, “When you see your data stagnate over a period of time something has to happen. Once you become flat, you understand that Okay, something is not working.” Also, some principals reported that they discuss with staff their evaluation of a program.

Additionally, some principals also considered if pedagogy, state, or federal mandate require change they will learn what those changes are and turnkey those changes to the staff. When changes occur Michael states, “Anytime you want to start something new it has to be vetted. Even if it’s a mandate, we will in the Covid world, mandates come down regularly and here it is and we start it in the educational world, mandates change, effective change has to happen slowly. Sometimes organically, and gradually into a system. So, if we have time to implement a change for an upcoming school year, of course, communication is key. Getting teachers’ input is key. Asking what’s the best way we could implement whatever that change is. How do we roll it out? Because often too many times in education rollouts are terrible and then it doesn’t work. So, it’s all about the rollout. It’s all about communication.”

A characteristic that all secondary principals demonstrated was a bias for reflective action. All the principals showed that they have reflected upon their actions, programs, and intentions. Augustine demonstrated reflective action for the pairing of inclusion teachers. When evaluating teacher pairing, he looks at the whole picture. Additionally, Augustine mentions that he strives to get better at being an instructional leader. He reflects on his administrative classes and how all of his professors tell being a principal is about being an instructional leader. He acknowledges that there are outstanding principals who make it a point that they are getting updated PD on instruction

and how to improve it. He wants to improve this and grow as an instructional leader. When determining if a program is not successful, Peter, states you have to assess why it's not successful. He asks himself, is it about the pairing? Is it about the curriculum? This reflective practice helps him to make changes to maintain the success of the program.

Fullan believes that a change leader must have tri-level engagement. This will include communication with stakeholders which include the building, district, state, teachers, and parents. The secondary principals' participants all stated that communication with stakeholders was important for this success. Michael supports these ideas stating, "First, myself it's a lot of research and education, as a principal and instructional leader, and then from there, it's taking that information in turn, keying it to all of our stakeholders, whether it's our teachers, our parents our students, our board of education. Having everyone informed in the beginning saves a lot of miscommunications. Teresa also concludes with, "the most important thing, really, is the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the parent. In terms of my teachers, my door is always open. I'm a big believer in having face-to-face conversations and really just hearing everyone's side and seeing what's happening. So, encouraging as much communication and directly as possible, not going around somebody, I think is really important."

Michael Fullan's staying the course is when a new program is in its infancy and experiencing some setbacks however staying the course over time will help to improve the outcome. Most of these principals inherited the inclusion model that is currently in use today. They did continue with the model and in that regard stayed the course.

However, Peter, who has been in his district as principal the longest compared to the

other principals did have to reconcile with the school's parents when the district introduced the Integrated Co-Teaching model. Peter said, "So we've had some pushback at times, especially as we're rolling out some of the new ICT classes, parents are a little worried because what's my child in that class? I don't want my child in that because that's for Special Education. And we are reminding them, that it's not for Special Ed. And we try to educate them that look, you get two teachers in a small class."

Implication of Findings

The following section will explore the implication of the research findings as they pertain to the three major areas. The first will include a reflection upon principals' responses to the research questions and the implication of school leadership in terms of inclusion programs. It will then also review the implication for future research and practice.

Principals' Responses to the Research Questions

The first research question was, "How do secondary school principals perceive their role in the development and support of inclusion classrooms within their school environment?" The data revealed by the participants showed secondary principals are supportive leaders to teachers, stakeholders, and to the special education administrator. The principals' reported that they collaborate with Special Education Coordinators, Chairpersons, or Administrators. The role of the principal to support teachers in the inclusion program is essential for its success. This is also indicated by Smith and Leonard (2006). Indeed, the role of the principal as a "support" for inclusion emerged frequently as a significant factor in the successful implementation of the change initiative (Smith & Leonard 2006).

Additionally, principals not only collaborated with department chairs, or special education coordinators but also collaborated with teachers. To make sure the vision of inclusion which is the shared vision of the district and the principal, was being implemented in the classroom the principals reported that they conducted both formal and informal classroom observations. This allowed them to see what is happening in the classrooms. These observations helped to collect data to not only evaluate the teachers but the success of the inclusion programs. Such observations would be used to help foster professional conversation about teacher pairing, and pedagogy which in turn will help the principal to understand the type of professional development that is needed either to maintain or to change the program to maintain its success. This supported Boscardin's contention that secondary principals who can evaluate teachers and provide feedback that is applicable to the curriculum and specific to the needs of the learners will help to close the achievement gap. The administrators through the observation process can foster an environment of support, and trust and demonstrate their understanding of pedagogy, therefore, creating high-quality teachers who then can foster successful inclusion programs for all learners. (Boscardin, 2005).

The principals described themselves in this role in various ways, liaison, the main point person, and even gatekeeper. All seem apt at various times. The principal receives information from Federal, State, and District offices, teachers, parents, and students. Then they disseminate the information and collaborate with all stakeholders to develop, implement, and maintain successful inclusion programs. All the principals interviewed described various methods they employed to communicate with stakeholders. Consistent with established good practice, they provided staff and parents with information

regarding laws and the value of the inclusion programs will help to foster positive results and additionally create a culture of not only awareness but also inclusiveness. Schuster states that this can be done through boarding meetings, PTA/SEPTA meetings, and faculty meetings and it is also important that the principal makes themselves available to answer questions (Schuster, 1985).

The principals also use data from state exams and quarterly reports to help them evaluate the inclusion program. By listening to stakeholders, observing inclusion classrooms, and evaluating assessment scores the principals then make decisions based on their information to make changes to either teacher pairing, professional development, or changes in schedule. This relates to what Fullan describes as knowledge building. Fullan believes that change leaders should look at data however it is not just numbers you are looking at but how to interpret the data and articulate it to the staff in a meaningful way. Fullan states, “one thing about information, is that it only becomes valuable in a social context.”

Sharing results and disseminating the data as well as providing feedback from observations allows the staff to see the principals are using various ways to collect data and then articulate the findings in a way that is helpful and useful. The principals then can use that information to direct professional development. The teachers then have an understanding of areas of improvement and therefore can develop professional learning communities to discuss pedagogy to improve performance (Fullan, 2001).

Most principals perceived themselves as instructional leaders, while for some of the principals that is their goal. One of the responsibilities of the school principal is to close the achievement gap, provide meaningful professional development to their staff

and create an inclusiveness environment where all students are successful. The principals rely on scores and data to help evaluate the outcome of inclusion programs. The principals understand to have successful inclusion programs they need to be the ones to provide teachers with the proper training in pedagogy and in recent research.

Additionally, the data revealed that principals saw themselves as lead teachers, and that their professional responsibility is to provide feedback and suggestions in the post-observation conference to help improve student achievement and create successful learning environments. Secondary principals that demonstrate this type of effective instructional leadership provide teachers with deep learning opportunities such as professional development and creating professional learning communities and therefore creating trust amongst staff and improving student achievement. “Principals must create learning opportunities for teachers in the same way that teachers would create learning experiences for students.” (White, 2021). In that capacity, principals need to remain current and up to date on recent educational reforms, pedagogy, and research.

Principals use their knowledge to lead faculty meetings, collegial circles, and professional learning communities, and in turn, this knowledge helps to create stakeholders’ trust in their principal. This theme helped to address the second research question: How do secondary principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support inclusion classrooms within their school environment?

Cultural Leader was an emerging theme that addressed the research question What leadership skills do secondary principals possess to foster successful inclusion in classrooms within their school environment? All the secondary principals reported communication was an important aspect of the success of their programs.

Communication with all stakeholders provides the principal with knowledge. Principals reported that meeting with teachers helps them to understand what professional development is needed additionally communication helps them to understand the relationship about the co-teaching pairing and helps them to either make changes to that pairing or continue it. Also, the principals help parents to get their feedback but if a parent has a specific concern the principals reported that they encourage the parent to speak with the teacher first then if further intervention is needed the principal will then step in. At that time the principal will communicate with teacher, student, and parent to understand all points of view.

The principal creates an environment of cultural inclusiveness. All the principals reported having clubs, sports, or activities that appeal to different types of students and learners. Additionally, the artifacts demonstrate that if there is a violation or discrimination against students or staff there is a protocol that will be followed to address the actuation. The principals want to create an inclusion program where if an observer came into the room, the observer would not be able to identify who the general education students are or who the inclusion students are this is also a goal for teachers. All students are engaged and meet or exceed the goals of the district and state regardless of academic label.

Principals also stated that they want to see the co-teachers sharing and teaching all students. The principals want to see the teachers co-teach and use a variety of inclusive methods. Their goal is to create a teaching collaboration where it is impossible to identify who is the general education teacher and who is the special education teacher. By the principals creating a culture of inclusiveness the students feel supported, safe, and

therefore able to express themselves and their needs to help them learn in a safe environment free from discrimination.

Understanding the culture of the building means reflecting upon the past, and the current situations while preparing for the future. To do this the principal has to engage, communicate, and have knowledge from various stakeholders to develop, implement and change programs.

What leadership skills do secondary principals possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms within their school environment? The response to this third research question seemed to emerge throughout discussions with principals, but especially when they considered their efforts to influence the culture of the classroom and ultimately that of the schools.

Those efforts were exhibited indirectly in various principal-led situations. For example, principals reported that they try to schedule planning periods for co-teachers however sometimes due to how the master schedule is made this is not possible, but teachers will plan on their own time. Additionally, the principals stated that if the pairing is successful by both measurable goals and by their communication with each other they will keep that pairing together. Furthermore, the principals also discussed how they try to limit the size of the inclusion classroom when possible. This relates to (Friend & Cook, 2007) the success of this will also be impacted by class ratio, class size, the pairing of teachers, and planning time together (Carpenter & Dyal, 2007).

Principals reported when selecting the class ratio in inclusion classes, they adhere to New York State law. They try to limit the size or ratio when possible. Also, many reported that those general education students who are selected for inclusion classes are

either done so randomly or because of how the inclusion class fits into their schedule. Some principals reported that if a general education student or 504 students could benefit from inclusion, they will then move them into the inclusion program. Though Murawski and Dieker provide guidance to administrators in terms of assigning students to inclusion classes. They warn administrators to avoid having more than 30 percent of general education classes designated as having special needs students (Murawski & Dieker, 2013). According to New York State, the maximum number of special education students in an integrated co-teaching classroom is 12. There is no maximum number of general education students however in order to truly have an integrated classroom there should be at least 12 general education students (*Continuum of special education services for school-age ... - P-12: NYSED*).

The principals see themselves as instructional leaders guiding professional development. To assist with constructive feedback with observations, directing professional development, and interpreting the data, principals need to be the practitioner they want their teachers to be. Having the knowledge of best practices helps to provide meaningful professional development and support for teachers to then see student growth and achievement (McMahon et al., 2016).

The secondary principals also had awareness and knowledge of the culture of their community and building. Understanding the culture of the building help to evaluate the needs and create changes to maintain successful inclusion programs (Green, 2017). Understanding the elements that comprise school culture will help principals implement change. Thus, they become what Michael Fullan describes as leaders of cultural change. This also relates to Zollers, Ramanathan, and Yu (2010), though their study reflects a

highly successful elementary school's inclusion program by fostering a highly inclusive culture within a school community it resonates with this study.

Implication for Future Research

The voices of principals as practitioners who implement state and federal programs with equality and justice for all students are very powerful and sincere. Future research that utilizes a phenomenological approach in conjunction with traditional quantitative data collection could provide additional insights into how successful inclusion programs could be adapted and replicated in schools experiencing difficulties.

The recommendation for future research would be to see if this model of leadership, program implementation, and maintenance could be applied to English as a New Language (ENL) or English Language Learner (ELL) programs in schools. ENL programs are emerging in ways similar to how Special Education developed in the 1970's, many new mandates have been made and will evolve as the number of ENL students increases. Replication of this study focusing on ENL, or ELL would benefit those principals in setting up successful programs.

Implication for Future Practice

The approach that the principals of these schools, deemed to have successful inclusion programs, could be used as models to help implement similar programs in districts that are underperforming. Reinforced in this research is that it is the responsibility of principals to demonstrate that they are supportive leaders. This can be achieved through collaboration with special education department chairpersons and with open communication with staff and all stakeholders to understand the needs of the program, as well as to maintain the program through staff development.

Additionally, this research supports the notion that principals who are instructional leaders can help assist the consultative model. They can provide evidence-based practice that will help improve capacity. And principals who are cultural leaders understand how developing and implementing programs that are inclusive to all learners and stakeholders create an environment that is safe for students to learn and for teachers to practice their skills. This model the secondary principals have developed, implemented, and maintained demonstrates it is successful. This research can be used to further enhance the professional development of both teachers and secondary principals. However, this research suggests that although a plan could be implemented and replicated, it is the moral component of the leader that will create successful programs. Also, this research has implications for the education and administration certification of secondary principals. Many of the principals who were interviewed followed Michael Fullan's Change Theory. Though they did not recognize this as their rationale, or part of their thought process, it was evident in the underlying logic of their responses regarding the development, implementation, and maintenance of their inclusion programs. Therefore, this research suggests that administrative certification programs that place an emphasis on the components of the theoretical structure of this study would enhance and support the knowledge base of future principals and their ability to develop the practical implementation of inclusion programs.

Graduate programs in administration tend to be generic in scope and for that reason do not necessarily reflect the nature of schooling today. Because of the increased emphasis on inclusion, and as the results of this study indicate, it is imperative that

certification programs for administrators incorporate special education administration, and in particular, inclusion programs into their curricula.

Limitations of the Study

A limitation of this study was the participants' time restraints. Although afforded many options and variations of venues for meeting with the researcher, scheduling meetings for the interviews was challenging during this post-Covid time. Principals reported that unfortunately, things come up that are not scheduled and take away from other duties. As a result of timing, participants may have shortened their responses because of other scheduled events that they needed their attention. When trying to email for a follow-up to their responses they often did not respond.

As the result of the past two years, principals' perspectives and their approach to the issues presented by the researcher may have been influenced by their reaction and adaptations to the Covid Pandemic. This could be seen as a possible limitation of the study.

An additional limitation was that only principals were interviewed. It would have been useful to interview various other stakeholders to gain insight into their perspectives on the role of the secondary principals in terms of inclusion programs.

Conclusion

This study investigated the role of the principals and implementing successful inclusion programs through the lens of Michael Fullan's Change Theory. This research has increased knowledge in this area of education where insufficient research and data were available, and additionally, this research provides insight into how secondary principals manage, maintain and foster successful inclusion programs that can be used in

other areas of school reform. Furthermore, this study underscores the efficacy of Michael Fullan's Change Theory as a viable approach to evaluating, reflecting, and decision-making to implement and develop successful inclusion programs. The role of the secondary principal is critical in setting an example for all stakeholders. Furthermore, understanding how these educational leaders view their roles in light of collaborative coordination and supportive and cultural leadership has provided greater insight into developing models of successful inclusion programs.

While the role of the secondary principal has changed due to law and mandates, educational stakeholders continue to look to the principal as someone who will lead with moral capacity to create the changes needed in not only the school but the community as well. If the principal can create and model an environment of educational inclusion, maybe that will help lead to a community and world of acceptance.

APPENDIX A LETTER OF SOLICIATION



Letter of Solicitation

From: Gabrielle Meier

Date

To: Prospective Participate

Dear Dr. _____,

I am a doctoral student at St. John's University Ed. D program for administration and supervision, researching how principals perceive their role in the development and support of successful inclusion classrooms and how secondary principals engage with school stakeholders. Additionally, the study will look at the leadership skills that secondary principals possess to foster and maintain successful inclusion programs.

I want to invite you to be a participant in the study. I understand that this may be a busy time of year; however, this study will be invaluable to the field of education. Be assured that your name and your school's name will not be identified in the study. Your privacy will be always protected.

The study will consist of a recorded interview, and you maybe be asked to participate in a focus group. The interview will take place at a time at your convenience. Additionally, the interview can be over the phone, google meet, or facetime. You will have access to the transcript to review.

I hope you will consider my request to be part of my study and help future secondary principals and school districts create successful inclusion programs. Please sign below and fill out the demographic screener questionnaire if you agree to this. Also, please let me know what date, time, and platform works best for you. If by phone or face time, please provide a number where you can be reached. If you prefer google meet, I will send you a code in a follow-up email.

Sincerely,

Gabrielle Meier

APPENDIX B LETTER OF CONSENT



Letter of Consent

You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about how secondary principals perceive and utilize their roles in developing and maintaining successful inclusion programs. This study will be conducted by Gabrielle Meier, a doctoral student, at St. John's University. This study will be used as part of the doctoral dissertation work. Gabrielle Meier's faculty sponsor will be Dr. Katherine C. Aquino, SJU School of Education.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to do the following and participate in a focus group with other secondary principals about examination into the beliefs and ideals principles possess within the decision-making process to support inclusion programs. You also are asked to participate in an individual interview.

Your interviews will be audio recorded. You may review the google memos recording and request that all or any portion of the recordings be destroyed.

Participation in this study will involve 2 hours of your time. The focus group will be 40 mins as well as the individual interviews. The interview and the focus group will take place at school following the protocols of the district and the state of covid guidelines.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. You will receive no direct benefit; you will not be paid for your participation in this research. This research may help the investigator understand how general education teachers characterize a successful inclusion classroom.

Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by codes when putting your responses into Dedoose. All transcripts will be recorded and collected on a password-protected computer. Transcripts and field notes will not be shared with any administrator in the building or district. Your names will not be used in the study or linked with any information you have provided.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. For interviews or discussions in the focus group, you have the right to skip or not answer any question you prefer not to answer. This interview will not affect your standing in the district or your job.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Gabrielle Meier at gabrielle.meier19@my.stjohns.edu or the faculty advisor Katherine C. Aquino at czadoaqk@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University's Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond Di Giuseppe, Chair digiuser@stjohns.edu 718-990-1955 or Marie Nitopi, IRB Coordinator, nitopim@stjohns.edu 718-990-1440. You have received a copy of this consent document to keep.

Agreement to Participate

Gabrielle Meier

Date

Subject's Signature

Date

APPENDIX C DEMOGRAPHIC SCREENER
Demographic Screener

1. What is your history as an educator?
2. Please indicate the certifications and degrees which you hold.
3. If you were a teacher, indicate the level, subject area, and the number of years?
4. Aside from your role as a principal, do you have any other administrative positions? If yes, please identify and indicate the number of years.
5. How long have you been principal in your current position?
6. Have you served as principal in other districts? If so, how many years?
7. Please indicate the platform you would like to use for the interview: phone, facetime, google meet (I will send a link), or in-person
8. Please provide a number that I can contact you.
9. Please provide a date on which you are available.
10. If you prefer an in-person interview, please provide a location.

APPENDIX D MATRIX OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Matrix of Interview Questions, Research Questions, and Fullan's Core Premises										
Interview Questions	RQ 1	RQ 2	RQ 3	FCP 1	FCP 2	FCP 3	FCP 4	FCP 5	FCP 6	FCP 7
How do you determine the success of your inclusion program?	x		x	x	x			x		
How would you describe your inclusion programs?	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
How do you determine teacher pairing for inclusion classes?		x	x		x					
How do you schedule time for co-teachers to plan?	x	x	x	x	x				x	
What supports do you offer co-teachers throughout the year?	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	
How do you determine what professional development is provided to inclusion teachers?	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
If a program is not successful, what steps do you take to change it?			x				x	x	x	x
How often do you meet with co-teachers to discuss improvement?	x	x	x	x		x		x	x	
What guides your decision-making when selecting the number of students in inclusion class and which students are placed?	x		x				x		x	
How do you share decision-making with a special education coordinator or with department chairs?	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	
How do you determine the allocation of spending on inclusion programs?	x		x				x		x	x
How do you articulate your vision of inclusion to your teachers?	x	x	x	x					x	
Do you see yourself as an instructional leader guiding professional development?	x		x	x	x	x		x	x	
What professional development have you provided your staff regarding inclusion classrooms?	x	x	x	x	x	x			x	
What professional development has the district provided for you and your staff?	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	
How do you collaborate with parents in creating successful programs?		x					x	x	x	x
How do you create a culture of inclusiveness in your school?		x	x							
In what ways do you motivate teachers to close the achievement gap?	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
What do you think is regular education teachers' perception regarding inclusion? Why do you think that is? (Either positive or negative)		x							x	
How do you reconcile problems with parents, staff, or teachers?		x	x	x	x		x	x		x

What was the state of the inclusion program you first came to the school? Or when you implemented a new program?*			X		X	X	X			
When do federal or state laws determine changes, how implement those changes?		X	X				X	X	X	
How do you know when it is time to create change to keep the program successful?	X		X	X	X					X
When you are making curriculum, budget, or schedules changes what guides your thought process	X		X				X		X	

***Background Information**

Research Questions:

1. How do secondary school principals perceive their role in the development and support of inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
2. How do secondary school principals engage with school stakeholders to develop and support inclusion classrooms within their school environment?
3. What leadership skills do secondary principals possess to foster successful inclusion classrooms within their school environment?

Fullan's Core Premises:

1. a focus on motivation.
2. capacity building, with a focus on results.
3. learning in context.
4. changing context.
5. a bias for reflective action.
6. tri-level engagement.
7. persistence and flexibility in staying the course.

APPENDIX E INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Interview Questions

1. How do you determine the success of your inclusion program?
2. What responsibilities do you have in developing inclusion programs?
3. How do you determine teacher pairing for inclusion classes?
4. How do you schedule time for co-teachers to plan?
5. What supports do you offer co-teachers throughout the year?
6. How do you determine what professional development is provided to inclusion teachers?
7. If a program is not successful, what steps do you take to change it?
8. How often do you meet with co-teachers to discuss improvement?
9. What guides your decision-making when selecting the number of students in inclusion class and which students are placed?
10. How do you share decision-making with a special education coordinator or with department chairs?
11. How do you determine the allocation of spending on inclusion programs?
12. How do you articulate your vision of inclusion to your teachers?
13. Do you see yourself as an instructional leader guiding professional development?
14. What professional development have you provided your staff regarding inclusion classrooms?
15. What professional development has the district provided for you and your staff?
16. How do you collaborate with parents in creating successful programs?
17. How do you create a culture of inclusiveness in your school?
18. In what ways do you motivate teachers to close the achievement gap?

19. What do you think is regular education teachers' perception regarding inclusion?
Why do you think that is? (either positive or negative)
20. How do you reconcile problems with parents, staff, or teachers?
21. What was the state of the inclusion program you first came to the school? Or
when you implemented a new program?*
22. When do federal or state laws determine changes, how implement those changes?
23. How do you know when it is time to create change to keep the program
successful?
24. When you are making curriculum, budget, or schedules changes what guides your
thought process

APPENDIX F WORD CLOUD



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