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EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE NON-ACADEMIC SETTING WITH
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHERS IN THE NON-ACADEMIC SETTING WITH PEOPLE WITH
DISABILITIES

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
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by

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE EXPERIENCE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS IN THE NON-ACADEMIC SETTING WITH PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

David E. LaPoma

The current study looked to understand the lived experience of special education teachers who work with children and young adults with disabilities in a non-academic setting (NAS). The study explored relationships between the learning experience and the teachers' self-efficacy in the setting. The experience of pre-service and in-service special education teachers (PISET) working with people with disabilities in a recreational setting related to their self-efficacy has not been explored in prior studies. A qualitative phenomenological approach was used to interview special education teachers working in these settings. The non-academic setting was defined as an experience where the focus of the interaction was not aligned with a learning goal but social and recreational. Research indicates a need for observational experience through community-learning experiences and an environment for teachers free of the pressures of academic burden. This suggests that the non-academic setting may be a significantly undervalued environment of exploration in special education research. The study evaluated themes and relationships between the experience and preparation for work in the classroom. The study discusses what this may mean for undergraduate teacher preparatory programs, suggestions for future research, and limitations of the study.

DEDICATION

Simply, this work is dedicated to my family. My wife, my children, my parents, and my siblings. You are all my motivation and inspiration.

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There is no measure of how incredibly thankful I am for my wife, Lisamarie. You helped me more than you know. This work might never have been completed without you. Not only have you allowed me to leave our family to spend hours in a cold Starbucks to complete my degree and this dissertation, but you were my sounding board and closest advisor. Your input on research methodology and editing helped push my work to the next level. It was especially helpful as I navigated the depths of qualitative methods. When my ideas needed to be funneled, you were there. In all the time required to meet this goal of mine, you supported it. I love you and am forever grateful for having you in my life.

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CHAPTER 1

The current study will explore the lived experience of pre-service and in-service special education teachers (PISETs) who have worked with people with disabilities (PWD) in a non-academic setting (NAS). The theoretical lens for the study provides a framework for conceptualizing the NAS as an unexplored learning environment. Research exists on the certification pathways offered to special education teachers, the value of community learning programs, and the development of self-efficacy in special education (An, 2021; Ismailos et al., 2022; Kent & Giles, 2016; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). Research has yet to include an analysis of the NAS as it relates to the experiences of PISETs (An, 2021; Emmons & Zager, 2018; Ismailos et al., 2022; Stayton et al., 2012). This setting is an unexplored variable for its role and influence on special education teachers. The conceptual frame of the study supposes the development of self-efficacy in the social learning environment of the NAS. This concept gives a frame for analyzing the collected data, linking the participant's experience to self-efficacy and special education teacher skill development. The study seeks to find connections, themes, feelings, and perspectives between the special educators and this uniquely defined setting.

The current phenomenological study will examine the lived experience of pre-service and in-service special education teachers working in non-academic settings and their perceptions of the experience in developing special education knowledge. The setting is defined by its lack of an academic focus in the activities provided to the PWD who attend. Instead, the setting provides social and recreational activities for individuals

with disabilities of any age group. This key element makes the NAS a unique and unexplored variable in the experiences of special education teachers.

Special educators work with a vulnerable population with diverse needs. Special education includes learners with various disabilities where every student represents a unique combination of learning styles, social skills, behavioral needs, sensory sensitivities, and other unique needs (Rembis, 2019). There are several non-academic settings for children and young adults with disabilities that are available for PISETs to explore. For this study, the non-academic setting is defined as an experience where the interactions focus is non-academic. The participants in the study worked in settings where the job expectation was recreational and social. The children and young adults in these settings are not evaluated on academic goals, through an individualized education plan, and/or through related service mandates. Looking at the lived experiences of pre-service and in-service special education teachers (PISET) will give perspective on how these experiences relate to a teacher's perceived ability to support people with disabilities and the role the experience plays in their knowledge of special education.

Students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate education with specialized teachers and related services (IDEA, 2004). These guarantees highlight the significance of developing teachers with elevated levels of self-efficacy, especially those who are starting their professional careers as educators. Prior studies indicate some general education teachers are not comfortable teaching students with disabilities and are unsure of their role in the education of special education students (Allen & Barnett, 2020). It is valuable to understand the relationship between how differing experiences relate to special education teachers' development of strategies to support students with

disabilities and how those experiences may support general education teachers. Many studies have evaluated community learning programs, observations, and pathways to certification (Ahmad et al., 2016; An, 2021; Ismailos et al., 2022; Kent & Giles, 2016; Shepherd & Brown, 2003). This study looks to understand the role of non-educational settings and the lived experience of pre-and in-service teachers. Current research exists on service-learning programs and their relationship to special education preparation, but the literature does not evaluate the non-academic settings specifically. Community service-learning programs lead to increased teacher self-efficacy (An, 2021). It is not yet known what life experiences outside of the educational setting contribute significantly to the preparation of special education teachers. There is a need in special education to evaluate the NAS-based experiences of special education teachers to better understand the relationship between those experiences and teacher preparation and self-efficacy development.

Purpose of the study

This study aims to understand the lived experience of PISETs who have experience in the NAS and how that experience provides an opportunity to learn about special education and feel confident in the instruction of PWD in the classroom. Teachers observe students in the classroom setting throughout their coursework as they work towards certification in special education (Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). Many pathways to certification in special education provide a component of observation or field experience. These experiences are often in schools with a cooperating teacher or through a community learning experience that focuses on the academic instruction of people with disabilities (Albright & Williams, 2021; Shepherd & Brown, 2003). The current study

proposes that there are influential learning experiences that happen outside of the classroom, within the NAS, which have an impact on a teacher's ability to teach special education. If the NAS is shown to have a connection between self-efficacy and the experience of the PISETs, it may provide a foundation for future studies to explore the impact significance of these settings on the preparation of PISETs.

Teachers who are not adequately prepared to teach students with autism have been shown to have adverse effects on student achievement (Albright & Williams, 2021). The preservice teacher's development of skills and strategies is important for the achievement and success of all students in the classroom (Kent & Giles, 2016). It is the responsibility of teacher preparation programs to ensure that teachers begin their careers understanding the distinct characteristics of every learner in the room. Exploring the NAS for its role in the preparation of PISETs in their work with people with disabilities is of importance.

The field experience of preservice teachers must include a wide range of learning opportunities during the preparation program. Preservice teachers have reported feelings of being underprepared to manage a classroom in the absence of rich field experience (Kent & Giles, 2016). The NAS represents an unexplored field experience where PISETs may be building skills and strategies that would lead to stronger beliefs in their abilities in the special education classroom. The study will advance the exploration of settings that present a learning opportunity for special educators. The NAS provides a human experience where the prospective teacher learns more about the person's motivations, deeper than just how they react to educational stimuli. It is because this setting is not bound by academic rigor that there is less pressure on the special educators working in

the setting and the individuals with disabilities. The NAS gives the educator a learning environment free of the pressures of high stakes testing. Research has suggested that teachers would benefit from working in a safe and pressure free environment (Conderman et al., 2023).

Teacher certification pathways outline the requirements by which individuals qualify to gain certification in teaching. These indicators have been evaluated across states and territories in the United States(Stayton et al., 2012). Educational regulations require that highly qualified teachers have certification in their area of teaching. Teachers of special education are required to hold a valid certification in special education to be considered a highly qualified teacher (IDEA, 2004). Research has been conducted to align the national and state components of special education teacher certification, which forms a basis for future research on how teachers acquire the skills to meet certification competencies. Teacher preparatory programs offer the opportunity for preservice teachers to learn and equip them with the knowledge, skills, and experiences necessary for success in teaching students with disabilities. A vital aspect of content knowledge is the understanding of students' cultural characteristics and needs (Kent & Giles, 2016). For the special education teacher, this content knowledge is the knowledge of a students' disability.

Students and teachers are connected in learning. The teacher in the special education setting should be learning from the students in the same way that students are learning from the teacher (Imig & Imig, 2006). There is value in a teachers' development in understanding the student's interests and motivations. Many schools of grades 6-12 do not provide a nurturing environment for successful relationship development for PWD

between peers and teachers (DeAngelis, 2010). The NAS may be an environment that addresses this concern, and the current study will expand on this idea through the analysis of the reported experience of PISETs in the NAS.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Theoretical Framework

A constructivist perspective served as a frame for the research of this study. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory describes learning as a social process. The constructivism perspective proposes that learners create their own learning. A person does not have knowledge imposed on them, but rather forms knowledge inside of them (Schunk, 2012). This was a guiding lens for interpreting how the social experience of teachers in the non-academic setting played a role in developing their special education knowledge. Vygotsky proposed that the development of children's abilities was through the influence of social interactions with more experienced adults. Special educators take on the role of the learner in the non-academic setting, while the individuals with disabilities serve as the more experienced "adult." These roles provide an environment for learning in the social context. The constructivist lens provides the framework for understanding the lived experiences of the special education teachers in the study regarding their experience in the non-academic setting with PWD.

The dialectical perspective in constructivism supports an idea that knowledge is derived between the learner and their environment. This perspective, in its simplest form, allows for learning internally and externally in tandem. The workings of the mind and the external world are working in unison. This concept is powerful when trying to understand

the relationship a non-academic setting has on the development of PISETs knowledge of people with disabilities. This perspective serves as an intermediary between the social learning theories of Vygotsky and the later discussed social cognitive theory of Bandura for analyzing the data of the current study (Schunk, 2012). The dialectical perspective provides the bridge between the constructivist and social cognitive theoretical frameworks. This connection builds the conceptual frame that creates meaning for the current study.

Social cognitive theory was applied to this study to enhance the idea of the social environment being the catalyst for learning. When a person observes, they acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes (Schunk, 2012). The academic observation for special education teachers in a public school is not a natural social environment. The non-academic setting represents a more natural social context for learning about a person. This gives the PISET an otherwise unavailable perspective in classic preparation programs to view the person with disabilities and a unique opportunity to learn from them. The absence of work demands free individuals with disabilities to be themselves and equally unburdens the PISETs from meeting the demands of an academic setting.

This application of social learning requires an additional context provided through Albert Bandura's concepts of self-efficacy development (Bandura, 1997). The perception of the participants lived experience in the non-educational settings represents a learning experience. The interactions in this setting provide input for the 4 contributing factors that the teacher develops self-efficacy through, which are provided for in the NAS through the social dynamics characterized by social cognitive theory. This additional

context to the social cognitive theory of Vygotsky provides a more complete level of analysis for the study. Social interaction plays a fundamental role in developing cognition. Although the formal education of special education teachers is at times social, this study evaluated the role of the NAS experience of the participants. The Social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura and the concept of self-efficacy development gives perspective to the data collected throughout the study. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to complete a task. The participants' responses were evaluated for the presence of experiences that increased self-efficacy and how they believed the experience gave them tools for success in the classroom. Self- efficacy is determined by the interaction of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, improving physical and emotional states, and verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). These attributes for building self-efficacy are explored in the responses collected from the study. The sociocultural theory with a dialectical perspective as a frame, further honed using Bandura's model for self-efficacy, provides context for the interpretation of data and discussion of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The current study introduces an application of sociocultural learning theory and self-efficacy theory as the framework for describing the lived experiences of the PISETs in the study. Given that the non-academic setting is defined as the social setting where interaction is not guided by mandates and academic pressures, the sociocultural view that interactions are critical in constructing knowledge is valid. Then, the study seeks to determine the relationship between this learning environment and the ability of PISETs. Their ability to provide special education services and support students in the classroom setting pulls in the theories of self-efficacy. PISETs are faced with unique circumstances

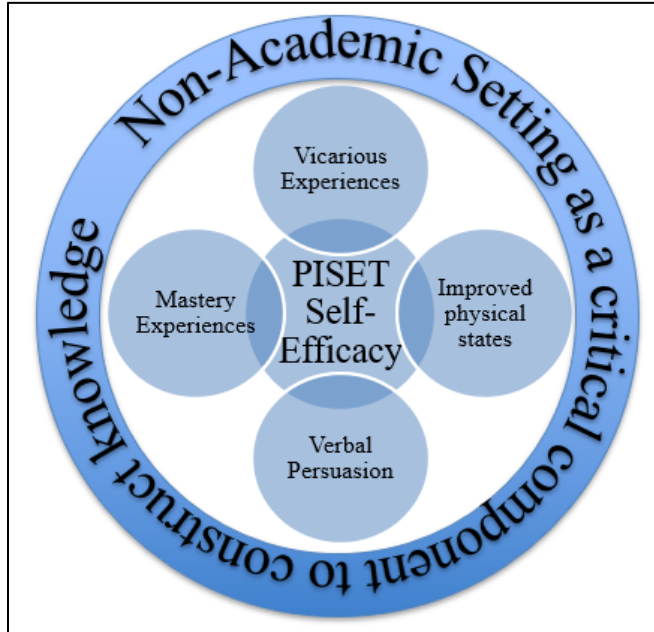
with every new student they engage with. Engaging in the NAS provides a unique opportunity for learning.

When applying the theory of self-efficacy to the preparedness of a special education teacher in the classroom, there is a need to identify which experiences lead to greater self-efficacy. Identifying the associations of PISETs between specific learning experiences and increased self-efficacy can support contracting pathways to certification that provide the best opportunity for teachers to be ready to work with students with disabilities in the classroom. Certification pathways have varied requirements between colleges, states, and level of degree completion (undergraduate degree, masters, or post masters certificate extension) (Albright & Williams, 2021; Shepherd & Brown, 2003).

The conceptual framework is visualized in figure 1 where the NAS is a component in constructing knowledge, while interactions within the setting contribute to self-efficacy. Social learning is the umbrella that includes the NAS as a source of learning for PISETs. The interactions within the setting serve as the stimuli contributing to self-efficacy development. If the conceptual frame for the study, visualized in figure 1, is accurate, participant responses will detail several ways that their experience relates to concepts of self-efficacy and preparation for teaching special education.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Visual Representation



Note. The researcher constructed the visual to support the concept of a universal social learning environment within the NAS where knowledge is constructed where concepts of self-efficacy are present within the interactions (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012).

Significance of the Study

The certification process for teachers of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) vary between states and when compared to the national standards and/or competencies outlined by national professional associations (Stayton et al., 2012). Aligned competencies between states and nationally developed indicators provide a framework for understanding the key skill components expected of special education certified teachers. These national and state educational goals for special educators are the targets of the traditional and alternative pathways to certification for special educators.

The indicators are of significance to the field of research in special education. If these are the standards by which we view qualified candidates for teaching special education, we should focus research on the number of ways teachers gain knowledge in such competencies.

Teachers are presented with multiple pathways to certification, some of which have been explored in educational research (Albright & Williams, 2021; Estes, 2019; Green, 2012; Kent & Giles, 2016; Shepherd & Brown, 2003). The intersection of special education and competing pathways to certification have been explored. Two outlined methods include traditional pathways to certification and alternative route pathways to certification (Green, 2012; Shepherd & Brown, 2003). Traditional pathways represent the university pathway of completing coursework and student teaching towards earning certification in a specific subject area. These programs are typical of undergraduate study. Alternative route programs have abbreviated coursework and extended field-based requirements compared to traditional program (Sindelar et al., 2004). It has been indicated that teachers of either pathway have stronger outcomes in their practice, evaluation by supervisors, and self-evaluations when they have participated in a program that includes more field experience (Sindelar et al., 2004). Teachers who gained certification through short-cut programs have been reported to leave teaching at a higher rate than those that gain certification through more intensive programs (Brownell et al., 2004). This is indicative of the need for research into how and why teachers stay in special education. The current study will add an unexplored perspective to teacher development through the lived experiences of PISETs who have experience in the NAS for PWD.

Research in the field has established a relationship between teacher self-efficacy and their participation in community-learning experiences (Emmons & Zager, 2018; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). These experiences include observation and/or time working with students with disabilities towards an academic goal. Teachers have reported higher self-efficacy scores and reported an increase in the ability to support students with disabilities after community-learning experiences (An, 2021). Teachers learn from experiences where they are free of the high-stakes assessment demands and where they can practice skills in a safe exploratory environment (Conderman et al., 2023). The current study defines this type of environment as the non-academic setting. The combination of research that points towards a need for observational experience through community-learning experiences and an environment for teachers that is free of the pressures of academic burden provides a strong indication that the NAS may be a significantly undervalued environment of exploration in special education research. Environments that are nurturing and concern the social-emotional well-being of PWD has been linked to better student outcomes (DeAngelis, 2010). Current research has implied a need to explore a setting that meets these requirements but has been unable to define it. The current study will continue to develop gaps identified in prior research for future study.

Educators have a responsibility to support students with disabilities as they are a vulnerable population (IDEA, 2004; Rembis, 2019). Evidence based instructional practices for students with disabilities are promised through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Increasing a teacher's self-efficacy is vital to the successful implantation of evidence-

based practices for students with disabilities. Looking at the factors that contribute to a teacher's self-efficacy holds significance in the ability to determine which experiences are more valuable to include in special education teacher preparation programs.

Connection with Social Justice and Vincentian Mission in Education

Special education knows no ethnicity or race. The current research will support the many interconnected vulnerable populations that special education attempts to support. Educators have a responsibility to support students with disabilities as they are a vulnerable population, inclusive of many demographics that are underserved (Rembis, 2019). Evidence based instructional practices for students with disabilities are provided within the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). The nature of special education creates challenges for newly certified teachers (Ahmad et al., 2016; Sharp & Goode, 2019). Special education legislation and the depth of interventions contribute to the intimidating nature of special education. A teacher's belief in their ability to provide education for PWD deserves attention. This study will add to the existing literature and advance the understanding of the lived experiences of special education teachers in the unexplored NAS.

Research Design and Questions

1. How does the experience of working for people with disabilities in a non-academic setting (NAS) contribute to knowledge of special education teaching?
2. How does experience in a non-academic setting influence self-efficacy in teaching people with disabilities for PISET?
3. What successes and challenges are experienced by PISETs in the NAS?

4. How do PISETs describe their experience in the NAS compared to their experience in the academic setting?

Definition of Terms

Non-Academic Setting (NAS)

A setting where a PWD attends as a participant or consumer for the purpose of recreational and social activities. The goal of the setting is not bound by educational expectations aligned to Individual Education Program goals or other related service mandate (PT, OT, Speech). The staff in the setting are focused solely on providing support for the individual in accessing these social and recreational games and activities. This activities may include playing a sport, arts and crafts, singing, dancing, yoga, fitness, cooking, etc. In the setting, the goal is to make these activities accessible to every PWD for their enjoyment and recreation.

Pre-Service and In- Service Special Education Teachers (PISETs)

The participants of the study fit this description; They are certified teachers of special education and/or students in a program that leads to special education certification.

Person with Disabilities (PWD)

An individual with a disability is defined by the ADA as a person who has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities, a person who has a history or record of such an impairment, or a person who is perceived by others as having such an impairment (Americans With Disabilities Act, 1990).

Camper

In the NAS of camp anchor, participants with disabilities are referred to as campers. Campers are the enrolled participants of the summer program. Campers have various ages, abilities, and demographics.

CHAPTER 2

In this section the study will review prior research related to the self-efficacy of special education teachers, teacher preparation programs and pathways, the significance of knowledge of students in successful teaching, and the competencies outlined for special education teaching certification. PISETs have participated in studies that measure self-efficacy and the outcomes of service-learning experiences. These studies are reviewed to establish the importance of learning experiences on the self-efficacy of teachers. The learning that occurs in the observational context, outside of the classroom, is significant to review for this study. In the studies reviewed, a pattern of observation in settings that have academic goals for students is present. A gap in the research surrounds the NAS and the lived experience of PISETs that have experience in these environments. The current study looks to determine the lived experience of pre-service and in-service teachers who have worked or are currently employed in a non-academic setting. The study will review literature regarding teacher competencies in special education certification for the purpose of understanding what attributes are valued by certification entities in the United States.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The NAS is defined as a space for the purpose of recreational and social activities. The social nature of the environment aligns to the frameworks of learning described by the constructivist perspective. Lev Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory describes learning as a social process, which serves as a universal constant for the analysis of the current study (Schunk, 2012). The NAS represents an ideal learning environment when viewed through this framework. With the goal of the NAS to promote social interactions, learning should

follow as a result. Vygotsky proposed that the development of children's abilities was through the influence of social interactions with more experienced adults. Applying this frame to an analysis within this study, we may find the dynamics of the NAS that promote learning between the PWD and the PISETs. For this reason, the conceptual framework was selected as a combination of constructivist social learning theories with a dialectical perspective and interactions of the pillars of self-efficacy development.

The framework for learning in the social context occurs with internal and external influences between the learner and the environment. The approach identifies the environment as a factor of the learning process. The experience contributes to the building of one's self-efficacy through the interactions with the setting. Through this frame, the setting is viewed as a social learning environment where the interactions of the participants between self and setting, self and colleagues, vicarious observation of external interactions and the people with disabilities all play a role in learning. This learning moments outside of the academic setting may be related back to teaching through the analysis of data collected with regard to self-efficacy development of special education teaching ability.

Albert Bandura developed the social cognitive theory to explain the impact of observing others on a person's learning. It supposes that a person's knowledge is a result of their observation of others in social interactions, experiences, skills, strategies, beliefs and attitudes. The reproduction of an observed behavior is influenced by the interaction of three determinants. The three determinants of social cognitive theory are a person's cognition, the environment, and behavior (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Schunk, 2012).

Self-efficacy is the theory that an individual can control and execute behavior. Teacher Self-efficacy can be developed with mastery experiences, vicarious experience, improving physical and emotional states, and through verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1997; Pfitzner-Eden, 2016). These four components influence one's self-efficacy. The current study will focus on the lived experience of PISETs who work in a NAS. The NAS represents an environment where the pillars of building self-efficacy are present and has been unexplored for how interactions influence the experience of teachers that have this specific type of experience. Experience in the NAS is not a required component of special education teacher certification but does present the components for learning about disability from individuals with disabilities (Albright & Williams, 2021; Green, 2012; Kent & Giles, 2016; Shepherd & Brown, 2003). Of the components leading to a person's increased self-efficacy, experiences based on performance accomplishments produced higher, more generalized, and stronger efficacy expectations (Bandura, 1997).

The theory of self-efficacy is a valid framework for this study as the current research supposes that the non-academic setting experience of special education teachers has an impact on their belief and ability to teach students with disabilities. Pre-service teachers traditionally have a student teaching component with experience in an academic setting. The current study will look at the experiences outside of the certification pathways of most college programs. The conceptual frame for the study serves to identify the NAS as a source of learning and self-efficacy development that is unexplored. The NAS may have a significant impact on teacher self-efficacy. By looking at these experiences, it can help to determine what events in a teachers experience outside of the classroom work to build a better prepared teacher. It will collect the experience of the

special education teachers for understanding their perspective on being prepared for the classroom related to their NAS experience. Identifying what experiences increase self-efficacy will help in program development for special education teacher certifications.

The intersection of social learning theory and self-efficacy provides the conceptual framework for the study. This is where the data in the study can be conceptualized. The environment is a unique setting where self-efficacy in special education was previously unexplored. The conceptual frame for the study creates a frame for the inclusion of the setting as a component of teacher development. The NAS represents a learning environment with the most natural social environment for interaction as it is not encumbered with academic pressures. PWD can express their voice, convey wants, needs, preferences, and motivation that is not otherwise available in an academic setting. The absence of academic pressures promotes this expression of self and advocacy. The PISSETs working in this environment have access to this experience which represents mastery experiences not available to them in the classical teacher preparation programs. Other influences on self-efficacy exist in the setting that are not available in other settings. This frame will serve to analyze the collection of data with respect to the mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, improved physical states, and verbal persuasion outlined by Bandura for developing self-efficacy within the social learning environment as described necessary of learning by Vygotsky (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 2012).

The frame for the study guides how prior research will be viewed and related to the findings. The study will evaluate what competencies special education teachers are expected to demonstrate for certification in teaching. This will serve to align participant

responses with how the NAS provided for their acquisition. Concepts of self-efficacy will serve to develop categories of the experience related to building self-efficacy of the participants. The conceptual frame of a social learning environment with dynamics of self-efficacy at the center of the experience will provide the lens for evaluating data.

Review of Related Literature

Teacher Certification

A review of teacher certification pathways will build an understanding of what experience is valued for prospective teachers. Prospective teachers may experience differing coursework and observational requirements based on their pathway to certification. Prospective teachers look for the shortest and most efficient program leading to teacher certification (Shepherd & Brown, 2003).

Stayton, Smith, Dietrich, and Bruder (2012) conducted a quantitative study of an item-by-item comparison of state certification standards for early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) with national professional association standards. The purpose of the study was to evaluate what competencies were covered in state certification standards compared to those of national professional associations. These findings have implications on professional association policy and on future research.

The study conducted website searches of state departments of education requirements, licensing and certification boards, and conducted interviews with certification coordinators to gather descriptive information about state certification policy. The study asserted that certification requirements affect the education and training that teacher candidates receive. These certification requirements establish the quality of

ECSE programs (Early et al., 2007). The study reviews the Elementary and Secondary Education Act amendments of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) which require that teachers be highly qualified. Highly qualified teachers for special education hold a certification in special education. Therefore, the requirements of these programs reflect the experiences and education that are significant in the preparation of teachers for working with people with disabilities.

The sample consisted of certification coordinators from 38 states who completed phone interviews and reviewed summary documents based on the researchers review of state certification policies for accuracy. Purposeful sampling was used to ensure the sample reflected certification models found for certifying personnel to work with young children with delays and disabilities. A sample of certification policies from 17 states was included in the study for analysis.

The study calculated the percentage of standards that matched between the state and national components. Data was coded to determine what state standards aligned to the national components. Only 15 state policies were included for analysis after matching components through coding. Analysis was conducted to compare what standards were most and least likely to be addressed by state certification policies. The study found that 4 of the 18 state policies reflected 80% of the national standards in their certification requirements. The wording in state policy was found to lack specificity in the wording compared to the national certification language. The lack of alignment can create ambiguity when trying to validate or interpret the certification requirements between states.

The study would benefit from using a known statistical method to compare the number of states who meet 80% and above of the national standards and those that do not. An independent samples t-test could be used to show significance between these two groups.

The study defines components of certification that are aligned between state and national standards. These indicators are key for understanding and developing a method of categorization of the experiences considered important for research in special education teacher preparation. The components covered include many indicators that are of particular importance to the social learning that may occur in the NAS. These components provide a starting point for coding interview transcripts and observational data. The study does well to define the larger components of teacher preparation but lacks the refined analysis of an individual preparation program.

A study conducted by Boe, Shin, and Cook (2007) evaluated the preparation of new teachers in both the general education and special education setting. The purpose of the study was to evaluate their preparedness in respect to content, pedagogy, and practice. The study investigated the relationship between teacher preparation and teacher qualification indices, using the national data from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). The study answered the research questions, to what extent is the amount of teacher preparation associated with the two key dimensions of a highly qualified teacher as defined by No Child Left Behind.

The study does not provide a framework for interpretation or analysis of the data. The study would benefit from connecting a concept of how learning occurs to the reasoning for the significance of the study. The study supposes that teacher training in

pedagogy and practice teaching has value in the preparedness of teachers. This dynamic would be served better through a lens of social learning, where the pre-service teachers receive instruction in coursework and through observation.

The study used archived data from the Public-School teacher Questionnaire (PSTQ). The PSTQ contained data for the amount of preparation in pedagogy and practice teaching and teacher qualifications. The study included teachers defined as those who reported employment in either full-time or part-time public-school positions in any grade K-12. The PSTQ collected assignment information across 64 fields. The study grouped the 64 fields into two categories, special education and general education. Of the 64 assignments, 15 fit the definition of special education. The PSTQ contained 10,952 responses for teachers in K-12 assignments who were in their first 5 years of teaching. Using the data to define levels of teacher preparation included evaluating the amount of reported practice teaching (observational experience), coursework, and receiving feedback on their teaching. The researchers were able to define three categories of teacher preparation in pedagogy and practice teaching: extensive teacher preparation, some teacher preparation, and little or no teacher preparation.

The study evaluated the data using chi-squared tests of significance of relationships between teacher qualifications and teacher preparation for both special education teacher and general education teacher groups. The study also conducted a logistic regression model for each of the six dimensions of being well prepared as a beginning teacher.

The study found that extensive teacher preparation mattered a great deal in satisfying the requirements of teachers being highly qualified. A key finding was in the

reported preparedness of teachers related to their preparation levels. Those that were from extensive preparation programs, including time in observational experiences, reported being more prepared to teach in their field. Participating in extensive preparation mattered a great deal in preparing qualified beginning special and general education teachers.

The literature continues to evaluate the preparation of teachers, and by consequence, provides an understanding of the types of experiences that teachers value in their preparation. As two of the more common pathways, traditional and alternately prepared teachers vary in the types of experience they are provided. Evaluating the two types, with what experiences are provided in each pathway, would add the knowledge base of what experiences are most valued for PISETs.

A study by Sindelar, Daunic, and Renells (2004) compared 3 teacher preparation types based on teacher's reported preparedness and efficacy. The study explored a traditional college pathway program, a hybrid university-district partnership program, and a district add-on program. The purpose of the study was to compare the graduates of the programs from their observation performance, principals' ratings, feelings of preparedness, and efficacy.

The study did not provide a defined framework for the interpretation of data and direction for developing research questions. The researchers instead reviewed literature which debated the preparation of teachers and whether expert knowledge of a topic translates to developing learners. The researchers assert that for teaching students who do not learn readily, pedagogical knowledge becomes increasingly important. Special education programs typically require more credit hours (Galambos, Cornett, & Spittler,

1985). Alternative programs may abbreviate course requirements and dilute the quality of special education teachers. The researchers review includes that successful special education alternative pathway programs were characterized by rigorous, coherent content and substantial in length (Rosenberg and Sindelar 2001).

The study collected data through classroom observations using the Praxis III: Classroom Performance Assessments of the Praxis Series: Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers. The assessment evaluates basic skills and knowledge of subject matter. Principal ratings for participants were also obtained. The participants also completed teacher self-reports. The researchers developed two rating forms, one for principals (Principal Questionnaire [PQ]) and one for teachers to complete (Graduate Questionnaire [GQ]). Participants were identified from 4 participating universities for the traditional preparation and through 6 alternative programs. There were 46 participants in the study. There were 16 students from traditional programs, 15 from the hybrid program, and 15 from the add-on program.

The results indicate that traditional program graduates were younger. The researchers discussed how this is aligned to the concept that older candidates usually participate in the alternative pathway's programs. An ANOVA was completed on the Praxis III between groups. Teachers of traditional programs outperformed those in both alternative programs on 3 criteria. They scored higher in making goals and instructional procedures clear, making content comprehensible, and monitoring student learning and providing appropriate feedback. A key finding of the study was in the PQ. Principals rated teachers in the alternative programs higher than the traditionally prepared teachers. This conflicted with Praxis results for the study. There was a discrepancy between the

results of the Praxis and PQ. This provides limitations of the study since the validity of rating is called into question. A key finding of the study exists in the efficacy reports of the 3 types of programs. Each program reported a healthy sense of professional efficacy. This supports a concept of building experience as tied to increasing the efficacy of teachers in the profession.

A study by Green (2012) was conducted to evaluate the method of certification on teacher efficacy. The study looked to identify the differences in self-efficacy between groups of teachers who obtain certification in special education in different pathways. The study sought to answer the research questions, “How does the way in which a teacher becomes certified to teach special education affect the way that they perceive their ability to teach students with disabilities?”

The study used a conceptual framework of social learning theory and self-efficacy based on the works of Rotter and Bandura. The study hypothesized that there was a relationship between method of certification and self-efficacy. The study used questionnaires of four certified special education teachers who each had taken different pathways to certification. Of the participants, one was traditionally certified while the other 3 had degrees, later obtaining the special education certification.

The study was conducted by sending questionnaires developed from prior research based on teacher efficacy. The questions were developed based on efficacy instruments of prior studies (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The researcher conducted multiple rounds of coding the transcriptions of participants for themes related to positive teaching aspects of teaching special education, the teachers’

beliefs that all students had the ability to learn, and how teaching students with disabilities affected the teacher.

Findings were mixed between the traditionally and non-traditionally certified teachers. Both groups mentioned a rewarding aspect of teaching students with disabilities. All respondents included needs based on individual instruction and differentiation in the setting. The researcher did not find a substantial difference in the teacher's perception of ability to teach students with disabilities from the results of the study.

The study was limited by the number of participants. This study would be enhanced through increasing the participant pool and utilizing snowball sampling and purposive sampling methods. All respondents mentioned a concern for the factors that they expressed were out of their control in teaching students with disabilities.

The study recommends future research to explore the relationships between teaching students with disabilities and teacher efficacy. The study concludes that teacher efficacy has a direct impact on teacher learning and posits that the realm of special education is most important in exploring this relationship. The study goes on to indicate that an understanding of the individual would support the effectiveness of teachers in the field of special education. The study indicates that no method of certification is significant over another for developing the efficacy of its teachers. If this is true, understanding the NAS experience, which is not mandated in the certification pathways for special education teachers, has significant value in the understanding of special education teacher efficacy development.

This study indicates a gap the current study seeks to explore. The area of understanding how special education teacher self-efficacy is developed, and in what forms the development occurs is a goal of exploration in the current study. The study also recommends future qualitative studies on teacher efficacy to understand and give insight into the thoughts of teachers.

Observations and Supervision

Preparation of special education teachers through traditional or alternative pathways include a component of observation in the classroom or expected experience in the field. The value added in preparation from these experiences is well documented in research. Teachers undertake hours in the field learning in a social context from a supervisor or cooperating teacher.

A qualitative intrinsic case study completed by An (2021) was performed to describe the learning of physical education preservice teachers (PEPT) regarding their knowledge of disability and teaching methods for students with disabilities in a semester long community service-learning (CSL) program. The purpose of the study was to determine how did the CSL program influence the learning of physical education preservice teachers regarding their knowledge of disability and teaching methods for students with disabilities (SWDs).

The author was guided by the situated learning theory of Lave & Wenger (1991). An (2018) applied the analysis of the framework to the idea that learning is an active process involving the person's engagement in sociocultural contexts. The author reviewed service-learning as a pedagogy that combines experiential learning with

community service to benefit the students and community members (Carrington, Mercer, Lyer, & Selva, 2015). The author further reviewed literature that would strengthen the case for service learning as an experience for preservice teachers. Service-learning integrates the learning activities in the community which enriches the student education (Erickson & Anderson, 2005; Jacoby 2015). The author identified gaps in the literature surrounding the design of the service-learning experiences. The author explored this gap through the qualitative analysis of PEPT experience in the CSL program.

The sampling method included face-to-face interviews, reflective journaling, visual artifacts, and field notes. This qualitative intrinsic case study design was appropriately chosen to answer the research questions guiding the study. Middle school students in the self-contained setting were offered the opportunity to participate in the APE CSL program. There were 17 preservice teachers running the program. A total of 22 children with disabilities participated in the program and 30 college students participated in the CSL program. Of the 30 students, 10 met the criteria for inclusion in the study. The 10 were selected for their enrollment as physical education teacher education students and were in their third or fourth year of the program. The main data source of the study was a face-to-face interview at the conclusion of the CSL program. Thematic analysis was conducted. An analysis of the transcribed interview was completed to identify themes. Visual artifacts and written documents were also reviewed to verify themes.

The themes that emerged were challenging but fulfilling experiences, uncovering the qualities and roles of a teacher, and transforming perception of disability and teaching. The results of the study provided information about the perceptions of SWD and the PEPT learning. The CSL approach was discussed as having a positive impact on

the PEPT teachers' sense of teaching SWDs. The results suggest that the CSL helped to establish the PEPT professional identities, and recognize resources designed for PE instruction.

The author connected the learning theory with the results of the study. Learning as an active process is supported in the themes that emerged. The author could increase the validity of the study by sampling more preservice teachers across other preparatory programs. The sample only included PEPT teachers, which is a limiting factor. Increasing the sample would allow the results of the study to be generalized to the global population of preservice special education teachers. The author would also increase the transferability of the study by increasing the participant pool to include teachers who are in other preparatory programs.

The study added to previous research of community service-learning. Themes of learning as an active process and CSL as a valuable experience of PEPTs were developed. These themes further the research on academic environments, but through omission, highlight the need to explore the NAS.

The study by Ahmad, Othman and Jahedi (2016) investigated the effectiveness of a community service learning (CSL) projects in contributing to preservice teachers' development and growth, furthering the understanding of CSL as a valuable environment of learning. The study was qualitative in nature and used the journal responses of the preservice teachers to analyze themes and results of the study. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of a CSL program in contributing to pre-service teachers' developmental growth.

The authors were guided by the theory of self-efficacy which was reviewed in the literature. They do not elaborate on self-efficacy as a framework for the study beyond its inclusion in the literature review. The authors reviewed the literature in support of service learning (SL) experiences and their link to personal learning, professional knowledge, social commitment and emotional growth (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Service-learning experiences offer a versatile experience that integrates school curriculum with community service (Myers & Pickeral, 1997). The author references literature that supported SL as an effective tool for increasing self-efficacy of pre-service teachers to modify pedagogy and improve the quality of teaching (Wasserman, 2009). The literature review was complete and supportive of the researchers' study. The authors were deficient in describing a connection to a theoretical framework and in building a conceptual framework for the study.

The study consisted of 20 undergraduate students enrolled in the same course. They were tasked with providing preparatory support in a debate tournament to students aged 13 to 24 years old. Reflections were collected before, during and after the CSL program. Analysis of the data was done manually through multiple readings where data was organized into categories. Then, the data was coded according to theoretical perspectives where themes emerged. The Study adopted a coding framework by Donison and Itters (2010).

The findings of the authors included three major themes, personal benefits and personal development; professional development; and community understanding and connections. The results indicated that after undertaking the CSL program, teachers experienced personal development, professional growth, and social connection. Teachers

reported many positive outcomes from the experience giving them a better sense of their ability to complete the tasks of a teacher as they move from preservice to in-service (Ahmad et al., 2016).

The authors described an evaluation of the CSL in respect to the growth of the student participants in the study, which was not aligned to the purpose of the study. The authors needed to develop a richer analysis aligned to the purpose. The confirmability of the study is an area of concern. The participants of the study completed the CSL and reflections as part of coursework requirements. This could lead to bias and decrease the degree of neutrality in the findings.

A study by Conderman, Baker, and Walker (2023) further explored the experience of special education teachers and their reported preparedness for teaching special education. The study collected data from undergraduate and graduate students to examine their experiences in student teaching. This mixed methods study looked to answer how candidates assessed their knowledge regarding implementing various skills presented during their program, assessing their ability to implement skills, what skills were observed in their student teaching experience, the relationships between student teaching placement and their perception of the ability to implement various skills, and the relationship between skills observed and the perception of their ability to implement those skills.

The study collected quantitative and qualitative data through a survey provided to participants. One hundred and nineteen participants completed the survey. Qualitative data was reviewed and coded by the research team. The coding process included inductive processes to establish emerging themes and form initial categories.

Interrelationships and connections between responses were placed in categories and coded. The survey was evaluated for reliability using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The researchers found $\alpha = .83$, which indicated a high consistency metric for all sub-scales.

The study found that candidates were able to identify their strengths and reported observing examples of professionalism, reflecting on their practice, and collaborating with general education teachers. Collaboration skills were shown to be critical areas of need which must be developed in coursework and clinical experience. Candidates require practice of critical skills over time, using skills in various conditions, and feedback on practice. The study finds that candidates have a need for practicing skills within a safe environment without the pressure of high-stakes assessment.

The study was limited by the sample. A non-random selection of candidates provided a sample that may not represent the greater population of student teachers. The lack of randomness in the sample also threatened the validity of the study. The external validity may have impacted the generalizability of the findings.

The study does add to the literature that candidates need an environment to practice skills. The environment needs to present a safe and free atmosphere, free of the burdens of high-stakes assessment. The proposed environment is not defined but is suggestive of the NAS and the learning environment it offers by definition. The unexplored environment presented by the non-academic setting aligns itself to the identified environment for learning discussed in the findings of the study (Conderman et al., 2023).

Experience in the Field

To add to the understanding of time in the field building teachers' capacity to teach special education, a quantitative study by Rupp, Neeper, and Dalsen (2016) focused on teacher perceptions of implementing teaching strategies for students with severe disabilities. The purpose of the study was to collect data about participants' preparedness to teach students with severe disabilities. The study looked for differences between teachers of different licenses, distinct levels of education, and different experience levels.

The theory of self-efficacy was used as a framework for the study, guiding the literature review and purpose. The study reviewed literature from the understanding that a teacher's preparedness is a strong indicator of their teaching self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow, 2002). The theory of self-efficacy was used as a framework for the study. Teachers need to have a high level of preparedness in implementing effective teaching practices because without self-efficacy they are unlikely to attempt the task (Bandura, 1997). The study further reviewed the importance of teacher preparedness impacting student outcomes and teacher effectiveness. The study described teacher perceptions about their own skill level affecting the likelihood they will implement a recommended practice (Ayers, Meyer, Erevelles, & Park-Lee, 1994).

The participants of the study were selected from the state of Wisconsin's Department of Public Instruction. The list was filtered to include teachers of special education, resulting in 104 respondents for the study. The survey method was administered using Qualtrics web-based survey software. Student vignettes were created to provide a profile of a student with a disability that respondents would answer questions

about implementing practices for. The respondents answered their preparedness to implement practices using a Likert scale (1 = not at all, 5 = extremely prepared).

Independent-sample t-tests were used to compare responses between the participant certification level, level of education, and teaching experience. The dependent variable in the analysis was the teacher preparedness ratings. The independent variable for the first t-test was teacher licensure. The independent variable used for the second t-test was teacher experience level. The study found a statistically significant difference in reported preparedness levels of teachers with a cognitive disability (CD) licensure and teachers with a cross categorical (CC) licensure. Teachers with a CD licensure felt more prepared to support the students described in the survey. There was no statistically significant difference between reported preparedness of teachers who did not hold a CD or CC licensure and the CC licensure group.

The study found that there was a significant difference in reported preparedness and teacher experience levels. The teachers with 10 or more years' experience reported significantly higher perceptions of preparedness. For all significant findings of each preparedness category, $p < .05$.

The study was limited in the sample. Teachers were selected from one geographical area. Since the preparedness rating was self-reported, it is hard to measure the actual preparedness level of respondents. The study does provide implications for teacher preparedness as it is related to licensure, experience, and education level. The appropriate statistical tests were chosen for the study.

The authors' findings implicate experience as a driver for a teachers' preparedness to teach PWD. The study found significant differences between teachers who have spent more time with PWD in the academic setting. The study adds to existing research that confirms experience as a proponent for increasing a teachers' ability to support students with disabilities in the classroom.

The study leaves questions of what other forms of support are provided to teachers for supporting PWD. This is important to evaluate as a point of purpose for exploring the NAS. Evaluating deficiencies in preparatory programs are explored in a study by Allen and Barnett (2020). The study is a qualitative study on the lack of educational support general education teachers receive in supporting students with disabilities in their classrooms. A collaboration between a middle school and university investigated the preparatory aspects of the general education license and the amount of coursework that the general education teacher was getting in supporting special education students. The grounding principle of the article was that all students are general education students. All students are the shared responsibility of every teacher in the school setting. This framework was used to evaluate the comfortability general education teachers have in supporting students with disabilities in the classroom, their ability to engage in meaningful teaching practices for their special education students, and how comfortable the teachers were in participating in parent meetings and IEP meetings. To have successful inclusive education practices the teachers need to have comfort in teaching students with disabilities through a partnership and shared team ideology.

The study established that general education teachers were not comfortable in teaching students with disabilities and were unsure of their role in the education of the

special education students. The coursework towards licensure included some 33 hours of course work for general education and only 6 hours of course work for special education. The study looked at groups of preservice teachers from the university and some in-service general education teachers. The participants interviewed reported they felt unprepared to participate in IEP meetings and how to provide instruction for the students with disabilities.

The collaboration between the school and university professor lead to the creation of an entire day professional development for the entire middle school staff. The professional development day was built around the learning target: “As an educator, I will be able to describe the basic tenets of special education law, the disability categories and support structures, and the role I play in supporting a student with an IEP.” As a result of the professional learning day, teachers reported a lower sense of anxiety regarding the education of students with a disability. The faculty in attendance shared that the change in mindset was due to the informative professional development workshop and the on-going support provided by the principal and assistant professor.

This level of analysis in the research adds to the knowledge that learning through experience is valued among PISETs.

Self-Efficacy in Preparatory Programs

A study by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) on the relationships between methods of measuring self-efficacy and the construction of the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES) build on the concepts of what constitutes and is valued as developing self-efficacy of teachers. The belief in their own capabilities to be successful

in the classroom, engage their students, and complete the tasks of teacher are described as ones teaching self-efficacy. The purpose of the study was to review the major measures of self-efficacy to develop a measure that addresses the persistent measurement problems of previous measures.

The authors first complete a review of self-efficacy, and the beginning attempts to measure the construct. The authors reviewed the first measures grounded in Rotter's social learning theory. A review of the theory and measures detailed the idea that the measure begins with the simple idea of two items. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) describe the pathway from these first measures, and they subsequently influenced Rand researchers in developing the concept that teacher efficacy is the belief of teachers to control the reinforcement of their actions either by internal influences or environmental influences. The authors go on to describe shortly after the Rand method, Guskey developing a 30-item measure. In the analysis of items between the Rand and Gusky measures, positive correlations between teacher efficacy and responsibility for both student success and failure were found to be significant. The authors go on to exam the intercorrelations between multiple measures. Those measures included the Rand items, Teacher locus of control scale, Responsibility for students' achievement questionnaire, Teacher efficacy scale, Efficacy vignettes, Webb efficacy scale, affect for teacher, and teaching self-concept.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) described the work of the College of Education at Ohio State University. The seminar included 2 researchers and 8 graduate students. The graduate students included 2 teacher educators, 2 full time doctoral students, and four participating teachers. The members had teaching experience ranging

from 5-28 years with an 11.9 mean. The group worked on selecting a format and scale for the newly developed measure. They reviewed the 30-items on the Bandura scale while also developing 8-10 items each that they felt were missing from the scale but critical to measuring the concept. The group developed a 52-item scale, which was reduced to a long and short form measure of 24 items and 12 items. The resulting measure was used in a study to determine the appropriateness of the items.

The instrument was tested on 224 participants including 146 pre-service teachers and 78 in-service teachers. The factor analysis and reliability of the items were reviewed. The construct validity and discriminant validity were measured. Three studies were reviewed in the use of the OSTES. The authors found that the studies completed in measuring the OSTES indicate that the measure could be considered reasonably valid and reliable. The positive correlation between the OSTES and other measures provides evidence of construct validity.

The study was limited in its ability to provide further testing and validation of the measure. Future studies of the reliability and validity of the OSTES should be conducted across various grade ranges, subjects, and environments of teachers. The study would benefit from longitudinal studies to follow teachers through their teaching journey and provide insight into the factors that can be attributed to their increased self-efficacy.

The study provided a complete description and understanding of the pathway toward understanding self-efficacy of teachers from the early measures to the development of the OSTES measure. The study suggests that understanding the self-

efficacy of teachers could have significant changes on the ways teachers are prepared and supported in their teaching.

The phenomenological study by Pearman, Bowles, and Polka (2021) sought to clarify teacher educator definitions of self-efficacy, how it is manifested in students, and ways it is taught in preparation programs. The author sought the lived experience of teacher educators related to how they defined and interpreted self-efficacy is taught in teacher preparation programs.

The theory of self-efficacy is used as a framework for the study. The author reviewed literature asserting that as teacher's self-efficacy increases, their belief in their students' abilities in their teaching practice also increases (Polka, 2010). A teacher with high self-efficacy can create a learning environment where they help participants succeed (Ergun & Avci, 2018). The literature reviewed added to the themes of self-efficacy by providing context on how teachers with high self-efficacy are more willing to try new instrumental methods and engage in professional dialogue with colleagues (Fullan, 2014). The author used the self-efficacy frame to support the purpose of the study. The author further expands on these findings that individuals lacking a strong sense of self-efficacy tend to avoid tasks or goals they perceive as challenging (Bandura, 1994).

The author used a purposive sampling method which met the needs of the study as the researcher was able to obtain a representative sample of the population. The author invited 180 participants from 3 universities that met the criteria of teacher educators at nationally accredited educator preparation programs. Of the invited participants, 114 completed the survey. The survey was sent out electronically consisting of 4 demographic questions and 7 open ended short answer responses. The authors reviewed

the responses and took notes. The authors met to organize and develop what the research meant, common language in responses, and characteristics mentioned. The authors utilized the constant comparative method to refine open response statements into categories (Patton, 2015). The authors found 5 personal characteristics of self-efficacy emerged: confidence/self-empowerment, commitment, ability to meet challenges, innovative thinking, and facilitation.

Results were described and were aligned to the purpose. The authors determined that participants had differing opinions of self-efficacy. Some participants described self-efficacy as an innate characteristic that could be developed through coursework, others wondered if it could be taught, and some described it present in some people to some degree before their education at the university began. Commonalities among teacher educators included that modeling and discussion along with reflection were key components of building self-efficacy. Pearman, Bowles, and Polka (2021) further concluded that teacher educators felt field experiences and the use of scenarios gave more exposure to situations that developed the self-efficacy of preservice teachers.

The study would benefit from including more sources of data. The study relied on survey responses but should have included an analysis of organizational documents related to the field experiences teacher educators provide in their classes. Triangulation of data would strengthen the results of the study. A conceptual framework would have better represented the data using the five categories emerging. This representation of how frequently any one category was mentioned would help to show how teacher educators viewed the category. Representing the data in this way would help in understanding what

of those 5 categories is valued more by the participants. This would give a richer answer to the questions the study asked.

The study determined self-efficacy as defined by pre-service teachers was varied, but the concept of its development in experience was solidified. It was found that modeling was adding to self-efficacy. Research on what modeling experiences hold the most value was not included in the study.

The purpose of the quantitative study by Emmons and Zager (2018) was to evaluate special educators' change in self-efficacy as collaborators after participation in a year-long federally funded graduate certificate program in Autism. The authors looked for a significant pretest-posttest difference in perceived self-efficacy scores of participants after program participation. The authors also calculated the effect size that program participation had on participants' self-efficacy perceptions with respect to collaboration expertise.

The authors evaluated the importance of collaboration, citing that collaboration helps students to meaningfully participate in school activities that might otherwise not be accessible (Lawrence-Brown, 2004). The authors further reviewed literature on self-efficacy to signal the importance of having higher self-efficacy. Emmons and Zager (2018) stated that a perceived higher self-efficacy regarding a teacher's ability to deal with difficult student behavior had fewer negative emotional reactions (Hasting & Brown, 2002). The review of literature in the study supported that high perceptions of self-efficacy are associated with better performance (Boyd et al., 2014; Morris et al., 1981; Mueller, 1992; Seipp, 1991; Zeidner, 2014).

The participants in the authors' study were enrolled special education teachers, related service providers, and administrators in the service training. In total, there were 104 participants in 8 cohorts. Participants completed the self-efficacy study scale at the beginning and the end of the program. The reported self-efficacy scores were the dependent variable for the study with participation in the service training serving as the independent variable. The survey used a Likert scale to measure participants' self-efficacy in key areas addressed in the Autism Specialist program. A t-test was conducted to test for significance between the pretest and posttest self-efficacy scores of participants. Cohen's d was used to determine the effect size of the results. The results showed that there was a significant difference between the pretest and posttest for participants self-efficacy scores in 6 of the 8 cohorts. Cohorts 1 and 5 did not have a significant difference. Cohort 2 had significance with $t(14) = 5.14, p < .001$, Cohort 3 had significance with $t(13) = 4.56, p = .001$, Cohort 4 had significance with $t(12) = 3.77, p = .003$, cohort 6 had significance with $t(7) = 6.94, p < .001$, and cohort 7 had significance with $t(9) = 7.12, p < .001$.

The authors used a within-participants one-way ANOVA to examine the statistical significance in the pretest and posttest differences across all cohorts. Results showed a significant increase in participants' collaboration efficacy levels using the Greenhouse-Geisser analysis, $F(1,86) = 135.55, p < .001$. The analysis of the effect size of the program was large for all cohorts except cohort 1, as follows: Cohort 1, $d_z = .66$; Cohort 2, $d_z = 1.33$; Cohort 3, $d_z = 1.22$; Cohort 4, $d_z = 1.04$; Cohort 5, $d_z = 0.95$; Cohort 6, $d_z = 2.45$; Cohort 7, $d_z = 2.25$; and Cohort 8, $d_z = 1.29$.

The authors' study was limited due to the lack of a control group. Participants in the study all attended the graduate program. The study evaluated collaboration as a self-reported score, which does not measure an observed score of collaboration because of the program. It is assumed, with self-reported collaboration, that participant responses will be candid and honest. Measuring collaboration as an observed or member checked data point would increase the validity of the study. The study questions did not evaluate varying types of collaboration, so there is no analysis of teacher's expertise of collaboration methods.

Conclusion

The qualitative research presented in the literature review establishes the main concepts within the conceptual framework of the current study. The conceptual framework describes a pathway to increased self-efficacy when working with students with disabilities. Increases self-efficacy of teachers leads to better outcomes for students in the classroom. Community service-learning programs lead to increased teacher self-efficacy (An, 2021). The CSL experience of this study was significant in increasing the self-efficacy of the PETE. In the study by Allen & Burnette (2020), there was a lack of comfort within the in-service teachers when working with students with disabilities. This discomfort decreased after the participants completed the professional development. The PD was its own mastery experience that led to increased self-efficacy of the teachers. The study by Ahmad, Othman, and Jahedi (2016) further established the need for mastery experiences that develop a teachers' ability to succeed at a novel task. The participants of the study reported that the experience opened their eyes and minds to the experience of in-service teaching. The study by Green (2012) recommends future research aligned to

the purpose of the current study while providing findings that the relationship between special education teacher self-efficacy and certification pathways is unclear. It leads to the importance of further studies that evaluate what experience is most valuable in developing the self-efficacy of special education teachers.

The quantitative studies reviewed provide an evaluation of how a participant's preparedness and self-efficacy are different between different independent variables. Rupper, Neepier, and Dalsen (2016) found statistically significant differences between teachers' years of experience, certification, and educational level. They found that more experience, higher-education level (Master's) and certification in special education were associated with increased self-efficacy. The study did not identify what experiences were different between those groups that lead to increased self-efficacy. Emmans and Zagar (2018) found significant differences in pre and posttest self-efficacy in collaboration scores for teachers who participated in the Autism service training. The literature supports the concept that mastery experiences lead to increased teacher self-efficacy about the training topic.

The literature provides accounts of individual studies where a single intervention is presented, and an outcome analyzed. The literature does not provide an analysis of what non-educational experiences lead to increased self-efficacy with teachers of students with disabilities. The literature provides analysis of academic and instructional focused experiences and how they relate to a teacher's self-efficacy, but there has not been an evaluation of what other experiences may be contributing to higher self-efficacy. Identifying these experiences could prove beneficial when designing teacher certification programs. The significance on self-efficacy in teaching SWDs with the experience of

having a sibling with a disability, working at a recreational camp for people with disabilities, or working 1:1 with a person with a disability as a self-direction service support provider have not been evaluated. This study will evaluate the impact of these non-educational mastery experiences on a teacher's self-efficacy in teaching SWDs.

The current study will look to fill the gaps in analysis of non-educational work experiences and the relationship between instructional self-efficacy. The study will support previous research on how experiences impact the learning and growth of special education teachers, as measured by their reported self-efficacy. The study will look to find a significant relationship between the non-educational experiences and self-efficacy. If there is significance, future recommendations will be made, and implications discussed.

Discovering the experiences that lead to increased self-efficacy of special education teachers will help to provide insight in increasing the self-efficacy of general education teachers as well. Methods of intervention, best practices, and teaching strategies are always being evaluated. Teachers need to have a high level of preparedness in implementing effective teaching practices because without self-efficacy they are unlikely to attempt the task (Bandura, 1997). Teachers with more experience have been shown to have higher self-efficacy in supporting students with disabilities (Rupper, Neeper, & Dalsen, 2016). Pre-service teachers need to prioritize their observational experiences to maximize their preparation before entering the classroom. Self-efficacy has been shown to increase when teachers are exposed to learning experiences and mastery experiences (Emmons & Zager 2018). In determining new measures of self-efficacy, it has been expressed that the potency of self-efficacy should be looked at with a

serious focus for its ability to impact teacher motivation and persistence (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The implications of which could determine the pathways, experiences, and support of pre-service teachers in their preparatory programs.

CHAPTER 3

Working in the NAS for people with disabilities represents an environment unexplored from the perspective of PISSETs and as an environment for developing self-efficacy in special education skills. Prior research has shown an interest in the field of education for evaluating the various types of experience that teachers engage in, and how those experiences impact their preparedness for teaching (Kent & Giles, 2016). This chapter will describe the specific inclusion criteria for the study developed from this unexplored environment and the need to prepare teachers for working in the classroom. The chapter will discuss the research design chosen to answer the research questions of the study. Phenomenological studies to capture the lived experience of teachers as an established method of research will be discussed. The relationship between the conceptual framework of the study aligned to the methodology will be detailed. Within this chapter the researcher will describe the methods for identifying organizations that meet the requirements of a NAS. The researcher will describe the process of requesting and gaining approval of the international review board for the participants of the study. The triangulation of data and alignment to the research questions for the selected methods of data collecting is discussed. This section will describe the coding process used for the identification of themes and results.

Research Design

The current study is looking at the lived experience of PISSETs in the NAS with people with disabilities. A phenomenological design was chosen for its ability to answer questions about the experience of participants (Letts et al., 2007). This phenomenological study will include survey, interview, observation, and the analysis of available literature

on the NASs identified within the study. The methods of data collection were selected to triangulate data across resources to provide a thorough analysis of themes.

The participants in the study have experience in the NAS that can be used to provide answers to the research questions of the study. Qualitative methods explore the meaning individuals attribute to an experience (Creswell et al., 2018). This method was chosen to provide a flexible structure with an inductive style to focus on the meaning and discuss the complexity of the study (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 4). This design provides the methodology to make sense of the lived experience of the participants from their interviews and the observation of interactions within the setting,

The conceptual framework of the study is one that connects a social learning environment with dialectic approach while understanding the components of self-efficacy are at play. This perspective is aligned to the world views within a constructivist perspective. This perspective is one that is meant to provide meaning, understanding, and social construction (Creswell et al., 2018, p. 6). To answer the questions of the study and provide an analysis for the purpose, a phenomenological qualitative approach was chosen.

Phenomenological research provides a line of thinking that seeks to make meaning of experience and provide a description of the participants lived experience related to a phenomena of study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020). The frame of the study presumes the interactions of social interactions as an underpinning of learning. The experience of participants must be captured to understand the complexity with which these interactions attribute to the specific purpose of understanding their relationship to preparation and acquisition of self- efficacy in special education.

The qualitative phenomenological approach was chosen for the ability in the method to gather in depth information through interviews and gather contextual information through observation. This method allows for the use of data collection through interview and observation for the purpose of triangulating data to increase the validity of the study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020, p. 41)

The observations for the study will be conducted as a non-participant observation for the etic perspective (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 171). The researcher will take care to not interact within the setting. The interactions within the setting between participants, and those around them are the subject of the study. Interference could potentially change the dynamic under analysis.

The analysis of teacher perceptions of self-efficacy has existed in prior research when looking at the academic experience of the participants (An, 2021; Emmons & Zager, 2018; Ismailos et al., 2022; Peebles & Mendaglio, 2014). The use of this method in defining the experience of teachers in academic settings has provided in-depth analysis and perspective helpful to the advancement of research in the field. The current study will use similar approaches to prior research to equalize the methodology for analysis. Using similar study methodology and design from similar studies was considered for the ability to provide a deep comparative analysis of the findings. The discussion of findings from the current study are better understood when looking at similar studies analyzing aspects of self-efficacy, but with the change of the newly defined non-academic setting as a learning environment.

Research Questions

1. How does the experience of working for people with disabilities in a non-academic setting (NAS) contribute to knowledge of special education teaching?
2. How do pre-service teachers relate the experience of the NAS to their preparation for teaching in special education?
3. What successes and challenges are experienced by PISETs in the NAS?
4. How do PISETs describe their experience in the NAS compared to their experience in the academic setting?

Methods and Procedures

Setting

Participants identified organizations that met the definition of a NAS within the survey. The identified organizations were then included as the settings for analysis and observation. The NAS is defined as a setting in which people with disabilities are enrolled or pay to participate in recreational and social activities. These activities may include arts and crafts, music, sports, fitness, yoga, cooking, dance, and other recreational activities. The NAS does not evaluate staff for teaching or pedagogical skills. The NAS does not provide report cards, academic assessment data, or goal attainment information as part of the program. The sole purpose of the program is to provide an engaging recreational activity where socialization and access are the focus. These programs may be provided by governmental funded agencies or are private pay. The means to which families access the program is not exclusionary in the study.

Participants identified 5 settings that met the criteria for inclusion in the study. These 5 settings include Best Buddies, Back Yard Players, Challenger Athletics, the Special Olympics, and Camp Anchor. The accuracy of the settings identified to meet the definition of the study was supported through observational data, an analysis of website data, and interviews with participants.

Participants

The sample consisted of pre-service and in-service special education teachers (PISETs). Inservice special education participants had a special education teaching certification. Preservice special education teachers were enrolled in a program leading to a teaching certification in special education. Participants acknowledged their enrollment or certification status as part of the survey for inclusion in the study.

Participants were selected using convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Participants were selected based on specific selection criteria and were asked to refer candidates who meet the same criteria. Participants were required to have a special education certification or be enrolled in a program leading to certification in special education. The participants had experience working in a NAS setting for people with disabilities. The NAS was defined with examples for the participants with the informed consent and inclusion survey to ensure they met the requirement.

The level of certification was not considered for selection. The participants must have experience working in a NAS setting for people with disabilities prior to becoming a special education certified teacher. The NAS was defined with examples to the participants to ensure they met the requirement. The current study sought 8 participants to

join the study. A survey was sent to prospective candidates which included an informed consent section, qualifying for participation based on certification section, NAS setting experience section, and an election to participate in interviews section. Participants of any race/ethnicity, gender, and subject taught were included. The inclusion criteria included a certification in any grade band of special education. The participants in the current study were selected from qualified participants that met the selection criteria with experience in the NAS prior to or during their programs for special education certification.

Demographic information found in Appendix D includes information of the eight participants of the study. The table is used to share the NAS organizations each participant has experience with, the years of their experience, the method of special education certification, and other pertinent information necessary for the discussion of results and findings.

Data Collection Procedures

Data was collected anonymously through a google form. The form consisted of 4 sections that would only allow access to each section as participants elected to participate and/or met the criteria outlined in the section. Participants were provided with the option to participate in interviews at the conclusion of the form. The participants elected to provide contact information if they selected to participate in the interview process of the study. Participants could opt-in to follow-up interviews and provide contact information at the end of the survey. Contact information was collected by the researcher through the survey if they opt-in to follow up interviews. This information will be held on a password protected computer in a locked office. The information will be used to coordinate follow-up interviews for member checking and the expansion of answers to survey responses.

The contact information will be erased and removed from all digital sources at the conclusion of the data collection period. Demographic information collected is general and non-identifiable. The data will be collected and stored on a password protected account on a password protected laptop. The laptop will remain in a locked desk in a locked office. The data file will be saved as an excel file.

The survey was created using a google form that was set to not collect any identifying information automatically, but only have sections for participants to complete after opting into the study. The first section of the form included the informed consent document for the study. Participants who acknowledged the informed consent and checked accept were then given access to the next section of the survey. Section 2 of the survey asked about their current certification status towards working as a special education teacher. Participants needed to meet the criteria as a special education teacher, or a student enrolled in a college program leading towards certification in special education. If participants met this criterion, they would then proceed to section 3. Section 3 clarified the definition of the NAS for the participant. They were asked if their experience qualified as the NAS described for the study. The section also collected the number of years' experience they had in the NAS, the name of the program, and if they were willing to participate in an interview for the study. If they answered yes, they were sent to section 4. Section 4 contained an input box for the participant to provide contact information for the researcher to use to schedule and complete the interview. Prior to interviewing participants, identified NAS programs were reviewed by the researcher by looking at public facing information about the programs. The researcher used the

information to verify that their information aligns to the identification of a program as a NAS.

Data was collected through direct observation by the researcher. Identified programs that meet the criteria for being non-academic settings for people with disabilities will be observed for a minimum of 5 hours for inclusion in the study. The researcher took field notes aligned to the indicators identified as components for certification in special education which were normalized across state and national standards, through analysis of certification in Autistic Spectrum Disorder, and in current certification research (Albright & Williams, 2021; Shepherd & Brown, 2003; Stayton et al., 2012). The observations noted the activities that participants were completing. The observations documented the roles that staff, volunteers, and participants play in the setting. The observations were conducted after interviews to find agreement or contradictions between the descriptions of participants.

Identified organizations that met the inclusion criteria for the study by participants in the survey will all be reviewed. Available literature and information about the organizations was coded and included within the study. The official websites of the organizations were reviewed for mission, vision, and about information or statements. These data points were reviewed for themes and connections.

Interviews with participants were conducted using the questionnaire provided in Appendix A. The researcher maintained the order of questioning to limit researcher bias and dissuade inconsistencies for the analysis of interview transcriptions. The questions were created in advance and used consistently across all interviews as appropriate interview protocol for the method (Creswell et al., 2018). The interviews were designed

to have consistency, be of appropriate length, and support a depth of analysis appropriate for the method (Jacob & Furgerson, 2015). Interviews were transcribed using an application that provided word for word transcriptions. The recordings were then played by the researcher while reading through transcription to confirm 100% accuracy of transcriptions before the coding process was begun.

Data Analysis Approach

The approach to data analysis was conducted as an organized and sequential process. Transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher to confirm their accuracy from the recorded audio. This was done using a word document for the transcription with the audio playing through the transcription app. The researcher corrected any miscoded words during this step and took notes after reviewing the eight participant interviews. The researcher used aspects of Tesch's eight steps in the coding process. Specifically reading and listening to the entire interviews while taking notes to organize categories for coding the data (Hennink et al., 2020, p. 196).

The researcher took notes during the process which revealed categories used in the first round of coding. The initial categories created and coded included teaching skills described in the setting, successes, family interactions, professional work-related skills, challenges, comparisons between academic and NAS, emotional states, and descriptions of lessons learned. Later rounds of coding were conducted to connect the more complex aspects of the setting where self-efficacy and the connection to the teaching environment could be understood. A discussion of these steps is included in the results as the natural conversation of the findings is connected to the process in understanding the lived experience of participants in the unexplored setting.

The approach will focus on small tasks in an organized analysis plan to gradually build meaning from the data collected (Hennink et al., 2020). Taking organized steps to build an understanding of the participant experience is necessary for effective analysis of the data (Creswell et al., 2018). The coding steps will be conducted for each participant in a methodical approach. After participant data is reviewed in one round, more complex analysis will continue. This was completed for 4 rounds of coding while ongoing interpretation of the findings followed in the reporting of the results.

Member checking and triangulation of data was conducted to support the validity and reliability of the study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020). Participants were provided with a final-draft version of chapter 4 where quotations and interpretation of interviews were conducted. The document contained non-identifying information and only participant identifiers. The participants were provided with their participation number for the purpose of review. Observations conducted as a non-participant and analysis of website information from the NAS organizations was included for triangulation of themes identified in coding the interviews.

Finally, the researcher took the coded and organized data from the interviews, website analysis, and observation for review within the context for the conceptual framework of the study. The framework was one that set the NAS as an environment of social learning while aspects attributing to the acquisition of self-efficacy were embedded in the experience. This framework and analysis of the experience will reveal the connections between the special education teacher's self-efficacy connected to their academic experience and professional development. These approaches to analyzing the data align tot the methodology of a phenomenological study and supportive of the

selection of the conceptual framework for the study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020; Jacob & Furgerson, 2015)

Trustworthiness of the Design

There are known threats to the research design of the study, which are: low statistical power and Hawthorne effects. To minimize the possible threats to low statistical power, the researcher attempted purposeful and snow-ball sampling. Through this method of sampling more participants were reached to complete the study. To minimize the Hawthorne effects of the study, the researcher did not ask specific questions about self-efficacy in the interview or lead respondents through varying lines of questioning. A set of questions was created that were followed by the researcher in the interview process. Anonymity was guaranteed to participants throughout the study. No identifying information was collected or included in the interpretation and analysis of the data. Being clear about collected data not being identifiable, the participants are less likely to show Hawthorne effects. The lack of research on the NAS was a challenge for choosing ways to categorize data and relate results to prior research. The data was related to competencies and indicators of special education certified teachers compared with national and state aligned indicators (Stayton et al., 2012).

Multiple rounds of coding were used to confirm accurate interpretation of themes related to the conceptual frame of the study and concepts of self-efficacy. The coding process was reviewed with colleagues to confirm the appropriateness for identifying themes. The identified themes and interpretation of interview data were subjected to member checking methods. Participants were given the completed results and findings section of the study along with their participant identifier. In this method, member

checking was completed. Zero of the participants provided conflicting feedback on the accuracy of interview interpretation and identification of the themes of the study,

Member checking was completed as a step of strengthening the validity and reliability of the design. Members confirmed that the interpretation and analysis of the data was an approach appropriate for the study. Triangulation of data was also approached within the study by looking at observational data and website data. The website served as an artifact review. Together, these sources increased the trustworthiness of the phenomenological approach of the study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020).

Research Ethics

The researcher sought Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the data collection and procedures of the study. Approval from the IRB was obtained prior to conducting any participant outreach, data collection, or continuation of the study. All measures of ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, and informed consent were followed as per the guidelines of the St. John's University IRB.

The participant pool was accessible due to the researcher's relationship to a non-academic setting included in the study. The use of purposeful and snowball sampling provided greater outreach beyond the scope of the researchers' access. The participation in the study did not provide any favorable advantage or gain. The access to the participants was granted by organizational representatives that shared the survey with potential participants. All collected information about the participants was kept anonymous.

Participants were informed that their completion of the survey constituted participation in the study. The study maintained that any participant could opt-out of the study at any time during the survey. Identifying information was not collected during the study or at any time throughout the process.

There are no known harmful consequences of participation in the study. The researcher provided anonymity throughout the study for participants. The data collected was downloaded to a USB drive and locked in a drawer in a locked office. Only the researcher had access to the survey results.

Researcher Role

The researcher is an Assistant Principal of Special Education at a middle school serving grades 6-8. The researcher has experience in the NAS as a former staff member for the Camp Anchor summer program. The researcher employed multiple steps to avoid biases related to prior experience within the collection of data, formulation of questions, and interpretation of data.

The researcher conducted moments of reflexivity throughout the study and process. Part of the researcher's personal experience within the NAS was the catalyst for the study. The researcher used member checking to ensure that bracketing personal feelings of the setting were effectively completed. Only data provided by participants were included in the results, findings, and implications. An epilogue referring to the experience of the researcher was completed to provide context to the bias that may exist, while the methodology and systematic analysis of data was completed so that results were only indicative of participant, observational, and artifact analysis.

Conclusion

The data collected through the methods described in this chapter will be reviewed and interpreted in the following chapter. The interview transcriptions will undergo a coding process where themes and findings will be discussed in alignment to the conceptual framework for the study. Triangulation of data will be completed using observational notes from the researcher, transcriptions of the interviews, review of website data for the NAS identified, and through member checking. The use of bracketing to account for bias will be supported in the use of member checking to confirm findings from the lived experience of participants only. These steps will be described and detailed throughout the next chapter. The findings will be discussed in relationship to the research questions of the study.

CHAPTER 4

This chapter will provide an interpretation of the results of the data collected for this study. The interview, observation, and non-academic setting mission, vision, and “about” information are used to provide triangulation of found themes and connections. The interview transcription coding processes will be discussed. The researcher conducted multiple rounds of coding to develop an understanding of the data. The results and findings will be analyzed and interpreted through the lens of the study. The research questions will be answered through analysis of participant responses, observation of settings, and the analysis of NAS literature. The lived experience of participants will be revealed as questions of the study are answered. The participants identified 5 settings that met the criteria as a non-academic setting when completing the initial survey. The 5 included Camp Anchor, Best Buddies, Challenger Athletics, Backyard Players, and The Special Olympics.

Results/Findings

Participants of the study had varying levels of certification in special education and pathways to teaching. Of the eight participants, six participants currently work as special education teachers in either integrated co-teaching classes, self-contained classes, or in specialized programs for students with disabilities. Of the eight participants, one participant is a current school building principal who maintained a special education certification with 11 years teaching experience. Of the eight participants, one participant works as a teaching assistant and is currently enrolled in a program leading to certification in special education teaching. The participants consisted of five females and three males.

Participants in the study hold various special education teaching degrees. Although two participants do not work as special education teachers at the time of the study, all participants have completed coursework to special education certification and have received degrees. Of the eight participants, one participant has a degree but is not certified in special education yet. Participants work with varying grade levels and settings in special education.

Participants identified five programs as meeting the definition of the NAS for the study. Triangulating information from transcriptions and with review of the public facing information for the organizations confirmed they meet the definition of the study. The settings do not use IEP goals or other measures for participant progress and participation in their directives or planning (*ANCHOR Program | Hempstead Town, NY, 2024; Best Buddies International, 2024; Camp Anchor, 2024; Challenger Athletics, 2024; Special Olympics, 2018; BackYard Players & Friends, 2023*) The programs have overall goals of implementing services or holding events where individuals with disabilities are provided inclusive, supportive, social and recreational activities. Some of these activities include sports, crafts, cooking, acting, board games, swimming, and bowling. This list is not comprehensive as the programs include missions of expanding their impact and are actively creating new ways for their participants to interact with peers and the communities they serve. Information about the five identified settings is detailed in table 1 below.

Table 1*Non-Academic Settings Identified by Participants*

Number of Participants Involved	Organization Name	Organization Type	Year Established	Area Served
7	Camp Anchor	Year-round Town of Hempstead, Nassau County Long Island program	1968	Long Island, NY
3	Best Buddies	501 (c)(3) non-profit organization	1989	International
2	Back Yard Players	501 (c)(3) non-profit organization	2015	Long Island, NY
1	Challenger Athletics	501 (c)(3) non-profit organization	2013	Long Island, NY
1	The Special Olympics	501 (c)(3) non-profit organization	1968	International

Camp Anchor was started in 1986 and was named for the acronym “Answering the Needs of Citizens with Handicaps through Organized Recreation”. The program serves over 1,200 children and adults with disabilities. The program is open to individuals with disabilities from age five and over. Residents of the Town of Hempstead apply for entry into the program. It is described as a comprehensive year round program that serves children and adults with disabilities living in the Town of Hempstead, Nassau County Long Island (*ANCHOR Program | Hempstead Town, NY, 2024; Camp Anchor, 2024*). The program holds a 6-week summer program where campers attend for a full day. They are exposed to activities such as arts and crafts, music, dance, drama, physical fitness, surfing, swimming, and other special events. The program presents an enriching and encompassing schedule of recreational activities throughout the year.

Best Buddies is an internationally recognized nonprofit organization established in 1989. They are dedicated to establishing global volunteerism in developing one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with disabilities. The goal of the program is inclusion and acceptance. Best Buddies programs in schools pair neurodiverse students with neurotypical peers in forming friendships. The program empowers people with disabilities in securing meaningful friendships with peers (*Best Buddies International*, 2024).

The Backyard Players is a non-profit organization established in 2015 servicing Long Island, New York. They are an inclusive, arts-based community program open to the public. Participants must be aged 14 or older. Their mission is to give every person a space so that together we can share ideas and experience openness, joy and creativity. They believe that inclusion creates diversity and strength. Their program has expanded into other programs supporting individuals with disabilities and servicing the community. The Front Porch Market is a learning environment where participants can learn about crafting and retail skills. The market offers space to create and celebrate neurodiverse entrepreneurs. Love Nana is a community service project by Backyard Players and Friends. They accept donations that are cleaned, sorted and packaged to assist local families in need. They collect new and gently used clothing for newborns (BackYard Players & Friends, 2023). The sum of these programs is community support, providing socialization and supporting the development of skills for people with disabilities.

Challenger Athletics is a non-profit organization created by Raymond Samson, and Stephen and Thomas Desimone in 2013. They were creating an organization to provide opportunities for Raymond's son who has Down Syndrome and for other people

with disabilities within their community. Its goal was to create a program that fostered the growth of children through sports. They have 9 active sports programs for lacrosse, tennis, soccer, a sports camp for a local school, a fishing trip, surf camp, flag football, basketball, and yoga (*Challenger Athletics*, 2024).

The special Olympics is a non-profit internationally recognized organization. Using sports as a transformative power to improve health and inspire a sense of competition is at the core of the Special Olympics. The power and joy of sports is used to shift the focus on to what the “athletes CAN do, not what they can’t” (*Special Olympics*, 2018). Their mission is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competitions. They support a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with disabilities. Among their goals is to provide opportunities for their participants to develop courage, experience, joy, and develop friendships.

An evaluation of the public facing information available for the various NAS that were identified by participants revealed similarities in the mission of each organization and supported the findings of participant responses. The information available on their public websites included statements and descriptions of building inclusion, acceptance, joy, empowerment, community, and socialization. The five identified NASs had no mention of academic goals as a function of their work. The organizations all include a level of volunteerism and promotion of independence for people with disabilities. They each bring a way of increasing awareness and inclusion. This information aligns with themes and shared experiences of the participants in the study (*ANCHOR Program | Hempstead Town, NY, 2024; Best Buddies International, 2024; Camp Anchor, 2024;*

Challenger Athletics, 2024; *Special Olympics*, 2018; BackYard Players & Friends, 2023)The website information was consolidated and included in Appendix E.

An initial round of coding was conducted with participant transcriptions by listening to interviews and color-coding categories related to the research questions of the study. The initial categories created and coded included teaching skills described in the setting, successes, family interactions, professional work-related skills, challenges, comparisons between academic and NAS, emotional states, and descriptions of lessons learned. The first round of coding identified several descriptions of skill acquisition for special education teaching from participants. Participants shared many experiences that were related to self-efficacy development. The first round of coding was completed using word for word transcription in conjunction with playing the audio of interview while reviewing. This was done to support an understanding of tone and intention when reviewing participant responses.

During the second round of the coding process transcriptions were underlined for themes of self-efficacy. This was done regarding descriptions that fit any of the four pillars of self-efficacy development. Many of the color-coded items served as examples of self-efficacy development. This alignment confirmed the presence for all participants of moments in self-efficacy development, later discussed in this chapter. Participant responses related to the overall significance of the setting in their lived experience were also coded with bold text. In cases where overlap between coding categories existed, the researcher made marginal notes and comments to track importance. This note taking was done to ensure that significant aspects of the transcriptions would be included in the discussion.

A third round of coding consisted of reviewing the color-coded items, underlined items, and bolded items to develop a more detailed alignment to aspects of self-efficacy and answering the research questions. Transcriptions were marked with line numbers for organization. Specific lines and color-coded items were then sorted by their connection to the research questions.

Participant responses that were coded to general aspects of self-efficacy were given more complex analysis as they were placed in the 4 principles of self-efficacy as described by Bandura. They were placed in mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasions, and affective states (Bandura, 1997). This level of coding was meant to support the analysis of research question 4, where a deep understanding of the setting in relation to self-efficacy is further discussed in the implications of the study.

Analysis of teaching competencies described by participants was documented as a tally. For instance, participants referenced differentiation and planning for the diverse needs of participants as part of their experience. This relates to their work as special educators and was mentioned by eight of eight participants. Quotes and descriptions are included in the discussion below. These descriptions relate to the category of competencies for Individual Learning Differences and Instructional Planning (Stayton et al., 2012). This process was continued to lift the aspects of special education teacher certification competencies that were a part of the participant experience in the NAS shared in the interviews.

One theme unaddressed in the research questions and not a specific goal of the study was the description of participants lived experiences in the NAS for how important the setting is for the growth of people with disabilities. Although the study focused on the

participants' lived experience, participants shared personal views on the importance of the settings. Strong feelings towards the impact these settings have on the states of individuals with disabilities of the setting were common among study participants. These descriptions were an outgrowth of the coding process and are included in the conclusion of the study.

Observation of available settings were conducted to triangulate aspects of the experience shared by participants and to confirm the presence of interactions described. The researcher observed 3 of the 5 settings, as the opportunity to attend an event was not available at the time of the study for 2 settings. The observations were completed after interviews and reviewing website information. Observational notes were collected and are discussed in relation to other data collected.

The observational data confirmed the presence of both mastery experience and vicarious experience within the setting. Staff were observed working one on one with people with disabilities to engage them with the activity. There was a general sense of joy and happiness in the interactions. Participants with disabilities were encouraged to participate and engage with peers. The researcher observed the staff of the settings acting silly, smiling, and being playful. The task at hand seemed second to the fact that staff were making the effort to create fun. Within the context of creating fun, staff were observed managing the movement of students, supporting engagement through challenging student behavior, and individualizing their method of engaging students. Staff were observed to naturally change their level of engagement on a student-to-student basis. This was observed in all 3 settings. The settings promoted comfort and acceptance in all directions of interaction. It was observed that staff were comfortable and free to

take risks in their engagement. They would high-five, dance, applaud, and perform actions not typical of an academic environment. The observations confirmed the presence of competencies for special education teaching being present as well as the four pillars of self-efficacy.

Member checking was used to verify interpretations and analysis of the interview data. Participants were provided access to the results and interpretation of transcriptions, with all identifying information redacted. They were informed of their participant number to review the included quotes, descriptions, and inferences from interviews. Participants did not communicate any changes or contradictions to the identification of the skills, themes, and interpretations of the data.

There is an interconnected nature of the total experience shared by participants between the ways the data can be interpreted in answering the research questions of the study. Aspects that support the analysis of one research question, closely, and at times, overlap an ability to support another research question. For this reason, it is worthwhile to interpret and synthesize the data described in this chapter for its ability to paint a full picture of the experience of each participant.

Research Questions

RQ1 How Does the Experience of Working for People with Disabilities in a Non-Academic Setting (NAS) Contribute to Knowledge of Special Education Teaching?

The comparison of state standards and national standards was used to provide categories for the competencies expected of special education certified teachers. The mention of a competency was tallied for inclusion of analysis for this research questions.

If participants are being exposed to the expectations of special education certification indicators, the contributions of the NAS to the preparation for the special education teaching can be linked. Standards were compared from the Council for Exceptional Children Common Core (CEC CC) and Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). The standards fall into 10 categories, Foundations, Development and Characteristics of Learners, Individual Learning Differences, Instructional Strategies, Learning Environments and Social Interactions, Language, Instructional Planning, Assessment, Professional and Ethical Practice, and Collaboration (Stayton et al., 2012). Participant responses related to each standard were recorded in table 2. The table shows how many participants referenced an aspect of the standard in their response during interviews. Reviewing transcript data, the researcher checked for each indicator within the context of the shared experience of the participant.

Table 2

Indicators for Certification in Special Education Mentioned in Participant Responses

Competency for Special Education Certification	Number of Participants
Foundations	8 of 8*
Development and Characteristics of Learners	8 of 8
Individual Learning Differences	8 of 8
Instructional Strategies	8 of 8
Learning Environments and Social Interactions	8 of 8
Language	8 of 8
Instructional Planning	8 of 8
Assessment	0 of 8
Professional and Ethical Practice	8 of 8
Collaboration	8 of 8

*Although not explicitly mentioned, participants share a level of special education personal philosophy falling under the indicator of Foundations.

Table 2 indicates that participants are experiencing a level of preparation aligned to the special education certification standards in the NAS. Of the 10 categories of standards for the CEC CC and the ECSE standards, 8 of 8 participants share portions of their experience that meet expectations of certified teachers in 9 of 10 categories. The only category not mentioned as a part of their experience in the NAS was dealing with assessment. No participant mentioned using, developing, or monitoring data in the setting. However, participants did make mention of a trial-and-error approach that may loosely relate to a measure of assessment. Assessments are not a part of the recreational social nature of the NAS. Direct quotes from participants are included in later discussions of the results which were part of the tally created in table 2. The table confirms the accuracy of the participants' application of the definition in defining their experience in these programs.

This was confirmed in the review of mission, vision, and other information about the organizations that were provided on their public facing websites. The settings all describe programs that seek integration, inclusion, acceptance, confidence building, enjoyment, and community. None of the settings describe a focus on meeting state or federal educational expectations. They do not mention that participants in the program will be working on IEP goals or other mandated goals (*ANCHOR Program | Hempstead Town, NY, 2024; Best Buddies International, 2024; Camp Anchor, 2024; Challenger Athletics, 2024; Special Olympics, 2018; BackYard Players & Friends, 2023*).

The contribution to participant knowledge of special education is explored in greater detail when answering research question number 4 of the study, regarding the experience related to aspects of self-efficacy. With a deeper analysis of the ways self-

efficacy development is established in the NAS, it becomes clear that the total experience has a strong relationship to special education teaching practice.

Participants referenced special educational skills that were learned through their experience in the settings. All participants mention a level of exposure to managing behavior and differentiating activities across all 5 NAS. Participants describe a need to understand the individual and how the setting gave them experience with a variety of people with disabilities. Participant 2 shared “So it really opened me up to seeing people my age and even older with disabilities.” When acknowledging the impact of the experience and her responsibilities, she shared “...seeing disability and working with them, like autism, and spending time with them throughout the day, making sure they’re motivated...assisting them as peer throughout the day and different activities. “This description touches aspects of development and characteristics of learners, individual learning differences, and foundations.

Similarities on the skills necessary for classroom management and the professional role of teaching were expressed in the lived experience of those in the study. Participant 7 shared what he viewed as his main 3 responsibilities in the NAS. He described “I would say for me it's really supervision of safety, having fun, and then building those relationships.” It also included “safety and wellbeing for sure...facilitating relationships between the volunteers and campers...trying to make the experience as fun as possible.” These indicators translate to the field of education and classroom management. Evaluation systems for teachers describe similar indicators of successful classroom management. Some of these indicators exist in the Danielson framework used while evaluating special education teachers in classroom observations (Jones et al.,

2022). Respect, culture, procedures, behaviors, space, are all among indicators that special education teachers are evaluated on. Participant 7 went on to say, “in preparation for being a teacher, you learn the behind-the-scenes work, preparing for the activity at anchor, same thing, preparing for a lesson.” The experience in the NAS mirrors expectations of the academic setting.

Participant 8 spoke on feeling a sense of duty and guardianship of his campers in the NAS, contributing to professional and ethical practice. In sharing his experience, he revealed how the setting exposes those that participate to various disabilities.

We need to protect these kids at the end of the day from whatever dangers they might encounter. I also feel like it, it gives you perspective on all disabilities. You're not just working with a couple kids that might be on the spectrum or you might have one student that has Down Syndrome. You're seeing the full spectrum of everything, of every different kind of disability there is to offer...from fragile X to down syndrome, to cerebral palsy, to the kids that may have been disabled by an accident.

Participant 3 described an experience in the setting which was his first exposure to an important aspect of the teaching profession. He describes his interactions with families in the NAS and “it’s really like the first I learned to have those like, you know, courageous conversations.” He described communicating to parents about behavioral issues in the NAS. This skill of communicating difficult and sometimes sensitive information to families relates to skills needed in special education teaching. He further shares about the exposure to several teaching strategies while working in the NAS, aspects of advocacy, and understanding the needs of a vulnerable population.

Token economies, communication, relationship building. Education is a relationship, uh, business at its core. So, learning how to deal with a different variety of people. You know, we have parents at Camp Anchor that, like I said, are involved, not involved, confrontational, polite. So, you get the wide spectrum. You're also learning how to advocate for what your kids [need], and that started all back at camp.

Participant 1 shared aspects of the setting which contributed to the competencies of instructional strategies and individual learning differences. She described learning vicariously about calming strategies and how to support her students "...from the healthcare professionals and aides traveling with the students." She described how she "...was then able to use them in my student teaching. Also, to see their demeanor and how they spoke to the athletes and how they encouraged friendship." These moments of learning were related to skill development for teaching and transferable to the student teaching experience. This comment demonstrates how the NAS provides an avenue for learning.

The learning environment and professional practice were present in the experience shared by participant 2. Managing resources and coordinating the efforts of a team are transferable skills to teaching. She described overseeing a group and "...delegating tasks to the staff and volunteers on how they can best support the participants in all the different areas of the day "

Participant 6 shared how the experience involved exposure to many different individuals and understanding of language. She shared "...that was like such a mixed bag of disabilities, physical disabilities, and cognitive abilities. My first summer was my first

exposure to somebody in a wheelchair.” She went on to detail how she learned the way to speak about and with people with disabilities. The experience in the setting provided the opportunity for her first exposure to these various expectations that would be aspects of the teaching environment.

Participants go on to share many more aspects of the experience that overlap between the learning in the social context within the frame of the study and the moments of developing self-efficacy. In discussing the pillars of self-efficacy, research question 1 is also addressed. The descriptions and quotes shared overlap with the tally of competencies shown in table 2. They are described in answering research question 2.

RQ2 How Does Experience in a Non-Academic Setting Influence Self-Efficacy in Teaching People with Disabilities for PISETs?

Participant responses were coded for relationships to self-efficacy during the second round of coding. If the participants described a part of their experience related to the 4 indicators of self-efficacy development outlined by Bandura, then the data was flagged. During subsequent rounds of coding, the flagged transcriptions were narrowed down to fit the 4 categories that contribute to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). The lived experience of the participants was analyzed in relationship to the various contributing factors to self-efficacy development.

The categories contributing to self-efficacy development are established in the literature (Bandura, 1997). These definitions served as a frame for describing the results of the study. Mastery experiences describe the successes and failures of one’s experience and how those experiences increase and decrease the self-efficacy of the individual. The

Vicarious experiences provide for the learning by observation. The vicarious experience is one of believing you can do what you have observed another doing. Verbal persuasion describes the effect of being encouraged in your ability from credible, capable, and significant sources. The physiological and affective states often describe the emotional states of the individual in the domain of the skill which either increases or decreases one's self-efficacy (Pfitzner-Eden, 2016).

Participants described their experience with many instances for mastery through doing. Participant 6 described the experience of working with different people on the autistic spectrum from year to year as a way of leveling up her ability.

Every year I just felt there was just another layer of the spectrum puzzle, you're like, we're just gonna level you up every single time, like each year that you're staff. Like you're gonna get another layer of toughness, of social isolation and language barriers and behavioral barriers and all these things that like, like I would never have known otherwise or never have like grown being comfortable with to the point where I started to feel I was just getting exposure and, and getting placed in groups that were more behavioral and, and requiring more behavioral intervention and recognizing triggers and diffusing situations and kind of just doing that all on the fly.

Participant 1 described some of the expectations and responsibilities in her role in the NAS as needing to differentiate materials. She was tasked to "differentiate the activities to make sure that they were appropriate for all levels of physical abilities, wheelchairs, ambulatory issues and everything across that line." This responsibility gave

her the experience of meeting the individual needs of the participants with disabilities outside of an academic setting. Similar experiences were described by the 8 participants.

A level of communication with families was accomplished directly by participants in the NAS. There was a need for communication with families on a frequent basis. Participant 2 described “I try to communicate with the whole group either on a weekly basis, some participants on like almost daily basis or a couple of days a week, um, through like texting or email.” This level of personal responsibility and success with communication to families describes situations leading toward increased self-efficacy. It is also aligned to competencies for special education teaching. Participant 2 went on to describe a particular instance of working with a camper to solve an auditory sensitivity issue with the family. In communicating with the family, the participant learned of potential reasons the camper was struggling in a particular activity. She described a moment where they realized a music speaker was giving an almost unnoticeable difference in audio clarity because it was slightly damaged. This was bothering the camper who had an auditory sensitivity.

I brought it up to the family, they said, um, about the pitch of it, like maybe the speaker was a little bit broken and the pitch might've been off and that was really bothering him and that like, that's what it was like WOW... So it was really nice to like talk to the parents about that.

They removed the speaker, and the camper was met with success in joining the activity. This overcoming of a challenge is related to successful mastery experiences that lead to increased self-efficacy.

Participant 1 shared that she would use "...a lot of modeling so, you know, depending on the disability, my peers didn't always know how to approach things." This modeling was not only an effective skill practice of collaboration related to special education teaching but was a mastery experience. The successful coaching of her peers further provided increased affective states as the enjoyment of students was reflected in their successful implementation of her provided guidance.

There are several experiences that may not be encountered in the academic setting which are a part of the NAS experience. Participant 8 shared his experience with "...bath-rooming, feeding, making sure kids had their meds taken care of, uh, handling crisis situations, uh, [and] making sure that it was safe and fun at the same time." The total effect of these mastery experiences helped him feel confident in supporting people with disabilities. He also shared how there was a sense of responsibility in teaching younger volunteers to feel comfortable in completing these tasks as well. The shared ownership of learning and teaching in this environment was captured in his remarks. The responsibility in training younger staff in the setting was shared by participant 6 when she expressed "I also found myself like having to oversee the volunteers when they were first getting these experiences." The themes of teaching and responsibility within the setting provided opportunity for mastery.

Participant 3 described vicarious experiences in the NAS setting when learning from another worker. Participant 3 described having "hands-on real-life training" through watching his supervisor. He went on to describe learning about token economies, positive reinforcement, and how to redirect campers. In reflection on one vicarious experience, he mentioned learning from a peer and as a group.

I remember one of my group leaders in the group for kids with cerebral palsy was all about how can we make activities more engaging? So, it was more like a brainstorming session on, you know, what activities can we modify and differentiate to get to where we need.

Not only was the NAS creating moments of vicarious learning but also indicative of a safe learning environment where collaborative mastery experiences are created. Collaboration is one of the 10 competencies expected of special education teachers (Albright & Williams, 2021). The collaboration and implementation of those ideas were described by this participant as part of the work completed in the NAS. There was a level of engagement with the work that was hands on, without worry of academic outcome in his descriptions. He shared how "...having access and developing those skills were huge to me."

Participant 5 shared the experience of learning by paying attention and watching other staff members in the setting. She shared about the influences of seasoned staff members with a wealth of knowledge gained from their experience in the setting. Participant 5 shared the amount of training comparative to other environments.

Camp Anchor was probably the most training, even though it wasn't necessarily formal...it's just hands-on, you know, making sure you're paying attention. A lot of visual hands-on learning and obviously the exposure at the time, you have staff and everything to teach you.

This was shared in the context of how she learned in the setting. She continued to refer to how her watching of peers and supervisors in the setting contributed to her

knowledge of working with campers. She observed effective strategies for managing behavior and described a comfort in attempting them on her own. Participant 4 detailed vicarious experience while recalling training received in the setting.

I feel like a lot of my training or things that I've learned with Anchor, I don't know if it's necessarily formal training. It's kind of just you, you live it and then you see, and you learn from experience sort of thing.

There was ample evidence of training throughout the participant responses. Although no formal training was indicated, a lack of training was omitted from participant responses. There was a confidence in learning from others in the setting and comfort in reaching out for help. This was a shared perceptiveness of participants in the setting.

The experience in the NAS included many examples of verbal persuasion. It was noted by participants that hearing they were doing a good job by their supervisors was part of how they defined success in the setting. Participant 5 mentioned while answering about how they defined success in the setting, "...with Best Buddies, it's like the teachers are the ones that would be telling you, you did a great job with an event or things like that." Participant 8 shared "I had the validation of my peers and higher ups." Participant 2 referenced an evaluation system by her supervisors, "[A] review we got at the end of the year was kind of reaffirming that I was doing a good job." These forms of verbal persuasion are contributors in the development of self-efficacy.

Participant 8 shared about the emotional state of starting in the NAS and its impact on his belief in working with people with disabilities, "I happened to get kids with

physical disabilities first and I was really scared obviously, but it ended up being what made me want to go back to work at Anchor and work with kids with disabilities forever.” The impacts of the NAS were further described as moments of triumph and success. Participants related emotional states to moments of success that made them enjoy the time in the setting. Participant 8 further describes his feelings related to small moments in the setting while mentioning a perception that the moment could not exist in the academic setting.

It's hard to not love these kids and it's hard to not feel joy when, when they succeed. And even if it's something as small as saying your name, if a kid learns your name that doesn't really speak very often. It, it's so rewarding to you. You feel special. You feel like you've impacted the kid enough where they remember you and they know you not just by face, not just by what you do... if they're afraid to speak or they have language deficiencies, to see a kid connect with you on such a level that might have gotten written off in school.

The affective states in the setting were tied to seeing the success of the campers for participant 2. The population of campers with autism that she worked with struggled expressing their feelings. She described how seeing the ways the campers enjoyed activities was viewed in her experience.

My participants don't really verbally communicate. So, when they were laughing or having a good time in the pool or running around with another person, it was really, really warming to see. And that made me feel successful.

Participant 1 shared of the work in the special Olympics "...the happiness that comes from these special Olympic athletes enjoying what they are doing, enjoying cheering for one another and being cheered for, that's what I define as success." There is emotional connection between success and experience in the NAS, tying in the increased affective states linked to higher-self efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Participant 7 referenced building character as an outgrowth of the experience. He described an inability to contextualize the lessons learned but said "...I don't know if I could really pin it into specific lessons, but it's just all been character building and I think it's helped me in my career as an educator." The experience in the NAS has direct links to the belief that PISETS can accomplish the work in the academic settings.

The affective states are present in the analysis of research question 2. The participants often related success in the setting to the emotional states of the people with disabilities they worked with. The participants all connected feeling successful, an increased affective state, with the fun, enjoyment, and happiness created in their work. More examples of the affective state connections are seen in the analysis of research question 3.

RQ3 What Successes and Challenges are Experienced by PISETs in the NAS?

Participants describe several successes and challenges throughout the interview process. Coding led to a series of larger topics and specific instances of success and challenge being identified. The two categories of experience will be discussed individually.

Participants were asked how they defined their personal success in the settings. As a NAS does not have data collection or assessment, it was necessary to understand how the participants identified success. Participants closely described success with emotional states for themselves and based on the emotional states of others. Participant 3 had thoughts on success that came down to a singularity, "...as long as they're happy and, you know, are smiling and laughing and making friendships, you can't put a price on that." He defined his own success based on the emotional state of others, rooted in their happiness, and without equivalence. There is a selflessness throughout participant responses in the ways that success is defined. Participant 4 continues the theme as she mentions "...just seeing the individuals that I work with and seeing how they're feeling and how they're happy to be where they are..." Reflecting on how she felt successful, it was again tied to bringing joy to others. She described how her campers' emotional states were the feedback she required when feeling successful.

The measures of success in the setting continued to reflect an evaluation of others' emotional states. Participant 7 laughed as he mentioned about measuring success "...this might sound corny, but like, I feel like in smiles." His measure of success extended to the state of the parents as well, "...and if parents are happy, I think that's a big, big indicator of success as well." Where success in an academic setting may include grades and progress towards goals, these participants are experiencing a learning environment where success is a feeling of joy.

Other versions of success were identified by participants in the setting. These experiences intersected with teaching skills, specifically when participant 6 shared speaking on success "I would say if I could diffuse a situation independently or maybe

with the support of one other person.” The situation referenced involved the behavioral needs of camper she worked with who was showing physical aggression and elopement. As she navigated the behavior, independently supporting the camper was a measure of success. This description connects teaching skill, self-efficacy, and measures of success. It also highlighted the connections that many moments in the NAS were interconnected between learning skills and developing self-efficacy.

Participants also described challenges within the setting. Evaluating challenge was significant for understanding how challenge was met by participants. It provided perspective from the participants on how challenge impacted them in the context of the study. The challenging situation of the setting is related to the learning moments of the social setting. As the frame of the study looks to understand the NAS as a learning environment, how participants handle and interpret their experience with challenge is significant for analysis. Participants shared moments of challenge that often related to an aspect of developing self-efficacy or moment of learning about special education. Participant 7 shared about challenges with behavior and its relationship to the classroom.

I mean, patience is huge. Patience, you know, at Anchor you have patience for the kids who are, who are struggling throughout the day, who give you those, those behavior issues. That's, it's the same kind of patience that you bring into the classroom where you're also dealing with behavior issues. You're dealing with, not even behaviors, but just the frustration of kids, you know, not being where they're at. You're trying to get them there... I gained a lot of experience in that area at Anchor that I brought it into the classroom as well.

Participant 5 shared about dealing with significant elopement behaviors and the challenge of managing that behavior with the team. Levels of team collaboration, vicarious learning, and mastery experience were all present in here experience.

I do remember...significant behaviors that I don't know if I had seen before. I remember one day, I can't remember what he escalated about or anything like that, but like, vividly standing near the parking lot, just like blocking to make sure we don't run into the parking lot screaming. And like in the moment we were handling it, and I knew everybody was handling it, but then looking at it after, I'm like, I was super young, He was probably twice my age. And it's just like such an odd situation to not know exactly what to do, but obviously it was a team. I wasn't alone or anything like that. So those types of things, I think just like communicating through it, you know, checking in, definitely working together, making sure I wasn't alone.

This experience both represented significant challenge, but also demonstrated how participant 5 was supported in meeting the challenge. Participant 2 shared a similar challenge in meeting the behavioral needs of her campers. A challenge she shared was "...sometimes not being able to completely understand what my participant needed...they would get so upset that they would become physical." Participant 2 further detailed that her focus was on "getting through" to the camper in the best way she could. She described a sense of persistence and ownership in figuring out how to best support her camper.

Some of the challenges represented levels of inclusion. Participant 1 described worrying about "...making sure you had the necessary tools to make everything

adaptable... how can this work so that everyone's fully included?" The presence of a sense of persistence through the challenge was evident in the participants response.

Participant 6 described working at Camp Anchor, which is located at a beach. The recreational summer environment posed its own challenges when working with the campers in her experience. She shared "I mean the environment itself is, is tough because there's a lot of sensory, there's a lot of sensory overload and natural sensory of like the heat and sand." In sharing the challenge, it is shown how the environment provides learning where the participant was exposed to the needs of her camper in relationship to sensory input.

Participants' expression of success and challenge are connected to a social learning environment and the development of their own teaching self-efficacy. The conceptual frame of the study provides the context for understanding how moments of challenge present learning and development. The presence of these moments throughout experiences in the NAS are consistent in responses.

RQ4 How do PISETs Describe their Experience in the NAS Compared to their Experience in the Academic Setting?

Comparisons of the academic setting and NAS came across in several ways. Some participants noted the freedom that the NAS provided in relation to the ability to cultivate an engaging experience. Participant 2 described getting to know the people with disabilities "in a different way." The NAS allowed for a less restrictive environment where bonds could be made stronger.

I feel like the work that we did at Anchor and working with participants in a non-educational setting made those bonds stronger. [Because] it wasn't just necessarily like working with students like, okay, you have to achieve like this IEP goal by this time...But I think just doing it through like a fun way where they're able to just really try new things. It's more relaxed. They can be themselves and, like, maybe do things that they've never done before. I feel like that broke some barriers and allowed you to find some common ground in a less restrictive setting.

Comparison between the academic setting and NAS revealed much similarity in learning opportunity for participants. Through participant responses, they drew on moments in the NAS and then how those skills fit into their academic setting. Participant 4 details how working with Challenger Athletics required differentiation that was helpful for work in the classroom stating "...I think that differentiating is a big thing within lacrosse or within my classroom, and relating that to fun, that even if everybody's not at the same level, you can still have fun." The need to make learning fun was a connection made by this participant that was taken into the classroom setting. Participant 1 shared "I think just having a little bit of involvement in that, see these kids in a different light really widens your growth as an educator and as a professional." She shared this statement in reflection of relating the time spent with special Olympics to growth as a special educator. The connection between settings was evident in the responses of many participants.

In comparing the settings, participant 2 describes a wholistic approach to understanding the child. She shares her perspective on the NAS where you are focused on learning more about the child than just what they can do towards meeting a goal.

So, I think you get to learn about the person as a whole, rather than their abilities to obtain a goal that's set for them. You get to kind of learn about their likes and dislikes, what makes them happy, what makes them sad, and you can still apply those things like at the end IEP goal. I feel like at Anchor it was just definitely more relaxed than a classroom.

What participant 2 described is a learning environment for both her and the participants in the camp. In the setting she would learn about a person with disabilities as a person, looking deeper than she could in the academic setting. This is the net result of the setting being “more relaxed than a classroom.”

Participant 3 reflected simply on aspects of the experience that related to special education when he said “I mean everything. I’ve been a teacher slash now I’m a principal and I literally talk about Anchor every single day” He related much of the experience in the NAS as impacting his teaching practice. He goes on to state that “after the first day, that's where I knew I wanted to be a special ed teacher.” There exists a deep connection between the experience in the NAS and the desire to work in the special education classroom.

Participant 4 shared thoughts on the totality of experience in the NAS compared to the formal experience of academic setting observations.

My informal experiences I think were more informative than my formal experiences just because it's in that like flexible environment where, you're always learning and it's not necessarily, there's not as much expected of you and it's more of a fun environment...and the biggest difference is in my classroom

experience, I have these goals that my kids have to meet and of course they try to make them fun, but it's more rigid. It's not as flexible.

Her experience was one of learning in a less demanding environment. The relaxed setting was believed to lead to better learning outcomes in her experience, compared to those of the classroom. She referenced how she could attempt to make tasks fun in the academic setting, but it was not comparable to the freedom of the NAS.

Participant 5 compared the classroom and the NAS in its overall weight of expectation. The classroom placed stressors on the participant that do not exist in the NAS. In comparison, she expressed the ways in which that weight is added in the classroom.

There's the added expectations of you need to teach this, you need to meet this goal, you need to, you know, reach these objectives for yourself. You need to be observed. So, adding all of that, and I guess like the fear and judgment or whatever, like, what are you doing is, that was a lot.

Her remarks add to the perspective shared among participants that the classroom and the NAS have unique differences. The burden of expectation in the classroom changes how participants feel. There is no misconception that both settings offer learning opportunity, but the social learning environment free of academic expectation seems to provide a supportive pathway for the participants. Their feelings about the experience in the NAS is often connected to the positive belief in attempting tasks. It is connected to learning in an environment of support.

Participant 1 described the academic and NAS as “So very, very, very different environments, but what I was able to connect was a lot of calming strategies.” She described connections between learned supports of the NAS to the academic setting but was clear that the settings were different. Her descriptions detailed how the NAS was a place to see the students in a “different light” which helped her as a professional.

There was a joking tone with the comments of participant 6 when sharing “I hated student teaching with such a passion.” Her message explaining why was one of frustration in the fact that she connected creating joy and fun in the NAS as a core value for special education. Her passion in supporting students with disabilities is in finding the aspects that bring joy. It is evident in her responses that her passion makes its way into the academic setting as she described her goals in teaching. The comparison was one that expressed frustration about the academic environment she experienced in student teaching but included her appreciation of the experience in the NAS.

The ability to “...put yourself out there and act ridiculous” was a difference between the academic and NAS described by participant 7. He shared how the moments where he would be free to act silly to engage the campers allowed him to feel less worried in the classroom. He shared “...when it's time to, you know, have someone in the classroom to observe, it's not as much of a freaking out kind of scenario.” The experience was different, but the skills were directly transferable to the academic setting.

Participant 8 shared his experience of the value added for the people with disabilities from the NAS.

There's a lot of, um, informal social interactions that you're not getting anywhere else. And these kids desperately, desperately need, um, social interactions like that with their typical peers and with their peers that are, um, neurotypical.

His ability to take this experience and bring it with him to the academic setting is valuable for himself and the students that he will teach. Understanding the needs of the people with disabilities that he worked with, from the social interactions of the NAS, are mastery experience, development and characteristics of learners, and personal educational philosophy all in one. It is an example of how the participants of the settings find the NAS experience compared to the academic setting. It shows their ability to make connections between what is important for social growth and helps to inform their practice in the classroom.

Conclusion

Participant experiences in the NAS shared several valuable perspectives which deepen the understanding of the setting and how those working in the setting perceive their development in special education. Many of the experiences shared aligned to skills associated with what certified special education teachers are expected to demonstrate (Stayton et al., 2012). The NAS for people with disabilities provided many opportunities for teachers of special education to build self-efficacy and develop their own connections to the population. The sum of successes and challenges described by participants were linked to aspects of increased self-efficacy. Comparisons between the academic setting and NAS provided similarities in skill development, however the NAS had a clear unburdening of pressure on the participants. There was a lack of fear of trying new things in the NAS and a belief that participants would find success. The belief that one can

accomplish a task is crucial component to self-efficacy development (Bandura, 1997).

The conceptual framework for the study connected the results of each research question and provided an interpretive lens which confirms the NAS as a social learning environment where aspects of self-efficacy are being experienced.

CHAPTER 5

This chapter will include a discussion of the findings and their implications. The experience of participants in the NAS may have implications on the preparatory practices for future special education certification programs. The NAS's role in developing special education teacher self-efficacy will be explored. The relationship between prior research and the NAS as an environment of skill development will be described. Suggestions for future research will be discussed. Future studies should include deeper qualitative analysis from alternate perspectives of all members within the NAS. Future quantitative studies should seek to quantify the value of settings in their role for supporting special education teachers. Studying the parental perspective of the NAS may provide insight into practices that should be incorporated into the academic setting. The chapter will connect the data to understanding the NAS. The chapter will discuss the significance of the NAS and its elevation as an area for further research within the field of special education.

Implications of Findings

There is a level of humor associated with difficult and challenging situations that arise in the NAS when shared by the participants of the study. Where discipline and disruption might exist in the academic setting, the NAS presented chances for the participants to understand, engage, and work back towards the enjoyment of the setting for the participants. What may seem like experiences that would deter a person from wanting to continue working with challenging behavioral needs, these participants made it seem endearing to the people and the setting. Their connection with the people with disabilities made their commitment and persistence evident. There is an element of the

setting which has shown these participants how to meet challenging situations with levity. This may be significant when addressing special education teacher retention and addressing special education teacher shortages (Nordness et al., 2022; Peyton & Acosta, 2022; Theobald et al., 2021).

Participants were clear in their experience leading to a better level of exposure to various disabilities. Participants described having the most exposure to a variety of disabilities within their work in the NAS. If the highest incidence of diversity exists in these settings, they deserve attention in the preparation of special education teachers. Where academic classes deal with groups of students with similar needs, this setting may offer the best opportunity for exposure to many types of disability.

Participants were clear that their experience either sparked their interest in special education or deepened their desire to work with the population of people with disabilities. The field of special education teacher development should focus on developing and securing programs like these in their local districts. Making programs like this available could lead to a stronger work force of knowledgeable, compassionate, and understanding special education teachers. The lived experience of participants in this study describes a setting where their self-efficacy is increased while also providing many learning opportunities related to skills necessary for successful special education teaching. The participants developed empathy and understanding in the setting. They valued the experience for its ability to teach them skills needed for teaching.

Special education teacher preparatory programs should consider a level of exposure to programs like those in the study for all students working towards special education teaching certification. Colleges and local government agencies should strongly

consider developing more programs for social and recreational purposes for the community with disabilities. The lived experience of the special educators from these programs details a level of understanding in working with the population that may be missing from special education teachers without the experience. The participants all describe a level of empathy and connection through their experience that is unique to the NAS. The participants described their exposure to various disabilities as a function of the NAS. They were met with a learning environment where they could try, fail, and were encouraged to persist. The participants were eager to share this experience as they felt strongly for its capacity to build skills and foster meaningful learning experiences. This is further described in the recommendations for future research.

Relationship to Prior Research

Prior research concerning the teacher experience related to self-efficacy has been explored in various academic settings including, the classroom, service-learning environments, and community learning environments (Ahmad et al., 2016; An, 2021, 2021; Ismailos et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2022). Prior studies explored the experience of teachers and the impact of extensive teacher preparation on teachers being highly qualified (Boe et al., 2007). The field of research supports that the more experience teachers have received in their field of certification and within the academic setting, the higher their reported self-efficacy and ability to perform the tasks of teaching. The research had not explored the setting defined and explored in the current study. This study adds a new perspective, that non-academic setting experience provides moments of skill development and the development of self-efficacy for teaching special education from the perspective of those PSETs that have worked in the setting. The summation of

data collected in the study shines a light on the setting and adds a level of preparation related to being free of the burdens of assessment that provide a highly potent social environment for learning. The current study adds the NAS as a significant source of skill development for future special education teachers.

The non-academic experiences are examples of mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states as described by Albert Bandura (1997). In the self-efficacy framework, the sum of the described experience of participants would lead to increased self-efficacy. Prior studies indicated that although teachers may take varying pathways to certification, experience in the field was tied to increased reported efficacy (Rosenberg & Sindelar, 2005). The current study highlights the NAS as a setting where the value of the experience may be significantly tied to increased self-efficacy. Data from the study provides a perspective that the attributes in the NAS provide an environment where the PISSET participants of the study have a strong belief in their ability to accomplish tasks and demonstrate skills associated with success in the academic environment within the NAS. Those skills were then generalizable to the academic setting. The participants of the study reflected on their comfort in handling difficult situations in the NAS which prepared them for handling those same situations in the academic environment.

Increasing self-efficacy of special education teachers has been documented through community service-learning programs where people with disabilities are instructed to meet the goal of an IEP or other academic goal (Ahmad et al., 2016; An, 2021; Conderman et al., 2023). Where prior research supported the acquisition of skills and self-reported increases in self-efficacy, they had only considered academic settings

for teacher preparation. The current study adds the NAS a source of experience that develops special education teacher skills in an environment unburdened by the demands of the academic setting. Prior research has demonstrated that experience working with people with disabilities supported teachers in feeling more comfortable with teaching special education (Allen & Barnett, 2020). Participants of the current study confirm these findings within the NAS. The findings suggest that the NAS may be considered a setting that has implications for developing special education teacher self-efficacy.

Special education certification and experience in the profession has been associated with higher levels of self-efficacy (Ruppar et al., 2016). When preparatory programs for special education certification are being developed, the value of the experiences included are valuable to understand. The current study draws connections between the experience of the participants and their skill development as special educators. The skills nationally recognized and overlapping with state indicators have been outlined (Stayton et al., 2012). The current study connects the skills experienced in the NAS to the indicators that special education teachers are expected to demonstrate mastery of. The findings describe the NAS as an environment where the participants are exposed to experiences that align to the expectations of certified teachers, although the settings are non-academic. Understanding the value added by gaining NAS experience is a critical first step, and an avenue to continue research.

Teacher shortages are influenced by multiple factors, and sometimes can be addressed through strategic partnerships (Theobald et al., 2021). Pairing prospective special educators with experienced teachers leads to better teacher retention and impact on student learning (Peyton & Acosta, 2022). The NAS settings may present a significant

environment where better retention rates of teachers and student impact exist. Participants of the study reflected on the NAS for guiding their mission to serve the population of people with disabilities in their teaching career. The experience of the PISETs suggests that the NAS may be a strong contributing factor to the long-term commitment to special education, as shared by participants in the setting. The current study adds the NAS experience as developing teachers who are passionate and dedicated to the profession. Participants of the current study all reference their commitment to serving people with disabilities through their roles as special educators.

Teacher self-efficacy is an area of focus for its ability to impact teacher motivation and persistence over a career (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The connection between the shared experience of the participants and the relationship to development of self-efficacy provides an understanding within an unexplored environment. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) described a need for future research on self-efficacy which may support the development of teacher preparatory programs and potentially shift the programs to look more like apprenticeships. Shifting away from the vicarious experience and verbal persuasion of the classroom and into more mastery experiences. Adding to this concept, the current study provides a unique experience within the NAS where participants compared their academic preparation. Where participants drew connections between the skills practices in the NAS and academic setting, they collectively provided frequent descriptions of joy, happiness, and fun. The connection between the affective states and acquisition of necessary teaching skills bridges the need to explore more perspectives within the NAS.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher has spent time working in two of the NAS defined in the study. The researcher has worked at Camp Anchor and supervised work with a best buddies program in a middle school. Phenomenological studies require interpretation of response without bias. Researcher bias was controlled by member checking findings and triangulation of data between participant responses, review of public facing website data of the NASs of the study, and through observation. The coding process and findings were reviewed with peers and followed a systematic and planned approach (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020). The researcher took especial care in providing specific quotes of participants to provide clarity in their interpretation within the contexts of the study.

The qualitative phenomenological interviews had participants answer questions during a single interview. The interviews were conducted in similar conditions with a set of questions. There was no follow up interview for participants, although participants were sent parts of the findings to provide member checking over the themes and data collected in the study. The use of member checking and triangulation were used to increase the credibility, dependability, and transferability of the study (Schwandt et al., 2007).

The study was limited through the purposeful sampling which provided non-random participation. There were eight participants which is a limited sample. To support credibility with the sample there was the use of triangulation, member checking, and audio recordings with verbatim transcriptions (Schwandt et al., 2007). Although the number for participants was eight, prior qualitative phenomenological methods suggest

that eight falls within an appropriate sample size for the type and method of the study (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020).

The current study is limited in its ability to provide causality between the setting and the themes discovered in the coding process, although some studies explore the relationship between qualitative methods and causality (Maxwell, 2020). Qualitative research explores experience and meaning (Creswell et al., 2018; Hennink et al., 2020). Quantitative studies would support an analysis where causality is accepted in research and is discussed in recommendations for future practice.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Special education involves more than just academic education. Recent focus in the field includes the education of the whole child, including social-emotional education (DeAngelis, 2010; McCormick et al., 2019). The NAS is a setting often described by participants using language of emotional states. Its success was defined by participants through the emotional states they experienced and their focus on providing people with disabilities' positive emotional states. Understanding the individual through the experience in the NAS may lead to better teaching practice by providing more experience in how to create positive emotional states for people with disabilities through the social recreational nature of the NAS. It would benefit the field to understand the impacts experience in the NAS may have on special educators.

The experience of participants in the NAS should be considered when meeting observational requirements in college coursework. Sharing the findings of this study with special education program faculty may be helpful in determining the addition of NAS

observational components making their way into the curriculum for teacher preparation. Students starting their pathway in college may benefit from having an observational experience in the NAS when learning the basic topics of students with disabilities and special education teaching. Participants shared how the NAS provided them with more exposure to learning about a variety of disabilities. The absence of academics provided an environment where more individuals were grouped on social needs, and not academic needs. The resulting environment is a positive social learning environment.

In specific reference to the impact that Camp Anchor had on seven of the participants who worked in the setting, it would be beneficial for more government agencies to support the development of similar programs. The camp currently services only members of its township. The participants of the study described how such a program enhanced their own character development and compassion in working with people with disabilities. They described how the setting gave individuals with disabilities an avenue for social development, enjoyment, and sense of community. Outside of the immediate benefit to those people with disabilities who join programs like Camp Anchor, this study provides several secondary benefits to those that work in the setting, the community surrounding the program, and the future impact of special educators as they work in the classroom. The overall enhancement of acceptance, awareness, and independence for people with disabilities that was experienced by participants deserves elevation in the public eye. A number of participants referenced how they would engage with people from camp in their community and how the NAS increased the awareness and relationship building of the community with the population of people with

disabilities. The setting raised awareness and gave the campers who attend connections with their community and peers through the social development provided.

Recommendations for Future Research

The connection to developing skills needed for special education teaching was evident in the study. It would be worthwhile to explore what is learned in the NAS that may be missing from the experience in the academic setting. Pre-service teachers currently conduct their field experience towards degree completion in classrooms, provider offices, and other academic environments. The NASs are not part of the requirements towards certification. If prospective special educators are missing aspects of developing empathy, compassion, and passion for working with people with disabilities in their academic experiences, it would be valuable to the field of special education to understand. This level of data could have an impact on the expectation that future special educators should complete observation hours in the NAS as part of the completion of coursework towards certification. Through study of the compared value of academic and non-academic settings, we can determine if there is merit in one form of experience over another.

The participants of the study mentioned how important they felt the setting was for the development of the individuals with disabilities who are participants. They shared the feeling that socialization, growth, and community all lead to the joy and happiness of individuals with disabilities. Further study of the participant and family perspective should be explored. If families and participants both value the learning that goes on in this social environment, it may have transferable impacts to the school setting. Furthering the significance of future research to understand this concept is present in the shared

stories of families who choose to send their child to places like Camp Anchor over a 12-month academic program. Understanding what parents value about the NAS over the academic setting could provide valuable perspective in the education of their children with disabilities.

The parent perspective of those who choose to send their child to a NAS over academic options should be explored. Parents of campers in NASs like Camp Anchor often send their child to camp instead of keeping them in a 12-month academic program. An exploration of the values that parents hold as significant for their selection process needs clarification. Parents of students with 12-month academic services who choose a NAS in the summer may provide insight into why the setting is better in their experience. Exploring the incidence of parental selection of NAS over academic settings for the summer may help to shape how academic school-based programs should adapt their approach to better serve their stakeholders.

Future research should continue to understand the difference between special education teachers' preparation, perspective, and understanding of people with disabilities with those who have and do not have experience in the NAS. It would be worthwhile to evaluate the impact of the NAS on teachers' development in a comparative study. Measures of self-efficacy should be administered between groups to perform statistical analysis for a significant difference between settings. In exploring the reported self-efficacy of these groups, we may be able to provide insight into the value of one experience over the other for the preparation of special education teachers.

This study represents a beginning for understanding the NAS for its ability to provide a powerful social learning environment where teacher skill and self-efficacy is

developed. The current study only begins to explore the undoubtedly profound impact that these programs have on all members associated with them. It is in the continuation of exploring these programs where future strides in the field of special education will lead to stronger outcomes.

Conclusion

The participants of the study describe NASs that are inclusive, full of joy, and teaming with positive social interactions. The settings all have an impact on their experience in the development of special education teaching skills, as outlined in the overlap between indicators for special education certification being present in the experience of the participants. The description of their experience provided several connections with increased self-efficacy. The ability for a setting devoid of assessment to provide such meaningful experiences for special education teachers is significant for the field. The participants also detail a connection between their NAS experience and why they chose the field of special education.

The impact of the NAS described by the participants must not be overlooked in future special education teacher curricular planning. The experience at least should be a requirement, while the full impact of the setting is explored in future research.

The participants reflected on the impact of the NASs. Their experience is captured in the following quotes from their interviews. Although not summative of their entire experience, it is worthwhile to memorialize their perspective for what the NAS has provided for people with disabilities, their own teaching practice, and the overall impact on special education.

Participant 1 reflected.

I think the biggest thing is it's all just enhanced my enjoyment for what I do. You know, I have seen students be challenged but also excel in the classroom. I also have seen students and adults excel and to be challenged outside of the classroom. I think bringing learning and life experience in multiple settings is the most beneficial for these students and the most rewarding for these students... I am so happy being in that setting because my kids are so happy. I'm so happy like when I see they're struggling and something happens that upsets them, and their peers are the ones picking them up and motivating them. I think there's so much growth that comes from outside of the classroom.

Participant 2 reflected.

I feel like the work that we did at Anchor and working with participants in like, in a non-educational setting made those bonds stronger... They can be themselves and like maybe do things that they've never done before. I feel like that broke some barriers and allowed you to like find some common ground that was in a less restrictive setting.

Participant 3 reflected.

I wish more places had these opportunities for kids to get in at a young age to see that this might be a potential avenue for them because, you know, if we're going to change the [teacher] shortages, you have to get more people into the profession. Maybe they see this is something that, you know, this is a population that they wanna help.

Participant 4 reflected.

Everybody's learning and you're not gonna be perfect at the things you do. I'm not perfect with anything that I do, and nobody really is. If you're coming from a place that is good and you're trying your best and you're trying to help the individuals that you're working with, you're trying to make their day the best day ever, you're trying to make them have as much fun as they can...that is what matters.

Participant 5 reflected.

Just because you have a disability doesn't make you any less than anybody else. Fun being included in everything I think is something important. If we do have a crazy busy schedule with how much we pack into our school day, at the end of the day I'm like "okay, we didn't get to it, but we had fun" ...and it's okay, we can all reach whatever potential is out there. I do think that sometimes the more recreational programs remind me of that.

Participant 6 reflected.

At anchor we are having such fun and like, you can never bottle that up. I feel like it's, it's like awe inspiring because I can't believe I get to wake up and do this every day and work with these kids and learn something from these kids and know that [the campers] bring me such joy. I wish other people got to do it with me... In this bubble, like everything is just so pure and everybody just loves bringing joy to other people's faces.

Participant 7 reflected.

It's just, it's the happiest place on earth. I mean, it's just, you can't beat it... I mean, I think the love of the population has just carried me through my career. I fell in love with this population in the recreation setting. I wanted to do something with that population as a career.

Participant 8 reflected.

It helps so much with empathy and compassion for this community of people. You know, you can't take everything that you do at camp with you in a classroom, but it really makes you able to connect more with kids of any level of disability...and humanize them more rather than patronize them as, as some people do these days...you care so much about kids with disabilities and felt joy and happiness. It really is one of the happiest places you could be.

Exploring the experience of teachers as an ongoing process for understanding the state of the profession is where research provides value. The lived experience of those who participated in this study echo settings that are referred to as the happiest places on earth. Understanding what special educators hold valuable is vital to the field and worthy of committing resources for future research. If the captured experience of participants in the current study is created when NAS programs create, expanding the availability of these programs should be a priority across communities. It would not only create a more inclusive community but serve to enhance the preparation and skill acquisition of future special educators. Likewise, if special educators relate their experience in the NAS the

way it has been captured in the current study, further research of NASs would serve to enhance the field of special education.

EPILOGUE

Having siblings with disabilities created what felt like a constant learning environment at home. I remember my brother Gary having a goal set by his school to stop his hand flapping. Anytime he would become overstimulated and excited by something, he would flap. To me, his flapping was an expression of enjoyment, of laughter. It was no different than a person bursting out loud with a belly laugh at something funny. Gary would become so excited seeing a firetruck or something come crashing to the ground, that he would flap and laugh. We were supposed to say, “Hands Gary,” as a reminder to stop that behavior. I thought it was crazy to ask him to change his enjoyment of this world when we could just as easily accept his happiness and difference. In fairness, it was a different time for special education, and much has changed. These moments growing up in my home drove me in my career and my focus in research. It also provided me with the perspective of the family as I continued to work within schools as a teacher and administrator.

Fast forward to my time at Camp Anchor. In this place, I saw people without disabilities jump and flap with children in celebration of their excitement. I would see children rocking and holding hands with a staff member, who was rocking back and forth with them. It was beautiful. Both parties grinning ear to ear. Pure joy. The staff would encourage and love all the ways each person at that camp expressed themselves. It was truly a place of beauty and acceptance. It also created a tremendous opportunity to understand people with disabilities far beyond the classroom. In the classrooms, they can't flap or rock or jump if they're expected to meet some academic goal shown by the compliance of sitting at a desk. They can't share with the teacher/observers their most

genuine self. The experience in the non-academic setting was so powerful in recognizing how to foster the classroom environment ideal for the purpose of special education.

I always felt the freedom to focus on fun in this setting was significantly more formative in understanding disability than any textbook or classroom could provide. In furthering my education and diving into research, I realized that settings like Camp Anchor are not studied for their impact on special education teacher development. More interestingly, there was not a definition for the setting, which had its own unique attributes, nor a focus on how the setting contributed to skill acquisition for special education teachers. It seemed so obvious that the NAS needed to become a place of research to remind the field what makes great teachers, what fosters true acceptance, and how to deepen the understanding of all people involved.

Programs like Camp Anchor, Best Buddies, the Special Olympics, and Challenger Athletics are incredibly impactful for those who participate. In many cases, it is life changing and career defining. I hope that by sharing the experience of special educators in these settings we can not only serve to address the shortage of special education teachers, but we can promote more schools and local governmental agencies to fund and support the expansion and development of these programs.

Appendix A

Google Survey for Participation with Informed Consent Section

Special Education Experience in the Non-Academic Setting

Informed Consent

Subject: St. John's University Doctoral Study on the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic settings for people with disabilities.

Introduction: My name is David LaPoma and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at the Graduate School of Education, St. John's University, Queens, NY. I am conducting a study for my dissertation titled: A Qualitative study of the experiences of special education teachers working with people with disabilities in the non-academic setting. My mentor is Dr. Cozza, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.

Purpose of the Study: I am writing to invite you to participate in the study designed to help me explore the experiences of preservice and inservice special education teachers who work or have worked with people with disabilities in a non-academic setting. I would like to get more feedback about your experiences with a virtual interview. Your responses will help me determine the role a non-academic setting for people with disabilities has on special education teacher development.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, choose not to answer specific questions, or withdraw at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality: If you decide to participate, that will constitute informed consent. The researcher will not collect your email address, IP address, your identity, or the identity of your school, as the interview will not collect any email addresses. If you choose to provide contact information to be included in any follow up interviews, the information will only be accessible to the researcher and never shared or published. All collected data will be destroyed at the end of the legally prescribed time frame, which is eight years.

Possible Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of daily life. Although you will not receive any remuneration or direct benefit, the results of this study may help to promote a greater understanding of the role a non-academic setting for people with disabilities may have on special education teacher experience. This research may help to develop what experiences should accompany future teacher certification course requirements. This research may benefit all people with disabilities, as teacher preparatory programs for special education certification may revise their curricula based on results from this study. Implications from this study may inform future studies to explore the significance in providing experience in the non-academic setting to all future special educators.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about my study or your participation, or if you wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact me, David LaPoma at David.lapoma21@my.stjohns.edu, or my mentor, Dr. Cozza at

cozzab@stjohns.edu. You may also contact the Coordinator of the Institutional Review Board at St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at (718)990-1955 or at digiuser@stjohns.edu.

Study Participation: Your support in completing the interview would be greatly appreciated to make known the experience of special education teachers' time in the non-academic setting.

As fellow educators, our voices through research can be shared to identify best practices in teacher preparatory experiences. Our experience can serve as a compass to guide the direction of special education.

The interview will only take approximately 25-40 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate in the study, a follow up interview may be scheduled using the contact information provided. The follow up interview may consist of questions to confirm findings or clarify answers from the initial interview.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study on the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic setting.

* Indicates required question

1. Informed Consent

Mark only one oval.

- I agree to participate in the study as described in the informed consent section.
- I do not agree to participate.

Qualifying participation based on teaching certification

Participants of this study should have a certification in special education or are currently enrolled in a program that leads to certification in special education. Qualifying programs to certification may be undergraduate, graduate, or alternate pathway programs to certification.

2. Do you have a certification in special education or are you enrolled in a program that leads to special education certification?

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

4. How many total years have you worked in the setting? Either sporadically or periodically

Mark only one oval.

- 1-5 years
 5-10 years
 10-15 years
 15-20 years
 20-25 years
 25+ years
 Other: _____

5. What is the name of the organization that you worked with?

6. Did you work in this setting before and/or during your special education certification program?

Mark only one oval.

- yes
 no
 Other: _____

7. Would you be willing to share information about your experience by participating in a virtual interview? The interview would consist of questions about your time in the setting and perspective having worked in the setting. *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
 No

Non- Academic Setting Experience

The Non-Academic setting experience describes a setting where a person with a disability attends as a participant for the purpose of recreational and social activities. The goal of the setting does not include meeting a goal described by educational expectations aligned to Individual Education Program goals or other related service mandate (PT, OT, Speech). The staff in the setting are focused solely on providing support for the individual in accessing these social and recreational games and activities. This activities may include playing a sport, art and crafts, singing, dancing, yoga, fitness, cooking, etc. In the setting, the goal is to make these activities accessible to every person with a disability for their enjoyment and recreation.

Clarifying examples:

Working on adaptive physical education skills of an individualized education plan would not qualify.

Working with a person with a disability to engage in a sport recreationally would qualify.

Working with a person with a disability to meet life skills goals outlined in an Individualized education plan by cooking a meal would not qualify.

Working with a person with a disability to engage in a cooking class as a social and recreational activity would qualify.

Working at a summer program or school that provides academic activities aligned to meeting individualized education plan goals would not qualify.

Working at a summer program where participants engage in recreational and social activities without the demands of meeting academic goals or standards would qualify.

3. Do you have experience in a setting that meets the defined criteria for a non-academic setting?

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

Election to participate in follow up interviews.

To better understand your experience and its role in special education knowledge and development, a follow up interview may be preferred. Please indicate if you would like to participate in a follow up interview to clarify and/or expand on any of the responses provided in this survey.

8. I would be willing to participate in a follow up virtual interview via video conference or phone call.

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

9. Please use the following information to contact me (email or phone):

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Researcher: David LaPoma

2023



Study: A Qualitative study of the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic settings for people with disabilities

Interview Questions:

Tell me how you got involved in (NAS Name).

How long did you spend working there?

Did you always have the same role?

What were your responsibilities and work expectations in those roles?

How would you describe your training to perform any of the tasks in the setting?

How would you define your own success in what you did in that setting?

How did you know you were doing a good job?

How was your relationship with the participants in the setting?

Did you have involvement with the families or other members of the participants' family?

What challenges did you experience in the setting?

How were those challenges overcome?

What aspects of your experience in the setting apply to your work/experience in special education?

What feelings and emotions did you experience working in the setting?

Did any particular lessons stand out from this setting? Good or bad?

In what ways did you learn on the job?

How would you compare the experience in the NAS and the experience you had in an academic setting?

Is there anything else about your work in the setting that stand out from your experience that you would like to share?

Is it ok if I follow up with you should there be any questions or clarifications about your responses and to check that my take-aways were accurate?

Appendix C

Informed consent notice

Informed Consent



**ST. JOHN'S
UNIVERSITY**

To:

From:

Subject: St. John's University Doctoral Study on the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic settings for people with disabilities.

Introduction: My name is David LaPoma and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership at the Graduate School of Education, St. John's University, Queens, NY. I am conducting a study for my dissertation titled: **A Qualitative study of the experiences of special education teachers working with people with disabilities in the non-academic setting**. My mentor is Dr. Cozza, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership, St. John's University.

Purpose of the Study: I am writing to invite you to participate in the study designed to help me explore the experiences of preservice and Inservice special education teachers who work or have worked with people with disabilities in a non-academic setting. I would like to get more feedback about your experiences with a virtual interview. Your responses will help me determine the role a non-academic setting for people with disabilities has on special education teacher development.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, choose not to answer specific questions, or withdraw at any time without consequence.

Confidentiality: If you decide to participate, that will constitute informed consent. The researcher will not collect your email address, IP address, your identity, or the identity of your school, as the interview will not collect any email addresses. If you choose to provide contact information to be included in any follow up interviews, the information will only be accessible to the researcher and never shared or published. All collected data will be destroyed at the end of the legally prescribed time frame, which is eight years.

Possible Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of daily life. Although you will not receive any remuneration or direct benefit, the results of this study may help to promote a greater understanding of the role a non-academic setting for people with disabilities may have on special education teacher experience. This research may help to develop what experiences should accompany future teacher certification course requirements. This research may benefit all people with disabilities, as teacher preparatory programs for special education certification may revise their curricula based

on results from this study. Implications from this study may inform future studies to explore the significance in providing experience in the non-academic setting to all future special educators.

Contact Information: If you have any questions or concerns about my study or your participation, or if you wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact me, David LaPoma at David.lapoma21@my.stjohns.edu, or my mentor, Dr. Cozza at cozzab@stjohns.edu. You may also contact the Coordinator of the Institutional Review Board at St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at (718)990-1955 or at digiuser@stjohns.edu.

Study Participation: Your support in completing the interview would be greatly appreciated to make known the experience of special education teachers' time in the non-academic setting. As fellow educators, our voices through research can be shared to identify best practices in teacher preparatory experiences. Our experience can serve as a compass to guide the direction of special education.

The interview will only take approximately 25-40 minutes to complete. If you choose to participate in the study, a follow up interview may be scheduled using the contact information provided. The follow up interview may consist of questions to confirm findings or clarify answers form the initial interview.

Thank you in advance for your consideration to participate in this study on the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic setting.

Sincerely,

David LaPoma
Doctoral Candidate,
Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership
St. John's University
Queens, NY 11439

If you do not wish to receive further emails from me, please click the link below, and you will be automatically removed from my email list.

[\[Opt Out Link Here\]](#)

Appendix D

Demographics

Demographic Information for Participants of the Study

Study Identifier	Non-Academic Setting Experience Organization	NAS Exp. Years	Teaching Exp. Years	Current Role	Certification Level	Method of Earned Special Education Degree
Participant 1	Special Olympics, Best Buddies	12	9	Teacher of grades 6,7,8 Special Education	SWD B-2 and SWD B-6	Master's in special education University of North Dakota
Participant 2	Camp Anchor	14	2+	Teacher of grades 2 and 3 Special Education	NYS SWD B - 6	Master's in special education
Participant 3	Camp Anchor	14	11	Principal, Elementary School (PK-5)	SWD 1-6	Bachelors Special Education James Madison University Master's in special education
Participant 4	Camp Anchor, Backyard Players, Challenger Lacrosse, Best Buddies	10+	3	ICT	NYS SWD B-6	Elizabethtown College PA
Participant 5	Camp ANCHOR, Best Buddies, Backyard Players & Friends	10+	6	Self-Contained 10:1:2	NYS SWD 7-12 Generalist	National University San Diego, CA Via Teach for America

Participant 6	Camp Anchor	17	9	10th Grade STEM Special Education	SWD 7-12 Generalist, SWD B-2, SWD 1-6	Master's in special education Molloy College
Participant 7	Camp Anchor	15	8	7th ICT ELA, SS and self-contained	SWD 7-12 Generalist	Master's in special education CUNY Brooklyn College
Participant 8	Camp Anchor	10	0 (3+ TA)	Teaching Assistant	SWD Coursework completed. Sitting for Exams	Master's in special education Philadelphia

Note: Experience indicated with a "+" is a minimum calculated from interview responses and form range response. Actual experience unknown and/or was not provided. Student With Disabilities (SWD).

Appendix E

Public facing Information of Identified Non-Academic Settings

NAS Organization	Mission, Vision, and/or About sections for organization
Camp Anchor	<p>Answering the Needs of Citizens with Handicaps through Organized Recreation (ANCHOR) is a comprehensive year-round program serving 1,200 children and adults with special needs. Town residents five years of age and over with developmental disabilities may apply for admission to the ANCHOR program.</p> <p>Throughout the fall/winter/spring season, the Town of Hempstead ANCHOR Program presents an enriching and encompassing schedule of recreational activities on weeknights and Saturdays. Residents with special needs, five years of age and older, are eligible to participate. Specific times and locations of ANCHOR activities are announced in the participant calendar.</p>
Best Buddies	<p>Best Buddies International is a dynamic and growing organization, thanks to the people that help advance its mission every day. From the Board of Directors to the summer interns, everyone on the Best Buddies team shares their energy and enthusiasm as they work to enhance the lives of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Best Buddies International is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to establishing a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, leadership development, and inclusive living for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD).</p> <p>Programs: Best Buddies is the world's largest organization dedicated to ending the social, physical and economic isolation of the 200 million people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD). Our programs empower the special abilities of people with IDD by helping them form meaningful friendships with their peers, secure successful jobs, live independently, improve public speaking, self-advocacy and communication skills, and feel valued by society.</p>
Back Yard Players	<p>Backyard Players & Friends is an inclusive, arts-based community program, open to the public for participants aged 14 and older. We work to give every person a space so that together we can share ideas and experience openness, joy and creativity. We believe that through inclusion there is diversity and strength. Our program seeks unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation</p>

Challenger Lacrosse Challenger Athletics' mission is to develop independence, confidence and self-esteem through socialization and non-competitive sports programs for individuals with physical and learning disabilities. It is our intention to increase awareness and provide educational resources to the athlete, their families and the larger community

Challenger Athletics Inc. was founded in April 2013 by Raymond Samson, Stephen and Thomas DeSimone. Raymond wanted to give his youngest son Patrick, who has Down Syndrome, the opportunity to play a sport he loves and has been involved with since his time at West Islip High School. Stephen, a junior at St. Anthony's High School and Thomas, a sophomore at Chaminade High School have known Ray's son since he was an infant. They have always held a special place in their hearts for Patrick and children with special needs. They wanted to become more involved with the special needs community after their nephew was born with a rare developmental disorder. Challenger Athletics was the perfect opportunity for Ray, Stephen, and Thomas to work with this amazing group of people and share with them their love for lacrosse.

Initially, they set out to get an indication from the community to see if there was truly an interest for a special needs lacrosse program. To do this, Ray drafted a letter stating their intent and sent it to Bay Shore PAL as well as other Suffolk PAL programs. The response was a resounding "yes." In fact, a copy of the letter was posted on Facebook and people from all over Long Island signed up to participate.

On June 18, 2013, with some help from friends, Ray, Stephen and Thomas founded Challenger Athletics Inc., a 501(c)(3) New York Not-for-Profit organization dedicated to fostering the growth of children through sports. Challenger Lacrosse held its first practice on June 29, 2013. The turnout was overwhelming, 50 athletes and 75 buddies were in attendance but what was more impressive was the FUN everyone had that day. The rest of the season was equally well attended over the next five weeks.

It is their mission to continue this success as well as build self-sustaining sports program for all to enjoy and benefit from. Currently, we have nine active programs lacrosse, tennis, soccer, a sports camp at St. Anthony's high school, a fishing trip, a one-day surf camp, flag football, basketball and yoga. Challenger Athletics Inc. is a New York Not-for-Profit Corporation duly organized under Section 402 of the New York Not for Profit Corporation Law. Additional information about our organization can be found on file with the New York State Attorney General's Office, Charities Bureau.

Special
Olympics

The mission of Special Olympics is to provide year-round sports training and athletic competition in a variety of Olympic-type sports for children and adults with intellectual disabilities, giving them continuing opportunities to develop physical fitness, demonstrate courage, experience joy and participate in a sharing of gifts, skills and friendship with their families, other Special Olympics athletes and the community. The transformative power of sports to instill confidence, improve health and inspire a sense of competition is at the core of what Special Olympics does. From the detailed coaching guides, we provide in many languages to the sharp-eyed officials at our international games, the focus is on real sports, real competition, real achievements. In Special Olympics, the power and joy of sport, shifts focus to what our athletes CAN do, not what they can't. Attention to disabilities fades away. Instead, we see our athletes' talents and abilities—and applaud them for all that they can do. And they are doing a lot—from gymnastics to soccer to open-water swimming. With our 30-plus Olympic-style sports, we offer adults and children with intellectual disabilities many ways to be involved in their communities, many ways to show who they really are.

Note. Information taken directly from organization web pages (*ANCHOR Program | Hempstead Town, NY*, 2024; *Best Buddies International*, 2024; *Camp Anchor*, 2024; *Challenger Athletics*, 2024; *Special Olympics*, 2018; *BackYard Players & Friends*, 2023).

Appendix F

Institutional Review Board Approval



Federal Wide Assurance: FWA00009066

Oct 13, 2023 3:08:03 PM EDT

PI: David LaPoma
CO-PI: Barbara Cozza
The School of Education

Re: Expedited Review - Initial - **IRB-FY2024-86** *Study of the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic settings for people with disabilities*

Dear David LaPoma:

The St John's University Institutional Review Board has rendered the decision below for *Study of the experiences of special education teachers in non-academic settings for people with disabilities*. The approval is effective from October 13, 2023 through October 11, 2024.

Decision: Approved

PLEASE NOTE: If you have collected any data prior to this approval date, the data must be discarded.

Selected Category: 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

Sincerely,

Raymond DiGiuseppe, PhD, ABPP
Chair, Institutional Review Board
Professor of Psychology

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