Teachers' Attitudes and Their Effect on Placement Recommendations for Students with Cognitive Disabilities

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TEACHERS’ ATTITUDES AND THEIR EFFECT ON PLACEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS
FOR STUDENTS WITH COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

by
Kathleen M. Everett

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the
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Doctor of Education
In
Special Education
In the
Bagwell College of Education
Kennesaw State University

Kennesaw, GA
2015
DEDICATION

First, I know in my heart that nothing is able to be accomplished without the blessing of my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. My entire being is at your mercy and all praise and honor go to you. I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my family. To my mother, who is one of the strongest woman I have ever known. I know you are looking down from the heavens and smiling bright. You have instilled in me the strength and perseverance to know that I can accomplish anything. To my beautiful daughters, Jennifer and Sarah, you are my inspiration and my joy. You put up with me throughout this entire process and while I know you missed me at times, you also encouraged me to complete it. I am so proud to be called your mother. You make me proud every day and I hope that I can be the spirit that inspires you throughout your lives.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The hardest part of doing anything in life is taking that first step. I enthusiastically took that step and follow down a path I never dreamt possible. While traversing the path to my dissertation, I staggered and took the long road but I ended up completing the journey for which I am grateful. I could never have completed this path without the genuine concern and guidance from my dissertation chair, Dr. Harriet Bessette. I know I tried your patience at times but your unwavering support is what has allowed me to complete this. I cannot thank Dr. Guichon Zong enough for her extremely constructive advice every step of the way. The very direct and pointed questions from Dr. Patricia McHatton made me reach deeper and think harder on every aspect of this project. I am so grateful for the committee that not only did not give up on me but encouraged me and pushed me to grown and learn. I am so grateful for your support in helping me complete my journey.
ABSTRACT

The implementation of Public Law 94-142 in 1974 guaranteed that students with disabilities had the right to be educated alongside their peers in the least restrictive environment. However, decades later, administrators, teachers, and parents continue to struggle to resolve the issue on how to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms, as well as how to recognize why students with cognitive disabilities were embodied more in self-contained classrooms than in comprehensive environments. In this study, I aimed to understand how special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities influence placement recommendations. Through the qualitative thematic analysis performed on the interviews with the six participants, the researcher found that teachers still have a passionate attitude towards students with cognitive abilities. It was also established that teachers employ their knowledge about the condition and progress about the student as the main determinant when making placements. Finally, teachers also employ knowledge about the condition as guide to the next actions to take. With the findings, it can be inferred that teachers try their best to provide a fair process when making recommendations. Schools can then utilize this current study to determine the needs of the teachers. The responses of the participants in the study indicated the aspects that worked and did not work for the teachers when dealing with students with cognitive disabilities; therefore, schools can take the reflections of the teachers in improving their system with the records of the students to make the process easier and reasonable.
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities is a perplexing issue. Special education is a service, not a place, and yet the issue of placement is often a point of contention at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. The IEP team members enter the meeting with a set of experiences, attitudes, perceptions, and varied levels of knowledge of special education. Placement recommendations are based on many factors derived from the formal processes or procedures schools typically follow, including where the goals and objectives can be implemented or instructed. Later, the processes are derived from whether a student was making progress. According to Yell and Katsiyannis (2004), “Placement has proven to be such an important and controversial area that in many due process hearings and court cases involving special education, the rulings have hinged on the hearing officer's or judge's interpretation of the term” (p. 29). Despite these rules and guidelines, placement recommendations continue to be a point of controversy and confusion.

The controversy and confusion of educational placement may often come down to the connotations that educators attach to two very important terms: “inclusion” and “least restrictive environment” (LRE). These terms are often used interchangeably when, in fact, they have contrasting meanings. The Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), commonly referred to as PL 94-142, outlined the rules and established guidelines in 1975 for students eligible for special education to receive an education in
the LRE. “Restrictiveness,” as it applies to the LRE, can be defined as the measure of opportunity a person has for proximity to, and communication with, appropriate peers (Schwartz, 2007). To this effect, LRE results in the placement of students with disabilities alongside peers without disabilities in a general education classroom (Lambe & Bones, 2008). The general education classroom was considered the least restrictive setting, one whose nature would be where inclusion would come into play.

“Inclusion” is a multifaceted term with no agreed-upon definition (Booth, 2005; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). The term was, typically, considered to describe the blending of students who were receiving general and special education in to the general education environment (Sapon-Shevin, 2007). For the past two decades, the concept of “inclusion,” combined with the LRE, has continued to be a point of contention in many meetings (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). Attitudes about inclusion and LRE have been studied for many years, but teachers’ attitudes and knowledge of inclusion and of how educators’ perceptions and knowledge may affect placement recommendations in regards to LRE remain less explored.

Aside from determining where goals can best be accomplished for students with cognitive disabilities and what progress these students can make, what other factors contribute to teachers’ recommendations? Do teachers’ attitudes, along with their knowledge of inclusion and the LRE, contribute to placement recommendations made during Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, despite procedural and policy mandates? If so, how do teachers’ attitudes affect the placement recommendation-making process (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994, 2009; Cacioppo, Berntson, & Decety,
Studies concerning teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion are plentiful (e.g. Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Buell, Hallam, & Gamel-McCormick, 1999; Cook, Semmel, & Gerber, 1999; McFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012; Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004) as are studies concerning the least restrictive environment (LRE) (Bouck, 2006; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Falvey, 2004; Palley, 2006; Skilton-Sylvester & Slesaransky-Poe, 2007, 2009; Taylor, 2004). Although the literature consulted in this study addressed teacher attitudes and their knowledge of students with disabilities, there remained a dearth of research that probed teachers’ attitudes specifically about students with cognitive disabilities.

Research is needed to address how teachers perceive students with cognitive disabilities—how they perceive LRE in the context of inclusion and what they perceive to happen in IEP meetings. Research of this kind is required to determine how each of these factors contribute to placement recommendations made by educators. Studies need to identify how and by what parameters an IEP team and, more specifically, general and special education teachers, make their recommendations regarding the placement of students with cognitive disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012) reported that the percentage of students with cognitive disabilities who spend more than 60% of their school day in self-contained classrooms was 48.2%. However, in
regards to students with specific learning disabilities, these students were removed only 80% of the time. Hocutt (1996) stated,

Approximately one-third of special education students spend 80% or more of their school day in the general education classroom. Another one-third spend 40% to 79% of their day in general education. Approximately one-quarter spends 0% to 39% of their time in general education, but their special education classrooms share a building with the general education classes. (p. 79)

Furthermore, reports from The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012) showed that more students with cognitive disabilities (intellectual disabilities) were most often removed from general education and placed in self-contained classrooms.

These statistics support the need for further investigation into the interplay between teachers’ attitudes and knowledge, a particularly important matter given the over-abundance of students with cognitive disabilities who are placed in self-contained classrooms for over half of their school day. Research is needed to identify the attitudes of teachers concerning students with cognitive disabilities and how those attitudes may impact their placement recommendations. Finally, additional research is needed to identify teachers’ attitudes toward both LRE and inclusion, especially because previous studies have shown that teachers’ attitudes are a critical variable to the success of inclusion (Van Reusen, Shosho, & Barker, 2000; Villa, Thousand, Meyers, & Nevin, 1996). In the current study, I examined the attitudes and knowledge of general and special education teachers and their attitudes and notions about students with cognitive
disabilities. In addition, I inspected the teachers and their attitudes and knowledge of inclusion and the LRE within the context of formalized placement procedures and the recommendations teachers make for placement based upon available data. Identifying the interplay between attitudes and knowledge may enable school districts to formulate professional development training and guidelines for furthering the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities in general education classes.

**Background**

The implementation of Public Law 94-142 in 1974 (U.S. Department of Education), ensured that students with disabilities had the right to be educated alongside their peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Almost 40 years later, the law still in place, administrators, teachers, and parents are still struggling to determine how to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms as well as how to identify why students with cognitive disabilities were represented more in self-contained classrooms than in inclusive environments (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Adding to the complexity is the possibility that the impact of teachers’ attitudes concerning students with cognitive disabilities and their effect on placement recommendations has not been specifically studied. Therefore, it is unclear what effect, if any, the attitudes of teachers could have on the placement recommendations that teachers make on behalf of students with cognitive disabilities.

Regardless of teachers’ attitudes, Public Law 94-142 requires educators to justify the reasons why students with disabilities are not educated alongside students without disabilities. Not only must the IEP contain a statement related to how the student’s
disability will affect his/her participation in the general curriculum, but it must also explain why the student will not be participating in the general education classroom and in extracurricular/non-academic activities. Teachers also must describe how and why students with a disability will participate in the general education environment. The IEP team, including the parents, create the rationale for placement recommendations. When there is a disagreement regarding the placement recommendation, it often concerns the LRE and inclusion (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The law requires removing a student to a more restrictive environment only if the student has failed to progress despite the implementation of supports and services (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

The law is unclear as to what constitutes progress or benefit and what supports or services should be implemented. This ambiguity in the law has allowed for some students with cognitive disabilities to be placed in general education classrooms while others are placed in self-contained classrooms. A self-contained classroom is a special education environment, or classroom, where every student in the class is eligible for, and receives, special education services. Although the law states that a student with a disability should only be removed from the general education classroom if a supporting structure, along with the services the student receives, fails to allow the student to benefit from the education, there has been no guidance as to how “benefit from the education” should be interpreted. Perhaps more perplexing is the practice of students moving inconsistently from an inclusive general education classroom to a self-contained classroom from year to year without documentation to warrant the changes.

For example, a student with a cognitive disability might be fully included one
year and then, despite making academic progress on IEP goals and objectives, be placed in a more restrictive (self-contained) environment for the next year. Would this change be warranted by the insertion of a new teacher with differing views on what constitutes differentiated placement? Or would this change be in reaction to the student’s behavior, abilities, or lack of satisfactory benefits from the education in the general education classroom? The opposite also can occur; students with cognitive disabilities might be placed in a self-contained classroom where they are making progress, and the following year a new teacher might recommend an inclusive setting. Although any of these recommendations might be appropriate, it cannot be ascertained why certain recommendations are made (i.e., their justifications). It may be reasonable to consider, though, which factors and data are considered by the recommending party.

The reality today is that although students identified with cognitive disabilities must legally have the full continuum of placement options available to them (i.e., varied placement options from student to student, school to school, and district to district that are individualized based on factors including present levels of performance, assessment data, goals, objectives, and parental input), students with cognitive disabilities have continued to be overrepresented in self-contained classroom environments (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012).

**Problem Statement**

The goal of this study was to cultivate an understanding of the attitudes teachers have about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities and of these attitudes’ possible effect on placement recommendations. How might teachers’ attitudes regarding
the LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities interrupt the recommendation process? How might the attitudes enhance it? How might the attitudes confound it?

Further, this research helped identify what differences exist (if any) between students with cognitive disabilities included in general education classrooms versus those placed in self-contained classrooms. More importantly, which factors, if any, led IEP teams to recommend the placement of students with cognitive disabilities in more restricted, segregated environments?

Since the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), schools across the country have strived to fulfill the least restrictive environment (LRE) guidelines from the U. S. Department of Education (Almazan, 2006). The targeted goal of IDEA was that 90% of students identified with disabilities be included in general education classrooms at least 80% of the day. Despite years of implementation, however, many school districts and states have failed to meet this standard. Furthermore,
the issue is that the states are not meeting the Federal Law to educate the students under the LRE. For example, during the 2007 to 2008 school year, data from the state of Maryland concluded that students with developmental disabilities such as autism, cognitive disabilities, and multiple disabilities were the least likely to be educated in general education classes (Alamazan, 2006).

In the U.S. Department of Education 35th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Parts B and C (2011), the overall percentage of students from ages 6-21 under IDEA Part B who were educated inside of a general education classroom was 61.1% in the fall of 2011. When looking at the data in Figure 1, it can be seen that approximately 61.1% of all students identified with a disability spent at least 80% of their day in a general education classroom. Looking at Figure 1, it can also be seen that 14% of the students with disabilities spent 40-79% of their time in the general education classroom. Figure 1 also shows that approximately 14% of students with a disability spent less than 40% of their time in a general education classroom.
Figure 1. Percentage of students ages six through twenty-one who were served under IDEA Part B by educational environment in Georgia: Fall 2011 U.S. Department of Education 35th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Parts B and C. The percentage of time spent inside the regular class is defined as the number of hours the student spends each day inside the regular classroom, divided by the total number of hours in the school day (including lunch, recess, and study periods), multiplied by 100. Students who received special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day were classified inside the regular class 80% or more of the day category. Those who received special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21% of the school day were classified inside the regular schools. Percentage was calculated by dividing the number of students ages 6-21 served under IDEA, Part B, in the educational environment by the total number of students ages 6-21 served under IDEA Part B in all educational environments, then multiplying the result by 100. Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), OMB 1820-0517: “Part B, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Implementation of FAPE Requirements,” 2011.

Although those numbers might be cause for concern, the statistics in Appendix E show a breakdown of students by disability. Almost 50% of students labeled as
intellectually disabled (cognitive disability) spent less than 40% of their school day inside of a general education classroom. Compared to other students with disabilities, students with cognitive disability spent almost twice as much time isolated from their peers in separate classes than other students who displayed other types of disabilities. According to the data displayed in Appendix E, only 17% of students with cognitive disabilities spent 80% of their time in a general education classroom. Comparing the 35th Report to the 31st report indicated that that figure has increased by 1% since 2009.

Although the national statistics are enough to warrant research, individual states also have had difficulty implementing the goal established from the federal government regarding the education of students with disabilities in the general education setting. In the annual progress report for Georgia, dated April 30, 2014 and completed with data from 2012, the state failed to meet its target of educating students (67%) with disabilities in the general education classroom. Despite the federal government’s goal of educating 90% of all students with disabilities in the general education classroom 90% of the time, Georgia showed a gain of .9 percentage points compared to the 2011 report. The report also stated Georgia served 13% of students with disabilities in the general education classroom less than 40% of the day. And the state reported a slippage of .1% concerning students with disabilities who were served in public private separate schools, residential placements, or homebound or hospital placements. The percentage of students with disabilities served in public private separate schools, residential placements, or homebound or hospital placements was 2.3%.

The pervasive question among educators, advocates, and parents became focused
on why so many students with cognitive disabilities were being placed in self-contained classrooms. Were students with cognitive disabilities primarily being viewed from a deficit-based model? This would suggest that disability—specifically cognitive disability—was being seen as an anomaly or deficiency. Were they promoting ableism or disableism? Were the educators more concerned about what students with cognitive disabilities could not do versus what the students with cognitive disabilities could do?

The assumptions by the researcher of the current project was that special education teachers utilize data in formulating their placement recommendations. The researcher’s assumption was that the formalized recommendation-making process was accompanied by other determinants. The current study questioned the impact that teachers’ attitudes regarding inclusion, the LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities have on placement recommendations.

**Purpose**

To answer the questions stated in the previous section, the present study set out to understand how special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities influence placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. Gaining an understanding of some of the factors involved in placement recommendations may enable school districts to formulate professional development training and guidelines for IEP teams so that these teams can increase the number of students with cognitive disabilities in general education.
Research Questions

For the current study, the following overarching question guided the investigation:

RQ1: How do the attitudes teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect the teachers’ placement recommendations?

Two sub-questions emerged in this study. They are as follows:

SQ1: What do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

SQ2: How do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

By identifying elementary general and special education teachers’ attitudes and their impact on the placement recommendation process, school districts may be able to determine what professional learning needs exist and where to address these needs. By identifying the needs of the professional educators responsible for making placement recommendations in the IEP process, students with cognitive disabilities may be positioned to achieve greater access in general education classrooms and greater equity in education.

Definition of Terms

The following definitions established a common understanding of terms and their use in the current study.
Cognitive disability refers to general mental capacity, such as learning, reasoning, problem solving, and so on. One criterion to measure intellectual functioning would be an IQ test. Generally, an IQ test score of 50 to 70 indicates a limitation in intellectual functioning called mild cognitive disability while a score between 35 and 55 indicates a moderate cognitive disability.

Inclusion is a multifaceted term with no agreed upon definition (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). It is typically considered to describe the blending of students receiving general and special education into the general education environment. Inclusion involves “the processes of changing values, attitudes, policies and practices within a school setting and beyond” (Polat, 2010, p. 1). Inclusion is a philosophy based on values that aim to maximize the participation of all in society and education by minimizing exclusionary and discriminatory practices (Booth, 2005).

Least restrictive environment (LRE) is describe as the “assumption that students with disabilities should be educated in settings as close to regular classes as appropriate for the child” (Yell, 1995). The definition of the LRE, according to the U.S. Department of Education, C.F.R. 300.320(a) (5), follows:

To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities...should be educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary
aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily [USDOE, 2004, U.S.C. 1412(a) (5) (B)].

*Mild to moderate cognitive disabilities* refers to students who are found eligible under the categorical label of mild or moderate cognitive disability and who are also referred to as displaying an impairment or disorder. The identification of the disability must have been made prior to the students’ turning 18 years of age.

*No child left behind* (NCLB) is the title of the re-authorized Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that mandates high standards of achievement for all students through testing and accountability measures that include public reporting and potential consequences if directives are not fulfilled (NLCB, 2001).

*Placement* refers to the educational environment for the provision of special education and related services, rather than a specific place, such as a classroom or school in which the special education service is delivered to the student. It must be derived from the student's IEP and be based on the student's needs, goals, and the LRE. The general education classroom must be the initial consideration. The IEP team must consider how the child with a disability can be educated with peers who do not display disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.

*Social justice* is a theoretical foundation that utilizes and “supports a process built on respect, care, recognition, and empathy” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 6). Social justice provides the foundation for a healthy society. It is an outgrowth of society’s sense that each person has value. When people can recognize the value and dignity of each person regardless of their abilities, only then can humans build a healthy society. This building
can be a slow, painful process of learning and growing. To help the process along, people develop perceptions of respect for one another. People can also display patterns of behavior to protect and enhance the worth of each person. One way to achieve this would be to provide an educational placement that provides for the least restrictive environment for all students, including those with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities. This justice must not be a goal, but a process, a struggle in which people can be engaged through all the pain and joy involved in growth.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The following review is presented to provide relevant literature apropos to the overarching research question, How do the attitudes teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect their placement recommendations.

Two sub-questions emerged in this study. They are as follows:

1. What do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

2. How do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

This chapter will begin by presenting the search techniques utilized by the researcher, followed by a review of literature pertinent to this study. Next, the foundations of the conceptual framework will be presented. This will be followed by literature relevant to the methodological framework. Finally, a conclusion will be offered that summarizes seminal themes in the literature.

**Literature Search Strategies**

Electronic databases use various search engines to access and retrieve relevant records. The researcher entered terms relevant to the study into search engines to retrieve records with those terms according to search engine rules. Boolean searching, or keyword searching, allowed the researcher to combine terms using Boolean Operators...
such as “AND,” “OR,” and “NOT” to expand the depth and breadth of the search. Different search engines work differently. And different databases contained different records within them, so it was useful to search more than one database when researching a topic thoroughly.

In addition to multiple databases, the researcher found it necessary to create a search strategy to increase knowledge of the subject, subject vocabulary, and confidence in the ability to complete the task. In conducting a good search strategy, one must ensure that the search is sensitive, specific, and systematic. The strategy should be sensitive enough to ensure that important, relevant information is retrieved. The search must be specific enough to avoid searching through thousands, or even hundreds of thousands, of articles. The search should be systematic so that the strategies used can be replicated.

Multiple database searches were conducted to identify recent publications. Search terms were limited to publication dates ranging from 2003 to 2014 (inclusive) in some databases while others were limited from 2010 to 2014. The most prevalent database searched was the Kennesaw State University Library Super Search, as it allowed the researcher to narrow the search further by requesting only those articles that had fully accessible text along with those included in peer-reviewed journals. All identified documents were scanned, and those that were relevant by terms in their title and or abstracts were retrieved for inclusion in the review. Reference lists of retrieved documents were manually searched to identify additional publications. A summary of the database searches performed during the process of conducting the review included Kennesaw State University (KSU) Super Search; Eric; Medline; Psychinfo; PyschEd;
Wiley Interscience; GoogleScholar; Sagepub; and EBSCO. Table 1 contains a sampling of the articles retrieved.

Table 1

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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cognitive+disabilities</td>
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The following were some of the terms utilized in each search engine and then scanned for relevancy to determine if the search terms warranted being included in the review: “Individualized Education Program,” “Placement Recommendations,” “Formalized Placement Recommendation Framework for IEPs,” “IEP” + “Placement Recommendations,” “Cognitive Disabilities,” “Developmental Disabilities + Placement Recommendations,” “Cognitive Impairment” + “Placement Recommendations,” “LRE,” “LRE + Placement Recommendations,” “Inclusion,” “Inclusion + Placement Recommendations,” “Attitudes about Placement,” “Attitudes + Students + with + Cognitive + Disabilities,” “Attitudes + LRE, Attitudes + Inclusion,” “Knowledge of LRE,” “Knowledge of Inclusion,” and “Knowledge of Students with Cognitive Disabilities.”
The search engines and terms yielded an unwieldy number of articles, some of which were not relevant to the current study. In one search on the KSU Super Search, a total of 165,000 hits were returned just for the terms, “Placement + Recommendations.” In an attempt to narrow the focus and the number of hits, only scholarly peer-reviewed articles with publication dates ranging from 2003 to 2014 were used. The volume of articles pertaining to just one search using various terms and the way they were input into the search engine produced a varying amount of articles. At times, the publication dates were altered to reduce the number of hits to range from 2010 to 2014. This allowed the researcher to decrease the number of articles to manageable numbers. Each article retrieved was scanned first by title and then by abstract so that the researcher could determine relevancy to the current study. In all, over 300 articles were considered for inclusion in the literature review.

**Relevant Literature**

The literature treated the topic of placement recommendations within the context of special education as a part of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) process. Any discussion of placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities should address some of the limitations established by the initial creation of special education along with factors that may influence placement recommendations. The history of special education began with a look at theories involving both deficits and abnormal behavior, both of which can be elicited from social behavior theories. When deficits and/or social behavior skills measured one standard deviation below the norm, a person would be considered “abnormal,” and if the person
was of school age, this person would then be referred for special education services. From the beginning of special education, students were evaluated using a deficit model. Students were initially evaluated through a social lens with an emphasis on “charity, welfare, and rehabilitation” (Powell, 2011, p. 3). According to Powell (2011), the focus has shifted to the point where “the issue is no longer whether to educate children with perceived impairments, but rather which services should they receive and in which educational setting” (p. 3). The setting or placement recommendation has significant implications for students. Ramifications may include how the students are taught; where they are taught; what they are taught; why they are taught; when they are taught; and by whom they are taught. Placement recommendations and how they are made continue to be somewhat of a mystery. There are many determinants in the recommendation-making process, and the determinants may include general and special education teachers’ attitudes about the least restrictive environment (LRE), inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities and the ways they impinge on the more formalized recommendation process.

The literature exposed the attitudes of general and special education teachers by presenting information on inclusion, LRE, and, to a lesser extent, students with cognitive disabilities. There was a dearth of information on how general and special education teachers actually come to make their placement recommendations. Based on the importance of placement recommendations, this was not sufficient, and more research was needed in this area. The overarching research question sought to provide insight into the overrepresentation of students with cognitive disabilities in self-contained classrooms.
versus general education classrooms. One of the most important guidelines in making placement recommendations according to Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) involved “the principles of individualization and appropriateness” (p. 34). This elicited the two part question, What attitudes do teachers hold about LRE, inclusion, and students with disabilities, and how do teachers’ attitudes impact their placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities.

**Placement Recommendations**

The literature primarily addressed placement recommendations through a legal lens that examined and evaluated the least restrictive environment (LRE) and a free, appropriate public education, or FAPE (Pauley, 2006; Ruble, McGrew, Dalrymple, & Jung, 2010; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004; Yell, Katsiyannis, Ennis, & Losinski, 2013). Placement recommendations for students with disabilities are guided by federal regulations, and these regulations were delineated in the Federal Register and referred to in the literature. The literature postulated a placement that would be appropriate under the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997) if the following factors were considered: (a) the educational benefits available to the student with a disability in a traditional classroom, supplemented with appropriate aids and services, in comparison to the educational benefits to the student with a disability from a special education classroom; (b) the non-academic benefits to the student with a disability from interacting with a student without a disability; and (c) the degree of disruption of the education of other students, resulting in the inability to meet the unique needs of the student with a disability (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). Furthermore, the literature elucidated that school
districts may not make placements based solely on factors such as (a) category of
disability; (b) severity of disability; (c) configuration of delivery system; (d) availability
of educational or related services; (e) availability of space; or (f) administrative
convenience (Rebhorn & Smith, 2008; Romberg, 2011; Wright, 2006). In the Analysis
of Comments and Changes to the final Part B regulations in the Federal Register, the U.S.
Department of Education explained that

The LRE requirements in §§300.114 through 300.117 express a strong preference,
not a mandate, for educating children with disabilities in regular classes alongside
their peers without disabilities. (71 Fed. Reg. 46585)

Furthermore, the concept of least restrictive environment (LRE) was defined in
§§300.114 through 300.117:

Each public agency must ensure that—

(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including
children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with
children who are nondisabled; and

(ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with
disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or
severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of
supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [§300.114(a]

Current literature was saturated with research about general and special education
teachers’ attitudes concerning inclusion and the LRE. However, the literature was void
of research concerning how placement recommendations for students with cognitive
disabilities were made. Gokdere (2012), along with Diken (1998) before him, researched teachers’ attitudes about the placement of students in inclusive classrooms and found that “very few teachers are willing to have inclusive students in their classes and the rest are not, but they stated that school administration placed inclusion students in their classes without getting their ideas” (p. 2). Current literature did not typically address how to increase the number of students with cognitive disabilities served in the general education classroom. Szumski and Karwowski (2012) found that socioeconomic status (SES) was positively associated with the placement of students with disabilities in inclusive settings, as well as with higher parental engagement. Furthermore, Szumski and Karwowski (2012) found that parental engagement mediated the positive effects of SES and placement in inclusive environments.

Research suggested that there are many factors that may play a role in placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities, the least of which being the formalized placement recommendation process required by law (Bateman & Chard, 1995; Reyna & Weiner, 2001; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012; Yell, Drasgow, & Lowery, 2005; Yell et al., 2012). According to research conducted by Gokere (2012), teachers felt that “inclusive education causes extra work and intra-class problems for teachers on duty” (p. 2804). In 2002, research conducted by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) concluded that teachers typically did not share the “total inclusion” attitude. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) further synopsized that the milder the disability, the more positive the teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion; the more training provided, the more comfortable the teachers felt; and the more teachers felt supported by administration, the
better their attitude was toward inclusion (p. 142). Similarly, Sadioglu, Bilgin, Batu, and Oksal (2013) concluded that some of the same concerns such as the lack of support, lack of knowledge, and lack of training could be detriments to teachers’ attitudes about students with cognitive disabilities and their placement in inclusive settings (p. 1761). The ability to accept the paradigm shift for inclusion could be attributed in part to teachers’ distrust of the ever-changing educational reforms, according to Duman, Baykan, Koroglu, Ylimaz, and Erdogan (2012).

Although some teachers were positive about the concept of inclusion, some did not hold the same positive attitude when it came to the implementation of inclusion (McFarlane & Woolfson, 2013). McFarlane and Woolfson (2013) also found that the principal’s expectations of teachers affected their attitudes of inclusion. Some teachers of gifted students, similar to some special education teachers, believed that students would get a better education when segregated (Hosseinkhanzadeh, Yeganeh, & Taher, 2013). Although previous research demonstrated the various attitudes of teachers toward inclusion, the field of research completed in this area lacked specifically in identifying attitudes that may impact placement recommendations.

**Procedures for placement recommendations.** The literature clearly identified two federal laws that provide rules and regulations to assist teachers in making recommendations for the educational placement of students with disabilities (Romberg, 2011; Weintraub, 2012; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The Individual with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004) established guidelines in determining placement to ensure that students with disabilities received an appropriate education in the least
restrictive environment (LRE). IDEA regulations (C.F.R. §300.552) and Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act of 1973) addressed the placement of students with disabilities (Department of Education, 2004). However, as the current study focused on students with cognitive disabilities who require an IEP, the review of literature centered on IDEIA. These laws that provided guidance to teachers were considered the formalized procedures for determining placement for students with disabilities. It was questionable if the guidance clearly established what constitutes an appropriate placement in the LRE. Lee-Tarver (2006) suggested the narrowing between policy and implementation of IEP requirements. Lee-Tarver also indicated that teachers were becoming more aware, and ultimately involved, in the provision of services for students with cognitive disabilities.

Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) contended that IDEA established three factors that all IEP teams must follow when making placement recommendations for students with disabilities. The first factor required a school district to evaluate students to determine if the students had a qualifying disability that negatively affected their education. Secondly, once a student was identified with a disability that negatively impacted education, the IEP team was required to develop an IEP. The IEP is a specific program based on the needs of a student. The law stipulated that the IEP contain measureable goals, objectives, or benchmarks for the student. Finally, from the goals, the team identified the specially designed instruction the student needed and then determined the placement for the student (i.e., the place where the instruction could be delivered and where the goals could be accomplished) (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). Placement recommendations are an important factor in the education of students with cognitive
disabilities, yet IEPs that contained the placement recommendation were often wrought with errors, according to Bateman (2011) and Yell (2012). According to Bateman (as cited in Yell et al., 2013), “the IEP is so important that it is at the center of most special education disputes in hearings or courts; thus, its importance cannot be overestimated” (p. 56).

The literature identified two types of IEP errors (Yell, 2012). The first was procedural errors. Schools are required to give prior written notice of meetings to parents, adhere to state mandated timelines, include the parents in all recommendations, conduct evaluations, and ensure the IEP is adhered to (Bateman, 2011; Yell, 2012). The other type of error, substantive, was compelling, as it requires the team to develop and implement an IEP that provides an educational benefit to the student. The factors listed above must be adhered to if this requirement is to be met. Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) believed that within the IEP process and plan “placement is the most important issue and the most controversial issue to be decided in an IEP” (p. 29). One substantive error, predetermination of placement, occurred when some members of the IEP team decided on a student’s service and placement prior to the IEP meeting. Despite school districts knowing that this constitutes a major substantive error, school districts across the country have continued to conduct business that can lead to the denial of a free and appropriate education (FAPE), a denial which constitutes a violation of IDEA (Bateman, 2011). Parents are required by IDEIA (2004) to be members of the decision-making process and are usually responsible for pushing the LRE in an inclusive classroom (Friend & Pope, 2005; Friend et al., 2010; Stainback & Stainback, 1989). While some schools may truly
offer a full continuum of placement options, it is usually the parent that must request and/or insist that the general education environment be considered for their child. Although a due process complaint can be filed for a myriad of reasons, Rickey (2003) found that more than 16% of the due process complaints filed in Iowa between 1989 and 2001 involved complaints about placement. Concerns about placement and how the placement recommendations were made have continued to plague the school systems, causing frustration for all. Predetermination of placement can certainly be one concern, but of equal concern would be how the IEP team comes to make a placement recommendation.

Determining placement, or where students with a disability will receive their specially designed instruction, consists of many variables. According to Yell and Katsiyannis (2013), the law (IDEIA, 2004) guaranteed that a continuum of placement options not only be made available, but considered for all students receiving special education services. The individual needs of the student should drive the placement recommendation, and this requirement was outlined in IDEIA (2004). Bouck (2006) pointed out that the debate about placement should focus on “the outcomes students want and need, as well as what they, their parents, and their teachers feel is best both academically and socially” (p. 7). The law stated that a student with a disability should be removed from the LRE only after the student has failed to make progress after being provided with support and services [IDEA, 20 U.S.C. 1412 (5) (B)]. Progress and/or the value of the progress can be measured differently depending on the students and teachers involved. According to Etscheidt (2006), measuring the progress students made on their
goals and objectives was essential in determining if the placement was appropriate.

Depending on the disability, progress may be made in a variety of ways that are often minor in quantitative measures or even difficult to measure. A student with a cognitive disability may have a behavioral goal that includes the objective of following a given direction within 10 seconds on four out of five opportunities to be measured once a month. To some, this objective may not be considered the focus of a student’s education. However, this objective, although not in the core curriculum standards, can be the focus of instruction in any educational environment or placement. Learning to follow directions is a critical life skill and one that every human being needs to possess. A student does not have to be in a special education classroom to receive support in accomplishing this objective. Fisher and Frey (2001) reported about how a principal questioned how a teacher knew that a student was making progress. The teacher responded that she monitored progress by how the student performed on knowledge assessments, how the student’s peers responded in small groups, and how the parents reported that the student was making a connection between the curriculum and the chores and tasks they did at home. The teacher questioned how the school and administrators could put all of that into an IEP. But instruction and progress monitoring can be accomplished in various types of placement when said monitoring is appropriate and effective.

Teachers and other members of the IEP team determine what progress is and how much progress has been obtained. When creating the IEP, the team can decide how much progress must be attained. Progress can be measured in terms of accuracy, percentage of
trials, or successful completion of a task. Progress will not be the same, or measured the same, for every student, regardless of where the students are receiving the specially designed instruction. For some parents, support and services would consist of a one-on-one paraprofessional for individualized support (Swick & Hooks, 2005), while the school district may believe that level of support requires a more restrictive environment.

Modifications to the curriculum are acceptable practices, but how much modification is allowed or can be accomplished in a general education classroom; the extent to which they should be made in specific placements are left to the recommendations of the IEP team.

The early literature was awash with research reports and books describing the process and need for “creating curriculum modifications” (Fisher & Frey, 2001). The process described by Janney and Snell (1997), Jorgensen (1998), and Udvari-Solner and Thousand (1996) included the creation and identification of goals and objectives, a description of the expectations for the students’ performance, a determination of the content to be taught and the instructional strategies to be used, a selection of specific adaptations and modifications, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of the adaptations. Much has been written on modifying curriculum; this material has included a decision-making process for curriculum modifications developed by different researchers, including Janney and Snell (1997), Jorgensen (1998), and Udvari-Solner and Thousand (1996). In addition, the literature contained a myriad of resources to explain the process of curriculum design and accommodation (Falvey, 1995; Fisher, Sax, & Pumpian, 1999; Jorgensen, 1998; Villa & Thousand, 1995). Lacking in the literature was information on
how much modification can or should be made for a student with a cognitive disability, so the student can still maintain the correct placement in the general education classroom.

Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, and Palmer (2010) contended that students with disabilities were more engaged in academics and demonstrated fewer behavioral issues when appropriate curriculum modifications were made. Through their research, Lee Wehmeyer, Soukup, and Palmer (2010) illustrated that students with mild cognitive disabilities were engaged in academics in 87% of the intervals, while students with severe cognitive disabilities were engaged in 55% of the intervals. The researchers further claimed that when placed in the general education setting, students with cognitive disabilities worked on “grade level standards three times more than they worked on just any grade level” (p. 216). The analysis demonstrated that the class setting (general versus special education) was a significant predictor of how much access students would have to the general education curriculum (Lee Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer 2010). They contended, “curriculum modifications, student, and ecological variables are important if students with disabilities are to achieve access to and progress in the general education curriculum” (p. 229).

Kurz, Talapatra, and Roach (2012) posited that having students with disabilities in the general education classroom could improve classroom instruction and student performance for all students. Kurz, Talapatra, and Roach (2012) asserted that teachers can begin curriculum planning according to what they specifically want the learning outcomes to be for students with disabilities and then continue on the spectrum of what else needs to be taught for all of the students. Education policy and research has focused
on several areas (e.g., the alignment between standards, assessments, and instruction; student time on task; teachers’ professional preparation and access to resources; and the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education classrooms) (Kurz, Talapatra, & Roach 2012). Yet the literature was devoid of these considerations when making placement recommendations.

Another aspect of the formalized procedure for placement recommendations involved access to the general education or core curriculum. By law (NCLB) all students must have access to the general education curriculum. The IEP team identifies the extent to which curriculum modifications require a placement in a more restrictive environment. These environments, however, are problematic, as it has been shown that teachers’ low expectations of students with disabilities in segregated classrooms can influence students’ motivation and performance (Kaylor & Flores, 2007). In general, the literature suggested that the performance of students with disabilities can be influenced by the teacher’s attitude and expectations of the student (Juvonen, 2000; Reyna, 2000; Reyna & Weiner, 2001). In the past, access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities in more restrictive placements has been limited, and students with cognitive disabilities have had few opportunities to interact socially with students who are without disabilities (Turnbull, Huerta, Stowe, Weldon, & Schrandt, 2006). The lack of access to the general education curriculum and to a social environment can result in a substandard education that includes course failure, poor test scores, and high dropout rates for students with disabilities (Kochhar-Bryant & Greene, 2009).

The U.S. Department of Education published policy letters to help IEP teams
make appropriate placement recommendations by outlining what are not appropriate factors to use as sole criteria. These factors include: “(a) category of disability, (b) severity of disability, (c) availability of educational or related services, (d) availability of space, (e) and administrative convenience” (Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004, p. 31). Having the factors that should not be used to make placement recommendations does not inform teachers of when they should include a student with a cognitive disability in general education. The research does not clarify whether the determination to include a student in a general education classroom can be based on the student’s needs and abilities or on the teachers’ ability.

McCray and McHatton (2011) contended that one of the concerns was whether teachers have the skills and support to teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. McCray and McHatton (2011) observed that less than one-third of general education teachers reported receiving training on how to collaborate with special education teachers; they reported that without preparation, teachers became less confident and insecure about their abilities to teach all children. McCray and McHatton (2011) claimed that “successful teaching and learning in inclusive classroom is largely predicated on a teacher’s knowledge, skill, and dispositions” (p. 136). Likewise, Pugach (2005) claimed that special education teachers have a deep-rooted interest in the attitudes of general educators and their inclusion of students with disabilities. One note of interest was that of Shippen, Crites, Houchins, Ramsey, and Simon (2005), who found that the teachers earning dual certification in general education and special education were more confident in their abilities to teach students with disabilities. The additional preparation of the
teachers to teach all students allowed them to be more at ease. However, Cook (2002) emphasized that the disability category had a significant effect on the teachers’ perceived abilities of teaching students with disabilities.

The disability category may also play a factor in the type of curriculum teachers feel is appropriate for students with cognitive disabilities. Scant research was available concerning the type of curriculum appropriate for students with cognitive disabilities. Specifically, Trela and Jimenez (2013) discussed the historical emergence of a “functional curriculum.” This term is used today to describe a curriculum that focuses on activities of daily living. The interpretation by some teachers was that students with cognitive disabilities require a different curriculum, versus one that is of the usual standards (Trela & Jimenez, 2013). Suggesting that a more appropriate term for the differentiated curriculum could be “personally relevant,” Trela and Jimenez (2013) contended that student IEPs would be written with a focus on the general education curriculum standards while ensuring the needs of the students were met. Trela and Jimenez (2013) claimed the question for educators should be “how to teach students” with cognitive disabilities using the general education standards in the general education classroom with the supports outlined in an IEP, not “whether or not to teach” the general education standards (p. 118).

Cognitive Disabilities

The literature reflected a variety of terms used initially and over time to describe people with varied or limited intellectual abilities. The term used by early psychologists included “defectologia,” a term that has no real English translation. The root word,
“defect,” has Latin origins and means “shortcoming, fault, or imperfection.” This term was used to describe people if they were deemed different or lacking in reasoning skills (Gindis, 1995). Using a deficit model, people were initially evaluated through a social lens with an emphasis on “charity, welfare, and rehabilitation” (Powell, 2011). The literature consistently showed that people with “defects” or intellectual disabilities (cognitive disabilities) were the least socially accepted when compared to other disability groups (Hernandez, Keys, & Balcazar, 2000; Miller, Chen, Glover-Graf, & Kranz, 2009; Wang, Thomas, Chan, & Cheing, 2003). This non-acceptance led to the stigma of people with cognitive disabilities and contributed to their treatment (Jahoda & Markova, 2004). Stigma, as defined by Goffman (1963), is the attitude people have toward a person who fails to meet societal expectations. People may, or may not, be knowledgeable about the stigma or stereotype; however, their existence can lead to prejudice and discrimination (Goddard & Jordan, 1998; McKown & Weinstein, 2008). Ditchman et al. (2013) along with other scholars reported that most of the research on attitudes toward people with cognitive disabilities has been conducted on children in regards to inclusive schooling practices. They further contended that children tended to have negative attitudes toward their peers with cognitive disabilities (Ditchman et. al., 2013; Siperstein, Parker, Norins, & Widaman, 2007). In more recent years, the focus shifted from attitudes about an individual with a cognitive disability to the point where “the issue is no longer whether to educate children with perceived impairments, but rather which services should they receive and in which educational setting” (Powell, 2011, p. 3).
Rodriquez, Saldana, and Moreno (2012) argued that the more familiar or experienced teachers were regarding a student with disabilities, the more positive attitudes the teachers possessed toward inclusion of that student. Rodriquez et al. (2012) emphasized the need for a strong support network, claiming that the positive attitudes of the teachers were multiplied when an effective support network was in place. Likewise, Makoelle (2014) contended that a piece of that support network was the training a teacher receives; the more training and foundational knowledge a teacher has of a particular disability, the more positive the attitudes of the teachers. Makoelle (2014) pointed to his own research, confirming that “collaboration is essential for changing teacher perspectives about their practices” (p. 1232).

The literature was unbending in its presentation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) and how it set the standard for all students to meet minimum proficiency in all core subjects with penalties for schools that did not meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). For the first time, AYP was to be made by all subgroups of students, including students with cognitive disabilities. The inclusion of students who were receiving special education services and the ability of schools to make AYP created anxiety in areas where students with disabilities were often overlooked (Yell et al., 2006). The educational emphasis for students with cognitive disabilities had been on teaching daily living skills, which eventually became known as the functional curriculum (Trela & Jimenez, 2013). Functional curriculum consisted of a static set of community living skills and activities that were deemed appropriate for students with cognitive disabilities (Wehman & Kregel, 2004). Because students with disabilities have not always been provided with access to
the general education curriculum, local education agencies (LEAs) had to create ways in which students with any identified disability, including cognitive disabilities, could demonstrate progress and proficiency in core standards to which many had never been exposed prior to the enactment of NCLB (Abedi, 2004). The opportunity to access the general education curriculum through inclusive placement and/or through the use of the general education curriculum in self-contained classrooms was often determined by the placement recommendations of the teachers and the IEP team (Freedman, 2000; Hitchcock, Meyer, Rose, & Jackson, 2002; Karger & Hitchcock, 2003).

Teacher Attitudes

The literature described the least restrictive environment (LRE) as a place ranging from the general education classroom to a special separate day school (Havey, 1998; Rea, McLaughlin, & Walther-Thomas, 2002; Zigmond, 2003). There was scant research related directly to the LRE and what that entails. When searching for literature on the LRE, one will be drawn to literature on inclusion. Inclusion is not synonymous with the LRE, yet the majority of the literature on the LRE invariably shifted to a discussion on inclusion. Taylor (2004) explained the confusion stating, “the lack of specificity of LRE at once explains its broad appeal and represents one of its major weaknesses” (p. 220). The literature treated LRE in the context of its legal definition, which involves a student’s right to be educated with students who are not disabled—that the student’s removal from a regular education classroom occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability, with appropriate support and services, prevents the student from making satisfactory progress (DeMonte, 2010; Etscheidt, 2006; Smith, 2006; Weintraub, 2012; Zigmond,
The same authors never clearly defined how to establish the LRE for students with disabilities or defined what criteria are required to place a student with a disability along the continuum of placements. Without established criteria or a protocol for placement recommendations or decisions, one cannot know how the placement decision was made and what data, if any, went into the placement recommendation or decision. Taylor (2004) specifically contended that the legal definition and its subsequent interpretations were flawed. Yet even Taylor (2004) “endorses an unconditional commitment to integration for people with developmental disabilities” (p. 224).

The literature consistently described the right to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) as an entitlement (Bouck, 2006; Palley, 2006; Rickey, 2003; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The right to FAPE was established for children with disabilities in 1974 (enacted in 1975) with the PL 94-142 Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Until this time, many children were denied access to an education or were unnecessarily separated from their peers and educated in alternative environments (Stainback, Stainback, & Forrest, 1989). The literature suggested that this dual educational system was wrought with tension between inclusion and exclusion from the beginning (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). Under this law and its subsequent reauthorizations, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA, 1997) and the Individual with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), students with disabilities were entitled to a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the LRE. Further clarified, this meant that students with disabilities should be educated alongside their peers in the general education classroom, with appropriate support and services to the greatest extent possible. However, as Smith
(2006) clarified, this did not mean the general education classroom would be the appropriate placement for all students with disabilities. Rather, it was but one of the many options on the continuum of placement. One way of representing the LRE was a straight line that began with the most restrictive and ended with the least restrictive (Taylor, 2004). This continuum can be described as a hierarchal ranking (Turnbull, 1981) where one placement on the continuum would be better than another. Reynolds’ (1962) original continuum included 10 steps, or places, that corresponded to the severity of the student’s disability: hospital and/or treatment centers, hospitals, residential, special day school, full-time special class, part-time special class, regular class plus resource room, regular class with supplementary support and services, and regular class with consultative services. The majority of the literature subscribed to the notion that the LRE is the general education classroom (Etscheidt, 2006; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; Taylor, 2004; Zigmond, 2003), and this may influence teachers when they make placement recommendations.

The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has remained a consistent and prominent focus of legislative policy and research since the adoption and implementation of Public Law 94-142 (PL 94-142), the Education for All Handicapped Children’s Act, more than 30 years ago (Bouck, 2006; DeMonte, 2010; Etscheidt, 2006; Palley, 2006; Rickey, 2003; Yell & Katsiyannis, 2004). The authorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1997), its reauthorization with the Individual with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA, 2004), and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) placed a greater emphasis on providing
students with disabilities access to, and participation in, the general education curriculum alongside their age-appropriate general education peers (Yell, Shriner, & Katsiyannis, 2006). Current literature highlighted the benefits of inclusion on students both with and without disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Gokdere, 2012; Lloyd, 2006; Swain, Nordness, & Leader-Janssen, 2012; Szumski & Karwowski, 2012; Villa et al., 1996). The effectiveness of inclusion on both academic and social goals for students with disabilities has been the topic of many discussions and research projects.

Jordan et al. (2009) contended that preparing teachers for inclusion through training and experience was essential for the successful inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities. Jordan et al. (2009) argued “school norms, or expectations by the principal and staff about inclusion and individual teachers’ beliefs about their roles and responsibilities for including students with cognitive disabilities and teachers’ sense of teaching efficacy predict teaching practices, which may predict student outcomes” (p. 536).

Seminal research by Cook et al. (1999) ascertained that inclusion was a moral imperative and that society cannot wait for empirical justification for its implementation. Earlier research by Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) reported that teachers educating in inclusive classrooms generally had a positive attitude for the concept of inclusion, but when the same teachers were questioned about the specific measures required for inclusion, they reported the teachers lacked adequate materials, training, and personnel support. Cook et al. (1999) asserted that inclusion happened when it was mandated from the administration versus the teachers seeing it as appropriate and effective.
The early literature and current literature indicated that the success of inclusion programs was dependent on teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion (Aitken, 2012; Cook et al., 1999; Eriks-Brophy & Whittingham, 2013; Salend, 2001; Sang Soo, Youngwan & Block, 2014; Van Reusen et al., 2000). Studies on the link between teachers’ beliefs and their actions (Lieber et al., 1998) indicated that a positive attitude among teachers was related to the success of an inclusion program. Therefore, the placement recommendations from teachers may vary based on the teachers’ beliefs about inclusion. Moreover, there was empirical evidence that teacher self-efficacy was the single most important factor affecting the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion (Weisel & Dror, 2006). Bandura (1977, 1986) defined self-efficacy as an individual’s belief in his or her abilities to perform successfully a set of required behaviors necessary to achieve an anticipated result. Furthermore, an individual’s sense of efficacy is constructed by a process in which feedback is received from administration, indicating a degree of trust and faith in the person.

In addition, the literature abounded with research that contended teachers have negative perceptions of inclusion (Butera, 1993; Coates, 1989; Lesar, Benner, Habel, & Coleman, 1996; Rodriquez, Saldana, & Moreno, 2012; Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991; Vaughn et al., 1996). The literature suggested that it was imperative that schools provide professional development and training to enable general education personnel to maximize the academic, behavioral, and socioemotional adjustment of students with disabilities who were placed in the general setting for all or some of the school day (Grolnick & Ryan, 1990; Kurz et al., 2012). According to Giangreco and
Cravedi-Cheng (1998), many teachers—both special education and general education—in the past reported that general education teachers could not successfully teach students with disabilities. Giangreco and Cravedi-Cheng (1998) stated that because of these attitudes, students with disabilities often spent much of their time in the special education classroom where their expectations were lowered—where they had little interaction with their peers without disabilities, where they spent too much time without instructional activities, and where they could become confused by questionable curriculum.

According to Van Reusen et al. (2000), teachers’ attitudes about inclusion changed when viewed from the inside of the classroom. They determined that high school teachers reported negative attitudes toward inclusion, viewing it as "an obstacle to the current teaching assignments and responsibilities" (p. 12). Van Reusen et al. (2000) noted that successful inclusive education was dependent upon the attitudes of the teachers involved, as well as the support they received during the implementation process. Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000) concluded that the data supported the importance of professional development in the formation of positive attitudes toward inclusion.

The literature conveyed that the educational path of a student with a disability could be varied and convoluted. Over the years, there have been a multitude of studies that have addressed the achievement of students with disabilities in inclusive environments (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Benerji & Dailey, 1995; Davies & Elliott, 2012; Kurz et al., 2012; Lee, Wehmeyer, Soukup, & Palmer, 2010; National Center for Educational Restructuring & Inclusion, 1995; Waldron & Leskey, 1998). Although the vast majority concurred that students with disabilities made academic and social
achievements, the majority of the studies focused on students with mild disabilities or learning disabilities. Few studies (Fryxell & Kennedy, 1995) focused on students with cognitive disabilities. It has been shown that students with cognitive disabilities were underrepresented when looking at the amount of time these students spend in a general education classroom. To this point, Stainback and Stainback (1990) contended that general education was not structured or equipped to meet the needs of students with special needs.

Nearly four decades after the first law requiring schools to educate all students in the least restrictive environment, which involved inclusion, there remains an issue with inclusion, as for many students it can still be elusive in the general education setting. As Stainback et al. (1989) stated, there are a number of constraints that limited an increase in the number of inclusive settings for students with cognitive disabilities, with the “major constraint attitudinal in nature” (p. 49). Lipsky and Gartner (1987) further stated that “the establishment of a separate system of education for the disabled is an outgrowth of attitudes toward disabled people” (p. 72). Myklebust (2006) posited that many teachers assumed that students with minor disabilities would be placed in inclusive settings while those with more significant disabilities would be placed in special classes. To increase the number of students identified as having cognitive disabilities in general education settings, “the attitudes of educators, parents, and the general public will need to change” (Stainback et al., 1989, p. 49). The view of traditional special education placement toward inclusive practices has been described as a paradigm shift requiring changes in teachers’ beliefs (Lipsky & Gartner, 1992; Skrtic, 1991). There were certainly different
attitudes in general toward people with disabilities, and this might lead one to question whether educators have been able to accept the paradigm shift and fully embrace inclusion as an effective method of education (Miller et al., 2009; Smith, 2006; Weintraub, 2012). Further, placement recommendations showed the impact of this paradigm shift with the increased number of students with cognitive disabilities included in general education. According to U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012), barel 48% of students with cognitive disabilities were served in general education classrooms.

Teacher Knowledge

The dearth of literature pertaining to teachers’ knowledge of the LRE might be indicative of the reality. Although LRE has been in effect for over 30 years, there is extreme variability in placement between schools, counties, and states (Hallenbeck, Kauffman, & Lloyd, 1993). Under the law, the regular education environment is the presumptive LRE; however, that is not what the law states (DeMonte, 2010). Taylor (2004) contended that the principle of the LRE legitimated a restrictive placement, while others felt it offered options that were not previously available. Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) purported the belief that teachers must make placement recommendations in the LRE based on the needs of the individual student, which requires that teachers have a thorough understanding of what constitutes the LRE. Understanding the principles of the LRE was required to make professional judgments about placement. As Palley (2006) pointed out, educators “continue to exhibit a preference toward more or less inclusion depending on economic and structural factors, rather than on the needs of the students”
This preference, based on the teachers’ beliefs, may decrease the number of students with cognitive disabilities included in general education.

The literature pointed out that teacher preparation programs were beginning to further the understanding of inclusive education for all teachers by creating programs that left teachers prepared and eligible to apply for both general education and special education certification (Ashby, 2012). The outcome of such programs may include the knowledge that all teachers are responsible for teaching all students. Walker, Shafer, and Iiams (2004) asserted that although teacher preparation programs can assist in furthering the education of teachers regarding inclusive education by focusing on effective teaching practices, few programs prepare teachers to make placement recommendations.

The literature revealed copious claims that the lack of training on how to teach students with cognitive disabilities was a problem for general educators (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2012). Teachers often felt unprepared to educate children with special needs, especially with recent emphasis on test scores and accountability (Jordan et al., 2009). The literature repeatedly gave prominence to three main factors teachers as to why inclusion fails: (a) students with cognitive disabilities detracted from the teachers’ instruction time to other students; (b) teaching students with cognitive disabilities required special training; and (c) teachers were not trained to teach the specialized instruction required by students with cognitive disabilities (Jordan et al., 2009). General and special education teachers cannot remain “hung-up” on whether inclusion is right or wrong, but must address the needs of each student and the intended or desired outcomes for each student (Bouck, 2006).
It is unrealistic to expect all teachers to have an in-depth knowledge of all students with disabilities (Lindsay, 2003). There are simply too many types and degrees of disabilities. Yet, understanding and having knowledge of a student with a cognitive disability was cited as one of the variables needed to continue in-service. Kusuma Harinath (2006) suggested that teachers had minimal knowledge on concepts, causes, and characteristics of children with cognitive disabilities. If teaching is to be effective, teachers must have an understanding of the students they are attempting to teach (Lindsay, 2003). How much a student learns from a teacher may be related to how that teacher views the student and how the teacher believes that student can learn (Young, Wright, & Laster, 2005). Multiple studies have demonstrated that teachers’ attitudes were one of the most important variables in the education of children with disabilities (Smith, 2000). The successful and effective education of a student with a cognitive disability may be dependent on the teachers' knowledge of, and attitudes toward, the disability (Loreman, Deppeler & Harvey, 2005). Some studies demonstrated a generalized prejudice against groups that do not conform to societal ideals (Crowson & Brandes, 2008). Less on humanistic qualities, the focus was more on identifying the differences and protecting their own ideals (Kreindler, 2005). Although others may not hold negative attitudes toward those who are different, they may reject the idea that the students with cognitive disabilities can function and/or belong in a general education classroom (Crowson & Brandes, 2008). This attitude may result in students with cognitive disabilities being unnecessarily placed in restrictive educational environments.
**Conceptual Framework**

To understand the conceptual underpinnings of this study, it was necessary to present and discuss attitude theory as described by a bulk of research (Boer & Fischer, 2013; Nadirashvili, 2013; Uta & Popescu, 2013; Zanna & Rempel, 1988; Zimbardo & Leippe, 1991), social justice theory (Ben-Porath, 2012; Booth, 2000; Gredler, 1997; Hytten & Bettez, 2011; Polat, 2011; Young, 2011), and care theory (Brannen & Moss, 2003; Gilligan, 2011; Held, 2006; Kittay, 2013; Koggel & Orme, 2010; Levy & Palley, 2010; Noddings, 2006; Tronto, 2009) all of which coalesced to provide a lens of investigation. These three constructs were complementary and independent; they provided the underpinnings of the current study. Each theory was explained, and the educational implication of each was highlighted. Although a research study may contain more than one conceptual framework, each framework chosen for inclusion must relate to the research question or questions (Merriam, 2002). The validity of a case study, according to Merriam (2002), is based more on the unit of analysis than on any aspect of the research.

The literature suggested the merging of three theories to effectively address the attitudes that teachers exhibit concerning inclusion, the least restrictive environment, and students with cognitive disabilities. It was difficult to isolate any one of the theories, as each of them was intertwined with another. The strength of all three theories was at the core of this research. Examining attitudes as they relate to providing a fair and just education to all students was at the crux of this research. The diagram in Figure 2 identifies the isolation of the theories and the merging of the theories. It is difficult truly
isolate any one of the theories as each of them is intertwined with another. The strength of all three theories is the core of this research. Examining attitudes as it relates to providing a fair and just education to all students is at the crux of this research.
Figure 2. Isolating vs. Merging Theories

Social Justice Theory
- Full, equal access to education and society
- Full participating member
- Ethical decisions
- Moral decisions

Attitude Theory
- Learned behavior
- Behavior based on past/perceived experiences, values, beliefs
- Educational Priorities

Care Theory
- All students valued
- Envision future of student
- Ethical decisions
- Acceptance
- Awareness

Educators
- Limited education
- Willing vs unwilling
- Acceptance vs opposing

Educators
- Nervous vs calm
- Resistant vs cooperative
- Abilities vs disabilities

CORE

All 3 Theories
**Psychological foundation-attitude theory.** The literature suggested that attitude theory was a learned behavior that can be described as positive or negative (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Carpenter, 2012; Kaplan, 1997; Langland-Hassan, 2012). Kaplan (1997) agreed that "attitude is a learned predisposition to respond to an object in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner" (p. 818). Some researchers suggested that this bipolarity in the direction of an attitude (i.e., the favorable versus unfavorable) has been viewed as its most distinctive feature and has been conceptualized as a simple one-dimensional concept: the evaluative (or affective) dimension. Similarly, Eagly and Chaiken (1993) defined attitudes as "a psychological tendency that is expressed by valuating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor" (p. 1). Many functions ascribed to attitudes have been relegated to other cognitive structures. The definition of attitude cannot be oversimplified. Although some attitude theorists felt the evaluative dimension was not a sufficient definition of attitude, other attitude theorists felt that the evaluative dimension, though a sufficient definition of attitude, was not itself one-dimensional. Zimbardo and Leippe (1991) described attitude as “an evaluation of someone or something along the continuum of like-to-dislike or favorable-to-unfavorable” (p. 31). As previously stated, the definition of “attitude” is complex and disputed among attitude theorists (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994). Despite the lack of a consensus, most theorists would agree with the following basic tenets required for a definition: (a) the cognitive aspect, concerning the beliefs or thoughts one may have about the issue; (b) the affective aspect concerning the emotional response or feelings one may have regarding the issue; and (c) the behavioral aspect, or an individual’s previous
actions or experiences with regard to the issue (Zanna & Rempel, 1988). Finally, Zanna and Rempel (1988) contended that attitudes can influence cognitions, alter affective responses, and change future intentions and behaviors.

The intricate interactions between the various elements suggested cognitions, affective responses, and behaviors blended into a psychological issue; the specific attitude toward that issue (e.g., “I like it” or “I am against it”) was an overall summary of that psychological issue (Zimbardo & Lieppe, 1991). To understand inclusion, one must understand the blending of the elements and how one would formulate those attitudes, beliefs, and values based on personal experiences with inclusion. Although there was a multitude of research on teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion, few addressed the issue as it related to the LRE and recommendation for placement of students with cognitive disabilities. Therefore, attitude theory was used to understand how teachers’ past experiences, beliefs, and values combined to create their perception. This perception led to the teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion and its effect on their placement recommendations.

**Theory of Social Justice.** Utilizing a theory of social justice could lay the foundation for understanding the importance of inclusion, the LRE, and the attitudes of teachers and their effects on the teachers’ abilities to make placement recommendations. Apple (2006, 2010) believed that to mobilize theoretical, historical, political, and empirical resources, people need to think relationally. Apple (2010) further explained, “understanding education requires that we situate it back both into unequal relations of power in larger society and into the realities of dominance and subordination – and the
conflicts – that are generated by these relations” (p. 14). Many educators contended that
they were committed to social justice, but were unable to discern the educational reforms
that were required to address the inequities in education. Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007)
defined social justice as both a process and a goal:

The goal of social justice education is full and equal participation of all groups in
a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a
vision of society that is equitable and all members are physically and
psychologically safe and secure (p. 1).

Social justice was commonly applied to situations involving racism, sexism,
heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, and classism but was less commonly applied to
situations involving oppression on the basis of disability. As Booth (2005) stated,
“disability in a socio-cultural context can be defined as a barrier to participation of people
with impairments or chronic illnesses arising from an interaction of the impairment or
illness with discriminatory attitudes, cultures, policies or institutional practices” (p. 20).

Nussbaum (2006) further clarified the issue, asserting that three unresolved issues of
social justice tended to be neglected by most researchers: justice to non-human animals,
justice to people with physical or mental disabilities, and the extension of justice to all
world citizens. Nussbaum’s (2006) alternative approach to identifying the tenets of
social justice—the capability approach—incorporated ten basic capabilities:


2. *Bodily health*: Adequately nourished and with shelter.
3. **Bodily integrity:** Freedom of movement, security from various forms of assault, and with opportunities for sexual expression and reproductive choices.

4. **Using one’s sense, imagination, and thought:** Using the senses to imagine, think, and reason in a “truly human” way, one informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.

5. **Emotions:** Having freedom of attachment and association.

6. **Practical reason:** Being able to form a conception of good and to engage in critical reflection about planning of one’s life. This entails protection of the liberty of conscience and religious observance.

7. **Affiliation:** Being able to live with others in forms of social interaction like friendship and work, protected against discrimination while enjoying and having social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation. This entails the provision of non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, religion, nationality, caste, and ethnicity.

8. **Other species:** Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.

9. **Play:** Being able to laugh, play, and enjoy recreational activities.

10. **Control over one’s environment:** Being able to participate in political choices and participation; having freedom of speech and association and being able to hold property, as well as being able to work as a human being.
Social justice for people with physical and mental disabilities was at the core of this research. Justice concerns more than awareness and tolerance. Justice can be regarded as appreciation, action, and anything else required for change. Young (2011) contrasted justice with its enemy: “oppression, which is the unfair treatment of others is embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules” (p. 41). Only through an understanding of oppression can society begin the process of determining what actions need to be taken for individuals with disabilities. IDEA (1997) and its subsequent reauthorizations established one way to address issues of social justice, inequality, and human rights for students with disabilities. Inclusion is a philosophy that minimizes exclusion and marginalization by placing a value on maximizing the participation of all in society and education. The goals of inclusion in an educational setting were to

- Utilize human resources and potential in the hope of creating an environment of mutual respect on campus, in the community, and the larger society.
- Create awareness.
- Create active agents of change.
- Promote tolerance and acceptance (Cook et al., 1999; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Polat, 2010; Powell, 2011).

However, there is a distance between the law and its application. Teachers’ attitudes of inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities certainly can
influence their recommendations for placement. If teachers—even with the best of intentions—perceive that a student with a cognitive disability can best learn in a self-contained environment or that the student is limited in what can be learned and should, therefore, be in a self-contained classroom, the teachers’ recommendations may reflect these perceptions (DeMonte, 2010; Taylor, 2004; Zigmond, 2003). Placing students with cognitive disabilities in their true LREs, therefore, may require a change in values, attitudes, policies, and practices on the part of teachers, parents, and administrators (Polat, 2011).

**Care theory.** The literature presented care theory as being more feminine and caring, and teaching can certainly be considered in that realm. The theory was a relative newcomer to educational theory (Koggel & Orme, 2010). What began in the nursing field now was accepted into many other areas such as education. Nurses, teachers, doctors, and other professionals were known as the caring professions (Held, 2006). Held (2006) believed that the focus of ethics of care was related to the moral aspect of caring for the needs of others. The ethics of care recognizes that human beings are dependent on others, and this holds true in education, but especially for special education and student with disabilities. Held (2006) contended that the ethics of care placed value on various emotions such as sympathy, empathy, sensitivity, and responsiveness, all of which must be cultivated. Yet as Held (2006) said,

> even helpful emotions can often become misguided or worse—as when excessive empathy with others leads to a wrongful degree of self-denial or when benevolent
concern crosses over into controlling domination—we need an ethics of care, not just care itself. (p. 11)

Caring is an emotionally packed word that many consider to be of importance. It is a word especially important to all educators who will, inevitably, find themselves teaching diverse students. It can be valuable to understand the term, “care,” and its various forms. A definition of “care” from the American Heritage (2011) dictionary presented caring as a “feeling” and “exhibiting concern and empathy for others” (p. 136). Although in Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary (2003), “caring” was defined as “to feel trouble or anxiety, to feel interest or concern, to give care such as for the sick, to have a liking, fondness, taste” (p. 187). Care can also be described as “a charge or duty, having oversight of something, and surveillance with a view to protection, preservation, or guidance” (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2007). The multiple definitions of care can demonstrate the diversity of its strength and implementation. Although exposure to diverse people can allow teachers to become aware of their own limitations, it can also enlarge teachers’ perspectives about diverse students by seeing care from different angles.

Tronto (2009) believed the most important aspect of care was realizing that people are receivers in addition to givers of care. Kittay (2013) and Gilligan (2011) defined care in terms of relationships and responsiveness to needs. Some have viewed caring as the physical and emotional care one receives from a caregiver (Levy & Palley, 2010). Caring can vary over time and across different groups, especially when considering the history, culture, and different levels of wealth, prestige, and power of the
various groups. Gilligan (2011) insisted that the logic of care was more inductive than deductive. Care can be separated from the act of caring. Most caring relationships take place between unequal people, specifically between the people who “need” care and those that have a duty to “give” care (Brannen & Moss, 2003). Care, therefore, can be seen as an ethical activity that uses moral thinking.

The literature suggested that the attention for care has a history with nursing and now has permeated into discussions of helping professions that employ educators, social workers, counselors, and other related fields. People in these fields tend to choose the care theory to help others make their lives more productive, healthy, and fulfilling (Slote, 2007). For general and special education teachers, the focus is on helping meet students’ needs. General and special education teachers need to help identify the students’ strengths and weaknesses and develop new skills to enhance the personal development of the student. When a teacher can show respect to a student, the student will respect the teacher. If students believe a teacher does not respect or value them, the students will think that the teacher will never understand them and have a difficult time assisting them in meeting their needs.

Trust was a prevalent issue in care theory, for without trust the student or parents will not be willing to share their problems or concerns with the teacher. The goal of care theory in an educational environment may be to build relationships and help students learn to take care of themselves, making them independent. Brannen and Moss (2003) believed a true caring relationship embraced a “being with” philosophy, instead of “doing to.” When applying care to the student, general and special education teachers must
balance their skills and knowledge while maintaining their purpose in their working relationships with the students.

Noddings (2006), a major care theologian, described caring from ethical standpoint versus natural caring. Noddings (1988) believed that ethical caring required an effort that could end up being an artificial relationship. General and special education teachers who viewed their caring as an obligation were more apt to have an artificial relationship. “A caring relation is, in its most basic form, a connection or encounter between two human beings,” claimed Noddings (2006, p. 15). As Noddings (1988) stated, “One who is concerned with behaving ethically strives to always preserve or convert a given relationship into a caring relation” (pp. 218-219). Noddings (2006) used the term, “principled ethics,” as an ethics of justice, separate from ethics of care. Although caring most certainly falls under care ethics, it may be difficult to separate caring from justice, the ability to see right and wrong. Noddings (1984, 1998) noted that moral education from the perspective of caring required four elements: “modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation” (p. 22). Noddings (1998, 2006) emphasized the need for dialogue, or communication for people to share together, and this dialogue involved the attending and receiving of others instead of expressing oneself.

Ruddick’s beliefs on care correlated to mothering in her book, Maternal Thinking: Toward a Politics of Peace, which caused much controversy when it was published in 1995. Ruddick interjected feelings into her understanding of care theory and stated that feelings are instruments of work and include hate, fear, and love. According to Ruddick (1995), reflective feeling was “one of the most difficult attainments of reasons.” Feelings
can allow teachers and others to interpret the world around them. For general and special education teachers to understand themselves and their students, they must call on and understand feelings. From the perspective of justice, “relationships require restraint of one’s own aggression, intrusion, and appropriation and respect for autonomy and bodily integrity of others” (Ruddick, 1995, p. 204).

The basic precept of care theory was the moral imperative of relationships and dependencies of individuals (Sander-Staudt, 2011). Teachers may seek to assist those most vulnerable in a manner that will enable the vulnerable to reach their full potential. Meeting the needs of students with cognitive disabilities can be more than collecting numbers; it can entail meeting the needs of others, both emotionally and physically. The way in which a teacher “cares” about a student with a cognitive disability can be dependent on the teachers’ attitudes and beliefs. Care theorists asserted that one’s motivation to care is dependent on how the person was cared for; thus, the idealizations of teachers who have not been cared for cannot be replicated in their caring for others. In this way, if teachers do not know how to care for students with cognitive disabilities, they may not be able to place a value on inclusion and may inadvertently inhibit the potential of a student by limiting the students’ placement options.

**Methodological Framework**

The literature established the purpose of a case study that had theoretical underpinnings to create a solid foundation for understanding a topic and, ultimately, presenting a foundation for improving an issue (Merriam, 2002). Stake (2005) as cited in Markula and Silk (2011) described a qualitative case study as one that "concentrates on
experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the effect of its social, political, and other contexts" (Stake, 2005, p. 444; Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 156). Stake (1995) identified two types of case studies, the intrinsic and instrumental case studies. Compton-Lilly (2013) explained Stake's (1995) two types of case studies as "intrinsic" focusing on the specific qualities and the interesting aspects of a particular case or study (p. 56). Compton-Lilly (2013) then quoted Stake (1995) that intrinsic case studies focus on a "person, place, program, policy, institution, or other bounded case for the main purpose of acquiring knowledge about that particular population" (p. 56). Meanwhile, the second type of case study is the "instrumental case study" which was designed to "provide insight into an issue or redress generalization. The case is of secondary interest it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates the understanding of something else which can lead to the improvement of the case being studied on (Stake, 2000, p. 437; as cited in Compton-Lilly, 2013, p. 56). From these definitions, the researcher has decided to employ an instrumental case study where the understanding of how special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities influence placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities shall allow and lead to the deeper understanding of some of the factors involved in placement recommendations. This may then enable school districts to formulate professional development training and guidelines for IEP teams so that these teams can increase and improve the number of students with cognitive disabilities in general education.

Stake (2006) claimed the following:
Using single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. The individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. The cases in the collection are somehow categorically bound together. They may be members of a group or examples of a phenomenon. (pp. 5-6)

An additional benefit of using a cross-case analysis, according to Miles and Huberman (1994), can be that a “cross-case analysis can strengthen the precision, validity, and stability of the findings” (p. 29). Using embedded units allowed the researcher to explore the case while considering other influences on the recommendation-making process. As Baxter and Jack (2008) stated,

The ability to look at subunits situated within a larger case is powerful when one considers that the data can be analyzed within the subunits separately (within case analysis), between the different subunits (between case analysis), or across all of the subunits (cross-case analysis). (p. 550)

This study sought to understand what data general and special education teachers use when making placement recommendations for elementary students with cognitive disabilities; the study also looked to identify if, and in what ways, general and special education teachers’ attitudes regarding the least restrictive environment (LRE), inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities influenced their placement recommendations. If a teacher, for example, never worked with a student with cognitive disabilities, this teacher may be apprehensive and even scared (Richards, 2010). Teachers’ attitudes, as seen through their base of knowledge and lived experiences, may provide valuable data on understanding how they make placement recommendations for students with cognitive
disabilities. The data obtained from collecting a summary of these experiences may be instrumental in furthering the understanding of how placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities are made in elementary schools.

Qualitative research has been gaining momentum as a valuable and viable process to develop, implement, and evaluate evidence-based practices needs’ clarification (Meyers & Sylvester, 2006; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Qualitative research can provide social validity to evidence-based practices (Meyers & Sylvester, 2006) and can provide insight into answering questions that then can be further researched through quantitative research methods.

A qualitative case study research method was utilized to address the purpose and related research questions for this study. A qualitative research study can be designed in many different ways. The process of selecting which type of methodology to use should be determined by the question or questions of the study (Creswell, 2007). Determining what questions the researcher wanted to address drove the study toward becoming a qualitative study. Given the questions for this research study, an instrumental case study was used and combined many theories, including social justice theory (Bogden & Biklen, 1998; Hall, 2009), attitude theory (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Eagly & Chaiken, 1995), and care theory (Koggel & Orme, 2010; Noddings, 2006), as the study’s conceptual framework. As in any research, the case study format must address the issues of trustworthiness and reliability for the study to be recognized and worthwhile.

Qualitative research does not consist of a strict set of guidelines or templates. Rather, qualitative case study research is concerned with explaining the why and how of
a phenomenon rather than the what, when, and where. Qualitative research remains exploratory and focuses on discerning the why of things rather than the what. A case study can generate a hypothesis that may be used as a theoretical model for quantitative research.

Merriam (2009) stated that a framework was the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame, of the research study. In the current study, the use of qualitative case study methods allowed the researcher to explore how the attitudes and knowledge of general and special education teachers in regards to LRE and inclusion may affect their recommendations concerning placement for students with cognitive disabilities. Qualitative research also provided a mechanism that allowed participants to make assumptions about what they were doing, how they were doing it, and why they were doing it (Bogden & Biklen, 1998). Merriam (2009) suggested that qualitative research shaped or modified existing theory in the following ways: (a) data are analyzed and interpreted in light of the concepts of a particular theoretical orientation, and (b) a study’s results are almost always discussed in relation to existing knowledge (some of which is theory) with an eye to demonstrate how the present study contributed to expanding the knowledge base.

Understanding how participants operate and what influences their recommendations is one of the basic tenets of qualitative research. Qualitative case study research can be useful in identifying unanticipated phenomena and how this evidence may play a role.

Today, the use of evidence-based practices has been more prevalent in the fields
of education and mental health. Evidence-based practices can enhance qualitative research by gathering data through empirical research. Qualitative research has been gaining momentum as a valuable and viable process in which to develop, implement, and evaluate evidence-based practices (Meyers & Sylvester, 2006; Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

**Summary**

The literature suggested that in inclusive classrooms, the attitudes and knowledge of teachers concerning LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities can play an important role in the acceptance and perceived efficacy of students who have cognitive disabilities. Despite laws that guide teachers in making placement decisions, the data that teachers may utilize and how teachers’ attitudes and knowledge regarding the LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities affect placement recommendations continue to remain elusive. Research was needed to identify what types of pre-service courses may benefit pre-service teachers in gaining an understanding of students with cognitive disabilities, thereby increasing their knowledge; this increased knowledge may affect the teachers’ attitudes and increase their overall comfort level (Sze, 2009). The literature remained saturated with information about LRE and inclusion, yet little to no research on the connection between LRE and inclusion and placement recommendations was found.

The theories of social justice, attitude, and care were intertwined in the conception of this study. All three theories that were presented and discussed supported an investigation of the data that teachers use in making placement recommendations for students with
cognitive disabilities. Using social justice as a lens for placement recommendations allowed the researcher to look at a fair and equitable process for placement recommendations.

Placement recommendations need to be carefully considered and made based on data to support the recommendation. Research has already shown how attitude theory plays a role in education, and this research demonstrated how general and special education teachers’ attitudes, knowledge, and understanding of LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities may affect placement recommendations. Using the theory of care as a guide for this study allowed for an investigation into the tenets of the theory and how they may impact placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities.

Identifying and understanding what general and special education teachers believed about the factors that influence their recommendation for placement may lead to measures administrators can take to decrease the overrepresentation of students with cognitive disabilities in self-contained classrooms (Lane, Wehby, Little, & Cooley, 2005). Socially and culturally, some people still do not accept people with disabilities as peers; thus, the knowledge needed to produce positive attitudes of people with cognitive disabilities would be difficult to gain from a society where some people do not place the same value on people with disabilities as they do on people without disabilities (Wasserman, Asch, Blustein, & Putnam, 2013).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed a qualitative design that used case study methods with an in-depth, case analysis. This study began with an exploration of the processes and mechanisms of placement recommendations. From there, the study delved into other determinants that may influence those recommendations, specifically, general and special education teachers’ attitudes about LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities. Weiss (1994) emphasized the need to consider a process through which inclusion and the LRE were associated with placement recommendations. The case study analysis allowed for the identification of factors or determinants that influenced the placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. Identifying the factors that do or do not influence placement recommendations may play a role in the development and implementation of reforms to ensure consideration of the full continuum of placement options during the recommendation-making process.

Case studies required the researcher to develop research questions and suppositions that were developed from an extensive literature review about the topic or issue of interest. In this study, initial questions about how educators make recommendations to include and support students with cognitive disabilities led the researcher to examine the way educators defined and understood inclusion, the LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities, along with the impact the teachers’ attitudes may impose on their recommendations concerning placement.
The purpose of the present study was to understand how teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities may impact the placement recommendations teachers make for students with cognitive disabilities. Gaining an understanding of the factors involved in placement recommendations may enable school districts to formulate professional development training and guidelines for increasing the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities. The study sought to understand not only what teachers’ personal, professional, or academic factors may be, but also how teachers trouble, balance, and weigh these factors—all of this while taking into account the formalized processes teachers are responsible for following when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. From this context, the following research question emerged: How do the attitudes teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect their placement recommendations?

Two sub-questions emerged in this study:

**SQ1:** What do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

**SQ2:** How do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

**Assumptions**

The research questions in a case study typically begin with how and why questions. The research study's assumptions can be derived from the questions and are helpful in focusing the study's purpose. Linking the data to assumptions and the
criteria for interpreting the findings are an aspect not always included in a case study. The assumptions and sources of data can be found in Appendix A. "Pattern-matching" is a useful technique for linking data to the assumptions (de Vaus, 2009). Based on the research questions outlined, assumptions, as found in Appendix A, were developed.

In this study, the primary unit of analysis included the various interview responses of individual general and special education teachers from three different elementary schools. Merriam (2009) asserted that the unit of analysis was the focus of a case study. Utilizing three different schools allowed the researcher to analyze data across the different environments. A total of six teachers from three elementary schools were chosen as the unit of analysis versus secondary schools, because placement recommendations in elementary schools typically involve fewer people. In an elementary school, a student typically has fewer teachers compared to high school. Although an IEP meeting is required to have general education and special education teachers as members, parents can request all of the student’s teachers be present for the meetings. In addition, elementary school placement recommendations do not involve the same level of complexity due to scheduling, staffing, and curriculum when compared with high school. Using the teachers as the unit of analysis, the goal was to understand how teachers understand, balance, and weigh the factors, or determinants, that they take into account in the formalized recommendation-making process for placement. The teachers in the district as a whole may also be considered
a unit of analysis, where broad conclusions can be derived from integrating data and common themes can be found among individuals.

**Research Setting**

The purpose of the present study was to understand if and how general and special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities have an impact on their placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. A total of three elementary schools was selected from a large suburban area within the southeast United States. District administrator approval was sought for the selection of the elementary schools for inclusion in this study while principal approval was sought for selection of teachers. In addition, the three schools selected for inclusion in the research were from three different socioeconomic status (SES) levels. The actual schools selected included School A, considered a Title 1 school with an enrollment of 715 students and 52% free and reduced lunch. School B was an average school, socioeconomically, with 659 students and 16% free and reduced school lunches. And School C consisted of 878 students and with 5% of the students on free and reduced lunches. Research demonstrated that the SES of a school can have an impact on various aspects of a student’s education.

The socioeconomic status (SES) of school communities can affect schools in many ways. Orfield and Lee (2005) found that schools with a low SES have less stable and less qualified teachers. Darling-Hammond (2001), in California, concluded that schools containing a minority body of more than 90% were nearly
seven times more likely to have unqualified teachers. SES also can impact teacher turnover, which can then impact student learning (Freeman, Scafidi, & Sjoquist, 2002). Further, research by Monk and Haller (1993) described how the lower the SES of a school, the less challenging the curriculum can be. The research demonstrated that SES has an impact on the education of students, and this begged the question if SES has an impact on the placement recommendations a teacher makes for a student with a cognitive disability. In consideration of the documented effect of SES, the study looked at three schools of differing levels of SES. The research did not support the connotation that teachers do not care, but rather that they were hampered by other constraints inherent in a low SES. The social justice of ensuring that all students have equal access to the curriculum can often be affected by other factors beyond the teachers’ control.

All of the elementary schools chosen for the study had students enrolled with cognitive disabilities, regardless of whether the students attended their home school. All of the selected schools either had students with cognitive disabilities included in general education classrooms or had such in the past. All of the elected teachers had some experience with students with cognitive disabilities.

**Participant Selection**

Case studies can utilize various methods for the selection of participants in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). This research study used purposeful selection for participation. One of the most important selection criteria for choosing participants as based on the participants’ ability to offer their experience and
expertise to the topic. Merriam (2009) posited that purposeful selection allowed the researcher to select participants from “which the most can be learned” (p. 77). All participants in this study were selected from one large metropolitan school district located in the southeastern United States. Although the teachers in this study were selected based on their certification, years of teaching, and experience, the schools from which they were selected were voluntarily solicited to include various socioeconomic demographics.

**Selection Process**

The participants selected met the following criteria: (a) all participants were employed as certified educators; (b) all participants had a minimum of one year of experience in teaching students with cognitive disabilities in either a self-contained classroom or an inclusive, general education classroom; (c) all had a minimum of five years of experience in teaching; and (d) all participants were required to sign a participant consent form prior to beginning any interview. In addition, all participants were made aware of their right to discontinue participation at any time during the course of the study. The researcher refrained from selecting participants in the school in which the researcher was currently employed.

With permission from the school district and local principal, the researcher solicited a total of six participants from across three schools. The researcher spoke with the principals of the three schools and asked for the contact details and e-mails of the potential teachers who can participate in the study. The researcher then e-mailed the potential participants and gave them a call once they responded and
showed their interest in joining the study. With the phone call, the researcher explained in detail the purpose of the study and what the participants needed to do to help in producing the current study. Once both parties have agreed, the researcher then delivered to the participants the informed consents, signaling the formality of their participation in the study.

Each participating teacher was assigned a pseudonym that was used to identify his or her responses to all interviews. Assigning a pseudonym rather than identifying teachers by name during recruitment, data collection, and analysis phases assisted with the confidentiality of interviews. In a focus group, it can be impossible to control what, and with whom, participants may share concerning interviews. All individual and group interviews were audio recorded and analyzed in such a fashion as to ensure participant confidentiality. Data retrieved, compiled, and analyzed will be stored for three years on a computer that is password protected. All individual and group interviews were audio taped, and the raw recordings, along with the transcripts, notes, or other observations, will be retained by the researcher for a minimum of three years following the publication of the research. The storing of electronic data allowed for rapid access to the data, fast read and write rates, low cost, ability to archive the data, removability, and for a backup system (such as storing data on CDs) (Straub, Boudreau, & Gefen, 2004). Data will be destroyed using a shredding machine if the data is not being used at the conclusion of three years.
Data Collection

Each participant was asked to take part in individual, in-depth biographical interviews. Then each of the six participants was asked if there was a formalized procedure for making placement recommendations in his/her building. If there was a formalized procedure, the researcher requested each participant to explain the procedures in a verbal statement. Next, to gain insight into the teachers’ collective attitudes, each participant was asked to respond to a set of semi-structured, open-ended questions that probed the teachers’ attitudes and knowledge about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities. Finally, the focus group interviews allowed for a merging of viewpoints and experiences from which major themes emerged in the analysis.

Data Sources

The interview form of data collection was employed in this case study (Morse & Field, 2013). The interview was an important technique for data collection, and there were various forms of interviews. Two prominent forms included closed, or structured, interviews and open-ended interviews. Open-ended interviews allowed subjects to express themselves more freely and to provide insight into events (Ryan, Coughlan, & Cronin 2009). For this study, the researcher used three types of interviews: a script of semi-structured, open-ended questions for the individual in-depth biographical interview; the individual semi-structured, open-ended questions; and the group interview. Employing these types of interviews allowed the respondents to express their opinions freely without leading or prejudice. The
questions and probes deviated slightly to provoke a more in-depth response from each teacher interviewed. Although no records were individually accessed, teachers were asked to respond to questions related to IEPs they wrote in the past.

In this study, the researcher asked the participants to describe information contained in IEPs to identify the reasons given for the students who were included and for the students who were not included in the general education classroom. Additionally, because all IEPs must contain statements as to how the student will be included in the general education environment and why a placement recommendation option was chosen, that data was also recorded. Of particular interest during the interview was any information that showed students who switched LREs, moving from a least restrictive environment to another least restrictive environment. Each data source is described in greater depth below.

**Individual in-depth biographical interview.** Each participant engaged in an in-depth biographical interview to obtain demographic and historical data concerning his or her background and education (Appendix A). Conducting this kind of interview allowed the researcher to gain insight into the participants’ perspective of teaching and to gather data concerning their personal and professional experience. The questions for the individual biographical interview were created to help identify the background of the participants. Sample questions included those that asked for age, years of teaching, and a description of types of classes and students the participants have taught. A sampling of questions were asked to gain an understanding of the participants’ educational background. The questions were
intended to be thought provoking and to get the participants to think about students with cognitive disabilities and how the participants became involved with these students. The sample of questions presented also allowed the participants to reflect on the feelings they first had when they first started to work with a student with a cognitive disability. The questions were as follows:

1. What is your background in knowing or working with students with cognitive disability?
2. How many courses in special education did you take? Were they mandatory? What do you remember from them? Why were they effective or ineffective?
3. What has your teaching career entailed? Types of classes and models used?
4. What, if any, changes would you like to see in special education in regards to students with cognitive disabilities?

*Semi-structured, open-ended individual interview.* The semi-structured, open-ended individual interview was used as the primary data source for this study. Semi-structured, open-ended questions (Appendix B) were used to answer the major research questions. The questions were designed to provide data while allowing the participants to express wholly their beliefs, attitudes, and understanding. Some of the questions were designed to address the specific research question while others were designed to extract information that the participant did not realize was valuable to the research. All of the questions were created to garner information about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities. A sampling of the questions used is as follows:
1. What formalized placement recommendation-making process do you employ for students with cognitive disabilities?

2. How does the amount and or type of modifications that would be required affect your placement recommendations? Is there a concern for the student, for the teacher? Why?

3. Can you describe the best learning environment for a student with a cognitive disability? Do you feel inclusive classrooms are appropriate learning environments for students with cognitive disabilities? Why or why not?

Electronic audiotape recordings were made of each interview and carefully transcribed verbatim. The transcription was entered into a computer and analyzed using a qualitative data analysis program, NVivo. The information was electronically stored on a computer that was password protected. It will be maintained for a period of three years and then deleted.

**Group interview.** A group interview utilizing a semi-structured, open-ended format designed to stimulate the flow and exchange of information was conducted after the individual interviews in part to establish the district’s vision for inclusion along with a comparison of teachers’ responses between individual and group interviews (Appendix C). The questions included what formalized procedures for placement decision-making were in place at each school. The interviews gathered data to determine what trainings and supports were offered to schools implementing inclusive education.
Additional interviews were scheduled as needed with participants, depending on the analysis taken, for more in-depth information in answering the research questions. The group interviews were conducted at a time and place convenient for the majority of the research participants and the researcher. The researcher strove to hold the group interview at a central location. Additional interviews were scheduled as needed. All questions and responses were audiotape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcription was then analyzed using a computer data analysis program, NVivo.

Data Analysis

In an attempt to answer the research questions, this study used three sources of qualitative data: in-depth individual biographical interviews; semi-structured, open-ended individual interviews; and semi-structured, open-ended group interviews. The researcher's role in interpreting the meaning of data was more centralized in the qualitative approach than it was in quantitative methods (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative researchers must analyze their research to identify the reasoning behind their data interpretations. Their data must be explicit in the analysis “because interpretations depend so heavily for their validity on local particulars” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, p. 42). Although the process of data collection was both recursive and dynamic, the analysis of the data was crucial to the study (Merriam, 2009, p. 169). Analyzing data while simultaneously collecting data is preferred in qualitative research (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2006). Case study analyses have no fixed formula to follow but can use various analytical techniques, such as pattern matching or cross-
case analysis and can use tools, including computer-assisted tools. The stated suppositions oriented the analysis of this research by focusing on certain data and reducing and discarding other data (Reviere, Berkowitz, Carter, & Ferguson, 2013). The use of suppositions assisted in the organization of the case study and allowed the researcher to consider alternative explanations within the analysis. Utilizing a descriptive strategy in conjunction with the suppositions assisted in identifying causal links.

Merriam (2009) described pattern matching as a desirable analytical technique; pattern matching was employed in this study, along with cross-case analysis. The type of pattern matching for this study included a special type called explanation building. The intent of explanation building is to "explain" the "how" and "why" something happened (Merriam, 2009). In this study, the explanation building was in narrative form, reflecting on the suppositions outlined previously. The explanation acceding or contradicting the suppositions provided valuable insight into the formalized placement recommendation-making process for students with cognitive disabilities. Furthermore, the explanation building technique allowed for the revision of the suppositions based on the conceptual framework of this study (attitude, social justice, and care theories) as they related to the placement recommendation-making process. Pattern matching provided for an overlapping technique of cross-case analysis. The intent of a cross-case analysis is to aggregate the results of the different case studies. For this study, the individual teachers were the primary unit of analysis, but additional data was aggregated between schools or
types of teachers. Creating a word table that outlines the results of the individual case studies led to conclusions about the formalized placement recommendation-making process. The creation of additional word tables to identify the attitudes and understandings of inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities among general and special education teachers was then analyzed, allowing for cross-case conclusions. Merriam (2009) firmly stated that the patterns must “rely strongly on argumentative interpretation, not numeric tallies” (p. 160). The formalized process of placement recommendation-making for students with cognitive disabilities was best identified and elucidated using a descriptive approach to explain the overall complexity of the process. Analytical tools proved invaluable in managing the word tables and associated data.

This study utilized the computer-assisted program, NVivo, in its analysis. NVivo is commercially produced qualitative data analysis software that has a multitude of capabilities to aid a researcher. The advantage of utilizing a computer-assisted tool was its ability to code and categorize large amounts of data that were derived from the various interviews conducted. The purpose of NVivo was to assist researchers with discovering and systemically analyzing complex phenomena contained within the raw data. Using the tools of the program, the researcher located, coded, and annotated results in the raw data. Although the tool did not “do” the analysis, it aided in the identification of terms that were included in a specific code; program also aided with counting the number of occurrences of the terms. The program assisted the researcher in evaluating the importance of the data and the
relationship between the data. It had the ability to consolidate large volumes of
documents and keep track of all notes, annotations, codes, and memos to allow for
further study and analysis.

Keeping track of interesting segments was one of the most useful aspects of
NVivo. Similar to highlighting in a book, the researcher was able to mark passages
or phrases in the text that were significant. In addition, the program allowed for
making short or lengthy annotations that were then efficiently used later on in writing
the study’s results. These segments formed the basis of the unit of analysis.
Beginning simplistically by placing the data into different arrays and evolving into
more complex coding allowed for an analysis that used both theoretical suppositions
and thick, rich description. Based on the research question, the researcher used any
number of codes for a specific quote or segment. The prominence of repetitive
segments enabled the researcher to identify themes in the research quickly.

Triangulation

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) identified four types of triangulation: “data source
triangulation”—when the researcher looks for the data to remain the same in different
contexts; “investigator triangulation”—when several investigators examine the same
phenomenon; “theory triangulation,”—when investigators with different viewpoints
interpret the same results; and “methodological triangulation,”—when one approach
is followed by another to increase confidence in the interpretation. Using what
Denzin (1978) described as analysis triangulation, all group interviews were audio-
recorded, transcribed, and coded for use in the final analysis and interpretation of
results. The individual and group interviews were used as two parts of the triangulation for the validity and reliability of the data. Additionally, the final leg of triangulation utilized the literature review as a data source for substantiating or refuting the results.

**Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness in a qualitative research study can be intended to support the argument that the researcher’s results are “worth paying attention to” (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 2005). Qualitative research addresses four constructs of trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility addresses the “credible” conceptual interpretation of the data drawn from results of a research study (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Sinkovics & Alfoldi, 2012). Transferability is the degree to which the results of the study can transfer or apply beyond the realm of the research. Dependability assesses the quality of the process used to collect data, analyze data, and generate a theory. Lastly, confirmability is used to measure how the research study’s results are supported by the data collection (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 2005).

**Credibility**

To achieve credibility, the researcher triangulated the results between the literature review and content found in individual interviews and group interviews. Although group interviews and individual interviews were similar, thereby decreasing their methodological strengths, they also were varied enough to stand on their own (Brewer & Hunter, 1989). By using a wide range of teachers, triangulation was
achieved by analyzing the data from the various interviews, creating a rich picture of the teachers’ attitudes about the placement of students with cognitive disabilities.

A literature review can be one way to make significant contributions to a field of study. In addition to providing a foundation, or theoretical framework, it allowed the researcher to present a point of reference for the current study. Merriam (2009) discussed three ways in which a literature review was useful in a study. First, using information from the literature in an introduction can help build a case for conducting the present research. Second, the chapter containing the literature review should describe and critique the topic and its strengths and weaknesses. Finally, in the discussion of the results, the literature review can show how the study extends, modifies, or contradicts previous work.

Enlisting the support of a competent peer debriefer also enhanced the credibility of the study (Guba & Lincoln, 1985, 2005). The study took into account any comments from the peer debriefer. The peer debriefer received updates as the study progressed, and continual feedback was sought from the debriefer.

Member checking was also a method of enhancing credibility. Following the interviews, all participants were asked to review a summary of the data collected to ensure its credibility. Comments or concerns from the teachers were taken into consideration.

Although biases can be nearly impossible to avoid in any study, the credibility of the research approach aimed to decrease any biases to the extent possible. Credibility can be compared to objectivity. Implementing multiple types of interview
questions, along with member checking and employing a peer debriefer, reduced the effect of researcher bias. The complete and detailed description of methodology allowed for other researchers to assess how far the data and results emerging from the study may be accepted.

**Transferability**

According to Merriam (2009), transferability can involve the extent to which the results of one study can be transferred or applied to another study. Although the qualitative research cannot be ascribed to the general population, it can allow other researchers to utilize the data if their study is similar in context. It was the researcher’s job to ensure that enough contextual information was included to allow other researchers the ability to transfer the data and conclusions from the current study to another. In the current study, specifying the biographical information along with a summary of the data collected and analyzed allowed others to add to the body of research.

**Dependability**

Credibility and dependability can be closely related in qualitative research. By purposely adding multiple types of data gathering, the study was actively working to ensure credibility. Thus, the researcher enhanced the dependability of the study. The overlapping of methods created by both group and individual interviews, along with biographical information, addressed dependability. In addition, the methodology of the study was reported in detail to allow another researcher to repeat the work in the future.
Limitations

The researcher observed several limitations or inadequacies upon the completion of this particular study. However, it can be assured that, with the limitations observed, the researcher tried her best to maximize the available resources to address the insufficiencies of the factors discussed. The limitations found were the following:

1. One limitation was the difficulty in obtaining the absolute true attitudes of the teachers versus what they felt was socially and educationally appropriate or acceptable. The possibility that the teachers interviewed controlled or limited their responses, as they were not comfortable with sharing their students’ condition, personal relationship, and dealings with them. The topic of cognitive disability of young children may have been sensitive for some, and the teachers may have wanted to protect their schools, profession, and their students; thus, they may have been careful with their responses. To address these issues, the researcher constantly reassured the six participant teachers that clauses stated in the informed consent signed by both parties would be followed dutifully. They were also reminded that all transcripts and soft and hard recorded data would be kept inside a vault for five years, with only the knowledge of the researcher, as required by most universities in the United States.

2. The sample population was quite limited in terms of the number of teachers interviewed as well as the choice of groups to be included. To generalize the
perceptions, a larger sample may be necessary, as this study did not adequately reflect or represent all of the attitudes and/or knowledge of teachers related to LRE, inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities.

3. A lack of statistical records from the schools to prove the statements and shared responses of the participant teachers was observed. This resource could have provided and strengthened the analysis and findings of the study by presenting both resources and seeing the similarities and differences of the responses with the formal collection of data from the involved institutions.

4. Another limitation were the personal biases and perceptions of the researcher. Although being invested both personally and professionally in the results of the research can be an asset, it can also be a detriment. To limit the effects of the stated limitations, the researcher incorporated various collection techniques.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations outline what one may expect but does not discover from a study. One delimitation of this study was the exclusion of middle schools and high schools. Elementary schools were chosen to establish boundaries to the topic. Another delimitation was the inclusion of both general and special education teachers as participants. Exclusively using one type of teacher over the other may have
produced different data. The inclusion of both types of teachers was made as they were both considered an integral part of an IEP team.

My Positionality as Researcher

I am both a special educator and a parent of a young adult with a cognitive disability. The impetus for this study grew out of my 27 years of raising a non-verbal daughter who has Down syndrome. From the very beginning of her life, the need to have my daughter included in society and various functions was solidified. The belief that to function in society one must grow up in society with all of its pros and cons became my rallying cry. When my daughter was still in an early childhood program, I learned about inclusion, LRE, and person centered planning. I went back to school to obtain a Master’s degree in Special Education after the birth of my daughter. I wanted to learn as much as I could to be able to help her reach her full potential. I chose to get certified in the archaic term of Educable Mentally Handicapped and Learning Disabilities. The educational knowledge gained from earning my Master’s degree was immensely empowering.

My daughter was at the forefront of early intervention, and I began early intervention services when she was five-weeks old. I had to wait that long because she was born in July, and the programs were closed for the summer. I was much like the intense parents that had their child in various therapies and programs; I did this to help her in the best way I knew. I researched different practices to make a
determination as to what therapies and programs I felt were best for my daughter. She began receiving support through the public education system when she turned three years of age. This program was an early intervention program where she received services in a small group and individual setting for several years. About two months prior to her fifth birthday, I began the numerous phone calls required to get the evaluations necessary for her to start kindergarten. Through a multidisciplinary team, it was decided to place my daughter in a developmental kindergarten class for one year, followed by a year in a general education kindergarten class at her home school. I became quite involved with a large suburban school district and participated in a yearlong collaborative process to implement a systems change for inclusion. My daughter was one of two children officially included for her kindergarten year in 1993.

Throughout my daughter’s education, I sought and obtained inclusion for her. Along the way, I often had to show other educators how to include students with cognitive disabilities appropriately and successfully into the classroom. The areas that required additional support were how to access the general education curriculum, what was important for my daughter to learn, and how to modify the curriculum to her level from the general education curriculum. Additional support was also needed for the teachers to address behavioral issues my daughter exhibited, such as dropping to the floor when directed to do a non-preferred activity or saying “No” to a teacher. I always felt that despite having to help the teachers with their inclusive practices, I was also helping them establish an excellent model of inclusion that could then be
replicated for others. My daughter continued to be included in classes throughout her school years, culminating with her graduation from her neighborhood high school with her peers. She was so proud to walk across the stage and receive her diploma just like her friends. She received a resounding applause that was louder than for any other student who walked across the stage that day.

In 2001, I began teaching full-time in an elementary school in the southern U.S. Surprised that inclusion was still not a real option for students with cognitive disabilities, I set about helping my school by encouraging, training, and conducting the first classes that included all students. Feeling the need to engage others in the process and dialogue, I volunteered for various committees and boards in the local area, such as the state Parent Teacher Association and the State Advisory Panel for Special Education. Since then, I have created my own consulting business to assist schools and families in building collaborative partnerships for inclusion and the LRE. I have continued to expand the inclusive practices in my school, where today every grade level exhibits some type of inclusion, and most grade levels have at least one class where the students are included all day long.

The research question for this study was derived from the professional and personal desire to have general education classes truly presented as an option for students who have cognitive disabilities. The study searched for possible reasons why teachers and administrators do not readily talk about a student with cognitive disabilities being educated in a general education classroom unless the parent expresses the desire for it or demands it. What needs to be instituted in schools
across the county for teachers to accept and believe that students with a cognitive disability can learn in a general education classroom? If research can show how attitudes and knowledge affect placement recommendations and decisions, then the option for improving the process should be sought.

**Description of the Sample**

Participants of the study were six elementary school teachers from three different schools. Teachers were from the same large school district in the southeastern United States. The participants’ ages ranged from 22 to 60 years old. Three teachers were from general education and the other three were from special education. Meanwhile, their years of experiences ranged from 2 to 30 years of teaching. A breakdown of the demographics of the participants can be referred to in Table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Special education or General education teacher</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant 1</td>
<td>22-30 years old</td>
<td>General education</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 2</td>
<td>22-30 years old</td>
<td>General education</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 3</td>
<td>41-60 years old</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 4</td>
<td>41-50 years old</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>6-7 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 5</td>
<td>51-60 years old</td>
<td>Special education</td>
<td>26 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant 6</td>
<td>51-60 years old</td>
<td>General education</td>
<td>30 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Summary**

Chapter 4 will present a more in-depth biographical sketch of each participant and will be based on the in-depth biographical interviews, semi-structured open-ended individual interviews, and on a semi-structured open-ended group interview.
Data will include those factors that influence teachers’ placement recommendations in the context of their attitudes and understandings of inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities. Chapter 5 will present an analysis of the data and discuss the impact of the findings. Data from the various interviews will provide a description of each participant’s knowledge of the formalized placement recommendation-making process and how they adhered to the process. It will include a summary and discussion of the findings and their influence on placement recommendation-making for students with cognitive disabilities. This chapter interconnected the conceptual framework of attitude theory, social justice theory, and theory of care.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The researcher presents in Chapter 4, the results and analysis of the interviews collected from the six participants of the study from three elementary schools. The study was performed in order to understand how special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities influence placement recommendations teachers make for students with cognitive disabilities. A qualitative thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interviews with the help of a computer software program known as NVivo10 by QSR. A thematic analysis was utilized to extract new meanings from the shared responses of the teachers as well as to seek answers to address the research questions of the study; this is to understand further the attitudes of the teachers toward students with cognitive disabilities and their effect on placement recommendation. Chapter 4 also includes the description of the sample, a brief research methodology, the presentation of the results, and the summary of the chapter.

For the study, the main research question that guided the investigation was: How do the attitudes that the teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect the teachers’ placement recommendations? Two sub-questions also emerged to be addressed in this study.

SQ1. What do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?
SQ2. How do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

Description of Participants

Participant 1 is a general education teacher with two-years of experience. She earned a dual certification of early childhood education and special education while in college. She incorporated special education into her course work believing that her early childhood degree was more limiting as a career. She was interested in special education from working at a summer camp for children with multiple disabilities. She worked as a special education teacher her first year and then transferred to work as a general education teacher. She began her career as a resource room teacher and is now teaching science and social studies exclusively. She teaching co-taught classes and loves making the subject material come alive for all of her students.

Participant 2 is another general education teacher, with six years of experience. Her experience with special education students comes from co-teaching reading, language arts, social studies, and science. While she had the one introductory course in special education in college, she believes her best education for students with special needs comes from her co-teaching experience. She was propositioned by the special education teacher in her school about bringing some students from a resource setting into the general education classroom for a co-teaching setting. She would like to have had more professional development training about inclusion and
co-teaching prior to being assigned as a co-teacher, yet she feels she was able to learn a lot just from working with the special education teacher.

Meanwhile, Participant 3 is a special education teacher with a very long 30 years of experience as an educator. She was required to major in both special and general education in college. During college she was able to observe many different types of classes but back then the classes were structured differently than they are now. She believes that goals for students with disabilities should be driven by what a child needs in life. When she sees a student making progress in the classroom it brings a lot of joy and that is why she continues to teach special education. She is concerned about some of the changes she sees in the teaching profession in regards to curriculum and pay. She is concerned about teachers that have to complete the alternative assessment for students and how subjective it is as to whether a teacher passes it or not. She does not believe the assessment is for the student but for the teacher.

Another special education teacher was Participant 4 with a seven-year experience. She began her teaching career in another state as a general education teacher. She became interested in special education after being hired as a paraprofessional for a young girl that was legally blind. She believes that working with this elementary student and an excellent special education teacher inspired her to become a special education teacher. Her formal special education training took place in college when she took the introduction to special education class that was required of all teachers. She took a teacher certification test for special education and believes
that she had the benefit of hands on experience, which was better than any formal education on special education.

Participant 5, also a special education teacher has 26 years of experience. Her formal education began more like an education psychology program as the college programs were set up very differently back then. She began her special education career working in early intervention for children 0-3 years of age. She has experience teaching in a variety of environments including a mental health facility. When she began teaching she had to create many of the materials she used for students as there were not many ready-made products. She enjoys teaching today just as much as she did when she began over 30 years ago.

Finally, Participant 6 is a general education teacher with a 30-year experience. She began teaching pre-K in the public schools and one year was assigned several students with disabilities. As a result, she was assigned to work with a special education teacher and a paraprofessional. It seemed to her that any time after that when a child with a disability came to the program, they would be assigned to her class. She started out college as a humanistic studies major and minored in art history. She later went back to school and earned her master’s in early childhood education and eventually became certified in special education. She finds her enjoyment of teaching in watching her students grow. She believes that we need to maintain a continuum of service models for students and that some students require a small group setting so they can have the material broken down for them into small pieces and/or repeated.
Participant Analysis

Participant 1 is a general education teacher with a 2-year experience.

With a two-year experience as a teacher, Participant 1 has always valued professionalism and fairness in all aspects. Given this, it was not surprising that Participant 1 had a professional attitude towards students with cognitive disabilities. She shared how they have constant discussions and careful deliberations before the student recommendations or placements. "I would say that we had a formalized process that we went to before but we went to the IEP meeting and just a lot of data collection and conversation between the whole IEP team."

In terms of the determinants when placing recommendations, Participant 1’s knowledge was her main indicator and guide when making such big and difficult decisions. "I think it really just depends on the kids; you have to know your kids. I think it really comes down to the relationship that you have with the kids and it is really difficult in the beginning of the year. I learned this last year when I had a couple of IEP meetings come up at the beginning of the year, being a brand new teacher it was really difficult, challenging... But you just got to take the time to talk with teachers that have worked with the kid and get to know the kid."

Finally, Participant 1 uses the determinant of knowledge as the first step in realizing the next actions that she could take as an instructor or teacher for the betterment of her students in need of much attention. "I think you have to consider what the objective was first of all. I think it needs to be on a case-by-case basis. Some of the kids I think, I do not know... They did change from fourth to fifth grade
and some of their goals were kept the same because we wanted to see okay, is this just something they can do in resource or is this something they are able to apply in a class with twenty-five kids? So I think it is just going to depend on like if you have a kid with a severe enough disability that you are like okay, you need to think to yourself they have made the progress here but they are still… This goal that they were working on, yeah they were kind of working based on the standards but we need to take it up some more before we put them in a less restrictive environment."

**Participant 2 is a general education teacher, with six years of experience.**

A six-year experience as an education has developed Participant 2's passionate dedication and love for her profession. The success stories of her children, their growth and improvement, and more positive outcomes allowed her to appreciate her job more. In addition, her passion has also affected much of her attitude towards her students, especially those with cognitive disabilities. "Success is growth to me. And looking at different benchmarks along the way and we will just access it at the end and okay the child grew. I hope so, cross my fingers kind of thing you know but just looking at it along the way. Collecting data and saying, "Okay this is a goal that we set you know, I want this child to, you know, this did not work. So now what we are going to do is we are going to look at it this way and we are going to modify the curriculum this way. Is that successful? Let's look." And I just, I did a lot more on… I feel like I put a lot on me to figure it out." Participant 2 not only had passion for her children but also valued professionalism in the following all processes in school, especially when making placements or recommendations. "So what we basically do
is we go through the whole RTI process so going through and you know, doing the interventions and working with the students that way and documenting all of that. Then if it gets up to the student is testing, then what will happen is the student will be pulled out and work with a psychologist. Sometimes IST does some of the testing too and then we will get the report and we will look at all of that. Then we will go into a meeting and then decide as a team."

With Participant 2's great concern on her students’ situations and condition, she then values progress and developments the most. "No, I think it just kind of depends on where that student is at. For instance we had a student that was team taught this year that when they went to their middle school meeting they started- how everything kind of goes." Another vital determinant for Participant 2 was the decision of the whole team or members. "I mean really what the whole team thinks. You know the parents see a different thing at school then we see at school a lot of the time because you know, they do not always have the opportunity to see the whole picture and sometimes the kids get so stressed out at school and then they go home and let it all out. So you know, the parents are getting that frustrated side that sometimes we do not always see in school, so I think that is why it is so important to have that whole team and that whole group of people talking about it." Participant 2 also studies and reviews the reports of the students for better understanding of their conditions. "Looking at the report that comes through. A lot of times, I will have questions about it because it is so thick and lengthy and to be able to get through it, you know people go through it… They read it and flip to the end to see what the
recommendations are. You know going through and being able to say, “Oh okay. You know what I am seeing in class does that match up to this one test.” And trying to figure out how all of that works. I kind of saw that.”

Lastly, Participant 2 makes sure that the reports as determinants are used as rightfully and accurately as possible. "And she is so big on collecting data and looking at it that way and trying to do, she is also into behavioral therapy. So looking at it trying to identify, collect the data figure out what the root of it is and make that behavioral modification and see if that helps. So just really looking at the data that way I think."

**Participant 3 is a special education teacher with 30 years of experience.**

Being one of the two interviewed teachers with the highest years of experience and a broad knowledge on special education, it was not surprising to discover that Participant 3 had the attitude of patience for her students by constantly adjusting the curriculum for the growth of the students and their needs. "I used to try and push in to science and social studies until I had some terrible teachers that were writing cursive on the board and telling the kids to just copy it in their notebooks and it was like, "I hate this. Why am I in here trying to push into this terrible teacher's science and social studies when I could make it exciting and do a much better job in my own room?" And that was when I started pulling out and we do hands-on activities for science and social studies. Make it lots more exciting, hit the highlights and do not just talk about dates and I do not write cursive on the board and say copy it in your notebook. I do not, and the same thing with reading."
As one of the most experienced teachers interviewed, she also has great importance in overseeing the cognitive level of her students. "We can make modifications but they still need modifications in my room. So I make modifications and recommendations on everyone's IEP. I get IEPs from GNETS all the time and they never have any modifications on them, zero. The kids coming out of GNETS do not need any modifications for some reason. And I have no idea why they do that. You would think their kids would need modifications but they do not. They do not write them. But yeah my kids need modifications. But it is not really the modifications. You can modify a test. You can use flash cards. You can highlight. You can tape record. You can use a word processor."

Finally, Participant 3 uses the cognitive levels to determine the stage or level of improvement that her students need especially before making the recommendations. "So just this year the fact that even if they did make those modifications all the information being presented is not- I would rather have them learn something about it. And by presenting what is really important and just covering that more and repeating it during the time that we have to cover it rather than being at their classroom and hearing a whole bunch more of stuff that I did not plan on covering because it was less important." At the same time, Participant 3 also uses proper communication with parents before making recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities: “We just talked before or after school. We just touched base to see what kind of things he was behind in and mom and I and the teacher emailed back and forth too. We all kept in touch.”
Participant 4 is a special education teacher with a seven-year experience.

With a seven-year experience in special education, Participant 4 has developed an attitude of being passionate towards her students' growth and improvement. "As far as what I teach now, what I love is when the kids get it. My students read. They are very verbal. They can do math.” In addition to being passionate, Participant 4 also gives importance to patience and flexibility in modifying her methods for the students. "I like to figure out the puzzle of what I can do to help them learn."

For the determinant that Participant 4, her knowledge that each student or child has his or her unique needs has helped her determine accurate placement recommendations. "Yes because all the students are different. Your classes are all different. What a presenter may present to you will not work in your classroom. What I found was a lot of the presenters had never even walked into a special education class and taught. You know, I learned how to take data during the year that I worked in the class."

Participant 4 then uses the knowledge to continue and guide her to the next steps or actions to employ: "Because when you have seven different IEPs with 50 something different goals and you’re expected to teach all of the standards for every single grade that you teach, it’s hard. So that’s always a struggle. I felt like because I have the general education background and it’s like get the standards."

Participant 5 is a special education teacher with 26 years of experience.
The attitude of being a proud and passionate educator has developed on Participant 5 with her love for her profession and the number of years she has spent with children. She stated: "There’s so much. I think the light in the eyes when they learn something new, or when they understand that they can control their own body, as far as their behavior. How reinforcement works to really build on their self-esteem, you know, just understanding that – oh, you’re sitting down, and here’s a sticker or a thumbs-up or whatever and the repetition that – they really get that. To see the little ones come in, in the morning, and hang up their own backpack and hang up their folder and show independence for classroom management – it’s like a mom seeing it, you know, you’re so proud."

Together with her passion for children, Participant 5 also knows the vitality of having knowledge on the needs and preferences of the children. "So you know, just understanding that yes, behavior needs to be taught like everything else, following directions needs to be taught like everything else, and then once you get them to that baseline, you can then get them into academics. Another use for Participant 5 would be as guide to the next actions to take: "Of course I always read the IEPs in the beginning and get to know the child, and anything with paperwork, coming from another teacher, another school, and summer has passed, developmental changes have been made, it looks different."

Lastly, Participant 5 also employs all needed information before making formal recommendations: "You know, I think it’s all the information - the old classic duration and intensity – all that kind of stuff."
Participant 6 is a general education teacher with a 30-year experience.

Participant 6’s 30-years of experience as a general education teacher as well as her personal experience of having a child with cognitive disability adds to her passion of seeing children evolve and grow through her eyes. "I like the kids. I like the flexibility. I like being in the classroom. I like setting up the classroom. I like seeing where they are and where they start at in the beginning and where you have them by the end of the year, through their help and through your help."

Participant 6 also shared how she thoroughly reviews all documents to gather data and knowledge about the students. "My current student with the IEP and we are looking for next year’s placement then I would bring into that meeting work samples. I would also bring in work habits. You know, how they are in the classroom. I would get more anecdotal notes, like this is what we usually do." Another determinant for the experienced educator would be the formative tests and assessments of the children. "I can do other little formative assessments that give me blank, you know, simple questions. Simple one-answer questions can do that. It is the other ones. So you want a nice smattering. They take and we do this, I mean, she takes a test and she can even simplify it even more."

Participant 6 has also learned to use the knowledge and available resources to guide her with her next steps. “You have got to do this so you sort of have to reign it in and for a lot of kids that is hard regardless of what they are and then you have these, you know, you have got to deal with the parents who have their expectations and you know, what all they want and well last year and I am like I understand that
but you have sort of got to give them some responsibility know, you have sort of have to do that.”

Presentation of the Results

The researcher utilized the computer software of NVivo10 to assist in systematically coding the interviews of the participants. With the use of NVivo10, themes were formed based on the responses of the participants. For the presentation of results, the themes or nodes (upon encoding to the software) that received the highest number of references or occurrences were determined as the major themes or nodes. Meanwhile, those that received relatively few references or occurrences were tagged as the minor themes or minor nodes. A detailed presentation can be found in this section, along with the verbatim texts from the interviews.

Major Theme 1

The first major theme that emerged from the study was based on the main research question of the study of how the attitudes that the teachers possessed regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect the teachers’ placement recommendations. It was then found that teachers had a passionate attitude toward students with cognitive abilities (i.e., more success means growth). The term passionate can be interpreted in various ways. For the purpose of this study, the term was interpreted to include attributes such as caring, loving, patient, and concerned. These are a sample of the positive terms the participants used in their interviews that described their passion for helping students learn and succeed. The major theme received the highest number of references from
the study with four out of the six participants stating or portraying the said attitude. The theme refers to how the teachers have a positive and zealous attitude in seeing the students with cognitive disabilities develop before and after making placement recommendations. Table 3 contains the breakdown of the major theme and minor themes while Figure 3 serves as the representation of the results in the main research question using a tree map.

Table 3

*Attitude Effects of Teachers Regarding Inclusion, LRE, and Cognitive Disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Themes</th>
<th>Number of Sources or References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Theme 1 or Node 1: Passionate attitude towards students with cognitive abilities; more success means growth.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 1 or Node 1: Patience for Knowledge about the condition and progress about the student modifications until children develop fully.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 1 or Node 2: Professional attitude towards recommendations through conversations and assessments</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3. Tree map for the results of the main research question.

Overall, participants of the study had a passionate attitude toward helping students with cognitive disabilities, for them more success meant more growth for the students [and even the teachers like them]. The major theme was deemed by the researcher as one of the three most crucial results of the study. Participant 2 had a passionate attitude toward students with cognitive disabilities. She shared how
success stories and positive changes served as motivation to work harder and help more children through different methods:

Success is growth to me. And looking at different benchmarks along the way and we will just access it at the end and okay the child grew. I hope so, cross my fingers kind of thing you know but just looking at it along the way. Collecting data and saying, "Okay this is a goal that we set you know, I want this child to, you know, this did not work. So now what we are going to do is we are going to look at it this way and we are going to modify the curriculum this way. Is that successful? Let's look." And I just, I did a lot more on… I feel like I put a lot on me to figure it out. Okay this did not work. What else do we have to do? And we will go and we have gone down and talked to our IST about it. Okay so we have tried this, this does not work. Is this the right placement? If it, you know, like what else can I do? I do not want to say let's move the kid out, so what else can we do? I have never had a kid moved out. What are the other strategies because you know you made the decision before me to put; this child has been put in this placement before the child even got to fifth grade or made it to my class.

Participant 4 stated that the attitude of being passionate with the children’s improvement helped in placement recommendations: “As far as what I teach now, what I love is when the kids get it. My students read. They are very verbal. They can do math.” Participant 5 stated that she enjoyed seeing the development and positive improvements in her students:
There’s so much. I think the light in the eyes when they learn something new, or when they understand that they can control their own body, as far as their behavior. How reinforcement works to really build on their self-esteem, you know, just understanding that – oh, you’re sitting down, and here’s a sticker or a thumbs-up or whatever and the repetition that – they really get that. To see the little ones come in, in the morning, and hang up their own backpack and hang up their folder and show independence for classroom management – it’s like a mom seeing it, you know, you’re so proud. And it’s just watching them grow, I mean especially when I get them at 3, and sometimes they don’t leave me until almost 5 – to see that growth. I’ve just enjoyed so much the opportunity to be able to just sit in awe and watch as these kids develop and being able to really take the time – I mean, there are times in my classroom where I may have the perfect lesson plans and we’re doing something, but I see a child who just wants me to read them one more story and I can take the time, sometimes, to do that for the one child for that one day and it makes such a difference.

Participant 6 shared how her personal story of having a child with cognitive disability allowed her to be passionate in seeing the growth and positive changes to the students through her help:

Oh I like the kids, I do. I like the kids. I like the flexibility. I like being in the classroom. I like setting up the classroom. I like seeing where they are
and where they start at in the beginning and where you have them by the end of the year, through their help and through your help.

**Minor theme 1.** The first minor theme that followed the major theme coded was the attitude of patience for curriculum modifications until children develop fully. The minor theme or node was gathered from the responses of three of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 3 had the attitude of patience for students with cognitive disabilities by uncomplainingly modifying and adjusting the curriculum for the students’ growth:

But the kids are so stressed right now in school, all the kids. You know? There is so much that they are pushing on the kids right now and the curriculum is so tight and all the teachers are being looked at for the... evaluation and everything else that is going on. By the time they are in you know, fourth or fifth grade, what the kids have to know in that grade and what a cognitively disabled student can understand is growing farther and farther apart. I used to try and push in to science and social studies until I had some terrible teachers that were writing cursive on the board and telling the kids to just copy it in their notebooks and it was like, "I hate this. Why am I in here trying to push into this terrible teacher's science and social studies when I could make it exciting and do a much better job in my own room?" And that was when I started pulling out and we do hands-on activities for science and social studies. Make it lots more exciting, hit the highlights and do not just
talk about dates and I do not write cursive on the board and say copy it in your notebook. I do not, and the same thing with reading.

Participant 4 also shared the importance of having the patience to modify the curriculum for the children to progress: “I like to figure out the puzzle of what I can do to help them learn. Participant 5 had the patience to try and modify the curriculum for the students before making formal and necessary recommendations:

Structured. My personal beliefs are to make it bright and colorful, you know, age appropriate and sound sensitive when necessary – just everything about engaging the student, everything about helping the student feel relaxed to learn. If they’re over stimulated by something, or they’re shy or nervous to try something then they won’t learn. So just making the learning environment fun, you know.

**Minor Theme 2.** The second minor theme that followed the major theme coded was having the professional attitude toward recommendations through conversations and assessments. The minor theme or node was gathered from the responses of two of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 1 had a professional attitude when it came to handling students with cognitive disabilities. He shared that they conducted conversations as they valued the students’ interest and well-being above everything else:

Well last year I have not done as much with placement. This year as a general ed teacher, I have been part of the conversation for a lot of kids. Last year we had a couple of students who were going into fifth grade and we, there was
another fourth grade IRR teacher at Hillside and we looked at the data and we had a lot of honest conversations with our kids about where they felt like they were at and how they felt like they learned best. And a lot of decisions came from looking at the data we had from their IEP goals. We looked at conversations that we have had with the parents and the kids, we looked at their assessment data from benchmark assessments and counter assessments. We tried to figure out if putting them in a co-taught setting as opposed to resource would be least restrictive. There was just a lot of conversation back and forth between the classroom teachers and the other special education teachers within the building and our ISP and the parents and the teachers as well. It was just a big conversation. I would say that we had a formalized process that we went to before but we went to the IEP meeting and just a lot of data collection and conversation between the whole IEP team.

Participant 2 described how she believed in following the whole process professionally, so that no bias or other factor could be affecting the placement recommendations:

So what we basically do is we go through the whole RTI process so going through and you know, doing the interventions and working with the students that way and documenting all of that. Then if it gets up to the student is testing, then what will happen is the student will be pulled out and work with a psychologist. Sometimes IST does some of the testing too and then we will get the report and we will look at all of that. Then we will go into a meeting
and then decide as a team. And so it kind of depends with everyone at the table. It is harder when I do not know some of things. It is difficult kind of, like what I said earlier about knowing everything, like the processing in math. Like okay, I do not necessarily know all of what that means. I can look at the test results and see there were x amount of tests given and this is how this child did on that as far as like the bell curve goes and all of that. So there is a lot of I feel like I can put in my piece but I do not feel like I know all of it. So that is why I feel like it is so important to rely on the team and the different experts that come to the table to make that recommendation.

**Major Theme 2**

The second major theme that emerged from the study was based on the second research question of what teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. It was found that teachers employed knowledge about the condition and progress of the student as the chief determinant when making placement recommendations. The major theme received the highest number of references from the study, with six out of the six participants stating the said determinant. The theme refers to how the teachers carefully and thoroughly assessed the students before making formal recommendations. Table 4 contains the breakdown of the major theme and minor themes while Figure 4 is the representation of the results in the main research question using a tree map.
Table 4

Determinants for Placement Recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of Sources or References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Theme 2 or Node 1: Knowledge about the condition and progress about the student</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 1 or Node 1: Decision of the whole team.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 2 or Node 2: Reports to answer questions about children.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 3 or Node 3: Formative assessments of students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nodes compared by number of items coded
Overall, the second major theme established concerned knowledge about condition as a guide for the next steps or actions to take and as the main determinant of the teachers. The second major theme was also deemed by the researcher as one of the three most crucial results of the study. Participant 1 believed that the main determinant when making placement recommendations was the knowledge of the teacher regarding the student’s or kid’s condition. The teacher was employed to make decisions about information and familiarity with the status of the cognitive disability of the student:

I think it really just depends on the kids; you have to know your kids. I think it really comes down to the relationship that you have with the kids and it is really difficult in the beginning of the year. I learned this last year when I had a couple of IEP meetings come up at the beginning of the year, being a brand new teacher it was really difficult, challenging... But you just got to take the time to talk with teachers that have worked with the kid and get to know the kid. Because I feel like kids with cognitive disabilities just like... You hear all the time with autism; it is different with every kid. It is the same thing with a cognitive disability in my mind. We have some kids that really thrive better in a resource classroom. Could they be in a team taught or self-contained classroom? Yeah but in a resource setting, the thing is you just have to really know the kid and when it comes down to me... I really- you really want to have like an honest conversation with looking at your data and your
IEP levels and stuff to think, okay where is the kid going to grow the most? That is how we made a lot of our decision last year.

Participant 2 explained that the recommendations depend on the state or condition of the students. Placing recommendations for this participant depended on the progress or development that the student was portraying:

No, I think it just kind of depends on where that student is at. For instance we had a student that was team taught this year that when they went to their middle school meeting they started- how everything kind of goes. In fifth grade often, they are more team taught and then when they go to middle school, the middle school, the parents are a little bit more nervous and so it is interesting. You have some parents who want them in resource and other parents just get nervous in all this changing. Then you have other parents who want to keep it the same kind of thing so it is interesting. Usually I see a shift though, more kids do like a class or two in resource going into sixth grade that did not do anything resource in fifth grade. We had one student last year who went into resource after the middle school meeting for reading and next year she is going to do resource for reading and language arts because she is dyslexic and she has some different learning disabilities with reading. So she basically was on a second grade level in fifth grade and so the mom just felt like it was too much. So she started going to fifth grade resource after that middle school meeting and then in sixth grade, she is going to do middle
school for reading and language arts but she stayed in my language arts team taught class.

Participant 3 stated that one determinant for her was the condition or cognitive level of the students:

I guess it does not. I do not think that is the part that affects it. It is just if they are going to be able to understand what is going on in there. It would just really be their cognitive level, not the modifications.

We can make modifications but they still need modifications in my room. So I make modifications and recommendations on everyone's IEP. I get IEPs from Gnet all the time and they never have any modifications on them, zero. The kids coming out of Gnets do not need any modifications for some reason. And I have no idea why they do that. You would think their kids would need modifications but they do not. They do not write them. But yeah my kids need modifications. But it is not really the modifications. You can modify a test. You can use flash cards. You can highlight. You can tape record. You can use a word processor. You can do all kinds of modifications but if the material is too difficult, the material is too difficult.

Participant 4 shared that the main determinant should be the knowledge that all students are different. Thus, teachers should know how to deal with them depending on their condition and needs:

Some of the county trainings that they- throughout the school year and also through preplanning they do trainings within the school and the learning
centers. Also that wonderful year of on-the-job training. Yes because all the students are different. Your classes are all different. What a presenter may present to you will not work in your classroom. What I found was a lot of the presenters had never even walked into a special education class and taught. You know, I learned how to take data during the year that I worked in the class. I learned how important it is to have a good rapport with parents. I mean, from feeding to lifting students out of wheelchairs to changing diapers—it’s just something that you’re not taught. It’s an experience that you have to have.

Participant 5 explained how crucial it is to know the progress of the students—i.e., how they are reacting to the interventions and activities being used:

You know, I think sometimes just educating their general-ed peers on what it is we do and how we do it, I think that a lot of special-ed teachers don’t realize it, but they’re the specialists as far as academics and behavior and just really—you know, one of the first things we ever learned in college was task analysis, breaking things down into small steps, and I think that’s the key, you know, it looks like this huge thing that you’ve gotta do - all of these special steps and accommodations that you have to make for these kids and it can be, but you just have to break it down, saying you know, if it’s a thicker piece of paper, or different scissors, or technology – there are tools, there are strategies, there are lots of things in our toolkit that we can pull out and share because a general-ed teacher may not have to do that – she may have 20 kids
sitting in a row all nice and following directions and raising their hands and all that kind of stuff, and we have kids doing quite the opposite. So you know, just understanding that yes, behavior needs to be taught like everything else, following directions needs to be taught like everything else, and then once you get them to that baseline, you can then get them into academics.

Participant 6 explained that one determinant when making placement recommendations was studying or having the knowledge about the state of the students:

I think I would… If it was my- if it were my student, my current student with the IEP and we are looking for next year’s placement then I would bring into that meeting work samples. I would also bring in work habits. You know, how they are in the classroom. I would get more anecdotal notes, like this is what we usually do. And do they work well in a routine? This is what I have seen and things like that. If I am going into the IEP and the child is going to be placed into my classroom for the next year, I would look at- I would listen and here what they are saying. I would look at paperwork and see what they have done, like that, and then I sort of, for all the years I have taught… I learned this sort of the first couple years, you sort of need to make your own, not assumptions, but you make your own observations in the fact. That is great and I try really hard not to do this. I try really hard not to tell somebody this about this child, other than your generalities like; you know you got to watch out for. You know, he is a runner. The mother is very intense, things
like that. Pretty much so I just sort of take them as they are and I sort of make
my own formulations and the more I see them, the more I get to know them.
Because I had years ago, one of the first autistic children I ever really had the
pleasure of working with came with a rap sheet and a file about an inch and a
half thick. Where it listed down all of these, it sounded like felonies. He
throws chairs. He does this, he does that. You are just like, "Wow, thanks so
much." I sort of had all summer long to let that just ferment in my brain. I
remember meeting his mother the first time. I think it would have to depend
on their level of cognitive ability. Several years ago I was next door to a self-
contained classroom with the same age of children.

**Minor Theme 1.** The first minor theme that followed the second major theme
coded was the decision of the whole team as another determinant. The minor theme
or node was gathered from the responses of three of the six interviewed teachers.
Participant 2 also shared that the decision of the whole team was another determinant
of the children’s recommendation—i.e., what the whole team thought and what the
whole team decided was best for the students:

I think a lot of times it just depends on the whole. I mean really what the
whole team thinks. You know the parents see a different thing at school then
we see at school a lot of the time because you know, they do not always have
the opportunity to see the whole picture and sometimes the kids get so
stressed out at school and then they go home and let it all out. So you know,
the parents are getting that frustrated side that sometimes we do not always
see in school, so I think that is why it is so important to have that whole team and that whole group of people talking about it.

Participant 5 stated that there were various determinants but that the decision of the whole team and their collaboration to help make the judgment should be made by the team:

That’s a tricky one. It’s a hard thing. I think you have to look at the whole picture of the environment about teachers being knowledgeable, teachers being willing, the classroom environment being open and educated, like if you were to go in and make sure that the general atmosphere is accepting, you know, I think that just putting a child into any classroom is not the answer, there are a lot of variables that go into it.

Participant 6 also stated another determinant by making the placement recommendations as a team; they planned together and examined the progress of their students:

Ideally, we plan together. We would go through and even now when we are doing, because we are sort of departmentalized here. So I do math and science, along with cursive, along with all that other stuff but my two main classes I teach are math and science. So when we do math, we plan together and then we look at the test. Even the unit math test now, even in the general ed, we will look at those tests and we will glean through and pick out the questions that we think, we do not really need to talk about now. If you are looking at the DOK (the depth of knowledge) questions and you want a good
smattering of those, which we have been told we want a good, you know, we want a nice even balance of those... Then if you have three of the DOK threes that are just like I will pull my hair out trying to help these children get through these, I think we can alleviate at least two. That is fine. This is what we are zeroing in on. If we have got six questions that are you know, a simple one answer, then we can eliminate some of those because we do not need that. I do not want your whole test to be like that.

**Minor Theme 2.** The second minor theme that followed the second major theme coded was the decision of the reports to answer questions about the children as another determinant. The minor theme or node was gathered from the response of one of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 2 also shared that she practiced looking at the reports that come through, which allowed her to perceive the children in different aspects:

Looking at the report that comes through. A lot of times I will have questions about it because it is so thick and lengthy and to be able to get through it, you know people go through it... They read it and flip to the end to see what the recommendations are. You know going through and being able to say, “Oh okay. You know what I am seeing in class does that match up to this one test.” And trying to figure out how all of that works. I kind of saw that. Oh, I never saw that in class that could definitely affect this and being able to see that bigger picture that way. So being able to see the date really helps me in that aspect.
**Minor Theme 3.** The third minor theme that followed the second major theme coded was the formative assessments of the students as another determinant. The minor theme or node was gathered from the response of one of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 6 also stated another determinant by making the placement recommendations as a team; they plan together, as well as examine the progress of their students:

I can do other little formative assessments that give me blank, you know, simple questions. Simple one-answer questions can do that. It is the other ones. So you want a nice smattering. They take and we do this, I mean, she takes a test and she can even simplify it even more. She can look at the, if there are four responses, depending on the child she can cross out two of them and say which one. Other accommodations, she has to read the test to them. So you have got many different kinds of accommodations to go through one test. So you cannot just hand them a test and have it automatically be done. They sort of have to work through it. Everybody has got to work through it. It is not like I am going to give a test tomorrow, good luck. You know, I have already printed them out. We have already changed the ones. We are having a test on Thursday, we have already changed some of the questions. We have added more things in there.

**Major Theme 3**

The third major theme that emerged from the study was based on the third research question of how teachers use these determinants when making placement
recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. It was found that teachers employed the knowledge about the condition as a guide to the next steps or actions to take. The major theme received the highest number of references from the study, with five out of the six participants stating the said employment of determinant. The theme refers to again to how the teachers carefully and thoroughly assessed the students before making formal recommendations, gathering knowledge and other important information needed. Table 5 contains the breakdown of the major theme and minor themes while Figure 5 is the representation of the results in the second sub-research question using a tree map.

Table 5

*How Teachers use Determinants for Placement Recommendations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Number of Sources or References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Major Theme 3 or Node 3: Knowledge about the condition as a guide to</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the next steps or actions to take.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 1 or Node 1: Data collection to figure out the roots and</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>causes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 2 or Node 2: Proper communication with parents.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minor Theme 3 or Node 3: Test assessments to validate decisions</td>
<td>1</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Overall, the third major theme that emerged was the knowledge about the condition as a guide to the next steps or actions to take. The major theme was considered by the researcher as one of the three most vital results of the study. Participant 1 shared that he used the determinant of the knowledge of the condition as a guide to the next step or steps that they had to take for the benefit of the students with cognitive disabilities:
Yeah but in a resource setting, the thing is you just have to really know the kid and when it comes down to me… I really- you really want to have like an honest conversation with looking at your data and your IEP levels and stuff to think, okay where is the kid going to grow the most? That is how we made a lot of our decision last year. I think you have to consider what the objective was first of all. I think it needs to be on a case by case basis. Some of the kids I think, I do not know... They did change from fourth to fifth grade and some of their goals were kept the same because we wanted to see okay, is this just something they can do in resource or is this something they are able to apply in a class with twenty-five kids? So I think it is just going to depend on like if you have a kid with a severe enough disability that you are like okay, you need to think to yourself they have made the progress here but they are still… This goal that they were working on, yeah they were kind of working based on the standards but we need to take it up some more before we put them in a less restrictive environment. Because I know some of the students we teach, they have made progress on their goals but they are still so far away from being on the same page as what is done in the gen ed classroom that it would not do them any good to be put in a general ed classroom. And that their goals need to be just a little bit more, I guess rigorous before the placement is changed.

Participant 3 discussed that by knowing the condition and progress of the students, they could make their modifications accordingly:
Yeah I do not foresee the teacher making the modifications that the student needs even if I tell them about it. But the other thing is we are not going to cover all the same material that they are going to cover. So just this year the fact that even if they did make those modifications all the information being presented is not- I would rather have them learn something about it. And by presenting what is really important and just covering that more and repeating it during the time that we have to cover it rather than being at their classroom and hearing a whole bunch more of stuff that I did not plan on covering because it was less important.

Participant 4 also practiced and perceived the importance of knowledge concerning the condition of the students to guide them in the next actions:

I feel like, as a special ed group at our school, we could do a better job with… Because the county is so in tune with data and how it feeds instruction, I would like for someone who has done this in another area to give us more insight into that. Because when you have seven different IEPs with 50 something different goals and you’re expected to teach all of the standards for every single grade that you teach, it’s hard. So that’s always a struggle. I felt like because I have the general education background and it’s like get the standards. That’s an internal thing where I’m like… Ok, I’ve got to get all these standards in. But I’ve got to work to the IEP and it truly… You really can’t mesh them together as we’d like to; there’s too many standards. So I think some guidance in that area would be very beneficial to everyone.
Participant 5 also described the importance of having background and information about the students before making recommendations for them:

You know, I think it’s all the information - the old classic duration and intensity – all that kind of stuff. Like, do you see it every day or do you see a child going in a direction where they’re starting to bend a little bit, be a little more flexible, get used to the noise, get used to the structure of the classroom. Participant 6 stated that she used the determinants to allow or open up the next steps of their actions:

The third grade, the odd numbered grades, it is just crazy, but third grade is where we sort of, you sit down and you start kicking butt, you know. You have got to do this so you sort of have to reign it in and for a lot of kids that is hard regardless of what they are and then you have these, you know, you have got to deal with the parents who have their expectations and you know, what all they want and well last year and I am like I understand that but you have sort of got to give them some responsibility know, you have sort of have to do that.

**Minor Theme 1.** The first minor theme that followed the third major theme coded involved the data collection to figure out the roots and causes of the children’s condition. The minor theme or node was gathered from the responses of two of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 2 shared how the school used data collection to figure out the history and causes of the students with cognitive disabilities:
And she is so big on collecting data and looking at it that way and trying to do, she is also into behavioral therapy. So looking at it trying to identify, collect the data figure out what the root of it is and make that behavioral modification and see if that helps. So just really looking at the data that way I think. But you know her being on the younger end she could look at the data and say okay this kid would be better in this kind of classroom but I think by the time you get into fifth grade a lot of the times, I mean if you get up to fifth grade and they are not at least you know, somebody has kind of put up the red flag at least try these strategies like that, we failed as teachers.

Participant 5 used the data gathered and submitted to review the state of the children and see their situations based on the progress and growth reported:

Of course I always read the IEPs in the beginning and get to know the child, and anything with paperwork, coming from another teacher, another school, and summer has passed, developmental changes have been made, it looks different. I personally think that, since I have taught in so many different environments, and states, through three kids, I mean me never quite teaching from 21 years old. I really think I’ve seen it all, and I don’t want to sound… I just really love it. I really love my work so therefore I think that when you’re working in your passion, it’s not hard… It’s strategic, you have to think about it, but it’s not overwhelming. Yes, in my current environment we have potty-training data, we have behavior data, IEP data, home and school communication data – you know, how children react at a birthday party? How
do they react going to the park? How much outdoors time do they get? I really try to take in every piece of information because for my class, they’re so young right now and it’s important to see how they’re growing, but I think that when we’re looking for patterns either in behavior or affect, you know, that gives us a lot of insight into that child. You know, if you have a child that doesn’t want to come to the table because it’s loud, you have to take that into consideration. When you look at the kid who doesn’t want to jump in and play because the teacher didn’t see that a kid keeps taking his toy away every single time – all of this, observing, is so important to see not only how the child reacts to the group, but also how the group reacts to the child and all of that. So everything, teacher observation, I’m always telling my assistants that you know, when they’re playing this is not a time to check your email, it’s a time for you to see – do they know what an apple is in the kitchen? Do they know how to stir in the kitchen? Do they know how to play with one person, or two, or three, or are they fighting every morning? Everything gives us information.

**Minor Theme 2.** The second minor theme that followed the third major theme coded was the use of test assessments to validate decisions. The minor theme or node was gathered from the response of one of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 2 again highlighted how she utilized progress reviews and examinations to seek answers in making the correct recommendations:
Yes, and looking at like as far as the test result. Like if they were being tested for, if they were in the gen ed room, if like I said I have not had an experience where a kid was put into resource, but relying on that team and saying look at this data point and this is where they should be. They are way below and so this is the most appropriate setting for them. I rely a lot on the data and the expertise of others.

**Minor theme 3.** The third minor theme that followed the third major theme coded was proper communication with parents. The minor theme or node was gathered from the response of one of the six interviewed teachers. Participant 3 also used conversations and proper communication with parents before making recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities: “We just talked before or after school. We just touched base to see what kind of things he was behind in and mom and I and the teacher emailed back and forth too. We all kept in touch.”

**Cross Analysis of Results.** Both general and special education teachers showed a passionate attitude towards students with cognitive abilities the said attitude of the teachers were portrayed both by very experienced special and general educators and the relatively new teachers as well. All special education teachers also showed patience for modifications until their students have shown development and progress. Their years of experience varied from seven to 30 years. Finally, special education teachers with two to six years of experience showed a professional attitude towards recommendations through conversations and assessments.
All general and special education teachers valued the knowledge about the condition and progress about the student. Therefore, it can be inferred that both types of teachers focused on the knowledge, skills, and standing of the students before making their decisions. Meanwhile, general education teachers shared the significance of seeking the decision of the whole team, before making their final decision with regard to the placement recommendations of the children. It was notable that one special education teacher with 26 years of experience also considered the decision of the team before making the decision while the other two made no mention of decision collaboration or whatsoever. Only one general education teacher employed reports to answer questions about children. Finally, only one general education teacher employed formative assessments of students. From here, it can be inferred that general education teachers valued the reports and data available on children more than their counterparts as the special education teachers made no mention of consulting data before making their placement recommendations.

Three special education teachers mentioned the need for knowledge about the condition of the students to know the next steps that they should take. Meanwhile, there was one general education teacher who did not state the said determinant. This special education teacher placed more focus on the results of the test assessments to validate her decisions. The analysis also revealed that both sets of teachers utilized data collection in order to study further the roots and causes of the behaviors of the students before making placement recommendations on the LRE. Finally, there was
one special education who found the need for proper communication with parents as one of the determinants upon making recommendations.

Summary

The researcher employed a qualitative thematic analysis with the help of NVivo10 to encode the responses of the participants and establish themes or nodes that would address the three research questions of the study. Overall, three major themes or nodes emerged from the analysis or the coding of data. It was found that the major attitude that the teachers possessed regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school and how these affected placement recommendations was defined by passion toward students with cognitive abilities—the idea that more success meant growth. Two more perceptions emerged with the knowledge concerning the condition and progress of students as the main determinant when making placement recommendations for those with cognitive disabilities.

Lastly, the knowledge about the condition as a guide to the next steps or actions to take was used as a determinant when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. In Chapter 5, the (a) Summary of the Findings, (b) Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature, (c) Implications of the Findings for Practice, (d) Recommendations for Future Practice, and (e) Conclusion will be presented.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities influence placement recommendations teachers make for students with cognitive disabilities. Overall, six special education and general education teachers participated in the completion of the study. Through the qualitative thematic analysis of the interviews and the NVivo10 software, themes were established to address the research questions of the study. The main research question that guided the investigation asked how do the attitudes that the teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect the teachers’ placement recommendations. Two sub-questions also emerged to be addressed in this study: (a) what do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. And (b) how do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

Summary of the Findings

For the main research question of the study, it was found that teachers had a passionate attitude toward students with cognitive abilities—i.e., that more success meant growth. Other significant responses or perceptions also emerged (e.g., having patience for modifications until children develop fully and a professional attitude
toward recommendations through conversations and assessments). For the first research sub-question, which asked what the teachers identified as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities, it was found that the chief determinant was the knowledge about the condition and progress of the student. Other significant perceptions or practices shared by the teachers were the determinants of (a) the decision of the whole team, (b) reports to answer questions about children; and (c) formative assessments of students.

Finally, for the second research sub-question, which asked how teachers used these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities, it was determined that knowledge about the condition was used as a guide to the next steps or actions to take. Moreover, there were other important perceptions on the use of the determinants: (a) data collection to figure out the roots and causes, (b) test assessments to validate decisions, and (c) proper communication with parents.

**Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature**

In this section, the researcher will incorporate and examine the main findings from Chapter 4 into the literature presented in Chapter 2. This section provides the examination of the particular findings of this study along with the established reports and studies about the subject of teachers’ placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. The discussion is presented according to the research questions and the themes that emerged from the analysis in Chapter 4.
Main Research Question

The main research question for this study was as follows:

**RQ1:** How do the attitudes that the teachers possess regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affect the teachers’ placement recommendations?

**Answer/major theme 1.** There was a passionate attitude towards students with cognitive abilities, wherein more success meant growth. It was already determined in the literature by Gokdere (2012), along with Diken (1998) that there was a period or a time when teachers’ attitudes about placement of students in inclusive classrooms was quite unacceptable and unenthusiastic. They even found that “very few teachers are willing to have inclusive students in their classes and the rest are not, but they stated that school administration placed inclusion students in their classes without getting their ideas” (Gokdere, 2012, p. 2). However, in this study, the findings were contradictory of the statement above. In this study, teachers had majorly positive attitudes towards the idea of inclusion and placement recommendations of students. They shared how they were eager, supportive, and accommodating of the idea so that more and more students with cognitive disabilities can be helped to reach and discover their full potentials. As established in the first major theme, a passionate attitude toward students with cognitive abilities (more success means growth) received the most number of references and occurrences from four of the six participants. Another three participants of the study again explained that they valued patience for modifications until children developed fully, an
additional confirmation that teachers of today are far more accepting and willing to help students with cognitive disabilities. Finally, two participants stated that they have a professional attitude toward recommendations through conversations and assessments. Although not as fervent as the first two attitudes established, the last attitude determined still implied the compliance of the teachers with the need for proper and just placement recommendations for the students.

As shared by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and reported in Chapter 2, it was contended that “the milder the disability, the more positive were the teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion; the more training provided, the more comfortable the teachers felt; and the more teachers felt supported by administration, the better their attitude was towards inclusion” (p. 142). The factors explained by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) were also illustrated in the responses of the interviewed teachers. However, what materialized most from their shared perceptions and experiences was the zeal concerning their profession in improving and changing children’s lives through their dedication and hard work. Moreover, this matched the statement of Lee-Tarver (2006) that teachers were certainly becoming more aware, and ultimately involved, in the provision of services for students with cognitive disabilities.

**Sub-Question 1**

**SQ1:** What do teachers identify as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

**Answer/major theme 2.** The answer to this question was the following: knowledge about the condition and progress about the student. From the literature
reported in Chapter 2, Yell and Katsiyannis (2004) discussed that the IDEA 
established three factors that all IEP teams must pursue when making placement 
recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities. The first factor required a 
school district to assess and evaluate students to conclude if the students indeed had a 
qualifying disability that negatively affected their schooling. Secondly, once 
identified as a student with a disability that harmfully influence his/her education, the 
IEP team would then create an IEP. According to Yell and Katsiyannis (2004), the 
IEP is a detailed program based on the needs of a student. The law demanded that the 
IEP must include measureable goals, purposes, objectives, or benchmarks for the 
student to achieve his/her full potential despite their disability. Finally, from the 
goals, the team identified the specifically designed training the student needed and 
then determined the placement for the student—i.e., the place where the instruction 
could be delivered and where the goals could be accomplished (Yell & Katsiyannis, 
2004).

Based on the report of Yell and Katsiyannis (2004), the determinants of this 
current research study matched and supported all three factors stated. With the major 
theme being the determinant of having the knowledge about the condition and 
progress about the student, a strict evaluation or assessment must be performed first. 
Without the reviews of the tests and formative assessments, knowledge cannot be 
generated about the condition of the students with cognitive disabilities. In addition, 
once it is determined that the student indeed has a cognitive disability an IEP must be 
built. This involves the decision of the whole team. I also involved the earlier
discussed attitude of patience for modification of curriculum as well as the professional attitude toward the work being done, especially when making the final conclusions and decisions for the students. It can be concluded that teachers both from special and general education follow the basic steps mentioned above as determinants when deciding whether children with cognitive disabilities must be put through placement recommendations.

Sub-Question 2

SQ2: How do teachers use these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities?

Answer/ major theme 3. The answer to this question was as follows: knowledge about the condition as a guide to the next steps or actions.

The findings in the third research question were similar to the findings in the second research question. All of the following served as answers as to how the teachers used the determinants in making the correct decisions regarding student placement recommendations: (a) the determinants of knowledge about the condition as a guide to the next steps or actions to take, (b) data collection to figure out the roots and causes, (c) test assessments to validate decisions, and (d) proper communication with parents were all answers to how the teachers use the determinants in making the correct decisions regarding student placement recommendations.

Jordan et al. (2009) argued that preparing teachers for inclusion through training and experience was essential for the successful inclusion of students with
cognitive disabilities. This aspect plays an important role today, seeing that teachers are far more accepting and professional about the job that they are tasked to do. It was discovered in this study that teachers put importance and significance in thoroughly studying and assessing the condition of the students before making any formal and vital decisions that would affect the children under them. Szumski and Karwowski (2012) agreed that parental engagement and cooperation interceded in the optimistic influences of SES and placement in inclusive environments, matching the perception of one of the participants of the study.

**Implications of the Findings for Practice**

The subject at hand plays an important part in finding answers and solutions in making the educational state of children with cognitive disabilities a more comfortable and secure one. Through the proper treatment and handling of the teachers, students can be aided to receive better care and education from their mentors. This particular study can then be helpful in the general field and practice by using the experiences of the teachers as tools to develop their training and guidance on how to properly manage students with cognitive disabilities—addressing matters such as what factors and elements work for the teachers and what factors hinder them from fulfilling their responsibilities to the students. In addition, the findings of the study can be employed by the schools to amend and modify their curriculum based on the suggestions of the teachers on how to help their children in need of quality education and support, given their condition; this may assist others as well to conduct
more formalized assessments and reviews to generate more accurate findings based on the responses of the teachers.

**Recommendations for Future Practice**

The researcher believes that this particular study can still be improved by future scholars to generate more lasting and effective findings. The researcher thus recommends that future scholars

1. Include a bigger sample population of teachers as well as heed the other stakeholders involved, such as the school administrators, principals, teachers, and even the students to provide extra information about the attitude of the teachers toward the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities. The recommendation shall enlighten the readers more about the current state of the issue, both of the teachers and their students.

2. Include other sources of data, such as statistical data from the schools involved, to provide a well-established findings section, supported by accurate numbers, which can determine if the responses of the teachers indeed match the findings and positive effects of their placement recommendation to the students.

3. Lastly, a study with concrete awareness should be generated focusing on the side (i.e., the perceptions of the parents of the students with cognitive disabilities) to establish fair and unparalleled responses from those who have real experiences and perceptions about placement recommendations. By doing so, a triangulation of method can then be fully implemented—studying
and analyzing valid resources that would provide extensive angles of the issue being investigated (in this case the attitudes of the teachers towards student placement recommendation on students with cognitive disabilities).

**Summary and Conclusion**

In conclusion, the researcher was able to answer and justify the three research questions of the study as well as the purpose of the research. Through the thematic analysis of the interviews of the study, three major themes were established. For the main research question of the study, which asked how the attitudes that the teachers possessed regarding inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities in elementary school affected the teachers’ placement recommendations, it was found that teachers had a passionate attitude toward students with cognitive abilities—i.e., more success meant growth. The participants demonstrated their genuine concern for students with specific conditions by the words they used to describe the students and their efforts in making placement recommendations. What became very apparent during the analysis of the data was the lack of any concrete response as to what determinants teachers use when making placement recommendations. Respondents of the study stated placements recommendations were made on data but could not elaborate and be more specific. They only mentioned test results and assessments which were very minimal when analyzed against the population. The respondents could not also define what they mean by "progress or growth" of a student nor can they say how much progress or growth would encourage them to look at a different placement. It was evident in the participant’s responses that they cared about the
students with cognitive disabilities; however, they could not definitively identify what specifically they use as determinants for their recommendations. When pressed about conditions (a nuanced term for condition, label, or eligibility), the teachers stated that the condition or progress of the student would determine placement recommendations. What could not be described by any of the participants is what progress and how much had to be made for a student to be placed in a general education classroom other than to say if they make progress. This begs the question of how much progress does a student have to make and on what goals and objectives to be considered for a general education placement (which should have been the first consideration).

The first research sub-question, which asked what the teachers identified as determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities, it was found that the chief determinant was the knowledge about the condition and progress of the student. While it is commendable that teachers want to learn about the students in their charge and their conditions or disabilities, that alone does not contribute or dictate their placement recommendations, which is clearly outlined in IDEA regulations (C.F.R. §300.552), (Department of Education, 2004). Placement recommendations are to be made based on the goals and objectives contained in the IEP. Contrary to the regulations, teachers, as was the consensus of the participants in this study, are making placement recommendations based on the condition, or eligibility, of the student, not on the goals and objectives. The significance of this finding illustrates what might be a contributing factor in the large
number of students with cognitive disabilities that are segregated in self-contained classrooms across the country.

Finally, for the second research sub-question, which asked about how teachers used these determinants when making placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities, it was determined that knowledge about the condition, was used as a guide for the next steps or actions. The major and minor themes established in the study coincided with the literature presented in Chapter 2. In addition, new information and data was also gleaned with the current study presenting more positive and constructive behaviors of the teachers toward the placement recommendations of students with cognitive disabilities, as compared to the scholarly literature found earlier. The determinants and all other placement recommendations shared were similar and comparable to the current literature. This can be interpreted to mean that little progress has been made in including students with cognitive disabilities in general education classrooms. Too often, it would appear from this study, that teacher’s placement recommendations for students with cognitive disabilities are based on the condition of the child and then arbitrary impressions of what progress the student is making and on what. With no guidelines as to what progress a student with a cognitive disability needs to make and on what goals, the likelihood of more students with cognitive disabilities moving into general education classrooms will continue to be rare.

The concern of this researcher is that too many placement recommendations are made by on a condition of the student and what the student is able to achieve.
Meaning that if they are diagnosed with Down syndrome, which typically carries a
cognitive disability condition and are not performing at grade level (which should not
be expected of them), they are not recommended for placement in a general education
classroom. Recommendations for placement must be based on whether or not a
student with a cognitive disability can learn in the general education classroom and in
my opinion; the answer is almost always yes.

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APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH BIOGRAPHICAL INTERVIEW

1. What school do you currently teach at?

2. Which best describes your age:  22–30  31-40  41-50  51-60  61-70

3. Are you a special education teacher or a general education teacher?

4. Years of teaching experience (specify general education versus special education):
   1-5  6-10  11-20  21-30

5. Describe the types of classes and students you have taught. Have you had students with cognitive disabilities in any of your classes; if so what type of classes or model?

6. What is your background in knowing or working with students with cognitive disabilities?

7. Give me a picture of your college career. What did you major in? What type of coursework did you take?

8. How many courses in special education did you take? Were they mandatory? What do you remember from them? How did they influence how you teach? How did they influence how you perceive students with cognitive disabilities? Why were they effective or ineffective?

9. What did/do you enjoy most about teaching?

10. What, if any, changes would you like to see in special education in regards to teaching students with cognitive disabilities?
### Assumptions, Literature Sources, and Questions from Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumptions</th>
<th>Literature Source</th>
<th>Individual Interview (I)/Focus Group Interviews (G)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. General and special education teachers make placement recommendations based on their attitudes about the value of inclusion in implementing the LRE.</td>
<td>Avramidis &amp; Norwich, 2002; Booth, 2005; Duman et al., 2014; MacFarlane &amp; Woolfson, 2013; Larrivee &amp; Cook, 1979</td>
<td>I-2, 12-22; G-5-7, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. General and special education teachers make placement recommendations based on their attitudes about the abilities/capabilities of students with cognitive disabilities.</td>
<td>Bouck, 2006; Dessemontet et al., 2012; Trela &amp; Jimenez, 2013</td>
<td>I-2, 4, 6, 7; G-2-4, 7, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. General and special education teachers use data to make placement recommendations.</td>
<td>Kurz et al., 2012; Myklebust, 2006; Powell, 2010</td>
<td>I-1-3, 7; G-1, 5, 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. General and special education teachers make placement recommendations based on their attitudes about LRE.</td>
<td>Jones &amp; Hensley, 2012; Semmel et al., 1991</td>
<td>I-1, 6, 7, 12-22; G-9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. General and special education teachers practice the continuum of placement options when making placement recommendations.</td>
<td>Davis &amp; Elliott, 2012; Obiakor et al., 2012</td>
<td>I-1, 3, 6, 7; G-5, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. General and special education teachers make placement recommendations based on their experience of inclusion.</td>
<td>Fuchs et al., 2010; Zanna &amp; Rempel, 1998</td>
<td>I-2, 12-22; G-1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. General and special education teachers have positive attitudes about inclusion.</td>
<td>Buell et al., 1999; Richards, 2010; Sapon-Shevin, 2007; Scruggs &amp; Mastropieri, 1996; Van Reusen et al., 2000</td>
<td>I-12-22; G-7-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. General and special education teachers understand the moral value of inclusion.  
   - Koggel & Orme, 2010; Mayton, 2005; Wasserman et al., 2013

9. General and special education teachers need support to implement inclusion.  
   - Cook et al., 1999; Villa et al., 1996

10. General and special education teachers understand the laws and regulations regarding the LRE.  
   - Bateman & Chard, 1995; Ben-Porath, 2012; Etscheidt, 2006; Palley, 2006; Polat, 2010; Powell, 2011; Yell & Katsiyannais, 2006; Yell et al., 2013
APPENDIX B
OPEN-ENDED INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What formalized placement recommendation-making process do you employ for students with cognitive disabilities? Please describe.

2. How do you determine if a student with a cognitive disability should be recommended for a general education classroom? How does the type of model (inclusion, Para, Team-teaching) affect your recommendations?

3. How does the amount and/or type of modifications that would be required affect your placement recommendations? Is there a concern for the student, for the teacher? Why?

4. What resources would you need to successfully include a student with a cognitive disability in a general education classroom? Training? Supports and/or assistance?

5. What support and/or assistance do you receive from administration to successfully implement inclusion of students with disabilities? With students with cognitive disabilities? Other teachers?

6. Can you describe the best learning environment for a student with a cognitive disability? Do you feel inclusive classrooms are appropriate learning environments for students with cognitive disabilities? Why or why not?

7. Where do you feel that special education teachers can best meet the needs of students who require significant modifications to the curriculum? Why?
8. Describe the type of data you use to base your placement recommendations on. 
   Test scores? Work Samples? Behavior Charts?

9. Describe your knowledge of special education law including your level of 
   confidence in implementing the law.

10. Considering the law and actual practice, what does least restrictive environment 
    (LRE) mean to you?

11. The law does not actually use the word “inclusion.” What does the word mean to 
    you and how do you apply it in practice?

Gen Ed - You are told that you will have a student with a cognitive disability in your 
    class next year.

Sp Ed – You are told that you will team teach next year in order to include a student 
    with a cognitive disability in the general education classroom.

Please decide which word best describes your feelings and why:

9. Enthusiastic or Unenthusiastic

10. Comfortable or Uncomfortable

11. Angry or Not angry

12. Unwilling or Willing

13. Confident or Insecure

14. Nervous or Calm

15. Annoyed or Indifferent

16. Accepting or Opposing

17. Prepared or Unprepared
18. Resistant or Cooperative

19. Excited or Scared

Is there anything you would like to add to the discussion that I have not covered?
APPENDIX C:

GROUP QUESTIONS

1. How do you operationally define inclusion?
   a. Is the definition of inclusion the same in all situations or is it different for each student?
   b. Is inclusion (and its goals) defined differently for different populations?
   c. How does your definition of inclusion match with those described in the literature?

2. What is your definition of “cognitive disability?”

3. What are your beliefs regarding inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities?
   a. What are the benefits of inclusion?
   b. Why do we do it?
   c. Why do you think parents of students with cognitive disabilities want them to be included?

4. What are your emotional reactions to inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities?

5. What types of past experiences have influenced your current understanding of inclusion and your feelings towards it?

6. How do you make recommendations about instructional placements? What is your school’s “formal” procedure?
a. What are the characteristics of students with cognitive disabilities that you believe are good candidates for inclusion?

b. How do you consider issues related to LRE as dictated by circuit court recommendations, such as continuum of placement options, portability of services and supports, relative educational benefit of placement options, impact on general education peers, consideration of costs, and participation with general education peers to the maximum extent appropriate?

c. What would cause you to discontinue inclusion and recommend moving a child to a more restrictive placement?

d. Are recommendations need-based (student-centered) or resource-based (availability of supports and services drive placement recommendations)?

e. How are your IEP meetings conducted? Who on the IEP team manages the IEP meeting? What formal procedures do you have in place for the conduct of an IEP meeting?

7. On what information sources (e.g., personal experiences, second-hand experience, research/best practices, data) do you draw when making these recommendations?

8. What outcomes do you wish to see as a result of students with cognitive disabilities participating in general education and do you think students are achieving these outcomes?

9. What are your perceptions of the overall effectiveness of your schools’ inclusion efforts?
10. Using the following domains of functioning as a general framework, what do you feel are the specific outcomes that parents wish to see in their children as a result of inclusion? Do parents perceive these results as being attained?
   a. Academic/Vocational Skills
   b. Communication
   c. Behavioral/Social-Emotional Functioning
   d. Community Integration and Normalization
   e. Recreational/Leisure Skill

11. What does LRE mean to you? How do you ensure you are providing the LRE?
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

My signature below indicates that I have read the information provided and have decided to participate in the study titled, How Special and General Education Teachers Negotiate Placement Recommendations for Students with Cognitive Disabilities, to be conducted between the dates of March 2014 to December 2014. I understand the purpose of the research project is to understand if, and how, general and special education teachers’ attitudes about inclusion, LRE, and students with cognitive disabilities have an impact on placement recommendations they make for students with cognitive disabilities. Gaining an understanding of all the factors involved in placement recommendation-making may enable school districts to formulate professional development training and guidelines for increasing the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities.

1. Participant will respond to open-ended and in-depth biographical questions in an interview.

2. Participant will respond to open-ended and in-depth individual questions in an interview.

3. Participant will respond to open-ended and in-depth focus group questions in an interview.

Although there may be no direct benefit to the participant, the potential benefits of the study may allow teachers to acknowledge their attitudes and understanding of the least restrictive environment (LRE), inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities.
as it relates the placement recommendations of students with cognitive disabilities. Self-reflection allows one to look at what they do and turn them into positive, resolute statements that can give you concrete goals on which to focus. The placement goal for all students with disabilities is to have 90% of the students educated 80% of the time in a general education classroom. This research will examine the factors, or determinants involved in the placement recommendation-making process. This study may be instrumental in helping teachers acknowledge the importance of their attitudes and understanding of the least restrictive environment (LRE), inclusion, and students with cognitive disabilities as it relates the placement recommendations of students with cognitive disabilities.

Any unauthorized disclosure of confidential information is illegal as provided in the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1973 (FERPA) and in the implementing federal regulations found in 34 CFR Part 99. The participation in a research study by school staff is strictly voluntary. The participant will be asked to sign two copies of the consent letter, the researcher will keep one and participant will keep a copy.

Any data, datasets, or outputs that may be generated from data collection efforts throughout the duration of the research study are confidential and the data are to be protected. Data will not be distributed to any unauthorized person. Data with names or other identifiers will be disposed of when their use is complete.
I agree to the following conditions with the understanding that I can withdraw from the study at any time should I choose to discontinue participation.

- The identity of participants will be protected. No pictures will be used. In all written material, including data collection sheets, produced either for this descriptive study or for any other appropriate professional presentation purpose, pseudonyms (numbers) will be used by the researcher.

- Information gathered during the course of the project will become part of the data analysis and may contribute to published research reports and presentations. All data will be stored electronically for a period of three years on a password-protected electronic storage device. At the end of the three-year period the data will be deleted and any written material shredded.

- There are no foreseeable inconveniences or risks involved to the person participating in the study.

- Participation in the study is voluntary and will not affect employment status or annual evaluations. If I decide to withdraw permission after the study begins, I will notify the researcher of my recommendation.

You will sign two copies of the consent form. One copy will be retained with the data and one copy will be given to you. If further information is needed regarding the research study, I can contact Kathy Everett at 678-230-6985.
Signature______________________________________________________________________________

Participant Date

Signature______________________________________________________________________________

Researcher Date
## APPENDIX E

**Percentage Time Spent in General Education by Students Ages Six through Twenty-one Served under IDEA Part B**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability</th>
<th>Percentage of Time Inside the Regular Class,</th>
<th>Other Environments&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disability</strong></td>
<td><strong>80% or more of the day</strong></td>
<td><strong>40% to 79% of the day</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All disabilities</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>19.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>39.0</td>
<td>18.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf-blindness</td>
<td>27.0</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental delay&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>43.1</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing impairment</td>
<td>56.7</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual disabilities</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>16.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Orthopedic impairment</td>
<td>54.0</td>
<td>16.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other health impairment</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disabilities</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or language impairment</td>
<td>86.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traumatic brain injury</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note. a Percentage of time spent inside the regular class is defined as the number of hours the student spends each day inside the regular classroom, divided by the total number of hours in the school day (including lunch, recess, and study periods), multiplied by 100. b Students who received special education and related services outside the regular classroom for less than 21 percent of the school day were classified in the inside the regular class 80% or more of the day category. c "Other environments" consists of separate school, residential facility, homebound and or hospital environment, correctional facilities, and parentally placed in private schools. d States’ use of the developmental delay category is optional for children ages 3 through 9 and is not applicable to children older than 9 years of age. For more information on students ages 6 through 9 reported under the category of developmental delay and states with differences in developmental delay reporting practices, see exhibits B-2 and B-3 in Appendix F. Percentage was calculated by dividing the number of students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, in the disability category and the educational environment by the total number of students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA, Part B, in the disability category and all educational environments for that year, then multiplying the result by 100. The sum of row percentages may not total 100 because of rounding.

Adapted from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS), OMB 1820-0517: “Part B, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Implementation of FAPE Requirements,” 2011. These data are for 50 states, DC, PR, and the four outlying areas. Data for BIE schools were not available. Data were accessed fall 2012. For actual data used, go to http://www.ed.gov/about/reports/annual/osep.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impairment</th>
<th>64.3</th>
<th>13.1</th>
<th>11.3</th>
<th>11.4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visual impairment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</table>