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What Makes you so Good? Highly Effective General Education Teachers Serving Students with Special Education Needs

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WHAT MAKES YOU SO GOOD? HIGHLY EFFECTIVE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS SERVING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

WHAT MAKES YOU SO GOOD? HIGHLY EFFECTIVE GENERAL EDUCATION TEACHERS SERVING STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

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Teachers are the single most important factor in student learning, including the learning of students who receive special education services. Most students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom but general education teachers often express feeling underprepared to meet their diverse needs. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of general education teachers in a traditional high school environment who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs in hopes of finding commonalities that could be replicated for other teachers.

In this study, six positive deviant general education teachers participated in interviews and observations which were transcribed and coded. Thematic analysis indicated highly effective general education teachers care about and build relationships with all students, collaborate, and learn from their robust experiences serving students with disabilities. These findings indicate that school leaders should invest in developing general education teachers' abilities to collaborate, communicate, demonstrate kindness and build relationships. Additionally, all six of the teachers in this study credited their effectiveness to their past experiences serving students with challenging needs, teaching

classes with a large number of students with special education needs enrolled, and attending IEP meetings. In fact, 40.9% of all final interview data and 24.2% of all final observation data proved this to be a major theme in the research. Therefore, all general education teachers need hands-on experience serving students with special education needs and attending IEP meetings in order to build their capacity to better serve all learners.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

All students can and will learn (Brookhart, 2017; Goksoy, 2018; Kauffman, Anastasiou, & Maag, 2017). In 2016, there were more than 6 million students ages 6-21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and required specialized instruction (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Often, the best learning environment for students with disabilities is the general education classroom (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Schwab, Holzinger, Krammer, Gebhardt, & Hessels, 2015; Walther-Thomas, 1997). Of the 6 million students who received special services under IDEA in 2016, 94.9% (or about 5.7 million) spent at least 80% of their school day in the general education classroom. Similarly, only 13.4% of the students spent less than 40% of their day in a general education classroom in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Since nearly all students with special education needs spend the majority of their school day immersed in general education environments, general education teachers must be equipped with the pedagogical skills to know how to serve them and meet their needs. Yet, many general education teachers express feeling underprepared to meet the diverse needs of their students who receive special education services (Blanton, et al., 2011; Brownell, Adams, & Sindelar, 2006; MetLife, Inc., 2008; MetLife, Inc., 2012; Schwab, et al., 2015; Thompson, 2017; Wanzenried, 1998).

Ronald Edmonds, a late Harvard University professor, is commonly known for teaching that all children can learn at high levels if they attend highly effective schools with highly effective teachers. He is also known for coining the phrase “All children can learn” (Leverett, 2006). Regardless of a child’s poverty level, skin color, English-

speaking proficiency, disability or other factors that may be adversely impacting them, students who face challenges are as capable as any other children in society (Ford, 2014; Leverett, 2006; OECD, 2005). Schools must welcome diversity to enhance academic outcomes for students, including those with disabilities (Larkin, Nihill, & Devli, 2014). Lack of progress and learning cannot be blamed on student skills or demographic. Based on the premise that all students can learn, student achievement is dependent on the teacher's capacity to vary their instructional approaches, differentiate instruction, provide high quality instruction and use best practice strategies (Blanton et al., 2011; Ferguson, Phillips, Rowley, & Friedlander, 2015; Leverett, 2006; Shani & Hebel, 2016). Highly effective teachers expect greatness, challenge and motivate students, and believe that all children can learn (Brookhart, 2017; Goksoy, 2018).

Every student deserves a highly effective teacher because teacher behavior and decision making impact student achievement (Crockett, Billingsley, & Boscardin, 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Tzivinikou, 2015b). In fact, teachers are the single most important factor in school effectiveness and influencing student achievement (Crockett, et. al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Quinn, 2014; OECD, 2005; Tzivinikou, 2015b). Teachers have more of an impact on student learning than other factors such as student behavior, students' skills, school climate, leadership and curriculum (Crockett, et al., 2012). When it comes to student performance on reading and math tests, teacher effectiveness has even been proven to be two to three times more impactful on student outcomes than many other factors (RAND, 2012). Tucker (2011) wrote extensively about teacher effectiveness and teacher quality when he compared and evaluated top performing education systems.

Since teachers have such a profound influence on student learning, it is important for school districts to invest in the development of teachers' skills (Oon-Seng, 2012).

Special education has a complex system of laws, rules, and regulations that protect students' rights, yet achievement gaps exist. For example, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is 10% lower than the graduation rate for non-disabled students (Aud et al., 2010). Outside of the school system, the unemployment rate for persons with a disability was 8% in 2018- more than twice the rate of those with no disability (3.7%) (Persons with a Disability: Labor Force Characteristics, 2019). Students with special education needs cannot afford general education teachers that are inadequately prepared to meet their needs.

Arrah (2013) writes that while teachers' perceptions of students with special needs are often favorable and they may enjoy providing services to them, the same group of teachers indicated concern about the "lack of sufficient resources and training available to do so" (p. 3). Many teachers report they do not feel adequately prepared for their job or to be accountable for the achievement of learners with disabilities (Blanton et al., 2011). Schwab et. al (2015) reiterates, "...teachers are not always qualified to teach children with special education needs" (p. 239). Despite their varied needs, students with disabilities deserve a robust learning environment and should be given the opportunity to be included with their peers and community (Kauffman et al., 2017). Therefore, schools have an obligation to provide children with special education needs general education teachers who are highly qualified, effective, and sufficiently prepared to meet all students' needs.

Both pre-service and in-service training is how teachers acquire their knowledge and pedagogical skills for teaching students. The dominant focus of pre-service education programs is understanding what it means to be a teacher and learning how to be a teacher (T. Ryan, Young, & Kraglund-Gauthier, 2017). Pre-service education often includes coursework, training, emotional and mentorship support (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004). The Government Accountability Office (2009) found that teacher candidates are expected to take one course focused on special education in 67% of secondary education programs. Additionally, one-third of colleges require special education training during student teaching and 11% require teacher candidates to participate in an IEP team meeting or collaboration process (Government Accountability Office, 2009). Upon entering the profession, teachers are expected to perform at high levels immediately (Wong & Wong, 2001). To support teachers in the field, school districts often offer in-service training. The dominant focus of in-service is improving practitioner skills and promoting student outcomes. In-service education traditionally involves activities and courses in which practicing teachers may participate for the purpose of enhancing their professional skills, knowledge and interest, subsequent to their initial training program (Osamwonyi, 2016). Effective trainings also include a combination of modeling, written instruction, rehearsal, teacher self-evaluation, and feedback (Brock et al., 2017; Tzivinikou, 2015b). Regardless of where and how teachers are provided their training, it is important they acquire the skills and knowledge to serve all students.

Predictably, many skills required for quality teaching instruction and effective pedagogical skills cannot only be learned at a university or in training; knowledge is best acquired through practice, performance, and failure. Teachers who learn by doing

experience less gap between knowing and doing (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton (2000) named this phenomenon the knowing-doing gap. The authors explain that the knowing-doing gap is the concept that merely having knowledge is not sufficient in demonstrating expertise. There is a loose and imperfect relationship that creates a gap between people knowing what to do and their ability to act on that knowledge. Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) outline the five main explanations as to why the knowing-doing gap exists:

- All talk, no action: This is often demonstrated by companies, and often their management, who are good at talking but lack action related to that talk. Smart talk is confused with good performance (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Companies tend to mistake talking for action, as seen when flashy, well-rehearsed presentations are more valued than actual action (Zeleny, 2008). There must be a point when organizations stop talking about their problems and move towards solutions.
- Memory and habit: Knowing-doing gaps can be created when memory, habit and ritual impede a person's ability to act in new ways. People in organizations often use memory as a substitute for new thinking and embedded precedents and customs become substitute for taking more wise action (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). This is demonstrated when people experience thoughts and utterances, but do not act accordingly because unconscious forces and habits drive behavior (Fletcher & Oxon, 2012). Fletcher and Oxon (2012) explain that people have their “experiencing self” and “reflecting self”. One’s reflecting self is controlled by their intentions and requires extensive effort to output; one’s experiencing self acts on gratification and automatic triggers so that no effort is required. Knowing-

doing gaps are then created when the two are at odds; in order to create change, the two must align.

- Fear and distrust: Fear and distrust can also create gaps in action and performance. Employees, including general education teachers, often have a fear of costly mistakes and punishment if mistakes are made. Because employers may punish mistakes instead of punishing inaction, employees often complete old habits that are more safe instead trying new actions that may actually better the organization (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). If fear was driven out, then knowledge could be readily developed and shared. Palmer & Louis (2017) conducted a study on the achievement gaps present between African American and Caucasian students. They found that teachers often feel hesitant to institute change addressing culturally informed instruction or to participate in trainings about student demographics for fear of being of being viewed as or called racist.
- Poor measurement of outcomes: People tend to be hyper-aware of what is being measured, and measurements conducted by organizations are often complex. When measurements focus on outcomes rather than credit where people are in the process, change can be daunting and feel unattainable (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).
- Internal competition among employee: Incentives like “employee of the month” diminish teamwork and collaboration within a company (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Leaders should believe in and value all employees. Emphasizing competition creates a culture where teachers and students do their best and beat their personal goals rather than working with others or obtaining content mastery (Schapiro et al., 2009).

Similar to the knowing-doing gap, Fletcher and Oxon (2012) write that some people go through life saying one thing but doing another, effectively living one life but wishing for something different. In order to close this gap, behavior must be altered. These same ideas hold true of the school system through general education teachers' impact on students with special education needs. Effective general education teachers must be able to turn their knowledge into organized action and do things other teachers will not or cannot do so that all students' needs can be met. Effective teachers close the knowing-doing gap. School leaders should strive to understand what makes some general education teachers successful in serving students with disabilities so that they may employ and develop other teachers to do the same.

Purpose Statement

It is crucial to a child's success to be educated by effective teachers that believe all students can learn. Schools have an obligation to meet the complex needs of all learners, including those with disabilities. Most students with disabilities are included in the general education classroom, so general education teachers must have robust knowledge about special education and the ability to apply that knowledge in their classrooms. However, many general education teachers indicate feeling unprepared and unable to meet the needs of students with disabilities (Blanton, et al., 2011; MetLife, Inc., 2008; MetLife, Inc., 2012; Thompson, 2017). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of general education teachers in a traditional high school environment who were highly effective in serving students with special education needs in hopes of finding commonalities between the teachers that can be replicated.

Central Research Question

What is the experience of high school general education teachers who successfully meet the needs of students with special education needs in their general education classrooms?

Definition of Terms

Accommodations and Modifications. Accommodations are adaptations that provide a student access to the general curriculum but do not fundamentally alter the learning goal or grade-level standard. With accommodations, students are still expected to learn and demonstrate the same content knowledge as their general education peers. Modifications, in contrast to accommodations, are changes made to curriculum and assessments that fundamentally alter the learning goal or grade-level expectations and content (Lee Ann Jung, 2017).

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). According to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA, schools must provide all students with an education at the public's expense. Schools must also conform with the individualized education program of each student (Sumbera et al., 2014).

Individualized Education Program (IEP). A student with a verified disability that impedes their education must have an IEP created and developed by that student's team. The student's team must consist of the parents of the child, at least one special education teacher, a school district representative, at least one general education teacher, and an individual who can help the team interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results. This legally binding document should be reviewed and revised at least once per year.

The IEP must include the following: a description of how the student is currently performing; a description of how the disability affects his or her participation and progress in the general education classroom; measurable goals, how the student will be assessed and how progress will be reported to parents or guardians; a description of special education and related services that will be provided to the student, including school supports, personnel, accommodations and modifications. There should also be a description of the type of services, frequency, location, and amount of service required; accommodations and modifications needed for the student to participate in district and state testing or a description of how the student will be assessed should these exams not be appropriate; a description of other services or accommodations needed like transition planning, assistive technology, behavior plans, and participation with English speakers of other languages (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007).

Knowing-Doing Gap. The idea that merely having knowledge is not good enough; there is a gap that exists between knowing what to do and actually putting that knowledge into action and implementing the learning. (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). This mandated requirement from IDEA, ensures that students with disabilities will be provided FAPE with their general education peers to the maximum extent appropriate (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007). When IEP teams decide on a student's LRE, they should consider accommodations in the general education environment first before considering alternative educational settings.

Positive Deviant. Someone who is faced with a widely shared problem and with similar conditions and context as others in their same community or organization. A positive deviant is able to successfully outshine performance by developing strategies and

behaviors to be successful despite access to the same resources as their peers (*Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach*, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Highly effective teachers have more of an impact on student learning than other factors such as student behavior, students' skills, school climate, and curriculum (Crockett, et al., 2012). Overwhelming evidence suggests that classroom teachers are the single most important factor in school effectiveness and influencing student achievement (Crockett, et. al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Quinn, 2014; OECD, 2005; Tzivinikou, 2015b). In 2016, there were more than six million students served under IDEA that required special services (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Yet, general education teachers often report they do not feel adequately prepared to teach learners with disabilities (Blanton, et al., 2011; Brownell et al., 2006; MetLife, Inc., 2008; MetLife, Inc., 2012; Schwab, et al., 2015; Thompson, 2017; Wanzenried, 1998).

Examples exist of general education teachers who are able to navigate the complexity of serving students with disabilities and positively impact the achievement of students with special education needs in the general education environment. However, there is a gap in research explaining how some teachers are more successful in meeting the diverse needs of all students. While a significant amount of research explains the complexity of special education and the challenges it poses to general education teachers, little research has been conducted on the teachers who use their pedagogical skills to overcome and close achievement gaps for students with special needs. General education teachers are the key to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. This study explored the experiences of highly effective general education teachers through

interviews and classroom observations. Identifying how high achieving teachers meet the unique learning needs of all students, including those with special education needs, may help school districts develop training and resources for other teachers who are less effective or feel underprepared.

Outline of the Study

This dissertation is divided into several chapters. Chapter One provides information regarding the need for general education teachers to have appropriate knowledge and skills to serve students with special education needs. It also includes the purpose for the study, the research question, definition of terms, and highlights the significance of the social impact this study will have. Chapter Two provides an explanation of why this study used the Positive Deviance research approach. Chapter Three explains the methodology, including participant selection and demographics, data collection procedures, accuracy checks of the interviews and observations, assumptions and limitations, data analysis procedures, and the role of the researcher for this qualitative study. Chapter Four outlines the interview data collected. Chapter Five outlines the observation data collected. Chapter Six explains the analysis and themes that emerged from all the data collected. Finally, Chapter Seven provides a conclusion to the study and recommendations for further studies.

Chapter 2 Positive Deviance Approach

Overview of the Positive Deviance Approach

The positive deviance research approach was developed in the 1960s as a strengths-based approach to solve social and behavioral problems. The approach is grounded in the idea that an organization, or in this case a school, has assets and resources that may be currently underutilized or under studied (Sternin et al., 2010). The mission statement of the positive deviance approach is "Promoting social change from the inside out, leveraging local wisdom for global impact" ("Positive Deviance Background, Mission, Terms, and Efficiency and Impact," n.d.). The solution to the research problem in a positive deviance based study already exists within the system and must be unveiled by the researcher (*Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach*, 2010). The concept of positive deviance is based on the notion that in every community or organization, there are some individuals who are able to defy odds and achieve success. Individuals' uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies enable them to find better solutions to problems than their like-peers who face the same challenges and barriers even though they have access to the same resources (*Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach*, 2010). Positive deviance research emphasizes the *practice* of individuals and not just their knowledge. This idea aligns with the concept of the knowing-doing gap.

History of the Positive Deviance Approach

The positive deviance research approach was first used in the 1960s in a nutrition study in which the original researchers, Sternin et al., (2010) studied healthy children who lived with very poor families and in communities with high levels of malnutrition.

The researchers documented that healthy children existed in these largely unhealthy communities despite the norm by which they were surrounded. Most importantly, the researchers were able to identify specific behavior these healthy children exhibited that allowed them to defy the odds and remain healthy. The results illuminated the factors positively impacting the overall health of children, providing positive replicative strategies for other communities to focus on rather than focusing on trying to extinguish what was going wrong for unhealthy children (Sternin et al., 2010). With the widespread success of the positive deviance research approach, professionals in other fields began using it for research too; public safety, hospital reform, and education are on the list of entities recently improved by positive deviance research ("Positive Deviance Background, Mission, Terms, and Efficiency and Impact," n.d.). Some organizations currently supporting positive deviance research include, but are not limited to, the CDC, UNICEF, Peace Corps, USAID, Children's Aid Society, United Nations, and the Rockefeller Foundation. As of 2016, there were a total of 116 positive deviance research projects impacting a total of 30,817,295 lives (Springer et al., 2016).

Positive Deviant

A positive deviant is someone who is faced with a widely shared problem and with similar conditions and context as others in their same community or organization. A positive deviant is able to successfully outshine performance by developing strategies and behaviors to be successful despite access to the same resources as their peers (*Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach*, 2010).

Positive Deviance in this Research Study

The *Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach* (2010) outlines five recommended steps for researchers planning a positive deviance study. These steps and guidelines were considered when outlining elements of this research study below.

Step 1: Define. In this study, the problem addressed is the need for highly effective general education teachers to serve students with disabilities. It is appropriate to use the positive deviance approach for this research study because the issue of general education teachers meeting the needs of students who receive special education services is a problem that is not exclusively technical; this problem is also relational and requires behavioral and social change within school districts. The problem is complex and other solutions have not yet been defined in other research studies.

In this case study, the community is defined as a traditional public high school in a metropolitan suburban setting in a midwestern state. The researcher is a member of this secondary school community and serves as a tenured special education teacher. The researcher has served as a co-teacher in a variety of classrooms and departments and supports students with special education needs across different content areas. As an invested member of the school, the researcher has a deep respect for the community, staff, students, parents, stakeholders, and culture of the school. More about the role of the researcher in this study is explained in Chapter Three of this study.

Step 2: Determine the presence of positive deviants. In this study, the positive deviants are general education teachers in a high school setting who are tasked with meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and are highly effective in doing so. Despite the complexity of serving students with varied

needs, these teachers regularly demonstrate success in a complex field. Their behaviors and strategies were documented in order to identify commonalities that school districts may replicate in order to train and support other teachers responsible for meeting the needs of students who receive special education services.

Step 3: Discover. The uncommon yet successful behaviors and strategies of positive deviants were discovered through inquiry and observation. The interviews and observations led the researcher to discover themes within demonstrably successful behaviors and strategies among general education teachers who close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to serving students with special education needs. The positive deviants involved in the research process acted as co-researchers who are also invested in developing replicable solutions to the community problem. Through interviews, observations, and thematic analysis of the teacher profiles, the researcher discovered common behaviors and strategies demonstrated by the positive deviants in their daily practice.

Step 4: Design. Proposals for school districts and recommended potential activities for the betterment of general education teachers are outlined in a later chapter of this dissertation.

Step 5: Monitor. This dissertation will not monitor and evaluate the results of school districts implementation of these recommended activities. This is a suggested action for future research studies.

Chapter 3 Research Methods

Introduction

All students can learn and teachers are the single most influential factor in affecting student performance (Crockett, et. al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; OECD, 2005; Oon-Seng, 2012; Quinn, 2014; RAND, 2012; Tziviikov, 2005b). With 6 million students served under IDEA, and 95% of them spending 80% of their day in the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2018), schools must employ teachers with the knowledge and skills to appropriately serve students with disabilities. Unfortunately, many general education teachers express feeling underprepared to meet the diverse needs of their students with special education needs (Blanton, et al., 2011; Brownell et al., 2006; MetLife, Inc., 2008; MetLife, Inc., 2012; Schwab, et al., 2015; Thompson, 2017; Wanzenried, 1998). Failing to appropriately serve students who receive special education services can lead to the widening in already existing achievement gaps. However, in all schools there are teachers who are able to effectively serve students with disabilities. While a significant amount of research explains the complexity of special education and the challenges it poses to general education teachers, little research has been conducted on the positive deviant general education teachers who practice highly effective strategies and close achievement gaps for students with special needs. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to explore the experiences of general education teachers in a traditional high school environment who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs in hopes of finding replicable commonalities among the positive deviant teachers.

Central Research Question

What is the experience of high school general education teachers who successfully meet the needs of students with special education needs in their general education classrooms?

Qualitative Research Design

Qualitative studies provide data that can be used to add dimension to research that cannot be quantified in numerical data (Pathak et al., 2013). A qualitative research approach was appropriate in this study because qualitative research is used to solve a complex research problem with many variables and to explore the meaning of individual experiences in a social problem (Creswell, 2014; Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). This study aimed to answer an important question about general education teacher experiences, thoughts, and actions as they effectively serve students with special education needs. The researcher in this study wanted to learn from participants as they act as co-researchers looking to find commonalities in the lived experiences of highly effective general education teachers (Creswell, 2012; Creswell, 2014; Proctor, 2018). The qualitative process is appropriate for this study because it allows for a more flexible structure. Additionally, the procedures, data collection, and analysis were done in a way that allowed for interpretation by the researcher (Creswell, 2014).

Case study. A case study research approach was chosen for this study because it provided the structure to conduct an intensive holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, a school. This allowed the researcher to describe, interpret, and evaluate the meaning general education teachers have created and the experiences they have had within their service to students with special education needs in their classrooms

(Merriam, 1998). The researcher in this case study sought to discover what can be learned about one specific case through thorough and unique investigation (Stake, 2005). A case study can be used to solve socially complex issues with multiple variables of importance so that the researcher can tightly control conditions (Merriam, 1998). Similarly, using a case study approach allowed the researcher to "fence in" or provide a bounded system in what was being studied (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith, 1978). In this study, the researcher wanted to tightly control variables by selecting participants from one school.

Additionally, a case study approach was appropriate for this study because the researcher wished to better understand general education teachers as they engaged in action and interaction (Collins & Noblit, 1978). Using a case study approach allowed for focus on discovery, insight, and understanding of the phenomenon from the perspective of those being studied (Merriam, 1998). Finally, conducting a case study was useful because it brought understanding that helped improve practice, evaluate a program, and helped structure future research that may wish to broaden the scope of the study (Merriam, 1998).

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was appropriate for this research study because in purposive sampling, also known as judgement sampling, the researcher intentionally and nonrandomly selected research participants due to the qualities each participant possessed (Ilker, Sulaiman, & Rukayya, 2016). Additionally, purposive sampling allowed the researcher to identify and select individuals or groups of individuals that were proficient and well-informed with the phenomenon of interest (J. W. Creswell & Plano Clark, 2010). The researcher in this study had the flexibility to decide what needed to be

uncovered in the study and set out to find people who could and were willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Bernard, 2002).

In a case study where participants were selected using purposive sampling, it was important that the participants were available and willing to participate and had the ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner (Bernard, 2002; Spradley, 1979). This sampling technique did not require underlying theories or a set number of participants (Ilker et al., 2016). However, Creswell (2014) suggests that a qualitative study include a sample size ranging from three to ten participants, in this case six participants.

Extreme/Deviant case sampling. This specific form of purposive sampling was used for this research study because it is designed to focus on individuals that are unusual or atypical- such as positive deviants. It is more often used when researchers are developing best practice guidelines and will use extreme case sampling to look for variations or commonalities in people to explain why they are successfully atypical (Ilker et al., 2016).

Participants

The participants in this study were highly effective teachers selected using deviant case sampling goals. Tripod Education Partners (2016) emphasizes that effective teachers provide their students with personal and curricular support as well as guarantee them academic press. Further, effective teachers willingly serve a wide range of students by identifying individual student's needs through the relationships they build with them. These teachers motivate the learners in their classrooms, provide clear instruction that is appropriately challenging, clarify misunderstandings by monitoring student progress

regularly and develop safe, structured classrooms (Tripod Education Partners, 2016). In relation to special education, effective teachers welcome the idea of inclusion, engage the special education team in their instruction, collaborate with student team members to aide in the development in the implementation and development of the student's IEP, and provide appropriate supports, accommodations, and modifications. The focus in selecting teachers for this study was especially on choosing participants who best represented the target qualities of effective teaching and with whom the researcher was able to establish the most productive relationship (Maxwell, 2013).

Participant selection. The target school's principal, assistant principal, and administrative coordinator each created a list of ten positive deviant general education teachers. The three lists were combined into one master list and six were randomly selected as the case study participants. The principal, assistant principal, and administrative coordinator hold valid state administrative certificates and were hired by the district to employ capable teachers and evaluate teacher effectiveness. The administrators regularly attend IEP meetings, respond to parent feedback about teachers, work with teachers in various roles, and observe in classrooms. The participating administrators had adequate knowledge and expertise to select teachers for this research study.

Participant demographics. Each general education teacher selected held a valid state teaching certificate and had obtained a degree or endorsement to serve as a certified teacher in the secondary setting. The teachers selected served in the target school for at least one year. The specific demographics of the participants in this research study are listed by category below.

Teaching department. Business, English, English, Math, Science, Science

Courses teaching currently. Accounting I, Accounting II, Algebra I, Advanced Placement English, American Literature, Biology, Composition, Essential Skills in Language Arts 9, Financial Wealth Management, Geometry, Honors English 9, Personal Finance

Number of years teaching. 2, 4, 10, 10, 16, 21

Number of years taught at target school. 2, 2, 4, 5, 10, 10

States where participants graduated high school. California (1) and Nebraska (5)

Colleges undergraduate degrees were obtained from. College of Saint Mary, Peru State College, University of Nebraska Omaha, University of Nebraska Lincoln (2)

Number of participants that switched majors as an undergraduate. 5

Number of participants who transferred colleges as an undergraduate. 3

Number of participants with at least one graduate degree. 4

Number of participants currently working on a graduate degree. 3

Graduate degrees earned or working toward obtaining currently. Curriculum and Instruction (4), Instructional Technology, Secondary Education with an emphasis in Business, Secondary Education with an emphasis in Math, Secondary Education with an emphasis in Natural Science, Doctor of Philosophy with an emphasis in Science Education

Number of participants serving as a Student Assistance Team case manager: 3

Number of participants coaching a sport or sponsoring a club at the target school: 6

Number of participants who stated they have worked with underprivileged persons in another job or volunteer opportunity: 6

Number of participants who are a parent: 5

Target School

The site for this study is in a growing metropolitan suburban school district in a midwestern state. The school district serves nearly 10,000 students and about 10% of them qualify for special education services under IDEA in the 2018-19 school year. The district is currently composed of 11 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 2 high schools. There are a total of 622 certified teachers in the district; about 70% of the teachers have obtained a master's degree. This growing district's enrollment climbs at an average of 6% each year and spends an average of about $10,000 per student. Since the start of the current rating system established by the state department of education, the target district and school have received the highest rating available (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019).

The specific high school selected for this research study serves about 1,300 students in the 2018-19 school year. In the 2018-19 school year, the school's graduation rate was 98%; 93% of the school's students attended college after graduation. 91% of the students who attend the target school are of the white ethnicity, 3% identify as Asian, 2% identify as Hispanic or Latino, and 2% identify as two or more races. 3.77% of the students in the target school qualify for free and reduced lunch. Additionally, about 7% of the students receive special education services under IDEA.

There were 78 certified teachers employed in the selected school in the 2018-19 school year and the average years of experience for each teacher was about 12 years.

Roughly 70% of the selected school's teachers have obtained a master's degree (Nebraska Department of Education, 2019). The target school has had the same principal since its opening in 2010. The building administration team consists of one principal, one assistant principal, one activities director, and one administrative coordinator (student dean).

There are currently five counselors on staff. Students are expected to earn forty-two credits to graduate. These credits must contain eight English credits, six math credits, six science credits, six social studies credits, two physical education credits, and one financial literacy credit. The target school runs on a seven period day with two semesters per year calendar. The school does not offer remedial or alternative courses for students not on alternate assessment. However, students who are considered academically at risk may take additional periods of support math, support English, and/or a reading intervention. Credits earned in these support courses count toward elective credits for graduation. For example, a student identified at-risk for math, may take both Algebra I and Essential Skills Algebra Topics in one day. Northwest Evaluation Association's Measures of Academic Progress test scores are used to track student progress and determine entrance and exit criteria for these support intervention courses.

In addition to these academic support courses, the school also has a Student Assistance Team (SAT). This team provides interventions and support to students who do not qualify for special education but have been identified as needing an additional tier of support. Five general education teachers serve as SAT case managers for one period each day. There are also seven special education teachers and twelve special education teaching assistants currently employed in the target school.

Data Collection and Procedures

The researcher sent an introduction email inviting each of the six selected teachers to participate in the study. Once the participant agreed, the positive deviant was provided a copy of the consent form to review. The researcher then scheduled a time for the participant to be interviewed and observed. Each participant was interviewed one time and observed two times.

Interviews. One-on-one interviews were conducted to explore the personal experience of six general education teachers in closing the knowing-doing gap as it relates to serving students who receive special education services. Savin-Baden & Howell Major (2013) write that interviews are an integral part of most research traditions and allow for natural conversation as the researcher attempts to understand the perspective and meaning of experiences. Interviews allowed for complex understanding of in-depth knowledge. Interviews in this study were used to understand the experiences, opinions, attitudes, and feelings that the teachers had in common.

The interview protocol was developed based on the central research question: What is the experience of high school general education teachers who successfully meet the needs of students with special education needs in their general education classrooms? This protocol sought to explore each teacher's experience in depth in order to identify commonalities in the teachers' development. The interviews were open-ended which allowed the researcher and participant to have a guided but natural conversation. This natural conversation provided space for the participant to contribute as much detail as they wanted and to fully express their viewpoints and experiences (Turner, 2010). The researcher who conducting the open-ended interviews prompted follow-up questions for

clarification as needed (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The interviews were held in each individual teacher's classroom so that they felt most comfortable. The interviews were conducted during non-contract hours and lasted no longer than one hour. Each interview was recorded digitally and later transcribed using an automatic transcription software.

Reflective journal. Researcher notes during interviews, reflective thoughts and field notes were kept in a reflective journal. During the interviews, the researcher conducted note-taking. Note-taking was a key element in data collecting because it allowed the researcher to jot down information about what was going on in the environment and supplemented the information learned in interview transcripts (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The reflective thoughts and field notes created by the researcher evolved into contact summary sheets (Miles & Huberman, 1994). By recording reactions, assumptions, expectations, and biases about the research process in a reflective journal, the researcher was also able to add rigor to this qualitative study (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Accuracy of the interview data. Questions formulated for the open-ended interviews were created in collaboration with school administration. The researcher practiced the interview protocol with two general education teachers not included as participants in the study to provide feedback to the clarity, relevancy, and validity of the interview process. Input was sought on the appropriate prompts for elaboration and follow-up questions were generated in the event that initial questions did not yield appropriately thorough responses. The interview protocol was adjusted according to the feedback received. During the study and after transcripts were created of each participant's interview, the transcript was shared with the participant. The participant was

prompted to reflect on whether the transcripts accurately represented their own experience. Interviewees were permitted to add or omit information in order to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of their responses.

Observations. Conducting observations allowed the researcher to see participants in a natural rather than controlled teaching setting. The researcher sought use classroom observations to document everyday practices and better understand the experiences of the positive deviant participants (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). Conducting observations helped the researcher understand participant priorities and better develop the relationship between the researcher and participant (J. Schensul, S. Schensul, & LeCompte, 1999). The researcher was also able to observe and collect data on the influence the physical environment had on the participants (Bernard, 2002). Additionally, observations were effective for data collection because some of the self-reported information, or what teachers said in an interview, needed to be confirmed and supplemented with observing what the teachers did in the classroom (Schmuck, 2006).

Each participant was observed twice. Observations were video recorded on a Swivl camera for the researcher to review digitally. Each video was transcribed verbatim by the researcher with the help of a software program. Digitally recording each lesson allowed the researcher to take a passive role as a spectator in the positive deviant teacher's classroom (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). It also allowed the researcher to review recordings as many times as needed. Notes about the highly effective teaching methods were taken. After watching each observation, the researcher completed a summary observation sheet that allowed the researcher to record reactions, assumptions,

expectations, and biases about the research process, adding a layer of rigorous reflection and analysis to the qualitative research process (Morrow & Smith, 2000).

Accuracy of the observation data. In preparation for data collection, one general education teacher was asked to participate in a trial observation to allow the researcher to practice effective data collection methods and data analysis. The researcher digitally reviewed the trial lesson video with the building principal, providing the researcher expertise in identifying highly effective strategies used during observed instruction as it relates to the school's instructional model. During the study and after the observations were digitally recorded, the researcher created a verbatim transcript of each lesson with the help of a transcription software. After the transcripts were complete, they were shared with each participant to review. Participants were permitted to omit information and suggest additions to confirm their highly effective strategies were accurately represented in the data analysis phase.

Confidentiality

The following steps were taken to ensure confidentiality among research participants in the study:

- Recorded interviews were erased once transcription occurred.
- Video recordings were erased once the lesson was reviewed by the researcher.
- No student information or behavior from the observation was reviewed or recorded in the study.
- The data analysis and written report contain pseudonyms such as research participant #1, research participant #2, etc.
- The data analysis and written report contain zero identifying information

including, but not limited to, the school name, school district, and student names.

- The written report was stored on a password protected site, with password information known only by the researcher.

Ethical Considerations

Approval of the instruments, including the observation protocol, interview questions and protocol and summary sheets was granted by the Director of Assessment in the target district. The research participants were recommended by the building administration, but each teacher participated by their own free will and had the opportunity to dismiss themselves from the research at any time, for any reason. The research participants also had the right to view and change their responses after the interview and observations occurred. This member checking was not only an ethical consideration, but also allowed for more accuracy within the data (J. Creswell, 2014). The proper documents were submitted for approval by the University of Nebraska Institutional Review Board (IRB). All participants were treated in accordance with the ethical guidelines of the American Psychology Association (APA) and IRB. Every precaution was taken to ensure the research participants felt safe, secure, and comfortable to share their stories and experiences with the researcher.

Data Analysis

Interviews. The interviews were recorded digitally with multiple devices and transcriptions were generated by a software program paid for by the researcher. The transcripts were coded and analyzed with the assistance of Dedoose qualitative analytic software. Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns in the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis supports the case study

approach to this research study. The analysis allowed the data to be organized into themes related to the research question, allowing patterns and trends to emerge (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). These themes were defined, named, presented and organized with the help of the Dedoose software. All files were saved in password protected domains.

Observations. The observations were recorded digitally and transcripts were created of each video by the researcher with the help of a software program. The transcripts were then coded and analyzed. In watching the videos, the researcher applied codes only about the positive and highly effective strategies used by the general education teacher in the lesson, based primarily on language from the target school's district instructional model. The researcher coded every action of the participant. Surprising new strategies were identified and added to the list of codes. To provide consistency when new codes were added, the researcher rewatched all observation videos to ensure no actions were overlooked. In total, each lesson was watched an average of four times.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher in this study serves as a special education teacher in the same target school from which the research participants were selected. When discussing sensitive and confidential information, it was important that the researcher and participant had a relationship and rapport. P. Ryan & Dundon (2008) defined rapport as "involving the exchange of meaningful dialogue that captures how respondents interpret their social world" (p. 444). DeJonckheere & Vaughn (2019) add that interviews are a special form of relationship, and rapport must be established so that the interviewer and interviewee

can converse about important and often personal topics. While this study could be conducted in many districts within the midwestern state because positive deviants exist in all schools, selecting participants where the researcher works allowed the researcher to leverage already established relationships with strong rapport. Consequently, the researcher's role was considered as a variable when determining data collection procedures and analysis.

In a qualitative case study, the researcher and research participants are co-researchers (Given, 2012), and the researcher is considered an instrument of the data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). To avoid potential bias, the researcher bracketed their previous experiences so they were able to take a fresh look as a co-researcher with the participant in the interviews and observations (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The researcher described their own possible bias and context related to the research and learned to bracket their own lived experiences and perceptions in order to accurately analyze the data (Proctor, 2018). Bracketing was used to assist the researcher in abandoning preconceived notions, protect the researcher in emotionally charged research situations, and support a reflective research process (Tufford & Newman, 2010). The researcher in this study used bracketing to assist in abandoning preconceived notions surrounding how the researcher believes general education teachers should serve students with special education needs in the high school environment. The researcher bracketed personal experiences related to special education and student experience in the general education classroom.

Researcher's context and experiences. My dad suffered from many debilitating health concerns that impacted his day-to-day life for many years until his death in 2014.

Since my parents were divorced and my Dad never remarried, many of his medical challenges were shared with me. It was an honor to help him and as a child I remember being excited to do things like organize his numerous medications for the week. Despite his many painful surgeries and daily struggles, he never complained. He worked as a farmer and did his best to carry out the unforgiving physical demands of his job. I admired his strength, courage, and relentless attitude he used to provide himself a meaningful life. I believe caring for my father and watching him experience his uncontrollable struggles opened my heart for those with both physical and mental disabilities.

I attended high school with approximately 2,000 students in a midwestern suburban school district. As a student, I helped to establish a social club that united students with and without disabilities. Inclusion was valued in my progressive high school, so much so that our student body elected students with severe disabilities as their prom and homecoming royalty several times. My high school experience inspired me to obtain my special education teaching degree. At my midwestern college, I was provided co-teaching experiences in the general through practicum courses and student teaching. Additionally, at the undergraduate level, I took many classes that reviewed the history and complexities of special education law. However, as a new teacher I was only able to comprehend the basics of what I learned. I had no prior experience in writing IEPs or dealing with conflict pertaining to the laws, so connecting the information to my practice was difficult. After a few years of teaching, I enrolled in a special education law class at the graduate level. Because I had experience to draw from, I was able to use the knowledge much more effectively in my practice. There was not a significant difference

in content from my undergraduate training, but I believe I was more ready to learn and use knowledge.

I am currently in my 6th year of teaching special education at the midwestern high school where this research study takes place. I have co-taught in classrooms within the math, social studies, and science departments. Additionally, I have provided individualized academic support for students with disabilities in all departments within the school. As an invested member of the school, I have a deep respect for the community, the staff, students, parents, and stakeholders in the school, and its culture. In my current role, I see students who receive special education services being served effectively by general education teachers every day. I also see a population of teachers seeking more guidance on how to best serve students with special education needs. My experience has ignited my passion for exploring the experiences of highly effective general education teachers in hopes of helping other teachers.

I cannot deny that my personal and professional experiences have shaped the person I am today, generating a number of biases that may affect my research. It is my personal responsibility to identify them and set them aside not only to become a successful researcher, but also to be a better person.

Assumptions and Limitations

This study selected a group of six positive deviant teachers to participate. These six teachers may not naturally represent the population of all positive deviant teachers who effectively serve students with special education needs and may limit the inferential potential of this research. While there are many positive deviant teachers who could have been selected, time constraints and the nature of the qualitative case study limited the

researcher to six participants. Data collection is subjective and may have been interpreted differently by another researcher and is subjective.

Chapter 4 Interview Data

Each general education teacher participant was interviewed by the researcher. Interviews were used to illuminate the experiences, opinions, attitudes, and feelings that the teachers had in serving students with special education needs. Interviews were transcribed verbatim with the help of a transcription software. The researcher then conducted thematic analysis with the organizational help of Dedoose software.

Initially, the researcher organized and coded the transcripts into categories based on common questions and responses that occurred during the six interviews. For example, if the participant talked about what they do when they know they have a student with special education needs in their classroom, their response was coded as “First Steps”. Or, if the participant discussed a professional development experience they found beneficial in building their skills in serving students with disabilities, that content was coded as “SpEd Training”. There were a total of sixteen initial content codes.

After organizing the content by category into the sixteen initial codes, the researcher then looked for commonalities within each of them. After becoming more familiar with the data as well as using intuition and analysis, the researcher began to see new themes within and among the sorted categories (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). The researcher took notes on new emerging themes, outlined them, then recoded all six transcripts. In total, seven new themes were used in this second round of coding. The researcher used further reflection, intuition, and immersion in the transcript data to look for new themes (Savin-Baden & Howell Major, 2013). After looking holistically at the content within each category, the researcher further broke down the data into eight final categories. The final data organization included the following codes: Collaboration

and Communication; Empathy and Caring; Relationship with Student; Large or Challenging Group of Students; Trial and Error or in Time Found Success; Success in Providing Accommodations; Outside School Experience; College, Preservice and Coursework. Table 1 shows the occurrence of each code within each participant interview and the total number of times the code occurred across all participant interviews.

Table 1

Interview Code Application

	Participant						Code
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	Totals
Communication and Collaboration	8	11	7	9	4	12	**51**
Empathy and Caring	12	8	8	6	4	9	**47**
Trial and Error or in Time Found Success	8	10	10	7	4	7	**46**
Success in Providing Accommodations and Attending IEP Meetings	6	9	8	8	4	4	**39**
Outside School Experience	10	12	3	8	8	7	**28**
Large or Challenging Group of Students	1	5	5	6	2	4	**23**
Realtionship with Student	4	4	4	1	3	3	**19**
College, Preservice and Coursework	1	3	0	2	1	4	**11**

Table 1

Collaboration and Communication

The concept of collaboration and communication was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 51 code applications. More specifically, the concept of communicating or collaborating with a special education teacher was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 15 code applications. Overall, collaboration and communication was the most occurring

code in the interview data. The general education teachers in this study emphasized the importance of collaboration and communication between themselves and school stakeholders, as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- “Once I started actively communicating with people outside of my classroom, that helped a ton.”
- “I sent a lot of emails to parents, and I'd always CC them (special education case manager) just so that they were aware of accommodations or support that was being given.”
- “I reached out to counselors quite a few times. I was always talking with special ed teachers that those kids were on their caseload to just give updates and stuff. I just communicated a lot, and I always asked for support for myself when I needed it. If I wasn't sure what I needed to do or if I was doing something correctly or not, I always reached out.”
- “Having that special education teacher in both of those classes was extremely helpful.”
- “I check in and them (student), ‘How is it going? Do you feel you're getting your needs met? What is some feedback?’ I ask, ‘Is the classroom setting good for you?’"
- “I think I just want to give the parents a glimpse into what their kids do and what they're capable of. Cause I think that there are some parents who sometimes will sell their kids short or aren't sure exactly what their kids are capable of. And I want to make sure that they know just exactly what their kids are doing. Certainly if there's anything that I can, any shortcomings that I see or anything that isn't being done outside of school, then I will raise those as areas of concern. But for the most part I try to be a positive voice. And especially if the kids are present to make sure that they know that they're valued and that people are looking for them and just to reinforce their good work in the classroom.”
- “I learned how to use my resources, my TAs, my case managers, parents to kind of help divvy up the load a little bit.”
- “It falls on everyone as a community… the case manager, TAs and the parents and it's just we all team up to try and make it the best year.”
- “...making positive connections with the kids, their parents, the case managers and SpEd support. Like all those different levels to try to get on the same page from the beginning. I think those elements are pretty crucial.”
- “I try as hard as I can to communicate with parents when kids are struggling and try to reach out at conferences or through email whenever there is something that the student struggles with. And then whenever I'm talking about a struggling student, I try to copy in a counselor or administrator as well so that they know, so that they're in the loop. I'm not trying to, it takes a community to raise a child kind of methods.”
- “I think it's helpful to talk to the special ed teacher too, to see what they know.”
- “Working with another teacher and saying, ‘Oh yeah, I had that student last year, here's what worked for me.’”

- “I talk to other teachers about helping students.”
- “We could all work together and then everybody gets helped in the process.”
- “...constant communication, like ‘are you getting this’ between me and a student or me with you guys, the special education teachers or between me and the parents. Just having that open flow of communication I think helps you know that they're getting their needs met. And I try to open that flow pretty early.”

The importance of collaboration and communication in schools is a concept supported in current literature. A culture of exchange and cooperation among teachers and school professionals benefits both teachers and students (John Hattie & Zierer, 2018). A teacher’s capacity to work effectively with a wide range of colleagues and share expertise is important (Blanton et al., 2011; Kellough, 2009; OECD, 2005; Thompson, 2017). Collaboration among teachers allows them to share responsibility and work together with the common goal of meeting student needs (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007). In fact, when teachers work together to develop and deliver high-quality curriculum and services attentive to the diverse learning needs in their classrooms, students’ achievements increase (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007).

This cooperation is particularly important for students with disabilities as they rely on special and general education teachers to ensure successful access within the general curriculum (Pellegrino, Regan, Weiss, 2015). Collaboration between special and general education teachers is a fundamental component of meeting the needs of students with disabilities (Arthaud, Aram, Breck, Doelling, & Bushrow, 2007; Friend & Cook, 2012; Nevin, Thousand, & Villa, 2009, Tzivinikou, 2015a). The working relationship between special and general education teachers has an impact on the quality of education students with a disability receive (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Fennick, 2001; McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; Wong & Wong, 2001). Enhanced academic performance, increased self-confidence and empowerment are all benefits gained for students with

special education needs when their special and general education teachers collaborate (Morocco & Aguilar, 2002; Walther-Thomas, 1997; Wilson, 2006). Highly effective teachers are naturally able to communicate and collaborate with students, are interested in their ideas, and welcome their perspectives (Ferguson et al., 2015). Through communication and collaboration with students, teachers also seek to understand students and respect their thoughts and opinions as part of the learning process (Tripod Education Partners, 2016).

Additionally, the positive deviant participants demonstrated that general education teachers must be able to effectively communicate with parents and guardians. Highly effective schools engage parents and families in the education of their students (Frans, 2018; Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, 2002). Kellough (2009) writes, "When parents (or guardians) are involved in their child's school and school work, students learn better and earn better grades, and teachers experience more positive feelings about teaching" (p. 69). Teachers that communicate with parents for a variety of reasons and through a variety of modes may leverage their relationship with the parent for the benefit of student learning (Kellough, 2009). A partnership and open communication between teachers and parents help children feel supported by ensuring that everyone is making the best decisions for students (Epstein, 2009). Therefore, collaboration and communication with school stakeholders is an important skill for highly effective teachers to possess.

Empathy and Caring

The concept of showing empathy and caring for students was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 47 code applications, making this concept the second highest occurring code in the interview data set. The positive deviant general education teachers

in this study emphasized the importance of empathy, kindness, and caring for students as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- “You just got to love them.”
- “I think you have to truly care, too. It's really easy to just say, ‘Nope, that student can't do it. I'm going to help the ones that can.’ But truly believing that any student given the right support and accommodations can do the work, is huge.”
- “I still cared about them. It's my care and my want to help them and just overall attention that I give them is the same.”
- “...really encourage them not to view these kids as lesser students. Believe in them until they show you they can't do it. Like assume that they can and just be, like I said earlier, just be empathetic and care about them.”
- “... make sure they're in the best interest of the kids.”
- “You need an element of empathy.”
- “...making sure that those kids with special needs don't have any, any additional hurdles to climb than they weren't already given when they walked in the door.”
- “Patience and understanding are important.”
- “I would say patience is a big thing. I think you have to have a heart for them.”
- “I really enjoyed the kids with severe and profound needs. It was hard, but it was eye opening and fun. Most kids are pretty amazing.”
- “I think you have to want to help everybody.”
- “ I look at it differently and as more of a mom role than a teacher role.”
- “Just because they have a disability doesn't mean they shouldn't be in my classroom.”
- “I have a passion and enjoyment of these populations.”
- “I mean in my own personal belief of students with special needs, I feel like they're almost an untapped resource. Just the way that they look at things is so unique and creative.”

The importance of teacher’s empathy and caring for students is supported in current literature. Caring teachers are good teachers and good caring teachers are important to the success of students (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). Highly effective teachers are motivated by the intrinsic benefits of teaching and making their contribution to society by working with children and helping them develop (Gavish, 2017; Gur, 2013; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008; OECD, 2005; Rozenberg, Munk, Keinan, 2002; Thomas & Beauchamp, 2007). Hattie (2008) found that the top teacher-student relationship variables associated with higher levels of student achievement included empathy and warmth.

Teachers work in the helping and caring profession, a profession of service to students and enhancing the quality of their lives (Wong & Wong, 2001). Hostetler (2011) adds, "...the fundamental aim of education should be to serve people's well-being, to help them live well. Educators have no greater obligation than to serve the welfare of students" (p. 1). Highly effective general education teachers foster learning environments built with genuine kindness and meaningful interactions with students (Hattie & Zierer, 2018).

As it relates to serving students with special education needs, effective teachers expect all learners can and will succeed regardless of students' initial abilities (Brookhart, 2017; Goksoy, 2018; Kauffman, et al., 2017; Kellough, 2009; Wong & Wong, 2001). Good teachers love students as they are (Ayers, Klonsky, & Lyon, 2000) and understand that student diversity is the rule rather than the exception (Blanton et al., 2011). In a research study conducted by Platsidou & Agaliotis (2017), the researchers found "teachers' feelings of empathy are not affected by the category of students they teach or the context in which their teaching takes place" (p. 66). As demonstrated by participant comments, highly effective educators embrace and care for all students as they are, including children with special education needs (Arriaga & Lindsey, 2016; Wanzenried, 1998).

Trial and Error or in Time Found Success

The concept of teachers experiencing success over time or through trial and error problem solving was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 46 code applications making this the third highest occurring code in the interview data set. The general education teachers in this study reflected on these experiences and this concept as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- “And then if it's not working, I usually will just try stuff. I never give them less than what they need. But if I think, ‘Okay, well let's try this accommodation,’ I'm always willing and ready to kickstart a different accommodation that maybe is not on the IEP but could benefit them and possibly be added at their next meeting.”
- “I see what the identification is but then it is just trial and error for what works best for them.”
- “I think it's just from learning how to deal with what their problems are. And I also think with age you realize that some things aren't as big of a deal. And you don't get stuck on... I'm thinking behavior wise, it's fine. Learning different ways to accommodate things.”
- “I think when I first started teaching I was overwhelmed by kids with special needs. I was like, ‘Oh my gosh, I have so much to support.’ And then as I got better at teaching, I feel like I kind of started to see the students in different ways like, ‘Oh okay, well if I adjust this instructional practice here, their strength can get played out here,’ and it ends up helping the majority of students and that worked out really well.”
- “...a level of confidence and comfort in who I am, both as a person and as a teacher.”
- “I don’t get as frustrated as I use to.”
- “I think that's just time. It takes time to develop some of those skills.”

The importance of robust teacher experience with a variety of students and student needs in the classroom is also supported in current literature. Teaching is a complex skill, and running a classroom is complicated (Blanton et al., 2011; Churchill, Mulholland, & Cepello, 2008; Ferguson et al., 2015; OECD, 2005; Rosenzweig, 2009; Schwab et al., 2015). Research has concluded that teacher’s feelings of underpreparedness and lack of skill needed to meet student needs can be blamed on inadequate experience (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Fine, Bloom, Chajet, 2003; Harriman, 2000; Melser, 2004). Additional time and hands-on experience provides teachers the opportunity to develop skills they may have been once lacking (Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, Algozzine, 2008). In an excerpt written to new teachers, Kellough (2009) writes:

> Starting now and continuing throughout your career, you will try your own ideas and you will borrow and modify ideas from others. You will continue to discover

> what works best for you in your own distinct situation with your own unique sets of students and challenges (p. 94).

With self-reflection, time and exposure to solving new problems, all teachers can become highly effective in serving all students (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Hall & Simeral, 2015; Kellough, 2009; Sawchuk, 2015; William, 2011).

Success in Providing Accommodations and Attending IEP Meetings

The concept of teachers experiencing success providing students with accommodations and attending IEP meetings was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 39 code applications. The general education teachers in this study reflected on these experiences and this concept as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- “I think the main goal for any student is getting them in the highest possible class that you can, where they can succeed. Because students will perform at the level you set for them, and if you put them in a lower class, they're going to perform lower. But if you put them in regular classes instead of just special education environments, they may struggle through it, but at least they're getting exposed to it and getting a chance. They have some positive role models they can look at. They get that experience of working with those students. I think in the long run, they may end up getting to that level where they wouldn't have, if they weren't put in that classroom or accommodations were not even tried.”
- “I had one student with an IEP that was for anxiety, and so making sure that I always checked in with her and made sure she was feeling okay about the assignment was effective. We either did an alternative setting, or I really prepped her, and we practiced a little bit more in depth. I had her come in a little after school and things like that. She ended up doing really well in my class.”
- “I've been in several IEP meetings and you just start to kind of pick up I think a little bit more along the way and understand what your job, what your role is as a classroom teacher in that IEP students’ educational road trip.”
- “I show up whenever possible for an IEP meeting because they’re important.”
- “I make sure that the kids with special needs don’t have any additional hurdles to climb than they already did when they walked in the door.”
- “IEPs used to be really intimidating to me but are not anymore as I’ve gotten older.”
- “I’ve learned different ways to accommodate things over the years.”

- “As soon as we found out what his skills were, we could accommodate almost any of our technology things for him.”
- “Now that I've experienced teaching and going to IEP meetings and all that, I wish it had been more training. I think I kind of figured it out on my own. I was exposed to, ‘This is what an IEP is.’ But they didn't tell me, ‘All right, here's the kind of things that are said in an IEP. Here's how you have that conversation.’ Or, ‘Here's how you advocate for students.’ I just kind of figured it out on my own by doing it.”
- “I attend an IEP meeting about once a week.”
- “It is most helpful when I make sure my students have their accommodations. I'll go around to specifically to those students with IEPs and just make sure, ‘Okay, do you have your notes? Are they available to you? Do you need the printed version again, or what can I further explain?’”

The importance of teacher experience with IEPs and providing accommodations is supported in current literature. A highly effective general education teacher is an active participant on IEP teams for the students in their classrooms because they understand that they have, undoubtedly, one of the most influential roles in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a student's IEP (Drasgow, Yell, Robinson, 2001; Huzinec, 2016; Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017). During the development of the IEP, input from a general education teacher about how a student’s disability affects their learning in the classroom is vital to the IEP team’s discussion regarding the accommodations and services required for that student to access their appropriate education.

After the IEP meeting has occurred, Lee-Tarver (2006) found that the majority of general education teachers feel that students’ IEPs were beneficial in planning their lessons and activities because the information in IEPs help students succeed. They found they could use IEP information to build thoughtful and meaningful activities appropriate for all their students. Specifically, general education teachers find that the most important parts of the IEP are the accommodations and modifications the student requires to be successful (Huzinec, 2016). Throughout the school year, a general education teacher is

also among the most effective on the student's team in helping the team determine if the IEP is sufficiently addressing the student's needs or if changes to the program need to be made (Huzinec, 2016; Rotter, 2014: Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017; The University of Kansas School of Education, 2019). By providing appropriate support and accommodations or modifications, providing input and feedback to the IEP team, and working in collaboration with the special education team, an effective general education teacher has the ability to help students with disabilities close their achievement gap between them and their typically developing peers.

Outside School Experiences

Participants credited life experiences outside of school as influencing their effectiveness. This concept was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 28 code applications. The general education teachers in this study reflected on these experiences and this concept as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- "I volunteered at the Malone Center. That was a really cool experience. It was an afterschool program for underprivileged youth. I would go on Tuesdays and Thursdays and run a writing club for them."
- "I'd bowl with the Special Olympics kids. Then in high school, I was in Circle of Friends, and I did the Adaptive PE class. I've just always been around kids with special needs and I've seen that they're just like everybody else. They want a friend. They want to learn. They want to do the best they can. They just need a little help. The exposure was huge for me."
- "I want them to also understand, unfortunately, it's not going to be easy just because they were dealt maybe a little bit more of a difficult hand, but it is doable and I think that comes with just being in a single-parent home. You could say, 'Well, I was dealt a bad hand. Life sucks and I can't do this,' or you can kind of just figure it out and try and make it work."
- "Having my own children has changed me as a teacher. Especially as they enter into the education world as students. Knowing how I would want to treat, or hope that someone is treating my children the way that I want them to be treated and trying to model that same behavior for the kids in my classroom."
- "I volunteered for Girls Inc. and that was pretty special sometimes. Some of the girls... I mean, they just had their struggles and so, we would help them with homework and you could tell they were not the level they needed."

- “I also have a niece who, at 14 months, was diagnosed with a brain tumor. And so she has needed a lot of assistance over the years, and I am actually her legal guardian if something happens to my brother.”
- “I was six when my cousin with muscular dystrophy passed away.”

The concept of outside experiences impacting participant’s teaching ability is also supported in current literature. It is important to consider that personal experiences affect professional identity and effectiveness in the classroom. Teachers bring their personalities, expectations, beliefs and personal and family history into their classrooms (Churchill et al., 2008; Gavish, 2017; Rosenzweig, 2009). These personal characteristics influence how a teacher responds professionally to their students and are often not learned in teacher courses or at school (Bullough & Gitlin, 1995; Hagger & Mcintyre, 2000; Wright, 1997). As evidenced by positive deviants in this study, highly effective teachers are motivated by their background and empowered by their life experiences (Gavish & Friedman, 2007; Kagan, 1992).

Large and/or Challenging Group of Students

The concept of teachers serving students with challenging needs or teaching a class with a large number of students with special needs enrolled was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 23 code applications. The general education teachers in this study reflected on these experiences and this concept as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- “I go through, look at 504s, look at IEPs. And just determine what needs are in each class ...last year it was a little overwhelming, especially with being my first year of teaching. My... what hour was that? Fifth hour had... oh, I don't even know, a dozen IEPs, I think, that I had to keep track of. And then seventh hour had eight or nine.”
- “In the past week, I have gone to 4 IEP meetings.”
- “That was really good for me to work with them because it just was a group of students I had never really worked with before and helped me figure out my practices. What I grew up seeing was very different than what some other groups

would need. The way I talk about things or just realizing not everybody grew up that way. Some students may need different examples or different support that I had never saw growing up. That was really helpful."

- "I had so many special education, 504, and SAT students; just the higher needs clientele."
- "(Student's) parents were threatening to sue the district so we had a lot of meetings and trainings."
- "I had at least 30 IEP, 504, or SAT kids in six sections. So about five students a period that were needing some type of accommodation or just extra attention."
- "I taught at an alternative school. It was very, very structured and rigid in that sense of everyone was dealing with behaviors the same way and expectations were clear across the board."
- "I just found that they were really fun to have in the classroom. I would say sometimes those kids are some of my hardest working students and you just gotta love them. They just work their butt off and they struggle the whole way through and they do an amazing job. They just keep trying and working and trying and working and that's very admirable. And so I think that's why I'm like, 'Hey, you're working really hard. I'm going to work really hard and we're all going to work really hard and be successful together.'"
- "That population was a group that just had a lot of needs. They were, like I said, struggled academically or students with discipline backgrounds or a lot of kids come from really tough, broken homes and substance abuse issues."

The importance of teacher experience with a large and varied number of student needs in the classroom is supported in current literature. Teaching is a craft that can be learned and developed by serving a variety of students (Wong & Wong, 2001). In fact, a variety of teaching experiences is positively associated with student achievement gains (Kini & Podolsky, 2016). Kini and Podolsky (2016) also found that teachers continue to improve in their effectiveness as they gain robust and challenging experiences in the classroom. Students with challenging needs can teach educators a variety of valuable lessons to reform their teaching craft ("Students Who Challenge Us", 2012). Effective general education teachers look beyond things that they cannot change like the initial skills and behaviors of the students in their classrooms and do not give up on them. Instead, they accept challenging students as a way to grow their teaching skills (Tomlinson, 2003).

Building Relationships with Students

The concept of teachers building relationships with students was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 19 code applications. The general education teachers in this study emphasized the importance of relationships with students as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- "You really have to come in with a clean slate for them. You shouldn't have any ideas about the student having autism, so they're going to be this, whatever we've been taught and told, like, 'This is a kid with autism and they have these things.' I think just coming in and just meeting the kid for who they are and seeing who they are and what their quirks are."
- "...really trying to get a personal relationship with them because I want them to be comfortable to advocate for themselves. I think that's the biggest key for a student who has an IEP is to be able to advocate because, after us, there's not going to be a form that follows them around. They have to be able to ask for the things that they do need to be successful. But then also, just so that they can feel comfortable coming and asking, 'I don't get this' or just being open with their struggles."
- " I would encourage other teachers to get to know the kids first"
- "...get to know the student."
- "I think you can tell when you have a relationship, are they happy in your classroom? Are they able to work to their best abilities, and do their grades and their work reflect it?"

The importance of teachers building relationships with students is also supported in current literature. One of the strongest indicators of effective teaching is the strength of the relationships teachers build with their students (Goodwin, 2010). Highly effective teachers are supportive, are able to build personalized relationships, foster an emotionally safe classroom, and respond with consistency to students' social, emotional, and academic learning needs (Tripod Education Partners, 2016). Teachers who make a positive impact on student learning are able to create effective learning environments for a wide variety of students and student abilities based on their knowledge of each student leveraged by their strong relationships with them (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; OECD, 2005).

In fact, the more safe and trusting the relationship between the student and the teacher is, the more the child will learn (John Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Kleinfeld (1994) found that teachers who demonstrated personal warmth had classrooms where students actively participated in class discussions and were willing to work hard for their teacher, with whom they had developed a positive and mutually respectful rapport.

Effective teachers embrace that each student is unique and ensure that all students have access to the tools they require to learn (Ayers et al., 2000). Similarly, highly effective general education teachers familiarize themselves with the exact needs of all learners, especially the needs of students with disabilities (Kellough, 2009). Having a firm understanding of each student's diverse needs allows the teacher to better assess student progress and make sound educational decisions (J. B. Crockett & Yell, 2008; Netzel & Eber, 2003; Petersen, 2016). Skilled teachers are responsive to not only the academic standards expected, but the students themselves. These teachers leverage students' prior experiences, cultural backgrounds, and their individual interests as a bridge to new academic learning (Blanton et al., 2011; Gordon, 2005, Wong & Wong, 2001).

College, Preservice, and Coursework

The value of college experience, college coursework, and preservice teaching experiences was coded in all 6 interviews for a total of 11 code applications. The general education teachers in this study emphasized the importance of their preservice teaching experience and courses as evidenced by the following quotes from interview transcripts:

- "I first learned about special education in undergrad. We had to take a class on students with special needs and they talked about IEPs."
- "We were required to take at least two classes about special education."

- “There were two specific classes that we took. One was more general just learning about special needs and kind of how that shows up in schools. There was one that... it was my methods class, and so the entire course wasn't dedicated to it, but there was a two-week section where we really focused on differentiation and support for special education students, IEPs, all of that kind of stuff.”
- “I did a practicum where I was there for three hours a day for a semester. That was eye opening because it was very, very different than anything I ever experienced. It's either the first or second most diverse school in (city).”

The concept of the impact that teacher experience in preservice teaching and in college has on their effectiveness is also supported in current literature. Will (2018) reported that in 2015 a total of 238,184 masters and bachelor degrees were awarded to teacher candidates. The dominant focus of teacher preservice coursework is on understanding what it means to be a teacher and learning how to be a teacher (Ryan, et al., 2017). Beginning teachers require more support and guidance to develop their basic skills necessary to implement best instructional approaches in their classrooms (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007). Meaning, education coursework, training, emotional and mentor support are critical during pre-service training as teachers develop highly effective skills (deBettencourt & Howard, 2004). Receiving preservice training with a combination of modeling, written instructions, rehearsal, teacher self-evaluation, and feedback is critical to improving practitioner skills and promoting student outcomes (Brock et al., 2017; Tzivinikou, 2015b). As it relates to training in the area of special education, The Government Accountability Office (2009) found that general education teacher candidates are expected to take one course focused on special education in 67% of secondary education programs. Additionally, one-third of colleges require special education training during student teaching and 11% require teacher candidates to participate in an IEP team meeting or collaboration process (Government Accountability Office, 2009).

Chapter 5 Observation Data

Two lessons per participant were recorded digitally with a Swivl camera. Recording the lessons digitally allowed the researcher to review the lessons as many times as needed. Observation recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher with the help of a software program. Observing each participant allowed the researcher to document the everyday highly effective practices of the general education teachers. Additionally, it was useful to observe behaviors directly in order to confirm the alignment between knowing, what teachers said they valued in their interviews, and doing. Seeing the teachers in the classroom allowed the researcher to observe the effective strategies the participants used to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to serving students with special education needs.

Development of Observation Codes

The target school's district instructional model was used to develop the initial observation protocol. The instructional model of the target school consists of elements that are required for every lesson and include: learning activation, learning goal, formative assessment, and closure. The instructional model also includes emphasis of gradual release with the following language: focused instruction, guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent learning. The instructional model clarifies that students should encounter all four phases of gradual release but they may not necessarily happen in every lesson or every day. The eight components of the target school's district instructional model were combined into a note taking form that became the initial observation protocol.

The researcher practiced using the observation protocol with the building principal. Together, the researcher and principal watched a recorded observation of a volunteer general education teacher. The principal helped the researcher identify the minute by minute strategies the teacher used to effectively serve students as it related to the district's instructional model. The notes taken in this trial observation were not included in the researcher's data. However, working with the principal allowed the researcher to develop expertise with the instructional model and initial observation protocol.

The researcher watched each of the twelve research participants' recorded observations and used the initial observation protocol to produce the first round of data. Notes about the strategies used in relation to learning activation, learning goals, formative assessment, closure, focused instruction, guided instruction, collaborative learning, and independent learning were taken. However, the researcher noticed highly effective strategies that were not represented in the target school's instructional model. The researcher watched each video again and focused on the strategies the teachers used related to behavior intervention and relationship building and took notes about the highly effective strategies that occurred. This additional set of categories was combined with the original list to create a final master list of codes. After much reflection and review of current literature, the researcher organized the codes into seven categories: Building Relationships with Students; Guided Instruction; Focused Instruction; Collaborative Learning; Independent Learning; Formative Assessment; Behavior Intervention.

With a fresh lens and firm understanding of highly effective teaching strategies, the researcher rewatched each video again using the new master list of codes. This

provided consistency and ensured all actions were included in the data. The researcher used the transcript of each video and master list of codes to take notes while watching each video. The researcher continuously coded teacher behavior one action to the next. Everything teacher did and everything the teacher said was coded. Some actions occurred for long periods of time and some were quick but each action, regardless of the time, was given a code. The codes from this round of viewing were used as the final set of data. Table 2 shows how many times each code category occurred in all twelve observations and the average number of times the category was represented per lesson.

Table 2

Observation Code Category Totals

	Total times codes appeared in all lessons observed	Average time code appeared per class period
Building Relationships with Students	1437	119.75
Guided Instruction	1407	117.25
Formative Assessment	827	68.92
Focused Instruction	428	35.67
Behavior Intervention	233	19.42
Collaborative Learning	32	2.67
Independent Learning	23	1.92

Table 2

Building Relationships with Students

Building relationships with students was a concept that occurred 1,437 times in twelve observations with a category average of 119.7 times per lesson. This was the highest occurring code category. Table 3 shows the highly effective strategies that teachers used in all twelve observations to build relationships with students, how many times those codes occurred in total across all observations and the average number of times the strategies were used in each lesson.

Table 3

Building Relationships Codes

Code Category	Teacher Strategy/Code	Total times code appeared in all lessons observed	Average number of times code appeared per class period
Building Relationships	shows respect to student by saying things like, "please" or "thank you"	162	13.5
	encourages student(s) by saying things like ,"Don't worry I will help you" or "I know you can do it".	130	10.83
	provides general praise like "good job"	185	14.42
	provides specific praise like "you did a great job highlighting the archetypes in the story"	81	6.75
	uses humor when engaging with student	198	16.5
	uses slang when engaging with student	77	6.42
	shows enthusiasm or passion with content	107	8.92
	presents content in the form of storytelling	100	8.33
	gets on the same level as the student; crouches down	23	1.92
	works 1 on 1 with a student	157	13.08
	connects content to student's personal life	105	8.75
	talks with student about their lives outside of school	57	4.75
	teacher admits mistake	55	4.58

Table 3

Teachers in the observations showed respect to students by saying things like, “please” or “thank you” a total of 162 times or an average of 13.5 times each lesson. The teacher participants encouraged students 130 total times or an average of 10.83 times each lesson. Finally, when providing verbal praise to students, the teachers provided general praise 185 times and specific praise 81 times averaging 14.42 and 6.75 times each lesson. The concept of verbally encouraging students and showing them respect is supported in current literature (Almquist, 2020; Kellough, 2009). A child is encouraged when approached by a teacher with kindness and polite behavior (Wong & Wong, 2001). Wong and Wong (2001) continue by saying, “Effective teachers know that they cannot get a student to learn unless that student knows that the teacher cares” (p. 75). Praising students is one of the most powerful teaching strategies because children crave positive attention and feedback (Kellough, 2009). Praise encourages students, shows them they are learning, and strengthens the connection between the teacher and student (Almquist, 2020). Providing praise to specific and concrete behaviors can significantly impact motivation, self-esteem, and efficacy as well as foster risk taking and creativity in the classroom (J. Blase & R. Blase, 2000).

Across all twelve lesson observations, positive deviant teacher participants used humor to engage with a student a total of 198 times or an average of 16.5 times each lesson. The participants also used slang to engage with a student a total of 77 times or an average of 6.42 times per lesson. Students learn from and appreciate teachers with whom they can laugh and smile. The positive effects of appropriate humor on learning are well established because humor relaxes students and connects them with their teachers (Kellough, 2009). Using humor is a highly effective strategy teachers use to create a

comfortable learning environment, activate students' minds, and bring classroom content to life (McNeely, n.d).

The reader may notice that the teachers in this study showed enthusiasm or passion when presenting content a total of 107 times or an average of 8.92 times per lesson. Additionally, the teachers presented content in the form of storytelling a total of 100 times or 8.33 times per lesson. Best practice research confirms these are important traits in teachers who seek to connect with their students and build relationships with them content (Frenzel, Goetz, Ludtke, Pekrun, & Sutton, 2009; Kunter et al., 2008). Enthusiasm in teaching can be defined as the possession of unwavering love of the subject matter and passion for teaching (Keller, Neumann, & Fischer, 2013). Enthusiasm and passion may be delivered by the teacher using storytelling, dramatic facial expressions, gestures, vocal influx, and any other method to draw the students' attention to the content (Frenzel et al., 2009; Kunter et al., 2008). Using these strategies can also engage students in content that is new or otherwise less appealing to them (Frenzel et al., 2009). Highly effective teachers who demonstrate enthusiasm and passion in their lessons have a positive influence on student outcomes and learning (Brigham, Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1992; Feldman, 2007; Kellough, 2009; Patrick, Hisley, & Kempler, 2000).

The teacher participants in this study got on the same level as a student they were conversing with a total of 23 times or an average of 1.92 times per lesson. They also worked one-on-one with students a total of 157 times or an average of 13.08 times each lesson. Effective teachers are supportive, build personalized relationships, foster an emotionally safe classroom, and respond with consistency to all students' individual social, emotional, and academic learning needs (OECD, 2005; Tripod Education Partners,

2016). This involves working one-on-one with students so that teachers may get to know their students and their needs. One-on-one instruction is high quality instruction where students are heard and instruction is personalized (The Brightmont Academy Team, 2017). Learning is an emotional and personal process and all students need strong personal connections in the classroom. One-on-one instruction helps meet that need for students (Stinnett, 2018).

Teacher participants in this study connected content to their students' personal lives a total of 105 times or an average of 8.75 times each lesson. Additionally, they talked with their students about their personal lives a total of 57 times or an average of 4.75 times each lesson. Highly effective teachers get to know students personally and work to build strong relationships with them (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Kleinfeld, 1994; OECD, 2005; Tripod Education Partners, 2016). Highly effective teachers use their understanding of each student's prior experiences, their cultural and community knowledge, and their personal interests as a bridge to academic learning (Blanton et al., 2011). Building relationships with students may also involve the teacher connecting content to students' lives, showing respect to all students, as well as providing praise. Teachers who captivate their students make learning interesting and relevant (Ferguson et al., 2015).

Guided Instruction

Guided instruction, or the "we do" phase of gradual release was a concept that occurred 1,407 times in twelve observations, which is a category average of 117.25 times per lesson. This was the second highest occurring code category. Table 4 shows the highly effective strategies that teachers used in all twelve observations as it relates to

guided instruction practices, how many times those codes occurred in total across all observations and the average number of times the strategies were used in each lesson.

Table 4

Guided Instruction Codes

Code Category	Teacher Strategy/Code	Total times code appeared in all lessons observed	Average number of times code appeared per class period
Guided Instruction	asks a question	391	32.58
	provides a prompt to help student	231	19.25
	answers a question a student posed	222	18.5
	restates student response to question	218	18.16
	review content already presented	113	9.42
	provide reminders like, "...don't forget that right angles are 90 degrees"	98	8.17
	holds student accountable for engaging in work- ie: providing fill in the blank notes	57	4.75
	tells students they are in the "we do it" phase	54	4.5
	students engage in a formal activity with teacher support	23	1.9

Table 4

Guided instruction is known in the target district's instructional model as "we do it" because the teacher begins to share the learning responsibility with the student. Highly effective teachers use guided instruction to facilitate learners' development with the goal of increased independence (Raymond, 2011). In the gradual release phase, highly effective teachers provide opportunities for students to actively participate in discussions and activities with the teacher (Dean, Hubbell, Pitler, & Stone 2012). These structured activities are designed just beyond the level of what the learners can do alone and hold students accountable for engaging in the learning with the teacher (Olson and Pratt,

2019). In this study, the teachers provided structured activities during which they engaged with students a total of 23 times or an average of 1.3 activities per lesson. Additionally, the teachers held their students accountable to engage in learning a total of 57 times or an average of 4.75 times per lesson.

In the guided instruction phase, the teacher scaffolds students' developing skills and knowledge through questioning, prompting, cuing, and additional modeling centered around the learning goals (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Teachers in this study asked their students a question a total of 391 times or an average of 32.58 questions every lesson. Questioning can be a useful tool for teachers to use in the classroom to assess where students are related to the learning goal (Dean et al., 2012; deBettencourt & Howard., 2007; William, 2011). In this phase of gradual release, highly effective teachers ask questions that check for understanding to uncover errors or misconceptions the students may have (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Effective questions help students access their prior knowledge. Leveraging prior knowledge helps students to learn new information (Dean et al., 2012; Raymond, 2011). In the data collected, teachers in this study reviewed content already presented to activate students' prior knowledge 113 times or an average of 9.42 times per lesson.

Additionally, highly effective teachers encourage students to ask questions (Dean et al., 2012). The positive deviant teachers in this study answered student questions a total of 222 times or an average of 18.5 times per lesson. In the guided instruction phase, students and the teacher are working together to build the student's independence in the content. In the process, teachers may need to provide prompts or reminders to students. Providing explicit reminders may help activate students' prior knowledge and

experiences that will aid them in learning new content (Dean et al., 2012). Teachers in this study provided content reminders to students a total of 98 times or 8.17 reminders per lesson.

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment codes occurred 827 times in twelve observations, which is a category average of 68.92 times per lesson. This was the third highest occurring code category. Table 5 shows the highly effective strategies that teachers used in all twelve observations as it relates to formative assessment, how many times those codes occurred in total across all observations and the average number of times the strategies were used in each lesson.

Table 5

Formative Assessment Codes

Code Category	Teacher Strategy/Code	Total times code appeared in all lessons observed	Average number of times code appeared per class period
Formative Assessment	student openly responds or volunteers	209	17.42
	proximity/walk around to check on students' work	185	15.42
	quickly and randomly calls on students	149	12.42
	asks the students if they have any questions	81	6.75
	corrects misunderstandings student has	77	6.42
	provides students wait time after asking a question	57	4.75
	adjusts instruction based on evaluation of students' work	40	3.33
	visually checks students' self ratings of their understanding. May say something like, "Give me a thumbs up if you are ready to move on. Give me a thumbs down if you need more time or do not understand."	17	1.42
	provides closure to lesson	12	1

Table 5

Formative assessment strategies are used by highly effective teachers to determine whether or not students are reaching their instructional goals (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). Formative assessment involves the teacher making judgements about the quality of student responses and performance as it relates to the learning goal and then immediately adjusting instruction if needed to improve student understanding (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Roskos & Neuman, 2012). Judgements about the quality of student progress should happen minute by minute and throughout the entire lesson. Formative assessment strategies may include the teacher engineering effective discussions with active student participation, tasks and activities that will elicit evidence of learning, using proximity to check for student errors, and providing a space in which students can take ownership of their learning and ask questions (William, 2011).

Highly effective teachers gather information about all students as they seek to understand where each student is in the learning process. The highly effective general education teachers in this study randomly called on students 149 times or an average of 12.42 times per lesson. This strategy sets the classroom precedent that all students are responsible for actively participating in learning (Lemov, 2010; William, 2011). One of many strategies used to randomly call on students includes the use of popsicle sticks. Teachers may elect to write each student's name on a stick and randomly draw one to determine the next participant. This was a strategy used by three of the participants in this study. Choosing students at random allows the teacher to sample various students and where they are in relation to the learning goal without any bias (William, 2011). Without having to be called on, students in the classrooms in this study responded openly a total of 209 times or an average of 17.42 times per lesson, suggesting that the exchange of

information between the teacher and their students happens regularly and frequently in the classrooms of the positive deviant teachers selected for this study.

Teacher participants also provided wait time a total of 57 times or an average of 4.75 times per lesson. Wait time is the amount of time between the teacher prompt or question and the student's answer. Highly effective teachers allow their students time to reflect without jumping in too quickly and providing help immediately (William, 2011). In addition to verbally gathering information about their learning from students, highly effective teachers use proximity as a strategy. Proximity used as a formative assessment strategy suggests that the teacher is moving around the classroom in close proximity with the students so they can see the work being done by their learners. In this study, teachers used proximity to gather information about students' learning a total of 185 times or an average of 15.42 times per lesson.

Formative assessment strategies provide feedback to the teacher from the students (Hattie, 2007). This feedback may include the teacher choosing to check in with students before moving on to new information or activities. This can be done verbally or visually. Teachers in this study stopped the lesson to ask students if they had any questions a total of 81 times or an average of 6.75 times per lesson. They also asked the students to visually rate their learning a total of 17 times or 1.42 times per lesson. Asking students to self reflect on their own learning progress yields higher achievement scores and improves learning in students (Glaser & Brunstein, 2007; William, 2010).

Based on the information gathered from students, teachers may find that students are not making adequate progress toward the learning goal. In this study, teachers corrected misunderstandings a total of 77 times or an average of 6.42 corrections per

lesson. Highly effective teachers address any misconceptions that may arise, and provide useful feedback to students (Tripod Education Partners, 2016). Feedback from teachers should be timely, direct, positive, reference the task, and focus on what to correct and do next in order to have a positive impact on student achievement (Brookhart, 2008; deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008). Feedback may also result in the teacher adjusting their instruction entirely to see students make progress toward the learning goal. Teachers in this study adjusted their instruction or activities a total of 40 times or an average of 3.33 times per lesson to accommodate students' immediate needs. Tweaking, reframing, or modifying instruction immediately improves student understanding (Hattie, 2007; Roskos & Neuman, 2012).

Closure. Closure is a required part of the target school's instructional model and is an activity at the end of the lesson that allows all students the opportunity to recognize what they have learned (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Closure refocuses students' attention to the learning goal and provides formative assessment data that guides the teacher on where to start the next lesson. Teachers in this study provided students with a closure activity in all twelve observations, an average of once each lesson.

Focused Instruction

Focused instruction, or the "I do it" phase of gradual release was a concept that occurred 428 times in twelve observations, which is a category average of 35.67 times per lesson. Table 6 shows the highly effective strategies that teachers used in all twelve observations as it related to focused instruction practices, how many times those codes occurred in total across all observations and the average number of times the strategies were used in each lesson.

Table 6

Focused Instruction Codes

Code Category	Teacher Strategy/Code	Total times code appeared in all lessons observed	Average number of times code appeared per class period
Focused Instruction	uses content specific academic vocabulary	147	12.25
	demonstrate/model new content	114	9.5
	preview upcoming content and connects current lesson to it	51	4.25
	think aloud	34	2.83
	tells students they are in the "I do it" phase	33	2.75
	connects current lesson to prior unit(s) and learning	28	2.33
	provides learning activation	15	1.25
	states learning goal	6	0.5

Table 6

In the focused instruction phase of gradual release, the teacher assumes most of the responsibility. The teacher often begins by activating students' prior knowledge, communicating the learning goals with students, and motivating them for the day's lesson (Fisher & Frey, 2014). As the content experts, highly effective general education teachers express competency in their professional knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors throughout the focused instruction phase of learning (Blanton et al., 2011; Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017). Teachers in this study used content specific academic vocabulary a total of 147 times or an average of 12.25 times per lesson. With clear and convincing use of language, teachers in the focused instruction phase explain new concepts and vocabulary in a variety of ways through techniques such as modeling and think-alouds (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Teachers in this study modeled or demonstrated the content a total of 114 times or an average of 9.5 times per lesson. Additionally, they used the think-aloud

strategy a total of 34 times or an average of 2.83 times per lesson. The focused instruction phase allows the students to be introduced to new learning and see, from an expert, new and exciting content.

In the "I do it" or focused instruction phase, teachers explicitly generalize key ideas from the lessons by connecting it to prior knowledge or upcoming units so that students can see the relationship between what is being studied in different units and classrooms (Bronzo & Simpson, 2006; Tripod Education Partners, 2016). Generalization between lessons creates broader and deeper meaning in the content (Dean et al., 2012; Pransky, 2009). Teachers in this study connected current learning to upcoming lessons a total of 51 times or an average of 4.25 times per lesson. They also connected the current lesson to prior learning a total of 28 times or an average of 2.33 times per lesson.

Learning activation. Engaged academic time can be lost during transitions but by providing a warm up or learning activation activity, a highly effective teacher is able to engage students right away at the beginning of class (Churchill et al., 2007). Learning activation is a brief activity required in the target school's instructional model to focus students' attention on the lesson's learning goals. The activation portion of the lesson helps students identify and discuss what they already know about the topic (Dean et al., 2012). Additionally, learning activation motivates students to engage with new content by mentally preparing them for the lesson. The positive deviant teachers in this study provided learning activation to their students a total of 15 times or an average of 1.25 times per lesson.

Learning goal. Providing the students with a learning goal is also a required component of the target school's instructional mode. In each lesson, highly effective

teachers use explicit cues to tell students what they are about to learn by using student-friendly language (Dean et al., 2012). The learning goal identifies the instructional focus and provides students a clear statement of what they should know when the lesson is over. The reader may notice that in all 12 observations, the teacher stated the lesson's learning goal.

Behavior Intervention

Behavior intervention codes occurred 233 times in twelve observations, which is a category average of 19.42 times per lesson. Table 7 shows the highly effective strategies that teachers used in all twelve observations as it relates to behavior intervention, how many times those codes occurred in total across all observations and the average number of times the strategies were used in each lesson.

Table 7

Behavior Intervention Codes

Code Category	Teacher Strategy/Code	Total times code appeared in all lessons observed	Average number of times code appeared per class period
Behavior Intervention	redirect student behavior	125	10.42
	provides students information about the structure of the work they need to complete and provides students step-by-step directions in preparation for an activity	85	7.08
	ignores student negative behavior	23	1.92

Table 7

While students make willful choices, the adults in the classroom environment can help guide the decisions they make (Netzel & Eber, 2003). Teachers who manage behavior and provide a safe and orderly classroom are also the most effective at improving student outcomes (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Mastropieri & Scruggs,

2000). Providing structure, routine and explicit directions may help prevent disruptive student behaviors (Floress et al., 2017; Kellough, 2009). Tripod Education Partners (2016) emphasize, “Teachers who are effective at classroom management foster orderly, respectful, and on-task classroom behavior. They create conditions that enable learning, including establishing positive classroom climate, teaching self-management skills, monitoring student conduct, and redirecting unproductive behavior” (p. 15). Teachers in this study provided clear, explicit structure and directions a total of 85 times or an average of 7.08 times per lesson.

When students are disruptive or do not follow directions, highly effective teachers provide quick and direct feedback that is assertive and clear to extinguish the student’s behavior (Emmer, Evertson, & Worsham, 2003; Kellough, 2009). The feedback they provide is fair and consistent (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Ziff & Zetlin, 2004). In this study, the highly effective teachers redirected student behavior a total of 125 times or an average of 10.42 times per lesson. Further, when a student inappropriately tries to gain the teacher’s attention, highly effective teachers ignore the behavior (Intervention Central, n.d.; Sprick, Garrison, & Howard, 1998). Teachers in this study ignored student behavior because the student was inappropriately seeking attention a total of 23 times or an average of 1.92 times per lesson.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning allows students to consolidate their thinking and understanding with each other. The “you do it together” phase of gradual release requires students to apply what they learn to new situations and turn to one another for enrichment and support (Fisher & Frey, 2014). Collaborative learning fosters student communication

and willingness to work with their peers to accomplish a goal (Partnership for 21st Century, 2009). In this phase of gradual release, students gain opportunities to participate in inquiry, decision making, goal setting, time management, and self monitoring (ASCD Whole Child Initiative, n.d). These skills, combined with teamwork, attitude, and collaborative problem solving, develop students' soft skills which are critical to gaining employment later in life (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In this study, the teacher participants provided students with collaborative learning opportunities a total of 32 times or an average of 2.67 times per lesson.

Independent Learning

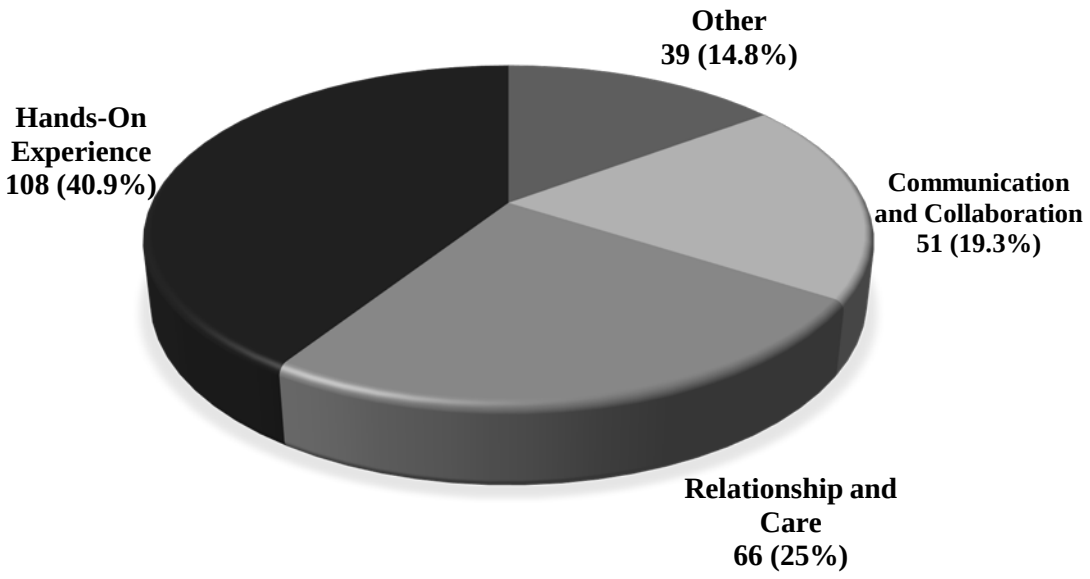
In this "you do it alone" phase of gradual release, students independently demonstrate evidence of their learning. In order to apply recently learned skills, students require deliberate practice and time spent working and thinking alone (Fisher & Frey, 2014; Gladwell, 2008). In the independent learning phase, students increase their speed, accuracy, and ability to recall information (Dean et al., 2012). The highly effective teachers in this study provided students with independent learning opportunities a total of 23 times or an average of 1.92 times per lesson.

Chapter 6 Themes

The researcher first coded and analyzed the data for common themes across six interviews and coded and analyzed the data for common themes across twelve observations. The interview data brought about themes representing the positive deviant teachers' values and experiences. The observation data brought about themes that represented the participants' highly effective teaching strategies. The researcher intensely reflected on the interview and observation themes that emerged. In isolation, the themes did not tell the story of how the positive deviant teachers successfully closed the knowing-doing gap as it relates to meeting the needs of students with special education needs. The knowing-doing gap is the idea that individuals, or in this case teachers, know what to do but do not always act upon that knowledge (Hall & Simeral, 2015; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). So, the researcher sorted and categorized all the thematic data across all six interviews and twelve observations.

Looking holistically at what the positive deviant general education teachers said in their interviews combined with researcher observations of what the teachers did in their classrooms, allowed the researcher to identify where teachers closed the knowing-doing gap as it relates to serving students with special education needs to answer the central research question: What is the experience of high school general education teachers who successfully meet the needs of students with special education needs in their general education classrooms? After intensive and repeated data analysis and reflection, the researcher was able to see three overarching common themes across all categories of data collected in both the interviews and observations.

Based on both interview and observation data, the researcher established that in this case study, highly effective general education teachers communicate and collaborate with school stakeholders, build relationships and care for students, and value their hands-on experience serving students with special education needs in their classroom. In fact, 85.2% of all codes that occurred in the positive deviant teacher interviews fell into one of those three categories in a meaningful and important way. There was no connectedness or relatable themes that emerged from the remaining 14.8% of the data. Additionally, 89.8% of all codes that occurred in the positive deviant teacher observations also fell into one of those three categories in a meaningful and important way. There was no connectedness or relatable themes that emerged from the remaining 10.2% of the data. Figure 1 shows the overall percentage each of these themes occurred in interview data.



Interview Theme Data

Figure 1. Coded interview data based on theme percentages

Codes related to communication and collaboration were applied 51 times in interviews, which means that 19.3% of all interview data related to this theme.

Additionally, codes related to fostering relationships with and caring for students was applied 66 times, which means 25% of all interview data related to this theme. 108 codes applied related to the hands-on experience theme, which means 40.9% of all interview data related to this theme. The organization of these themes leaves only 39 code applications or 14.48% of the interview data unused. Figure 2 shows the overall percentage each of the three themes occurred in observation data.

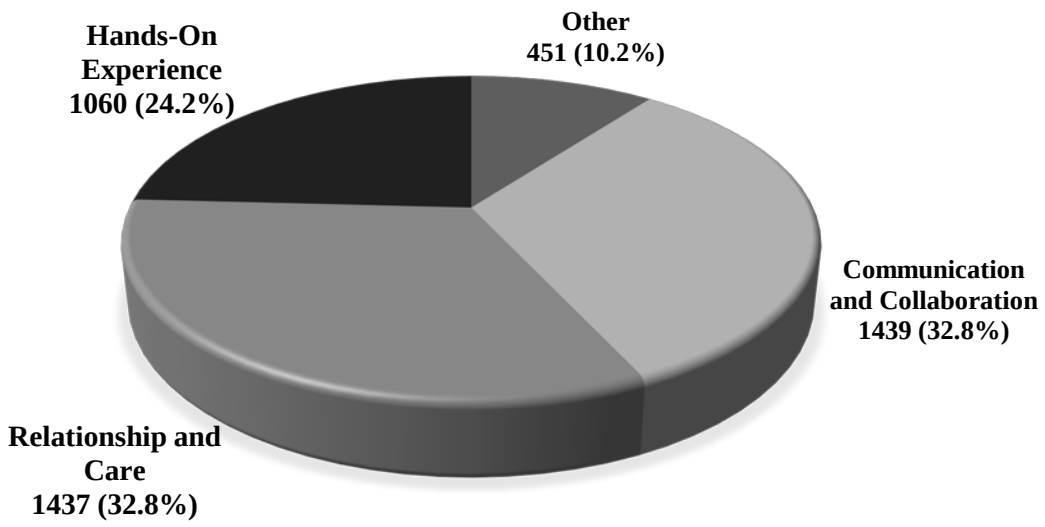


Figure 2. Coded observation data based on theme percentages

Codes related to communication and collaboration were applied 1,439 times in observations, which means that 32.8% of all observation data related to this theme. Additionally, codes related to fostering relationships with and caring for students was applied 1,437 times, which means 32.8% of all observation data related to this theme. 1,060 codes applied related to the hands-on experience theme, which means 24.2% of all observation data related to this theme. The organization of these themes leaves only 451 code applications or 10.2% of the observation data unused. The researcher acknowledges a discrepancy between the hands-on experience theme totals in the interviews and the

hands-on experience theme totals in the observations. The difference of 16.7% may come from the fact that it is hard to see all experiences a teacher has within two fifty minute lessons. Additionally, many key experiences teacher's cited in their interviews such has attending IEP meetings, cannot be seen in the traditional classroom setting.

Communication and Collaboration

In both interviews and observations, all six participants demonstrated that they value and act on collaboration and communication with school stakeholders and were able to close the knowing-doing gap as it related to serving students with special education needs in this area. Table 8 shows the code categories from both the interviews and observations that were combined to demonstrate this theme and how many total codes were applied from each category.

Table 8

Theme 1: Communication and Collaboration

Interview Code Category	Code Application Total	Observation Code Category	Code Application Total
Communication and Collaboration	51	Guided Instruction	1407
		Collaborative Learning	32
Total	**51**		**1439**

Table 8

Codes demonstrating the teachers' value of collaboration and communication occurred a total of 51 times and are further explained in Chapter Four of this dissertation. The researcher combined the data from classroom observations in the code categories "Guided Instruction" and "Collaborative Learning" to demonstrate the teachers' ability to

collaborate and communicate. Guided instruction, or the “we do it” phase of gradual release, requires teachers to collaborate and share with students the responsibility of learning (Fisher & Frey, 2014). In this phase, the teacher and students work together to develop each student’s understanding of the learning goal. Highly effective teachers foster communication with students and encourage them to actively participate in discussions and activities with them during the guided instruction phase of gradual release (Dean, et al., 2012; deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; William, 2011). Therefore, all codes related to the category of guided instruction from classroom observations were used to demonstrate the teacher participants’ communication and collaboration skills.

Additionally, codes applied to the collaborative learning category of observational data were used to demonstrate the teacher participants’ communication and collaboration skills. The researcher believes that these codes demonstrate communication and collaboration because the teacher fosters communication and collaboration skills among the students. In the collaborative learning phase of gradual release, teachers demonstrate their value of communication and collaboration by providing students opportunities to work with their peers and to practice communal decision making and teamwork skills (ASCD Whole Child Initiative, n.d.; Partnership for 21st Century, 2009; Fisher and Frey, 2014). Codes from the guided instruction and collaborative learning phases of learning were applied a total of 1,439 times. The data from both interviews and observations proves communication and collaboration to be a major theme in this research. This data confirms that the positive deviants in this study were able to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to communication and collaboration as an effective strategy to meet the needs

of students with disabilities because they were among the highest coded categories in both the interviews and the transcripts.

Building Relationships and Caring for Students

In both interviews and observations, all six participants demonstrated that they value and act on building relationships with and caring for students. Table 9 shows the combined code categories from both the interviews and observations and how many total codes were applied from each category.

Table 9

Theme 2: Building Relationships and Caring for Students

Interview Code Category	Code Application Total	Observation Code Category	Code Application Total
Empathy and Caring	47	Building Relationships with Students	1437
Relationship with Student	19		
Total	**66**		**1437**

Table 9

Interview codes demonstrating the teachers' value of building relationships and providing empathy and care to students occurred for a theme total of 66 code applications. In the classroom observations, a total of 1,437 were applied to the building relationships with students category. These categories are explained in more detail in Chapter Four and Chapter Five of this dissertation. This data confirms that the teachers in this study were able to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to building relationships with and caring for students as an effective way to serve students with special education

needs because they were among the highest coded categories in both the interviews and the observations.

Hands-On Experience

In both interviews and observations, all six positive deviant participants demonstrated that they value their robust hands-on teaching experience serving students with special education needs and were able to effectively demonstrate their ability to adjust instruction to meet the needs of all learners in their classrooms. Table 10 shows the combined code categories from both the interviews and observations and how many total codes were applied from each category.

Table 10

Theme 3: Hands-on Experience

Interview Code Category	Code Application Total	Observation Code Category	Code Application Total
Trial and Error or in Time Found Success	46	Behavior Intervention	233
Success in Providing Accommodations and Attending IEP Meetings	39	Formative Assessment	827
Large or Challenging Group of Students	23		
Total	**108**		**1060**

Table 10

The importance of hands-on experience serving students with special education needs was the main theme that occurred in teacher interviews. In interviews, participants credited their current effectiveness to past experiences serving students with challenging needs, teaching classes with a large number of students with disabilities enrolled, and

attending IEP meetings. A total of 46 code applications related to the value the teacher participants placed on their success over time and trial and error experiences meeting students with disabilities needs. The teachers in this study credited their effectiveness to attending IEP meetings and seeing students succeed after providing accommodations; this category was coded in the interview data 39 times. Finally, 23 code applications from interviews related to teachers experiencing success and learning effective strategies after serving a large and/or challenging group of students. The researcher believes these three categories demonstrate that highly effective general education teachers value their hands-on classroom experience serving students with special education needs. This is the most coded theme in the interview data.

To demonstrate the teachers' ability to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to the hands-on experience theme that emerged from the interview data, the researcher used the categories "Behavior Intervention" and "Formative Assessment" from the observation data. In interviews, teachers stated that they learned highly effective strategies because they served a variety of students with challenging needs in prior years. In the observations, the category that demonstrated the teachers' abilities to manage challenging behavior was coded a total of 233 times.

The teachers in the interviews stated they developed highly effective strategies that help them serve students with disabilities because they have robust experience providing accommodations and adjusting instruction for students based on their needs. In the observations, the teachers' ability to do this can be demonstrated through their formative assessment strategies. Using formative assessment strategies, highly effective teachers determine students are making progress toward their learning goals (Hattie &

Zierer, 2018). If students are not, highly effective teachers accommodate the activity and adjust their instruction to meet the students' needs (deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Hattie, 2007; Roskos & Neuman, 2012). Teachers in this study were able to demonstrate effective formative assessment strategies a total of 827 times across all classroom observations, indicating that the teachers were able to assess students' abilities and understanding, make instructional adjustments, and manage challenging student behavior a total of 1,060 times. These behaviors indicate that effective teachers internalize hands-on experiences to develop their capacity in serving students with special education needs and close the knowing-doing gap.

Chapter 7 Conclusion

Data in this research study from six interviews and twelve observations suggests that general education teachers, in order to be highly effective in serving students with special education needs, should be able to communicate and collaborate with others, build relationships with all students, and have robust experience serving students with disabilities. Every student deserves a highly effective teacher because teacher behavior impacts student achievement (Crockett, et al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; Tzivinikou, 2015b). In fact, teachers are the single most important factor in school effectiveness and influencing student achievement (Crocket, et al., 2012; Goodwin, 2010; OECD, 2005; Quinn, 2014; RAND, 2012; Tucker, 2011; Tzivinikou, 2015b). However, many general education teachers express feeling underprepared to meet the diverse needs of their students who receive special education services (Blanton, et al., 2011; Brownell et al., 2006; MetLife, Inc., 2008; MetLife, Inc., 2012; Schwab, et al., 2015; Thompson, 2017; Wanzenried, 1998). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the experiences of general education teachers in a traditional high school environment who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs in hopes of finding commonalities between the teachers in order to answer the central research question: What is the experience of high school general education teachers who successfully meet the needs of students with special education needs in their general education classrooms? This chapter includes a discussion of findings related to the themes that emerged from the analysis of interview and observation data, the implications of the results, and suggestions for future studies.

Discussion of Results

The results of this research showed that the six highly effective general education teacher participants shared the ability to communicate and collaborate with other school stakeholders, build relationships with all students using kindness and empathy, and learn from their experiences serving students with special education needs. All six teachers were able to demonstrate in the classroom the values they expressed in their interviews. What the positive deviant teachers know and described in their interviews is what they do as evidenced by their classroom observations. Meaning, these six teachers were able to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to the three main themes in this study: collaboration and communication, building relationships with students, and learning from their experiences serving students with special education needs. These themes also support and add to current literature about highly effective teaching.

Collaboration and communication. Teachers in this study said that communicating and collaborating with other school stakeholders helped them to be highly effective in meeting the needs of students with disabilities. They demonstrated the ability to communicate and collaborate with students in their classroom observations. 19% of all interview data and 32.8% of all observation data indicated that teachers who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs communicate and collaborate with school stakeholders.

Current literature also confirms that highly effective teachers collaborate and communicate with school stakeholders (Blanton et al., 2011; Kellough, 2009; Martin & Mulvihill, 2017; OECD, 2005; Thompson, 2017). In fact, student learning is benefited when teachers work well with students, parents and colleagues (Goddard et al., 2007;

Hattie & Zierer, 2018, OECD, 2005). Collaboration is especially important when teams serve students with disabilities because stakeholders can exchange expertise, share responsibility, and work together with the common goal of meeting the student's needs (Arthaud et al., 2007; Blanton et al., 2011; deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Friend & Cook, 2012; Nevin et al., 2009; Pellegrino et al., 2015; Thompson, 2017; Tzivinikou, 2015a). Additionally, collaboration and communication are important skills for 21st century students. Today's students need the skills to function in environments that require them to work with others to accomplish a variety of tasks. It is important for teachers to facilitate practice opportunities in these critical soft skills (Dean et al., 2012). Therefore, in order for general education teachers to be highly effective in serving students with special education needs, they must be able to collaborate and communicate with other school stakeholders and facilitate collaboration and communication among students.

Building relationships and caring for students. Teachers in this study said that the relationships they built with students and the care they provided, especially to those with disabilities, helped them to be more effective teachers and meet students' needs. They also demonstrated the ability to build relationships with students in the classroom. 25% of all interview data and 32.8% of all observation data indicated that teachers who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs build relationships with students and provide students with empathy and compassion.

Current literature also confirms that highly effective teachers embrace and care for all students as they are, including children who require additional support because effective teachers recognize that student diversity in schools is the rule, not the exception (Arriaga & Lindsey, 2016; Blanton et al., 2011; Platsidou & Agaliotis, 2017). Caring

teachers are good teachers and good caring teachers are important to the success of students (Shaunessy & McHatton, 2009). Research supports that highly effective teachers serving students with disabilities not only care about them but are also able to build appropriate personalized relationships with them (Goodwin, 2010; Hattie & Zierer, 2018; OECD, 2005). Building personalized relationships with students allows teachers to respond with consistency to all students' social, emotional, and academic learning needs (Tripod Education Partners, 2016). Creating learning environments built on trust and relationships with students has a positive impact on student learning (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; OECD, 2005). In fact, children learn more, participate willingly in class discussions and activities, and work harder for teachers with whom they have a relationship (Hattie & Zierer, 2018; Kleinfeld, 1994). In order for general education teachers to be highly effective in serving students with special education needs, they must be able to build relationships with and care for them.

Hands-On experience. Teachers in this study credited their current effectiveness in meeting the needs to students with disabilities to their practice and experience serving students with special education needs in the past. In fact, all six teacher participants attributed their current effectiveness to their past experiences attending IEP meetings, teaching classes with a large number of students with disabilities enrolled, and serving students with challenging needs. The teachers also demonstrated the ability to adjust instruction and meet student needs in the classroom. 40.9% of all interview data and 24.2% of all observation data indicates that teachers who are highly effective in serving students with special education needs have robust experience in doing so.

Often, teachers who express feeling underprepared or lacking in skill blame inadequate experience (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Youngs, 2002; Fine et al., 2003; Harriman, 2000; Melser, 2004). Additional time and hands-on experience can provide teachers the opportunity to develop skills they may have been lacking (Kellough, 2009; Spooner et al., 2008). Teaching is a craft that can be learned and developed over time (Wong & Wong, 2001). As teachers refine their craft by gaining more experiences, they can have a positive impact on student outcomes (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; "Students Who Challenge Us", 2012). Teacher experience serving students with special education needs and attending IEP meetings is important.

General education teachers have, undoubtedly, one of the most influential roles in the creation, implementation, and evaluation of a student's IEP (Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017). The input from a teacher about how a student's disability affects their learning in the classroom is vital to the team's discussion of accommodations, needs and services required for that student to access their appropriate education. A general education teacher is among the most effective on the student's team in helping the team determine if the IEP is sufficient in addressing the student's needs (Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017). Day to day, highly effective teachers are able to assess whether students are meeting their instructional goals (Hattie & Zierer, 2018). If they are not, these teachers provide students feedback, additional support and accommodations, and adjust instruction to improve student understanding (Brookhart, 2008; deBettencourt & Howard, 2007; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Shute, 2008; Tripod Education Partners, 2016). It is critical for students to have general education teachers with robust experiences serving students with special education needs and attending IEP meetings.

Implications

There are a number of practical implications of this research study. One of the best ways to improve student outcomes is to improve teacher quality and preparedness (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002; William, 2011). The themes and ideas that surfaced in this study could be used to develop professional training and resources to build the capacity of general education teachers who are less effective in their practice serving students with disabilities. Positive deviant general education teachers who are highly effective at serving students with special education needs are often tasked with teaching the majority of the students with disabilities in their school. By building the capacity of more teachers, students with special education needs can be taught by a variety of teachers and this may reduce the burned out feeling some positive deviant teachers express they have.

This study indicates that general education teachers need to be able to close the knowing-doing gap as it relates to teaching students with special education needs by developing their communication and collaboration skills, enhancing their ability to build relationships with students, and have meaningful hands-on experiences teaching students with disabilities. The following are recommendations by the researcher to help school leaders develop the skills of general education teachers as it relates to their ability to serve special education students:

- First and foremost, general education teachers need hands-on experience and support teaching students with disabilities. District leaders and building administrators must ensure that teachers gain robust experiences serving students with diverse needs and attending IEP meetings. In order for general education teachers to close the knowing-doing gap and develop highly effective strategies to

serve students with special education needs in their classrooms, frontline training must also be allocated and provided. As general education teachers serve more students with disabilities and attend more IEP meetings, administrators should provide the teachers with hands-on coaching support. Providing frontline coaching support to teachers builds confidence, allows the teachers to be more self-reliant, manage their stress in the classroom, increase their knowledge and skills, and provides them with strategies necessary to manage diverse student needs (Brownell et al., 2004; Sawchuk, 2015).

- To enhance the ability of general education teachers to become highly effective in serving students with special education needs, districts must also provide the teachers with timely professional development that contains content on how to build relationships with students and how to collaborate and communicate with school stakeholders. School leaders must develop teacher competency. Teacher competency refers to the professional knowledge and skills necessary for education to perform their duties (Şenay İlik & Sarı, 2017). Professional support and development help teachers fill in the gaps in their skills, increase their efficacy, and further develop their teaching competency (Peters & Jolly, 2018; Sawchuk, 2015). Providing teachers professional development opportunities increases opportunities for both teachers and students (Tzivinikou, 2015b).

In order for general education teachers to establish and implement highly effective strategies to help them better serve students with special education needs, general education teachers need frontline training and professional support. With a combination

of professional development and frontline coaching, general education teachers can become highly effective in serving students with special education needs.

Recommendations for Further Research

More research is recommended to evaluate the effectiveness of the supports and training recommended by the researcher so that schools can implement sound training that makes a direct impact on student learning. Additionally, this case study was conducted in one midwestern high school and could also be replicated in both the elementary and middle school settings to see how the results compare to this study. To broaden the scope of this research, it could be replicated in any other high schools as well. Finally, each of the themes uncovered in this research study could easily be studied in a dissertation of its own. Another researcher could study each theme independently to further develop the impact they have on student learning.

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APPENDIX A: Introduction Email

Dear_____,

My name is Paige Gill and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

I will be conducting a research study exploring the experiences of highly effective teachers. I hope to uncover themes and commonalities in teachers' experiences that may be identified and used in the development of other teachers. You were identified by your administrative team as being a teacher who is able to effectively serve students who receive special education services and then randomly selected to participate.

Should you choose to participate, you will complete an in-person interview with me and allow me to digitally observe you teach twice.

In the interview, we will discuss your experiences in serving students who receive special education services. The interview will be semi-structured in nature and I will have guiding questions for the interview. With that said, the conversation is the focus of the interview and the questions remain flexible. The conversations will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. I will provide you with a transcript of the interview for you to check the accuracy.

I will also record two of your lessons which I will review to identify the positive things happening in your classroom. The purpose of the two digital observations is to identify the positive things happening in your classroom. The observations are not part of your teacher evaluation process.
Like the interview transcripts, I will provide you with a summary of the classroom observation for you to check the accuracy.

The recordings from both the interview and observations will be reviewed and destroyed immediately following transcription and review. Your identity will not be shown in the discussion or findings. Confidentiality is a focus throughout the study.

Please respond to this email to indicate whether or not you are willing to participate in this study. Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions. I truly appreciate your consideration and time.

Sincerely,

Paige Gill
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APPENDIX B: Consent Form

What makes you so good? Highly Effective General Education Teachers Serving Students with Special Education Needs

Invitation

You are invited to take part in this research study. The information in this form is meant to help you decide whether or not to take part. If you have any questions, please ask.

Why are you being asked to be in this research study?

You are being asked to participate in this research study based on your administrative team recommendation because they identify you as someone who is highly effective in serving special education students.

What is the reason for doing this research study?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of teachers, like you, who are highly effective in serving special education students in hopes of finding commonalities between the teachers that can be replicated for other teachers.

What will be done during this research study?

Eligible participants were identified through purposive selection completed by the building administrative team of then target school and then randomly selected. An initial email was sent to discuss the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and time requirements of study participation. The consent form was shared for review by each participant. Once participation is confirmed, the interview and observations will be scheduled.

A semi-structured interview will be conducted with each participant. The interview will be transcribed and shared with each participant in order to allow he/she an opportunity to add to and/or retract any of the statements. Each interview will be analyzed and themes will be identified. The researcher will also review recorded video footage of the participant teaching 2 lessons. The researcher will identify positive ways the teacher provided effective instruction according to the target school's district instructional model.

What are the possible risks and benefits of being in this research study?

There are no known risks to you associated with this research study. You are not expected to get any direct benefit from being in this research study.

What are the possible benefits to other people?

The information acquired from this study may help gain a better understanding about the experiences of teachers who are highly effective in serving special education students.

What are the alternatives to being in this research study?

Instead of being in this research study you can choose not to participate.

What will being in this research study cost you and will you be paid for being in this research study?

There is no cost to you to be in this research study and you will not be paid.

What should you do if you have a problem during this research study?

Your welfare if the major concern of every member of the research team. If you have a problem as a direct result of being in this study, you should immediately contact one of the people listed at the end of this consent form.

How will information about you be protected?

Reasonable steps will be taken to protect your privacy and the confidentiality of your study data. You will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure that your identity is kept confidential. Audio files will only be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed and the observation reviewed, the audio and video files will be destroyed.

The only persons who will have access to your research records are the study personnel, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and any other person or agency required by law. The information from this study may be published in scientific journals or presented at scientific meetings but your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

What are your rights as a research subject?

You have rights as a research subject. If you have any questions concerning your rights or complaints about the research, talk to the investigator by calling (402) 559-6463.

What will happen if you decide not to be in this research study or decide to stop participating once you start?

You can decide not to be in this research study, or you can stop being in this research study ("withdraw") at any time before, during, or after the research begins. Deciding not to be in this research study or deciding to withdraw will not affect your relationship with the investigator, or with the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Documentation of Informed Consent

You are freely making a decision whether to be in this research study. Signing this form means that 1) you have read and understood this consent form, (2) you have had the consent form explained to you, (3) you have had your questions answered and (4) you have decided to be in the research study.

If you have any questions during the study, you should talk to one of the investigators listed below. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

Signature of Subject:_____Date:_____

My signature certifies that all the elements of informed consent described on this consent form have been explained fully to the subject. In my judgment, the participant possesses the legal capacity to give informed consent to participate in this research and is voluntarily and knowingly giving informed consent to participate.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:_____Date: _____

Authorized Study Personnel

Principal Investigator: Paige Gill (402) 740-0781
pcopple@unomaha.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Tamara Williams (402) 554-3502
tamarawilliams@unomaha.edu

APPENDIX C: Interview Protocol

Time of Interview _____ **Place _____**

Date _____ **Interviewer _____**

Interviewee _____

Pseudonym _____

1. Introduction: Thank you for agreeing to take part in this case study. Your time is very much appreciated.

2. Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of teachers, like you, who are highly effective in serving special education students in hopes of finding commonalities between the teachers that can be replicated for other teachers.

3. Structure of the interview: Today, I want to ask you several open-ended questions so I can try to uncover how you became such a highly effective teacher. You may choose to answer any or all of the questions. I am recording our conversation and the audio will be transcribed verbatim. Your results are confidential, and you and our school will not be identified specifically in my report. It is okay to use student names and tell specific stories as all identities will be protected. Our conversation today will last no longer than 1 hour.

4. Check for questions

5. Informed Consent
- **-Review**
- **-Sign**

6. Test audio equipment

7. Make the participant feel comfortable

8. Opening Question: Tell me about your experience teaching students with special education needs.

Other questions to ask if needed for flow of conversation:
-Why are students with special education needs included in your classroom?
-Tell me about how you use what you know about special education in your class?
-When you know you have a student with special needs in your class, what is the 1st step you take?
-How do you know a student's needs are met?
-When you look at a student's IEP, what do you look for?
-How does administration know you work well with students who receive special education services?
-If you were to coach another teacher about serving a student special education needs, what you do and say?
-When you reflect on your experience as a teacher serving students with special needs, what has changed for you from your 1st year of teaching until today?

9. Closing: Thank you for taking the time today to participate in this interview. I know that time at this point in the semester is limited and I appreciate you reserving some of it for me. I will provide you the transcript of our conversation today for you to review to be sure your story was accurately represented. Again, let me reassure you of the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out.

10. Record an observations, feelings, thoughts, and/or reactions about the interview on Summary Contact Sheet

APPENDIX D: Summary Contact Sheet

Participant	Interview Date
1. What are the main ideas or themes that struck you during this interview?	
2. What new information did you gain during this interview?	
3. Was there anything surprising to you personally? Or that made you think differently about this research question?	
4. What messages did you take from the interview?	

5. How would you describe the general attitude towards serving students with disabilities?
6. What else was important about this interview?
7. Were there any problems with the topic?
Notes:

APPENDIX E: Original Observation Protocol

Time Observation Recorded _____ **Class Name _____**

Date Observation Recoded _____ **Reviewer _____**

Teacher _____

Pseudonym _____

Every Day Lesson Elements:

Learning Activation	**A very brief activity to focus students' attention on the lesson's learning goals.**
Learning Goal(s)	**A statement describing what students should know and be able to do at the conclusion of the lesson.**
Formative Assessment	**Minute-by-minute check for understanding centered around each students' knowledge of the learning goal(s).**
Closure	**An activity to close the lesson and allow students to reflect on their learning.**

Gradual Release:

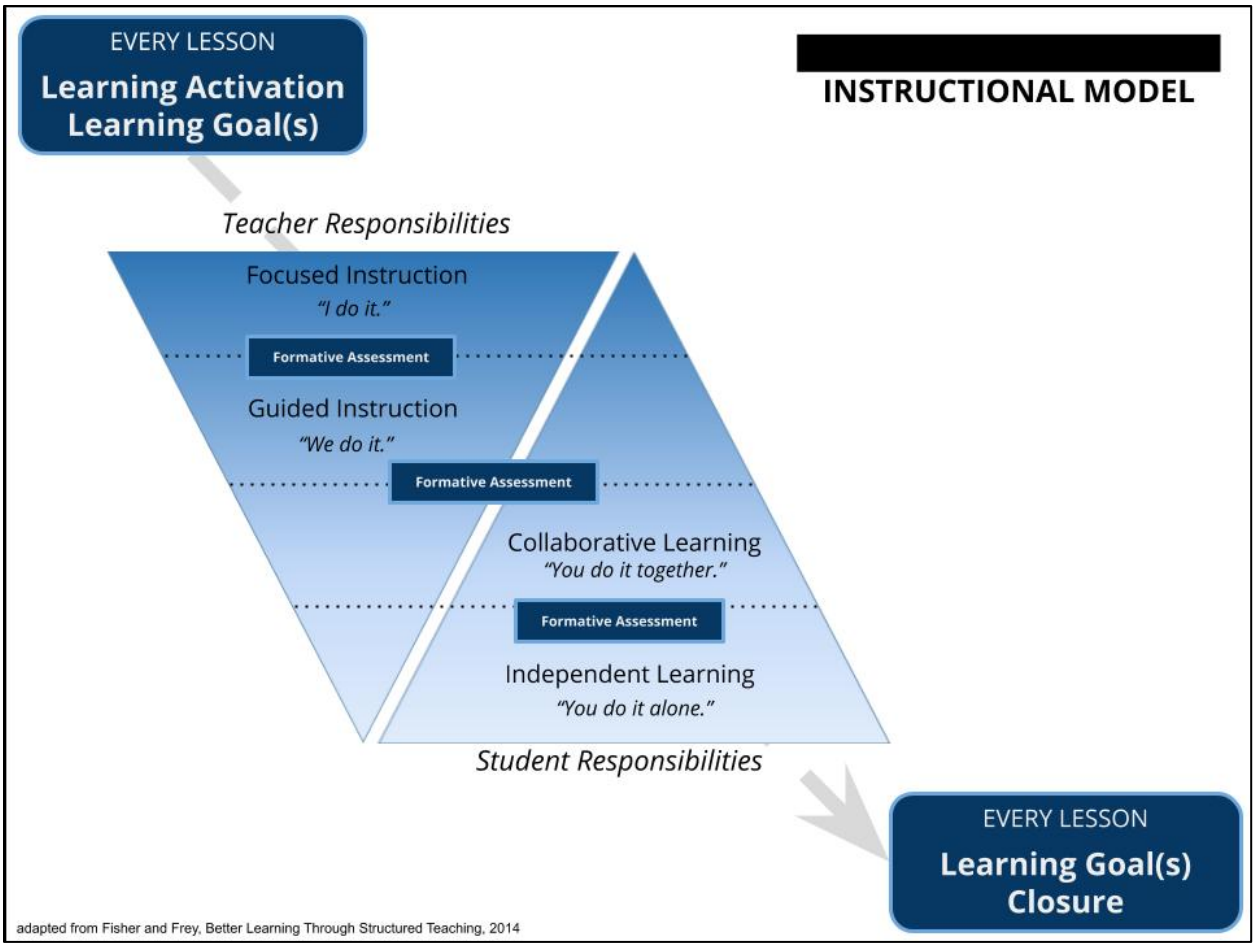
Focused Instruction	**I do it.** (Teacher has the majority of the responsibility)
Guided Instruction	**We do it.**
Collaborative Learning	**You do it together.**
Independent Learning	**You do it alone.** (Students have the majority of the responsibility)

APPENDIX F: Summary Observation Sheet

Participant	Observation Date
1. What are the main ideas or themes that struck you during this observation?	
2. What new information did you gain during this observation?	
3. Was there anything surprising to you personally? Or that made you think differently about this research question?	
4. What messages did you take from the observation?	

5. How would you describe the general attitude towards serving students with disabilities?
6. What else was important about this observation?
7. Were there any problems with the topic?
Notes:

APPENDIX G: Target School District's Instructional Model



APPENDIX H: Master List of Observation Codes

- Says phrases like please and thank you
- encourages student
- provides general praise
- provides specific praise
- uses humor
- uses slang
- show content enthusiasm/passion
- presents content by storytelling
- gets on same level as student
- connects content to personal life
- talks with student about lives outside of school
- works 1 on 1 with student
- admits mistake
- asks student a question
- provides prompt
- answers a question student asked
- restates student response to question
- review previous content
- provide reminder
- hold student accountable for engaging in work
- tells students they are in the “we do it” phase
- students engage in formal activity with teacher
- student openly responds or volunteers
- proximity
- randomly calls on student
- asks students if they have any questions
- corrects misunderstandings
- wait time
- adjusts instruction
- visually checks students self-ratings
- closure activity
- uses content specific vocab
- model
- preview upcoming content and connects it to current lesson
- think aloud
- tells students they are in the “I do it” phase
- connects current lesson to previous unit
- learning activation
- states learning goal
- redirect student behavior
- provides step-by-step instructions
- ignore student behavior

APPENDIX I: IRB Approval Letter

Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

November 4, 2019

Paige Gill, MS
Teacher Education
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB # 803-19-EX

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: What Makes You So Good? Highly Effective General Education Teachers Serving Students with Special Education Needs

The Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) has reviewed your application for *Exempt Educational, Behavioral, and Social Science Research* on the above-titled research project. According to the information provided, this project is exempt under 45 CFR 46:104(d), category 2. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable HRPP Policies. It is also understood that the ORA will be immediately notified of any proposed changes for your research project that
A. affect the risk-benefit relationship of the research
B. pose new risks which are greater than minimal
C. constitute a new risk to privacy or confidentiality
D. involve sensitive topics (including but not limited to personal aspects of the subject_s behavior, life experiences
or attitudes)
E. involve deception
F. target a vulnerable population
G. include prisoners or children
H. otherwise suggest loss of the exempt status of the research.

You are encouraged to contact the ORA to discuss whether changes to exempt research requires review by ORA.

Please be advised you will be asked to update the status of your research yearly by responding to an email from the Office of Regulatory Affairs. If you do not respond, your project will be considered completed.

Sincerely,

Signed on: 2019-11-04 16:35:00.000

Gail Kotulak, BS, CIP
IRB Administrator III
Office of Regulatory Affairs