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Navigating Conflict in Inclusive Education: Autoethnography from an Elementary School Principal

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University of San Francisco

NAVIGATING CONFLICT IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:
AUTOETHNOGRAPHY FROM AN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

A Dissertation Presented
to
The Faculty of the School of Education
Department of Organization and Leadership

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

by
Kimberly C. Adams
San Francisco, CA
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ABSTRACT

Navigating Conflict in Inclusive Education:

Autoethnography from an Elementary School Principal

Practitioners and researchers have interpreted and debated the concept of the least restrictive environment creating the operational practices of mainstreaming and inclusion to adhere to the laws of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Despite the laws to ensure equal access to general education classrooms, and the vast body of literature on the technical implementation of inclusive practices, students with disabilities continue to be segregated and educated in a separate and unequal system of special education.

The purpose of this study was to better understand the competing tensions and conflict in inclusive education that elementary school principals navigate on a daily basis while making a school wide shift from providing special education supports and services to inclusive education. This study intended to make explicit the competing tensions and conflicts principals must navigate from the institutional, district, school, and personal levels in addressing the academic and social needs of students with disabilities.

The main questions that guided this research were: a) What are the everyday conflicts that elementary school principals experience on a daily basis while transitioning from providing special education services and supports to inclusive education? b) How do elementary school principals navigate the everyday conflicts that occur while transitioning to inclusive education? A focused autoethnographic design, with the addition of semi-structured interviews, was used to answer these research questions. This research identified conflict through a social justice leadership perspective. Identifying

conflict, through an equity framework is a critical step that allows for productive change and the advancement of discussions around inclusive education.

Conflicts were found in the areas of roles and responsibilities; skills, knowledge, and experience; time and resources; and placement. This study provided recommendations to school leaders to address the identified everyday conflicts in inclusive education.

In order for schools to become inclusive, school leaders must clearly communicate the basic shifts required for inclusive education to happen, but must also address the contradictions in the current educational system, and the individual ideologies that continue to segregate and stigmatize students with disabilities.

This dissertation, written under the direction of the candidate's dissertation committee and approved by the members of the committee, has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty of the School of Education in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. The content and research methodologies presented in this work represent the work of the candidate alone.

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CHAPTER 1

THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Statement of the Problem

How many students would we label and place if we had to look students squarely in the eye and say to them, “You are labeled and placed in this special classroom because of the choices we have made. We have constructed a world, a society, schools, and classrooms in which you do not fit; and, under the circumstances this seems like the best option.”

Most likely, the answer is very few. (Gallagher, 2001, p. 651).

Elementary school principals today are more than their representations of school-building managers, purveyors of student discipline, and bearers of bad news. The modern school principal is in a complex position required to meet the needs of students, families, teachers, staff, and the school district, while upholding state and federal laws and policies. Principals not only run the building and support the management of student behavior, but also act as instructional coaches, supervisors, inspirational leaders, community figureheads, finance officers, transformational leaders, teachers, social justice leaders, and often middle managers who translate policies from district offices or state and federal mandates to the classrooms (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Another key function of the principal is to articulate the vision and mission of the school and to create, align, or restructure school policies, procedures, and day-to-day operations that aid in the implementation of that vision. Most school visions incorporate the desire to provide *all* students a safe and supportive learning environment in which each child achieves high levels of academic performance, however students with

disabilities are often excluded from classrooms with high academic expectations and social environments with non-disabled peers.

In the United States, students with disabilities represented about 13% of public school students during the 2013-2014 school year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). During that same year, 14% of students with disabilities spent less than 40% of the school day inside a general education classroom with nondisabled peers, 19.8% spent between 40% and 79% in a general education classroom, and 61.1% spent 80% or more time in the general education setting.

Several federal mandates have been passed over the last 40 years that seek to provide equal access to education for students with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Public Law No. 94-142), enacted by Congress in 1975 originally as the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA), and most recently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004, required states to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) for all students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). The 1997 amendments of the IDEA mandated that all students with disabilities be educated and participate with nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Practitioners and researchers have interpreted and debated the concept of LRE creating the operational practices of mainstreaming and inclusion to adhere to the laws of the IDEA. Despite the laws to ensure equal access to general education classrooms, and the vast body of literature on the technical implementation of inclusive practices, students

with disabilities continue to be segregated and educated in a separate and unequal system of special education (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; Braddock & Parish, 2001).

Background and Need for the Study

Since the conception of public education in the United States, students with disabilities have been segregated and educated in separate and unequal systems (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; Braddock & Parish, 2001). The historical 1954 passing of the *Brown v. Topeka Board of Education* case declared, “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal” (Administrative Office of the U.S Courts, 2016). Although this case addressed the segregation of African American students in the United States public schools, it also opened the door for advocacy for students with disabilities. Disability advocates used this case to set the precedent for other court decisions that impacted special education in the United States, leading to the 1975 passing of Public Law No. 94-142.

The “Statement of Findings and Purpose” section of P. L. 94-142 recognized that students with disabilities represented more than eight million students in the United States, they were not having their educational needs met, and many of them were excluded entirely from the public school system. The intended purpose of the law was to ensure all students with disabilities received a free appropriate public education (FAPE) with special education and related services to meet their unique needs and ensure their rights (Public Law 94-142, 1975).

The 1997 amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandated that all students with disabilities be educated and participate with nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have debated the meaning of least restrictive

environment since its conception in the IDEA. While this policy intended to rectify the exclusion and segregation of students with disabilities (Thomas & Rapport, 1998), the concept of LRE is inherently unsound (Taylor, 2001; 2004; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). The LRE concept leaves room for interpretation, which has led to controversy around the “appropriate” environment or placement for students with disabilities. The amendments to the IDEA further complicated this debate by adding that students have a “continuum of placement” options ranging from least restrictive to more restrictive. These provisions allowed the continued segregation of students with disabilities into separate or special day classrooms, and the continued debate on what it means to be an inclusive school or implement inclusive practices.

Inclusion has been and continues to be a controversial issue in education. School principals are in a complex position of navigating the interpretations of inclusive education of the many stakeholders they partner with on a day-to-day basis. As school leaders and middle managers, principals are required to articulate and carry out their school’s vision that supports the learning of all students while translating policies from district offices or state and federal mandates to the classrooms. Research shows that strong principal leadership is required to support school restructuring to achieve inclusive schools (Bai & Martin, 2015; Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Riehl, 2000; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

Research on the role of the school principal in creating inclusive schools and whole school reform also stresses the importance of articulating the school vision for inclusion (Causton & Theoharis, 2014; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998; Riehl, 2000;

Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011). While Causton and Theoharis (2014) emphasize, “setting a bold, clear vision of full inclusion” (p. 4) much of the research fails to address the varied interpretations of inclusion in the school vision, or provides a description of inclusion that includes exclusion. Research on reform initiatives recognize that schools “embody a complex array of understandings, beliefs, and values that find legitimacy through their acceptance by the broader public and that are encoded in school structures, cultures, and routine practices” (Riehl, 2000, p. 60).

Some urban school districts have recognized the importance of identifying the inequities in school structures, cultures, and practices and have charged school leaders with the role of social justice leader. As social justice leaders, school principals must identify systems of systemic oppression in their current sites and district in order to address inequitable barriers that students face (Personal communication, Administrative meeting, 2016). This task requires school principals to have knowledge of systemic or institutional oppression and be able to identify laws, customs, beliefs, or practices that produce inequities based on one’s social group or identity.

Anderson (1990) argues,

...unless research in the field of educational administration find ways to study the invisible and unobtrusive forms of control that are exercised in schools and school districts, administrative theories that grow out of empirical research... will continue to perpetuate a view of school effectiveness that is unable to address in any significant manner the problems of their underprivileged clients (p. 39).

Anderson makes clear that more research is needed that addresses the invisible forms of control in schools and school districts. Without examining these issues, underprivileged clients, such as students with disabilities, will continue to lack inclusive and equal education.

The development of inclusive schools will rely on principals to address the competing beliefs and values regarding students with disabilities that are enacted through the varied discourses of inclusive practices and the underlying institutional identities of students with disabilities. This will first require identifying the competing tensions and conflicts that school leaders encounter on a daily basis, something the literature on inclusive practices and whole school reform have yet to identify. Explicitly identifying conflict in inclusive education will advance the conversations around inclusion, and ultimately lead to productive change for students with disabilities.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the competing tensions and conflict in inclusive education that elementary school principals navigate on a daily basis while making a school wide shift from providing special education supports and services to inclusive education. This study intended to make explicit the competing tensions and conflicts principals must navigate from the institutional, district, school, and personal levels in addressing the academic and social needs of students with disabilities. After identifying the competing tensions and conflicts, the purpose of the study was to identify the leadership moves principals made in response to the daily conflicts. Identifying how principals navigated, or responded to the conflicts, intended to address issues of equity for students with disabilities.

Research Questions

The main questions that guided this research were:

1. What are the everyday conflicts that elementary school principals experience on a daily basis while transitioning from providing special education services and supports to inclusive education?
2. How do elementary school principals navigate the everyday conflicts that occur while transitioning to inclusive education?

Conceptual Framework

In order for school leaders to be able to articulate a clear vision that supports the learning of all students in an inclusive environment, principals must have a clear understanding of the institutionalized practices that perpetuate the status quo, as well as the actions that address the marginalization of students based on difference. A critical constructivist approach to educational administration was used to better understand the competing tensions principals face in supporting students with disabilities. This framework provides a mediation model, showed in figure 1, for the study of legitimation (Anderson, 1990). This model recognizes the competing beliefs and practices in organizations and administrators' unique position that requires them to continuously navigate conflict and construct meaning.

Anderson (1990) provides three different dimensions of mediation that school leaders use on a daily basis. These three dimensions were used to organize the different ways principals navigate conflicts and are: "(a) mediation of conflict at the point of open contention, (b) mediation as day-to-day meaning management among organizational

stakeholders, and (c) mediation as the cognitive task of resolving (or perhaps dissolving) contradictions within the structures of one's own ideology" (Anderson, 1990, pp. 46-47).

<i>Mediation involves</i>	<i>Coherence achieved by</i>
Definition 1: intervention between conflicting parties or viewpoints	Resolving conflicts at the point of open contention
Definition 2: social interchange across spatial and temporal gaps	Resolving social and organizational contradictions vertically, horizontally, and across time
Definition 3: the cognitive task of achieving congruence between conflicting dimensions within ideology	Resolving contradictions between the fundamental and operative dimensions of ideology

Figure 1. Mediation Model.

The first definition describes conflicts that are at a point of open contention and requires mediation by intervening between conflicting parties or viewpoints. An example of this could be a disagreement between teacher and parent. The second definition requires the principal to "resolve conflicts of interest at a symbolic level by interpreting the various segments of the organization to each other and the school to the community" (Anderson, 1990, p. 47) and is often done through the analysis of organizational practices and structures. The third definition focuses on how a principal dissolves "contradictions between the fundamental and operative levels of ideology" (Anderson, 1990, p. 51) and is best studied through close narrative analysis of a principal's inner dialogue.

Using this model allowed for a deeper analysis of the conflicts elementary school principals navigate on a daily basis because it provided a basis for varying conflicts and the mediation required for each of the conflicts. This model takes into account the historical and societal contexts in which an organization is situated and allowed for the investigation of the deeper-lying power struggles an administrator is faced with.

Educational Significance

This research added to the body of knowledge on inclusive education and whole school reform. Traditionally, inclusive education has focused on the technical implementation of classroom practices while whole school reform has emphasized the importance of setting a clear vision for inclusion. This research identified institutional conditions that create barriers to inclusive education as well as the beliefs and values of school employees that contribute to the underlying institutional identities of students with disabilities and lead to practices of segregation and marginalization. This research also added to the body of work on educational administration by providing a detailed account of the day-to-day experiences of a school principal. This account allows for a critical reflection about the role of the school principal and provides next steps in addressing the invisible forms of control in schools that impact the education of students with disabilities.

Definition of Terms

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): “Special education and related services that (a) have been provided at public expense, under public supervision and direction, and without charge, (b) meet the standards of the State educational agency, (c) include an appropriate preschool, elementary, or secondary school education in the State involved, and (d) are provided in conformity with the individualized education program” (20 USCS § 1401).

General Education (Gen Ed): “General Education is the program of education that typically developing children should receive, based on state standards and evaluated by

the annual state educational standards test. It is the preferred way of describing its synonym, ‘regular education’” (Webster, 2015).

Inclusive Education: “Inclusive education is based on the simple idea that every child and family is valued equally and deserves the same opportunities and experiences.

Inclusive education is about children with disabilities- whether the disability is mild or severe, hidden or obvious- participating in everyday activities, just like they would if their disability were not present” (PBS, 2017).

Individualized Education Program (IEP): “Written annual education plan for a student eligible for a disability classification. This document outlines placement, services, accommodations, and modifications necessary to meet the student’s individualized needs in the least restrictive environment” (Rapp & Arndt, 2012, p. 27).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Provision of the IDEA that states “to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are to be educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in the regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (20 USCS § 1412(a)(5)).

One-to-one aide: A paraprofessional assigned to support one student.

Paraprofessional (Para): An educational assistant in the school generally responsible for specialized assistance for students with disabilities, but who is not a licensed educator.

Resource Specialist Program (RSP) Teacher: A special education teacher who provides services to students with disabilities who are educated in the general education classroom for 51% or more of the day.

Special Day Class (SDC): A more restrictive setting, and multi-grade classroom, provided to students with disabilities whose IEP states the need for more than 51% of the day in a separate setting.

Special Education Teacher (Special Ed, or Sped Teacher): A teacher who provides specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. This includes special education teachers of special day classrooms or resource specialist programs.

Special Education Supervisor (Sped Supervisor or Special Ed Supervisor): A central office, administrative role responsible for partnering in the development, coordination, and facilitation of Special Education services. The person who provides support to school principals, and coordinates with other departments and divisions, to enhance educational services for students with disabilities.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

This review of the literature will begin with an understanding of the concept of the least restrictive environment (LRE) and the continuum of placements described in the IDEA. Then, a discussion on the discourses of inclusion, and multiple stakeholder attitudes towards inclusion, will be provided. The numerous discourses and stakeholders demonstrate a varied interpretation of the concept of LRE as well as the very purpose of education. The review of the literature will conclude with the understanding of the complex role of the school principal in school reform and the creation of inclusive schools.

LRE and the Continuum of Placements

P.L. 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975, later reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and most recently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) was the first legislation in the United States that intended to protect the rights of students with disabilities. This federal legislation required states to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) to students with disabilities, and the 1997 amendments mandated that all students be educated and participate with nondisabled peers in the least restrictive environment. The legislation later provided a continuum of placement options, ranging from least restrictive to more restrictive, in which students with disabilities would be educated.

Since its conception, policymakers, researchers, and practitioners have interpreted the concept of the LRE. The body of literature on the principle of the LRE often describes the historical context and development of the LRE concept and its many flaws that contribute to varied interpretations that influence the implementation of inclusive practices and hinder the creation of inclusive schools.

Thomas and Rapport (1998) provide an analysis of the different court decisions that laid the groundwork for the concept of the LRE. They conclude that “federal statutes do not require public school districts to educate every child in the regular classroom” and that placing every child in the general education setting first and providing supplementary aides and services would delay the appropriate program for those students with higher needs. They however state that failing to place students in the least restrictive environment, or general education setting, based on claims of cost, disruption, or inconvenience would also violate the IDEA. Their report identifies the debate regarding implementation of the loosely defined concept of the LRE. Taylor’s (1988) critical analysis of the principle of the least restrictive environment on the other hand highlights the pitfalls of the concept.

Taylor provides seven conceptual and philosophical flaws of the LRE principle. One key pitfall of the LRE principle he suggests is that it legitimates restrictive environments thus perpetuating a segregated educational system. Taylor also describes how the LRE principle puts the notion of the physical setting at the forefront of the discussion, one that continues to be the main debate regarding the implementation of inclusive practices. Although he recognizes the principal of LRE was “forward-looking

for its time” (p. 227), Taylor posits a need to find new concepts to guide the education of students with disabilities that includes total integration.

The notion of total integration is one that has not yet been realized in most schools in the United States. In fact, there have been varying approaches to inclusive practices. Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, and Schattman (1994) conducted a qualitative policy study of the LRE provision of the IDEA to investigate the interpretations and implementation of the LRE provision. Their study identified the “factors and conditions that contributed to the varying approaches to implementation of LRE policy across states and local school districts” (Hasazi, et. al., 1994, p. 492). The findings showed six factors had the largest influence on implementation of LRE policy: finance, organization, advocacy, implementers, knowledge and values, and state and local context. Their study also concluded that the leadership at each site was crucial to the implementation of inclusive practices and how the leadership interpreted LRE determined “how, or even whether, much would be accomplished beyond the status quo” (Hasazi, et. al., 1994, p. 509).

The literature on the principle of LRE makes clear that the meaning of the LRE is up for debate. This debate has led to varying interpretations of LRE and factors that influence its implementation, thus leading to multiple approaches to inclusive practices and a myriad of discourses of inclusion.

Discourses of and Attitudes Towards Inclusion

The different interpretations of the LRE have created a variety of approaches to inclusive education, however Winzer (2000) suggests the ideas of inclusive education are most commonly viewed through three lenses: legal, technical, and philosophical. The

legal lens often focuses on the interpretations of LRE, as previously discussed, the intent of the law, and providing supplementary supports and services (Hasazi, et. al., 1994; Kluth, Villa, & Thousand, 2001; Taylor, 2001; Taylor, 2004). The focus on supplementary supports and services has emphasized the technical aspects of inclusive practices. Research from the technical lens provides instructions or recipes to follow with ingredients for classroom teachers such as differentiated instruction and cooperative learning (Ainscow, 2000; Ainscow, Howes, Farrell, & Frankham, 2003; Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; Kurth, Lyon, & Shogren, 2015; McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). The philosophical lens looks at inclusion as a moral right and declares that all students be educated in the general education setting (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004; Biklen, 2010; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2009; Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008; Hehir, 2002; Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Nusbaum, 2013; Skrtic, 1991). The vast body of literature on inclusive education can usually be categorized into one of the three lenses, however different school stakeholders also take varying positions regarding inclusive education. Winzer (2000) asserts, "Inclusion means different things to different people, and no one interpretation matches the needs of all stakeholders in the process" (p. 7).

The shift towards inclusive education has required general education teachers to educate all students in their classrooms. De Boer, Piji, and Minnaert (2009) conducted a review of the literature on regular primary school teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education. Their review of 26 empirical studies revealed general education teachers predominately hold neutral or negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities. The study concluded that most teachers do not feel confident in their abilities

to educate students with disabilities, however the study also reported that teachers with fewer years of experience teaching reported more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Teachers' attitudes were also related to the types of disability and their attitudes were more positive towards students with physical disabilities and sensory impairments.

Another review of the literature on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion by Avramidis and Norwich (2002) reported similar findings. A meta-analysis of American classroom teachers reported 65 percent of teachers agreed with the idea of inclusive education, however only 40 percent believed inclusion was a realistic goal (p. 133). Additional attitude studies reported on in the review of the literature suggested in America, "general educators have not developed an empathetic understanding of disabling conditions, nor do they appear to be supportive of the placement of special needs learners in their regular classrooms" (p. 133). Similar to the findings of de Boer, Piji, and Minnaert, Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found that placement of students in the general education classroom varied by the nature of the students' disabilities and teachers were more willing to serve students with mild disabilities, physical, or sensory impairments than they were to accept students with more severe learning or behavioral needs (p. 142).

While the research on attitudes of general education teachers towards inclusion is mostly neutral or negative towards students with disabilities, attitudes from parents reveal different views. Connor and Ferri (2007) explored the public discourse on inclusion from approximately 250 editorials from major U.S. newspapers. Their analysis proved that parents had varying attitudes towards inclusive education. Some parents showed support for inclusion based on the impact they saw in their child's self esteem after being

educated in the general education setting. Other parents showed mixed thoughts regarding inclusion and noted that self-contained classrooms allowed for academic improvement that would not have happened in a large general education setting, thus allowing their children to be educated in the general education setting in the future. Still other parents felt that inclusion did not provide students the support they needed to be successful, and that segregated classrooms were “a safe haven from an unwelcoming general education system” (Connor & Ferri, 2007, p. 67). The public discourse on inclusive education revealed a variety of parental views about inclusive education and the appropriate place for their children to be educated.

The varied discourses of inclusive education as well as the wide-ranging attitudes of multiple stakeholders towards inclusion put school principals in a complex position in which they are required to navigate and make meaning of on a daily basis.

Principal’s Role in School Reform for Inclusive Schools

The research on educational leadership and inclusive education consists of studies on the attitudes of principals on inclusion (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Praisner, 2003; Salisbury, 2006), the knowledge and skills of principals in regards to special education or inclusive practices (Bai & Martin, 2015; Protz, 2005), and the role of the principal in school reform for inclusion (Black & Simon, 2014; Causton & Theoharis, 2014; Cobb, 2014; DeMatthews, 2015; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Parker, 2016; Riehl, 2000; Waldron, McLeskey, & Redd, 2011).

The literature on school reform highlights the complex position and roles that are played by the school principal. In this complex position, school principals spend a disproportionate amount of time, between 36 to 58 percent, on special education related

matters (Cobb, 2014). Cobb (2014) provides a meta-analysis of 19 peer-reviewed studies that focus on how school principals envision and act to foster inclusive school communities. He identified three domains of the school principals' work regarding inclusion that included: program delivery, staff collaboration, and parental engagement, as well as seven roles that principals perform: visionary, partner, coach, conflict resolver, advocate, interpreter, organizer. His review also revealed that school principals face a number of challenges that include: "fostering collaboration where perspectives diverge, establishing a cohesive school vision of inclusion and practice that offers differentiated learning experiences, and reducing situations involving litigation and teacher attrition" (p. 213).

In conclusion, the modern school principal is placed in an intricate position between legal mandates and multiple stakeholders. The school principal must act as interpreter to translate legal policies into school and classroom procedures and practices. The school principal must also partner with the multiple stakeholders in the school community. These stakeholders often hold competing views of inclusive education based on their roles in the education system that requires the school principal to act as conflict resolver. The principal, as visionary, must then make meaning of the multiple perspectives, beliefs, and values and articulate a vision for inclusion that acts as a road map to guide all community members. From there, the principal must advocate for resources and organize systems and structures that are in alignment with the school vision while providing ongoing coaching and support to keep everyone on track.

This research addresses the gap in the literature on how principals navigate the competing tensions and conflict in the varied discourses of inclusive education, as they

relate to students with disabilities. While the current research stresses the importance of creating a school vision for inclusion, little is known about how principals make meaning of competing tensions and articulate a consistent vision.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand the competing tensions and conflict within inclusive education that elementary school principals navigate on a daily basis while making a school wide shift from providing special education supports and services to inclusive education. This study intended to make explicit the competing tensions principals must navigate from the institutional, district, school, and personal levels in addressing the academic and social needs of students with disabilities.

The main questions that guided this research were:

1. What are the everyday conflicts within inclusive education that elementary school principals experience on a daily basis?
2. How do elementary school principals navigate the everyday conflicts in the competing discourses of inclusive education?

Research Design

To address these research questions, this study used a focused autoethnographic qualitative design with data collection from systematic self-observations, a self-reflection field journal, semi-structured interviews, and artifacts. The purpose of qualitative inquiry is to investigate “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). A qualitative method of inquiry was appropriate for this study because it sought to understand how principals navigate contradictory discourses of inclusive education and how meaning is made through the varying contradictions on a daily basis. Ellis, Adams, and Bochner

(2011) describe autoethnography as, “an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (p. 1). Autoethnography best addresses the research problem because it provides insight into the meaning making and decision making processes of the school principal and provides a rich account of the conflict a principal must address or mediate on a daily basis.

The underlying philosophy of this research is critical constructivism. A constructivist orientation assumes that meaning is made through social interactions and norms while critical research not only interprets the world in which one lives and works, but also addresses issues of who has power, how it is negotiated, and what societal structures reinforce it (Merriam, 2009). This research addresses issues of power by examining the competing beliefs and values regarding students with disabilities that are enacted through the varied discourses of inclusive education and the underlying institutional identities of students with disabilities.

Anderson (1990) suggests, “Accounts are urgently needed that describe how administrators attempt to manage the meaning of their organizations and who benefits from the resulting social constructions” (p. 51). The use of autoethnography in this study provided an account that details the mediation of social, organizational, and ideological contradictions regarding discourses of inclusive education.

Research Participant and Setting

As an autoethnography, the primary participant in the study was myself, a white, female, currently able-bodied, second year principal. The school that served as the primary research setting was the elementary school in which I serve as principal. The

elementary school is located in an urban public school district on the west coast of the United States. This school serves students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Typical class size in grades kindergarten through third grade was 22 students, and 33 students in grades four and five. The school also has two special day classrooms with a capacity of 10 students each. One special day classroom served students with IEPs in kindergarten through second grade and the other served students with IEPs in third through fifth grades.

Throughout the study, the number of enrolled students fluctuated within ten students, however the school had an average enrollment of 515 students. The race and ethnicity of students according to Illuminate Education, the school district utilized data system, was 41.55% Asian, 28.35% White, 11.26% two or more races, 9.13% Hispanic, 5.83% unknown, 3.11% Filipino, and 0.78% Black or African American. 31.46% of students were considered English language learners, 33.59% were socio-economically disadvantaged, and 13.0% of students received special education services and had an IEP.

Background of the Researcher

I began my formal career in education in 2005 and obtained my first full time teaching assignment in the fall of 2007. As an elementary school teacher, I found pleasure in working with students with disabilities, and creating a classroom environment that appreciated difference and communicated the fact that each member of the community had strengths and areas of opportunity. During my time as a classroom teacher, special day classrooms, with an autism focus for students with moderate to severe disabilities, were added to the school site. The experiences I had, seeing the positive relationships that formed when students from the segregated special day

classrooms were included in the general education classroom, as well as other academic and social benefits for all students, further strengthened my interests in working with students with disabilities.

In the summer of 2013, after six years of classroom teaching experience, I was in a major head-on car collision that resulted in extensive physical therapy. Although this was not the first time I had been in an incident that required physical therapy, it was the most serious accident I had experienced. In addition to the physical injuries, I was also diagnosed with posttraumatic stress syndrome and noticed a significant difference in brain function. After seven months of therapy I decided to go back to school and enrolled in a doctoral program. This decision was made in part because of my physical inabilities and the physical demands of classroom teaching, as well as my desire to work on my brain function, and to do more with the life that I was given.

After seven years of classroom teaching I became an Instructional Reform Facilitator, or instructional coach, that worked in a low performing school with a predominately African American student population. Seeing the inequities within the school district only furthered my desire to address the issues that contributed to the marginalization of certain student populations. The following year I obtained a full time position as an elementary school principal, at a different school that served over 500 students. I currently remain the principal of that elementary school and am serving my second year in the position.

I acknowledge that my background also influences my perspectives and the way I see the world around me. I come from a white, middle class family with a long history of educators and higher education. My great grandmother obtained a master's degree and

began the family tradition of being an educator. My mom holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and is a tenured professor on the east coast of the United States.

I believe my family and my experiences growing up contributed to my desire to become an educator. I have lived in six different parts of the United States and abroad, exposing me to a wide range of cultural norms. The frequent moves to locations with very different norms made me an outsider throughout my schooling. My life experiences not only instilled in me the value of education, but also taught me the importance of every human individual, and gave me the desire to work towards building a more inclusive society.

Background of the Site

When I was first hired as principal of the site, I was given background from the Assistant Superintendent and Director about the school. They had told me the current 2014-2015 school year was the first year a third through fifth grade Special Day Class was added to the site, and the kindergarten through second grade Special Day Class had been added just one year before. They informed me of the challenges the school was having with the addition of the new classrooms and the increase of students with IEPs, but assured me that my background and knowledge around special education would be an asset to the school.

Shortly after being hired, I also had to opportunity to visit the school on two separate occasions at the end of the 2014-2015 school year. During my visits I had noticed desks in the hallways, just outside of several classrooms, and saw paraprofessionals working with students with IEPs at those desks. This was something that immediately struck me as problematic. At the start of the 2015-2016 school year, I

addressed this issue by informing staff of fire code issues and removed all furniture from the hallways.

In the last few days of the 2014-2015 school year, and over the summer, I was informed that the third through fifth grade Special Day Classroom teacher, and both of the RSP teachers would not be returning to the site. This left me with three open special education positions to fill, and the only remaining member of the special education team was the kindergarten through second grade Special Day Classroom teacher. I was given minimal information, regarding the special education program at the site and the students with IEPs, however the change in personnel made it possible to change some of the structures and ways supports were provided to students from the start of my appointment as principal.

In my first year as principal, I began making shifts from providing special education services and supports to a more inclusive education. Although the school district communicated the directive of inclusive education, the decision to move towards more inclusive education stemmed mostly from my individual equity lens and ideological commitment, and was more of a move away from some of the problematic practices I had observed rather than towards a model of inclusive education.

Data Collection

Data collection began on January 3, 2017 and continued until March 24, 2017. Data collection took place on days that aligned with the school district work calendar. Data was collected through systematic self-observations, self-reflections, document analysis or artifacts, and semi-structured interviews. Primary data consisted of systematic self-observational occurrence recordings as well as self-reflection journal data.

External data was collected through artifacts such as published district materials and websites, emails from varying stakeholders, and meeting notes. The external data provided contextual information and complemented the primary data. Secondary data was collected through semi-structured interviews with an additional two elementary school principals. This information was used to determine if the findings from the primary data were unique to one school site, or if other elementary school principals had similar experiences at their schools.

Systematic Self-Observation

Self-observational data record actual behaviors, thoughts, and emotions as they occur in their natural contexts (Chang, 2008). Self-observational data were collected each day through occurrence recordings. Any time that I engaged in work that related to special education or students with disabilities, I made an occurrence recording. The data that were recorded included the time of interaction, people involved, location, and a brief description of the activity. Examples of systematic self-observation occurrence recordings are shown in the figure below.

Date: Wednesday 1/25		
Time: 8:35am-8:40	Location: Upper Yard	People: RSP
Description: Checked in with RSP teacher about student support plan for the day.		
Date: Monday 1/30		
Time: 10:00am	Location: Room 202	People: Teacher, Para
Description: Checked in with teacher and paraprofessionals to sort out lunch breaks and provide coverage with para absences.		

Figure 2. Self-Observation Occurrence Recordings.

Collecting occurrence recordings for every action I took that related to special education provided a detailed representation of the activities in which I participated. The daily repeated collection of this data allowed for identification of patterns in my work

that included the tasks I engaged in, the people I interacted with, and where these took place.

Self-Reflection Field Journal

A field journal was also used to record self-reflective data. One narrative entry was recorded in the field journal at the end of each workday and provided the opportunity to record feelings, thoughts, and reactions in response to the daily events. The average length of the entries was roughly one spiral notebook page long. The field journal entries were written as a stream of consciousness that described how I felt at the end of each day and included private inner feelings about the day's events and how they were in alignment or not with my personal philosophies. The use of self-reflection field journal entries provided another perspective of the daily activities in which I engaged. This data was important because it showed my struggle with ideological contradictions regarding inclusive education. The process of writing a journal entry at the end of each day also led to new ideas or next steps that I could take or implement in the future. The process also served as a way of analyzing my own professional practice as principal.

Artifacts

Data included a variety of artifacts from district publications and websites, emails from multiple stakeholders, and meeting notes. They were collected as they were encountered or used throughout the day and became an occurrence recording. Examples of this would include documenting that an email was read from a teacher, and the content of the email. The researcher, in the role of principal also looked at the district's Special Education Department website to determine the directives from the district. I was also part of a learning academy on inclusive practices that met four times and discussed the

challenges of implementing inclusive practices. Notes from these meetings were recorded and provided additional information from other elementary school principals about the challenges of transitioning to inclusive education. As the principal, I took part in IEP meetings as well. Although notes were taken as part of my role as principal, they were not used in data analysis. The information in IEP meetings remained confidential, however participation in the IEP meetings did contribute to the thoughts and feelings I had that were recorded in daily self-reflection field journal entries.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews took place between two additional elementary school principals and myself. Both interviews took place on March 21, 2017. Initial data analysis was conducted before the interviews in order to create an interview protocol. The data from the two interviews were used to determine if the findings from the primary data were unique to my own site and leadership practices, or if other elementary school principals had similar experiences regarding the conflict in inclusive education. The first interview took place in person and was audio recorded to allow the interview to feel more relaxed and take on a conversational feel. The second interview took place thirty minutes after the completion of the first interview and was over the phone due to the time constraints of the principal. This interview was also audio recorded. The audio recordings from both interviews were later transcribed by the researcher in order for the data to be analyzed. The interviews asked participants about their school's vision for inclusion, the different education programs and practices at the school site, the principal's leadership practices as they relate to inclusive education and working with students with

disabilities, and a variety of leadership experiences that relate to inclusive education. The complete interview protocol can be seen in Appendix A.

Data Analysis

Collected data sets consisted of systematic self-observation occurrence recordings, daily self-reflection field journal entries, audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews with two additional participants, and artifacts that included documents from: district websites and publications, emails from multiple stakeholders, and meeting notes. Data were labeled and logged as a set as they were collected.

The first research question sought to identify the everyday conflicts that principals experience on a daily basis. Identifying areas of conflict are important because they serve as a first step in addressing barriers when implementing new programs, and outward conflict is often related to deeper social contradictions (Anderson, 1990). To answer this question I began initial data analysis of the self-observation occurrence recordings. Each occurrence recording was either sorted into a category of outward conflict or no conflict. For the purpose of data sorting, outward conflict was defined as any disagreement between people, ideas, or feelings, or any difference that prevents agreement. Examples of outward conflicts included a general education teacher reporting to the principal a disagreement between the teacher and paraprofessional about what the paraprofessional should be doing, an RSP teacher expressing frustration about another RSP teacher being placed at the school site, and a teacher reporting that students will be removed from the classroom for disruption. Examples of data where no conflict was present included a psychologist asking for a date for an IEP meeting, and a parent

reporting positive experiences with the supports the teacher is using in the classroom for her son.

Once each occurrence recording was sorted into categories of conflict, or no conflict, I began to look for groupings of related topic or issue that led to conflict. Four different themes emerged from the data and were: roles and responsibilities; skills, knowledge, and experiences; time and resources; and placement. Each occurrence recording was then labeled by theme. Next, I used the transcribed audio recordings from the semi-structured interviews to determine if the other principals experienced similar themes relating to conflict. I added and labeled the conflict they described and grouped it with the other occurrence recordings.

Data that were grouped under the theme of roles and responsibilities included any situation where a community member questioned what was within his or her job responsibilities or the job duties of another community member, or had a difference of opinion about what someone should be doing. The theme of skills, knowledge, and experiences included situations where community members made statements or performed actions that demonstrated a judgment was made about the quality of work of one's self or another. Time and resources included all references made to time, including scheduling of events, and resources included funding, supplies, and personnel needed or wanted by another. The theme of placement included the physical location of different members of the community as well as conversations or discussions about the continuum of placement options.

I then pulled the different occurrence recordings by theme in order to compile them into the different narratives in the findings section. Occurrence recordings that

were labeled as roles and responsibilities were used to write the vignette “Who?”, those labeled as skills, knowledge, and experiences were used in “What?!”, and the ones labeled time and resources, and placement were used to create “When and Where”. The occurrence recordings served as events that would take place in the narrative findings in chapter four.

After compiling a list of events that would be included in each vignette, I used the self-reflection field journal entries to provide more contexts to the events. The field journal entries detailed personal thoughts and feelings about the events of the day as well as information about how I responded to the daily events. This data was compiled along with the events from the occurrence recordings and was then used to write the autoethnographic findings.

After writing the findings in chapter four, I then shifted my focus to address the second research question, on how principals navigate or respond to the everyday conflicts. To address this question, I used Anderson’s (1990) mediation model. This model was used because it addressed conflict that occurred, “a) at the point of open contention, (b) as day-to-day meaning management among organizational stakeholders, and (c) as the cognitive task of resolving (or perhaps dissolving) contradictions within the structures of one’s own ideology” (Anderson, 1990, pp. 46-47).

First, I looked at the conflict in the findings that occurred “at the point of open contention” (Anderson, 1990, p. 46). I then followed the leadership moves that were made to determine how mediation occurred. Next, I looked at how principals navigated the day-to-day meaning making. Analysis of the findings did not provided information on how principals resolved social and organizational contradictions. Finally, I went back

through the self-reflection field journal entries and identified times where I described conflict between the leadership decisions I made and my own ideology. This information was added to the autoethnographic findings to provide additional context.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

In autoethnographic research, reliability is judged through the reader. Ellis, Adams & Bochner (2011) describe reliability in an autoethnography as the narrator's credibility. If the narrative account provides factual evidence it will be more reliable than one that takes "literary license to the point that the story is better viewed as fiction than a truthful account" (p. 10). Credibility is also judged by the reader's ability to put the provided story to use and to feel that it seemed real.

Trustworthiness is also gained in autoethnography through transparency. Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz (1991) state, "Being trustworthy as a qualitative researcher means at the least, that the processes of the research are carried out fairly, that the products represent as closely as possible the experiences of the people who are studied" (p.93). The use of semi-structured interviews with an additional two elementary school principals were used in this study as a way of determining if the data collected was unique to the experiences of one principal, or if they were similar. The details described earlier in this chapter also provide an account of how data was collected and analyzed in order to create the autoethnographic account in the proceeding chapter.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Introduction

To the average school principal, conflict is a common occurrence. School principals spend the majority of their time problem solving, handling a variety of conflicts, and constantly putting out fires. When a principal encounters a conflict there are always basic questions that are asked. These questions include: *Who was involved?*; *What happened?*; *When did this take place?*; and *Where were you?*. I used these basic questions, as inspiration for the titles of the vignettes in the findings, and to depict the major conflicts that an elementary school principal encounters on a daily basis. The following three stories: "Who?", "What?!", and "When and Where?" each highlight the themes regarding the conflict that was encounter and navigated on a daily basis: roles and responsibilities; skills, knowledge, and experiences; time and resources; and placement.

Introduction to Who?

The following vignette highlights the conflicts around roles and responsibilities. The narrative story depicts one main event that occurs because of the leadership decisions I made in order to provide coverage to students when different community members were absent, and the varying perspectives regarding the roles and responsibilities of different community members. This main event is of particular importance because it demonstrates how leadership moves, and conflict around roles and responsibilities can impact learning for students with disabilities. Other events are depicted throughout this story that portray different situations included in the theme of roles and responsibilities and bring up questions regarding what it means to be an inclusive community.

Who?

“I’m a bit disappointed”, I said with a stern voice. “I know that everyone is stressed out, but it is never okay to be acting the way that I have seen some of you act lately.” I paused for a minute to allow what I was saying to sink in, and to model appropriate wait time. It was true, I did not like how some of the staff had been acting, and I felt a staff meeting was an appropriate time and place to clarify expectations, even if my message was only intended for a small few. I stood tall and spoke with authority. “We treat everyone in this building, students, each other, workers, with respect and dignity at all times, even if we don’t feel we are being respected.” The room was silent and all eyes were on me.

Bzz, bzz, bzz. Bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz. Ugh, the familiar sound and soft vibrations on my wrist informed me of my current reality. I was not in the library delivering the perfect speech on teacher and staff expectations, but rather in the comfort of my Tempur-Pedic. The warmth and stability of my bed was a stark contrast from the reality of my job. I raised my wrist to avoid having to lift my head from the pillow, and pushed the one button on my fitness tracker to silence my alarm. As I tried to comprehend where I was, a small smirk appeared on my face. Although it had not actually happened, the vivid realness and details of my dream brought a smile to my face.

I roll to my side, grab my cell phone, and begin my morning ritual. First, I sync my fitness tracker to find out how well I slept. *Time asleep: 7hr 26min, sleep quality: 0 times awake, 9 times restless, 10min awake/restless.* The data give me comfort that I had enough sleep to tackle the challenges of the day ahead. I close the app and move to my email. 6 messages during the night: *junk mail, something from the district, forwarded*

message-absence creation, parent posting to the listserv, junk mail, PTA president. I open the email with the absence notice to confirm it's for today. I immediately begin thinking about how stressed the teacher will be, and which para I can pull, to cover the missing one-to-one aide, as I forward the message to the secretary. On to the weather.

Now: feels like 48. Hourly: 51, 53, 54, 57, 58. Precipitation: 20%, 30%, 35%, 25%.

The chance of rain was high enough to note I would need to keep an eye on it throughout the day. Clock. I turn off my two back-up alarms before they sound, hop out of bed, and head to the shower. I shake my head as if to confirm I'm awake, still in shock by how real my dream had seemed.

As I arrive into the office, I check the whiteboard to see if anyone else had called in sick. *Custodian-out.* I unlock my office door, put down my bag, take out my lunch, computer, and notebook, and hang my bag on the back of the door. I plug in my laptop, sign on, and check to see if I have any new emails. Only one. I look at the sender and know immediately that it is a message that can wait, a continuation of the drama that began a week ago between a gen. ed. and special ed. teacher. I close my email, pull up my para schedules, and print a few extra copies. As I walk to the whiteboard in the main office again, I see the print out of all staff absences, which jobs have been filled with subs, and which ones will most likely remain open for the day. Four paras out and one sub.

“Good morning!” I say to my secretaries. “I see we have a lot of people out today. I'm going to pull a few people to different rooms. Here are their new schedules in case you see them before me. I'll go unlock the building and let the teachers know I need to pull some paras.” As I walk down the hall to unlock the main doors I see one of the

paras in the workroom. “Good morning. We have four paras out today and only one sub so I need you in another room. You will be taking Ms. M’s schedule for the day.” I hand her a copy of the schedules I had printed out. She looks at me with wide eyes and cocked head. It was a look that was telling me what I already knew, that she didn’t want to be in that room.

“If I’m going to be in that room then I need to meet with you and the student so we can be clear on what the expectations are. I have no problem calling the police or going home if she isn’t going to behave like a student her age.”

I keep calm and with a smile on my face say, “Sure, we can quickly review expectations at the start of the day.” Setting clear expectations are a good thing I think, after all it was what I was so proudly doing in my dream last night. If reviewing behavioral norms was all I needed to do to keep the peace then I was okay with that.

“Okay great. I will meet you both right after morning announcements.”

I finish walking to the end of the hall, unlock the front door, and turn down the side hallway to unlock the other doors before returning to the office. My secretary comes to me with shrugged shoulders, arms crossed, and head turned away. In a mousey voice she says, “There’s poop on the bathroom seat. I can handle dead mice, but I am not good with poop.”

“Poop on the toilet seat?” I wonder, as I walk to the staff bathroom to assess the situation. With no custodian on site for the day, I knew this was the “any and all other duties” part of my job. I open the bathroom door and sure enough there it was, a glob of feces plopped right on top of the toilet seat. My initial thoughts question how it is even possible for poop to end up there. I can’t help but wonder how one would flush the toilet

and not realize what is left on the seat, which brings me to question if anyone was mad at me enough to do it on purpose. “No one can be *that* frustrated with anything I’ve done”, I think, “to want to leave poop on the toilet seat!” I had wiped up urine before, but this was a first. Part of me wanted to take a picture so that I could make signs of what the bathroom should and shouldn’t look like after using it. I took a glove out of the first aid kit, grabbed a wad of toilet paper and wiped the poop into the toilet. After sanitizing the seat and washing my hands I emerge from the bathroom. “Crisis averted!” I declare as I walk back into my office.

I sit at my desk, open my laptop, and get ready to read through all my emails when a teacher comes to the door. “Do you have a minute?” she asks.

“Sure, come on in.”

“Can I close this?” she points to the door and begins to shut it.

“Of course.”

“So, I just want to let you know that I might have said something to Ms. Z that made her mad and now I’m in this argument with her and she might come to you about it. It’s just she should be helping the students in the classroom, but she frustrates them when she works with them and they can’t understand her so I gave her a workbook to copy. I have all these English Learners in my class in addition to the students with special needs and they all need extra support and I can’t be focusing all my attention on Ms. Z. Is it okay that I will just have her copy this book because I can use it for my newcomer and that is something I really need done?”

The teacher seems almost out of breath and exhausted from telling me what she is dealing with. I look at her and say, “I know it can be hard managing adults, I will check in with Ms. Z. Until then I think it is fine that you have her doing that.”

“Okay, thank you. I just don’t want to stress so much about this when I have so much else going on in my room.”

“Not a problem.”

She turns towards the door and heads back out. A stream of teachers trickles in for the day, and they begin congregating in front of my office door near the daily bulletin and sign-in. I keep my eyes peeled for any other teachers I need to check in with regarding the para absences. Another teacher approaches, walks up to my desk and begins speaking. “I just wanted to let you know that Ms. Z was in the workroom almost all day yesterday. I was in there a few times throughout the day and she was there every time copying four full books. Shouldn’t she be doing something else?”

I look at her with a questioning face and say, “Hum, thank you for letting me know. I will be sure to look into it.” She walks out and two minutes later an RSP teacher pops her head into my office.

“Is there another para around the school? Ms. D is out again with no sub.”

She leaves the office without giving me time to respond; her way of showing me that she disapproves on the fact that Ms. D has been out so much, and that students are missing out on services. I look at the clock, 8:35. With just three minutes until the first bell rings, I head to the yard so I am ready to give announcements. By 8:40 the students are lined up and ready to listen. “No other announcements, “ I say. “Go ahead and pass to your classes, learn something new, and have fun!” I watch the herd migrate into the

building as I wait by the flagpole to confirm every class has a teacher for the day. I enter the building and head upstairs to meet Ms. T and Juliette so we can do our quick check in. Ms. T is standing by the door waiting for me. “The class is outside doing P.E. do you want to come down so we can all check in?”

“P.E.? They don’t usually do that today. Okay,” she says with questioning uncertainty. As we get down the stairs I notice the class is lining up already coming into the building. It must have been just a quick lap to get extra energy out before starting the day. I approach the teacher. “Could I check in with Juliette quickly?” I ask. “Ms. M is absent so Ms. T will be in your room today and she would like to review expectations before starting.”

“Suuure,” the enthusiasm in her voice and exaggerated smile tell me the student is already having a difficult start to the day. I walk up to Juliette and whisper, “Good morning. How are you today?”

“I’m FINE!” she screams. “I didn’t do anything!”

Calmly I tell her that I just want to check in and ask if she would like to join me in my office. She accepts my offer and walks into the office, Ms. T following closely behind. She plops her body into the chair and I sit in the one next to her. I look up at Ms. T to see if she is going to say something, but her look implies she would like me to be the one reviewing the expectations. “Thank you for coming to my office,” I say. “Ms. M is out today so Ms. T will be your helper. We just want to be sure that you know what is expected in terms of your behavior. Do you know what we expect to see from you today?”

In an agitated and rapid voice she responds, “Be respectful, calm body, no hitting. Okay bye,” and heads out the door.

“She is *not* going to act like that today or I am leaving,” Ms. T declares.

I walk out the door and ask Juliette if she could try that again, this time showing me that she can do it in a respectful manner. She turns around, heads back into the office, and sits down again in the chair. I prompt her to use a slow calm voice and give a sentence frame of “Ms. T, I know that I can be...”

“Ms. T, I know that I can be respectful, use a calm voice, and not hit anyone. Okay? Thank you.” She stands up, heads out the door, and begins walking upstairs to her classroom.

“I can not believe students can just walk out of the principal’s office without being excused around here. Is that the expectation you have for them, because I need to know that she is going to be respectful and that was not respectful? I would like her to be excused first before going up to class.” Ms. T looks at me with disgust, as she shakes her head no.

I walk upstairs to see if Juliette made it back to class, Ms. T following behind. I get up to the room and ask Ms. T to wait outside by the door. I am tempted to send Ms. T back to her regularly assigned schedule, but decide not to. Juliette is putting her backpack away in the cubbies. I approach her again, “Juliette thank you for using a calm voice. Ms. T wants to be sure you will be respectful all day. Could you go outside and ask her permission to be excused? That would show her you can be respectful.” She walks out the door and sits in the desk just outside the classroom, and raises her hand. Ms. T calls on her, “Yes Juliette?”

“May I go to class now?” she asks. I look over at Ms. T, but realize she is contemplating having her go back down to the office to try it. I quickly respond, “Yes you may. Thank you very much Juliette.” Already frustrated by the power struggle I was witnessing, and second-guessing my decision to pull this para in the first place, I feel myself losing patience. I look up at Ms. T, smile, watch her walk into the classroom, and head back downstairs to my office.

I unlock the door, sit down at my desk, and reach for my first sip of coffee. Feeling frustrated and disappointed in myself, I give myself a minute to reflect on what I could have done differently. “Why do the adults in the building need to create so much drama?” I wondered. Perhaps we need to review staff expectations, roles, and responsibilities in a staff meeting? I stand up, walk out to the secretaries, and ask, “Could you please put in a work order to change the lock on the staff bathroom door? I would like one where you need a key to enter. I’m tired of cleaning up everyone’s fecal matter.”

Introduction to What?!

This next vignette focuses on the theme of skills, knowledge, and experiences. This particular story describes a day when a special education teacher with a disability arrived at the school site for a meeting with the principal, a representative from the human resources department, and the site’s special education team. The purpose of this meeting was to decide if the special education teacher with a disability was qualified enough to be placed as a teacher at the site and is a salient example of conflict regarding skills, knowledge, and experiences. It also shows the different standards that exist for people with disabilities.

What?!

Bzz, bzz, bzz. Bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz. The 6am alarm sounds again. With squinting eyes, open just enough to see the screen of my phone without being blinded from the light, I collect my morning data. *Time asleep: 7hr 18min, sleep quality: 1 time awake, 15 times restless, 23min awake/restless.* 9 Emails: *auto-confirm@amazon, junk mail, parent, teacher, listserv, listserv, work-order confirmation, IT, junk mail.* Weather: *Now: partly cloudy, feels like 54.* Clock. *Off, off.*

“Go ahead and pass to your classes, learn something new, and have fun!” The students make their way into the building. I pull out my cell phone, check my calendar, and confirm what I have on the agenda for today. The big meeting with HR and my potential new RSP was just an hour away. As I walk to the office I see an unfamiliar person sitting in a chair across from the secretaries. I approach her, “Hello, are you Jocelyn?” I ask.

“Hi, yes.”

“I’m the Principal. Nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too. I know I’m really early. I just wanted to be sure I got here and could figure out where I’m going. I’m also very excited about this!”

“I’m very excited you are here as well. I need to run, but I’ll be right back. Maybe we can check in before everyone else gets here.” I turn and walk back out to the hallway to begin my rounds.

After checking to see that all students were safely in their classes, and getting a sense for who was in the building, I head back down to the office. I’m excited to be getting another RSP teacher, but I need to fill Jocelyn in on everything that has happened

at our site this year, and give her a heads up about how everyone is feeling at the moment. “Jocelyn, okay, do you want to come in?”

“Okay,” She stands up, assembles her cane, and waits for directions.

“We are just going to go to the left,” I say. “Would you like me to lead you?”

“Yes,” she holds out her elbow for me to guide her into my office.

“There is a chair right behind you.”

She feels behind her, takes a seat, and disassembles her cane. I pull up another chair and sit across from her.

“Welcome! As you know, HR wants all of us to meet so we can figure out if it would be a good fit. Could you tell me more about where you have worked and what you were doing?”

I ask the question partly to find out more about what had happened to her, and why she was being placed halfway through the year. All I had been told from the Special Ed. Department was that she was hired by another site at the start of the year, but was pulled from the position, and had been back at the site she had done her student teaching. When my Special Education Supervisor heard HR was looking for a site to take her, she immediately called me about it. She knew not only was I was short handed, but also that I was an advocate for students with disabilities and would be very welcoming and willing to accommodate her as well.

“That sounds great,” I say, after hearing about how she was running reading groups with students. “I think this is going to be a great fit. I just want to let you know that my staff is not very happy right now though. At the end of last year I was given an allocation for another RSP teacher so I hired one, but then I was consolidated a few

months ago. Since the new hire had more seniority than one that I hired last year, she got bumped. My other RSP is very close with her. She is not very happy that we lost her, and now we are getting someone to replace her. I just want you to know that because emotions are high right now and it is nothing against you.”

“Oh, it’s okay. I’m just so happy that I will be able to do what I went to school for and what I was hired to do.”

“Great. HR should be coming in just a minute. Let me go see if he’s here.” I open the door, peek my head out, and see him at the desk signing in. “Perfect timing!” I say. “I was just meeting with Jocelyn to give her a little more information about the site and what we would be having her do. Come on in.” I pull up a few more chairs so my two RSP teachers can join us as well. I begin to fill HR in on everything I had been discussing with Jocelyn, when the two RSP teachers walk in. “Great, now that everyone is here, I can go over what I had in mind. Ms. Jocelyn was telling me that she did a lot of work with students using Leveled Literacy Intervention. I think it would be great if she continues with that. After looking at your schedules, I think she would be able to lighten your case load quite a bit, and the students would be getting more of the support they need.”

“So this is a done deal then?!” the RSP asks with frustration, as she crosses her arms, and sits back in her chair.

“Yes, we believe it will be a good fit, but I am happy to address some of your concerns. What are you both concerned about?”

The same RSP responds, “We have a very small office space and there isn’t any room for another person. Are you saying she would be there and her aide, and another person who is coming to supervise her?”

HR responds, “The additional person would only be coming to support for the first week. To see that everything is going smoothly and Jocelyn has the accommodations she needs.”

“The office is small,” the other RSP confirms, “and when we both have groups of students in there it is very difficult.”

I think to myself, “*Well, if you were both providing services in the least restrictive environment, like the schedules say, then we wouldn’t be having this issue*”, but respond, “I hear your concerns about space. We all know that space is a huge problem around here, but I’m sure I can come up with a solution that works for everyone. Do you have any other concerns? If not, then I know how busy you are so I’m going to dismiss the both of you.”

They stand up and walk out of the room. Once the door closes, HR looks at me with a surprised look on his face. I’m shocked by the hostility projected at Jocelyn, but not surprised. “*Does anyone else see the irony in this?*” I wonder. “*Isn’t the whole point of special education to provide additional support so people can become independent and join society in a productive manner? Isn’t this the exact moment we are hoping for? Why would special education teachers not want this to happen?!*”

“Everyone is a bit upset about what has happened here with allocations and consolidation,” I respond. “Don’t worry, I will be sure that everyone is on board before

Jocelyn's official start date. Why don't we take a tour of the school? I can show you the RSP office," I say with a smile. "Perhaps it's best you leave your things in here today."

Introduction to When and Where?

This final vignette highlights the themes of time and resources, and placement. This story depicts several situations that focus on the time and resources that are needed to provide services and supports for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment. It also shows how different situations and attitudes result in the change of placement for students with disabilities.

When and Where?

Bzz, bzz, bzz. Bzz, bzz, bzz, bzz. Time asleep: 7hr 44min, sleep quality: 3 times awake, 13 times restless, 28min awake/restless. 8 Emails: parent-URGENT new schedule, auto-update@amazon, psychologist-IEP confirmation, calendar invite, teacher, junk email, music schedule update, absence creation. Weather: Now: scattered showers, feels like 52, precipitation: 60%, 65%, 70%, 85%. Clock. Off, off.

I pull up the email with the URGENT subject line and begin reading. I notice that the parent had emailed the message to the classroom teacher, the RSP, and myself so I need to reply all before anyone else complicates things. *Re URGENT: Hello, I am happy to discuss your concerns. Do you have time to come in and meet with me this afternoon? Thank you.* I know better than to address any concerns by email, and since I didn't quite have an answer to her request, I figured it would be best to give myself some time. I immediately forward the parent email to my Special Education Supervisor and Assistant Superintendent. *Fwd: URGENT. See email below from parent. Not only is it a major violation of the ADA to put Jocelyn on unpaid leave because the district can't obtain the*

proper accommodations for her, I am also dealing with a lot of parents that are upset their children aren't getting the services in their IEPs, since I'm down an RSP now. This would never have happened if my concerns regarding allocations were taken seriously in the first place. Please let me know if you have any update on when Jocelyn will be returning to our site. Thank you. It wasn't common of me to reach out to my Assistant Superintendent, or to be so blunt regarding my concerns, but this was something that I was furious about, and I wanted to be sure I was getting my point across. I hit send. Swoosh.

My first meeting begins at 8:10, the official start to teachers' contractual workday. My Special Education Supervisor arrives half an hour early, partly because parking is easier, and partly so I can fill her in on some things happening at the site. I give her some updates: *a parent wants change of placement into the SDC classroom, another parent submitted a request for independent educational evaluation because her child didn't qualify for services, I recently received a parent request for records, we brainstorm ideas around what the parent is hoping to achieve.*

8:10 rolls around, the teacher arrives, and hands us a two-page letter detailing his concerns. Since it is the first time meeting the supervisor, he begins by giving some background about himself and mentions that he has been a teacher at this site for over twenty years. He discusses his personal concerns with the RSP teacher and then goes on to discuss how he feels that a pull out model of services should be assumed unless the RSP teacher schedules a meeting with the teacher ahead of time. I sit quietly and listen to what else he has to say, wondering if he knows anything about special education law and least restrictive environment.

He moves on to the topic of student behavior. “It is a given that classroom teachers don’t have time to create a behavior plan or to train a para on how to implement it. We have extreme, tier four students who are chronically disruptive and there is no clear punishment for their behavior.”

I feel myself losing patients. *“It’s a given, no, it actually isn’t,”* I think. *“You should see how teachers on the other side of town are able to manage behaviors, and they have students who do more than make noises and stand up in the classroom. How many times do I have to say we don’t refer to students as ‘tier students’? And there are only three tiers of interventions!”*

He continues, “We need a behavior specialist at our site so we can have them create and implement behavior plans. We should also pay a teacher or teachers on site to collaborate with the RSP teachers to develop interventions for those students. We also need a no tolerance policy for hurting adults. Okay, that’s all I have to share. Thank you for listening to everything. If you want to submit a response I’m available to meet again.”

The Special Education Supervisor responds, “Okay, great. Thank you for sharing all of this with us. I will type up a response and share it with your principal.” The teacher stands up, gathers his things and walks out the door. I stand up as well, shut the door after him, and look over at my supervisor who responds, “Well, I heard a lot of ‘those kids’. Wow! I am glad that I was here for that meeting.”

“Do you see what I am dealing with? There are a lot of old ways of thinking around here, and it doesn’t help that so many of the teachers have only taught at this site. I wish they would go and see what other teachers in the district are doing.”

“I am not even going to respond about the request for the behavior specialist.”

“I know. I don’t think teachers fully understand the bigger issues in the district right now, ugh. Well, thank you for coming. I will see you in two days for that IEP. I believe we have a district attorney confirmed already.”

I open the door, walk back to my desk, open my laptop, and sign on. Email reply from parent: *Re Re URGENT: Yes, I can meet this afternoon. I will stop by your office. Thank you. Re Re Re URGENT: Great. See you then. Thank you.* A teacher appears in the door. “So, I saw the revised RSP schedules. My student is missing history with that schedule. Can you change it?”

“Would you like him to miss history or federally mandated services?” I ask. “We all have to make things work until Ms. Jocelyn returns. Maybe you can change what you are teaching in the classroom, but I don’t have any flexibility in the RSP schedules right now.”

“Okay,” she says with acceptance, but disappointment as she walks away. I peer out the window behind me to check the status of the weather. It looks as if the clouds are moving in, but we will be okay for morning announcements.

“Go ahead and pass to your classes, learn something new, and have fun!” I see a parent on the yard I need to talk to so I grab her to confirm she can make it to the IEP meeting. It was not a meeting I wanted to have, but the parent felt strongly about moving her child into the Special Day Classroom. I was told to do the change of placement now because enrollment for next year was happening soon and it was not looking good in terms of saving a spot for him. “Does that date work for you?” I ask.

“Yes, that is great. When will he be able to start in the new classroom?”

“After the meeting and after you sign off on the changes to the IEP he will be in his new classroom. Would you like me to show you the room?”

“Yes please.” We wait for the last of the lines to funnel down the stairs and into the building. We walk down the hall and into the classroom.

“This is the room. You are welcome to observe for a few minutes.” I open the door and we walk in. The teacher looks over at us.

“Well, good morning,” he says.

“Good morning. We are just observing for a minute.”

“Okay.” The teacher had already been filled in on the changes that were going to happen. Although he warmly welcomed every student into his classroom, he shared his concerns with me about his room being a dumping ground for gen ed teachers. He was not happy with the fact that there had not been consistent intervention in the gen ed setting, and certainly didn’t want teachers to think his room was an appropriate placement for anyone with behavior challenges regardless of their academic levels.

I leave the parent in the classroom and head back down the hallway towards my office when my cell phone begins to ring. *Assistant Superintendent*. I walk a little faster so I can get to my office and have a private conversation. “Hello?”

“Hi there. How’s it going?”

“It’s going okay.”

“Listen, I got your email. Is that the RSP teacher that was just placed at your site a month ago? Let me talk to the Special Ed. Department and to HR and find out what’s going on. Your Sped Supervisor is actually at an instructional visit right now so I’m going to drive over there right now and surprise her.”

“Okay. Thank you. It has just been crazy this year with RSP allocations. First I had three RSPs then I had two, then three, and now I’m back down to two. I really need her here at this site. Everyone has been so happy she is here and I really hope she is back soon.”

“I will let you know once I hear more from HR.”

“Okay. Thank you.” I hang up, put the phone back in my pocket, sit down and reach for the first sip of my coffee when I hear someone say something to the secretary.

“Could you call the custodian? His finger is stuck in the window.”

Stuck in the window? Call the custodian? No, this is something I need to handle. I stand up and walk into the office. “What happened?” I ask.

“A student has his finger stuck in the window in the boys’ bathroom. Would you like me to call the custodian?”

“No, let me go check it out.” I head upstairs towards the bathroom. Knock, knock, knock. “Hello?” I want to be sure there aren’t any other students in the bathroom before I go in. I open the door and prop it wide open with the garbage can. The para is standing just outside the back stall. “Is he clothed?” I ask.

“Yes. But his finger is stuck in the window handle.”

“Okay. Will you hold the stall door open for me?” I walk into the stall and sure enough his finger is stuck in the circular part of the window latch. The swelling tells me it has probably been stuck in there for a while. “Do you need help?”

“Yes.”

I touch his finger to see if it will move at all, but it is jammed in pretty good. I walk over to the sinks and fill my hand up with soap. “I’m going to put soap on your finger. Okay?”

“Yes.”

I dump a pile of soap on his finger, but he pushes me away, so I give him a minute to try and pull his finger out himself. Thoughts of having to call the fire department to cut him out cross my mind. I walk to the sink and fill my hand up with soap again. “One more time,” I tell him as I cover his finger in soap. Sure enough it slides right out. “Good job!” I walk back down to my office hoping to be able to sit down and have some coffee.

When I get into the office I see a student sitting in the chair. I had a feeling he was not there because he was sick. “What are you doing in here,” I ask him. He lets me know he was told to come here and that his teacher is mad at him. “Do you need a break or are you ready to go back to class?”

“I need a break. Five minutes.”

“I will give you two minutes.” I set the timer on my phone and show him. “And then we are going back to class.” I unlock my office door, pull out the Family Handbook, and begin flipping to the pages on student behavior policies. I want to be sure to review state and district board policies with my staff. Rrrring, rrrring, rrrring. The timer on my phone goes off and I walk out to the office. “Let’s go back to class.”

The student stands up and we head back to his classroom. I sit with him awhile to make sure he is focused and ready to do his work, and to let the teacher know that I will

be in her classroom anytime she wants to send a student to the office. After a few minutes I head back to my office, still hoping for that first sip of coffee.

I unlock the door, head to my desk, open my laptop, sign on, and check my email. 12 new messages. I scroll through the messages and see one from HR. *Hello, I wanted to let you know that Jocelyn will be returning as soon as next week.* Ahhhh, I let out a big sigh of relief, sit back in my chair, and reach for my coffee. As I take the first sip I peer out the window. The rain begins to fall.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to better understand the competing tensions and conflict within inclusive education that elementary school principals encounter on a daily basis. Identifying the competing tensions and conflict within inclusive education is the first step in addressing barriers to whole school reform that supports the learning of students with disabilities. This study also intended to identify how elementary school principals navigate the daily conflicts. Identifying the leadership moves, made by principals, that ameliorate or exacerbate the institutional conditions contributing to the conflicts provides next steps for school and district leaders.

Research Question One Discussion

The first research question sought to identify the everyday conflicts in inclusive education that elementary school principals encounter on a daily basis when transitioning from implementation of special education supports and services to inclusive education. Four main themes were identified and described in the findings. Although there is some overlap within the four themes, it is important to discuss each one separately.

Roles and Responsibilities

Conflict was identified regarding the roles and responsibilities of a variety of stakeholders including general education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, the principal, parents, and people in district central-office positions. The first vignette, “Who”, depicts several examples of the conflict around roles and

responsibilities. It describes moments where people held differing beliefs about what their own role is and is not, as well as the roles of others.

The paraprofessional held beliefs about the behavioral expectations for all students, her position of authority over students, and the role of the principal. She expected the student to “behave like a student her age”. She also viewed herself as someone that was to be respected by the student as the authority, and had a clear idea about what respect looked like. The conversation between the student, paraprofessional, and principal shows the paraprofessional also believed it was the role of the principal to set the expectation for student behavior.

One of the teachers portrayed in the story described her role as providing support to students, which encompassed providing additional instruction directly to students, but did not include managing the adults in the classroom so they could better assist students. The teacher displayed the desire to have the principal be the one to solve the conflict regarding the paraprofessional’s role, and to give her instructions on what she should be doing in the classroom. Another teacher in the story also expressed her opinion of the role of the paraprofessional, and how it was not to be making copies all day.

The principal in the story, myself, is depicted as the custodian and the one responsible for cleaning up all the messes, however I also show frustration with others who are not meeting my expectations and beliefs regarding their roles and responsibilities.

The second and third vignettes also touch on the conflict regarding roles and responsibilities. They both describe the unstated views, held by the principal, regarding the role of people in district positions, and how they should be held accountable for

upholding laws and regulations as well as providing the basic resources to sites that are needed to ensure mandates are being met.

Skills, Knowledge, and Experience

The skills, knowledge, and experiences of the varying stakeholders were also factors that created tension between members of the community. All three of the vignettes depict this theme to some extent. Teachers express concern about the skills of paraprofessionals, special education teachers question the skills of general education teachers and vice versa, and I, as principal, question the knowledge, skills, and experiences of just about every category of employee including myself.

In “Who?”, the teacher questions the skill level of the paraprofessional and her ability to support students in the classroom without explicit direction. In “What?!” there is tension and uncertainty from HR and other RSP teachers about the ability of an RSP with a disability. The same RSP questions the district’s knowledge of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and her rights to be working in the position in which she was hired. In “When and Where?”, the special education teacher questions a teacher’s experience with students who need behavioral supports and their inability to provide the proper support. General education teachers express the same inability of themselves to provide behavioral support to students.

I express concerns with the lack of knowledge of general education teachers and special education teachers regarding federal laws, in particular the concept of the least restrictive environment. There is also tension between general education teachers and the principal regarding how to support students in the classroom who are disruptive. I see this as a lack of skills and knowledge of general education teachers about positive

behavior interventions as well as current research on behavior modification, and state and board policies. The teachers however, view the situation as a lack of support from the administration and special education teachers.

Time and Resources

“When and Where?” focuses on conflict regarding time and resources. Time was a major issue that came up in several forms. Teachers, parents, RSP teachers, and I express concern regarding when services are provided to students with disabilities. General education teachers express a lack of time to provide individualized supports to students with disabilities. My day-to-day activities display the challenges of the fast paced and unpredictable job.

When to provide services to students was an issue that impacted several people and created tension. I was at odds with the district for not having the RSP allocation needed to be in compliance with all students’ IEPs regarding service minutes. The constant changes in allocation also created conflict because it required constant changes to schedules for student services. This led to parents’ requests for their children’s services to be provided at a specific time of the day. The general education teacher also expressed concerns that the times their students were receiving services were not ideal.

The lack of time in the day also led to other conflict, such as those regarding roles and responsibilities and knowledge. General education teachers expressed they did not have time to create behavior plans for students, to train paraprofessionals in how to implement the behavior plans, or to make modifications to the curriculum or provide accommodations to students. This lack of time needed to provide appropriate services

and supports also created issues that related to placement, as well as the amount of learning time students spent outside of the classroom.

Placement

“When and Where?” depicts the heated debate in inclusive education regarding placement of students, who belongs, and who does not. The debate on where students should be educated came up on several occasions and from varying stakeholders. There were disagreements between special education and general education teachers regarding placement of students, and where services would be provided to students. General education teachers also expressed concerns about where students should be if they demonstrated disruptive behaviors, and parents had varying attitudes regarding where their children were educated.

General education teachers held strong beliefs about removing students from the classroom if they disrupted the learning of others due to their behavior. Conflict between the general education teachers and me were created because of this. General education teachers’ beliefs about placement also created conflict between special education teachers and the general education teachers. The special day classroom teacher depicted in “When and Where?” describes feeling his classroom was a “dumping ground” for students the general education teachers did not want in their rooms, but the general education teachers express a lack of support from the principal and the special education teachers.

Research Question Two Discussion

The purpose of the second research question was to explore how elementary school principals navigate the conflict they encountered. To address this question, I looked at the institutional conditions that ameliorate and exacerbate the conflicts that

were identified, as well as the leadership moves that were made to address the institutional conditions. I also looked at situations where there was no conflict, to determine what conditions were different, or what leadership moves were made that prevented conflict. First, is an account that describes how I navigated conflict at the point of open contention. Then, a discussion of the social and organizational conflict is provided, followed by contradictions within ideology.

Resolving Conflict at Point of Open Contention

Most of the outward conflicts that were described in the findings were mediated by extracting someone from the setting. This extraction, of student, personnel, or both, often resolved the primary conflict, however it created changes in services or supports for students with disabilities, often leading to compliance issues and an unintentional disservice to and disregard for the student or students involved.

In “Who?”, the paraprofessional’s belief about her role and the identify of a specific student led to tension, which I tried to resolve by supporting the paraprofessional’s request to review expectations. The plan, to quickly review behavioral norms, only exacerbated the conflict between the paraprofessional, the student, and me, and resulted in student removal from the classroom for a period of time longer than I had anticipated.

Also in “Who?”, was the conflict between the teacher and the paraprofessional, which stemmed from the teachers’ belief that the paraprofessional lacked the skills to support the students, and the teacher lacked the time to support the paraprofessional. I viewed this situation as temporarily resolved, when the teacher removed the paraprofessional from the classroom, and therefore, took no additional immediate action.

The paraprofessional was asked by the teacher to make copies and spent a full day in the workroom, which meant the students did not receive direct services from the paraprofessional.

In “When and Where?”, there are multiple examples of concerns from general education teachers about their inability to support students with behavioral needs. In some of these situations, I was not available to provide immediate direct support, which resulted in removal of the student from the classroom. In another example, the lack of consistent support to the general education teacher resulted in the parent request to move her child to a special day classroom, where the needed support would be provided. I complied with the parent request, but it created additional conflict between the general education teacher and the special education teacher.

Most of these examples show how the immediate responses I made, in the moment of conflict, resulted in the removal of students from their environment, however there were also leadership moves that were made, upon reflection of these incidents, that intended to address the key areas of conflict, providing longer-term solutions.

Resolving Social and Organizational Contradictions

In the findings, I addressed the key areas of conflict: roles and responsibilities; skills, knowledge, and experience; time and resources; and placement, in a variety of ways to provide longer-term solutions. I clarified roles and responsibilities through staff meetings and one to one discussions with employees. Skills, knowledge, and experiences were addressed by providing additional professional development to employees, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings were used to inform parents about changing state and district policies and instructional shifts at the school site level. I acquired

resources for teachers and staff to support the learning of students with disabilities, and simple moves such as scheduling all annual and triennial IEP meetings at the start of the year, and sharing calendars with service providers prevented scheduling conflicts, and freed up time spent confirming meeting dates with all required attendees. Although these leadership moves addressed the key areas of conflict, I did not dive deeper into the root causes of these conflicts or identify social and organizational contradictions that impacted students with disabilities. Further analysis of the data identified some of these contradictions.

The purpose of special education is to provide additional supports and services to students, however once students were identified with disabilities they often received less support and a fragmented education. Once a student was identified as having a disability, there was often a shift in beliefs about who was responsible for the student's education. General education teachers believed RSP teachers were responsible for making modifications to the student's educational program, in addition to the services they provided, and often used the constraints of time and lack of expertise to justify the need for someone else to take responsibility. RSP teachers however had caseloads larger than most general education classrooms, less or no planning time, and no relief time during the day. RSP teachers also spent a very small amount of time with the students, ranging anywhere from 60 to 450 minutes a week to compared to the 1,800 minutes a week a general education teacher spent with the students. When these service minutes were provided to students in a pull out model, students often missed out on the learning the rest of the class was doing which put them further behind their peers and also excluded them from social situations with non-disabled peers.

Teachers strongly believed they were making decisions that were in the best interest of all students, however some of the actions made by general education teachers had side effects that were detrimental to students with disabilities, and contradictory to their intent to support all learners. The lack of knowledge, skills, or experience of some classroom teachers, and the constraints of time and resources resulted in a mindset of teachers to do what benefited the highest number of students in the least amount of time or energy. When teachers tried to do what was best for the collective group, instead of looking at the needs of each student, the most marginalized students became even further marginalized. Curriculum was often not differentiated to meet the individual learning needs of students, and the classroom teacher did not directly provide additional modifications and accommodations, or give directions to the paraprofessionals in how to do so. General education teachers also displayed this mindset, of doing what was best for the collective group, when handling issues that related to student behavior.

This mindset was most commonly seen when students with disabilities disrupted the classroom with behaviors that were viewed by the classroom teacher as inappropriate or disruptive. Teachers expressed they were not able to “teach” and were also concerned about the way they were viewed by other students for allowing these perceived inappropriate or disruptive behaviors to occur. The decision to remove the student from the classroom communicated to the other students that those behaviors were not accepted, which led other students to believe that student was “bad”. Once a student was removed from the classroom, it often resulted in a repeated pattern of removal, a belief that the student was to blame, and that the general education classroom was not the appropriate placement for the student.

Resolving Conflict within Ideology

Further analysis and deconstruction of these individual situations point to conflicts based on ideologies. The root conflicts of the issues identified in the previous sections stemmed from individual ideologies about what it means to be a teacher, assumptions about power and authority, and the assumptions and dominant ideologies that surround disability and difference. Although I did not address the conflicts regarding ideology, it is important to describe the varying beliefs that led to conflict.

One assumption that was held, by general education teachers, regarded the idea of what it meant to be a “teacher”. When teachers believed their sole job was to impart knowledge, either in academic content or skills, specific to the grade level they taught then conflict developed. The teacher viewed teaching as delivering the planned and prepared curriculum to students. When students interrupted the planned learning, or when the teacher had to create additional plans for students who were not meeting grade level standards, the teacher perceived herself or himself to no longer be “teaching”.

This belief, about what it means to be a teacher, also led to assumptions about power and authority. Although teachers need to be responsible for the learning of students and the management of a classroom, what this looked like to teachers varied. At times of conflict, the teacher held beliefs that s/he was the one in authority and that authority was not to be questioned or interrupted. These situations almost always resulted in power struggles that led to the removal of a student from the classroom.

Issues of authority and power also arouse from beliefs about what it means to be different or to have a disability. If a student had a label of being disabled, teachers were able to justify their desire to have them removed from their general education classrooms.

If a student was not removed, and a teacher held the beliefs previously described, then the student developed the stigma of the “bad” student or the one not capable of meeting the expectations other students could meet because of their “disability”.

Discussion Summary

The review of the literature discussed earlier in this study described the three lenses in which inclusive education is usually categorized: legal, technical, and philosophical (Winzer, 2000). Although the study intended to address the conflicts regarding the competing beliefs and values that are enacted through varied discourses of inclusive education, the conflict that was observed in this study stemmed more from a lack of knowledge regarding inclusive education and the laws pertaining to students with disabilities, as well as individual beliefs about teaching, authority, and difference, rather than competing discourses of inclusive education.

Decisions that were made regarding what supports were provided, and when and where they were provided, were made based on the convenience of the adults and their beliefs or insecurities regarding their position of power, rather than the interests of the students. The decisions made by general education teachers also focused on how to support the largest number of students in the most effective manner instead of looking to serve the needs of each student individually. This almost always led to the removal of students with disabilities from the classroom or the expectation that someone else would be responsible for their learning.

Winzer (2000) states, “When students with exceptionalities are placed into regular classrooms where general classroom teachers are expected to duplicate the results of special education and the treatments associated with them, then inclusion represents a

basic shift that changes who does what, to whom it is done, where it is done, and how resources support what is done” (p. 21). School leaders must clearly communicate the basic shifts required for inclusive education to happen, but must also address the contradictions in the current educational system, and the individual ideologies that continues to segregate and stigmatize students with disabilities.

Implications

Results from this dissertation could have implications for my current school site and current school leaders, students with disabilities, and future school leaders. This research can support school leaders by contributing to a more reflective practice. The use of autoethnography in the field of education as a practitioner and a researcher has many benefits. As a school leader, I was more clearly able to identify the areas of conflict at my site and proactively develop a plan to address the root causes of conflict, instead of always being reactive. Being a researcher also provided me with additional knowledge about the current issues in education and best researched based practices.

A copy of this dissertation will be provided to the special education department of the district for consideration. It is hoped that the recommendations provided will be used to support school and district leaders trying to achieve inclusive education that supports the learning of all students, especially students with disabilities.

Anyone interested in going into school leadership would also benefit from this research. It provides a clear image of what it is like to be a school leader and the challenges one might face on a daily basis. Using the accounts found in this study can provide future leaders with practical, real life situations that can be analyzed and used to better understand how to make better, split-second decisions in a face paced environment.

Recommendations for the Profession

The creation of inclusive schools will not be possible unless school principals address the institutional conditions that lead to conflict and the different ideologies held by the varying members of the school community. School principals must be intentional about the decisions they make and how they frame the work that is done in schools. For schools to become inclusive, school principals must recognize and communicate to all stakeholders the challenges and shifts that will occur. Principals must set high expectations for inclusion, but also acknowledge that change takes time.

Principals should begin by acquiring resources and freeing up time that is needed to make these changes. Then principals should focus on communicating roles, responsibilities, and expectations to all community members. From there, additional professional development is essential to ensure employees have the prerequisite skills. Throughout this process, school principals need to address ideologies and certain ways of thinking that lead to marginalization and stigmatization of students with disabilities. Following are steps and suggestions that principals can take to address each of the identified areas of conflict.

Recommendations Regarding Time and Resources

Principals must first address the issues of time and resources. To begin, principals must make the decision to make inclusive education the primary focus of their school site's professional development plan and use inclusive education and equity as the framing for all other professional learning. Principals should have both a long term, or five-year plan for inclusive education, as well as a short term, or yearly plan. This plan should include the different professional development topics as well as the funding and

resources needed to implement them. Suggestions regarding professional development topics will be discussed in the futures sections of these recommendations.

In school sites with high number of students with IEPs, like the primary setting of this research, scheduling becomes an important aspect of supporting students with disabilities. Decisions regarding the scheduling of service minutes need to be done before student class assignments are made and before daily classroom electives and schedules are created. If teachers know when they will have special education supports and services in their classrooms, they can make decisions on what activities or curriculum should be occurring at that time. In many school sites, this scheduling is done after the fact and leads to a more fragmented education for students with disabilities.

The scheduling of IEP meetings should also be done for all students at the start of the school year. When I scheduled annual and triennial IEP meetings for all students at the start of the year, and used a shared online calendar such as Google, it reduced the amount of time it took to confirm participation of all IEP participants. It also ensured that timelines were being met for annual IEP meetings. Of course additional IEP meetings and initial IEPs will be scheduled throughout the year, however creating and sharing these schedules with all members of the IEP team made it easier for all parties involved and less time was wasted trying to coordinate IEP meetings that required the participation of multiple people.

Students with disabilities often need curriculum modifications or other academic interventions that require both time and resources. Principals can acquire resources or programs that teachers can use for intervention if they are not already provided by the school district. Teachers should be involved in the process of learning about different

programs so they can provide input about what their students need and what they would feasibly be able to implement in the classroom.

School principals also need to make adjustments to structures or schedules so there is common planning time for general education and special education teachers and related service providers to collaborate. This could include designated time at site meetings after school, or within the school day, but will vary depending on a number of factors such as the ability to provide classroom coverage during the school day, the number of special education teachers and related service providers, and the number of classrooms serving students with disabilities. This collaboration will also require the principal to clearly communicate expectations regarding roles and responsibilities of all community members.

Recommendations Regarding Roles and Responsibilities

Once school structures and resources are in place, school principals can begin to address the shift in roles and responsibilities. Principals must communicate the need for employees to work collaboratively and to treat each other with respect. Employees must learn to work together and share responsibility for the learning of each student. Principals can begin by pairing members together that already work well together and where trust has been established.

Setting the expectation regarding roles and responsibilities will also require the knowledge of different federal, state, local, and union laws and regulations and they can be referenced when the principal communicates these expectations. Clearly outlining the job duties and requirements of all community members and communicating and making the information available to all members of the community will help relieve some of the

conflict regarding roles and responsibilities. School principals can also reach out to district leaders in varying departments to reinforce the expectations or use district posted job descriptions as a basis for principal expectations, or can develop these expectations with a committee of school community members. Being transparent about the decisions regarding what is expected from each community member will make compliance and implementation more likely. This will also require additional skills, knowledge, and experiences for the different community members.

Recommendations Regarding Skills, Knowledge, and Experiences

General education teachers, special education teachers, paraprofessionals, related service providers, parents, and principals could all benefit from additional skills and knowledge about how to support students with disabilities. School principals should provide professional development that begins with the intention of federal laws and the history of segregation of students with disabilities. This will serve as the foundation for all other professional development. School principals may also require professional development around these topics, or they can request support from other district leaders or departments, or the special education teachers or other members of the community who possess that knowledge.

Additional learning may also be required in the areas of implementing academic interventions or providing curricular accommodations and modifications, supporting students with behavioral needs, and collecting and using data to make decisions, but will vary by school site and will require the site leader to make decisions based on the level of readiness of the school community members.

A major area of conflict at my school site was rooted in a lack of skills, knowledge, and experiences in providing positive behavior interventions and supports for all students, including students with disabilities. Many of the practices regarding the management of student behavior consist of punitive consequences that are not backed by educational research and do not result in a change of student behaviors. These punitive, punishment based techniques often resulted in the creation of normative constructs that, when violated, created negative labels for students and most often students with disabilities.

For this reason, my school site plan will focus on creating positive classroom cultures with positive behavior interventions and supports as well as workshops around de-escalation and avoiding power struggles. This includes developing intervention plans, collecting and reviewing data every six to eight weeks, exposing teachers to different school sites with successful implementation of these strategies, and regular classroom visits with feedback from the principal. Providing additional skills, knowledge, and experiences to all school employees can lead to a safer and more supportive learning environment in which each child achieves higher levels of academic performance.

Recommendations Regarding Placement

If school principals can address the institutional conditions regarding time and resources, roles and responsibilities, and skills, knowledge, and experiences, then conflicts regarding appropriate placement of students should decrease. All employees need to understand that placement and support decisions must not be determined based on convenience of the adults or their beliefs and insecurities regarding their position of

power, but rather on the best interests of the students. This will not be achieved unless principals can hold discussions with employees regarding ideology.

Recommendations Regarding Ideology

Addressing the issues of time and resources; skills, roles and responsibilities; and skills, knowledge, and experiences are important in making a shift to inclusive education, however this shift will not occur unless school principals can also address the individual ideologies that are detrimental to student learning and identity. Principals must lead staff discussions about what it means to be inclusive and to facilitate the identification of inequities in school structures, cultures, and practices. Teachers must engage deeply in conversations about what it truly means to be an inclusive school. These discussions must include analysis of school structures, cultures, and practices that identify issues of control and power, as well as social constructs of disability, and other normative constructs that are created in classrooms.

The findings in this study pointed out a variety of situations in which both students and adult members of the community were excluded. These situations must be pointed out and discussed in order for changes to be made in current practices. Principals can use the narrative vignettes in this study to begin these conversations with their school communities. The use of autoethnographic research could also be a method used by principals and other school employees to identify and address the inequitable barriers students face.

Recommendations for Future Study

This autoethnographic study focused on conflict regarding inclusive education from the perspective of elementary school principals, thus providing one perspective of

the issues and conflicts described in the study. A recommendation for future study would be to broaden this study by conducting a full ethnography that includes the perspective of the different stakeholders in the community such as general education teachers, RSP and special day classroom teachers, and paraprofessionals.

This study was situated in one geographic location of one urban school district and within three elementary schools with similar student demographics and special education programs. The conflicts that were described in this study were observed to varying extents across the three school sites, however it would be recommended to replicate this study in schools with different student and parent demographics.

Concluding Thoughts

The focus of this study was on how elementary school principals navigate conflict, and the findings in this study portrayed several areas of conflict. Identifying conflict in a system of inequity and injustice is a necessity, and the establishment of justice requires conflict. In this regard, conflict is seen as a positive and a crucial factor in the advancement of discussions around inclusive education.

It is also important however, to keep in mind all of the positive work that is already happening at these schools and the moments that are not depicted in this study. The detrimental mindsets described in this study were held by a select few rather than the majority of employees.

For me, this study also brought up issues regarding the treatment and inclusion of all members of the community and exposed the different set of standards adults have for the treatment of each other versus children. During data analysis, when I had discovered that my leadership actions resulted in the removal of a community member, I felt like a

terrible leader. This realization however, has made it clear that inclusive education is not just about students with disabilities, but all members of the community. As school leaders, principals must lead by example, and the creation of inclusive school communities requires principals to demonstrate mutual respect to all individuals.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The purpose of my study is to better understand the competing tension and conflict regarding inclusive education that school principals must navigate from the institutional, district, school, and personal levels in addressing the academic and social needs of students with disabilities. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

School Vision

- Tell me about your school's vision for inclusion regarding students with disabilities.
- How do you communicate that vision to your community (teachers, staff, parents, students)?
- How does your school's vision regarding students with disabilities compare to that of the district?

School Programs and Practices

- Describe the different programs and staff you have at your site for students with disabilities.
- Tell me more about how decisions are made regarding where services are provided.
- If you were a student with a disability at your school, what are three things you would know or be able to do?

Leadership Practices

- On average, what percent of your day do you think you spend on issues relating to students with disabilities?
- Can you tell me more about what this looks like on a given day?
- How would you describe your participation in IEP decisions?

Leadership Experiences

- Tell me about a time you experienced conflict regarding special education?
- How did you remedy the situation?
- Can you think of a time where you were conflicted about what to do?
- Have you experienced a situation where you wanted to do one thing, but experienced competing directives?
- Can you describe any institutional conditions that exacerbate conflict regarding inclusive practices or students with disabilities?
- What do you find to be the most frustrating, or troublesome, about being an administrator and the work you do to support students with disabilities?
- What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect being an administrator and the work you do to support students with disabilities?
- Is there anything else you want to tell me?

Please tell me a little bit about you and your experience working in education by answering the following. You may skip anything you do not feel comfortable answering.

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Age:

Ability:

Years as a school principal:

Years at your current site:

Years as an assistant principal:

Years as a classroom teacher:

Years in other positions in education, and list positions:

Anything else you would like to describe about your personal background:

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT



Consent Form Appropriate for Adults

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Below is a description of the research procedures and an explanation of your rights as a research participant. You should read this information carefully. If you agree to participate, you will sign in the space provided to indicate that you have read and understand the information on this consent form. You are entitled to and will receive a copy of this form.

You have been asked to participate in a research study conducted by Kimberly C. Adams, a graduate student in the Department of Organization and Leadership at the University of San Francisco. This faculty supervisor for this study is Dr. Darrick Smith, a professor in the Department of Organization and Leadership at the University of San Francisco.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ABOUT:

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the competing tension and conflict regarding inclusive education that school principals must navigate from the institutional, district, school, and person levels in addressing the academic and social needs of students with disabilities.

WHAT WE WILL ASK YOU TO DO:

During this study, the researcher collected data around her daily practices and experiences as a school administrator regarding inclusive education. Then the researcher began to analyze the data and pull out initial themes regarding conflict within inclusive education. An interview protocol was then developed in order to determine if other principals experienced similar conflict and issues.

You have been selected to participate in a one to one interview with the researcher. This entails answering questions about your school's vision, programs, and practices as well as your own leadership practices and experiences. You will be asked to provide detailed accounts about conflict you have encountered in your work as a school leader.

DURATION AND LOCATION OF THE STUDY:

Your participation in this study will involve your permission to audio record a one to one interview between yourself and the researcher with the potential for an additional follow up interview. The interview will take place at a time and location that is convenient to you.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS:

We do not anticipate any risks or discomforts to you from participating in this research. If you wish, you may choose to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation at any time during the study without penalty.

BENEFITS:

The possible benefits to you of participating in this study are developing a closer bond with colleagues in your critical friends group as well as having access to this study which may help guide future policies and practices and allow for principals to make decisions regarding inclusion in a more ideological and intentional manner. Information from this study may also benefit students with special needs by promoting more inclusive school environments.

PRIVACY/CONFIDENTIALITY:

Any data you provide in this study will be kept anonymous. The names of the school district and each school site will not be provided. The findings of this study will be written in a manner that does not differentiate the events that happened at one school from another and will therefore also keep the individuals described in your experiences anonymous. All audio recordings will be kept by the researcher in a secure location and will be erased and disposed of one year after the publication of the research study.

COMPENSATION/PAYMENT FOR PARTICIPATION: There is no payment or other form of compensation for your participation in this study.

VOLUNTARY NATURE OF THE STUDY: Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty or loss of benefits. Furthermore, you may skip any questions or tasks that make you uncomfortable and may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. In addition, the researcher has the right to withdraw you from participation in the study at any time.

OFFER TO ANSWER QUESTIONS:

Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you should contact the principal investigator: Kim Adams at 415 971-7319 or adamskimc@gmail.com. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the University of San Francisco Institutional Review Board at IRBPHS@usfca.edu.

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION. ANY QUESTIONS I HAVE ASKED HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT AND I WILL RECEIVE A COPY OF THIS CONSENT FORM.

PARTICIPANT'S SIGNATURE

DATE