

TEACHING MIDDLE-SCHOOL INCLUSION CLASSROOMS:  
A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATORY MULTIPLE-CASE STUDY

by

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study was to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within the Metro-Phoenix area to assist in developing effective policies and teaching practices. Twelve middle-school teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona participated via 10-question semi-structured and 10-question structured telephone interviews to identify similarities and patterns related to instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. The semi-structured interviews asked 10 scripted questions, not necessarily in the same order, and prompted more discussion. The structured interviews asked 10 scripted questions in order, without conversation. Based on analysis of data, three major themes emerged. Theme 1: Funding is a significant challenge that impedes instruction in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Theme 2: Multiple skill-levels within one class impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Theme 3: Preparing for Arizona State mandated standardized tests impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Additionally, minor themes included concerns about problematic behavior specific to disabilities interfering with classroom management and concerns that inadequate professional development impeded effective teaching. Information obtained from this study can assist Arizona public school leaders in future policy-making decisions and curriculum specialists in designing future curriculum for inclusion classrooms. Further research can assist policy makers in developing clearly defined, effective inclusion programs.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my granddaughters, Mia Noelani and Alivia, and to my bonus-grandson, Adriel, and future grandchildren. I hope I can inspire you in the way my grandmothers inspired me. Additionally, I dedicate this work in loving memory of my parents who taught me that love conquers all things. Finally, this work is dedicated in loving memory of my grandparents who were examples of strength and endurance as they brought their families to America for the opportunities that have benefitted me.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In 2004, the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) reaffirmed the rights of disabled students to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Specifically, Congress stated that low expectations of disabled students impeded implementations of IDEA and emphasized that access to the general-education environment would improve student outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Accordingly, to the maximum extent appropriate, schools must educate students with disabilities in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) of the general-education classroom (Ben-Porath, 2012). General-education inclusion classrooms include special-education students and general-education students in a general-education classroom instructed by a general-education teacher with support from a special-education teacher (Ben-Porath, 2012).

Despite placement in general-education classrooms, special-education students continue to require appropriate services, modifications, and differentiated instruction (Fullerton, Ruben, McBride, & Bert, 2011). Students with emotional or behavioral disabilities have increased risk for problematic conduct (Gable, Tonelson, Sheth, Wilson, & Park, 2012). Although 96 percent of general-education teachers in the United States teach students with disabilities in their classrooms, only 30 percent received training in preparation for the instructional challenges of inclusion classrooms (Fullerton et al., 2011).

Untrained teachers instructing middle-school students with disabilities present a weighty problem because in addition to having disabilities, students commonly enter the

pubertal stage of human development during middle-school years (Fullerton et al., 2011). Adolescent students tend to demonstrate exaggerated emotions, more behavior problems, and a broader gap in academic achievement levels (Costello, Copeland, & Angold, 2011). The combination of general-education and special-education students in the same class exacerbates behavior problems and increases aptitude gaps (Gable et al., 2012).

The general topic of this dissertation study encompasses the unique instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. This qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study explored the shared, central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classes through the study of cases having the shared experience of teaching middle-school inclusion classes. Through structured and semi-structured interviews, teachers described their experiences. Chapter 1 includes an explanation of the problem, the background of the problem, the significance of this study, the purpose of the study, and an overview of previous research in this area. Chapter 1 presents the study method, study design, theoretical framework, relevant terminology, assumptions, scope, limitations, and delimitations of the study.

### **Background of the Problem**

In 1975, Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), guaranteeing children with disabilities the right to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. In 1990, IDEA replaced EAHCA, assuring the right to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Florian, 2010). In 2004, the reauthorization of IDEA reiterated the rights of students with disabilities to be educated in the general-education setting. Efforts of schools to comply with IDEA have resulted in the current trend toward inclusion classrooms where

special-education students learn alongside non-disabled students in general-education classrooms (McCray & McHatton, 2011). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2011), 58 percent of special-education students in the United States spend at least 79 percent of their school day in the general-education environment.

The political legislature does not consider the practical issues of inclusion (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Moving special-education students into general-education inclusion classrooms requires appropriate staff and support (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, & Cosier, 2011). Despite legislative demands for inclusion, sufficient funding is not available for needed support in inclusion classrooms. The percentage of disabled students in inclusion classrooms increased, whereas the number of teaching staff in the classroom decreased (Rebell, 2012). The Federal government added responsibilities and requirements to schools without fully funding the mandates (Upstead, 2008). According to Gordon (2013), educational reform regarding disabled students originated from civil rights issues and extended to educational concerns. The political policies highlight the rights of disabled students in public schools. Conversely, the rights of non-disabled students come into question when interference from disabled students hinders their acquisition of knowledge (Gordon, 2013).

Inclusion in middle-school increases the possibilities of intensifying problems in an inherently challenging learning environment (Gable et al., 2012). As middle-school students transition from childhood to adolescence, they experience physical, intellectual, psychological, social, and emotional changes (Howell, Thomas, & Ardasheva, 2011). Physical and emotional changes associated with puberty can provoke undesirable behaviors (Howell et al., 2011). Problem behaviors that accompany disabilities such as

attention-deficit disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, autism, and emotional disabilities can intensify during adolescence (Al-Yagon, 2012). By combining special-education and general-education adolescent students, the risk of disruptive classroom behavior increases (Rusby, Crowley, Sprague, & Biglan, 2011). Classroom disruption by externalized behaviors can impede academic achievement of students (Moilanen, Shaw, & Maxwell, 2010).

In inclusion classrooms, the potential for disparity in skill-levels increases significantly (Ben-Porath, 2012). Extreme variations in skill-levels can consume teaching schedules (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). The additional strain of teaching to a broad spectrum of aptitude levels can hinder effective teaching and affect students' academic achievement (Mastropieri, Scruggs, Guckert, Thompson, & Weiss, 2013). Obligations to meet the needs of disabled students may consume teachers who may neglect the needs of non-disabled students (Gordon, 2013). Inadequate support can hinder an effective teaching and learning environment (Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, & Algozzine, 2012).

Literature regarding teaching experiences in general-education classrooms abounds (Cook & Cook, 2008). Information regarding teaching experiences in inclusion classrooms remains scarce (Gable et al., 2012). Outdated studies involving effective teaching for students with Emotional Disabilities (ED) need to be updated to include the mainstreaming of ED students into inclusion classrooms (Gable et al., 2012). A scarcity of information exists regarding research specific to teaching practices in middle-school and high-school inclusion classrooms (Burke-Hogan, Boon, Smith, & Fore III, 2008). Because the trend toward inclusion classrooms happened recently, the data remain

limited (Moore, 2008).

Complex issues such as special-education and disabilities require fluid analysis. Educating disabled students requires more than one fixed frame of reference (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Because of a lack of protocol for inclusionary practices in the classroom, school districts have generated a broad range of policies without researched-based guidance (Rhoades, 2011). Lack of strategic planning for handling the process of mainstreaming special-education students combined with the unique environment of middle-school inclusion classrooms prompted the general topic of this study. “With this state of flux, complexity, and present lack of process data, how should educators prepare ...?” (Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker, & Soares, 2011, p. 219). Research provided information for educational leaders to develop sound policies for an effective teaching and learning environment in middle-school inclusion classrooms.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The nation-wide support of mainstreaming special-education students in to general-education classrooms began in 1990 when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) replaced EAHCA (Vannest et al., 2011). In 2004 the reauthorization of IDEA underscored the need for schools to execute effective policies ensuring the LRE for special-education students (Council for Exceptional Children, 2013). Educational leaders scrambled to abide by the mandates of IDEA (Gordon, 2013). The concept of inclusion classrooms is gaining popularity among school district administrators who see inclusion as a means of compliance with IDEA (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). After the reauthorization of IDEA, school districts began mainstreaming special-education students into general-education inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al.,

2011). This reform requires supplemental staffing in the general-education classes, alternative curriculum resources, and additional training for teachers (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). Funding issues prevent adequate resources for the successful restructuring of special-education students' placements including additional special-education teachers for team teaching and additional teachers' aides to work individually with special-education students in the general-education class (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). An inclusion classroom should meet the needs of general-education and special-education students using strategies within general-education classroom including team teaching, modifications, small group instruction, and individual instruction (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011).

Although educational reform over the past ten years has reached unparalleled proportions, little research is available regarding inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al., 2011). School districts increasingly move toward inclusion; however, decisions regarding inclusion rarely consider teachers' input (Logan & Wimer, 2013). Research suggests that general-education teachers lack proficiency regarding special accommodations in the classroom (Crawford & Ketterlin-Geller, 2013). Because schools hastily implement LRE as mandated in the reauthorization of IDEA, a significant lack of information and thoughtful preparation of policies hinders successful protocol for inclusion practices in middle-school (Malian & McRae, 2010). Without data for guidance, schools generate a broad range of policies for mainstreaming special-education students into inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al., 2011). The rush toward full inclusion without suitable planning causes unforeseen problems leading to a reversal of policies and policy changes (Vannest et al., 2011). Without research, the current instructional

challenges of teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms remain unidentified, and policy-makers have little information by which to design effective, long-term policies.

According to Florian (2010), the contemporary special-education schema underscores least restrictive environment. general-education teachers can no longer assume that emotionally or behaviorally disabled students will be placed in an exclusive classroom for special-education students (Curtis, 2012). Instead, many school districts have adopted a full-inclusion policy (Vannest et al., 2011). Adolescent middle-school students demonstrate intensified behavioral and emotional problems (Leonova, 2010). Combining general-education and special-education adolescent students increases the possibilities of problematic behaviors (Al-Yagon, 2012). Although teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms involves complex issues, little research can be found regarding teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al., 2011).

The problem is imprecise policies for teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms result in insufficient guidance for effectively teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms in the Southwestern United States (Vannest et al., 2011).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study was to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona to assist in developing effective policies and teaching practices. The general population is seventh and eighth-grade teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms in Arizona. The sample included seventh or eighth-grade mathematics, language arts, science, or social studies teachers of inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Two teachers from the sample

participated in the field study. The field study sample did not participate in the main study. The exact number of participants remained unknown until theoretical saturation. The minimum of 12 middle-school inclusion classroom teachers participated in the main study.

Data for this study included participants' responses to structured and semi-structured interview questions and observations (Yin, 2003). Interview questions prompted teachers to describe experiences, personal perceptions, and instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom. Interviewing continued until theoretical saturation occurs (Stake, 1995). Findings of this multiple-case study may assist in structuring policies for the complex task of teaching inclusion, middle-school classrooms and promote future studies on this topic.

### **Significance of the Study's Contribution**

This qualitative study explored teachers' perceptions respecting the experience of teaching middle-school inclusion classes using multiple-case study design. Issues involved in this phenomenon include teaching students with diverse skill-levels, teaching students with behavioral and emotional disabilities, and teaching a classroom inclusive of special-education and general-education adolescent students. Although other studies explored these individually, middle-school inclusion classrooms contain a combination of issues. This study explores these topics collectively.

To comply with IDEA and the least restrictive environment for special-education students, school districts across the nation increased inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al., 2011). An exploratory case study uncovers characteristics and patterns that can be used in future studies to address unfolding needs of a relatively new phenomenon. The results

of this study extended general knowledge of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Variables that surface from the research may become units of analysis for a future study. In qualitative research, variables represent differences. Whereas variables in quantitative data represent differences in measurement on a continuum from low to high, variables in qualitative data represent categorical differences. Quantitative variables include a range of numbers, including ordinal, ratio and interval. Qualitative variables include numbers solely for identification purposes. Possible differences in this qualitative study include differences in administrative policies and disabilities of special-education students in the class.

The findings of the current study contribute to information available to administrators, teachers, and policy-makers regarding middle-school inclusion classrooms. Information is useful for developing policies, designing training, and updating previous studies regarding teaching students with disabilities. Findings may prompt future exploration of inclusion classrooms at other grade-levels and future research of specific characteristics revealed in this study.

### **Contribution to Curriculum Design**

Special-education students may require a modified curriculum to accommodate lower academic skill-levels (Fullerton et al., 2011). Differentiated instruction involves teaching the same educational concept to a group of students possessing varying aptitude levels. The University of Colorado conducted a study of curriculum reform (Anderson, Riley, & Robinson, 1996). According to the results of the study, effective change in curriculum occurs through research in schools under typical conditions (Anderson et al., 1996). Studies conducted using candid input from teachers provide accurate information

to make curriculum reforms (Anderson et al., 1996). Because the current study involves exploring the experiences of core-subject teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms, findings may contribute to developing core curricula that meet the current needs of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

### **The Nature of the Study**

The study involved a qualitative method and exploratory case study design. The general population includes teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms in Maricopa County, Arizona. The sample for the study included seventh or eighth-grade inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona. Two teachers from the sample participated in the field study. The exact number of participants for the main study remains unknown and interviews continued until data reaches theoretical saturation with a minimum of 12 participants. Data collection methods included structured and semi-structured interviews.

### **Research Method**

Qualitative research supports gaining a deeper understanding of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experience it and supports exploration of a phenomenon from the human perception (Kemperaj & Chavan, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Common data-collection instruments for qualitative research include interviews, observations, and questionnaires (Yin, 1984). Qualitative research methods most suitably meet the needs for data collection and analyzing data to explore teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. In interviewing participants, qualitative methodology allowed themes to develop without restraint from focusing on specific characteristics of the experience (Yin, 1984). Qualitative research methods supported the development of in-

depth understanding of experiences in teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

Quantitative research strives to explain phenomena by controlling measurements and predicting cause and effect (Christensen, 2011). Additionally, quantitative data seek to find evidence to support or contradict a specific hypothesis. Data analysis involves mathematically based methods, namely, statistics (Nimon, 2011). Analysis involves determining variation in quantitative measures by focusing on the effects of variables (Christensen, 2011). Quantitative research appropriately suits research whereby data can be readily quantified or when the relationship between variables is readily identifiable. Additionally, numerical analysis of quantitative research requires large sample size (Nimon, 2011). In contrast, small sample size best suits qualitative research because it employs collaboration, observation, and reflection (Maxwell, 2005).

Mixed methods research involves the combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods in a single study (Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). According to Venkatesh et al. (2013), in a mixed methods study, a qualitative method may be used to develop an understanding of individuals' perceptions of a phenomenon, while using a quantifiable method of addressing research questions. Mixed method research entails quantifying variables. Mixed method research is not appropriate for the current study.

The current study does not involve large numbers of participants to analyze cause and effect or differences in variables. This study does not involve quantifying variables. Instead, the current study involves making sense of unstructured data by classifying, sorting, and arranging data to identify insights and common themes for the development of meaningful conclusions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Quantitative research and mixed methods did not align with the problem, purpose, and research questions of the current

study.

## **Research Design**

Qualitative research includes a range of approaches. The design for qualitative research evolves after reviewing literature and determining existing knowledge about the phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). Four major designs of qualitative research include phenomenology ethnography, grounded theory, and case study (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013). Each of these designs consists of distinguishing traits and aligns with distinct research questions.

The foundational question of grounded theory asks about the theories and explanations as they emerge from analysis of data collection. Grounded theory of qualitative research involves a continuum of generating data and analytical categories as it emerges from the study of a phenomenon (Glaser, 2003). Essential characteristics of grounded theory include fit, understanding, generality, and control (Guest, 2013). The purpose of a study aligns with its design (Yin, 2003). The current study does not involve an explanation of data or development of new theories. The intention of this study does not strive beyond an exploration of experiences of the central phenomenon.

The foundational question in phenomenology asks the meaning and structure of lived experiences of a phenomenon by one or more individuals (Guest et al., 2013). After collecting data, the researcher searches for commonalities and writes an in-depth report that provides a rich description of experiences, so the reader vicariously experiences the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The intent of the current study does not involve understanding the meaning of experiences. Instead, the goal involves understanding the challenges. The foundational question in ethnography asks about the cultural

characteristics of a group of people or a cultural milieu (Anderson et al., 1996).

Ethnography involves cultural systems of shared beliefs, values, and practices used to understand the unique aspects of a culture (Guest et al., 2013). An ethnographic design is not appropriate for the current study because understanding a cultural group is not the research goal. The foundation question in case study asks about the characteristics of the experiences of a predetermined phenomenon by one or more individuals or a group of people (Guest et al., 2013). Case study answers how and why questions (Yin, 2003). A case study explores something bound to time and circumstance (Croswell, 2002).

Teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms satisfied the required conditions of case study. The case study method answered the research questions and aligned with the exploratory purpose of the current study. Analyzing data from interviews and drawing on related literature, the case study method gleaned a fuller elucidation of the instructional challenges experienced by middle-school inclusion classroom teachers.

### **Case Study Design**

A case study approach provides the opportunity to explore an under-researched phenomenon or a phenomenon needing a comprehensive understanding, making it an appropriate design choice for the current qualitative study (Hartley, 1994). Although single case studies can provide rich detail, single cases can involve biases of the single case (Eisenhardt, 1989). Types of case studies include exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive (Yin, 1984). A descriptive case study expands initial research and focuses on a feature of the issue or phenomenon taken from initial research results (Stake, 1995). A descriptive case study did not fulfill the current study's purpose due to insufficient prior research. An explanatory case study tries to explain reasons for the phenomenon (Stake,

1995). The purpose of the current study does not encompass explanations regarding teaching middle-school inclusion classes.

An exploratory case study focuses analytically on an event, activity, or other specific phenomena as a means of understanding the phenomenon through those who have experienced it (Stake, 1995). As initial research, an exploratory case study involves looking for patterns and similarities in the data. An exploratory case study provides the means to explore the research topic and develop ideas for future research (Yin, 2003). An exploratory case study approach is appropriate to capture information to address the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms and promote further study to develop policies for mainstreaming special-education students.

According to Yin (2003), case studies include intrinsic, instrumental, and multiple-case studies. An intrinsic case study seeks to explore a case, guided by personal interests. An intrinsic case study was not appropriate because personal interests did not guide the study. An instrumental case study seeks to gain a better understanding of the characteristics of the case to establish or extend theories. Because the purpose of the study did not involve establishing theories, an instrumental case study did not align with the purpose of the study. A multiple-case study seeks to study and compare multiple cases in a single study. The current study sought to provide in-depth understanding of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms from the perspective of teachers from various school districts within Maricopa County, Arizona. Analysis included comparing experiences of cases, grouping common characteristics and challenges of experiences, and identifying patterns and similarities.

Exploring multiple-case studies typically involves analyzing narratives of case

descriptions for matching patterns (Yin, 1984). A narrative report of interviews, evaluated for common themes, provided the basis for results of the study. The inductive technique of data analysis uses the data to determine the structure of the analysis (Kemperaj & Chavan, 2013). The software program, NVivo 11, assisted the researcher in coding and identifying trends from the data obtained through interviews. Participants were coded to protect their identity.

### **Research Questions**

Research questions give shape to the purpose of the study. Resulting from an interactive design process, the research questions of this study combine the breadth of vision and precision of focus by explicitly establishing what the study seeks to uncover (Maxwell, 2005). Four research questions guided this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study:

R1. What are the experiences of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R2. What are the perceptions and characterizations of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R3. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of current administrative support to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R4. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of personal instructional strategies to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona similar?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical or contextual framework of the multiple case study guides the meaning of the research (Hartley, 1994). Without a theoretical framework for case study research, the researcher risks developing meaningless results (Hartley, 1994). Theories regarding inclusive education remain under-developed and unclear (Dickson, 2012). The roots of education for disabled students stems from the political perspective of benevolent charity instead of the civil rights of the disabled. The diversity of disabilities contributes to the delay of theory development because the broad variety of students' disabilities constricts the articulation of theory (Dickson, 2012). Theoretical frameworks for educational equality did not include the disabled. Instead, race, gender, and religious freedom drove frameworks. However, these theories provided a basis for educational equality for the disabled (Dickson, 2012). Extrapolating a combination of concepts from social theory and educational theory establishes a theoretical framework for this study.

### **Vygotsky's Theory**

Social learning theories suggest that learning takes place as a social experience, whereby teachers construct learning communities (Vygotsky, 1978). The teacher facilitates purposeful discussion and encourages all students to participate. According to Vygotsky's theory, valuing the contribution of each student to the group discussion increases motivation and promotes deeper understanding (Wertsch, 1985). Knowledge construction occurs when teachers skillfully manage meaningful dialogue and students collaboratively work together, building on each other's personal experience and background. When collaborating with more capable peers, a learning-disabled student can progress in problem-solving even if the student remains unable to complete the

assigned task independently (Wertsch, 1985). Vygotsky (1978) introduced the zone of proximal development (ZPD). The ZPD refers to the zone within which a learner progresses while collaborating with peers. Each student's ZPD varies, requiring varying levels of peer-support and cueing from the teacher. Students do not master skills simultaneously. More competent students model competency. The teacher deliberately chooses groups of students with varied skill-levels to provide the ZPD for students with lower-level skills, creating learning communities and group practice (Wertsch, 1985).

### **The Communitarian Theory**

The communitarian theory holds that all students study the same subjects in a common environment to learn the information needed for productive citizenship (Waltzer, 1983). The teacher works at achieving equal results for all students, regardless of diversities or disabilities (Waltzer, 1983). Application of the communitarian theory aids in understanding the practice of teaching inclusion classrooms because the class includes disabled students and nondisabled students in a common area (Dickson, 2012). Communitarians regard the school community as an extension of the outside community. For that reason, public education should include practical and moral teachings, modeling the structure of the wider, democratic society, including inclusion of disabled citizens. Communitarians view education as a catalyst for inclusion more than an instrument of opportunity (Howe, 1994). While communitarian writers offer little information explicitly on inclusive education, it emphasizes democracy and the right of disabled people to self-determination and respect (Dickson, 2012).

### **Definition of Terms**

*Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)*. NCLB requires states to use a single accountability

system to determine if students are making adequate progress toward meeting state academic content standards. Each year, states compare schools' tests results to the previous year to determine if students' progress meets state-determined AYP standards (Education Week, 2014).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA).* Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975. This landmark law, Public Law 94-142, guaranteed children with disabilities the right to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Before Public Law 94-142, many states had laws excluding certain students with disabilities such as children who were deaf, blind, emotionally disturbed, or mentally retarded (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

*Emotionally Disabled.* According to IDEA '04, A.R.S. §15-766, for eligibility under the category of emotionally disabled, a student must exhibit one or more of the following characteristics over a long period and to a marked degree and the behavior adversely affects performance in the educational environment: “an inability to build and maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general and pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems; an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors” (Arizona Department of Education, 2012).

*general-education.* Sometimes called, regular-education, general-education is the educational placement of non-disabled students. general-education is considered the least restrictive environment of public schools (Ben-Porath, 2012).

*Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA).* Congress enacted the Education

for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) in 1975, ensuring that disabled children have access to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*. IDEA is the federal special-education law. Congress amended EAHCA in December 2004, changing the title to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In August 2006, Congress published final regulations for school-aged children. In September 2011, Congress published final regulations for babies and toddlers. Public schools throughout the United States must implement IDEA. Special-education services must meet Federal and State IDEA laws (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). IDEA guides the special-education process from identifying a student with a suspected disability through evaluation, eligibility, and constructing an individual education plan (IEP) that meets the qualifications of a free and appropriate education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

*Inclusion*. In implementing IDEA's least restrictive environment provisions, schools may place students with special needs in a general-education classroom located in the child's regular, home-district school. A classroom containing disabled and non-disabled students is an inclusion classroom. Inclusion refers to the implementation of placing a special needs student in a general-education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

*Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*. LRE means that school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom to the maximum extent appropriate, along with their nondisabled peers in the school they would attend if not disabled.

Students may need aids and supports, referred to as "supplementary aids and services, " This requires an individualized inquiry into the unique educational needs of each disabled student in determining the possible range of aids and supports that are needed to facilitate

the students' placement in the regular educational environment before a more restrictive placement is considered (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

*No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).* Congress passed The Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 as a part of the “War on Poverty.” ESEA emphasizes equal access to education and establishes high standards and accountability. The law authorizes federally funded education programs that are administered by the states. In 2002, Congress amended ESEA and reauthorized it as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). The focus of No Child Left Behind is to close student achievement gaps by providing all children with a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education. NCLB requires each state to establish state academic standards and a state testing system that meet federal requirements. This accountability requirement is called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

*Other Health Impairment.* Other health impairment means having a verified condition that limits “strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems” and this condition “adversely affects performance in the educational environment” (Arizona Department of Education, 2012).

*special-education.* special-education defines an alternative education program that focuses on teaching students with academic, behavioral health, or physical needs beyond those met by traditional educational programs or techniques (Ben-Porath, 2012).

### **Assumptions**

This study has several fundamental assumptions. First, it assumes that teachers

answered interview questions thoughtfully and honestly. Second, it assumes that the sampling used in the study represents the larger population of middle-school teachers in Arizona. Third, it assumes that the sampling used in the study is similar to other middle-school teachers of inclusion classroom settings in Arizona.

### **Scope, Limitations, and Delimitations**

According to Cooper (1989), the scope of a study varies according to the available information from previous studies. Additionally, the accessibility and willingness of the population to participate in the study limits research. Delimitations included confines imposed by the researcher that provide specificity for research.

#### **Scope of the Study**

This exploratory multiple-case study used structured and semi-structured interviews, seeking to explore the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms by investigating experiences and instructional challenges of cases experiencing teaching middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona, to gain a richer understanding for future development of middle-school inclusion policies. Responses could provide insightful implications for application by teachers, educational leaders, and policy-makers regarding mainstreaming middle-school special-education students into inclusion classrooms. This study included teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Because the culture of non-academic classrooms may differ substantially from core-subject classrooms, the study did not include teachers of non-academic subjects such as art or physical education. The findings of the study might not be applicable in dissimilar school settings. However, there exists a likelihood of similar findings in comparable settings and

situations.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study was limited to the number of participants needed to reach theoretical saturation with a minimum of 12 participants. Participants of the study consisted of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona. Middle-school consists of seventh and eighth-grades. Limitations included teachers' self-selection to participate in the study and the inherent bias of participants who wanted to share their experiences, leading to partial representation or inflation of experiences. For example, teachers who feel unsatisfied may want to participate in the study as a vehicle to voice complaints. An undetermined number of teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms may not have responded to the initial request for participants, reducing the pool of possible participants. Demographics of school districts may have affected funding available for classroom aides and materials, possibly altering experiences.

The study was limited by the thoughtfulness and truthfulness of the subjects interviewed and by the extent of information they choose to share. The study was limited to participants' responses to structured and semi-structured interview questions. Significance of semi-structured interviews depended on the interviewer's insightfulness regarding noteworthy areas to expand further. Limitations may have included interview bias revealed in unplanned, subtle changes in voice tones and words that could inhibit participants' responses. To avoid interview bias, the researcher conducted telephone interviews, eliminating facial expressions or body gestures commonly associated with approval or disapproval. Because the researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis of qualitative case study research, limitations involved the

researcher's integrity in reporting significant data obtained from interviews and awareness of possible biases regarding preconceived notions (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Although remaining completely unbiased is not possible, the researcher made efforts to limit biases as much as possible. Gathering data through interviewing has the potential to expand on meaningful topics, ignore insignificant minutiae, or miss significant details (Emerson et al., 1995). During interviews, the researcher engaged in an active process selecting important details to expand on, while neglecting expansion on others. The researcher remained mindful of the purpose of the study, developed conversation about experiences that added valuable information to the study, and expanded on experiences that participants presented as meaningful.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

Delimitations of data collection included the number of participants needed to reach theoretical saturation or a minimum of 12 middle-school teachers of inclusion classrooms. Additionally, only teachers of core-subjects within Maricopa County, Arizona participated. The researcher allocated one hour for each interview, posing a time constraint for subjects, whereby possibly restricting information shared. Potential participants had more than one-year experience teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. An additional delimitation included the cost of this personally-funded research.

Delimitations of the study included purposeful exclusion of general-education, elementary or high-school teachers who may have provided significant data regarding inclusion classroom settings. The study did not include middle-school inclusion classroom teachers who teach non-academic subjects such as art or physical education.

The classroom culture of non-academic classrooms may differ substantially from core-subject classrooms. The difference between non-academic and core-subject classrooms may have interfered with findings of the study. The study did not include middle-school general-education teachers of non-inclusion classrooms. The study did not include special-education teachers who may have significant data regarding special-education students of inclusion classrooms.

### **Summary**

In compliance with the mandates IDEA, inclusion classrooms provide the least restrictive environment for 58 percent of special-education students (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Middle-school teachers, already challenged by the inconsistent behaviors and academic achievements of adolescent students, have an additional challenge of meeting the needs of special-education students (Gable et al., 2012). EAHCA proposed the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for special-education students. When LRE was emphasized in IDEA and again in the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, educational leaders hurried to comply by promoting inclusion classrooms creating a significant proliferation of inclusion beginning in 2004 (Vannest et al., 2011). The inclusion model of special-education has developed over the last 10 years, and research specific to teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms remains scarce (Vannest et al., 2011). Limited research is available to measure the effectiveness of special-education programs in middle-school (Aron & Loprest, 2012). A better understanding of the services, needs, and outcomes of the special-education continuum in middle school will promote effective reform for middle-school and other grade-levels (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

The focus of this exploratory multiple-case study involved exploring the experiences of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms by investigating perceptions of instructional challenges of cases of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona to gain a richer understanding for future development of middle-school inclusion policies. This study involved interviews with middle-school teachers of inclusion classrooms. The researcher used structured and semi-structured interview questions to obtain data. Half of the teachers participated in structured interviews. Half of the teachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Data analysis explored similarities and identified common characteristics of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

Chapter 2 contains a review of significant literature in the area under study. The literature review includes research regarding middle-school inclusion classrooms as it relates to teachers, administration, and policy makers. The review includes the unique challenges of mainstreaming special-education, adolescent students. A review of the literature includes pertinent issues discussed in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 addresses funding issues, legal issues regarding LRE, benefits, disadvantages, and planning issues of mainstreaming special-education students in middle-school. Chapter 2 presents a summary identifying pertinent issues presented in the literature review and a conclusion providing the rationalization for the research. Additionally, Chapter 2 includes an attempt to establish a connection between the existing body of literature with the qualitative study method and gaps in the literature.

## Chapter 2

### Review of the Literature

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study was to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. According to Moustakas (1994), qualitative research seeks to find the meaning of experiences by obtaining descriptions through accounts of personal experiences in conversations and interviews. A thorough review of the literature is necessary for a full understanding of the issue and to present a theoretical framework for the research (Christensen, 2011). The focus of a literature review involves guiding readers through an account of previously published literature on a specific topic (Rhoades, 2011). Although the implications of the current qualitative case study rest upon participant interviews, the literature review serves to authenticate the identified problem, demonstrates a gap in the literature, and elucidates the need for this study. According to Christensen (2011), exploring past research reveals topics relevant to current research. Few studies exist specific to middle-school inclusion classrooms. Accordingly, the purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study is to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges teachers experience in teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Analysis of data might satisfy the need for further research on middle-school inclusion classrooms by bringing attention to the imprecision of the inclusion concept in combination with the unique environment of middle-school.

Middle-school can consist of the sixth, seventh, and eighth-grades (George, 2009). Within Maricopa County, Arizona, sixth grade can remain in the elementary

school in a self-contained classroom, where students receive education in all core-content areas taught by a single elementary school teacher (Arizona Department of Education, 2012). Within Maricopa County, Arizona, seventh and eighth-grades constitute middle-school, whereby students move to and from separate core-content classrooms, taught by teachers specialized in respective core-content areas, meeting the definition of middle-school. In accordance, seventh and eighth-grades represented middle-school in the study.

### **Title Search**

For the literature review, background, and historical aspects of the study, online databases accessed included EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and ERIC from the University of Phoenix Online Library Collection. Additional online journals included *Educational Researcher*, *School Psychology Quarterly*, *Journal of special-education*, *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, and *The Middle School Journal*. Many key phrases related to this topic composed the queries of online databases. The primary title search terms in the research study include: The primary title search terms used in the research study included: least restrictive environment and middle-school ;at-risk students and middle-school classroom management; and middle-school; classroom management and adolescence; teaching and middle-school and special-education; middle-school and student achievement; middle-school and teachers; discipline and middle-school and special-education; adolescence and learning disabilities; adolescent and behavior. Excluded search terms included elementary-school, high-school, art class, physical-education class, music class, and foreign-language class.

### **Synthesis of Literature**

Major kinds of literature reviews include integrative, theoretical, methodological,

and thematic (Cooper, 1989). According to Cooper (1989), integrative reviews present current knowledge on the research topic and draw conclusions from many, individual studies. Current knowledge of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms remains scarce. Review of the literature revealed information regarding inclusion, middle school, and adolescence in isolation. However, the literature review revealed little regarding studies specifically on middle-school inclusion classroom.

The theoretical review analyzes theories responsible for the phenomenon. Theories at the core of the current study include those involving disabled students and the economic benefits of educating handicapped students. However, a theoretical review of literature would not align with the purpose of exploring the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

The methodological literature review explores research methods used in previous studies of the research topic. The lack of research specifically related to middle-school inclusion classrooms would make a methodological review unfruitful. Additionally, the purpose of the study does not involve exploration of research methods used to study the central phenomenon.

The thematic review extrapolates and organizes core themes presented in studies, presenting findings within the core themes. The focus of this study and of the literature review involves exploring the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms through the experiences of teachers therein. A thematic literature review is appropriate for the study because review of the literature includes social, political and educational developments driving inclusion programs. Additionally, the review of the literature presents issues regarding the nature of adolescence and managing unique

behaviors of middle-school students. Main methods of qualitative synthesis include thematic synthesis (Yin, 2003). Exploring the phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms using qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study generated common themes and facilitate thematic synthesis.

Literature recounts the original intent of EAHCA of 1975 and its evolution to the current application of least restrictive environment. Additionally, literature regarding special-education and inclusion include economic aspects. Literature on the historical, social, and philosophical development of special-education examines the evolution of education for disabled children and inclusion. Literature regarding teacher preparation focused on practical content and relevant hands-on experience in education programs. Literature regarding adolescence includes relevant information regarding adolescent, special-education students with behavioral disabilities and additional instructional challenges presented in the classroom. The literature contains research on classroom management and classroom climate relevant to effective teaching. Additionally, literature examines differentiated instruction techniques, whereby teachers use the same curriculum to teach to students with a variety of skill-levels. Evaluating current and future needs demonstrates the distinctiveness of this qualitative multiple-case study (Leedy & Ormond, 2010). Extending previous research that explored issues in isolation, this study focuses on combined issues of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

### **Historical Overview**

Review of the literature recounted historical developments in the education of disabled children leading to inclusion in general-education classrooms. In the nineteenth century, the medical model of disabilities used four categories to label children with

intellectual deficits: feeble-minded, imbecile, idiot, and moral-defective (Kellett, 2004). According to Kellett (2004), educational leaders and medical professionals in the nineteenth century considered idiots unteachable. Imbeciles attended special schools or government-funded asylums. Local educational agencies provided feeble-minded students a separate education segregated from the general-education student population. Moral-defective students lived in state asylums or other secured institutions.

In the early 1900s, medical and educational professionals regarded learning disabled students as brain damaged (Kellett, 2004). Independent schools and programs offered brain-damaged children a segregated education. Most of the special programs received private funding and restricted access according to benefactor's requirements (Kellett, 2004). In 1954, the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* declared that it was unconstitutional to maintain separate but equal schools (Gerardo & Burciaga, 2014). This civil right court case motivated advocates for disabled children. After this decision, parents of disabled children began campaigning for equal public education for handicapped students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) granted equal education to disadvantaged students. In 1966, Congress amended ESEA to address handicapped students and established a grant program for public schools to develop educational programs for disabled students (Ben-Porath, 2012). Before the 1970s, federal laws were not specific to the rights of children with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

In 1972, the groundbreaking case of *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* changed the opinion of U.S. courts regarding the rights of disabled children to access a free public education (Ben-Porath,

2012). In 1975, Congress enacted EAHCA to support states in defending the right of disabled children to an appropriate education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Public Law 94-142, Section 504, mandated public education for special needs students in the LRE. The LRE, in the public school arena, represents shared public space with nondisabled peers to the extent that best facilitates learning and academic progress and varies according to the individual needs of students (Ben-Porath, 2012).

Congress amended EAHCA in 1990. The amended version was termed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). IDEA provides a mechanism to force public school compliance with the principles of a free and appropriate education for all children, including those with disabilities (Ben-Porath, 2012). Beginning in 1990, according to directives of IDEA, special-education teachers provided specialized instruction in a resource room or in a self-contained classroom within the same school as general-education students, considering these segregated locations the LRE (Mastropieri et al., 2013).

Congress reauthorized IDEA in 2004. IDEA of 2004, includes the Child Find mandate, requiring that public schools practice and document procedures to identify, locate, and evaluate all disabled children within their school district (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Additionally, IDEA (2004) reiterates and stresses Public Law 94-142, regarding the LRE. To the maximum extent appropriate, “children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions, are educated with children who do not have a disability, and special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of

supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily” (One Hundred Eighth Congress of the United States o, 1999, p. 37). Congress charged schools with low expectation for disabled students and claimed that disabled students would make more progress in the general-education classroom (Marzano & Marzano, 2003). The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 emphasizes that special-education students had the right to be placed in the LRE of the general-education classroom to the greatest extent possible (Ben-Porath, 2012).

The current application of IDEA reveals unresolved issues for teachers and students, including disruption. According to Antoinette (2003), IDEA regulation addresses classroom disorder by stating that if a special-education student’s disruptive behavior significantly impairs other students’ education, the school may place the disruptive, special-education student in a more restrictive environment. The vague terminology leaves schools questioning how to measure significant disruptiveness (Antoinette, 2003). The primary targets of the original IDEA included students with learning disabilities and milder forms of neurological conditions, whereby schools provided small-group instruction within the general-education environment without disruption (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The imprecise concept of inclusion has generated confusion regarding which students benefit from inclusive education. Additionally, school do not have precise measurement to determine when a disturbance hinders the education of other students. Although the law encourages inclusion, the federal government does not provide specifics about inclusionary strategies (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Aaron and Loprest (2012) review categories of disabilities in United States’

public schools over a 10-year span. The variations of disabilities and within disability categories demonstrate the complexities involved in educating special-education students in general-education classrooms. In 2001, 6.3 million students in the United States received special-education services. In 2010, 6.48 million students received special-education services in the United States. Among categories of disabilities, specific learning disability affected the highest percentage of students at 46 percent in 2000 and 38 percent in 2010. Speech or language impairment, the second highest category of disability, represented 22 percent in 2001 and 22 percent in 2010. Other health impairment represented five percent in 2001 and 11 percent in 2010. Intellectual disability represented 10 percent in 2001 and seven percent in 2010. Autism represented two percent in 2001 and six percent in 2010. Emotional disturbance represented eight percent in 2001 and six percent in 2010. Developmental delay represented three percent in 2001 and six percent in 2010. Other disabilities represented the remaining five percent in 2001 and in 2010.

### **Political and Social Perspectives**

Various political and social theoretical positions regarding disabilities and special-education contribute to the rise of inclusion in the classroom. “The linking of education and social justice is...not new...To believe, then, that the kind of society we create emerges from the kind of education we provide has a long intellectual pedigree. The quest for ...inclusive education [is] part of that tradition” (Thomas & Loxley, 2007, p. 111). Antoinette (2003) connects social justice with inclusion classrooms. The issue of placing special needs students in the LRE derived from an equal-rights debate rather than an educational concern (Antoinette, 2003). The review of literature confirmed that

mainstreaming special-education students stemmed from civil rights issues as society's view of handicapped people changed.

Literature by Stagner (2014) and Rose (2012) directs attention to veterans of the World Wars to explain increased awareness of the needs of people with disabilities. After World War I, injured veterans returned to the United States with handicapping conditions, including mental disabilities (Stagner, 2014). According to Stagner (2014), World War I disabled veterans expected rehabilitation and vocational training. Similarly, Rose (2012) indicated that rehabilitation services after World War I included work-related skills, emphasizing independence and hiding disabilities. World War I veterans wanted to appear nondisabled, aligning with the traditional sense of society's view of normal (Rose, 2012). Handicapped veterans accepted restrictions of access to public buildings and education. They wanted to learn how to access these buildings and services by traditional means, hiding disabilities. In the 1940s and 1950s, World War II disabled veterans challenged social norms by crusading for rehabilitation, vocational training, and education (Rose, 2012). Instead of hiding disabilities, disabled veterans wanted integration and accessibility despite physical disabilities. In the 1960s, the civil-rights movement gained strength. Although the 1964 Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination, the legislation did not include protection for people with disabilities. Disability advocates joined the civil-rights movement to demand equal rights for people with disabilities (Pasachoff, 2014).

In review of the literature, the Warnock Report (1978) surfaced as a transitional piece leading to inclusion in classrooms worldwide. In 1973 the United Kingdom's education secretary, Margaret Thatcher, appointed Mary Warnock to chair a 27-member

committee of inquiry regarding education of handicapped children (Warnock, 2005). The committee recognized the rights of handicapped students to integrate into an educational environment with unhandicapped peers (Warnock Report, 1978). “Integration for the disabled means a thousand things. It means the absence of segregation. It means social acceptance. It means to be treated like everybody else...to be educated up to the university level with one’s unhandicapped peers...” (Warnock Report, 1978, p. 99). The Warnock Report (1978) impelled educational leaders worldwide to address the education of disabled students.

In 1973, coinciding with the year Mary Warnock accepted the position to chair the committee in the United Kingdom, the United States Congress passed the Rehabilitation Act that provided legal protection for people with disabilities (Pasachoff, 2014). According to Pasachoff (2014), the Rehabilitation Act demonstrated society’s changing views about people with disabilities. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibits discrimination by a physical or mental disability within federally funded programs. Section 504 mandates equal access to public services to people with disabilities. Public services include public education. The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) oversees Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and examines procedures of identifying students with disabilities and placement of students with disabilities (Pasachoff, 2014). The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 prohibited federal funding to an organization that engaged in the segregation of disabled people (Aron & Loprest, 2012). According to Aron and Loprest (2012), the Rehabilitation Act forced society to reexamine the reasons for poor educational and career outcomes of disabled people. Instead of blaming the disability for limitations, society began to address limitations stemming from societal

barriers.

In 1975, EAHCA specified that every child had a right to education, and mandated the full inclusion of children with disabilities in general-education inclusion classes, unless the nature of the child's disability prevented a satisfactory level of education in the general-education environment (Vaughn Switzer, 2003). In 1990, Congress reauthorized the EAHCA and changed the name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Act further elaborated on the inclusion of children with disabilities into regular classes.

In the 1980s, activists began to lobby for a consolidated civil rights act for the disabled. Decades of campaigning for the civil rights of disabled people in the United States lead to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Umeasiegbu, Bishop, & Mpofu, 2013). Congress passed ADA in 1990. ADA prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability in areas of employment, public transportation, access to public buildings, public services, and telecommunications services. The purpose of ADA included integration of people with disabilities in all areas of society. People with disabilities had the right to be fully included in all levels of society (Umeasiegbu et al., 2013).

In 1993, the United Nations gave a human rights context to the concept of educational inclusion by producing a document, *UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (United Nations, 1993). The document outlines standard rules for disabled people, whereby establishing the right of special-education students to be educated in the general-school system (United Nations, 1993). In 1994, more than 300 participants from 92 governments and 25 international

organizations converged in Salamanca, Spain for the World Conference on Special Needs Education: Access and Quality. The resulting Salamanca Statement demonstrated international support for inclusive education (Soan, 2005). The Salamanca Statement proclaimed the belief that “regular schools with this inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system” (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix). The Salamanca Statement reflects the evolution of society’s view from the human capital and capabilities theories to the communitarian theory whereby public places, work environments, and educational institutions include people with disabilities (Ben-Porath, 2012).

### **The Least Restrictive Environment**

Thomas and Loxley (2007) reinforce the link between political legislation and inclusion classrooms. The concept of the LRE for special-education students initiated with legislation of EAHCA (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). Students with physical and emotional handicaps began attending school in separate classrooms from the general-education population (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). The special-education resource room was put in place for students with less severe disabilities who remained in general-education classrooms for part of the school day. This resource-room model of pull-out and push-in became widely used for learning disabled students of average intelligence. Students with cognitive, physical, behavioral, and emotional disabilities remained in separate locations from general-education students (Thomas & Loxley, 2007). To

comply with IDEA and the least restrictive environment for special-education students, schools began implementing inclusion in general-education classrooms (Ben-Porath, 2012).

In considering placement of special needs students, the LRE varies according to the needs of students (Ben-Porath, 2012). According to Causton-Theoharis et al. (2011), research indicates that self-contained, special-education classrooms may be the least restrictive environment for some students, while creating barriers to academic progress for others. Some students may thrive in the general-education classroom with in-class or pull-out services. Other students may need self-contained, special-education classrooms housed in regular public schools. Students with severe disabilities may need residential homes or hospital instruction. In some cases, less severely disabled students inappropriately placed in special-education, self-contained classrooms may contend with challenging, distracting behaviors from more severely disabled classmates. Students with learning disabilities without severe behavioral issues might find more success in an inclusion classroom (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). In cases of behavior problems, special-education students may not find success in an inclusion classroom and may disrupt general-education students. Antoinette (2003) indicated that students with behavioral issues might disrupt the classroom to the detriment of the rest of the class. Medical conditions, psychological conditions, behavior disabilities, or impaired cognition may exclude the general-education classroom as the least restrictive environment for some students (Ben-Porath, 2012).

Although some disabled students may have typical cognitive functions and the academic ability to complete grade-level assignments, they may need educational support

in an inclusion classroom (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). For example, students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder can display necessary academic abilities, but lack the social skills, coping skills, and functional behavior needed to attend to general-education classrooms (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). Despite academic and cognitive strengths, students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder might require significant educational support to address emotional, sensory, and behavioral challenges. Additionally, Dalton (2013) indicated that although hearing impaired students may have typical cognitive functions and grade-level academic achievement, they have significant challenges gaining full inclusion in a general-education classroom (Dalton, 2013). Interviews with hearing impaired students reveal a reluctance to ask for help from the teacher or classmates because of possible communication breakdown and shame (Dalton, 2013). Hearing impaired students can experience decreased social and emotional well-being due to an interrupted development of communication. Because students with mild hearing loss remain intelligible and can maintain typical academic levels, teachers might overlook their needs as special-education students (Dalton, 2013).

Decisions regarding special-education placement can vary according to teachers' and administrators' attitudes toward inclusion and experience (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). To comply with LRE, evaluation teams can use misguided judgment when placing special-education students. Teachers might assume that special-education students who perform academically at grade-level should be placed in a general-education inclusion classroom. Decision-makers can ignore the emotional, behavioral, and sensory needs of some special-education students because of the students' academic strengths. Whereas some studies demonstrate that special-education students benefit

from general-education placement, other studies demonstrate that some special-education students benefit from time in segregated classes (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). The decision about LRE requires individualized consideration and an informed educational team. Informed decisions regarding placement can guide evaluation teams in providing adequate support to disabled students (Hecker, Young, & Caldarella, 2012). Research conducted by Wilcox and Angelis (2012) indicated that the degree of teacher collaboration improves successful outcomes in middle-school inclusion classrooms.

Alquraini (2013) indicated that unclear expectations may cause problems with inclusion. The lack of a clear explanation regarding determining LRE has hindered informed decision-making (Alquraini, 2013). Without clear standards, schools do not have guidelines for determining LRE, and the problem has resulted in increased numbers of court case involving LRE (Alquraini, 2013). IDEA gives only two directives: the special-education student should remain in the general-education environment to the maximum extent possible and moved only when the severity of the disability prevents the student from receiving an appropriate level of education (Alquraini, 2013). Schools must decide if the student with disabilities can remain in the general-education classroom with aids and services. If a school places a special-education student in a segregated classroom, the administration and teachers must demonstrate that the amount of time spent in the general-education environment remains at the maximum extent possible. Considerations include the social benefits of the general-education environment. Additionally, the school should consider if the student can learn in the general-education classroom. Due to unique needs of each disability, some students may require a special-education teacher team-teaching in the general-education classroom. In some cases, a

student requires full-time exclusion (Alquraini, 2013).

Additionally, schools struggle with behavioral interventions and disciplinary action for students with disabilities (Aron & Loprest, 2012). IDEA requires that schools consider the cause of an offense leading to disciplinary action such as suspension or expulsion. Disciplinary referrals among special-education students have increased due to zero-tolerance policies adopted by schools in response to the outbreak of violence in schools throughout the United States (Aron & Loprest, 2012). When recommending long-term suspension of more than 10 days or expulsion of a special-education student, the school must decide if the offense is a manifestation of the student's disability. If the school determines that the behavior is a manifestation of the student's disability, IDEA requires the school to assess the behavior and design a behavior intervention plan aimed at reducing offensive behaviors (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

### **Least Restrictive Environment in Middle School**

Adding students with documented emotional and behavioral disabilities to middle-school classrooms presents an especially extraordinary challenge to teaching (Howell et al., 2011). The reasons include that problem behaviors tend to surface in the middle grades. Adolescents with emotional or behavioral disabilities manifest increasingly severe behavior problems, complicated by physiological changes of puberty (Howell et al., 2011). Because adolescence is a transitional period in human development, it affects children physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Studies show an increase in prevalence of depression, drug abuse, panic disorders, bipolar disorders, psychoses, and eating disorders during adolescence (Costello et al., 2011).

Literature reveals that middle-school students with emotional and behavioral

disorders have less contact with peers and have fewer relationships than peers without disabilities (Hecker et al., 2012; Soomro & Clarbour, 2012). Adolescents with emotional and behavioral disabilities experience rejection in the general-education setting due to lower levels of social competency including noncompliance and aggression (Hecker et al., 2012). Internalized behaviors include anxiety, withdrawal, and depression. Adolescents with emotional and behavioral disabilities tend to annoy peers by provoking classmates and frustrate teachers by defying authority. Middle-school students experience a natural flux of hormonal and emotional behaviors (Hecker et al., 2012). Students with emotional and behavioral disabilities demonstrate exaggerated hormonal and emotional instability.

Emotional and behavioral problems lead to academic difficulty and higher drop-out rates (Soomro & Clarbour, 2012). Students with emotional disabilities tend to disrupt instruction to avoid the academic challenge (Soomro & Clarbour, 2012). Adolescent students with emotional disabilities tend to have lower self-esteem. Low self-esteem during adolescence negatively affects academic progress, hinders interpersonal relationships, and fosters behavioral problems in the classroom (Soomro & Clarbour, 2012). Bullying behavior including name-calling, social exclusion, and teasing remain grave concerns in middle school (Nese, Horner, Dickey, Stiller, & Tomlanovich, 2014).

Additionally, intolerance continues to exist in middle-school despite efforts by teachers and administrators to curb it. The middle-school environment can appear tolerant of differences because of fewer discipline referrals (Lapp, Fisher, & Frey, 2013). Superficial peaceful coexistence within school boundaries does not equate to social tolerance. Instead, middle-school students have learned other ways to handle disputes.

For example, with the rise of available technology, adolescents can use cyber-bullying (Lapp et al., 2013). All things considered, The middle-school atmosphere can cause stress on students, particularly those with emotional disabilities (Soomro & Clarbour, 2012). A stressful transition into middle-school can cause a decrease of student achievement (West & Schwedt, 2012). Low (1997) indicated that the focus on an imprecise principal of inclusion might cloud the right of disabled students to receive a good education.

### **Study Context and Gaps in Literature**

Adolescence is a complicated period of life, generating heightened emotions. Inclusion in seventh and eighth-grade creates an increased potential for causing problematic classroom environments (Gable et al., 2012). According to West and Schwedt (2012), the customary middle-school model has significant flaws. Middle-school students do not fare better in high-school than students attending self-contained seventh and eighth-grade classrooms. In fact, in high school, students who attended middle school make less achievement in math and reading (West & Schwedt, 2012). Middle-school students reading levels have remained alarmingly low over the past 20 years (Montgomery, 2012). If a student enters middle school with below-grade-level reading skills, the traditional structure of middle school does not provide opportunity for reading instruction (Montgomery, 2012). According to Wilcox and Angelis (2012), literary skill-building can enhance overall performance in reading. Research conducted by Lawrence, Galloway, Yim, and Lin (2013) suggests that middle-school students do not receive opportunity to improve literacy skills, as measured by the disciplinary genre standards. Teachers do not dedicate regular and consistent time for reading and writing

(Lawrence et al., 2013).

## **Curriculum**

Curriculum can affect the effectiveness of inclusion. Until the 1980s, states developed individual standards that offered guidance to public schools (Desimone, 2013). The 1989 President's Education Summit with Governors prompted the first federally initiated standards-based model of instruction used by public schools throughout the United States (Ben-Porath, 2012). In 1994, Goals 2000: Educate America Act (One Hundred Third Congress of the United States, 1994) established a system of standards and assessments for public school student. In 2002, NCLB proposed to close the achievement gap between low-income and minority students and non-minority students from higher-income families. NCLB mandated state-developed standards and required adequate yearly progress of students in public schools (Desimone, 2013). However, literature indicated that disconnect between grade-level standards and modified curriculum caused confusion in the classroom.

Desimone (2013) conducted research regarding standards-based testing across 10 school districts in five states. Results indicated that teachers were motivated to use a variety of teaching approaches to reach struggling students. Accountable for students' academic growth, teachers searched for new ways to reach struggling learners. Coleman's qualitative study (2014) suggests that teachers welcome accountability for the progress of special-education students. However, teachers do not think mandatory standard-based tests accurately measure special-education students' progress and cause disappointment, undermining students' efforts. Teachers' complain that when a student is two or three grade-levels lower than general-education classroom peers, the student

cannot compete on grade-level, standard-based testing. If required to compete at the same level, teachers lament that students' individual progress goes unnoticed because individual progress is not reflected in the scores (Coleman, 2014). Additionally, according to Desimone (2013), high-stakes standardized tests elicited a focus on testing content causing teachers to cover lessons with less depth.

Literature indicates that varied skill-levels in middle-school inclusion classrooms can cause students to fall further behind academically and increase the achievement gap (Lawrence et al., 2013; Lingo, 2014; Cirino et al., 2013). In inclusive classrooms, a comprehensive program that encourages collaboration of general-education and special-education teaching techniques yields positive results in student achievement (Wilcox & Angelis, 2012). A standards-based curriculum provides less opportunity for collaboration because it dictates instruction and gives little flexibility for remediation (Lawrence et al., 2013).

Teaching involves content, process, and product (McKlesley & Weldon, 2000). According to McKlesly and Weldon (2000), the content of the curriculum includes knowledge, concepts and skills that students need to learn the lesson. The process involves making sense of content, and the product provides evidence of learning and progress. Differentiated instruction for inclusion classrooms involves adjusting the complexity of content, providing several ways to process, and offering several means of demonstrating knowledge of content, according to the individual learning profiles of students (McKlesley & Weldon, 2000). To learn the content, students need readiness skills. Effective instruction begins at the student's skill level (Lingo, 2014). Processing information requires time and practice to make sense of the content (McKlesley &

Weldon, 2000). Because the final product reflects individual knowledge of the content of the lesson, products vary in complexity according to level of students (McKlesley & Weldon, 2000).

Due to time restrictions and to cover grade-level standards, middle-school teachers easily overlook learning deficits (Lingo, 2014). According to Lingo (2014), middle-school teachers regularly neglect reading fluency because teachers assume that students mastered reading skills in elementary grades. However, middle school students with reading disabilities require continued support (Cirino, et al., 2013). Middle-school students who struggle in reading should focus on several components, including decoding, fluency, and comprehension (Cirino et al., 2013).

Reading fluency combines accuracy and rate of words read within a specific time period (Lingo, 2014). The interdependence between reading fluency and adequate understanding of content increases with grade-level (Beyers, Lembke, & Curs, 2013). Students with low reading skills have difficulty with content-area vocabulary, increasing potential for failure. Screening students' reading ability can include fluency and vocabulary (Beyers et al., 2013). Vocabulary skills gauge successful reading comprehension (Beyers et al., 2013). For special-education students, reading and writing skills may be grade-levels below expectations (Ben-Porath, 2012). Without dedicated time to improve skills, below-grade-level students may enter high school with deficiencies.

Although struggling middle-school students might desire improvement, students do not want an embarrassing situation (Moreau, 2014). Because students do not want to expose weaknesses to classmates, struggling readers may use coping strategies to

avoid reading aloud in class, including disruptive behavior (Moreau, 2014).

Identification and remediation of reading deficits take place in elementary school (Cirino et al., 2013). However, decoding skills, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and vocabulary need to be addressed in middle school (Cirino et al., 2013). Middle-school students may hide reading fluency deficiencies through keen listening comprehension skills (Cirino et al., 2013). Therefore, reading fluency problems may go unnoticed unless the middle-school curriculum addresses learning differences (Cirino, et al., 2013).

### **Funding**

Review of literature indicated that although the federal government mandates special-education services, the cost of providing services increases without increase in Federal funding (Aron & Lorest, 2012; Rebell, 2012; Mcray & McHatton, 2011; Wright, 2012). Although the original legislation of IDEA set the maximum federal funding at 40 percent of the excess cost of educating students with disabilities, federal funding has never reached this 40 percent cap (Aron & Loprest, 2012). A special study of federal funding for special-education in the 1999-2000 school year revealed that federal funds covered 17 percent of excess costs (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Rebel (2012) indicated that the federal contribution to schools decreased in 2008. Because of federal budget cuts in 2008, schools decreased the requirements of inclusion classrooms staff; whereas, the percentage of disabled students to nondisabled students increased (Rebell, 2012).

Since the 2008 economic recession, reduction in public school revenue throughout the United States has resulted in raised classroom size and reduction in instructional supplies and staff (Rebell, 2012). After budget cuts in 2008, public schools could no longer afford added services in classrooms (McCray & McHatton, 2011). The

national proportion of students receiving special-education services amounts to 13.14 percent of the total student population. A survey of 46 states indicated that 37 spent less on education in 2011 than in 2008 and 50 percent of the 46 states cut funding by more than 10 percent (Rebell, 2012).

Budget cuts in 2008 prompted public school administrators to review district spending (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Consequently, a decrease in school counselor positions occurred due to the economic recession (Wright, 2012). Suicide during adolescence concerns mental health professionals. For middle-school students, one out of four suicide attempts results in death (Wright, 2012). Without school counselors, mental-health problems remain unresolved and can lead to critical situations. Common mental health issues in middle school include depression, anxiety, sexual issues, homelessness, gangs, and drug and alcohol abuse (Wright, 2012).

The caseloads of special educators have increased significantly since 2008 (Giangreco, Suter, & Hurley, 2013). With each student needing individualized education, high student numbers present a difficult challenge. In an effort to reduce spending, schools hire paraprofessionals instead of highly-qualified teachers to support special-education students in academics (Giangreco et al., 2013). According to research conducted by Giangreco et al. (2013), paraprofessionals teach over half of the special-education students within the general-education classroom or in a resource rooms.

Additionally, special educators support more students than reflected in the special-education caseload of students with IEPs (Giangreco et al., 2013). Due to decreased staffing, special educators may need to assist other students in response to intervention programs (Giangreco et al., 2013). Additionally, students with higher needs

may require more staffing. Although IDEA allows states to assist local school districts with high-needs students by using 10 percent of their federal grants to distribute among local districts, increase among all categories of disabilities has created a significant growth in special-education expenditure (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

Pressed by accountability to comply with educational reform and faced with financial considerations of implementing LRE, administrators encounter a daunting challenge. Inclusion requires teacher training and other supports including modified curriculum and additional staff to assist in the general-education inclusion classroom (Gordon, 2013). According to Gordon (2013), “Inclusive education is expensive and requires ...a great deal of money in order to provide the pre-conditions for joint education” (p. 756). In the 1999 -2000 school year, the United States spent \$77.3 billion on special-education, including services required for inclusion classrooms (Aron & Loprest, 2012). The amount equates to 21 percent of the total spent on elementary and secondary education in the United States. Twenty years earlier, the total equaled 17 percent of the total spent on elementary and secondary education. Additionally, in the 1999-2000 school year, schools in the United States spent an average of 90 percent more on special-education students than general-education students, including general-education and special-education funding (Aron & Loprest, 2012).

### **Teaching Inclusion Classrooms**

Teaching an inclusion classroom requires differentiated instruction designed to meet different levels of academic performance and different learning styles (Florian, 2010). Combining special-education students with general-education students requires a single curriculum, prepared and designed to meet the needs of all students (Fullerton,

Ruben, McBride, & Bert, 2011). Curriculum modifications and small-group instruction assist special-education students to access the general-education curriculum (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Teachers can assign alternate tests and modify grading standards. Inclusion classrooms may require supplemental aids and services (Conderman, 2011). Examples of supplemental aids and services include paraprofessionals; electronic devices to assist disabled students, and behavior specialists to consult with the general-education teacher in regard to disruptive behaviors of disabled students. A qualitative multiple-case study conducted by Crawford and Ketterlin-Geller (2013) suggests that middle-school teachers lack knowledge regarding accommodations for students with disabilities. Whereas some teachers may not understand accommodations that struggling students need, others give too many accommodations (Crawford & Ketterlin-Geller, 2013). Teachers tend to assign the same accommodations to many students without individualizing needs, which might prevent academic progress (Crawford & Ketterlin-Geller, 2013).

Because the needs of students vary, the complexity of the general-education classroom has increased (Lingo, 2014). general-education teachers receive little pre-service teacher education to address the diverse academic and emotional needs of special-education students (Gable et al., 2012). special-education teachers receive training designed for small-group settings (Howell et al., 2011). This training may not be useful in larger, general-education classrooms, rendering the special-education teacher unprepared to provide support to the general-education teacher (Gable et al., 2012). Consequently, general-education teachers lack the necessary preparation to implement effective classroom management strategies for special-education students. Because

effective teaching requires classroom management, middle-school teachers need training on approaches and expectations in middle-grade classrooms that lead to improved classroom management (Englehart, 2013).

Seventh and eighth-grade teachers of inclusion classrooms containing emotional and behaviorally disabled students may experience significantly more behavior challenges than teachers of middle-school, non-inclusion classrooms (Jung, 2007). Diverse problems appear during adolescence, when emotional states fluctuate, peer association changes, relational aggression increases, and adult supervision decreases (Rusby et al., 2011). general-education teachers receive minimal training on managing the behavior of special-education students with emotional and behavioral disabilities (McCray & McHatton, 2011). Similarly, according to Oral (2012), inadequately trained teachers may face unexpected, uncommon behavioral challenges. The added stress may overwhelm teachers, breaking down the learning environment (Oral, 2012). Hough and Schmitt (2011) indicate that disruption from externalized behavior can create an inadequate learning environment and add undue stress on the classroom teacher, leading to unsatisfactory academic progress of students and teacher attrition.

Middle-school teachers can avoid some problematic classroom behavior with training and advanced planning (Englehart, 2013). Novice teachers' narrow conceptualizations of teaching can clash with the reality of the complexity of teaching in diverse and multifaceted inclusive classes (Chong, 2011). Simplistic views of learning conflict with the reality of varied learning styles and skill-levels of students (Chong, 2011). Providing training for pre-service, middle-school teachers adds to their knowledge about teaching adolescent students (Lacina, 2012). Teacher candidates need

opportunities to practice varied instructional strategies that motivate and engage middle-school students. New teachers have an understanding of the theory of inclusion without practical skills needed to teach an inclusion classroom (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). According to a quantitative study of beginning public school teachers in the 2007-2008 school year, 10 percent of teachers who were assigned mentors were not teaching in 2009-2010 compared to 23percent of the teachers who were not assigned mentors, demonstrating the importance of guidance and training for new teachers (Institute of Education Sciences, 2011).

Research regarding professional development topics suggests that educational leaders do not demonstrate realistic understanding of teaching inclusion classrooms in public schools (Grima-Farrell, Bain, & McDonagh, 2011). Without understanding the unique environment and demands of inclusion, administrators may provide inadequate professional development to equip teachers for academic and behavior challenges (Grima-Farrell et al., 2011). To achieve effective inclusive classrooms, administrators and teachers must work together by educating themselves on differentiated instruction and classroom management strategies for an effective, inclusion classroom (Obiakor et al., 2012). Additionally, logistical challenges prevent intervention for struggling students in middle school (Prewett, et al., 2012). Because core classroom teachers have inflexible time blocks, class schedules diminish time for small-group instruction (Prewett, et al., 2012). Pre-service training assists middle-school teachers to identify and handle avoidance behavior before it becomes a behavior problem (Lacina, 2012). New teachers need experienced mentors to provide guidance and support (Lacina, 2012).

Improving teacher-training programs by embedding more practical content

increases teachers' ability to implement skills necessary for effective teaching and learning in inclusion classrooms (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). The classroom experience remains important for students' success now and in the future (Kennedy, 2011). Secondary teachers maintain a more negative perception of inclusion than elementary teachers (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). In higher grade-levels, the complexity of core competencies intensifies. Without practical experience, secondary teachers become increasingly negative regarding inclusion classrooms in higher grades. Current research suggests that including an inclusion model in student-teachers' practicum courses increases positive attitudes among preservice teachers (Swain et al., 2012).

According to Gehrke & Cocchiarella (2013), improving teacher preparations programs includes emphasis on elements of inclusion in practice. To implement change in preservice teacher training, administrators and policy makers of higher education should understand the benefit of providing preservice training in inclusion practices. Without a realistic view of teaching inclusion classrooms, policy-makers and administrators remain ill-prepared to provide adequate support to teachers (Grima-Farrell et al., 2011). Research shows that classroom disciplinary climate strongly motivates student achievement, which influences teachers' self-efficacy (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2009). In summary, an effective learning environment includes a positive disciplinary climate, student achievement, and teachers' self-efficacy.

### **Educational Policy**

Before EAHCA and Public-law 94-142 of 1975, general-education teachers

needed only classroom management strategies and instructional training designed for grade-level general-education students without emotional or behavioral challenges (Ben-Porath, 2012). Disabled students received instruction in separate settings away from students without disabilities (Ben-Porath, 2012). In the 1980s, disabled students began mainstreaming into non-content area classes such as music, art, and physical education (Swain, Nordness, & Leaser-Janssen, 2012). Special-education students participated in core content courses when they could meet the expectations of the academic content without modifications. Students who were not at grade-level academically or displayed disruptive behaviors were referred to special-education programs and placed in segregated classrooms. The practicality of teaching to a non-disruptive class of comparable skills outweighed the ideologies of inclusive education for disabled students. However, in 1998 and 2004, IDEA mandated that special-education students cannot be removed from general-education classrooms for the sole purpose of convenience (Causton-Theoharis et al., 2011). For example, if a special-education student causes disruption that interferes with the learning of others, the school must enforce behavior strategies or a positive behavior plan as a genuine attempt to keep that student in the LRE. Providing LRE for special-education outweighs disruption in the learning environment for other students in the class.

Vague terminology clouds the legal responsibilities of public schools (Alquraini, 2013). For example, no clear guidance exists in determining the rights of general-education students to learn in an environment conducive to learning. Unclear expectations for inclusion result in inappropriate placement of special-education students (Alquraini, 2013; Aron and Loprest, 2012). The Salamanca Statements refers to

most of special-needs children without explaining the minority (UNESCO, 1994).

Although the Salamanca Statement equates inclusion to a human right, the pedagogical application remains confusing. The first of five beliefs of the Salamanca Statement proclaims that “every child as a fundamental right to education and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning” (UNESCO, 1994). Nationwide, inclusion classrooms have increased as school districts mainstream special-education students into general-education classrooms (Swain et al., 2012). Forty-nine percent of disabled students remain in the general-education inclusion classroom for 80 percent or more of the school day and approximately 23 percent of students receive their education primarily in separate, special-education classrooms. Twenty-five percent of students with emotional disabilities spent at least 80 percent of their school day in general-education inclusion classes (Gable et al., 2012).

### **Opposing Viewpoints**

According to Causton-Theoharis et al. (2011), disagreement with LRE surfaces because there is a lack of empirical evidence “that all teachers can teach all students within a general-education setting. The goal of teaching all students well and teaching all students in the same place and at the same time (i.e. full inclusion) are on a collision course...” (p. 63). The success of inclusion involves the general-education classroom experience (Aron & Loprest, 2012). general-education teachers’ limited expectations can stunt the academic progress of students with disabilities in inclusion classrooms. The potential for behavior problems increases with inclusion (Costello et al., 2011). Students with emotional or behavioral disabilities have a greater likelihood of disruptive behavior in the classroom than any other students (Gable et al., 2012). Unprepared general-

education teachers have concerns about behavior issues associated with some disabilities (Jung, 2007). Because administrators hold teachers accountable for state test scores, teachers worry about low-functioning, special-education students' scores (Costello et al., 2011).

The literature revealed that special-education inclusion students may not make as much progress as the data imply (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Despite inclusionary practices of IDEA, national achievement scores do not reflect significant gains. In 2009, national achievement scores resulted in 64 percent of high-school students with disabilities testing below proficiency compared to 24 percent of nondisabled peers (Aron & Loprest, 2012). In 1987, 54 percent of special-education students who enrolled in high school in the United States graduated (Aron & Loprest, 2012). In 2003, 70 percent of students with disabilities in the United States graduated from high-school (Aron & Loprest, 2012). However, less than half of the 70 percent of 2003 special-education graduates received a regular diploma (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Forty six percent of special-education students who graduated from high-school in 2003 received a regular diploma whereas, fifty-four percent received a certificate of completion (Aron & Loprest, 2012). Public school efforts to comply with laws regarding the education of students with disabilities generated increased graduation rates for special-education students. However, fewer special-education students received regular high-school diplomas in 2003 than in 1987. Schools have not addressed instructional challenges associated with inclusion (Sansoti & Sansoti, 2012).

Varying skill-levels in the same classroom requires differentiated instruction, including collaboration between the special-education teacher and the general-education

teacher in developing modified curriculum that is appropriate for all skill-levels (Fullerton et al., 2011). In middle grades, the variation of skill-levels becomes more pronounced than in elementary grades (Howell et al., 2011). Anderson et al. (1996) indicated that differentiated instruction requires curriculum changes to address teaching the same lesson to students regardless of skill-levels. Future needs include development of readily available differentiated curriculum.

### **Gaps in the Current Literature**

The literature is extensive on individual topics of inclusion, adolescence, differentiated instruction, and problem behavior in the classroom. However, few findings detailed the combined problems and complexity of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom (Gable et al., 2012). According to Gravani (2008), prior studies fail to share a common education experience with teachers. Studies occur in isolation of one another, restricting research to parallel examination of topics. Past studies on issues involving inclusion classrooms and differentiated instruction do not present authentic perspectives of those teaching inclusion classrooms (Gravani, 2008). Although the literature review did not reveal research targeted at teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom, qualitative methodology dominated research of inclusion and teaching strategies.

### **Summary**

Mainstreaming middle-school special-education students into inclusion classrooms began as a response to IDEA promoting LRE. Lack of sufficient funding and thorough planning has negatively influenced the process. Inclusion involves policy makers, administrators, teachers, students, and parents. This complicated process requires a collaborate effort from stakeholders. Curriculum needs adjustments for

teachers to instruct academic concepts to students of various skill-levels. The modifications necessary to use grade-level textbooks for below-grade-level students can overwhelm teachers, hindering effective teaching and learning. Additionally, adolescence encompasses behavioral changes associated with human development (Howell et al., 2011). Policy makers and politicians mandated LRE without providing adequate funding for adjusting curriculum to support inclusion classrooms and for behavior supports needed in inclusion classrooms.

Table 1.

*Literature Review*

Key Term Searched	Books	Scholarly Journals	Other Web Resources/ Dissertations	Reviewed	Used
Least Restrictive Environment AND middle-school	73	364	179	56	8
At-risk Students AND middle-school	64	1,474	36	86	18
Classroom management AND middle-school	693	1417	293	32	7
Classroom Management AND Adolescence	568	2,941	419	48	8
Teaching AND Middle-school AND Special-education	927	3,165	393	59	19
Middle-school AND Student achievement	173	2,618	543	83	8
Middle-school AND Teachers	851	3,090	318	89	10
Discipline AND Middle-school AND Special-education	110	1,160	424	43	5
Adolescence AND Learning disabilities	214	1,324	211	52	7
Adolescent AND behavior	209	2,164	293	62	8
Totals	3,882	19,717	3,109	610	98

## **Conclusions**

In examining over 600 peer-reviewed articles, 98 sources were relevant to this study. Some literature discussed possible classroom management strategies for inclusion classrooms. Few discussed teaching inclusion classrooms from the first-hand experience. No literature presented studies dedicated entirely to the specific subject of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Additionally, 19 peer-reviewed articles, three books, and four websites included information relevant to this study regarding historical, social, and legislative issues. An additional sixteen articles and nine books contained information relevant to this study regarding research methodology and design. Six articles contained information relevant to this study and curriculum.

The literature review indicated the need for more research on teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. The current qualitative, multiple-case study contributions might motivate further rigorous studies. Additionally, the current qualitative, multiple-case study might aid in developing clear guidelines for placement in middle-school inclusion classrooms and developing curriculum to meet the instructional needs of middle-school inclusion classrooms. The goal of the current qualitative research is to explore teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona through the experiences of teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona using exploratory multiple-case study design.

Chapter 2 included a review of literature related to the background of special-education and middle schools, theories supporting LRE and inclusion, funding issues of inclusion, professional development for teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms, current findings, and future needs regarding teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

Chapter 3 presents a discussion of the population and sample, the methodology of the study including a description of the survey instrument, an explanation of credibility and dependability, and a description of data analysis.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study is to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Teaching middle-school inclusion classes encompasses a collection of issues, including adolescent development, adolescent behavior, emotional disabilities, various academic abilities, and diverse learning styles. Whereas prior research focused on issues addressed separately as disjointed topics, little research encompasses the combined issues specific to teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms (Florian, 2010).

Chapters 1 and 2 addressed the research problem, literature review, and relevance of the study. Beginning a research project requires methodology, which involves scrutinizing the purpose of the study and justifying a research method. Chapter 3 includes a description of the research method and its appropriateness to the study. Also, Chapter 3 includes identification of the targeted population to be studied, sampling frame, data collection protocol, description of the field study, and ethics in research. A discussion of the analysis encompasses credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. A chapter summary highlights the important points and presents an introduction to Chapter 4.

#### **Research Method Appropriateness**

The exploratory multiple-case study approach provides an appropriate channel for qualitative data collection and content analysis. According to Stake (1995), the value of an exploratory multiple-case study lies in facilitating the extrapolation of unique

contextual complexities of the phenomenon. Detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of cases can produce large amounts of data and analytic conclusions that answer the research questions. For this reason, multiple-case study research provides a useful approach for exploring a phenomenon. According to Stake (1995), the focus of a case study involves a program, an entity, an event, a phenomenon, a person, or group of people. For this qualitative study, an exploratory multiple-case study extended experiences of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers to bring greater understanding of the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classroom.

The methodology of qualitative research relies on the interpretation and construction of people's perceptions into organized data (Wahyuni, 2012). Whereas quantitative research suggests a focused, structured approach to collecting data to examine hypothesis, qualitative research involves a broader strategy of extrapolating data from descriptions of personal experiences (Neuman, 2003). The intention of a qualitative study includes an authentic understanding of people's experiences as they relate to the study (Moustakes, 1994). The qualitative study explored teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. The results of a qualitative study of a relatively unexplored topic may lead to future qualitative and quantitative studies (Wahyuni, 2012). Common themes uncovered in this study may provide data for future research of middle-school inclusion classrooms.

### **Design Appropriateness**

Without preconceived ideas on finding, the conceptual framework of the study involved an inductive approach of interpretative analysis of data to gain understanding and construct new knowledge about a phenomenon through the perceptions of individuals

experiencing the phenomenon (Gerring, 2004). Although variations in approaches to case studies allow for both quantitative and qualitative analyses of the data, qualitative case study involve details that quantitative research may not capture (Yin, 2003). A case study is an in-depth study of a research problem and is useful when not much is known about an issue (Russell et al., 2015). According to Gerring (2004), "... a case study is best defined as an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar's aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena" (p. 341). Case study design can explore a complex issue through contextual analysis of a limited number of events or experiences (Stakes, 1995). According to Stakes (1995), an intrinsic case study explores a case for its own sake. An instrumental case study examines a pattern of behavior of a small group of subjects. A collective case study coordinates data from several different sources, combining multiple cases in a single study. Instrumental and collective case studies allow for the generalization of findings to a larger population (Stakes, 1995). The method of the study is qualitative. The design of the study is a case study. The type of case study is an exploratory multiple case study.

### **Population**

For case study research, a theoretical sampling of the targeted population focuses efforts on useful, meaningful data (Eisenhardt, 1989). The targeted population for the research consists of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers in Maricopa County, Arizona who teach core-subjects of mathematics, language arts, science, or social studies. Generally, in Maricopa County, middle-school consists of seventh and eighth-grades (Arizona Department of Education, 2012). According to information provided by the Arizona Department of Education (2012), variations exist within school districts

regarding sixth grade. Whereas some districts consider sixth grade as part of a middle-school program, sixth grade remains self-contained in other school districts.

In preparation for high-school, middle-school involves specialized teachers for core subjects (George, 2009). Students travel from classroom to classroom throughout the day (George, 2009). To avoid extreme variations in classroom environments, the study restricted participants to core-subject teachers, including language arts, mathematics, social studies, or science.

### **Sampling Frame**

In multiple-case study research, cases can include typical cases or unique cases (Stake, 1995). This study involved typical cases of the population within Maricopa County, Arizona. The non-random, purposive sample population had the experiences and cultural norms of any teacher of a core-subject in a middle-school inclusion classroom. The participants had experience teaching an inclusion classroom for at least one year. Two local organizations reached out through email to announce the opportunity to participate. The announcement contained contact information for those interested in participation.

According to Yin (1985), qualitative research seeks a rich, contextual understanding of experiences. Random, large sampling does not produce an in-depth understanding (Yin, 1984). Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study because this exploratory multiple-case study requires data from specific participants who experience teaching middle-school inclusion classes. Because statistical sampling methods are not appropriate for qualitative research, this study did not use statistical sampling (Yin, 2003). Except for the criteria of experiencing the phenomenon of teaching middle school

inclusion classrooms in Maricopa County, Arizona, the sample did not have additional demographical requirements (Yin, 2003). The purposive sample population involved in the study satisfied the purpose of the study and answered research questions. The sampling approach involved purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

By multiple-case study research standards, the researcher invited the targeted population of teachers of middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona to participate in the study (Yin, 2003). Recruiting participants involves gaining access to the populations' community (Sixsmith, Boneham, & Goldring, 2003). The researcher solicited prospective participants indirectly through emails sent by Arizona Professional Educators (Arizona Professional Educators, 2016) and Arizona Certified Education Services (Arizona Certified Education Services, 2016). The solicitation for participants included general information about the study, a description of the purposive, targeted population, contact information of the researcher, and an explanation of necessary informed consent before interviews (Appendix A). The first round of solicitation emails resulted in four responses. After ensuring that respondents met criteria for target population and participants gave informed consent, the researcher assigned code names and began telephone interviews. The second round of solicitation emails resulted in an additional three response responses from teachers meeting the study's criteria. After participants gave informed consent, the researcher assigned code names and began telephone interviews. Snowball sampling helped achieve sampling size by asking participants for referrals to other seventh and eighth-grade teachers of inclusion classrooms. Participants forwarded solicitation email to other teachers, which resulted in six additional responses from teachers meeting the study's criteria, totaling 13 authentic

responses.

Although the exact number of cases depends on when the researcher reaches theoretical saturation, the sample included a minimum of 12 participants. Participant interviews continued until the researcher determined that data saturation occurred. According to Guest et al. (2013), when additional data does not provide new information, the researcher has reached data saturation. The decision regarding data saturation remains subjective (Guest et al., 2013). The minimum number of 12 participants met criteria to provide sufficient data for in-depth understanding of teachers' experiences teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms (Yin, 2003).

Two randomly-selected teachers from the sample participated in the field study. The sample size of the main study consisted of 12 participants, whereby the results reached theoretical saturation. When data evidenced theoretical saturation because marginal improvement becomes insignificant, the researcher ended data collection (Hartley, 1994). If the interview process needed to continue, the remaining interviews would have been divided equally regarding semi-structured and structured interviews because sample may not have totaled an even number of participants upon reaching theoretical saturation.

### **Informed Consent**

Prospective participants received a letter and consent form outlining the purpose and intended use of the study (Appendix B). The letter was delivered by email and included information regarding the steps taken to ensure participants' privacy and confidentiality, including treatment of data collected for the study, coding used to maintain anonymity of participants, treatment of audio recordings, and destruction of all

data used in the study. By telephone, the researcher addressed confidentiality agreements and treatment of data as explained in the letter. The letter contained contact information and followed the criteria established by the Protection of Human Research Subjects Standards. Before signing consent, participants had the opportunity to ask questions. If in agreement, participants signed a consent statement at the end of the letter.

Additionally, participants were asked to sign the portion of the consent form allowing the researcher to record the session. The researcher explained that audio recording was not mandatory for the interview and participants could consent to the interview and refuse audio recording. The researcher explained that participants could withdraw from the study at any time by faxing, mailing, or delivering in person a dated, signed letter stating decision to withdraw. The researcher provided a stamped self-addressed envelope for the participant to mail the signed consent statement to the researcher. Participants signed permission by hand and not electronically.

### **Confidentiality**

During data collection, personal names and school names were replaced by codes. The researcher did not include participants' names, school names, or specific identifying information such as years of experience or specific demographic information in the results. The researcher encouraged participants to be honest and forthcoming when answering the interview questions. Recordings remained in a secured filing cabinet until each participant approved the transcriptions of corresponding recording, at which time the recordings of the approved transcripts were destroyed. Consent forms will remain in a secured filing cabinet for three years after the study is published. All written and electronic data including consent forms will be held in a secured filing cabinet for three

years after the study is published. After three years; but before three years and two months after the study is published, all written data and electronic data will be destroyed, including consent forms.

### **Field Study**

A field study included two middle-school inclusion classroom teachers from the sample-population. The researcher randomly selected two of the first four authentic respondents and presented the option to participate in the field study, explaining the importance of the field study to identify potential problems in the interview process. Both respondents agreed to participate in the field study instead of the main study, one for the structured interview and the other for the semi-structured interview. The purpose of the field study was to refine interview dialogue and identify potential obstacles in the data collection process. The researcher asked for constructive feedback from participants of the field study. Both participants felt comfortable and agreed the questions were understandable and comprehensive.

### **Geographic Location**

The participants of the study were located from various school districts within Maricopa County, Arizona. The researcher solicited seventh and eighth-grade inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County. To avoid travel and additional time constraints, interviews occurred by telephone.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Data collection for qualitative case study research included interviews, researcher's records, audio recordings, and audiovisual recordings (Stake, 1995). Instruments selected for this qualitative study included field notes, the interview

protocols, and the researcher. In qualitative studies, instrumentation includes the researcher because analysis involves descriptions and interpretations of experiences (Merriam, 2002). Interviewing is a primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research (Stucky, 2013). Gathering data for qualitative studies involves more than gathering facts (Emerson et al., 1995). Conversational interviews eliciting extensive, candid responses work well for qualitative research (Leedy & Ormond, 2010). Interviews reveal thoughts and feelings that questionnaires and surveys may not reveal (Christensen, 2011). NVivo 11 software was used to sort, arrange, and classify textual and audio data, including field notes and transcribed narratives of structured interviews and semi-structured interviews. This section contains descriptions of selected instruments.

### **The Researcher**

The researcher used strategies to limit bias during interviews and analysis of data (Yin, 2003). The researcher maintained a self-critical attitude about how personal assumptions affect the research. The researcher kept a record of personal feelings, biases and insights after each interview and included a summary description in chapter 4. Using a software assistance for analyzing data, such as NVivo 11, for coding textual narratives of interviews reduced possible mistakes of missing key words or phrases and enhanced quality and credibility (Christensen, 2011).

### **Interview Protocols**

The researcher used semi-structured and structured interviews and as instruments for data collection in this study. Interview questions that guided the interviews related to the research questions and helped answer the research questions regarding similarities

and differences of experiences (Yin, 2003). To gain deeper understanding of experiences and instructional challenges, interview questions included a variety of issues for an overall depiction of teaching middle-school, inclusion classrooms. Interview protocols focused on training, support, curriculum, personal instructional strategies, and issues contributing to instructional challenges. The semi-structured interviews in this study contained structured questions and allowed open-ended responses. The researcher engaged in an active process of interviewing and expanding on significant details. Structured interviews involved a structured set of questions. The researcher encouraged participants to respond truthfully, openly, and honestly. The researcher used the participants' consent form as a script to review important details. This script helped the interviewer to remember important details including confidentiality, consent, contact information, and subsequent procedures (Jacob, 2012). No unexpected issues arose during the interviews and interviews were conducted during one session. At the end of the interviews, the researcher asked for questions, comments, or concerns. The researcher responded to any questions, comments, or concerns. The researcher reviewed confidentiality of the interview to reassure participants of anonymity. The researcher expressed gratitude to the participants for their contribution to the study.

### **Field Notes and Recordings**

With participant consent, the researcher audio recorded interviews. Recording interviews freed the researcher to engage in interviews without inconveniently stopping for note-taking. Participants granted permission to audio record the session before the interview. The researcher explained the research goals and procedures, including recording, during initial contact when participant signed the consent form. Recording

interviews can produce anxiety and affect the quality of the interview. Al-Yateem (2010) suggests that at the time of the interview, the researcher avoid reminding the participant of interview recording (p. 34). At the time of the interviews, the researcher avoided reminding participants of audio recording. Four participants had signed permission for audio recording; but, at the time of the interview, expressed discomfort with audio recording. The researcher recorded data of these interviews by note-taking.

### **Interviews**

Types of interviews include structured, narrative or unstructured, and semi-structured (Stucky, 2013). The interviewer's control differs in each type. Narrative interviews begin with a narrative question that allows interviewees to tell the story of their personal perceptions of an experience. Narrative interviews can contain a wide range of themes, making the data difficult to analyze. A semi-structured interview followed an outline of predetermined topics with opportunity for open-ended responses. The outline of topic questions prepared the interviewer to cover necessary areas of discussion for analysis, while allowing the interviewee to contribute personal expressions. The interviewer did not have to follow a systematic order of questioning and could incorporate additional unstructured questions according to the direction of the discussion. The interviewee's responses guided the direction of discussion when discussion diverged from the outline. Structured interviews followed a predetermined, systematic set of questions. Structured interviews adhered to the order and wording of questions.

For the study, at least half of the participants participated in structured interviews (Appendix D) and at least half participated in semi-structured interviews (Appendix E).

Interviews took place by telephone to give participants convenience and comfort. A comfortable setting fostered a relaxed, open conversation (Merriam, 2002).

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

The semi-structured interviews remained conversational. Although the researcher asked all prepared questions to guide interviews, the answers led to additional questions. The researcher maintained a conversational format for the semi-structured interviews. In the semi-structured interviews, the researcher encouraged participants to communicate experiences and add additional comments. Successful interviewing requires undistracted listening (Jacob, 2012). During the interviews, the researcher listened for subtopics in the participants' answers that could lead to expanded responses. Participants had the opportunity to clarify answers. Probing techniques encouraged participants to offer more information. Probing techniques included how, what, where, and when questions (Bernard, 2013). Silent probing involved remaining quiet to encourage participants to continue with more information (Bernard, 2013). Echo probing involved repeating the last statement and asking the participant to continue (Bernard, 2013). Affirmative probing involved making affirmative nonbiased statements to encourage the participant to continue (Bernard, 2013). Interpretive probing asked for more meaning about a statement (Bernard, 2013). The interviews included asking participants to give additional information not discussed by guiding questions and probing questions.

### **Structured Interviews**

The researcher encouraged participants to provide an answer that most accurately expresses their sentiment and give explanations. The researcher read each question verbatim and in assigned order. The researcher recorded or noted participants' responses.

No additional conversation occurred during the structured interviews. An exploratory case study provided a basis for further research of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

### **Research Questions**

Combined information of cases added to the entirety of the study (Stake, 1995) to answer the research questions:

R1. What are the experiences of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R2. What are the perceptions and characterizations of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R3. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of current administrative support to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?

R4. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of personal instructional strategies to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?

### **Trustworthiness of Study**

Establishing trustworthiness of data collection and analysis for qualitative research involved establishing credibility and dependability. In qualitative research, credibility of the data collection and analysis establishes construct validity.

Dependability of measurement, procedures, and study findings establishes reliability.

Because qualitative research involves interpretations of experiences, objectivity of the researcher increases trustworthiness. Member checking ensured accurate interpretation

of interviews, increasing credibility and trustworthiness.

### **Credibility**

In quantitative research, construct validity involves validating the accuracy of the measurement instrument and confirmation that the measurement instrument measures what the researcher intends for it to measure. In qualitative research, credibility refers to the construct validity of quantitative research. Whereas quantitative research measures concrete traits, qualitative research measures nonfigurative traits including perceptions, experiences, feelings, and thoughts. Credibility involves reaching accurate interpretations and impressions of the phenomenon under study. For this study, member checking decreased the possibility of drawing incorrect conclusion. Member checking satisfied considerations regarding credibility, comparable to internal validity of quantitative studies (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). Additionally, the researcher enhanced credibility by referencing the existing literature to demonstrate the relationship with extant research (Yin, 2003).

### **Member Checking**

Member checking of transcripts served to minimize researcher's inaccuracies (Stake, 1995). Each participant reviewed a copy of the transcription of his or her interview and approved transcription as an accurate portrayal of individual experiences. The researcher encouraged participants to comment on the transcript regarding misconceptions of their experiences. The researcher made necessary changes and began data reduction and analysis after final approval of transcripts from participants. Immediately after interviews, the researcher constructed codes for recordings to secure confidentiality. The codes included a number assigned to each participant, a letter

designating the type of interview, another letter representing the subject taught, and another letter designating the gender of participant. After transcribing the recorded interviews, the researcher used member validation to ensure validity of interviews. The researcher emailed a copy of each transcribed interview to the corresponding participant to review and approve or to provide feedback for changes before approval. Upon approval, participants signed and dated the transcripts, acknowledging approval of contents and mailed the original signed transcript back to researcher. All forms were signed and returned.

### **Dependability**

Dependability in qualitative research relates to reliability in quantitative terms (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). The researcher demonstrated dependability of the study by describing the purpose of the study, explaining the purposed selection of participants, giving a detailed description of data collection and data reduction for analysis, and clearly explaining the analysis of research findings. Documentation of procedures used in data collection and analysis increases dependability (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).. Additionally, the researcher demonstrated dependability by providing evidence of transferability.

### **Transferability**

Transferability in qualitative research compares to external validity in quantitative research. Transferability refers to the ability to transfer research methods from one group to another (Stake, 1995). The researcher satisfied external validation through transferability, demonstrating that the research methods have applicability with other participants (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The researcher provided a detailed description of the population purposefully chosen for the study: middle-school inclusion classroom

teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona. The researcher extended the study to two elementary-grade classroom teachers who taught inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Although results may vary, transferability applies in the ability to transfer the study from one group to another. Because the results demonstrated genuine understanding of teaching elementary-grade inclusion classroom, as well as middle-grade inclusion classes, the results showed transferability and external validity.

### **Field Study**

A field study was conducted prior to participant interviews. The field study consisted of two teachers, one each from seventh and eighth-grade middle-school inclusion classrooms. The purpose of a field study involved reviewing the instruments for data collection and data reduction and checking for areas that need revision. The value of a field study involves identifying possible problems and adjust areas that may hinder the study such as improving interview questions or adding sub-questions (Stake, 1995).

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in qualitative, exploratory case study includes content analysis (Maxwell, 2005). Stages of content analysis include transcription, data reduction, displaying data, drawing conclusions, and verifying data. Coding involves breaking the data apart and reorganizing it into categories. Categorizing data reduces the information into meaningful groups. The goal of content analysis includes exploring data to find answers to research questions. The data obtained for the study encompassed records of structured interviews and semi-structured interviews of twelve middle-school teachers of inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona, as well as researcher's notes of

auditory observations during interviews.

Because interview responses can contain large amounts of data, the researcher used NVivo software in the data reduction and analyzing process. NVivo software supported the qualitative research by organizing and analyzing content from interviews, audio, and surveys, uncovering subtle connections. NVivo software deeply analyzes qualitative data and justifies findings, making it well suited for exploring issues, understanding phenomenon, and answering the questions of the research. Using NVivo, the researcher imported interviews and set up case nodes for each participant. To insure accuracy and clarity of data, a node for each question sorted responses, allowing the researcher to explore data for each question and code emerging themes. Additionally, the researcher used text search and word frequency queries to scrutinize teachers' experiences as communicated through interviews. Coding-queries uncovered patterns and revealed subtle connections in the themes. As coding progressed, NVivo visuals helped the researcher to identify trends in the data and provided another means of scrutinizing organizational accuracy.

Content was examined for underlying themes and patterns. The researcher created transcripts from recorded interviews. As themes emerge, the researcher used NVivo to create theme files. The researcher gave categorized themes a heading and created a general rule for inclusion into that category, according to the theme description. Axial coding involves examination of the initial themes for underlining themes. As the researcher identified text related to coded themes, the researcher categorized the text. As new themes emerge, the researcher created new files for themes and continued categorizing text. After categorizing text, the researcher reorganized themes into a

hierarchy, creating parent themes and minor themes.

Coding highlights in the text document displayed colored stripes corresponding to different themes (Qualitative Solutions Research, 2010). The stripes helped the researcher visualize the amount of text related to each theme and make decisions regarding aggregation of themes. Visual models displayed major themes that have the most coding references. Charts visually represented coding, allowing the researcher to have a comprehensive view for hierarchical analysis, including categorizing major themes and underlying themes. The results of the study included visual models. Using NVivo query options, the researcher examined the content for oversights in creating themes or categorization. Finally, the researcher constructed an integrated thematic description, representing the experiences of combined data clusters. Data analysis related to the research questions regarding similarities of experiences of the central phenomenon and adding to a deeper understanding of the central phenomenon.

### **Multiple Sources of Data**

The accuracy of case study findings increases when analysis involves multiple sources of data (Yin, 1984). The current study involved structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and documents found in literature review. Structured interviews involved asking participants the same 10 questions verbatim in the same order, without additional questioning. Questions allowed open-ended answers, however, the researcher did not prompt or engage in conversation. Semi structured interviews involved asking participants the same 10 questions verbatim, allowing open ended answers, and asking additional questions, encouraging participants' personal reflections, opinions, and observations of their experience teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

## **Convergence of Evidence**

According to Yin (1984), case studies using convergence of multiple sources of data yield more convincing evidence. Each data source results in separate findings and conclusions. Triangulation involves convergence of findings and conclusions from multiple sources of data, providing multiple measures of the same phenomenon (Yin, 1984). Without convergence of data, findings produce separate sub-studies (Yin, 1984). The current study merges evidence from semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, and documentation of results of other studies.

## **Summary**

Chapter 3 includes justification for using qualitative methodology and exploratory multiple-case study design in researching the phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. This qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study drew meaning from interviews by analyzing narratives of interviews using NVivo to extrapolate common themes. Additionally, chapter 3 includes steps that were taken to collect and analyze data. The multi-layered approach of this qualitative research derived meaning through inductive analysis, building upon data until a meaningful interpretation was achieved. Chapter 4 contains information regarding data obtained through interviews and the outcome of data analysis.

## Chapter 4

### Results, Analysis, And Findings

The purpose of this exploratory multiple-case study was to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms in Arizona to assist in developing effective policies and teaching practices. Chapter 4 includes a presentation of analysis and results of the study. Collection of data involved sampling of six semi-structured interviews and six structured interviews. Two local organizations solicited participants through emails sent to members and clients (see Appendix A). The presentation of data analysis and results encompasses three broad sections. The first section presents data collection and analysis of semi-structured and structured interview questions. The second section explains results of findings, including themes that emerged from data analysis. The final section summarizes the information. Tables and charts throughout the chapter provide visual presentations of result

#### **Population Demographics and Background**

The targeted population is middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona. Purposive sampling of participants targeted seventh and eighth-grade general-education teachers who have experience teaching an inclusion classroom for at least one year in any of the core subject areas including language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The sample included twelve middle-school teachers of inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Two participants participated in the field study. One participated in the semi-structured interview and one in the structured interview. For data collection, six participants participated in structured interviews, and six participants participated in semi-structured interviews.

Table 2.

*Participants' information*

Participant	Interview	Subject Taught	Gender	Free & Reduced Lunches
1SMF	Structured	Mathematics	Female	< 50%
2SSF	Structured	Science	Female	< 50%
3SHM	Structured	Social Studies	Male	< 50%
4SMF	Structured	Mathematics	Female	➤ 50%
5SHF	Structured	Social Studies	Female	< 50%
6SEM	Structured	Language Arts	Male	< 50%
1IEF	Semi-Structured	Language Arts	Female	< 50%
2IHM	Semi-Structured	Social Studies	Male	➤ 50%
3IEF	Semi-Structured	Language Arts	Female	➤ 50%
4IHM	Semi-Structured	Social Studies	Male	< 50%
5IMF	Semi-Structured	Mathematics	Female	➤ 50%
6IEM	Semi-Structured	Language Arts	Male	➤ 50%

### Case Synopsis

Research for this qualitative, exploratory multiple-case study was guided by four research questions: What are the experiences of the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona? What do teachers perceive and characterize the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona? What do teachers perceive the effectiveness of current administrative support to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona? What do teachers perceive the effectiveness of personal instructional strategies to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?

This multi-case study involved twelve cases. Participants taught in various school

districts within Maricopa County, Arizona and districts differed in average level of income of population therein (Vygotsky, *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*, 1978). Each participant was currently teaching and had at least one year of experience teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom. Three female teachers taught mathematics; one female teacher taught science; two male teachers taught social studies; and one female teacher and three male teachers taught language arts.

### **Interview Questions**

Data collection involved two instruments: a semi-structured interview and a structured interview. For this study, questions solicited perceptions of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms and the challenges involved. Semi-structured interviews allowed for conversation, whereas structured interviews involved no discussion other than asking and answering the question.

#### *Question 1*

Semi-Structured: “What are the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?”

Structured: “What are the challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?”

#### *Question 2*

Semi-Structured: “What professional training has prepared you to teach special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms?”

Structured: “How satisfied are you with the training you received to prepare you for teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?”

#### *Question 3*

Semi-Structured: “How does your current curriculum allow you to adjust to varying academic skill-levels?”

Structured: “How do you prepare all students for mandated State standardized testing (AZ Merit)?”

*Question 4*

Semi-Structured: “How do you design lesson plans to meet the needs of various academic skill-levels?”

Structured: “How satisfied are you with support received from administration?”

*Question 5*

Semi-Structured: “How do you prepare students of varying academic skills for mandatory standardized testing?”

Structured: “How satisfied are you with the school curriculum and the availability of additional resources within the curriculum to meet the needs of students’ various skill-levels?”

*Question 6*

Semi-Structured: “How does inclusion in middle-school affect classroom management?”

Structured: “How satisfied are you that your lesson plans satisfy all of your students' academic needs?”

*Question 7*

Semi-Structured: “How do students (special-education and general-education) benefit from an inclusion classroom in middle school?”

Structured: “How satisfied are you with the accuracy of State standardized testing

in measuring progress for special-education and general-education students in your classroom(s)?"

*Question 8*

Semi-Structured: "How do school leaders and administration support the process of mainstreaming special-education students in middle school?"

Structured: "What factors contribute to or hinder the progress of special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms?"

*Question 9*

Semi-Structured: "What instructional strategies have you found effective in meeting the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom."

Structured: "What personal instructional strategies have you found to be effective in teaching your inclusion classroom(s) containing students of varying skill-levels?"

*Question 10*

Semi-Structured: "Considering the instructional challenges of teaching your middle-school inclusion classroom(s), what other pertinent information can you add to this interview?"

Structured: "What information would you give to school leaders and state officials in developing policies for middle-school inclusion classrooms?"

Table 3

*Semi-structured questions and answers*

Semi-Structured Questions	Ratio: answers from six participants
1. Instructional challenges.	5/6: Multiple skill-levels in one classroom.
2. Level of satisfaction with training.	6/6: Not satisfied.
3. Level of satisfaction with curriculum.	5/6: Not satisfied.
4. Level of satisfaction with classroom lessons.	4/6: Need more planning time for effective lessons.
5. Opinion regarding accuracy of State Testing.	6/6: Not accurate in measuring progress of lower-skill level students.
6. Tell about classroom management and inclusion.	5/6: Felt restricted and ineffective due to fear of impeding upon disabled students' rights.
7. Tell the benefits of inclusion.	6/6: No benefits.
8. What support is needed?	6/6 Funding for resources and staff.
9. Which instructional strategies were effective?	3/6: Teachers used a variety of methods.
	6/6: Felt that students did not benefit equally.
10. Other.	6/6 Felt that additional funding is needed.

Table 4.

*Structured questions and answers*

Structured Questions	Answers from six participants
1. Instructional challenges.	6/6: Multiple skill-levels in one class.
2. Level of satisfaction with training.	5/6: Not satisfied.
3. How to prepare lower-skill level students for State testing?	6/6: Exposed students to grade-level concepts.
	6/6: Felt this strategy was unsuccessful.
4. What support is needed?	6/6: Need more funding.
5. Level of satisfaction with curriculum.	5/6: Not satisfied.
6. Level of satisfaction with lesson plans.	4/6: Did not cover all levels.
7. Opinion regarding accuracy of State Testing.	5/6: Not accurate in measuring progress of lower-skill level students.
8. Issues that impede progress.	6/6: Multiple skill-levels in one class.
9. Instructional Strategies.	3/6: Used variety of methods.
	6/6: Felt that students did not benefit equally.
10. Other	6/6: Felt that additional funding is needed.

Table 5.

*Research Question, Related Interview Questions, and Related Theme*

Research Question	Semi-Structured Interview Question	Structured Interview Question	Theme
R1. What are the experiences of the central phenomenon of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?	Q6. How does inclusion in middle-school affect classroom management? Q7. How do students (special-education and general-education) benefit from an inclusion classroom in middle school Q10. Considering the instructional challenges of teaching your middle-school inclusion classroom(s), what other pertinent information can you add to this interview?	Q7. How satisfied are you with the accuracy of State standardized testing in measuring progress for special-education and general-education students in your classroom(s)? Q8. What factors contribute to or hinder the progress of special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms? Q10. What information would you give to school leaders and state officials in developing policies for middle-school inclusion classrooms?	Theme 1. Theme 2. Theme 3.
R2. What are the shared perceptions and characterizations of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?	Q1: What are the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?	Q1. “What are the challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?”	Theme 1
R3. What are the shared perceptions of the effectiveness of current administrative support to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona?	Q2. What professional training has prepared you to teach special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms? Q3. How does your current curriculum allow you to adjust to varying academic skill-levels? Q8. How do school leaders and administration support the process of mainstreaming special-education students in middle school?	Q2. How satisfied are you with the training you received to prepare you for teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom? Q4. How satisfied are you with support received from administration? Q5. How satisfied are you with the school curriculum and the availability of additional resources within the curriculum to meet the needs of students’ various skill-levels?	Theme 2.
R4. What are the shared perceptions of the effectiveness of personal instructional strategies to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona?	Q4. How do you design lesson plans to meet the needs of various academic skill-levels? Q5. How do you prepare students of varying academic skills for mandatory standardized testing? Q9. What instructional strategies have you found effective in meeting the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom.	Q3. How do you prepare all students for mandated State standardized testing (AZ Merit)? Q6. How satisfied are you that your lesson plans satisfy all of your students’ academic needs? Q9. What personal instructional strategies have you found to be effective in teaching your inclusion classroom(s) containing students of varying skill-levels?	Theme 3.

## **Findings**

Findings resulted from a comprehensive exploration of narrative data and extrapolation of critical themes that represent case by case perceptions of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Presentation of findings includes narrative descriptions of participants' perceptions of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom and tables for visual display. Using NVivo 11 qualitative data analysis software, the researcher explored the content of transcriptions of interviews to identify patterns and extrapolate themes. Data analysis involved coding textual narrative of interviews and text search queries using NVivo 11 qualitative software.

## **Limitations**

This study concentrated on middle-school teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona. Although the study can be generalized to other grade levels and geographic locations, the findings of the study are limited to this geographic area. Therefore, the data do not allow comparison of various locations. The study deliberately omitted elective teachers such as art and dance teachers. The data do not allow for comparisons of classroom environments such as elective subjects compared to core subjects or teaching styles. Participants came from various school districts within Maricopa County. The researcher noted a comparison of income levels of school districts based on Free and Reduced Lunch Programs (Table 2). Interestingly, no significant data correlated to different income levels of school districts. Therefore, results did not include conditional comparisons.

## Major Themes

Throughout the data analysis, several major themes emerged regarding the challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Responses from semi-structured and structured interviews indicated three predominant themes:

### Theme 1

Funding is a significant challenge that impedes instruction in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Case by case analysis of structured and semi-structured interviews indicated that participants perceived funding obstacles that impede effective teaching. One hundred percent of semi-structured interview participants and 100% of structured interviews participants referred to concerns related to funding as a significant obstacle to teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Participant 2SSF commented, “Saving money on education does not make sense because society pays down the road. There is no money, no resources, and the students suffer.” Participant 6SEM explained, “Lack of money and resources are significant obstacles and affect morale.”

Question 1 in the semi-structured interviews asked, “What are the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?” Five out of six participants pointed to the challenge of having multiple-skill-levels in one classroom. When prodded for more information about multiple-skill-levels, all five teachers commented on difficulty teaching grade-level standards as required by State government. One out of six participants, 5IM8F, answered that behavior problems can pose the biggest challenge. When prodded for more information regarding behavior problems, this participant responded that general-education teachers are not trained to handle the needs of students with behavior disabilities. Additionally, 5IM8F commented that problematic behaviors,

even behaviors of benign nature such as compulsive rituals of students with OCD, distract from teaching.

Question 1 in the structured interviews asks, “What are the challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?” All six participants considered multiple-skill-levels of students a challenge of effective teaching. Participant 1SM7F explained that the challenges vary according to skill sets of students. “If I have groups that are on the same levels, then it is not as bad because I can teach groups. It is more challenging when there are single students scattered at different levels.”

Question 6 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “How does inclusion in middle-school affect classroom management?” Five out of six participants felt restricted in curbing behavior problems because they were unsure how to address disabilities involving behavior and did not want to infringe on students’ rights. Three out of six participants felt that problematic behavior specific to disabilities disrupted classrooms and impeded effective teaching.

Question 7 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “How do students (special-education and general-education) benefit from an inclusion classroom in middle school?” A subsequent question asked about issues that hinder progress. Three out of six participants were not sure about benefits to any of the students. Participant 2IHM replied, “I don’t know if anyone benefits.” Participant 3IEF answered, “There is not much benefit to anyone because it is not possible to reach all students.” Participant 4IHM answered, “to be honest, I don’t know.” Participant 4IHM added that a benefit “might be that special-education students stay with their classmates and get some grade-level exposure.” Four out of six participants felt that lower-level special-education

students benefited from exposure to grade-level instruction and remaining with peers in the general-education classroom. Two out of six participants felt that general-education students learned tolerance for different learning styles. All six participants answered that multiple skill-levels hindered progress. Four out of six participants responded that special-education students' problematic behavior hindered progress.

Question 7 of the structured interviews asked, "How satisfied are you with the accuracy of State standardized testing in measuring progress for special-education and general-education students in your classroom(s)?" One out of six participants was satisfied with the accuracy of standardized testing in measuring special-education and general-education students' progress. Five out of six participants felt that standardized tests did not always measure the achievement of general-education students accurately. Five out of six participants felt that standardized tests left out special-education students with below grade-level skills. Participant 3SH7M answered, "I think the tests should be on the level of the student so he can see his progress".

Question 8 of the structured interviews asked, "What factors contribute to or hinder the progress of special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms?" All six responses indicated that multi-skill-levels in one classroom hindered the progress of special-education. Upon further questioning, four out of six participants commented that additional teaching staff would help the situation. Five out of six answered that additional funding for teaching staff and resources would remedy some of the problems.

Question 10 of the semi-structured interviews asked, "Considering the instructional challenges of teaching your middle-school inclusion classroom(s), what other pertinent information can you add to this interview?" All six responses involved

funding for more teachers and resources. Three participants commented that administrators may not realize the situation and difficulties involved in teaching so many skill-levels in one classroom.

Question 10 of the structured interviews asked, “What information would you give to school leaders and state officials in developing policies for middle-school inclusion classrooms?” Four out of six responses included the need for more funding for additional teaching staff and resources to address multiple skill-levels. Two out of six wanted to tell leaders and officials that their policies were unreasonable, and one teacher cannot teach an inclusion classroom successfully because of multiple skill-levels and behaviors.

## **Theme 2**

Multiple skill-levels within one class impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Case by case analysis of structured and semi-structured interviews indicated that participants perceived multiple skill-levels as a significant problem that impedes effective teaching. Analysis of structured and semi-structured interviews revealed that 100% of semi-structured interview participants and 100% of structured interview participants referred to issues related to multiple skill-levels as a significant challenge that impedes effective teaching. For example, Participant 4SMF commented that having multiple-skill levels in one classroom was the most significant challenge and offered several reasons including the need to differentiate lessons, which embarrassed some students who tried to hide their assignments from other students. Participant 3SEF commented, “...so you just don’t know where to start. Do I teach to the middle or the high or the low?”

Question 2 in the semi-structured interviews asked, “What professional training has prepared you to teach special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms?” Three out of six participants admitted to having no training in special-education. Three out of six participants had some preparation. Two participants had limited professional development workshops. One participant had several undergraduate courses. Three out of six participants commented independently that more preparation in the area of special-education would benefit effectiveness as a teacher. When prodded about why training is significant, all six participants replied that teachers need more confidence in handling issues regarding special-education students. Additionally, all six teachers mentioned that more training would help with differentiating instruction for very low-level students.

Question 2 in the structured interviews asked, “How satisfied are you with the training you received to prepare you for teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?” Five out of six participants were not satisfied with the training they received regarding special-education students. Four out of six participants mentioned that they went into general-education and did not consider they needed special-education training. Participant 3SHM was satisfied with training because general-education teachers are not specialists in special-education and should not handle those issues. The researcher noted the tone of sarcasm in this answer.

Question 3 in the semi-structured interviews asked, “How does your current curriculum allow you to adjust to varying academic skill-levels?” Five out of six participants indicated that the curriculum did not offer sufficient resources for multiple skill-levels, especially lower-level students. When asked the reason for lack of resources, all six participants answered that insufficient funding attributed to lack of resources.

Question 4 of the structured interviews asked, “How satisfied are you with support received from administration?” All six participants named issues related to funding as areas that lacked support from administration. Funding issues included technology, resources, and additional teaching staff. Five out of six participants were satisfied with support from school principals and felt that support from higher levels of authority was lacking, especially in the area of funding. One out of six participants did not feel supported by administration from school or district levels.

Question 5 of the structured interviews asked, “How satisfied are you with the school curriculum and the availability of additional resources within the curriculum to meet the needs of students’ various skill-levels?” Five out of six participants answered that the curriculum did not have sufficient resources for multiple skill-levels and associated lack of resources with lack of funding. One out of six participants got resources from the curriculum of lower grade-levels.

Question 8 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “How do school leaders and administration support the process of mainstreaming special-education students in middle school?” All six participants were not satisfied with support from administration and responses reflected the need for more funding, including funding for more teachers and resources.

### **Theme 3**

Preparing for standardized tests impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. When getting ready for State-mandatory tests based on grade-level standards, teachers face the daunting task of preparing students of multiple skill-levels, including students with far below grade-level skills. Data analysis revealed that 100% of

semi-structured interview participants and 83% of structured interview participants demonstrated concerns about effective teaching when preparing students who are far below grade-level for a grade-level Arizona State mandated standardized test.

All six participants of semi-structured interviews and all six participants of structured interviews expressed the intention to familiarize lower skill-level, special-education students with grade-level concepts so that students will recognize items on the test. Six out of six semi-structured interview participants felt that the time teaching students with low-level skills could be better spent focusing on their individual needs. Regarding Arizona State standardized testing, Participant 2IHM commented, “It is like trying to pour a gallon of liquid into a quart-size container. It does not work.”

Participant 2IHM expressed concern for the students who were overwhelmed. One out of six participants of the structured interviews felt that mandated standardized tests accurately measured progress of students, including low-level special-education students. Eleven out of twelve total participants felt that mandated standardized testing did not accurately measure lower-level special-education students’ progress. For example, regarding special-education students, Participant 3SEF commented, “I wish they had the opportunity to show what they know instead of guessing about things that are beyond them.” Participant 3SEF expressed dismay about not having time to build up skills from students’ baselines rather than spending time drilling higher level concepts for the test.

Question 3 of the structured interviews asked, “How do you prepare all students for mandated State standardized testing (AZ Merit)?” All six participants answered that they exposed lower level student to grade-level curriculum in order to familiarize them with concepts that may appear on the state test. All six participants made reference to

ineffectiveness of preparing special-education students who are far below grade-level for State testing at grade-level. Participant 2SSF commented, “I feel like I am always spinning my wheels and I am sure the lower special-education students feel the same way.” Participant 1SMF commented, “I understand the premise of inclusion is to improve the achievement levels of special-education students; but, it is not reasonable to believe that they all can participate in general-education classrooms. I think some of my students would love to take a lower-level math course so they can learn.”

Question 4 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “How do you design lesson plans to meet the needs of various academic skill-levels?” One out of six participants included all skill-levels in lesson plans, including instruction of all skill-levels. Four out of six targeted lessons for grade-level learners and made reference regarding materials that could be used for multiple skill-levels. Time constraints prevented writing lesson plans for each of the multiple skill-levels. Four out of six participants felt that time for lesson planning could be increased with more teaching staff. Inadequate funding relates to inadequate teaching staff.

Question 5 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “How do you prepare students of varying academic skills for mandatory standardized testing?” All six participants exposed students to grade-level instruction so that the students could be familiar with concepts likely to be included in state tests. All six participants felt that lower-level, special-education students were not prepared to take grade-level state tests because the material was beyond their competence. All six teachers felt that mandating special-education students to take grade-level state tests was unfair and demoralizing. Participant 3E8F explained, “I teach the class the grade-level curriculum and hope the lower level

students will retain some of it for testing” and expressed concern that low-level students with learning disabilities rarely approach answered that the lesson plans were meeting the standards. All six participants felt they did not have time to prepare students who are far below grade-level standards.

Question 6 of the structured interviews asked, “How satisfied are you that your lesson plans satisfy all of your students' academic needs?” Four out of six participants answered that lesson plans did not cover the needs of all students, especially the lower-level special-education students. One out of six participants responded that lesson plans covered required standards and; therefore, met the needs of all students. One out of six participants included all levels in each lesson plan and felt that the lesson plans satisfied the needs of all students.

Question 9 of the semi-structured interviews asked, “What instructional strategies have you found effective in meeting the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom.” Three out of six participants used a variety of teaching strategies to reach all types of learners. One participant started lessons by teaching to the middle-level learners and extending lessons to others. Two out of six answered that it varied from year to year depending on students and did not feel they could answer that one is better than another. All six participants admitted that not all students benefited equally because of multiple skill-levels in one classroom.

Question 9 of the structured interviews asked, “What personal instructional strategies have you found to be effective in teaching your inclusion classroom(s) containing students of varying skill-levels?” Three out of six participants used a variety of teaching methods and materials to reach students with lower skill-levels. Two out of

six participants allotted extra time to teach students with lower skill-levels. One participant checked for understanding throughout the lessons and encouraged students to ask questions.

Table 6

*Main themes derived from participants' responses*

Experiences/Perceptions of Issues that Hinder Effective Teaching	% of Participants of Semi-Structured Interviews Who Expressed Concerns	% of Participants of Structured Interviews Who Expressed Concerns
Inadequate Funding	100%	100%
Multiple Skill-Levels	100%	100%
Preparing for Arizona State Standardized Tests	100%	83%

**Minor Themes**

Analysis of structured and semi-structured interviews revealed two minor themes. Lack of classroom management leads to ineffective teaching because teachers spend teaching-time on trying to manage behaviors. general-education teachers do not have adequate training in areas of special needs. The following discussion includes the minor themes as identified in results of data analysis.

**Minor Theme 1**

Problematic behavior affects classroom management. Case by case analysis of structured and semi-structured interviews indicated that participants perceived problematic behavior associated with students' disabilities as a significant cause of ineffective teaching. Fifty percent of semi-structured participants and 67% of structured interview participants referred to issues related to behavior as a significant challenge that

impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms. Two participants commented that when students’ problematic behaviors are associated with their disability, the teachers do not know how to address the situation and, consequently, disruptive behavior can go unchecked. For example, Participant 2IHM commented, “I used to be able to handle all behavior in the same way. Now, I feel that my class is less managed because I don’t want to be hauled into court for impeding someone’s rights.”

**Minor Theme 2**

Inclusion classroom teachers need more professional development. Twelve out of twelve teachers admitted to having little training regarding special-education students and learning disabilities. Ten out of twelve teachers had some professional development and two out of twelve had taken at least one credited class as part of their undergraduate program. Sixty-seven percent of the semi-structured interview participants referred to the need for training and 50% of the structured interview participants referred to the need for training regarding special needs. For example, Participant 2IHM commented, “They don’t train regular classroom teachers about how to teach special-education, so I feel like I wing it a lot.”

Table 7

*Minor themes according to participants’ responses*

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	Six Participants of Semi-Structured Interviews	Six Participants of Structured Interviews
Problematic Behavior	50%	67%
Professional Development	67%	50%

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## **Summary**

Chapter 4 included responses to semi-structured and structured interview questions by teachers of middle-school classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. Data analysis involved the use of NVivo 11 for coding textual data and extrapolating major themes. Major themes included inadequate funding for resources; teaching a class containing multiple skill-levels; and preparing for Arizona State mandated standardized testing. Minor themes comprised disruptive behavior impeding effective teaching and inadequate training to meet the needs of special-education students. Chapter 5 contains a summary of pertinent information gathered from participants' responses, implications and recommendations.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona to assist in developing effective policies and teaching practices. Although differing in approach, the predominant issue of most of the studies presented in the literature review involved general-education teachers' attitudes toward inclusionary practices. Most studies focused on teachers' acceptance of inclusion. None of the reviewed studies focused on the instructional challenges of inclusion classrooms in middle-school, which is a transitional period for students. The current study expands upon studies found in the literature review and focused on teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Middle-school typically presents challenges unique to adolescent students and this study focused on the instructional challenges of adding special-education students' needs to that environment. The participants reflected on challenges, including multiple skill-levels of students, the behavior of students, support from administration, and training. Chapter five presents study conclusions, recommendations, and the researcher's reflections on the study.

Based on analysis of responses from semi-structured interviews, structured interviews, and documents, findings answered research questions of the study.

R1. What are the experiences of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona? Participants felt that the challenges of effective teaching included multiple skill-levels; inadequate funding for resources; and preparing for Arizona State mandated standardized testing. Additional concerns included

problematic behavior specific to disabilities and insufficient professional development in special-education. More than half of the participants in this study felt that full inclusion policies did not benefit special-education or general-education students. Research questions two, three, and four explore these similar experiences in more detail and converge results with results documented from previous studies.

R2. What are the perceptions and characterizations of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona? Based on analysis of data, instructional issues included creating differentiated lesson plans and teaching lower-level students. Lesson plans target grade-level concepts required by curriculum standards. However, classes contain multiple-skill levels. Time constraints limit individual attention and prevent effective teaching to all levels. The curriculum focuses on grade-level standards and does not have adequate resources for lower academic levels. Therefore, teachers struggled to find appropriate assignments that aligned to the grade-level curriculum. Similar objections resonate in previous studies regarding structured standard-based lesson plans. According to Lawrence et al. (2013), standards-based lesson plans do not provide the flexibility to accommodate students who need remediation.

R3. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of current administrative support to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms teachers within Maricopa County, Arizona? Although some administrators at the school level provided moral support, teachers' responses indicated that insufficient funding left teachers without adequate materials to teach effectively. Inadequate funding affects the availability of resources to reach multiple academic levels. Curriculum

contained some resources for interventions; however, the curriculum did not contain enough resources for students with significantly lower skill-levels. Teachers gleaned material from lower grade-level teachers or searched online for assignments suitable for students with below-grade-level academic levels. With limited time for planning and individualized teaching, teachers do not have time to search for resources. A comparison of results to previous studies demonstrates agreement with the findings of the current study: inadequate funding thwarts availability of resources for lower academic levels. According to Thomas and Loxley (2007), scant funding results in insufficient resources and insufficient staff.

Additionally, professional development requires funding. According to participants' responses, general-education middle-school teachers do not have sufficient training regarding differentiated instruction and comprehensive teaching methods for various learning styles. Likewise, Lindsey (2013) concluded training teachers regarding mainstreaming special-education students requires more funding. McLesky and Weldon (2002) maintain that successful inclusion of special needs students into general-education classrooms requires hands-on training with continued support and collaboration from professionals who can assist teachers with real-life situations.

A comparison of the results of the current study to previous studies reveals similarities in professional development. Research conducted by Causton-Theoharis et al. (2011) demonstrates the need for additional training for teachers in inclusive classroom settings to meet the needs of varying academic skill-levels and behavioral difficulties. Investigating inclusion programs, McCray and McHatton (2011) concluded that general-education teachers receive minimal training regarding behavior problems

specific to students with disabilities.

R4. What are the perceptions of the effectiveness of personal instructional strategies to meet the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona? Teachers expressed concern for special-education students who fail despite their best efforts. The pressure to teach all the standards within scheduled time periods leaves little room to reteach lessons. Students who struggle with concepts can be left behind as other students move forward. Lingo (2014) agrees that struggling students can fall behind quickly in middle school with fast-paced lessons and limited class time. The middle-school schedule leaves little time for review or to give attention to students with lower-level skills.

Question three of the structured interviews asked, “How do you prepare all students for mandated State standardized testing (AZ Merit)?” All six participants exposed lower level student to grade-level curriculum to familiarize them with concepts that may appear on the state test. All six participants felt that preparing special-education students who are far below grade-level for Arizona State testing at grade-level was not effective teaching.

Moreover, most participants taught grade-level concepts to expose low skill-level students to grade-level concepts. Teachers hoped this strategy would help students recognize some of the concepts when presented in the test. Similarly, a qualitative study by Coleman (2014) suggests that teachers do not think the standards-based tests accurately measure the progress of lower academic level special-education students. Furthermore, traditional teacher-training programs no longer prepare general-education teachers for the complexities of an inclusive environment because standardized testing

based on mandated standards has added another complication to inclusion (McLesky and Weldon, 2002).

Furthermore, responses indicated that teachers feel ill-equipped to handle problematic behavior resulting from students' disabilities and, consequently, struggled with classroom management. Teachers avoided addressing behavior particular to disability due to concerns about infringing on the rights of disabled students. Teachers indicated that they needed more training because disruptive behavior can impede learning of all students in the classroom.

Similarities exist in previous studies concerning increased problematic behavior in inclusion classrooms. According to Rusby et al. (2011), fluctuating emotions and changes in relationships during adolescence result in behavioral problems and academic decline, which puts additional stress on middle-school teachers. According to Lindsey (2013), the most significant challenges reported by teachers include lack of training regarding the needs of special-education students, managing the behaviors of special-education students, and lack of support from the school community in creating an inclusive environment.

### **Recommendations**

The results of the study identify current instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms in Arizona. Recommendations are based on the findings and conclusion of the study and include suggestions for leaders about how to apply the results of the study in designing middle-school inclusion programs.

Recommendations include a narrative of topics that need closer examination to resolve the problem that imprecise policies for teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms

result in insufficient guidance for effectively teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Examination of topics generates new questions for future studies.

### **Recommendations to Leaders**

Through the experiences of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers, Arizona public school leaders and policy-makers might focus on the challenges cited by participants. Information obtained from this study can assist Arizona, public school leaders in preparing professional development programs to address inclusion classes. Furthermore, the current study may assist Arizona policy-makers in developing policies that support teachers to effectively teach middle-school inclusion classrooms. The results from the current study can assist in resolving the identified problem of imprecise policies and insufficient guidance for effectively teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms (Vannest et al., 2011).

*Funding is a significant challenge that impedes instruction in middle-school inclusion classroom.* Participants of this study agreed that funding issues significantly impede effective teaching. Lack of funding affects staffing, teaching materials, and other resources required to teach effectively in middle-school inclusion classrooms.

*Multiple skill-levels within one class impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms.* Participants perceived multiple skill-levels as a significant problem that impedes effective teaching. With various skill levels, teachers find that it is difficult to keep all students engaged throughout lessons. Additionally, teachers must accommodate work to meet diverse skill levels and design several lesson plans.

*Preparing for Arizona-State-mandated standardized tests impedes effective teaching in middle-school inclusion classrooms.* Ninety-one percent of participants

agreed that preparing students for mandatory standardized tests interfered with effective teaching. The time spent teaching students with low-level skills could be better spent focusing on their individual needs.

*Problematic behavior affects classroom management.* Lack of classroom management leads to ineffective teaching. Teachers spend time managing behaviors instead of instructing. Participants' responses indicated they lack confidence dealing with the behavior issues of special-education students.

*Inclusion classroom teachers need additional professional development.* General-education teachers do not have adequate training in areas of special needs. Uneasiness about insufficient knowledge of disabilities affects how teachers respond to students. Additionally, teachers expressed the need for training to teach students with multiple academic levels.

### **Recommendations to Curriculum Specialists**

Recent advances in curriculum include tiered resources for interventions and benefit students who dip slightly below or approach grade-level standards. However, the tiered resources do not benefit students who demonstrate far below grade-level abilities. For example, reading disabled students with average cognitive ability can understand grade-level lessons, but cannot read grade-level text. They need to access the contents of text to participate in group discussion, read assignments, and studying for tests. Additionally, special-education students with below-average cognitive ability can access some modified grade-level concepts if the presentation is designed at a lower grade-level. If inclusion models continue to expand in public schools, curriculum must meet the challenge by incorporating resources for below grade-level learners.

## **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Previous research focused on middle-school, inclusion classrooms, and classroom management in isolation. This study explored the issues surrounding teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms collectively. Issues included the behavioral needs of adolescent students with special needs, the combination of general and special-education adolescent students, multiple academic skill-levels in one classroom, preparing students for mandated standardized tests, and resources needed to effectively teach middle-school inclusion classrooms. The exploratory nature of the current study naturally lends to future research that examines experiences specific to middle-school inclusion classrooms. Additional exploratory studies might expand the study to explore students' perspectives of inclusion classrooms. Expanding the number of participants may yield useful quantifiable results. A quantitative study may expand on the results of the current study by increasing the demographic range of participants.

Future research might assist in developing classroom environments conducive to effectively teaching middle-school inclusion classroom and develop training programs for general-education teachers to prepare them for the combined needs of special-education and general-education students. Inadequate research regarding the instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms hinders development of clearly defined policies. Future studies regarding teaching inclusion classrooms of high school may give information to use for developing inclusion programs in secondary education.

## **Reflections**

As a special-education teacher, the researcher witnessed significant changes over the past decade regarding the placement and instruction of special-education students. When the federal government passed NCLB, States mandated standardized testing (Ladd, 2016). After conducting this study, the researcher feels that the Federal and State governments made hasty decisions without sufficient research, planning, or, most importantly, input from educators in the field writing documents and working with students. The researcher remembers confusion at this time and bewilderment about why educators were not consulted before developing Federal and State regulations that contradict established special-education laws

Additionally, with NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA, special-education students began rapidly mainstreaming into general-education classes, especially in the upper grades where teachers are highly qualified in content areas (Antony, 2012). Inclusion was introduced as a means to teach special-education students in the least restrictive environment of the general-education class (American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 2015). Although the law underscores the least restrictive environment through inclusion programs, it does not clearly define inclusion nor supply schools with adequate funding to implement regulations (Hayes, 2015). After conducting this study, the researcher feels that the Federal and State governments made decisions without sufficient research, planning, or, more importantly, input from educators in the field, working with students. The researcher agrees with Kauffman and Badar (2014) that the focus of inclusion has become the education environment over the quality of education for special-education students.

Over a decade after passing NCLB and the reauthorization of IDEA, the researcher sought to explore experiences of a targeted population of teachers. The experience has confirmed the researcher's belief that teachers' input is essential when developing policies and procedures for the classroom and that this study can be useful to policy makers. After conducting this study, the researcher feels that the Federal and State governments made decisions without sufficient research, planning, or, more importantly, input from educators in the field working with students. This study has led the researcher to agree with Kauffman and Badar (2014) that the focus of inclusion has become the education environment over the quality of education for special-education students. The researcher urges future research about teaching inclusion classrooms in middle-school and other grades to help school leaders and policy makers consider the experiences of teachers when making decisions.

With the No Child Left Behind Act, States adopted and mandated standardized testing. The Reauthorization of IDEA highlighted the rights of special-education students to be taught in the least restrictive environment of the general-education classroom. Decisions to mainstream special-education students into general-education classrooms increase in middle-school through high-school where teachers specialize in content area instruction. Middle-school students are at a fragile age due to physical and emotional changes as they transition from childhood to adulthood. Special-education students with emotional and behavioral disabilities can demonstrate increased problematic behaviors during adolescence. Middle-school inclusion classrooms contain general-education and special-education students and students may range significantly in academic skill-levels. Additionally, middle-school inclusion classrooms may contain students with behavioral

disabilities.

Overall outcomes of the study, including comparison and convergence of documented results of other studies, indicate that middle-school teachers of inclusion classrooms perceive several challenges that interfere with effective teaching. Multiple academic skill-levels make it difficult to reach all students. Inadequately funded inclusion programs prevent teachers from having sufficient materials and additional teachers in the classroom. Problematic behaviors specific to disabilities disrupt teaching and teachers are unclear about how to address behaviors. Teachers do not have sufficient training regarding the needs of special-education students. Preparing special-education students with low academic skill-levels for mandated standardized tests does not genuinely benefit special-education students; but merely familiarizes students with concepts that might be found in tests, increasing probability of guessing correct answers.

### **Summary**

Previous research explored issues of inclusion individually. The current study investigated the issues collectively as the research explored the experiences of teaching middle-school inclusion classes using exploratory multiple-case study design. The results of the current study may prompt future studies. The results avail policy makers to the insights of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers. The results can be used in developing more effective inclusion programs, development of professional training for general-education teachers, and improving policies for increased effectiveness. Additionally, the results can be used for curriculum reform to include low level academic material that aligns with grade-level concepts.

With rapid changes in special-education, general-education teachers have taken

more responsibility for special-education students without sufficient planning or training. Results of this study give school leaders and policy makers information specific to the needs of middle-school inclusion classroom teachers to provide teachers with an effective teaching environment and students with an effective learning environment, including more resources and additional teachers to lower teacher to student ratios. Focused attention on results of this study and future research regarding middle-school inclusion classrooms can help plan inclusion programs and teacher training to facilitate effective teaching and learning in inclusion classrooms.

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## Appendix A: Recruitment Solicitation

### Middle School Teachers

Call for participants: this is an opportunity for you to tell about your experiences concerning teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. If your seventh or eighth-grade class is (1) located within Maricopa County, Arizona, (2) includes both special-education students and general-education students, and (3) you teach a core subject (language arts, mathematics, social studies, or science), you meet the purposive criteria for this study. In partial completion of doctoral degree, I am conducting a research study entitled Teaching Middle-school Inclusion Classrooms: A Qualitative Exploratory Multiple-Case Study. I am collecting information regarding teaching experiences in middle-school inclusion classroom. The purpose of this study is to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms in Arizona. As a voluntary participant, you will be asked to participate in one interview by telephone, taking approximately one hour. Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. No risks are anticipated in participating in this interview. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. Informed consent will be obtained from perspective participants before interviews.

If interested in participating in this study, please contact:

Deborah Lashley by telephone at \_\_\_\_ or by email at \_\_\_\_.

## Appendix B: Informed Consent

### Informed Consent: Participants 18 Years of Age or Older

#### UNIVERSITY OF PHOENIX

Dear Prospective Participant,

My name is Deborah Lashley and I am a student at the University of Phoenix working on a doctoral degree.

I am doing a research study entitled Teaching Middle-school Inclusion Classrooms. The purpose of the qualitative, exploratory multiple-case research study is to explore and identify the patterns and types of instructional challenges of teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms in Arizona. The targeted population includes core-subject teachers of seventh or eighth-grade classrooms within Maricopa County, Arizona. The sample size of this study will include a minimum of twelve participants.

**Participation:** Your voluntary participation will involve one telephone interview at a time convenient for you. The time commitment will be no more than one hour. I will randomly select at least six of the participants for semi-structured interviews with open-ended question and at least six for structured interviews with closed-ended questions. The data you give me will be used for my doctoral dissertation, required as partial fulfillment of my Education Doctoral Degree from the University of Phoenix. The research results will be used for publication. This study may be used as the basis for articles or future studies. I will interview by telephone in one session of one hour or less. If unexpected circumstances arise during the interview, I will give you the opportunity to complete the interview. **If you cannot complete the interview, I will not resume the interview at another time.** If you cannot complete the interview in one session, I will terminate your participation in the study.

**Audio-recording of interviews:** With your permission, I will audio record the interviews to ensure accurate transcription. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording. You must give permission for audio recording the interview. You may decline recording and remain a participant in the study. If recording is declined, I will take notes throughout the interview.

**Withdrawing from study:** You can decide to be a part of this study or not. Once you start, you can withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits. You can withdraw from the

study at any time by mailing or delivering in person a dated, signed letter stating decision to withdraw. The researcher will provide a stamped, self-addressed envelope to each participant for this purpose, if necessary.

**Confidentiality:** At no time will your actual identity be revealed. Upon consent to participate, I will assign you a code that replaces your name. The key linking your name with your code will be kept in a secured cabinet in my home and no one else will have access to it. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. All materials including the key to your name code and the transcription of your interview will be destroyed no earlier than 36 months after the study is published and no later than 40 months after the study is published. The results of the research study may be published but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be made known to any outside party.

**Risks:** In this research, there are no foreseeable risks to expect except: none. I anticipate no risks in participating in this study.

**Benefits:** Although there may be no direct benefit to you, a possible benefit from your participation is that you will have the opportunity to tell about your experiences teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms. Results from this study could provide insight for educational leaders regarding mainstreaming middle-school special-education students into general-education inclusion classrooms. Data uncovered in this study may assist in planning for professional development and future policies regarding middle-school inclusion classrooms. Additionally, educational leaders can gain an understanding of the issues involved in teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms.

**Costs:** There is no cost to the subject for participating in this study.

If you have any questions about the research study, please call me at \_\_\_\_ or email me at \_\_\_\_\_.

For questions about your rights as a study participant, or any concerns or complaints, please contact the University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board via email at [IRB@phoenix.edu](mailto:IRB@phoenix.edu).

As a participant in this study, you should understand the following:

1. You may decide not to be part of this study or you may want to withdraw from the study at any time. If you want to withdraw, you can do so without any problems. You can withdraw from the

study at any time by mailing or delivering in person a dated, signed letter stating decision to withdraw.

2. Your identity will be kept confidential. Your identity will remain confidential throughout the study and after the conclusion of the study.
3. Deborah Lashley, the researcher, has fully explained the nature of the research study and has answered all of your questions and concerns.
4. Interviews may be audio recorded. You must give permission for the researcher, Deborah Lashley, to audio record the interviews. You understand that the information from the audio recorded interviews may be transcribed. The researcher will develop a way to code the data to assure that your identity is protected.
5. Data will be kept secure in a locked cabinet in the researcher's (Deborah Lashley) home. The data will be kept for three years, and then destroyed.
6. The results of this study may be published.

The purpose of audio recording the interview has been sufficiently explained and

I agree to the audio recording of my interview.  I do not agree to the audio recording of my interview  
(CHECK ONE)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

“By signing this form, you agree that you understand the nature of the study, the possible risks to you as a participant, and how your identity will be kept confidential. When you sign this form, this means that you are 18 years old or older and that you give your permission to volunteer as a participant in the study that is described here.”

I accept the above terms.  I do not accept the above terms. (CHECK ONE)

Signature of the research participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix C: Semi-structured Interview Questions

1. What are the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?
2. What professional training has prepared you to teach special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms? Please include pre-service training, professional development, and mentoring programs.
3. How does your current curriculum allow you to adjust to varying academic skill-levels?
  - a. What types of supplemental resources do you use for students with below grade-level skills?
    - i. Do you access supplemental resources from the curriculum or from personal resources?
4. How do you design lesson plans to meet the needs of various academic skill-levels?
5. How do you prepare students of varying academic skills for mandatory standardized testing?
6. How does inclusion in middle school affect classroom management?
  - a. What personal strategies have found effective in maintaining proper classroom management?
7. How do students (special-education and general-education) benefit from an inclusion classroom in middle school?
  - a. What issues hinder the progress of students?
8. How do school leaders and administration support the process of mainstreaming special-education students in middle school?
  - a. What information would you give to policy makers regarding teaching middle-school inclusion classrooms?
9. What instructional strategies have you found effective in meeting the instructional challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom.
10. Considering the instructional challenges of teaching your middle-school inclusion classroom(s), what other pertinent information can you add to this interview?

## Appendix D: Structured Interview Questions

1. What are the challenges of teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom?
2. How satisfied are you with the training you received to prepare you for teaching a middle-school inclusion classroom? Please, include pre-service training and professional development. Please, elaborate and give reasons for your answer.
3. How do you prepare all students for mandated state standardized testing (AZ Merit)?
4. How satisfied are you with support received from administration? Please, elaborate and give reasons for your answer.
5. How satisfied are you with the school curriculum and the availability of additional resources within the curriculum to meet the needs of students' various skill-levels? Please, elaborate and give reasons for your answer.
6. How satisfied are you that your lesson plans satisfy all of your students' academic needs? Please, elaborate and give reasons for your answer.
7. How satisfied are you with the accuracy of State standardized testing in measuring progress for special-education and general-education students in your classroom(s)? Please, elaborate and give reasons for your answer.
8. What issues contribute to or hinder the progress of special-education students placed in inclusion classrooms.
9. What personal instructional strategies have you found to be effective in teaching your inclusion classroom(s) containing students of varying skill-levels?
10. What information would you give to school leaders and state officials in developing policies for middle-school inclusion classrooms?