ELEMENTARY TEACHERS UNDERSTANDING OF DISABILTY, INCLUSION, AND
SPECIAL EDUCATION: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC STUDY

By

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ABSTRACT

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A wide range of cultural studies research have explored the impact of deeply held cultural stereotypes on stakeholders' attitudes and dispositions towards race, gender and class, which has resulted in the development of culturally responsive teaching frameworks designed to address educational inequity for diverse groups of students. Research exploring cultural stereotypes of disability however, is generally missing from the special education literature. A phenomenographic case study design was used to explore stakeholders' cultural perceptions of disability, special education and inclusion in a rural elementary school. This study involved 30 participants from various stakeholder groups. Semi-structured interviews and a researcher developed image sort were utilized to explore participants' conceptions of disability, inclusion and special education. The data revealed that the majority of participants' perceive disability to be primarily physical or visible. This is important because the majority of students found eligible for special education services have invisible disabilities such as LD, ASD, EI, ADHD, POHI, etc. These findings have significant implications for teacher practice and teacher preparation programs.

DEDICATION

To Julie, the most incredible woman I have ever known and my reason for being. Your unending support, love, and confidence motivated me to persevere through the most challenging of nights. Without your guidance and encouragement, I would never have known what I am capable of accomplishing. It is because of you that I am in this new place pursuing my passion. To my daughter Jessa, my biggest fan, my eternal cheerleader and one of the most patient twelve year olds a mother could ask for. I hope this experience has shown you what can be accomplished when you believe in yourself. To my daughter Devan, for challenging me to believe blindly in the love between a mother and her child. To Dr. Susan Peters for showing me a different way to think about disability, special education, and inclusion.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom and curriculum has received increasing support both legislatively and socially for well over a decade. In the United States, many school districts are shifting from segregated special education service delivery models to more inclusive models. This change in service delivery not only has implications for where students are serviced, but how they are serviced. "Simply integrating children with disabilities into general education environments without pedagogically dealing with attitudes is meaningless and, in some cases, increases negative attitudes" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 7). Therefore, a shift in placement must also include a shift in attitudes – an important lesson learned from the racial desegregation of schools.

In *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1954)*, the Supreme Court unanimously recognized that the segregation of school children by race, even if the facilities and other tangibles were equal, deprives them of equal educational opportunity (Donelan, Neal, & Deneese, 1994). And though *Brown* helped remove legally sanctioned barriers to educational equality, subsequent policies allowing academic tracking and ability grouping drew new boundaries to stifle African Americans as they sought to realize their full potential in school and life (Donelan, Neal, & Deneese, 1994). Howard (2006) attributes this to the fact that "schooling, like all other social institutions, continues to function as a system of privilege and preference, reinforced by power, favoring certain groups over others" (p. 118). Therefore, we cannot simply attend to issues of placement without also attending to issues of deeply held cultural biases, stereotypes, and perceptions.

Many scholars have indicated that the examination of deeply held cultural beliefs is a critical first step in raising awareness of the educational inequities experienced by marginalized groups of students. For example, Teel and Obidah (2008) stress that competent teachers possess an "awareness of race, of the possibility of their own racism and the racism of others, and the significance of these perceptions in the teaching and learning process" (p. 4). Giroux stated that, "education works best when those experiences that shape and penetrate one's lived realities are jolted, unsettled, and made the object of critical analysis" (as cited in Szpara & Wylie, 2005, p. 811). Additionally, Szpara and Wylie (2005) suggest that only through "deep reflection and experiential opportunities" can "peoples belief systems (including their prejudices and biases)" be influenced (p. 811). This has important implications because *Brown* served as a catalyst for legislation aimed at equalizing educational opportunities for other minority groups including students with disabilities. Fitch (2002) recommends developing closer collaboration between the movements for inclusive education and multicultural education in an effort to address the lack of cultural understanding and critical discourse that continues to reproduce segregation and inequality for disabled and minority students.

The 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), later called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) with its subsequent reauthorizations, mandated that students with disabilities receive access to a free and appropriate public education in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Both IDEA and *Brown* sought to address educational inequity by changing "where" minority and students with disabilities received their education, however limited attention was given to "how" this would occur. Much like academic tracking and ability grouping allowed the continued segregation of minority students, IDEA's requirement that school districts provide a complete continuum of alternative placement options

allowed opportunities for the continued segregation of some students with disabilities (Kavale & Forness, 2000).

The achievement gap that exists today between white and minority students and students with disabilities suggests there is more to be done than simply changing educational locations. Ukpokodu (2007) argues that unless teachers are prepared to develop a sense of consciousness of schooling as a sociopolitical context and a sense of social responsibility, the academic failure of urban students and the achievement gap will remain problematic and will continue to prepare teachers who cannot successfully teach in urban schools. This also has implications for special education as increasing numbers of students with disabilities are placed in general education classrooms for the majority of the school day to comply with the legislative requirements of NCLB (2001) and IDEIA (2004). Teachers must be prepared to teach increasingly diverse populations of students, which as Grant & Asimeng-Boahene (2006) suggest, requires teachers to come to terms with their preconceived notions of the abilities of students from diverse backgrounds if they are to see past the stereotypical underachievement of diverse students. Teachers must also come to terms with their preconceived notions and stereotypical beliefs about students with disabilities as well.

It is important to understand how educational stakeholders' assign meaning to the terms and concepts disability, special education and inclusion because they are frequently used in education research and practice yet how they are conceptualized has been relatively unexplored. Much of the research on inclusion explores stakeholders' professional rather than cultural attitudes and dispositions towards including students with disabilities in the general education classroom and often assumes that stakeholders have a shared understanding of these concepts. If individuals hold differing conceptions of these terms and we proceed as if there is a shared

understanding, much of the work aimed at improving the educational experiences of students with disabilities may be missing a critical component that could prove very useful in changing attitudes and dispositions towards inclusive education. According to Artiles (2003), unless researchers and practitioners surface their assumptions about difference, as well as culture and space, the special education field will continue to perpetuate the silences that threaten the educational and life needs of historically marginalized students. This study aims to add to the special education literature by exploring how stakeholders at Parker Elementary understand the concepts special education, inclusion, and disability and to raise awareness of potential misconceptions that may influence inclusive attitudes and dispositions. Because perceptions are often very personal, phenomenographic methodology was used. However, because perceptions are also driven by cultural factors, critical semiotics was also used as an additional analytic frame.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to explore how stakeholders assign meaning to the concepts inclusion, special education, and disability. Additionally, it was intended to enrich our knowledge about individual's conceptions of disability, special education and inclusion and the role of culture in the development of these conceptions. A researcher developed image sort was used to elicit responses beyond those obtained through semi-structured interviews. Because participants might be inclined to respond to interview questions in prescribed ways, the image sort was created as a method for promoting dialogue, affording opportunities for a deeper understanding of participants' conceptions of disability and inclusion. An exploration of the meanings individuals assign to the concepts disability, special education, and inclusion may provide powerful insights that could potentially inform our efforts to improve inclusive practices.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study were the following:

1. How do teachers and students understand the phenomenon of disability, inclusion, and special education?

2. What categories or patterns of the phenomenon emerge within and between the participant groups?

3. How do the intra and inter-individual understandings of the phenomenon of disability, special education, and inclusion reflect current policy and practice?

4. Does the image sort/verbal protocol and the semi-structured interview elicit similar and/or different aspects of the relationship between the participant and their understanding of the phenomenon of disability, inclusion, and special education?

5. What are the potential implications for practice?

Background on the Problem

With the legislative call for increased accountability for the academic achievement of students with disabilities, many school districts have shifted from self-contained special education service delivery models to increasingly inclusive models where students with disabilities receive the majority of their instruction in the general education classroom. Since the passage of No Child Left Behind in 2001, with its expectation that students with disabilities demonstrate progress towards grade level standards, increasing numbers of students with disabilities are being included in the general education curriculum. This is most frequently achieved through inclusive practices. The U.S. Department of Education (2009) estimates that more than half of all students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent or more of their day in the general education classroom.

The increased implementation of inclusive practices has resulted in a variety of research studies exploring issues related to inclusion. Much of this research explores stakeholders' professional rather than cultural attitudes and dispositions towards including students with disabilities in the general education classroom (Alghazo, Dodeen, & Algaryouti, 2003; Avramidis, 2002; Cook, 2001; Hastings, Hewes, Lock, & Witting, 1996; Monahan, Marino, & Miller, 1996; Praisner, 2003; Waldron, McLeskey, & Pacchiano, 1999) and often assumes that stakeholders have a shared understanding of the concepts "inclusion", "disability", and "special education". This assumption warrants exploration because these terms are frequently used in special education research and practice yet how individuals assign meaning to these concepts has been relatively unexplored. It is also important to explore conceptions of all three terms: disability, inclusion, and special education, because beliefs about one influence beliefs about the other(s). Those who ascribe to a clinical/medical rather than sociological conception of disability would likely have clinical/medical conceptions of special education and inclusion. From the medical model perspective, special education is frequently perceived as involving diagnosis and treatment and inclusion in the general education classroom is frequently perceived as more appropriate for students with mild impairments.

Though many studies have explored stakeholders' professional attitudes towards inclusion, special education and disability (Alghazo, Dodeen, & Algaryouti, 2003; Praisner, 2003; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Everhart, 2009; Monahan, Marino, & Miller, 1996), few have considered how participants' more personal and culturally rooted conceptions may influence their understanding of these terms. A wide range of cultural studies research suggests that stakeholders are likely to hold deep cultural stereotypes about these issues and while cultural stereotypes about race, class, and gender have been well researched, this type of cultural studies

inquiry is generally missing from the special education literature. Baglieri & Shapiro (2012) suggest that attempts to understand the issues of disability, schooling, and inclusive education at a micro level must examine the cultural meanings of disability at a macro level. In other words, large macro-level social issues and policies affect individual perceptions (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2001).

One example is the fact that legally enforced racial desegregation contributed to individual racist beliefs in the United States. The Supreme Court mandated the desegregation of schools, however they failed to provide strong supervision, which signaled a weak commitment to change and encouraged white resistance (Feagin & Barnett, 2005). According to Feagin and Barnett (2005), most school desegregation has done little more than change the demographic mix of students. They maintain that in most segregated schools, teachers are disproportionately white and many other features of school settings remain white-normed. Given the realities of institutionalized racism, black children in desegregated schools with white majorities have continued to face racial harassment and other discrimination (Feagin & Barnett, 2005).

Special education has experienced similar issues. Historically, special education within the public school system developed as a specialized program separate from general education and was embodied in the categorical "special class" (MacMillan & Hendrick, 1993; Safford & Safford, 1998). And according to Gerber (1996), it was seen as the best means for avoiding conflicts while providing universal education. However, Dunn's (1968) seminal article entitled *Special Education for the Mildly Retarded – Is Much of it Justifiable?* questioned whether separate "special" classes were justifiable, which brought the issue of inclusion to the forefront. Since that time, there has been contentious debate between special education traditionalists, who maintain that a continuum of service options is necessary to meet the diverse needs of students

with disabilities (Pugach & Lilly, 1984; Reynolds & Wang, 1983) and full inclusionists, who

maintain that all students with disabilities be integrated, regardless of disability type or severity

level (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984b).

Though IDEA requires consideration of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for

students with disabilities, it does not mandate full inclusion. Various stakeholders' that may have

differing perceptions of disability and special education determine the extent to which students

with disabilities are included in the general education classroom. According to Fitch (2002),

continued educational segregation and inequality for individuals with disabilities may be due to

the lack of cultural understanding and critical discourse in this area. This study sought to add to

this critical discourse by examining stakeholders' perceptions of disability, special education,

and inclusion at Parker Elementary School (a pseudonym). Though multiple theoretical

frameworks provided the foundation for this study, a summary of the broader theoretical

framework, sociocultural theory, will be provided in the next section. Phenomenography and

critical semiotics, which provided the analytic framework, will be discussed in greater depth in

Chapter Three.

Theoretical Framework

Sociocultural theory provided the broader theoretical framework for this research study due

to its overarching focus on the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-

construction of knowledge (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Sociocultural approaches are based on

the concept that human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and

other symbol systems (semiotic mediation), and can be best understood when investigated in

their historical development (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). This study draws upon the aspect of

sociocultural theory focused on Semiotic Mediation (Lemke, 1997) where cultural tools and

various signs are used to construct meaning. Chandler (2005) defines semiotics as the study of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech and anything that 'stands for' something else. Signs take the form of words, images, sounds, odors, flavors, acts or objects. However, as Chandler (2009) asserts, these have no intrinsic meaning and only become signs when we invest them with meaning.

Special education has been criticized for its reliance on labeling and categorization, which according to Bourdieu (1984) provide ways to perceive and ignore, to value and devalue, to include as well as exclude individuals associated with these categories and labels. Labeling deviance theory helps explain how enforceable definitions of deviant labels such as "learning disabled", "culturally disadvantaged", or "at risk" depend on the ability of one or more groups to gain enough power to enforce their definition or version of normality, competence, social worth/utility, and morality on others (Fitch, 2002, p. 468). And though this theory was not used as a framework for this study, it recognizes the centrality of language in the social construction of deviance and deviant identities and how societies create, sustain, and penalize nonconformity as certain individuals and groups are positioned outside the norm (Fitch, 2002), which reflect underpinnings of sociocultural theory. Chandler (2005) suggests studying semiotics to assist us in becoming more aware of reality as a construction and of the roles we play in constructing it. Additionally, he asserts that deconstructing and contesting the realities of signs can reveal whose realities are privileged and whose are suppressed; a critical notion to consider when exploring inclusive education.

Thomas and Corker (2002) argue that while our understandings about the nature of the body and mind as being impaired or not are produced in our social interactions, they originate and are mediated through the ways that language symbolizes our ideas about the human body.

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The meaning of disability, like so many other meanings within culture, is not fixed but rather is changed across time and place (Scully, 2002). Sociocultural theory is inherent in the social models of disability and serves as the foundation for this study particularly as it relates to semiotic mediation. However, this study was supported more specifically by phenomenography and critical semiotics because images and language were used to explore how meanings of disability are constructed and perceived across various stakeholder groups. Phenomenography and critical semiotics as methodological frameworks for this study will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study explored the qualitatively different ways that stakeholders at Parker elementary understand special education, disability, and inclusion. To provide a foundation for understanding conceptions of disability, I will begin this chapter with a brief overview of the historical development of cultural conceptions of disability. This will be followed by a review of the literature on teacher beliefs because according to Brown (2006), beliefs are the best predictors of individual behavior and educators' beliefs influence their perceptions, judgments, and practices. I will further review the special education literature on perceptions of disability and inclusion and provide a brief summary of the literature in diversity education specifically in terms of how disability is addressed within the field and how some of the methods used to develop cultural awareness in preservice and in-service teachers might also be used to increase disability awareness. I will close the chapter with a discussion of two opposing models of disability, the medical model of disability and the social model of disability. Though they are considered competing models, when taken together, they may actually provide a framework for improving inclusive practices.

Cultural Perceptions of Disability

    History of cultural conceptions of disability. The cultural narrative of disability as a deficit is woven throughout our history from the perceived inability of individuals with disabilities to contribute to human survival to the perceived threat of passing on undesirable or defective genes, to the need for segregated, specialized programming. Today individuals with disabilities experience increased access to and participation in their communities, however deeply held cultural stereotypes may continue to impose barriers to full inclusion. Therefore, it is

crucial to consider the various ways disability has been culturally influenced and socially constructed over time. I will begin this review with a brief description of culture as it is referred to in this study.

Kalyanpur & Harry (1999) describe culture as the "shared implicit and explicit rules and traditions that express the beliefs, values, and goals of a group of people" (p. 3). Our perceptions of and responses to disability have a rich history dating back to primitive societies (Funk, 1987). Our past influences our present therefore, it is prudent to examine historical conceptions of disability and their influence on present day perceptions of special education and inclusion. As Baglieri & Shapiro (2012) attest, "Attitudes do not arise in a vacuum- they emerge from the customs, laws, and practices of the past. Examining their foundations helps us perceive the long-lasting influence of culture and beliefs about disability on the present" (p. 53).

Throughout human history, societies have defined what did and did not constitute a disability and these definitions have changed over time (Scheer & Groce, 1988). Early human societies relied on hunters and foragers for survival. They relied on the able-bodied for provisions of food, shelter, and safety. Their very existence depended on their ability to contribute to the collective group. In some cases, those who were unable to contribute due to physical or intellectual disabilities were perceived as a threat to survival and were often left behind to die. Counter to this Western stereotypical notion, there are a number of societies in which there is evidence to indicate that disabled children were relatively well treated (Scheer & Groce, 1988). For example, Marshall (1976) reports that a child with a physical disability was carried on his mother's back into adolescence. Prior to Europe's industrialization, most persons with disabilities were integrated into community roles, protected by ties of kinship and participation in wider social networks (Stone, 1984).

There is some evidence to support the idea that reactions to human variation were heavily influenced by spiritual and religious beliefs, which often linked disability to immorality (Garland, 1995). Many believed that extreme disabilities were omens or punishments from God. These beliefs led to a range of cultural practices such as extermination and segregation (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012), which occurred throughout time and across cultures. For the purposes of this study, the following sections will address American reactions to and perceptions of disability beginning with the colonial period and continuing through present day.

During the colonial period in the United States and until the twentieth century progressive era, the care of disabled persons was the responsibility of the family unless the family could not provide for their basic needs. There were few distinctive terms for types of disabilities. Prior to modern medicine, a wide range of physical and psychological illness was very common and many conditions, that are medically treated today, caused what are now considered learning difficulties and psychological issues. The unhealthy or an abnormal body was a much more familiar part of everyday life. People commonly had damaged or absent limbs due to injury or infection. Disabilities resulting from diseases such as polio and rheumatic fever and tuberculosis were common. Given that antibiotics were not commonly used until after World War II, most extended families included people with significant illness and disability. As a result, parents did not always have the expectation that they would raise a healthy child.

In the mid to late 1600's through the 1700's, a few communities in New England began building residential facilities to house individuals with disabilities who required public care. These residential facilities, also called almshouses, poorhouses, jails, and insane asylums became places to house colonists with disabilities whose care was charged to the public (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). The great majority of communities in the United States and Europe, however,

did not have facilities for any deviant person, or even full time school until the later nineteenth century.

According to Rothman (1971), the introduction of a disease/medical model of disability and a humanitarian social movement encouraged the public funding of asylums to shelter and educate the disabled during the mid to late 1800s. Asylums for the mentally ill were the first to be built, followed by residential and educational facilities for the blind, the deaf, and the mentally impaired (Scheer & Groce, 1988). These facilities established, maintained, and perpetuated the segregation, isolation, and infantilization of disabled people. The focus of these residential facilities, which once aimed to educate individuals with disabilities, shifted during the late nineteenth century to providing long-term custodial care, often in the name of benevolence and protection (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). The belief that disabled individuals needed to be protected from society shifted to a growing sentiment that society needed protection from disabled people.

Concern over the appalling living conditions and the inhumane treatment of individuals in these facilities prompted a comprehensive reform movement with the goal of providing education and rehabilitation. The success of the few institutions that provided educational and vocational opportunities was short lived as the late 1800s and early 1900s became increasingly driven by science and research. During this time, researchers became increasingly interested in studying heredity and the reproduction of desirable traits to improve the biological progress of mankind. This signaled the beginning of the eugenics movement with the aim of eliminating unwanted inherited disorders from human populations through selective marriage practices, compulsory sterilization, restricted immigration, and institutionalization (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

The early part of the twentieth century was marked by two World Wars and the return of veterans with various combat-related disabilities. Antibiotics enabled soldiers that would have died in previous wars to survive often leaving them with various physical disabilities. This changing face of disability was met with federal policies and initiatives such as the War Risk Insurance Act (1914) and the Smith-Sears Veterans Rehabilitation Act (1918) aimed at addressing the concerns of disabled veterans. Others such as the Disabled American Veterans (1920) organization, the National Easter Seal Society (1922), the League of Physically Handicapped (1935-1938), and the March of Dimes (1937) signified a shift in societal perceptions of disabled people and paved the way for a new era of disability rights to emerge (Baglieri & Shaprio, 2012).

The latter part of the twentieth century marked a shift in the social, scientific, and political landscape as individuals with disabilities and disability advocates began to challenge discriminatory laws and practices. The creation of a Social Security Disability Insurance (1956) program provided financial assistance to disabled workers while the Vocational Rehabilitation Amendments of 1943 and its subsequent amendments expanded vocational programs and increased federal funding to address rehabilitation, education, and accessibility issues for individuals with disabilities and their families (Disability History Timeline, 2003). This period also saw an increased focus on the deinstitutionalization of disabled individuals and the beginning of efforts to support independent living.

Brown v. the Board of Education along with the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 provided the foundation for challenging discriminative laws and policies towards individuals with disabilities. Pushed by a growing civil rights movement and by the legal challenge of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the Supreme Court

declared racial segregation in education to be unconstitutional in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), an important triumph that set the stage for a major new development in American education: the desegregation of southern schools as well as concerns about segregated northern schools. (Feagin & Barnett, 2005) At the same time, in this climate of rights based social action, courts established legal mandates to recognize the educational rights of females, the handicapped, and non-English speaking students.

The 1970's gave rise to the Disability Rights Movement, a grass roots effort by disabled people to acquire the right to control their own lives. This prompted a shift in the way physicians and rehabilitative professionals serviced individuals with disabilities affording them increased control over their care and treatment. This was one of the first indications that the perceptions of individuals with disabilities as deviant, feebleminded and helpless were changing. The Disability Rights Movement more directly targeted adult populations, however it was influential in shaping educational legislation for children with disabilities as well. In 1971, the Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children (PARC) fought for the right of ALL children to enter public schools with *Mills v. the Board of Education of the District of Columbia* following suit in 1972. Both cases were instrumental in opening the public school doors for children with disabilities and paved the way for additional legislation addressing educational inequities. (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012)

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) passed in 1975 provided states with funding to establish school programs for students with disabilities. Public schools for students with disabilities sought to provide specialized instruction for those who had long been denied educational opportunities. The ratification of EHA required the provision of a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Though

this groundbreaking legislation was the first to specifically address the educational inequities for students with disabilities, students were still perceived as decidedly different from typical students and in need of specialized programming. By the 1980s, equity was increasingly interpreted not just as having physical access to equally funded and openly available schooling but, much more deeply, as having equitable access to responsive curriculum and instruction based on aspects of difference. IDEA (1997) required consideration of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) when developing the Individualized Education Program (IEP) to ensure that students with disabilities were educated alongside non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate. The subjective nature of IDEA language however, still allowed justification for segregated placements of students perceived as too disabled to be in the general education classroom. PL 94-142 was reauthorized in 1997 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and included amendments aimed at improving the education of students with disabilities through early identification, access to the general curriculum, and increased accountability.

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 along with the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 have attempted to address the achievement gap for disadvantaged students through increased accountability measures. For the first time, students with disabilities would be held to the same educational standards as non-disabled peers and required to demonstrate progress towards these standards as measured through statewide assessment programs. The inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessments has prompted a shift in special education service delivery models. Special education service delivery has progressed from segregated schools to special classrooms within public schools, to resource room programs providing specialized instruction in

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a segregated setting for a portion of the day, to full inclusion in general education with special education support.

The changes in special education service delivery have rapidly progressed, however changes in attitudes and dispositions toward disability have failed to keep pace. This could be due in large part to the underlying beliefs and perceptions of disability that have been culturally influenced, maintained, and perpetuated over time. As indicated earlier, the United States has a long history of perceiving human variation as abnormal and deviant, which influences the development of individual beliefs. Pajares (1992) defines beliefs as a foundation or support system for attitudes therefore attempts to change one's attitude toward human diversity must first begin with an understanding of one's beliefs about it. In the last 100 years, since the inception of compulsory education in the United States, the educational system has failed or simply excluded the *same* groups of students – African Americans, American Indians, students with disabilities, a succession of recent immigrant groups, poor Whites, and so forth (Spring, 1989). And according to Valle and Reid (2001), the public and educators have historically and systematically located the reason for failure within the groups themselves, rather than the practices and policies of schooling, which may due to the individual biases, assumptions, and perceptions held in association with these groups. For this reason, many researchers have considered how our beliefs and perceptions associated with different racial, ethnic, gender, and social class groups influence our attitudes and dispositions. The following section will review the literature regarding diversity education and teacher beliefs more specifically, how teacher education has addressed the preparation of teachers to work with students from diverse backgrounds and the ways in which disability is addressed within the field.

Diversity Education and Teacher Beliefs

In-service and preservice teachers need to develop the understanding that every act of teaching is a political act (Cochran-Smith, Freire, 1970; Greene, 1998; Kriesburg, 1992), that their role as teachers within a democracy is to ensure the equitable delivery of education to each child and to be socially responsible by challenging the status quo and unjust educational practices (Ukpokodu, 2007). The first step in achieving this, according to Cochran-Smith (2003), is by examining and challenging existing ideological underpinnings by placing culture and racism front and center. This is critical because the majority of teachers are White and have been shaped by ideologies of color/culture blindness therefore they must learn to deconstruct who they are as socio-cultural/racial beings and how their socio-cultural/racial worldview and positionalities might influence their thinking, perception, knowledge base, relationship, and practice (Ukpokodu, 2007).

Other researchers also espouse the importance of exploring teacher beliefs particularly as they relate to diverse populations. For example, Brown (2006) evaluated research by other scholars who indicated that beliefs are the best predictors of individual behavior and influence teachers' perceptions, judgments, and practices. Pohan and Aguilar (2001) posit that professional beliefs and behaviors are shaped by personal beliefs and Gay (2010) suggests that beliefs need to be reflected on, articulated, and confronted, not only for the curricula and student interaction but also for the teachers themselves.

Many researchers support the exploration of deeply held beliefs about race and ethnicity as a critical step in developing culturally responsive teachers. For example, Ullucci and Battey (2011) suggest that raising awareness of how discrimination functions in society is crucial to the preparation of teachers for working with children from diverse backgrounds. Easter, Shultz, Neyhart and Reck (1999) appear to agree as they discuss how unexplored beliefs of preservice

teachers can result in perpetuating antiquated and ineffectual teaching practices and the importance of examining these beliefs to better prepare them for teaching students from diverse backgrounds. Though these authors are specifically referring to the preparation of teachers for students from different racial, ethnic and social class backgrounds, it is also appropriate for the preparation of teachers for working with students with disabilities.

According to Ullucci and Battey (2011), "Teachers cannot see racial inequities if they position race as insignificant in schooling and see racism as a historical artifact. Rather, teachers need to be open to the fact that racism still operates in structural and interpersonal ways" (p. 1196). Delpit (1995) suggests that with changes in attitudes and actions in the classroom, we can change what happens in schools and in the lives of our students. However, as Ullucci and Battey (2011) attest, change hinges on our ability to confront potentially negative and/or outdated normative beliefs that determine who is worthy of an education, which students are deemed able, and who is pushed and who is left behind. When applied to issues of disability, this has important implications. Fitch (2002) indicated that the normalizing discourse of categorization and labeling that occurs within the special education field continues to play a key role in the increasing acknowledgment of disability as a fundamental cultural signifier.

Because "societal knowledge and beliefs about disability are communicated through media, entertainment, art, laws, and language" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 5), many researchers have studied the influence of popular culture in the perpetuation of disability stereotypes. For example, in 1972, Wolfensberger, Nirje, Olshansky, Perske and Roos described the typical attitudes and related stereotypes associated with disability and though other scholars have conducted similar studies more recently (Darke, 1998; Shakespeare, 1994; Thomson, 1997; Nario-Redmond, 2008), many of the stereotypes associated with disability have remained

unchanged and continue to influence individual beliefs and perceptions of disability. For example, some of the most persistent stereotypes that are readily recognizable in media, entertainment, art, and other elements of culture include individuals with disabilities as the object of pity, subhuman, the eternal child, the burden, and the supercrip or the extraordinary disabled. The stereotype of the 'supercrip' portrays the disabled person as deviant because of "superhuman" feats or as "special" because they have regular lives "in spite of" disability, which reinforces the idea that disabled people are deviant – and so, for someone who is less than "complete" the accomplishment is "amazing" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 36).

"Stereotypes and their related prejudices can lead to discrimination in everyday interactions, as well as operate within oppressive social structures and systems" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 36). For example, underlying stereotypical beliefs about disability, such as the ones mentioned above, can result in ableism, which Wolbring (2008) describes as "A set of beliefs, processes and practices that produce – based on abilities one exhibits or values – a particular understanding of oneself, one's body and one's relationship with others and the environment and includes how one is judged by others" (p. 252). According to Wolbring (2008), ableism is one of the most societally entrenched and accepted isms and one of the biggest enablers for other –isms (p. 255). Storey (2007), suggests that as our schools struggle with the inclusion of students with disabilities, ableism may play an influential role in why students with disabilities are often excluded.

The way in which teachers respond to the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is inextricably linked to their underlying beliefs and assumptions about disability. Simpson and Miles (1993) reviewed the literature describing inclusive programs written from the late 1960s to 1993 and concluded that supportive attitudes of general education

[and special education] teachers are an essential condition for successful inclusion programs. As Ullucci and Battey (2011) explain, preparing teachers to work with children from diverse backgrounds requires a willingness to see how prejudice and discrimination functions in society, however this preparation also requires a willingness to see how ableism functions in schools and societies. Though there is limited research exploring teachers' personal beliefs and perceptions of disability, there are studies that have examined professional beliefs about inclusion and disability, which provided additional support for this study.

School Personnel Perceptions of Disability, Special Education, and Inclusion

In this study, I aimed to uncover stakeholders' conceptions of disability that have been internalized through institutionalized rules, regulations, and practices. My experiences as an educator in both general and special education settings have revealed that teachers may hold relatively narrow conceptions of disability. Some teachers' embrace the inclusion of students with mild disabilities in the general education classroom however, may respond less favorably to students perceived as having moderate to severe disabilities. A synthesis of twenty-eight research studies conducted by Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996) reported that the majority of teachers surveyed believed they lacked the sufficient skills, resources, and training necessary for including students with disabilities in general education. This may be due to the influence of the medical model of disability on education systems and teacher preparation programs. An outline of the medical model of disability and its influence on the development of special education legislation and separate education systems will be provided later in this chapter.

Many studies have explored teachers' beliefs about diversity and disability (Brophy, 1983; Cardona, 2005; Herrera, 2010; Praisner, 2003; Pajares, 1992; Pierre, 2009; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Sparks, 2009) because beliefs are the best predictors of individual behavior

and influence perceptions, judgments, and practices (Brown, 2006). An abundance of research exploring stakeholder attitudes towards disability and inclusion can be found in the literature (Alghazo, Dodeen, & Algaryouti, 2003; Praisner, 2003; Cook, Cameron, & Tankersley, 2007; Everhart, 2009; Monahan, Marino, & Miller, 1996) however, few have considered the influence of the social and medical models of disability on stakeholder attitudes and perceptions and many assume a shared understanding of the concepts disability, special education, and inclusion. For example, Praisner (2003) surveyed 408 elementary school principals to investigate attitudes towards inclusion using The Principals and Inclusion Survey. The survey was designed to determine the extent to which training, experience, and program factors were related to principals' attitudes towards inclusion, however it did not operationally define inclusion to ensure a shared understanding across participants. The author identifies the assumption that all principals work under the same conditions as a limitation of the study. An additional limitation could be the assumption that all principals hold a shared understanding of the meanings of inclusion and disability. This study examines participants' experiences with various disability categories, which reflects the medical model of disability. The use of specific disability categories implies a normal/abnormal, able/disabled distinction.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) conducted an extensive review of the literature on teachers' attitudes towards integration/inclusion, noting that uncommon language may indeed pose challenges to research. They reported that much of the research has been primarily represented by acceptance and/or rejection issues, which reflect the traditional categories of disability. They suggest that this may be problematic given that respondents may have multiple interpretations for the same label. Research exploring inclusion should attend to issues of differing interpretations/meanings of critical terminology in special education.

Olkin & Howson (1994) conducted a study of attitudes toward and images of physical disability, which involved the examination of two separate studies. Study 1 asked 184 undergraduate students to complete the Attitude Toward Disabled People scale (Yuker, Block, & Campbell, 1960; Yuker, Block & Younng, 1966), the Social Distance Scale (based on Bogardus, 1933) and an open ended question "When I think of the term 'disabled person', I usually think of someone who has the following disability _____" (Olkin & Howson, 1994). Study 2 involved 84 participants from the Department of Social Services. The participants responded to the SDS scale and the open-ended question provided in Study 1. The researchers chose to omit the ATDP scale to reduce the time required to complete the questionnaire and because it was less central to their primary research question. In both studies, when subjects named a specific disability, it most frequently fell into the category of "wheelchair" even though approximately 90% of school age students with disabilities have "invisible" disabilities. In both studies, participants were asked to complete the surveys prior to answering the open-ended question. The surveys focused on disabilities that are generally visible to the observer, which may have influenced responses to the open-ended questions given that the image most frequently evoked by the term "disabled person" is of a wheelchair user (Olkin & Howson, 1994). This study explored the attitudes of undergraduates and employees of the Department of Social Services who may or may not have experience with individuals with disabilities. Expanding this study to include a variety of educational stakeholders could add to the literature on inclusive education. For example, exploring how children understand disability provides an interesting perspective that adds to the discourse of inclusion.

Children's Understandings of Disability

Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) consider how attitudes toward disability are formed early in life through "observational learning" and that many negative influences in our culture teach children to accept the idea that certain human qualities such as physical "wholeness", attractiveness, intelligence, and clear speech are valued, whereas the qualities of others are demeaned, stigmatized, ridiculed, feared and degraded. They also assert "Children learn to assume that people with disabilities are more "different from" than "similar to" persons without them and those differences minimize their status and set them apart" (p. 7). Though younger children show more acceptance of their peers with disabilities, by ages seven and nine, children's awareness of differences may be transformed into full-blown prejudice (Brodkin & Coleman, 1993). For this reason, some researchers have chosen to examine children's beliefs and perceptions of disability and special education.

One such study was conducted by Mousourou (2009), in which ethnographic methods were used to study young children's understandings of disability. Through interviews, artifacts, and field notes, the researcher explored how teachers, parents, and students with and without disabilities come to understand the term 'special needs'. This involved actively listening to how students and teachers explained it during classroom activities and how it was used in dialogues and interactions. Additionally, the researcher asked students what comes to their mind when they hear the words 'special needs'. The findings indicated that the children held a primarily functionalist point of view describing 'special needs' as one's inability to perform certain functions such as walking, talking, hearing, or understanding certain things due to brain problems or illness. The researcher also invited participants to draw or write a few words of things that came to mind when they heard the term 'special needs'. Several of the participants drew hospitals, nurses and doctors, or people in wheelchairs. The findings also indicated that

students obtained much of their information about 'special needs' from parents, family members, the media, teachers, other school professionals, and peers with special needs. This study focused on how educational stakeholders in Cyprus conceptualize the term 'special needs'. The present study sought to extend this exploration to include the terms and concepts 'inclusion', 'disability', and 'special education' to examine how various educational stakeholders come to understand and make meaning of these terms. However, before discussing stakeholder perceptions of special education, I will provide an overview of special education in the United States in next section.

Special Education

The fight for access to a public education for children with disabilities resulted in the development of a dual education system, the general education system and the special education system. As discussed earlier, a macro-level policy such as separate but equal in special education inevitably fosters cultural perceptions of extreme difference. This dual system has had profound implications for both public education and teacher preparation as well as for cultural perceptions of the disabled. The following section will address the implications for public education.

The passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) ensured students with disabilities access to a public education. Though the intention of the act is to ensure that children with disabilities are afforded equal educational opportunities, a possible unintended consequence of the law was to stigmatize and marginalize students through required labeling and, often, individualized programming in segregated settings. This legislation guaranteed a free, appropriate public education for students with disabilities, however in its early implementation students were often placed in programs based on their disability. For example, there were particular classrooms for students labeled mentally retarded, visually impaired, deaf, emotional

impaired, etc. Many of these early special education programs were housed in special schools or as self-contained classrooms within public schools. The underlying assumption was that students with particular disabilities would benefit from the same kinds of services and curriculum (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

The idea that the educational setting should align with the disability diagnosis is reflective of a scientific approach to disability. Reauthorizations of EHA (1975) challenged this assumption by requiring that students with disabilities be educated alongside their non-disabled peers to the maximum extent appropriate and that alternative programming only occur when the nature and severity of the disability prevented the student from progressing within the general education curriculum and environment. The subjective nature of the language in this progressive piece of legislation continues to allow justification for placing students with disabilities in segregated settings. It is probable to assume that such decisions are influenced by cultural stereotypes as well as the dominance of the medical model in schools. Disability studies research indicates that stereotypes, misconceptions, uneasiness, and fear still drive perceptions of the disabled.

Cultural stereotypes and the medical model are as influential today as they were in the early twentieth century. "Despite the strides made in law, the medical paradigm of disability is still a persistent influence on the general public's perceptions of disability and disability-related political issues" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 96). For many, school is the first place that experience with disability occurs and in the early 1970s perceptions of disability were profoundly influenced by labeling and programming practices. The placement of students with disabilities in categorical programs in segregated classrooms perpetuated the perception of disability as deficit (Baglier & Shapiro, 2012).

As indicated previously and supported by Mousourou's (2009) study, many beliefs and perceptions associated with disability are culturally influenced by literature, arts, media, school, and families, which have historically reflected medical, psychological, and behavioral orientations toward disability. This is important because these paradigms of disability primarily locate disability within the individual, which results in a narrow conception of disability as an individual deficit in need of remediation and/or cure and while these orientations are necessary and valuable, they may result in negative perceptions of disability if they are not considered alongside social models of disability. As indicated by many scholars in the field of disability studies (Baglieri and Shapiro, 2012; Danforth & Gabel, 2006; Hehir, 2002; Oliver, 1996; Valle & Connor, 2010), a primarily medical model perspective fails attend to the broader socio-political context in which disability is experienced. The medical and social models of disability provide critical perspectives, which are frequently referred to throughout this study. For this reason, a brief summary of both the medical and social models is provided below.

The Medical Model of Disability

The models of disability are conceptual frameworks for understanding disability, which can provide some insight into why certain attitudes exist and how they are reinforced in society (Sullivan, 2011). Though we have made substantial legislative progress in our treatment of individuals with disabilities, our cultural perceptions of disability are evolving much more slowly. Baglieri and Shaprio (2012) suggest that the ways in which we make meaning of disability are funneled through cultural ideologies, which they indicate are heavily influenced by a medical model orientation toward disability. According to them, a medical model perspective best describes how we address disability in American schools and society (p. 15). Therefore, it is

critical to consider the ways in which the medical model has influenced the field of special education in both positive and negative ways.

The historical conception of disability as a medical anomaly in need of treatment influenced the development of special education. That is, an education program that responds to the unique and varied needs of students with disabilities, which are perceived to differ substantially from the needs of students in general education. "IDEIA offers an overview and rules and regulations for the process of diagnosing or assessing disability, then developing a formal course of treatment for the student, which is documented in the IEP" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 22). IDEIA's alignment with the medical model of disability is evidenced by its requirement of the use of "technically sound" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 22) instruments to inform assessment and reliance on information obtained from educational experts such as school social workers, speech and language pathologists, physical and occupational therapists, and/or various categorically certified educational consultants. The eligibility determination process culminates in a written educational report detailing the students' academic, functional, and behavioral strengths and weaknesses along with suggestions for addressing the students' identified weaknesses. This information may be useful in determining appropriate academic and behavioral interventions, which have been found to be beneficial for some students exhibiting similar characteristics. However, as Reid and Valle (2004) attest, there are important unintended outcomes related to this process. "Ironically, although the intention in testing is to 'level the playing field', it is common knowledge that tests have become instruments to confirm unconscious assumptions about the unacceptability of some students and to legitimate their exclusion" (Reid & Valle, 2004, p. 469).

The medical model of disability unintentionally influences educational policy and practice in potentially negative ways as well. Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) identify two distinguishing features of the medical model (a) its classification schemes in which characteristics are designated as normal and abnormal or pathological; and (b) the preference for a course of cure-seeking treatment, as prescribed by a medical or rehabilitation professional (p. 25). A narrow conception of disability as primarily medical, leads to a limited understanding of the individual and the particular ways that a specific individual may experience a disability. According to Sullivan (2011), the medical model is the root of most negative attitudes held towards people with disabilities; they are seen as defective and dependent, in need of cure or rehabilitation. The hegemonic conception of disability as abnormal perpetuates negative stereotypes of disability many of which were discussed earlier in this chapter.

According to Baglieri and Shapiro (2012), stereotypes are reflections of paradigms and are created and circulated over time and reinforce the paradigms on which they were built. The medical model of disability, as a paradigm, heavily influences both professional and personal perceptions of disability and frequently reinforces ableist attitudes, for example, the belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to have one and it is better to do things in the way that nondisabled do (Storey, 2007). "Reliance on the scientific, medical, and psychological discourses for making meaning of disability discourages conceptualizations of difference other than as "deviance from the norm, as a pathological condition, as a deficit and significantly as an individual burden" (Linton, 1998, p. 11, as cited in Reid & Valle, 2004, p. 469). Hehir (2002) contends that negative cultural assumptions about disability continue to have a negative influence on the education of children with disabilities. For this reason, I believe attention to competing paradigms of disability is crucial in both preservice and inservice teacher education.

The next section will provide a brief summary of the social model of disability and discuss the importance of presenting a balanced approach to understanding disability that draws on both the medical and social models of disability.

The Social Model of Disability

Contrary to the medical model, which views disability as pathological, the social model of disability considers how disability is experienced within the broader socio-political context. "Social models of disability forefront the influence our economic and social structures and central values have on the ways in which we define disability and respond to persons with them" (Oliver, 1990, as cited in Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 25). The aim of the social model is to understand disability as a total experience of complex interactions between the body and physical, social, and cultural environments, rather than primarily individual and pathological. This orientation affords a more comprehensive understanding of the disability experience and provides an important foundation for challenging negative perceptions of disability often perpetuated by medical model perspectives. "The thrust of social models is to interrupt the dominance of the medical model, in order to more fully understand and challenge the ways that deep-seated assumptions and beliefs about how the nature of impairment and disability prevent the equal participation and status of disabled persons" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 29).

The social model is reflected in schools though the idea of inclusive education. From this perspective, inclusion is seen as active engagement in social interactions with all members of the school community and more specifically, peers in the general education classroom. According to Allan (1999), classroom members continuously construct and negotiate the social and academic contexts of schooling to position themselves and others as included and excluded, full or ancillary members in the classroom and learning community. From a social model perspective,

disability is constructed as a natural form of human variation. Reid and Valle (2004) recommend, examining the social meanings we give to variations that exist in human behavior and appearance to begin to challenge the implicit or explicit valuings used to construct exclusionary categorical binaries such as normal/abnormal and able/disabled. They also assert that "when we view variation as productive and natural, we can address it through the differentiation of instruction, not through the sorting of children into already available categories – a very different way of thinking about both disability and classrooms" (Reid & Valle, 2004, p. 473), which can have incredibly positive implications for improving inclusive practices.

Reid and Valle (2004) call for a balanced approach to understanding disability by infusing a social model perspective within the already dominant medical model perspective as a way to broaden conceptions of disability to include the variety of ways disability is experienced. "Either we can continue to sort and segregate students according to the current special education discourses, despite the lack of evidence that these are helpful to them – or we can work in solidarity with and for disabled people to foster a set of different assumptions: not competition, but cooperation; not exclusion, but inclusion, and not disability, but ordinary human diversity" (Reid and Valle, 2004, p. 474). Reid and Valle (2004) suggest that we need to break this cycle by generating knowledge about how macro-level processes such as societal attitudes about diversity interact with micro-level conditions and events as they are articulated in commonly held beliefs and in the legislation that protects those values. This study examined stakeholders' culturally influenced perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion with the intention of providing a starting point for addressing this concern.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In this study, I employed a phenomenographic, semiotic case study design to explore stakeholders' perceptions of critical terms in special education in a rural elementary school, which recently shifted from primarily pullout to an inclusive education model. Much of the research on inclusive education involves studies of individual's professional beliefs about disability rather than their personal beliefs. Some multicultural research has suggested that teachers must investigate their own attitudes and beliefs about other cultures before they will be able to implement a culturally responsive pedagogy (Nieto, 2004; Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006). A pedagogy that is culturally responsive to sexual orientation, class, ethnic and racial differences must also include dis/ability. For this reason, it is important to investigate stakeholders' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion, disability and special education.

Operational Definitions

There are various definitions for the terms disability, special education and inclusion though it is often assumed that individuals hold universal understandings of these terms. Baglieri & Shapiro (2012) discuss this as it applies to the term integration, "the concept of integration, with respect to schooling, is often described with several terms producing confusion among those unaware of their definitional nuances" (p. 11) For example, the terms Mainstreaming, Least Restrictive Environment, and inclusion are commonly used interchangeably with the term integration though they have significantly different professional meanings. To provide a common understanding of the concepts explored in this study, the terms will be defined in the following way:

Inclusion: The school-based arrangements in which students with and without disabilities learn together in general education settings (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

Disability: According to The Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAA) of 2008, an individual with a disability is a person who has: a) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities of such individual, b) a record of such impairment, and c) being regarded as having such an impairment.

Special Education: Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Special Education is defined as specially designed instruction provided at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability.

Role, Positionality, and Ethics

My professional experience includes seventeen years as a Special Education teacher and as such, in this study, I am a member of the general group "special education teacher." Since I am not currently working in this role, nor working in the school I will study, I am conducing my research as a "partial member". This role affords me with contextual understanding of these concepts and issues, as well as the corresponding need to bracket my own views in order to listen to my participants without judgment.

I became interested in exploring individual's perceptions of disability as a result of my experiences in a Special Education Policy course during my first year of doctoral education. I was still teaching full time in a resource room for seventh and eighth grade students with disabilities while taking this course. The instructor introduced us to the social model of disability, which aims to understand disability as a total experience of complex interactions between the body and physical, social, and cultural environments (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). This was an entirely new perspective for me. The clinical/medical model of disability heavily

influenced the teacher preparation program that I was involved in during my undergraduate studies. This perspective recommends a scientific approach to disability with the primary concerns being proper diagnosis and determination and implementation of appropriate treatments (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

The Disability Rights movement inspired by the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's led persons with disabilities to demand full control and access to society. Individuals with disabilities fought for full access to society's spaces, places, and opportunities, and the rights to self-determination and dignity. The central issue being that individuals should not be discriminated against on the basis of their perceived dis/ability. I had spent the majority of my teaching career believing that I knew what was best for my students; that I knew what they needed and what should be expected. Suddenly, my entire perspective shifted. I began engaging my middle school students in conversations about their education. They became instrumental in developing their own Individualized Education Program and frequently participated in facilitating the meeting. These seemingly minor changes significantly impacted the culture of our classroom. Students were less resistant to working on academic tasks and increasingly engaged in appropriate conversations with staff regarding academic and behavioral expectations. This experience prompted me to consider how one's beliefs about disability influence their attitudes and dispositions towards individuals with disabilities.

In the fall of 2010, I participated in a series of workshops designed to challenge racism by understanding privilege and oppression. We engaged in a variety of activities to broaden our understanding of issues related to race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. The facilitators organized the activities around the idea that individuals must understand their own prejudices, biases, and beliefs if they hope to become advocates for social justice. Though this experience

was incredibly powerful and had a profound personal and professional impact on me, I wondered why the topic of disability was given such limited attention. If exploring our own beliefs about race, ethnicity and class is the first step towards becoming more culturally aware and responsive, then it seems as though exploring beliefs about disability would also be beneficial.

I chose to conduct this study at Parker Elementary because of their recent commitment to providing an inclusive education to students with disabilities. The building shifted to inclusive practices only a few years before I had joined the staff. I was hired briefly as a part-time special education teacher to provide services to a small caseload of students with disabilities within their grade level classrooms. The majority of staff members reported feeling positive about inclusion, however did not feel as though they were adequately prepared for teaching students with disabilities. The principal expressed interest in continuing to provide inclusion and a desire to improve their practices. This appeared to be a mutually beneficial situation as the findings of the study could potentially provide important information for improving inclusive practices at this school while also affording me the opportunity to conduct a study exploring perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion.

As a previous staff member, I had developed a positive rapport with teachers, parents, and students, which aided in the selection of participants. The sense of trust and respect I built during my short tenure at Parker Elementary put participants' at ease, making the interview process more comfortable and allowing me to obtain richer more descriptive responses. I was also able to obtain additional information about the history of special education at Parker Elementary through oral histories and document reviews. This allowed for the development of a comprehensive study of stakeholders' perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion at Parker Elementary. However, as noted above, my role as a partial member also demands that I

remain reflective about my own experience and perceptions in order to best represent my participants' perspectives.

Phenomenography

My study focused on exploring how meanings associated with disability, special education, and inclusion are constructed and communicated across stakeholders in one elementary school. Sociocultural theory provided the broader theoretical framework as it attends to how meaning is socially constructed and reconstructed through various interactions and experiences. More specifically, I used both phenomenographic and critical semiotics as analytic frames to examine the meanings associated with special education, disability and inclusion.

Phenomenography provided an appropriate framework for exploring the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena (Richardson, 1999). This methodological approach was used to examine how stakeholders perceive and communicate their understandings of disability, inclusion, and special education and how variations in meaning are related to their experiences. The phenomenographic method is an explorative procedure using empirical data to discover differentiated categories that describe a phenomenon in the world as people see and describe it in various ways (Marton, 1994; Lepp & Ringsberg, 2002).

The focus of this study was to describe how stakeholders at Parker Elementary experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand the concepts disabled, special education and inclusion. According to Svensson (1997), the most significant characteristics of phenomenography are the aiming at categories of description, the open explorative form of data collection and the interpretive character of the analysis of data, which provides a powerful framework for analyzing the data. It is important to note that the conceptualizations the

participants hold regarding these critical concepts was the unit of analysis, not the participants themselves.

Phenomenography has particular relevance in educational research for example, Walker (1998) used a phenomenographic approach to remind educators that it is incorrect to assume that a text or lesson is read or learned in the same way by every child. I used a similar approach in this study as a reminder that it is incorrect to assume that the terms disability, special education, and inclusion are understood and perceived in the same way by every teacher and every student. Walker (1998) goes on to say that learning and experience are inextricably connected and what we learn affects how we experience phenomena, and how we experience phenomena affects how we learn and relate ideas. From this perspective, phenomenography reflects an association with sociocultural theory in that learning is mediated by social interactions/experiences and is constructed and reconstructed over time.

Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) recognize the critical relationship between cultural experiences and attitudes toward disability, "We begin to form attitudes about disability early in life, from strong cultural influences including, school, media, language, and literature" (p.3). Literature and media have historically portrayed individuals with disabilities as less desirable or abnormal. Dahl (1993) suggests that children's classics are particularly graphic frequently representing villains as ugly and deformed while heroes and heroines are depicted as beautiful and graceful. For example, the childish dwarfs and humpbacked wicked witch in Snow White, the evil giant in Jack and the Beanstalk, and the sly deformed dwarf, Rumpelstiltskin impress upon young minds that individuals with mental or physical differences are to be feared, pitied, trivialized, or ridiculed (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Many of us are introduced to these images early in life and they frequently resurface as we struggle to make meaning of difference and

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disability. Therefore, efforts to disrupt the influence of these images on beliefs and perceptions of disability is imperative, however we must first raise awareness that negative perceptions of disability exist. One way this can be accomplished is through social semiotics. Language, media, and literature are considered semiotic resources because they are used for communicative purposes and have a meaning potential based on their past uses and a set of affordances based on their possible uses (Van Leeuwen, 2004). I introduce semiotic resources here first, to preface their importance in the cultural development of meaning and second, as a brief introduction to critical semiotics, which I employed as an additional analytic frame for this study.

Social Semiotics

Since cultural images and representations help shape conceptions about disability and special education, I also used techniques from social semiotics in the design of my data collection procedures and data analysis. Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) was one of the first founders of semiotics. Saussure argued that a word (either spoken or written) creates meaning in the minds of the readers or listeners (Pearson & Warburton, 2008). The word itself is referred to as the 'signifier' and the mental image it conjures up is referred to as the 'signified'. The word and the image taken together are referred to as the 'sign'. Saussure was the first theorist to develop the idea that signs are arbitrary, that there is no absolute connection between the word and the mental image it creates, however as Pearson and Warburton (2008) point out, the meanings of words are captured in forms of social knowledge and a complex set of shared rules which allow members of a speech community to process language. That is to say, individuals reach a shared understanding of the meanings of 'signs' as demonstrated by their ability to effectively communicate through a shared language system. Pearson and Warburton (2008) further state that everyone (who speaks English) knows "what the word 'dog' means because the

word existed before we were born and we were acculturated into a social system where the meanings of words have been largely fixed and which we learned as children" (p. 165). While culture has influenced the development of shared meanings for words such as dog, chair, and car, it has also influenced the meanings ascribed to concepts such as disability, special education, and inclusion.

I utilized a semiotic photo elicitation approach to explore how participants' come to understand critical terms in special education. Photo elicitation in data collection involves using photographs during interviews and asking research subjects to connect images to personal conceptions and to discuss the meaning of photographs. According to Mavers (2008), a social semiotic approach takes for granted that while the ways in which meanings are made are the same for all humans, the resources and the conditions in which meanings are made in one culture and society are not necessarily like those in another (p. 174). This approach provided an appropriate framework for exploring the range of social and cultural meanings attached to these terms so we can begin to understand how perceptions of disability are related to attitudes and dispositions towards individuals with disabilities.

Specifically, I used the following semiotic analytic concepts: sign, signifier, hegemonic representation, binary and myth. At the macro-level the overarching structuralist semiotic concept is hegemony. According to Antonio Gramsci (1978), this term denotes the permeation throughout society of an entire system values, attitudes, beliefs, and practices that have the effect of supporting unequal power relations. Hegemonic society employs "discourses" as the "organizing principles" of everyday life (Heilman, 2011). A discourse is a system of signs and signifiers, which means the words and images (signs) that they connote (signifiers) establish the

boundaries for making sense of the world. One way to understand and break down a discourse is to begin to notice its important oppositions or binary structures of meaning and value.

A hegemonic representation is smaller than a discourse. A hegemonic representation is usually more of a noun; it is a particular concept like "disability" and it is held up within discourses and their binaries. Hegemonic representations are attempts to dominate the field of discursivity, "to arrest the flow of difference to construct a center" (Gramsci, 1978). A hegemonic ideal is in effect and has a powerful influence when a certain idea, group, or type "naturally" seems better or right and everyone knows what it is; a hegemonic representation is a more general term, and it is in effect when everyone comes up with a similar image and interpretation in response to a simple word like disability. Hegemonic ideals and representations are those to which most people give "spontaneous consent" to the "general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci, 1978, P:12). What Roland Barthes (1973) calls a **myth** is the story that goes with hegemonic ideals. In "On Myth", Barthes (1973) explains that we have "myths of Order" that are necessary for social control and cohesion. We use them to both to interpret action, objects and scenes, and suggest choices. They organize understanding over time. They have a plot. In this way, because they occur over time and are historical, they are four-dimensional.

To summarize, phenomenography was used as the first layer of data analysis to explore the qualitatively different ways that participants' perceive and understand disability, special education, and inclusion. It aims to describe the key aspects of the variation of the experience of a phenomenon rather than focus on the richness of individual experiences (Reed, 2006). I employed social semiotics as a second analytic layer, which involved examination of the data for

evidence of hegemonic conceptions, binaries, and myths associated with conceptions of disability, special education and inclusion.

Context

   Setting the Stage. This study of stakeholders' perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion took place at Parker elementary school, a medium sized school with approximately 441 students. Parker is located in a small suburban area in the Midwest outside a major city and inside an urbanized area with a population of less than 100,000. A flashing sign advertising upcoming school events and student birthdays sits at the school entrance. The school sits approximately sixty yards southeast of a small intersection. On the northeast corner is a gas station with the city post office just to the right of the gas station and across the street from one of the schools two parking lots. A local bank sits on the southeastern corner of the intersection with a laundromat and a restaurant on the western corners. Most of the students are bused to school, however some students who live in nearby neighborhoods walk to school. There are two wheelchair accessible entrances to the building, one off the staff parking lot and one at the front entrance.

   There is a sprawling playground behind the school surrounded by a chain link fence. There is a small jungle gym, two sets of swings, a slide, and a basketball court. The remaining area is used for soccer and football during recess times. The majority of the playground is cement with patches of grass in the eastern corner. Parker has two cafeterias, one in the third and fourth grade wing and one in the fourth and fifth grade wing. Only the cafeteria in the third grade wing is wheelchair accessible and allows access to the playground as well. The only entrance to the other cafeteria is located down a small flight of stairs, therefore fifth and sixth grade students

requiring wheelchair accessibility are required to use the cafeteria located in the third grade wing.

Parker elementary is a predominantly white, lower-middle class school. The student demographic break down is as follows; 93.9% White, 3.2% Black, .69% American Indian/Alaskan Native, .69% Asian/Hawaiian Native/Pacific Islander, and 1.4% Hispanic. Fifty percent of the student population is at-risk according to socioeconomic data collected by the district and determined by the number of students receiving free or reduced lunch. At the time of this study, approximately 17% of the student population in grades three through six received special education services. There are a total of 24 classroom teachers including music, physical education, technology, and Title-I reading. Two full-time teachers and one part-time teacher provide special education services to eligible students within the general education classroom. One teacher provides special education services in a Cognitively Impaired (CI) self-contained classroom. There are four certified teachers at each grade level third through sixth. 63.7% of the certified staff hold bachelor's degrees with continuing education hours and 36.3% hold advanced degrees.

Parker Elementary publishes an annual report with information for parents regarding curriculum, the school-wide positive behavior support program, enrichment programs and special services. The inclusion model for teaching is listed as a special service along with reading recovery, speech therapy, social work, physical therapy, Title-I, resource room, and Response to Intervention support. No additional information about the programs is provided. A summary of the state wide assessment results were provided by gender indicating slow but steady growth in reading and mathematics scores.

I conducted a thorough review of the student handbook, which provided detailed information regarding school policies, the district and school mission statements, emergency procedures, field trip, homework, and attendance policies, as well as transportation rules and policies. Several pages were dedicated to providing a detailed explanation of the school discipline policy including the positive behavior support expectations, steps, and procedures. The handbook did not contain information regarding any of the special education programs, procedures or contact information. There was also no description of the "inclusion model for teaching", as it was referred to in the annual report, providing additional information for parents or guardians. I also reviewed the special education manual, however the manual referred to policies prior to the 2004 reauthorization of IDEIA and did not include the major policy changes.

I conducted two interviews with individuals who have extensive knowledge of Parker elementary including the history of Special Education at the school. Louise has worked at Parker for over 25 years as a paraprofessional in the classroom and more recently as the student facilitator for in-school suspension. She reported that prior to 2000-2001, special education at Parker was primarily self-contained with minimal if any inclusion. Louise indicated that the first shift in special education services occurred when a new teacher was hired in 2003-04. She was hired to teach in the Cognitively Impaired (CI) classroom and within the first year or two, she had begun mainstreaming her students into the general education classroom for science and social studies. Louise indicated that this was met with significant resistance from the general education teachers initially, however after a short time, they seemed to adjust. The next major shift in special education service delivery at Parker occurred when Gretchen arrived as the new principal. Louise indicated that conversations regarding the full time placement of students with disabilities in the general education classroom began shortly after Gretchen became principal.

According to Louise, this too was met with extreme resistance at first particularly with veteran teachers close to retirement. She reported that the principal was supportive and responsive to the needs of the teachers involved in inclusive classrooms and tried to assist them by lowering their class sizes and offering some paraprofessional support for portions of the day. Louise shared that she was initially resistant to inclusion as well but has since changed her mind because she has seen the benefits of it. She also indicated that general education teachers have become more positive about it as well.

The second interview was conducted with Leslie a former Parker elementary student, parent of students who previously attended Parker, and a current employee at Parker. She appeared to share Louise's sentiments regarding special education's transition to inclusion over the last five years. She too reported being aware of the initial resistance by general education teachers and how the support of the new principal appeared to ease some of the tension. Leslie indicated how the legislative changes in IDEA that occurred in 2004 had begun to impact special education policies and practices at Parker but that it was not until Gretchen arrived in 2006-07 that a significant change was made. Gretchen, the principal at Parker elementary, has been with the school for the last six years. She supervises twenty-four certified staff members as well as six paraprofessionals. A detailed discussion of her interview can be found in Chapter seven.

Both Leslie and Louise reported feeling positive about inclusion and indicated a desire to see the program expand to include students in the self-contained CI classroom.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to achieve a phenomenographic semiotic description of stakeholders' perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion therefore, it was important to select teachers with some experience including students with disabilities in the

general education classroom. Purposive sampling was used to select teacher participants to ensure that at least one general education teacher at each grade level had experience teaching students with disabilities in the general education classroom. I purposefully avoided the selection of new teachers and those with very long experience or unusual experiences.

Teachers. Eleven general education teachers participated in this study. Three of the eleven had participated in the previous study, however I conducted follow up interviews to update the previous data as well as to collect additional data that was not part of the interview protocol in the initial study. Three itinerant teachers were selected to participate based on their experience with inclusion. All three itinerant teachers worked with inclusive and self-contained classrooms without additional support from the special education teacher, which provided a unique perspective. Both of the special education teachers had participated in the previous study, however I conducted follow up interviews to update the original data and to collect new data based on revised interview protocols. A total of 17 teachers participated in the current study. In addition to the demographic data provided in Table 3.1, I also provide a brief narrative description of each participant. All participants in this study are identified by a pseudonym to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

Table 3.1 *Demographic Data of Teacher Participants*

Teacher	Grade/Role	Years Exp.	Education	PD/CW
Todd	6th S.E.	11-15	Masters +	Yes
Carrie	3-4th S.E.	6-10	Bachelors	Yes
Holly	3-6th S.E. CI	11-15	Masters	Yes
John	Gym	11-15	Masters	Yes
Julie	Music	6-10	Masters	No
Kelly	Computers	1-5	Bachelors	1
Ellen	6th	1-5	Bachelors	2 PD
Greg	6th	11-15	Masters	No
Lisa	5th	6-10	Masters	No
Amy	5th	1-5	Bachelors	No
Susan	5th	11-15	Masters	1 PD
Jessica	4th	11-15	Bachelors+	1 PD
Colleen	4th	1-5	Bachelors	2 PD
Amanda	4th	1-5	Bachelors	1 CW
Marcia	4th	1-5	Bachelors	1 PD/ 2CW
Tracy	3rd	6-10	Bachelors	2 CW
Renee	3rd	11-15	Masters	PD
Gretchen	Administrator	15+	Masters	No
Leslie	Oral history	20+		
Louise	Oral history	20+		

Note. PD = professional development seminar on special education topics; CW = undergraduate/graduate coursework on special education topics.

Greg is a sixth grade general education teacher with over 11 years of teaching experience at Parker elementary. He is over six feet tall and wears a shirt and tie to work Monday through Thursday; on Fridays, the staff is encouraged to wear their school colors. Greg is on the school board in the district where his children attend school and where his family resides. Greg is

responsible for teaching math to all sixth grade students. He holds a Masters degree in curriculum and reported receiving no professional development or coursework related to inclusion or special education. He has been an inclusion teacher for the past five years.

Ellen is a sixth grade general education teacher with less than five years of teaching experience. She is responsible for teaching writing to all sixth grade students at Parker. Though she is a relatively new teacher, she indicated receiving no coursework in her teacher preparation program involving inclusion or students with disabilities. She indicated participating in two professional development sessions regarding inclusion and co-teaching. She holds a bachelors degree and indicated that she was enrolled in a Masters program at the time of this study.

Amy is an energetic fifth grade teacher with less than five years of teaching experience. She holds a bachelors degree but indicated that she is currently in a Masters program. She is responsible for teaching math to all fifth grade students. She reported having two years of experience with inclusion and expressed positive feelings about it. She indicated that she had no coursework or professional development regarding inclusion or students with disabilities.

Lisa joined teaching later in life as a second career. She was in the business field prior to becoming a teacher. She is a self-contained fifth grade teacher with three years of inclusion experience. At the time of this study, she was co-teaching with a first-year special education teacher. Lisa reported having no coursework or professional development related to inclusion or students with disabilities.

Susan is a fifth grade teacher with more than 11 years of teaching experience. She is responsible for teaching writing to all fifth grade students. She holds a masters degree in teaching. She reported having at least five years of experience with inclusion and reported

positive feelings about it. Susan indicated having some professional development related to inclusion and co-teaching.

Colleen is a fourth grade general education teacher with less than five years of teaching experience. She entered teaching later in her career. She holds a bachelors degree and reported having at least two professional development sessions on inclusion and co-teaching. She indicated positive feelings about inclusion for both students with and without disabilities.

Marcia is a fourth grade general education teacher with less than five years of teaching experience. She indicated having no experience with inclusion, however she had taken three courses related to inclusion and students with disabilities. She holds a bachelors degree. Marcia expressed very strong feelings about inclusion particularly in regards to how it is implemented at Parker.

Jessica is a fourth grade teacher with more than 11 years of teaching experience. She holds a bachelors degree plus 30 graduate credits. She indicated participating in one professional development session during her 11 years at Parker. This was her first year as an inclusion teacher and she reported very positive feelings regarding its implementation.

Amanda is a fourth grade teacher with less than five years of teaching experience. She holds a bachelors degree and reported receiving some coursework on inclusion and students with disabilities. Amanda indicated that she did not have experience with full inclusion but had some experience with partial inclusion. She indicated that students from the self-contained CI classroom were in her homeroom and participated in science and social studies daily.

Renee is a third grade general education teacher with more than 11 years of teaching experience. She reported having experience with full inclusion as well as partial inclusion. Renee expressed very positive feelings about co-teaching and believes that all students belong in

general education, unless they are a disruption to the learning environment. Renee indicated that she did not have any coursework or professional development related to inclusion or students with disabilities.

Tracy is a third grade teacher with less than five years of teaching experience at Parker. She had taught several years in another school district. Tracy holds a bachelors degree and indicated having at least two courses regarding inclusion and students with disabilities. She reported positive feelings associated with inclusion though she had not yet had the opportunity to be an inclusion teacher at Parker. She did report having experience with inclusion at her previous school however.

Kelly is a computer teacher for grades three through six at Parker. She has less than five years of teaching experience. She reported having one course on inclusion in her undergraduate program. She holds a bachelors degree and indicated that she will be pursuing a masters degree. Kelly reported having three years of experience teaching students with disabilities within the general education setting as well as in a self-contained setting. She reported feeling like inclusion is extremely challenging because she does not have support from the special education teacher or a paraprofessional in her classroom.

John is a physical education teacher for grades three through six and has more than 11 years of teaching experience. He holds a masters degree and reported having minimal coursework on inclusion and students with disabilities. He indicated fairly positive feelings about inclusion particularly in gym class.

Julie is a music teacher for grades three through six at Parker. She has more than six years of teaching experience. She indicated that she had no coursework or professional development related to inclusion or teaching students with disabilities. Currently, she teaches

music to students with disabilities in the general education setting as well as in the self-contained CI classroom setting.

Todd is a special education teacher with more than 16 years of teaching experience. At the time of this study, he was co-teaching with two sixth grade teachers for math and language arts. He holds a masters degree and 30 additional graduate credits. Todd is soft-spoken and kind. He reported feeling burned out and ready for a change but was unsure about leaving Parker elementary.

Carrie is a special education teacher with more than six years of teaching experience. She began her career as a resource room teacher and reported feeling positive about the move to inclusive practices. She indicated enjoying her work with Renee, the third grade teacher, and Jessica, the fourth grade teacher. She holds a bachelors degree and indicated that she is considering a Masters degree at some point.

Holly is a self-contained special education teacher in the Cognitively Impaired classroom. She began her career at Parker and has been there for more than ten years. Holly holds a masters degree in special education. She indicated a desire to move to inclusive practices with her students but felt that administration was unsupportive. Holly mainstreams her students for science and social studies but reported that she would like to do more.

Students. I used network sampling to ensure a balanced representation of student participants with disabilities and without disabilities. I asked teachers to suggest students with and without disabilities who might be interested in participating in the study. Six students from fifth and sixth grade participated in the previous study therefore I was primarily interested in finding participants from third and fourth grades. Third and fourth grade teachers assisted in the selection of student participants. Eight students in grades three and four were invited to

participate. After repeated attempts to obtain parent/guardian permission, three fourth graders

and one, third grader agreed to participate. In addition to the demographic data provided in Table

3.2, I also provide a brief narrative description of the student participants.

Table 3.2 *Demographic Data of Student Participants*

Students	Grade level	General Education	Special Education
Brian	6th	X	
Carly	6th		X
Jay	6th		X
Mary	5th	X	
Jack	5th	X	
Adam	5th		X
Cassie	4th	X	
Andrew	4th		X
Tyler	4th		X
Thad	3rd	X	

Three fifth grade students participated in the previous study. I was not able to locate them

for follow up interviews to update the interview data or obtain new data. Adam was a fifth grade

student who was eligible for special education as a student with a specific learning disability. At

the time of the initial study, he was enrolled in a full inclusion classroom. Mary was a general

education fifth grade student enrolled in an inclusion classroom at the time of the initial study.

Jack was also a general education fifth grade student enrolled in an inclusion classroom at the

time of the initial study. The data for all three participants was included in this study.

Brian was a sixth grade general education student enrolled in an inclusion classroom at

the time of the initial study. Carly and Jay were both students eligible for special education

services as students with specific learning disabilities. At the time of the initial study, both

students were enrolled in an inclusion classroom.

Andrew and Tyler were both fourth grade students enrolled in an inclusion classroom at the time of this study. Andrew was eligible for special education services as a student with a specific learning disability, as was Tyler. Both students participated in the interview and the image sort, both of which were audio recorded.

Cassie was a fourth grade student at that time of this study. She was not in a full inclusion classroom, however several students from the self-contained special education classroom joined her homeroom for science and social studies. Cassie's data is not included in the current study because she was unable to answer the interview questions or complete the image sort. Cassie was not able to describe images associated with disability or special education because she reported that she did not know what those two words meant. For that reason, she was also unable to complete the image sort. Thad, a third grade student, responded similarly. He too indicated no knowledge of what disability and special education were. It is interesting to note that the two fourth grade participants that were quite familiar with the concepts of special education and disability were both students with disabilities.

Data Sources

Two data sources were developed to explore participants' perceptions of disability, special education and inclusion; a semi-structured interview protocol and verbal data based on participants discussion of the researcher developed image sort. Both of these forms of verbal data were recorded and transcribed. A semiotic document analysis and place analysis provided additional secondary data sources, which helped me understand the context in which these beliefs are held.

Discussion of the Reasearcher Developed Image Sort. Data was collected as participants completed an image sort and discussed their perceptions and choices. In the previous section, I

addressed the influence of culture on our perceptions and the role images play in constructing, maintaining, and/or perpetuating individual's beliefs about disability. For this reason, I chose to use photo elicitation as a way to stimulate conversation regarding participants' beliefs about disability and inclusion. Although photo elicitation has been used in many types of research, there were no existing image sort protocols in the area of disability and special education to draw from or adapt for the purposes of this study, therefore I designed a photo elicitation image sort specifically for this study.

The image sort needed to include images that represented various disabilities as well as images that represented inclusion. In the fall of 2010, I contacted twelve colleagues from the university's teacher education and special education departments requesting examples of 3-5 images that they believe represent disability and inclusion. I chose these particular colleagues because of their affiliation with both general and special education programs. Of the initial twelve contacted, six individuals responded sending me five or more images they felt represented those categories. I collected a total of 30 images.

A semiotic analysis of the images revealed that twenty-two images involved a visible disability therefore; I selected an additional eight images that could be representative of inclusion or invisible disabilities. These eight images included two photographs of a child without a visible disability, three photographs of groups of individuals in social settings, one photograph of an accessible van, and two graphics representing inclusion. See Table 3.3 for a breakdown of the number of images by category.

Table 3.3 *Total Images per Category*

Image Category	Total Images
Photograph of typical classroom	2
Photograph of isolated visible disability	3
Photograph of adaptive equipment/vehicles	4
Illustrations/ graphics of inclusion	3
Universal symbols and graphics of disability	4
Photograph of groups of individuals in social settings	4
Photograph of two people; one with a visible disability	3
Photograph of classrooms including students with visible disabilities	5
Photograph of single individual without a visible disability	4
Photograph of single individual with a visible disability	6

Numbers were randomly assigned to all images and recorded on the back of each image with a black marker for the purpose of data analysis. Figure 3.1 displays all 38 images.

Figure 3.1 *Images*

1.	2.	3.	4.
5.	6.	7.	8.
9.	10.	11.	12.

Figure 3.1 (cont'd)

13.	14.	15.	16.
17.	18.	19.	20.
21.	22.	23.	24.
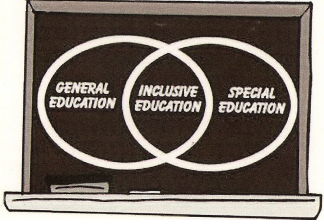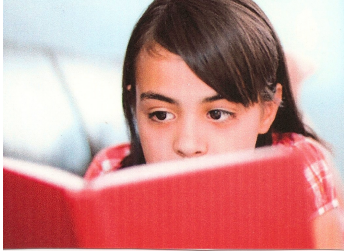
Figure 3.1. (cont'd)

25.	26.	27.	28.
29.	30.	31.	32.
33.	34.	35.	36.

Figure 3.1. (cont'd)

| 37. | 38. |
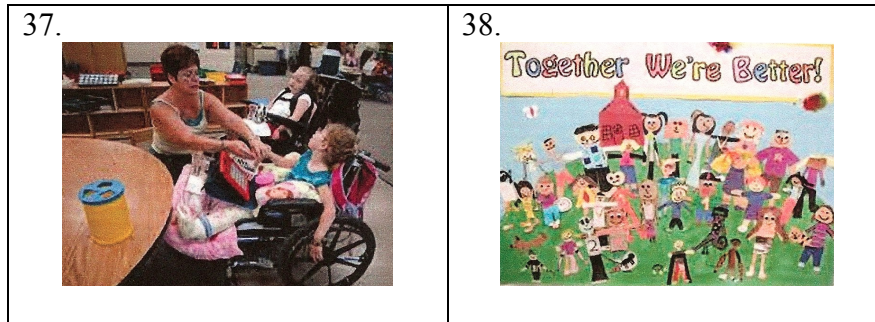
* Note. For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation. See footnote for citations and description of image 25. [1]

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[1] 1. (Borba, 2013); 2. (Co-teach Preschool , n.d.); 3. (Alibaba.com, n.d.); 4. (Rosenberg, 2010); 5. (Interior Design and Style, n.d.); 6. (Glastonbury Public Schools, 2013); 7. (Home Away, n.d.); 8. (Southern Nevada Chapter, 2010); 9. (Inspiring Movie, 2011); 10. (Train, 2011); 11. (Blogspot.com, n.d.); 12. (Marlee Matlin Biography, 2013); 13. (Datcher, 2013); 14. (National Inclusion Project, n.d.); 15. (Filmsound.org, n.d.); 16. (Lisveen, n.d.); 17. (Sweeter than Candice, 2010); 18. (Daisy Among Roses, 2012); 19. (Pacer Center, 2013); 20. (ESL Article.com, 2013); 21. (Life-Medic, n.d.); 22. (Waffles, 2010); 23. (Miller, 2010); 24. (Peters, 2010); 25. (Kids Together, Inc, 2010) General Education/Inclusive Education/ Special Education; 26. (Grey Ops, 2011); 27. (Autism & Oughtisms, 2011); 28. (Peters, 2010); 29. (Briccola, 2001); 30. (Peters, 2010); 31. (Enjoying the HI-5's of Autism, 2013); 32. (Smart Exchange, 2011); 33. (Temporary Pedestrian Access Routes, 2013); 34. (No Author, n.d.); 35. (Mizzou Wire, 2007); 36. (Squidoo, n.d.); 37. (Education Jobs, Special Education Jobs, 2013); 38. (Thomas, 2013)

Semi-Structured Phenomenographic Interviews. Semi-structured interviews offer

insight into respondents' memories and explanations of why things have come to be what they

are (Stark & Torrance, 2008) or in this case, how respondents conceptualize disability, special

education, and inclusion. The interviews were conducted prior to the image sort so as not to

allow the images to influence interview responses. Three separate interview protocols were

developed to capture the variation in participant knowledge and experiences. The interviews

were 15-30 minutes in length. All interview protocols began with the question, "What images,

(by images, I mean symbols, objects, people, etc) come to mind when you hear the words

disability, special education, and inclusion?" Additional questions were developed for the adult

participant interview protocols. The teacher interview protocols included additional questions to

explore personal and professional feelings associated with these concepts. See appendices for

interview protocols. An oral history from an individual who was present through these transitions

was also collected.

Document Analysis. Documents can be examined for immediate content, changing

content over time and the values that such changing content manifests (Stark & Torrance, 2008).

A semiotic review of policy documents provided insight into how the district as a whole

communicates their understanding of disability, special education and inclusion. I also looked for

historical special education policy documents to gain an understanding of how special education

has been communicated to people in this building over time. I looked specifically for special

education manuals for the eras where special education legislation changed; 1975, 1997, and

2004 by contacting the local Intermediate School District. The only available manual was

entitled, "Intermediate School District Plan for the Delivery of Special Education Programs and

Services" from 2001. The secretary indicated that this was the most current manual and that

previous manuals did not exist. It is important to note that Parker elementary has been operating under this manual since 2001.

Place Analysis. I examined the building in terms of the semiotics of how space is used and what signs and symbols may convey related to inclusion, disability and special education.

Procedures

At the beginning of the study, I met with the school administrator and the district superintendent to obtain permission to conduct my study. This study was an extension of a prior study I conducted at Parker elementary and included additional participants as well as document analysis. With the principal's permission, I expanded this study to include third, fourth, and sixth grade teachers as well as itinerant teachers. Due to the nature of the research question, purposive sampling was used to select teacher participants who then recommended student participants.

I met with each teacher and scheduled interviews, distributed consent forms, and enlisted their assistance in identifying student participants. The teachers provided contact information and invitations were sent to four parents of students without disabilities and four parents of students with disabilities. Following the consent process, I determined a convenient time and location to meet with the participants to conduct the interview and image sort. A total of thirty interviews were conducted and audio recorded for transcription.

Data Collection

Image sort data. Participants were provided a template with two columns. At the top of the left column was the word Disability, at the top of the right column was the word Inclusion. Participants were instructed to consider which images they believed represent Disability and/or Inclusion and place them in the corresponding column. To indicate when they felt the image represented both categories, they were instructed to place the images in the middle. I prompted

the participants' to provide a rationale when placing various images in particular categories to gain a deeper understanding of their conceptions of disability and inclusion. The image sort was audio recorded and transcribed.

The images were randomly numbered on the back and as participants completed the activity, I recorded the numbers in the appropriate columns. Numbers of images that represented both categories were documented at the bottom of the template. An excel spreadsheet was used to record participant responses and to develop preliminary descriptive data. Frequencies of responses were calculated using an Excel spreadsheet, which included the number of the image, the four response categories, and the total number of participant responses for each category. The categories were assigned values 1 through 4 with category 1 representing Inclusion, category 2 representing disability, category 3 representing both, and category 4 representing omitted images. A series of descriptive statistics were calculated including frequency and percentages.

Interview data. The information gathered from the semi-formal interviews was collected to explore *what* cultural images and experiences have influenced participants' understandings of disability, inclusion, *and* special education. The interview protocols can be found in the appendices A, B, C, and D. The interviews were audio recorded using a recording device. A total of thirty-three interviews were transcribed and coded for analysis.

Data Analysis

My approach to analysis drew upon qualitative traditions of phenomenography and social semiotics. In this section, I explain these analytical frames and how they related to my research. I then explain how I employed them in the analysis of my data.

Phenomenographic Analysis

Aspects of phenomenography and social semiotics drove my analysis, as this was most appropriate for addressing the research questions developed of this study. The most significant characteristics of the phenomenographic approach according to Svensson (2006), are the aiming at categories of description, the open explorative form of data collection and the interpretive character of the analysis of data. Phenomenographic analysis identifies similarities and differences in the way the participants perceive disability, special education and inclusion. It involves identifying the ways in which the phenomena is experienced by participants and allows for grouping the experiences to understand at a deeper level what has been said or not said. According to Reed (2006), the ways of experiencing a phenomenon are often referred to as conceptions, which in phenomenographic research are typically represented in the form of categories of description and should be thought of as 'denoting' conceptions rather than as synonymous with conceptions.

This type of analysis allowed me to examine the way in which participants conceptualized and communicated their understanding of disability, special education, and inclusion. Barnard, McCosker, and Gerber (1999) refer to the qualitatively different ways in which people understand a phenomenon as "outcome space". The interviews involving the verbal protocol and the photo-elicitation protocol were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. My research assistant completed the initial transcriptions, which I reviewed and examined for accuracy. As interviews were transcribed and reviewed, I became more familiar with the data and began to note interesting comments and responses that were similar and/or distinctly different.

I then reread each transcript aiming to identify the qualitatively different ways of understanding disability, special education, and inclusion. I compared responses and labeled

them in the margins, which resulted in the identification of several preliminary categories. I reviewed the data and began coding accordingly. Initially, I had approximately 20 codes, however as I went back through the codes I was able to condense codes that were similar and remove codes that were less robust. To provide a detailed discussion of the findings for each concept, I felt it was important to limit the number of categories discussed. I chose the top four or five categories that emerged for disability, special education and inclusion with the help of my dissertation co-chair. Five additional categories emerged that have particular relevance to the research questions, which can be found in Chapter Seven.

There are two ways to characterize outcome space, hierarchical and horizontal. Hierarchical outcome space occurs when one conceptualization is considered more advanced or developed than the rest of the outcome space (Webb, 1997). Horizontal categories occur when different viewpoints emerge, which are of equal importance in relation to one another (Hyrkas, Astedt-Kurki & Paunonen, 1999). The conceptualizations of disability, special education, and inclusion that emerged from the outcome space could be discussed hierarchically however, I preferred to discuss the themes that emerged horizontally because I believe these conceptions are equally important in relationship to one another. The intertextual and intratextual nature of the outcome space revealed conceptions of disability, special education and inclusion, which I believe would be more appropriately discussed in relationship to one another.

For organizational purposes, the findings are discussed according to the specific concept that was explored. For example, Chapter Five addresses participants' conceptions of disability, Chapter Six addresses participants' conceptions of special education, and Chapter Seven addresses participants' conceptions associated with inclusion. Organizing the chapters in this way provided a framework for discussing them as distinct conceptualizations however, they were

frequently described in relationship to one another. For this reason, I chose not to present them hierarchically in order of importance, but rather horizontally, alongside one another. The interrelated nature of these concepts was revealed throughout the study therefore, the order in which I discuss each of the themes within the chapters also does not reflect their significance in comparison to one another but rather their significance in relationship to one another and the natural progression of the chapters.

Social Semiotic Analysis

The phenomenographic outcome space was further reviewed and coded for patterns, which revealed (a) hegemonic and marginalized representation, (b) binary conceptualizations, and (c) the wider cultural discourses and myths associated with these ways of thinking. As I examined the outcome space, I coded for evidence of the hegemonic conception of disability as understood from a medical model orientation, that is, pathological and individualistic. I also coded for evidence of binaries associated with disability such as able/disabled, normal/abnormal, right/wrong, visible/invisible, and so forth. My final analysis involved coding for evidence of responses reflecting cultural myths associated with disability such as the myth of the supercrip. This analysis afforded a more nuanced approach to examining the data and will be discussed alongside the phenomenographic findings in the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER 4

PERCEPTIONS OF DISABILITY

In this chapter I discuss the nature of participants' perceptions of disability, special education and inclusion. I also discuss the implications for educators as well as for disabled people and a democratic society. With the legal and philosophical mandate to provide equal opportunity, liberty and justice to all, research exploring stakeholders' perceptions of disability, inclusion, and special education is crucial. According to Furman (2008), "There can no longer be a view of teaching as apolitical or that ignores issues of diversity in its many forms. The job of a teacher must be to make inequity visible and to broker in intercultural capital" (p. 76). To address issues of diversity and inequity in education, first requires educators to examine their biases, prejudices, and beliefs associated with culturally diverse groups. These examinations are key in determining how one's awareness and beliefs will eventually end up informing their practice in the classroom (Dedeoglu & Lamme, 2010).

I wanted to explore perceptions of disability, inclusion and special education in such a way that participants' would naturally engage in dialogue about their assumptions, biases, and prejudices. For this reason, I paired photo elicitation with phenomenographic interviews to stimulate dialogue and to potentially obtain richer descriptions of teachers and students beliefs about disability, inclusion and special education. I was interested in exploring how individuals at Parker elementary come to understand and make meaning of these phenomena in their own minds. First, I asked participants to describe what images, symbols, objects, or ideas came to mind when they heard the words disability, inclusion, and special education. To further explore their perceptions, I then showed participants 38 images and asked them to determine which images they believed represented disability and which images represented inclusion. "Images

evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words; exchanges based on words alone utilize less of the brain's capacity than do exchanges in which the brain is processing images as well as words" (Harper, 2002, p. 1) For this reason, photo images were used to elicit responses from participants that would provide a deeper paradigmatic understanding of their perceptions of disability and inclusion than research without images. According to Harper (2002), elicitation interviews connect "core definitions of the self" to society, culture and history, which proved to be instrumental in exploring participants' cultural perceptions of three incredibly complex phenomena.

Researching Semiotic Conceptions and Phenomenological Beliefs

Social semiotics provided an exciting and effective method for exploring participants' personal and professional perceptions of disability because it is concerned with how meaning is attached to signs. Bal and Bryson (1991) say, "human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs" (as cited in Rose, 2012, p.106). In this study, I explored participants' cultural associations of disability, inclusion, and special education. Some of the participants appeared to be aware of the difference between a cultural association and a more reflective personal association and seemed distressed by it. McLeod (2008) refers to a situation involving conflicting attitudes, beliefs, or behaviors as causing cognitive dissonance. McLeod states that cognitive dissonance produces a feeling of discomfort or tension leading to an alteration in one of the attitudes, beliefs or behaviors to reduce the discomfort and restore balance. "Cognitive dissonance can be seen as an antecedent condition which leads to activity oriented toward dissonance reduction just as hunger leads to activity oriented toward hunger reduction" (Festinger, 1957, p. 3). Several participants reported feeling frustrated during the image sort

because they did not feel as though it accurately reflected their "personal" beliefs. Wilson (2011) points out that dissonance can be manifested in the particular way an individual feels on a personal level, a belief or attitude, that may not be appropriate on a professional level, which creates the dissonance between the two (p. 14). This appeared to be the case for Marcia, a fourth grade teacher, who expressed intense frustration towards the end of the image sort because she felt as though she was not representing *her* beliefs, "Okay, I'll tell you what bothers me because I feel like *you* just put me into how the regular public perceives these things and that makes me feel uncomfortable because that's not how it should be." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Other teachers appeared to experience cognitive dissonance, however Marcia expressed the most intense feelings about it. See Table 4.1 for additional information.

Table 4.1

Indications of Cognitive Dissonance Related to the Image Sort.

Teacher	Words Used to Express Feelings Related to Image Sort
Kelly	None
Colleen	Nervous
Tracy	Nervous, judgmental
Greg	Judgmental
Julie	Stereotypical, awkward
Ellen	Weird
John	Too open ended
Holly	None
Carrie	Very uncomfortable, stereotypical
Todd	None
Susan	A little uncomfortable
Jessica	Bad, judgmental
Amanda	Not good
Renee	Happy
Lisa	A little nervous
Amy	Self-conscious

The majority of the participants expressed feelings of nervousness, discomfort, and judgment associated with the image sort. Both Amy and Carrie expressed some frustration as they engaged in the image sort. Amy's frustration appeared to stem from uncertainty, "you do question yourself because you want to do it, you want to put them in the right category." (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Carrie, a special education teacher, reported feeling uncomfortable because, "it makes you think of things, like preconceived notions or stereotypes that you've had your whole life. No one wants to do this, you know? It's uncomfortable…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013).

It is worth noting that all three teachers were given the option to change the sort to more appropriately reflect their beliefs, yet only Amy and Carrie opted to do so. Marcia refused saying, "No, because I don't know enough [about the individuals in the images]." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). However, when she reported being very familiar with one of the images, she appeared even more frustrated saying, "I feel like I know the most about image 9 and it bothers me even more." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She decided to leave the images in their original categories even though she was visibly uncomfortable with it. Grohol (2008) suggests that we often do not like to second-guess our choices because we may feel that we are not as wise or as right as we have led ourselves to believe. For this reason, we may commit to a particular course of action and become insensitive to and reject alternative, perhaps better, courses that come to light. The participants may have refused to revise the placement of some of the images in an attempt to reduce the discomfort experienced by competing/contradictory beliefs and by accepting the dominant social perception of disability as visible.

While teachers sometimes correctly pointed out that their perceptions weren't "their fault", they were nonetheless their perceptions and their existence highlights the importance of this research. It is particularly important to research concepts that are culturally weighted with signification since this is the symbolic milieu in which we live, think and speak.

The data below reflects participants' sometimes conflicting and even directly contradictory beliefs and perceptions. I have not tried to find a "one best answer" from participants since this complexity and contradiction is a very relevant part of their personal conceptual frameworks. Individuals can, for example, believe something strongly or not, with passion or not, for good reason or not. Two persons may hold the same belief system with a different measure of strength, with more or less adequate reasons, or with more or less adequate evidence. They may, on the contrary, believe different things with equal strength, reason or evidence (Green, 1968, p. 38). Green describes these differences as referring to the way in which beliefs are held in relationship to each other and second to the way in which beliefs are held in relation to evidence or reasons. Green (1968) describes a "primitive belief" as one, which is held without question, which has the status of an arbiter, so to speak, in determining which beliefs can be received and which must be rejected. According to Greene (1968), whether a belief is central or peripheral has little to do with its consent. "Some beliefs are more important than others and the measure of their importance…is not whether they are logically primitive, but whether they are psychologically central (p. 40)." The data does not indicate with certainty whether the participants were experiencing cognitive dissonance or merely holding conflicting beliefs, however several important and relevant themes emerged which may provide valuable insight into attitudes and beliefs about disability and inclusion that could positively influence the future of inclusive practices.

The interview and image sort responses were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for phenomenographic and semiotic analysis. The phenomenographic analysis resulted in an "outcome space" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999) for examination, interpretation, and discussion. The outcome space revealed several interesting themes related to participants perceptions of disability, which will be discussed in this chapter. I will first present and briefly explain the themes that emerged related to participants' perceptions of each phenomenon including the perception that disability is visible; disability is incompetence; disability is easily defined and disability is abnormal. I will also discuss the potential implications of these findings.

Perceptions of Disability

    Disability is Visible. As part of the verbal interview, I asked participants to describe any images, symbols, or objects that came to their mind when they heard the word *disability.* For the majority of participants, the response was distinctively a physical and/or visible disability. Though several participants would later reference cognitive or learning disabilities, the first image that came to their minds was that of a visible or physical disability. Table 4.2 displays the images most frequently associated with disability as elicited by the question, "What images, symbols, or objects come to mind when you hear the word disability?

Table 4.2
Images, Symbols, or Objects Associated with Disability.

Images	Tally
Wheelchair	11
Physical Impairment	10
Mental Impairment	6
Learning Disability	4
Cane/Crutches	3
Walker	3
Braces	2
Hearing Impairment	1
Emotional Impairment	1

Table 4.2 (cont'd)

Images	Tally
Heart Problem	1
Cleft Palate/Mouth Guards	1
Handicapped Parking Sticker	1
Helmet	1

Participants' perception of disability as visible is supported by the image sort data as well.

During the image sort, 84 percent of participants appeared to use evidence of a visible disability as their main criteria for categorizing the images. Amanda, a fourth grade general education teacher, reluctantly stated, "…I would say that this student maybe looks like she may have a disability…" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013) as she contemplated placing image 14, a photograph of a student with Down syndrome, in the disability category. Marcia, also a fourth grade general education teacher, used the lack of visible evidence to determine the placement of image 32, a photograph of a young girl reading, saying, "I can't see right away if this child has any learning disabilities or not." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). John, a physical education teacher, categorizes image 36, a photograph of a young boy outside, as disability because, "…it looks like he could be autistic…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). The perception of disability as visible was woven throughout the verbal interview and image sort data as indicated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3
Conceptions of Disability as Visible

Participant	Grade or role	Sorted for visible disability		Verbal response of visible disability		
		Yes	No	Yes	Yes + invisible	No
Todd	SE teacher		X		X	
Carrie	SE teacher		X		X	
Holly	SE teacher	X		X		
John	PE teacher		X	X		
Julie	Music teacher	X			X	
Kelly	Comp. teacher	X			X	
Ellen	GE teacher 6th	X		X		
Greg	GE teacher 6th	X			X	
Lisa	GE teacher 5th		X			X
Amy	GE teacher 5th		X	X		
Susan	GE teacher 5th	X		X		
Jessica	GE teacher 4th	X		X		
Colleen	GE teacher 4th	X		X		
Amanda	GE teacher 4th	X			X	
Marcia	GE teacher 4th	X		X		
Tracy	GE teacher 3rd	X			X	
Renee	GE teacher 3rd	X			X	
Brian	6th GE student	X				X
Carly	6th GE student	X		X		
Jay	6th SE student	X		X		
Andrew	6th SE student	X				X
Mary	5th GE student		X		X	
Jack	5th GE student	X		X		
Adam	5th SE student	X			X	
Tyer	4th GE student	X			X	
Cassie	4th GE student		X			X
Thad	3rd GE student		X			X
Totals		19	8	11	11	5

* *Note. SE = Special Education; GE = General Education; PE = Physical Education*

The image sort data indicated that participants most frequently categorized images as representing disability when they involved a) photographs of individuals using mobility devices such as wheelchairs, prosthesis, canes, or walkers; b) photographs of individuals using sign language and/or braille; c) symbols such as the handicapped parking sign and symbols representing cognitive, hearing, vision, or physical impairments; and d) photographs of individuals with characteristics indicative of Down syndrome and Cerebral Palsy.

Twenty-seven of the 38 images involved individuals with visible disabilities, assistive devices, or symbols associated with disability and though the participants used different criteria for categorizing images as representing disability, there were several images that appeared to be the least contested across all participants. Images 5, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21, 23, 27, 29, 33, 34, 35, and 37 were categorized as representing disability most frequently across participants (See Table 4.4). Of these 18 images, six photographs included wheelchairs, three involved universal disability symbols, four involved individuals using prosthetic devices, four involved individuals with vision or hearing disabilities and one included an individual with Down syndrome.

Table 4.4

Percentage of Participants Who Categorized Image as Disability

Image	Percent of Participants	Number of Participants
5	88	23
29	88	23
10	85	22
17	85	22
20	85	22
27	85	22
37	85	22
33	85	22
12	81	21
21	81	21
23	77	20
8	77	20
35	77	20
18	73	19
16	73	19
11	69	18
34	69	18
7	62	16

*Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56 .

As mentioned above, I asked participants to describe the process they used to determine which category each image represented to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of disability. Ninety-three percent of participants reported that they placed images in the disability category if there was visible evidence of a disability or the need for adaptive equipment or assistive devices. Kelly, a third year computer teacher, reported that she "…stuck to physical disabilities, just in disability [category]…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Greg, a sixth grade general education teacher, appeared to associate disability with difference or aberration, categorizing image 27, a universal symbol of various disabilities, as representing disability "…because it just represents things that could be wrong." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He identified three other images; 34, a photograph of an individual with a prosthetic leg, 33, a photograph of an individual using a cane, and 20, a photograph of a child with Down syndrome, as representing disability based on the visible nature of the disability.

Amongst the collective K-12 student population in the United States today, the number of students with invisible disabilities far outweighs the number of students with visible disabilities. According to the U. S. Department of Education (2012), 10.3 percent of the 13.1 percent of students receiving special education services have invisible disabilities such as Specific Learning Disabilities, Speech or Language Disabilities, Intellectual Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance, and/or Autism. The remaining 2.8 percent are students with visible disabilities such as Physical Impairments, Hearing Impairments, Vision Impairments, and/or Multiple Impairments. The data from the current study suggests that teachers may be more likely to perceive disability as visible or physical, which could influence how they perceive and respond to students with invisible disabilities. Dedeoglu and Lamme (2010) reiterate the importance of determining how aware

individuals are of the diversity that surrounds them and how they choose to respond to it because it is a key factor in knowing how beliefs will ultimately be reflected in the classroom.

This study involved photo-elicitation as a way to more deeply explore participants' beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions about disability and inclusion. Two-thirds of the images used in this study involved visible cues of disability and though this was the criterion most often used to categorize images as representing disability, it certainly was not the only one. Even though the images did not involve an equal number of visible and invisible disabilities that did not appear to negatively impact the findings primarily because the images were used as a qualitative method to elicit participants' deeply held beliefs and assumptions about disability and not as a quantitative method for numerical analysis. The visible presence of a disability did not automatically prompt participants to categorize the image as representing disability. There were occasions when participants indicated using background knowledge and social context as criteria for determining whether images represented disability as well, a finding that will be explored further later in the chapter.

Another implication is that physically disabled students may be understood to be "more" disabled in school than students with invisible disabilities; a finding that will be explored further in Chapter Six. A physical disability does not always result in significant educational challenges. One example of this is the famous physicist and cosmologist *Stephen Hawking,* who has amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and has been nearly completely paralyzed for decades. Students with physical disabilities (that do not impact their academic abilities) need support and respect for their "normalness", which ironically may be something not clear to teachers who seem fixated on physical limitations. This will be discussed further in the following section.

Participants described their process for categorizing images as representing disability using primarily visible criteria however, for some participants, this criteria changed based on the perceived success of the individual(s) in the photographs. The notion that success reduces or eliminates disability is noteworthy; therefore, I will explore this in greater depth in the following section.

Disability as Deficit. Research suggests that for many people, disability is perceived as a deficit and is often described in terms of what one cannot do (Wolfensberger, 1988; Darke, 1998; Mitchell & Snyder, 2001; Nario-Redmond, 2008; Westbrook, Legge & Pennay, 1993). Similarly, for some of the adult participants in this study, disability appeared to be determined by the level of success or normalcy that could be achieved. That is to say, the more successful and "normal" the individuals appeared, the more difficult is was for some of the participants to consider them disabled. For example, image 12, a photograph of Marlee Matlin, prompted this response from Greg, "I don't think she fits, the lady from T. V. I don't know, she just, maybe she is just doing too well." (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Her success as an actress appeared to strongly influence Greg's perception of her as non-disabled because he categorized image 8, the universal symbol for sign language, as representing disability. Baglieri and Shapiro (2012) point out that the ways we make meaning of disability are funneled and focused through cultural beliefs that inherently devalue disability as appeared to be the case with Greg who struggled to associate disability with success.

John indicated the belief that attitude and confidence are important factors in determining disability. He quickly decided that image 11, Stevie Wonder, did not belong in the disability category saying, "…I guess the main thing is, with him, it's his attitude as far as his disability. He just doesn't let it bother him. It's no big deal. He's very confident in himself and that helps"

(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He used a similar rationale for image 18, a photograph of a woman running with prosthetic feet, "Here's one with a woman running…on her prosthetic legs so, I don't see that as either [disability or inclusion]. Um, I mean they made an adaption so, it's not really disabled, you're still doing what you can do" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Some of the individuals in these images were perceived as being too successful to be disabled and some with access to devices that enable them to do "normal" things were also perceived as less disabled or not disabled at all. Amanda, for example, struggled to categorize image 34, an individual with a prosthetic leg, saying, "…if this person had pants on, I wouldn't even know this person has a disability or not…I guess it is a disability but I think they could probably function just like the rest of us" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). The more able-bodied, the more successful, and the more confident the individuals were perceived to be, the less disabled they were perceived to be.

The majority of participants implicitly indicated the dominant myth of disability as deficit. The perspective of disability as a deficit is inherent in the medical model of disability, which recommends a scientific approach to disability. It is the most dominant model for addressing disability in schools as evidenced by IDEIA, which provides the framework for determining special education eligibility and service provisions. Greg, John, and Amanda indicated orientation toward the medical model of disability as they resisted the association of disability with success, able-bodiedness, and confidence. Other participants also indicated an orientation toward the medical model of disability as they described "lack of motivation" and "lack of confidence" as characteristics typically associated with disability. Some responses reflected the indication of a social model orientation toward disability, which considers the

broader context in which disability becomes meaningful. The next section will discuss the role context played in the determination of disability.

Disability in Context. The majority of participants consistently associated disability with visible or physical features as indicated by the interview and image sort data. However, it appeared that background knowledge and familiarity with the images played a role in the determination of disability for some of the teacher participants. I will begin this section with a brief overview of these images to provide a context for discussing the unique perspectives of four teachers and their implications for inclusion.

Five of the 38 images involved famous characters from movies and television as well as famous musicians and actors. Image 11 is a photograph of Stevie Wonder, a famous singer, songwriter, and multi-instrumentalist. Image 12 is a photograph of Marlee Matlin, a famous movie and television actress who is the only deaf performer to win the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Leading Role. Image 9 is an advertisement for the movie *I am Sam* (Nelson, 2001), which involves a father with mild cognitive impairments played by Sean Penn. Image 15 is a photograph of Forrest Gump, played by Tom Hanks, sitting on a park bench waiting for the bus in the Academy Award winning movie *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994). Image 22 is a photograph from the movie *Mask* (Starger, 1985) starring Eric Stoltz as Rocky Dennis, a boy diagnosed with Craniodiaphyseal Dysplasia, an extremely rare disorder known commonly as *Lionitis* due to the disfiguring cranial enlargements that it causes. The majority of adult participants indicated being at least vaguely familiar or very familiar with these images, which reportedly influenced how some of them categorized the images. The results for the categorization of these images are shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Results for Teacher Categorization of Familiar Images

Images	Categorized image as representing:			
	Disability	Inclusion	Both	Omitted
9	5	3	7	2
11	8	2	5	2
12	9	2	5	1
15	5	5	4	3
22	4	5	5	3

* Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56.

As indicated earlier, the majority of teachers appeared to associate disability with a visible or physical condition across the data. There were four teachers however, who appeared to associate disability with other factors such as, the level of success or independence achieved. This was particularly relevant in reference to image 11, a photograph of Stevie Wonder. John, a physical education teacher, and Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, omitted the image altogether, while Jessica, a fourth grade teacher, and Holly, a self-contained special education teacher, categorized it as representing inclusion only. Their rationale for placement may indicate an orientation toward the social model of disability or an orientation toward the myth of the 'supercrip'.

Image 11 elicited the following response from Jessica, "…people don't really see that or don't think of it as he's blind and that he can't see…he's still a wonderful singer that everyone's amazed with his singing ability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She elaborated saying, "I don't necessarily think about him being disabled…I just don't, I think of him as a singer…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). John did not believe image 11 represented disability or inclusion and omitted it from the sort saying, "I guess the main thing is, with him,

it's his attitude as far as his disability. He just doesn't let it bother him, it's no big deal, he's very confident in himself and that helps" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Even though he recognized that Stevie Wonder is blind, John did not perceive it to be a disability. Lisa also omitted image 11 from the sort saying, "I don't consider image 11 a disability…he's overcome it" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). The perception of disabled individuals as overcoming the trauma of disability through courage and perseverance is regarded by many in the disabled community, as the myth of the "supercrip" (Nelson, 1996).

Though Julie categorized image 11 as representing both disability and inclusion, she indicated a similar perception saying, "There is an obvious disability but he didn't let that stop him, he is very mainstream" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). The narrow focus on the heroic struggles of the few, diminishes the much needed attention to broader accessibility issues such as, healthcare, employment, education, recreation, and housing that remain problematic for many disabled individuals (Nelson, 1996). Although all four of these participants reported being aware that Stevie Wonder is blind, they did not perceive him to be disabled reportedly because of his level of success and independence. Similar responses were elicited by images 9, 10, 12, 15, 18, 22, 29 and 34, which will be discussed in further detail below.

Image 12, a photograph of Marlee Matlin, a well-known television and movie actress who is deaf, prompted interesting responses from several participants. While nine participants categorized the image as representing disability, only two participants categorized it as solely representing inclusion. Five teachers categorized it as representing inclusion and disability while one teacher omitted the image altogether. As two participants struggled to categorize this image, they provided surprising rationale for their decisions. For example, Greg was apprehensive about categorizing image 12 as disability initially saying, "I don't know, she just, maybe she is just

doing too well" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013) indicating the belief that because she was so successful she may not be disabled. As he debated where to place the image, he finally conceded that, "I guess she is deaf. She would probably be disability…I don't know, yeah I'm going to go with disability" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Greg's indecision was apparently caused by Matlin's perceived level of success. Lisa reported a similar perception, "I don't consider that a disability because she uses sign [language] and I think there are a lot of ways to accommodate that now" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013).

The belief that individuals with disabilities who are successful or who appear to function independently are somehow less disabled or not disabled at all was indicated by other participants as well. Jessica provided this rationale for image 18, a photograph of a woman with prosthetic feet, "…this person is running down the beach. I think I would have an automatic respect, like this person doesn't have any kind of disability, they're running" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). The woman in image 18 has access to assistive devices that afford her the opportunity to participate in an activity that she may not otherwise be able to engage in. Accommodations are intended to increase access to opportunities that may not otherwise be accessible to individuals with disabilities, however they do not eliminate the disability.

Amanda appeared to hold a similar perception about image 15, an advertisement for the film *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994), saying "Well, I think that he is obviously…mentally a little slow obviously…there were obviously social cues that he missed but that didn't stop him really. So, I don't know where he falls" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). Marcia used a similar rationale for images 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 29, and 34, "These, to me…are possibly people with special needs that have achieved inclusion in their lives outside of the classroom; meaning

that they have taken…their disability and made it to where, their disability hasn't stopped them [Pause] beyond the classroom. To me, these people have overcome, or done their best to overcome their disability, to function outside, beyond school" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). The perception that people with disabilities cannot lead full and productive lives is a myth commonly associated with disability. Marcia indicated that some of the individuals in the images have *overcome* their disability because they appeared to be functioning independently and successfully. She did not seem to consider the possibility that individuals could function independently and successfully with a disability, but rather that they must have overcome it.

John appeared to hold similar conceptions, however rather than suggesting that the individuals have overcome their disability, he suggested that they do not have a disability at all. For example, as he considered images 18 and 34, he said, "Here's a person that has a prosthetic leg [Image 34] and with the advances today, I don't really see that as a disability because there are people that were in the Olympics that have that. Here's one with a woman running [Image 18], like I said with the man in the Olympics…I don't see that as either [disability or inclusion]" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). John did not perceive image 11, Stevie Wonder, as disabled either due to his perceived success and positive attitude. He provided a similar rationale for image 15, a photograph of *Forrest Gump*, saying, "…I don't think he really needed the braces…in the movie he was portrayed as a little slow but did many great things so, I don't think he really had a disability" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013) Lisa provided a similar rationale for omitting image 15 from the disability category, "I personally don't think it belongs in either one. He's productive; he was successful in his life story in the movie. He did not, he's not any different than anybody else as far as his life goals and being able to achieve them" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013) She also omitted images 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 22, 29, and

34 from the disability category saying, "…to me [disability] is a challenge that the person who holds it cannot easily overcome…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Lisa appeared to believe that individuals, who use adaptive equipment, assistive devices, or accommodations, are not disabled because, "You can overcome, you can live your life to the fullest in a wheelchair" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013) See Table 4.6 for additional data pertaining to categorization of images 10, 18, 29, and 34.

Table 4.6

Results for Teacher Categorization of Images as Less or Not Disabled

Images	Categorized image as representing:			
	Disability	Inclusion	Both	Omitted
10	10	2	4	1
18	6	3	6	2
29	10	2	4	1
34	9	6	1	1

* Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56.

This orientation toward disability perpetuates the stereotype of "the supercrip" or the "extraordinary disabled" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). According to Smart (2001), disability advocates define a supercrip as the presentation of a person, affected by a disability, as 'overcoming' to succeed as a meaningful member of society and to live a 'normal' life. While popular because of its inspirational element, the supercrip reinforces the low societal expectations of people with disabilities (Iwakuma, 1997; Golden, 1992). The myth that the more successful and independent you are, the less disabled you are has several important implications. First, providing appropriate accommodations or adaptive equipment is intended to minimize the impact of a disability, not eradicate it. To view individuals with disabilities as less disabled or not disabled at all because they are able to access the world around them in seemingly non-disabled ways, assumes that all disabled people strive for normalization when in fact, there are

many ways in which disability can be experienced. For example, some individuals with disabilities that are not highly visible may choose to pass as 'normal' because their disability is not the most salient part of their identity, rather they tend to see themselves as 'normal' people who 'happen to have' a disability (Darling, 2003, p. 886). In contrast, there are others who view their disability as their primary identity and view it positively, sometimes even in association with disability pride (Darling, 2003). As humans, we have multiple and varied identities that change over time. The same is true for disability; therefore we must be aware of and sensitive to these changing identities and resist ascribing to the negative stereotypes and myths associated with disability.

Second, perceiving individuals with disabilities as less disabled or not disabled at all because they are successful, reflects the assumption that those with disabilities can overcome their disability through hard work, determination, and a positive attitude. This implies that disability is the obstacle; that the disability is what must be overcome and that it is the responsibility of the individual to make that happen. This is a common and pervasive myth that is not only reflected in this study, but in society as well. For example, Rock Your Business is an online blog designed to provide professional support to "up and coming" musicians. On March 6, 2011, the authors posted a story about Stevie Wonder entitled, "A Lesson in Overcoming Adversity". The blog entry suggested taking a lesson from Stevie Wonder and don't make excuses for yourself, rise above adversity, stop complaining and work hard. They also added that Stevie "was dedicated, hard working, and talented. He didn't want others to feel sorry for him" (Miller & Levitch, 2011, para. 9). This perspective is influenced by the medical model of disability, which fundamentally constructs students with disabilities as physically "defective" and most in need of diagnosis and treatment (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

The myth of disability as visible was reflected in the majority of participants' interview and image sort data, however some participants appeared to hold contradictory beliefs about disability. On the one hand, they appeared to perceive disability as primarily visible or physical, yet on the other hand, they reported believing that some visible disabilities were not disabilities at all. For example, seven participants categorized images 5, 10, 16, 17, 20, 33, and 37 easily, without providing a rationale indicating that there was something inherent in the image itself that allowed them to easily categorize it as representing disability (See Figure 3.1 on page 56).

Jessica illustrated this point as she easily categorized image 16, a photograph of an individual reading Braille, as representing disability but struggled to categorize image 11, a photograph of Stevie Wonder, as representing disability. She indicated that if she "didn't know him [Stevie Wonder]…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013) she would have easily categorized it as disability, however because he is a famous singer, she did not perceive him as disabled. Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, indicated her perception of disability as, "…more of a cognitive disability, I don't think of physical as necessarily a disability, it's more the cognitive" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013) Staying true to her beliefs, she easily categorized image 20, a photograph of a child with Down syndrome, as representing disability saying, "there's more of a cognitive impairment here…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013) however, her specific knowledge of image 15, *Forrest Gump*, prompted a contradictory response. While she acknowledged that *Forrest Gump* was cognitively impaired, she did not perceive that as a disability based on his success and ability to achieve his goals. The idea that participants may hold contradictory beliefs about disability became even more apparent when looking at images 9, an advertisement for the movie *I Am Sam* (Solomon, Hall, Zwick, Nelson, & Herskovitz, 2002) and 22, an advertisement for the movie *Mask* (Starger, 1985).

The data indicated that the majority of participants perceived disability as primarily visible, however it appears as though context played an important role in the determination of disability in some cases. When the participants had more specific knowledge of the individual in the image, they appeared to use contextual factors to determine whether the image represented disability. Image 9, an advertisement for the movie *I Am Sam* (Nelson, 2001), involves a photograph of an adult male pushing a young girl on a swing. There is no visual indication of disability for either the man or the young girl, therefore drawing on specific knowledge of the characters in the movie aided them in categorizing this image. Ellen, a 6th grade teacher reported, "…most of the things I put with disability are things that I can see, I can physically…tell that they're different somehow…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013), yet she did not use this criteria for categorizing image 9. Ellen appeared to draw on her knowledge of the movie when determining that image 9, an advertisement for the movie *I Am Sam* (Nelson, 2001), represented both disability and inclusion saying, "…he's definitely disabled, but he's kind of working in the real world. He has to figure out how to mesh in the real world" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She appeared to associate disability with an invisible characteristic such as cognitive functioning in the case of image 9. Jessica also categorized images as disability based primarily on visible criteria, yet she appeared to agree with Ellen saying, "…but I know from the movie that he has some kind of disability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). This also appeared to be the case with Greg who primarily used visible criteria when categorizing images as disability, however he categorized images 9, *I Am Sam* (Nelson, 2001) and 15, *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994) as representing disability based on their perceived level of cognitive functioning as a result of his familiarity with the movies.

Eight participants categorized image 22 as representing disability based on appearance alone. Image 22 is an advertisement for the movie *Mask* (Starger, 1985), which involves a teenage boy with Craniodiaphyseal Dysplasia resulting in the development of visibly different facial characteristics. Eight participants familiar with the movie did not categorize the image as representing disability rather they placed it in the inclusion category or chose to omit it altogether. Carrie provided this rationale, "I think he was born with a bad birth defect, I saw the movie but I don't think it's necessarily a disability, he doesn't seem to be cognitively impaired just because he has a deformed face" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Amy responded similarly saying, "I don't even know if that would be a disability because it's just a deformed, deformity. That's not necessarily a disability…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Jessica concurred saying, "I mean he has a disease but it's not necessarily a disability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013).

As this data indicates, there were occasions when participants appeared to use contextual factors to determine whether the image represented disability, which may reflect a social model of disability orientation. This is illustrated by Todd, who believed image 22 represented inclusion rather than disability, saying, "…if I didn't know the movie, I probably would have put it over here [disability], just saw someone who had a disability…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Jessica referred to this as well when categorizing image 9, *I Am Sam* (Solomon, et al., 2002), saying, "…I know from the movie that he has some kind of disability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). While familiarity with the image appeared to assist some participants in categorizing some of the images, one participant did not find it helpful. Initially Marcia indicated a desire to know more about each image so she could sort them, however she quickly changed her mind when she came to image 9, *I Am Sam* (Solomon, et al., 2002). As a

matter of fact, Marcia found it even more frustrating saying, "I feel like I have the most history with this one. I feel like I know the most about this one and it bothers me even more!" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Those participants that considered the context of the image rather than relying solely on what was visible in the image could be reflecting a broader conception of disability. Though there was no specific reference made to different conceptions of disability, their responses could potentially reflect an underlying belief of disability as socially constructed. "Social models of disability forefront the influence our economic and social structures and central values have on the ways in which we define disability and respond to persons with them" (Oliver, 1990, xii, as cited in Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 25). That is to say, social models focus not only on the impairment, but also on the social context in which it becomes meaningful (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). As mentioned above, some of the teachers used information about the social context of the image as they categorized them, which may indicate the potential for broadening teachers' conceptions of disability to include the social model of disability. Social models of disability provide a paradigm that places the physical, social, and political environment as the crucial focus of intervention rather than the student, which is the primary focus of current legislation. Education becomes truly inclusive when the student, the disability and the physical, social, and political contexts are considered together rather than separate.

As indicated above, there were occasions where participants appeared to think about disability as more than primarily visible or physical, however this often occurred because specific images were familiar. The majority of images did not involve familiar individuals or events and therefore did not elicit extended responses. These images were categorized easily and

with minimal consideration, which along with their verbal responses indicated that disability is very easily defined. This will be explored further in the next section.

Disability is Easily Defined. For educational purposes, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) provides the vocabulary to define disability (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). According to IDEIA, there are 13 disability categories: Visual Impairments, Hearing Impairments, Deafness, Deaf-Blindness, Speech or Language Impairments, Orthopedic Impairments, Traumatic Brain Injury, Other Health Impairments, Multiple Disabilities, Cognitive Impairments, Specific Learning Disabilities, Emotional Disturbance and Behavioral Disorder and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Each of these categories has its own distinct definition that is used to aid in the determination of a disability for school-aged children. Disability involves many diverse and complex distinctions.

In this study however, participants easily, narrowly and similarly defined disability. Though there are 13 different categories of disability, each with unique characteristics, many of the participants in this study provided similar conceptions of disability and again, they did this quickly and easily. Below, I will describe this finding in greater detail and provide examples from the image sort as well as the verbal interview.

Twenty-two of the 27 participants provided verbal descriptions of disability that involved visible criteria, learning disabilities, or indicated a deficit in physical or intellectual functioning. For example, Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, confidently stated, "…it's more of a physical impairment and not an educational impairment" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Amy, also a fifth grade teacher, explained, "When I think of disability, I think of…someone who has a physical disability…I think of body disabilities, not necessarily disabilities that you don't see from the outside" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). This was a theme that was

woven throughout the verbal interviews but was particularly relevant in general education teacher responses. Three of the 4 fourth grade teachers easily associated disability with a visible presence. For example, Jessica responded by saying, "…I just think of disability as someone who's in a wheelchair…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). and Marcia responded similarly, "The first things that come to my mind are like wheelchair or cane, or physical limitations" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Amanda described disability as, "…either physical or mental" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). Renee, a third grade teacher appeared overwhelmed saying "…like a hundred pictures show up in my head at once…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013) but as she proceeded to describe the images, she led with, "I'm seeing kids in wheelchairs…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Some of the student participants also appeared to easily define disability as visible. Jay, a sixth grade student with a disability, described it as, "…someone who can not like walk around that good…" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011) and Brian described disability as, "…like not being able to do things that other people are common with or can do well" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). Mary, a fifth grade student, provided this definition of disability, "I think of kids that have, like they can't do stuff that we can. Like kids in wheelchairs. They can't walk like we can and some kids can't think as we can, like mentally retarded…" (Personal communication, May 17, 2013). The most compelling evidence that disability is easily defined or understood by the participants was revealed during the image sort.

In this paragraph, I report the distinctive findings that resulted from data collected through the audio-recorded image sorts. While I have field notes on all participants conducting this activity, the precise words and phrases used are important for discussing disability as "easily" defined. There were 15 image sorts audio-recorded (2 students and 13 teachers) for this

study. As I conducted the image sorts, I was struck by how easily some of the images were categorized as representing disability and how some images appeared to be more difficult, eliciting longer more detailed explanations. During the image sort, the majority of the participants appeared to easily categorize images as representing disability. This was indicated by the speed with which they placed the image and the limited rationale provided for placing the image. For example, as Jessica participated in the image sort, she provided detailed explanations for placing some images in the disability category while others she did not. She pondered over the placement of image 14 saying, "Okay, um, I guess I would say this is both [disability and inclusion] because it looks like a girl who has a disability…and another girl who may not. They look like they're friends and they work together. So, I guess I would say it's both" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013), however she quickly placed image 7, a photograph of a woman in a wheelchair holding hands with a man walking next to her, in the disability category saying only the word, "Disability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). The table below shows the images that appeared to be easily categorized as representing disability.

Table 4.7

Images Easily Categorized as Representing Disability

Image	Rationale Provided:			Number of Participants	Percentage
	No	Limited	Detailed		
20	8	3	3	14	93
17	8	3	0	13	87
27	10	1	1	13	87
5	10	1	0	12	80
8	7	4	0	12	80
9	5	3	2	12	80
12	6	4	2	12	80
29	9	1	1	12	80
33	10	1	1	12	80
16	8	1	1	12	80
35	9	2	1	12	80
37	9	0	1	12	80
26	9	0	1	12	80
10	9	1	1	11	73
11	10	0	1	11	73
18	7	2	1	11	73
21	7	2	0	11	73
23	11	0	0	11	73
34	8	1	1	10	67
28	6	1	0	8	53

* Note. Percentages based on the total number of audio-recorded image sorts N=15 (Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56)

The images that were categorized as representing disability that elicited the least amount of dialogue were images that involved adaptive equipment such as; wheelchairs, glasses, braces, canes, a small bus or universal symbols associated with disabilities or individuals with visible disabilities. This indicated that participants' perceived disability to be primarily a visible condition but it also indicates that disability is easily identifiable and easily defined. As indicated by IDEIA's 13 disability categories, not only is disability not easily defined or identifiable, it is incredibly complex. Though specific, formal disability categories were not explicitly referenced, participants' responses reflected some awareness of the disability categories of Cognitive

Impairment, Specific Learning Disability, Orthopedic Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Visual

Impairment, Emotional Impairment and Autism through their description of images associated

with disability. Their responses however, did not reflect an awareness of the other disability

categories including Speech or Language Impairment, Traumatic Brain Injury or Multiple

Disabilities. Disability is not easily defined nor easily identified. The data however, revealed that

some participants hold narrow conceptions of disability as visible and they may also hold

hegemonic representations of disability as abnormal. This theme will be explored in greater

detail in the following section.

       Disability is Undesirable. The interview data indicated that the majority of participants

hold hegemonic representations of disability as not only a visible, observable condition but also

as abnormal or different from the "norm" and somewhat negatively. Hegemonic representations

are those to which most people give "spontaneous consent" to the "general direction imposed on

social life by the dominant fundamental group" (Gramsci, 1978, p. 12). Connell (1996) explains

this in relationship to the concept of masculinity. He says, "hegemonic" signifies a position of

cultural authority and leadership, not total dominance; other forms of masculinity persist

alongside. The hegemonic form need not be the most *common* form of a concept; it is simply the

most *dominant* or valued [italics added] (p. 211). In other words, when asked, these teachers

were able to refer to their professional knowledge to report that the most common disabilities in

schools are invisible learning disabilities, yet when grouping images or responding to terms, the

hegemonic conception of *physical* or *visible* disability as the most dominant meaning of

disability, came to their minds, as did clearly negative associations. This is unsurprising given

that the traditional framework, or medical model, of disability, which "emphasizes the medical

nature of disability and focuses on individual-centered deficits and impairments" (McDonald,

Keys, & Balcazar, 2007, p. 146) has been extremely influential in developing both personal and professional beliefs about disability. Below I describe the many negative adjectives and phrases used to characterize disabilities. The data indicated that participants perceive disability as different from the norm and negatively both in terms of physical and intellectual functioning as well as appearance. This perception of disability as abnormal was indicated throughout the data both as part of the verbal interview and the image sort. I will begin by discussing how this theme emerged through the verbal interview data followed by its emergence in connection with the image sort data.

During the verbal interview, participants were asked to describe what they believe to be characteristics of a "typical" student with a disability. This question was designed to further explore participants' perceptions of disability and the characteristics they commonly associate with it. Several participants indicated the perception of disability as behavioral deviations from the norm. For example, John, a physical education teacher, indicated that students with disabilities often lack motivation when participating in physical education. He suggested that, compared to non-disabled students, students with disabilities require constant motivation, "…if I'm not right on top of them, they'll lie around and not do much" (Personal communication, May 15, 2013). Marcia, one of the fourth grade teachers, indicated that behavioral issues are the first things that come to mind when she thinks about characteristics of a student with a disability, though she clarified that, "…its not necessarily always negative behavior issues, although that is the first thing that stands out in my mind…" (Personal communication, May 15, 2013). She described a typical student with a disability as exhibiting behaviors that were negative in extreme ways such as, "withdrawn…disappear in the classroom…don't talk, they don't participate…or they participate too much, or seek attention in other ways that are a distraction…" (Personal

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communication, May 15, 2013). Amy, a fifth grade teacher with three years teaching experience, also described negative behavioral characteristics of a typical student with a disability saying, "I thought they were the kids that were not socially adept. I mean they don't have the social skills…that others do" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). Perceiving disability in negative terms either behaviorally, academically, or visibly creates hegemonic binaries of abnormal/normal, wrong/right, irregular/regular, deviant/acceptable and more, which influence how we respond to individuals and situations. These binaries are reflected in stereotypes of disability, which can be understood as exaggerated beliefs associated with a category (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Nario-Redmond (2010) posits that the distinction between individual beliefs and cultural stereotypes is important because whether or not one rejects the validity of a stereotype, it can nevertheless influence reactions to particular group members.

Some participants appeared to perceive disability as negative based on intellectual functioning and, again negative, *binary adjectives* were used such those found in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8

Binary Adjectives

Negative – Abnormal Terms	Positive – Normal Terms
Slow	Fast
Dumb, Retard	Smart
Low	High
Wrong	Right

Holly described a typical student with a disability as being, "…just a lot, lot *lower* [functioning]" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Two fifth grade student participants used negative statements to describe disability. Mary stated, "…their brains are *not thinking as fast* as we are and they're just a little bit *slower*…" (Personal communication, May 17, 2011) while Jack said,

"…they either have some *problem* when they were born or they can't walk *right*…" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011). Three teacher participants also appeared to associate disability with something *wrong*. Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, recalls her perception of disability as a high school student in the early 1980s, "I remember the perception in general that they were *dumb*, that they were *stupid*, that they were *retards*…" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011)She described how, "We got to know them because they had some kind of a label or something *wrong* with them". Carrie, a special education teacher, struggled to describe her perception of disability, "I would typically think of a physical…or a learning disability more so than…a disability like something is *wrong* with them or something like that" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). A fourth grade teacher, Amanda, shared how visible differences make it easier to see disability, "…when people have a physical disability it's easier for you to see that with your eyes but it's not easy to see if the student looks like everyone else…" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). Susan, a fifth grade teacher appeared to agree with Amanda saying, "…you always think about disability as being something that's more like, physical or sensory…something you can look at or obvious…not so much as…having a learning disability or something *wrong* with the brain necessarily…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011).

Data from the verbal interview and image sort transcripts indicated that some of the participants might hold perceptions of disability as visibly different or abnormal, however as I read and re-read transcripts, I became struck by some of the words and phrases participants chose to use to describe disability. Because words are powerful indicators of our beliefs and our perceptions, I chose to re-read the transcripts paying particular attention to words associated with disability that could be considered negative or hegemonic in nature. See Table 4.9.

Table 4.9

Negative Words Used to Describe Images of Disability.

Words/Phrases Used	Utterances
Mentally having problems / slow / behind / struggling / delayed / cognitively impaired	19
Short bus	3
Birth defect / missing leg / can't walk / deformity / can't control / hearing problem / handicapped	26
Struggling reader/ poor writer	5
Poor behaviors/ frustrated/ demanding/ unmotivated/ antsy/ low self esteem/ off task/ unorganized	17
Looks different	3
Wrong/ out of whack/ dumb/ stupid/ retards	6

The words displayed in Table 4.9 reveal important binaries associated with disability such as normal/abnormal, wrong/right, typical/defective and high functioning/low functioning, which contribute to the deficit driven disability discourse that heavily influences personal and professional beliefs and perceptions and educational policy and practice. For example, both IDEIA (2004) and NCLB (2001) reflect a medical model orientation through the special education eligibility determination process, which requires identification of academic and/or behavioral deficits and Response to Intervention, which requires universal screening to identify students who may be "at-risk" for school failure. Sullivan (2011) identifies language as one area where the lasting influence of the medical model can be seen. She proposes that language has the potential to be labeling and oppressive, to perpetuate misconceptions, and to reinforce stereotypes of disability such as weakness, dependence and incompetence. Though great strides have been made to shift language from labeling and oppressive to people-first terminology, which emphasizes the person rather than the disability, the data from this study indicated there is still much work ahead.

The perception of disabled individuals as significantly different from the "norm"

appeared to justify their exclusion from certain educational opportunities. For example, three

participants from this study appeared to believe that the students' perceived level of academic

functioning plays a role in determining how and where he or she receives their education. Tracy,

a third grade teacher, indicated this belief as she looked at an image of a bus specifically used to

transport students with disabilities stating, "Some kids might be too impaired and need a separate

environment" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). She also indicated that, "If the student

can't cognitively keep up in high school, they might need a separate class…to receive instruction

in life skills" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Renee expressed support for the

inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom, "…unless it affects

others in the classrooms ability to learn…when there's outbursts constantly…that's where I think

the excluding part should happen, the pull-out, the separate room" (Personal communication,

May 15, 2013). Carrie shared the story of a former student with a visual impairment who was

placed in a self-contained classroom for students with mild to moderate cognitive disabilities

because the general classroom teacher could not support his academic needs. This memory

appeared to influence Carrie's belief that students with visual impairments may require self-

contained placements as she placed an image of an individual reading braille in the disability

category rather than considering the category of both [disability and inclusion]. The music,

physical education, and computer teacher participants shared their perceptions of students in both

self-contained and inclusive settings, which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Eight.

As indicated by the data, many of the participants associated disability with something

visible or observable either in terms of the adaptive equipment used such as wheelchairs,

prosthesis, braces, canes, and sign language or in terms of their perceived intellectual functioning as indicated by facial characteristics such as Down syndrome.

While this study focused primarily on disability and inclusion, participants often conceived of these concepts in relationship to, or in tension with, the concept of "special education". Special education was not a category provided as part of the image sort however, participants referred to special education periodically throughout the sorting activity in association with disability and/or inclusion. Some of the participants' appeared to hold different conceptions of disability and special education; therefore this data will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

SPECIAL EDUCATION IN RELATION TO THE CONCEPT OF DISABILITY

A research study exploring teachers' perceptions of disability should also attend to teachers' perceptions of special education since the two concepts are educationally interrelated. According to Baglieri & Shapiro (2012), special education encompasses the sets of procedures, services, and practices designed to evaluate and instruct students with disabilities in school settings. Special education has also been heavily influenced by the medical model of disability as evidenced by past categorical placement practices. "The assumption that students with the same disability would benefit from the same kinds of services and curriculum exemplifies the assumption of the objectivity of a disability diagnosis" (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p. 22). As a result of these practices, special education became synonymous with the placement of a disabled child into a segregated classroom with groups of students with similar disabilities (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Legislation such as IDEA 1997 and 2004 has taken up the issue of categorical placement by requiring consideration of the LRE, which specifies that the removal of children with disabilities only occurs when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular classroom with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(5)(B)). And, despite the strides made in the law, the medical paradigm of disability is still a persistent influence on the general public's perceptions of special education and disability as the data from this study indicates.

My initial study only asked participants to describe images that came to mind when they heard the words "special education". Responses indicated that participants might hold notably different conceptions of disability and special education therefore, in this study I chose to explore this phenomenon further. I asked participants to not only describe images associated with

special education, but to explicitly describe their conceptions of disability in relation to special education. Then they were asked to describe any characteristics they associate with a typical student with a disability and a typical student with special needs. These two questions were designed to explore participants' assumptions about special education and disability in association with students. According to Sullivan (2011), it is important to study language because it has the potential to be labeling and oppressive, to perpetuate misconceptions, and to reinforce stereotypes of disability.

Again, the interview and image sort responses were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for phenomenographic and social semiotic analysis. The phenomenographic analysis resulted in an "outcome space" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999), which is used for examination, interpretation, and discussion of the data. The outcome space revealed several interesting themes related to participants' perceptions of special education such as special education involves invisible disabilities, special education is a characteristic, special education requires specialized knowledge and training, and special education equals more impaired. I will begin this section with a brief discussion of how participants did or did not associate special education with disability followed by a thorough discussion of each of the themes mentioned above.

In the previous chapter, I discussed participants' perception of disability as primarily visible. This theme emerged as a result of recurring phrases and words used to describe disability as, for example, a "physical presence", "wheelchair", "canes", and "braces". I had anticipated similar responses for images associated with special education mainly because according to IDEIA (2004), a student must have an identified disability to be eligible to receive special education services. This, however, was not the case. Two participants (students) were unable to

provide images associated with or describe their understanding of special education, therefore descriptive statistics were calculated based on the total number of participant responses, N = 25. The results of which will be discussed in further detail in the following paragraphs.

According to the data, 40 percent of the participants indicated the belief that special education and disability are related, if not identical, concepts however, 60 percent perceived disability and special education to be significantly different concepts. When asked to describe images associated with special education, ten participants initially responded with either the word *student*(s) or made reference to students. For example, Amanda, a fourth grade teacher, said, "…I see a *student* needing accommodations…" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013) and Julie, a music teacher, replied, " I think of a class full of *students* that aren't very uniform" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Amy also associated special education directly with her students, specifically identifying them by name. Susan described special education as, "…a *kid* who looks just like everyone else…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013) and Carrie, a special education teacher, replied, "…I would think of *students* with more severe disabilities typically" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). This immediate association of special education with students or student characteristics is interesting given that special education is actually a *service* provided *to* students with disabilities. Three participants indicated a potential understanding of special education as a program or service while they engaged in the image sort activity. For example, Kelly, a computer teacher, indicated an understanding of special education as a service or program saying, "…they don't need special ed. services, they need a 504 but they don't need an IEP…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Amy also said, "…you can have a physical disability and not need special education services support" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Julie indicated a similar understanding, "I guess I think of

someone who has a disability as a part of special education, like the disability would be the pre-cursor to the service" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). The majority of participants did not associate disability with special education rather they appeared to perceive them as two completely different concepts. However, some similarities in conceptions of special education were revealed as participants described characteristics associated with a student with special needs. One common conception appeared to be the association of special education with invisible, cognitive or learning, disabilities. Table 5.1 displays the data related to participants' conception of special education and disability. The distinction between special education and disability is an important one and will be explored further in the following section.

Table 5.1

Perceptions of Special Education and Disability

Participant	Special Education and Disability:		Explicitly Indicated:	
	Same	Different	Yes	No
Jessica	X		X	
Kelly		X		X
Amanda	X		X	
Lisa		X	X	
Renee		X		X
Susan	X		X	
Julie	X		X	
John				
Todd	X		X	
Ellen		X	X	
Marcia		X		X
Amy		X	X	
Colleen		X	X	
Greg	X		X	
Carrie	X			X
Tracy		X	X	
Holly		X	X	
Andrew	X			X
Tyler		X		X

Table 5.1 (cont'd)

Participant	Special Education and Disability:		Explicitly Indicated:	
	Same	Different	Yes	No
Jack		X	X	
Mary	X			X
Brian	X		X	
Adam		X	X	
Jay		X	X	
Carly		X	X	
Cassie	No response			
Thad	No response			
Totals	10	15	18	7

* N = 25 (two participants did not provide a response)

Special Education Involves Invisible Disabilities. As Table 5.1, displays, 60 percent of the participants' responses indicated marked conceptual differences between special education and disability. Of those 15 participants, 11 described explicit differences between the two concepts. The most common distinction indicated by participants involved the association of special education primarily with cognitive or intellectual disabilities, whereas disability was primarily associated with physical/visible disabilities. This is surprising given that all students who are eligible to receive special education services must be identified as having at least one of the 13 disabilities covered under IDEIA, which includes visible disabilities such as, orthopedic impairments and multiple impairments.

The medical model of disability views disability as something that needs remediation, which significantly influenced how special education developed: disabilities were seen as individual flaws and special education was designed to remedy a child's "deficits" (Rapp & Arndt, 2012). Special education and disability are inextricably linked in terms of special

education service provision, which makes participants' conception of special education and disability as discrete constructs intriguing.

The association of special education with invisible disabilities was a recurring theme revealed both explicitly and implicitly. Student participants were only asked to describe images associated with the words special education, whereas adult participants were asked two additional questions regarding their perceptions of special education. The first question asked adult participants to describe how they understand special education and disability as separate or related concepts. The second question asked adult participants to describe characteristics they associate with a typical student with special needs. This gave participants the opportunity to explain their understanding of special education within the broader context of disability and within the more personal context of classroom experiences. These questions elicited more detailed and varied responses from the adult participants, therefore I will begin with a discussion of the students' perceptions of special education and transition into a more thorough discussion of teachers' perceptions of special education.

The student participants frequently indicated a cognitive association with special education and a physical/visible association with disability. For example, Jack describes images of special education in terms of intellectual functioning such as, "…they can't understand" and "…their brain needs a little more help" while he describes disability as, "…they can't walk right or something" (Personal communication, May 18, 2013). Carly appeared to hold a similar understanding of special education describing it as, "…kids that need help learning…someone that kinda needs help" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011) while she associated disability with, "Wheelchair, helmet, and people with mouth guards" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Two other students also associated special education with cognitive ability. Brian

described special education as, "Like needing help with things…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). He did not refer to a particular person or indicate the type of help needed; however his nonchalant response indicated that needing help might not be an unusual occurrence. At the time of this study, several of his classmates were receiving special education services in the general education classroom, which may account for this seemingly casual response. Mary, after serious consideration, responded by saying, "Special education? It makes me think about kids…around our age, but their brains are not thinking as fast as we are. They're just a little bit slower…" (Personal communication, May 17, 2011). She focused her response primarily on the students' cognitive functioning adding, "…it's like they have a different brain age…" (Personal communication, May 17, 2011). There were also several students receiving special education services in Mary's class at the time of this study so she may have been drawing on that experience when responding to this question.

These students appeared to hold decidedly different meanings of special education and disability, which could indicate a potentially important conceptual disconnect that could have implications for inclusive practices. If students' perceive disability as primarily visible or physical and special education as primarily related to intellectual ability, do they understand that students who receive special education services have a disability? "Public perceptions of disability are of people who use wheelchairs or are blind, readily apparent markings of a disability; these perceptions have not yet expanded to naturally include the array of ways disabilities manifests themselves" (McDonald, Keys, & Balcazar, 2007, p. 153). Knowing that an individual has a disability influences our perceptions and expectations. For example, an individual with a physical disability that requires the use of a wheelchair would not be expected to walk to class, however the perceptions and expectations of students with learning disabilities

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might be similar to that of non-disabled students simply because the disability is not visible. It is possible that by making the invisible visible, that is to say, making cognitive and learning disabilities visible by acknowledging them, students may begin to understand the connection between special education and disability. Rather than associating special education with students that "just need a little extra help" or "have a different brain age", students could begin to associate it with a disability. Acknowledging disability and special education in the classroom could be a stepping-stone to creating truly inclusive classrooms, however this assumes that teachers have a clear understanding of the relationship between special education and disability. However, the data from this study indicates that teachers' conceptions of special education and disability are similar to that of the students.

The adult participants were asked to describe their understanding of special education and disability, more specifically, they were asked to describe any characteristics they associated with a typical student with special needs, because as Pohan (1996) indicates, those with strong biases or those who hold negative stereotypes about diverse groups are less likely to develop beliefs and behaviors that lead to practices that allow them to teach in culturally responsive ways. For this reason, it was important to explore the characteristics teachers' associated with a typical student with special needs.

According to the data, teachers' not only appeared to associate special education with primarily invisible disabilities such as cognitive impairments, learning disabilities, and/or emotional impairments, but they also tended to use deficit-based language. For example, Tracy described special education as students who, "*struggle* with writing and written expression" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013), a characteristic that is not immediately visible. According to Lisa, a fifth grade teacher with seven years experience, special education involves

students who are, "…just like you and me. It's just something they're not grasping as quick maybe at this time" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Lisa did not refer to specific disabilities such as dyslexia, auditory processing delay or dyscalculia, rather she described it as, "…their minds maybe work a little differently…they might be working so fast that they *can't process*, or maybe working *so slow* that they can't process" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Todd, an upper elementary special education teacher, described characteristics associated with a student with special needs as, "Students who need more support than your typical [student]" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). John, a physical education teacher, specifically indicated his perception of special education as related to cognitive functioning saying, "…most of the special education students I see don't have [physical] disabilities…it's usually their cognitive needs" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee, a third grade teacher in her fifth year of inclusion, describes a typical student with special needs as, "A kid that needs a little extra time, a little extra motivation, a little extra confidence" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Some teacher participants used disability-specific terminology associated with special education, though much less frequently than the majority of teacher participants' who used vague descriptions of student characteristics (see Table 5.2). The association of special education with vague characteristics rather than specific disabilities may help explain why these teachers did not perceive special education as associated with disability. Specific terms such as learning disabilities, dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, auditory processing disorder, autism, speech and language impairment and/or emotional impairment were rarely mentioned in association with special education. As a matter of fact, many of the teachers appeared to intentionally avoid using disability specific terminology. This is important because not only are special education services

directly tied to the presence of a disability, but also because "most of us reach a determination about our intelligence, appearance, and intrinsic worth through a process of learning how others see us" (Jenkins, 1996, p. 30). Describing a student who receives special education services as, "…needing accommodations…or special help with reading, writing, and math…" (Amanda, fourth grade teacher), minimizes or disguises the disability which, may or may not be as stigmatizing as the label itself. Hehir (2007) suggests that one way to minimize the impact of disability and maximize opportunities is for parents and educators to have a clear understanding of the students' disability diagnosis. It is also important for students to have a clear understanding of their disability whenever possible to aid in the building of self-determination and self-advocacy skills.

Table 5.2

Specific Disabilities Associated with Special Education

Teacher	LD	CI	ADHD	EI
Todd	X	X		
Carrie	X			
Holly				
John				
Julie				
Kelly				
Ellen				
Greg				
Lisa		X		
Amy	X		X	
Susan				
Jessica	X			
Colleen				
Amanda	X			
Marcia				
Tracy	X	X		X
Renee				
Totals	6	3	1	1

* LD = Learning Disabilities; CI = Cognitive Impairments; ADHD = Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder; EI = Emotional Impairment

Special education is linked to disability both legislatively and educationally, however this data indicates that personally and professionally they are perceived quite differently. As indicated above, one of the most dominant themes that emerged was participants' primary association of special education with invisible disabilities such as learning, emotional, and cognitive disabilities however, the data also revealed the perception of special education as a characteristic rather than a service. The data revealed that participants used the words special education to describe a place or a person more often than as an educational service provided to students with disabilities. I will explore this theme further in the next section.

Special Education is a Student Characteristic. Baglieri & Shapiro (2012) describe special education as the set of procedures, services, and practices designed to evaluate and instruct students with disabilities in school settings and though many participants indicated a similar conception, another association emerged from the data that warrants investigation.

Sixty percent of the participants appeared to associate special education with students themselves, frequently referring to them as "special ed students or special ed kids." There were also 13 participants who associated special education with programs and/or services. Five participants associated special education with teachers, referring to them as "special ed teachers." Table 5.3 shows the number of participants who associated special education with students, teachers and/ or programs.

Table 5.3

Special Education is a Characteristic

Participant	S. E. Student/ kids	S. E. Teachers	S. E. Class/Programs
Adam			X
Brian			
Andrew	X		
Carly	X	X	
Jack	X		
Tyler			X
Jay			X
Cassie			
Thad			
Mary	X		
Amanda	X		X
Amy	X		X
Carrie	X	X	
Ellen			
Greg	X	X	
Holly			X
Jessica	X		
John	X		X
Colleen			
Kelly	X		X
Lisa			X
Renee			X
Susan	X		
Todd	X	X	
Tracy	X	X	X
Marcia	X		X
Julie			X
Totals	15	5	13

* S. E. = Special Education

While Table 5.3 shows the number of participants who used special education to describe students, teachers, and/or programs, what the table does not show is how often participants' referred to "special ed students" in comparison to "special ed programs" during the interview. This is important because while participants did refer to special education as a

program or service, they much more frequently used special education to describe students. For example, Susan, a fifth grade teacher, used the phrases, "…special education students", "…they're labeled special ed…" and "So and so is special ed…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013) as she described her understanding of and experiences with special education. Todd, an upper elementary special education teacher, used similar phrases eight times during his interview. Carrie, a lower elementary special education teacher, made reference to "special ed kids" on four separate occasions. Tracy, a third grade teacher, used the phrase "special ed kids" or made reference to special education students on seven occasions during her interview, while only making reference to special education as a program once.

Table 5.4

Number of Special Education Associations with Students, Teachers, and Programs.

Associations	Number of Utterances
S. E. Students / Kids	49
S. E. Teachers	8
S. E. Programs / Services	20

As Table 5.4 shows, participants referred to "special ed students" or "special ed kids" much more frequently than either "special ed teachers" or "special ed programs" during the interviews. The perception of special education as a student characteristic rather than a service that is provided to students with disabilities has important implications. It reflects a hegemonic binary of special versus general education, which inherently privileges one type of education over the other. This could be seen in some of the teacher participants' responses. For example, Holly, a self-contained special education teacher, described her idea of a general education classroom as, "…kids without learning disabilities…doing work at grade level…" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011), while she described a special education classroom as,

"…academic based but still working on more functional time and money…basic skills"

(Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Amanda, a fourth grade teacher, assumed special

education classrooms were, "…maybe very disorganized…" and "…kids… not knowing what to

do…" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). Renee, a third grade teacher with over ten

years of teaching experience, provided this description, "…involved with *regular* ed kids more.

Involved in the *regular* curriculum a lot more. Exposed to different things that they wouldn't

normally be exposed to in pull-out "(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee's

description of general education as providing increased opportunities appears to privilege general

education over special education. Artiles (2003) supports this claim saying, "special education,

an historically segregated system parallel to general education, further privileges certain groups

by separating and marginalizing students deemed problematic or difficult" (p.90).

The association of special education with individuals rather than services provides fertile

ground for marginalizing students with disabilities by identifying them as belonging to a

stigmatized group. Special education refers generally to the medical model as practiced in

schools (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012) whereby students classified as having disabilities are

provided "special" rather than "general" education services. The segregation of students based

on ability is referred to as *ableism*, which has been historically present in schools as well as in

society at large and is tied in part to the medical model that seeks to "fix" people with disabilities

(Longmore, 1995). An important consequence of ableism is the relegation of disabled people to

the position of 'other', which was a perspective that was reflected by the data in the current

study.

An important idea to address at this time involves *how* special education was associated

with students. Often times, the phrases that were used situated students in the position of

"other". For example, Jack, a fifth grade student, described special education like this, "…*they*, like need more. *They* can't understand…*their* brain needs a little more help…and *they* need more hands on activities…that would really help *them*" (Personal communication, May 18, 2011). Jack refers to "*them*" a total of five times as he described what images came to mind when he heard the word special education. Carly indicated that sometimes "*they* go into a room to calm down" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). And Mary said, "…*their* brains are not thinking as fast…*they're* just a little bit slower…*they* need to learn about *their* level…*they* have a different brain age" (Personal communication, May 17, 2011). This "othering" was not only indicated in student responses but in teacher responses as well. See Table 5.5.

Table 5.5

Frequency of "Othering" Phrases Involving They and Them.

"Othering" Pronouns	Total Utterances by:	
	Teachers	Students
They	140	6
Them	48	1

As indicated by Table 5.5, the teacher participants used "othering" phrases much more frequently than students. As a matter of fact, there were five teachers who used more than ten "othering" phrases during their interview. Of the five teachers, two were itinerant teachers who teach music and physical education to all students at Parker Elementary, one was a fifth grade teacher with seven years of teaching experience, one was a fourth grade teacher with less than 5 years of teaching experience, and one was a third grade teacher with more than ten years of teaching experience. It is interesting to note that only one teacher did not use any "othering" phrases during the entire interview. Below are some examples of the phrases that were used.

Table 5.6

"Othering" Phrases

They	Them
They've never been pushed	Constant battle between me and them
They'll lie around and not do much	The motivation for them isn't really there
They're more in their natural element	It's easier for them
They can't necessarily overcome	I was subjected to them
They're just like you and me	Something wrong with them
They can learn to adapt to it	Their disability hasn't stopped them
They've coped in different ways	Breaking steps down for them
They don't talk	People just expect them to be
They participate too much	It makes them angry
They can't advance as quickly	A large percentage of them do know
They work hard at whatever level	what's going on

Describing students with disabilities in terms of "they" and "them" leads to broad generalizations that often perpetuate negative attitudes and dispositions towards special education, disability, and inclusion. The dominant groups in society reduce minority culture to a discourse of the other (Peters, 2000). "The 'them and us binary' is central to the notion of the other' in which impairment labels are used pejoratively to denote deviance and undesirability and to differentiate between them, 'the impaired', and us 'the dominant non-impaired majority' (Goodley, 2011 as cited in Martin, 2012, p. 15). The consequences of "othering" have profound implications for inclusive practices, which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Eight.

At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed my decision to add some additional questions to further explore participants' perceptions of special education. They were asked to describe images associated with special education; they were asked to describe characteristics associated with a typical student with special needs; and they were asked to describe their understanding of disability and special education as either related or unrelated concepts. As an

additional way to explore personal beliefs about special education and disability, I asked participants to describe any feelings they associated with special education, disability, and inclusion. A common theme emerged from their responses that reflected participants' hegemonic conception of special education as significantly different from general education. So different, in fact, that many of the teachers indicated the belief that they are not adequately credentialed or prepared to teach students who qualify for special education services. A discussion of this finding is provided in the following section.

Special Education Requires Specialized Knowledge and Training. As discussed earlier, three of the interview questions were designed to explore teachers' perceptions of special education. They were asked to describe images associated with special education, to describe their understanding of special education as related (or not) to disability, and to describe characteristics associated with a typical student with special needs. The majority of teachers' responses appeared to come primarily from a professional perspective as they frequently drew upon past and current experiences with students, classrooms, and programs. For example, Renee began one of her responses with, "I've had so many kids with different disabilities…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Ellen referred to specific students currently enrolled in her classroom saying, "Bobby [pseudonym] is such a sweetheart but he gets so frustrated so easily…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Julie, a music teacher, drew upon her experiences with different programs as well saying, "…when they're in self-contained, they act a lot differently than when they are with their homerooms…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). In an attempt to probe a little deeper into teachers' perceptions, I asked them to describe any feelings they associated with special education. This question appeared to elicit responses from both a professional and personal perspective. As I recursively coded and analyzed interview

data, I noticed explicit references to the need for specialized knowledge or training in special education while other references, though somewhat cryptic, appeared to indicate similar understandings. In the next paragraph, I will focus my discussion on the hegemonic conception of special education as requiring specialized knowledge and/or training, which emerged from the teacher interview data.

The data revealed that 12 of the 17 teacher participants either explicitly stated or otherwise indicated that special education required knowledge or skills beyond those required for general education. I purposely chose to include three itinerant teachers in this study because music, physical education, and computers are typically the classes that students who receive special education services are included in first and often without additional support. Therefore, I felt it crucial to include their perspectives and as I had anticipated, their perceptions of special education were similar to those of classroom teachers. Both the computer and music teachers reported feeling less knowledgeable about teaching students with special needs. And though the physical education teacher, John, did not indicate a need for additional training or knowledge, it appeared to be because, "…most of their IEPs have to do with making accommodations for the cognitive and in gym class, there isn't really much cognitive, it's mostly physical" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He reported that students with disabilities often required more motivation but less instruction because, "…they seem to understand most of what I talk about" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

As previously mentioned, the computer and music teachers both questioned their teaching efficacy in regards to special education. For example, Kelly acknowledged feeling "…a little stressed because it's [special education] more and it's not my specialty…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She went on to say that, "I feel like I would need more training

in it and because of that, I don't know if I'm doing my best…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Julie, the music teacher, appeared to have similar feelings as she replied, "I think it makes me nervous because I want to do the best for them but I don't feel as though I'm super equipped" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Both teachers expressed a sincere desire to meet the needs of students with disabilities and believe that additional training and knowledge is necessary for that to occur.

Two general education teachers and one special education teacher appeared to share this sentiment. Marcia, a fourth grade teacher, was extremely emotional throughout the entire interview expressing frustration and anger related to special education and disability in particular. She angrily acknowledged that while she would like for students with disabilities to be included in the general education classroom, she doesn't, "think the resources are available" or "that teachers have the knowledge" or "that teachers have the understanding" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013) required to make it a reality. Tracy, a third grade teacher, expressed similar feelings about special education saying, "I feel like they should be given the same opportunities and chances as everybody else…" and similar frustration because, "…not everybody sees it that way because they don't have the training…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Not only did Tracy indicate a need for additional training, but she also identified "patience" and "creativity" as characteristics needed for successfully teaching students with disabilities. This may be due to her perception that teaching students who qualify for special education services as much more challenging than teaching students with disabilities. Tracy explained that, "…kids with disabilities don't require as many accommodations or modifications or energy because they still have enough skills to be able to support themselves", however "…the special ed kids, they need a lot, a LOT [emphasis added] more" (Personal

communication, April 18, 2013). Carrie, a special education teacher, responded from a deeply

personal perspective as she shared her thoughts about special education and inclusion. She

thought about the services that would be necessary for specific students to be successful in the

general education classroom and whether additional knowledge, skills, or training would be

required. This was particularly apparent in regards to students with vision and hearing

disabilities, "…she [a student who is deaf] couldn't be in a typical inclusion classroom because I

don't know sign language" and "he [a student who is blind] couldn't go into a typical

classroom…without a teacher that's specially trained" (Personal communication, April 30,

2013). As she considered her current situation, she said, "We'll take any kid no matter how high,

no matter how low…except for the visually and hearing impaired, unless I can get some training

on that, then I'd have a hard time on that one" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). These

three classroom teachers explicitly indicated that additional knowledge, training, and skills are

necessary to effectively teach students who receive special education services.

Although six teachers explicitly indicated the perception that special education requires

specialized knowledge or training, there were also six teachers who implicitly indicated a similar

conception. Jessica expressed feelings of frustration as she described the challenges she faces as

a general education teacher when, "you don't really know what to do for those kids...who may

need extra, like more, than just a regular classroom…" (Personal communication, April 30,

2013). She indicated the perception that students with special needs may need more or different

instruction than what she can reasonably provide. At the time of this study, Jessica was in her

first year of inclusion and co-teaching with a special education teacher. While she indicated that

her perception of special education has changed somewhat, she maintained her belief that, "…to

some extent kids do still need the separate, one on one time or at least small group" (Personal

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communication, April 30, 2013). She seemed to believe that some students required more specialized instruction in a self-contained special education classroom. Ellen, a sixth grade teacher with more than three years of experience co-teaching, also indicated her frustration with special education saying, "…it's hard to meet those demands in a way that's going to help them succeed" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She reported feeling pressure because students are "…so far behind and I just don't know how to get them caught up" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). As Ellen described her feelings about special education, she expressed an overwhelming sense of frustration with the lack of support saying, "I feel like it's all up to me…it would be nice to have some support…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She clarified this to mean that she needed more than just "…another body in the room" indicating that perhaps, specialized knowledge or training might be necessary.

Amanda, a fourth grade teacher, expressed the belief that students with special needs require, "…special help with their reading, writing, and math" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013). Amanda reported that she had no experience with full inclusion or co-teaching but that she did have experience teaching social studies to students with disabilities in her classroom. She described that experience as a "struggle" because she "…had them on her own" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013), meaning without support from the special education teacher. Colleen, also a fourth grade teacher, reported feelings of fear and anxiety associated with special education due to the "…additional work" required to differentiate instruction and "…figure out what works" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

The issue of additional support was a common theme among these six teachers. While they did not always explicitly state that special education required specialized knowledge or training, they frequently referred to the presence of an additional teacher. This additional teacher

was often the special education teacher who is perceived as having specialized knowledge and training to meet the needs of students with disabilities. This was indicated by Susan, a fifth grade teacher and Renee, a third grade teacher, both with more than five years of co-teaching experience. Susan expressed being frustrated with the lack of support from the special education teacher saying, "He just stands around. He doesn't work with the special ed kids and he is the one with the special ed degree" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). Renee approached this from a different perspective. Rather than describing her own personal feelings about teaching students with special needs, she reported being extremely angry with other teachers who, "…make comments about students with disabilities…saying that they didn't get into teaching to teach those kind of kids…they aren't trained to teach them" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee did admit however, that her opinion about special education could be due to the "fact that my co-teacher is so awesome…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

It is interesting to note that of the five remaining teachers who did not appear to perceive special education as requiring specialized knowledge or additional special education teacher support, only one of them appeared to think about it from a potentially more inclusive perspective. Amy, a fifth grade teacher with three years of teaching experience, indicated a potentially more inclusive perspective of special education. As she participated in the image sort, she engaged in extensive dialogue about disability, special education and inclusion, even though special education was not included in the image sort. Amy was determining where to place image 32, a photograph of a young girl reading, when she decided that it represented inclusion. To gain a deeper understanding of her perception of inclusion, I asked her to explain her thinking. She said, "Because you have a lot of struggling readers but…they don't necessarily have to have special education services, but they still need to have extra support" (Personal

communication, April 30, 2013). She went on to explain that because so many of the images involved individuals with visible disabilities, it influenced how she interpreted the images. However, as she reflected on her response, she said, "…it's possible that she's not a struggling reader. She could be my high reader and if she's my high reader, technically I should be giving her services that are higher level services…making sure her needs are being met" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). I cautiously interpreted this to mean that she viewed herself as primarily responsible for meeting the diverse needs of the students in her classroom. My caution turned to optimism as she again made reference to herself as the primary teacher responsible for meeting her students needs, "…you have to meet all of their needs and at some point, you figure you have to – whether they're at a regular fifth grade level, they're below level, or higher level – you still have to do some form of [intervention]" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). When she described her perception of inclusion, she again indicated that the general education teacher is at least equally responsible for providing services, "Even if it's just one on one or more time with your regular classroom teacher without the additional teacher… they need some kind of extra support" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). It is interesting to note that she never indicated needing specialized knowledge or training to meet the needs of her students. Her perspective stood in sharp contrast to the majority of the teachers' responses in this study, however it definitely added to the discussion and will be revisited as I consider the implications of this research study.

Research indicates that the feelings experienced by general education teachers such as, lack of sufficient knowledge, experience, training, and support for including students with disabilities in the general education classroom is nothing new (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Burke & Sutherland, 2004; Bradshaw & Mudia, 2006; Cook, Tankersley, Cook & Landrum,

2000; Esposito, 2003). Gartner and Lipsky (1987) suggest that, "there is, in effect, a "deal" between special and general education. The former asserts a particular body of expertise and a unique understanding of "special" students, thus laying claim both to professional obligation and student benefit. The latter, because of the lack of skills and resources or prejudice, is often happy to hand over "these" students to a welcoming special education system" (p. 181). It is interesting to note however, that research suggests that disabled students who are placed in segregated programs do not exhibit greater educational gains than comparable peers educated in integrated contexts (Artiles, 2003). If specialized knowledge and training doesn't produce increased academic gains for students in segregated settings, what then is the rationale for maintaining a system of exclusion?

Others, with a social model of disability orientation, believe that disabling attitudes and dispositions towards students with disabilities must be addressed first if the benefits of inclusion are to be realized. Hehir (2006) likens it to cases of racism and sexism suggesting that progress toward equity must begin with the acknowledgment that ableism, the belief that it is better or superior not to have a disability than to have one (Storey, 2007, p. 56), exists in schools. As Hehir (2006) suggests, this is accomplished through open discussions about disability and the recognition that disability is a basic issue of diversity.

Teachers' belief that special education requires specialized knowledge and training could be influenced by their perception of students who receive special education services as more impaired than students with disabilities. This theme emerged as I repeatedly coded and analyzed interview data. I will discuss the findings and the potential implications in the next section.

Special Education Equals More Impaired. The interview data revealed that 53 percent of the teacher participants' appeared to perceive individuals who qualify for special education as

more impaired than individuals with disabilities. Not only did these participants reflect differing conceptions of disability and special education, they frequently described special education as potentially more severe than disability. Seven of the teachers appeared to hold very similar perceptions related to this theme, which I will discuss first. The other two teachers appeared to hold somewhat different conceptions related to this theme, which I feel compelled to address at the end of this section.

There appeared to be an implicit assumption that students who qualify for special education are more impaired than students with disabilities for seven of the nine teachers. This emerged as participants' described their conceptions of special education and disability. For example, Kelly, a computer teacher, acknowledged that images of students from the self-contained special education classroom came to mind when she thought about special education. She reported having to "check in on them after each direction" and that "I know with them I have to dig a little deeper" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Carrie, a lower elementary special education teacher, described students who are eligible for special education services as, "…students with more severe disabilities typically", "…possibly students maybe with Down syndrome" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Yet, she described images of disability as, "typically I would think of physical disabilities…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Todd, the upper elementary special education teacher, appeared to have a similar conception of special education describing it as, "…students who are a couple of grade levels below their grade equivalency…typically students who need extra support and accommodations to be successful in the general ed room" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). John expressed a clearer distinction between special education and disability saying, "…with special education, it's usually their cognitive needs…not the physical abilities" (Personal communication, April 15,

2013). He described his experience with students from the self-contained special education classroom as, "…a constant struggle to keep them going" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Ellen, a sixth grade teacher, also described students who receive special education services as, "unmotivated", "antsy", and "frustrated" though she described disability in terms of "difficulty with motor skills" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She also described special education as it related to her current students describing them as, "so far behind" that she fears they won't get "caught up" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Jessica and Amanda, both fourth grade teachers, described disability as mostly physical but described special education as students who, "need accommodations", "special help with their reading, writing, and math" and "need extra support", indicating the perception that special education is more involved.

Tracy, a third grade teacher, indicated a much stronger distinction between disability and special education often emphasizing the more challenging nature of special education. She reported, "I think of kids with special needs in different ways…their pacing is different…they might need some form of tools, something to type with or to write with and steps broken down for them" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). She described disability as being, "…isolated, being more one area that's a struggle…somebody with a disability might just struggle in writing…or processing…it doesn't affect their entire learning or their entire ability to process…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Tracy referred back to special education saying, "…I find special ed kids can struggle in the big picture of *everything* [emphasis added]" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). She also described special education in the context of the classroom saying, "I find that the special ed would be more in depth, I'd have to go further with it, where my child with a disability may not need me to go as in depth with everything"

(Personal communication, April 18, 2013). She provided additional clarification saying, "I find that kids with disabilities don't require as many accommodations or modifications or energy because they still have enough skills to be able to support themselves where, often the special ed kids, they need a lot, a lot more…" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). It appeared that for Tracy, the students who received special education services were significantly different than students with disabilities and she made the differentiation based on whether the student had an IEP. This was indicated by her description of the different classrooms, "I think I deal with kids more with disabilities than I do with special ed because kids with special ed or IEPs are not with me. They are in a full inclusion classroom because they need greater accommodations, deeper accommodations" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Tracy made no reference to special education as involving students with disabilities, which made it difficult to interpret whether she believed that students who are eligible for special education also have a disability. She did, however, make it clear that she knows students with disabilities might not be eligible to receive special education services. This type of misconception could have implications for how students access and make progress in the curriculum, how they are perceived by their peers, the types of support and services they are provided, and the role of the classroom teacher in all of this.

Lisa indicated a very different perception of special education. Rather than perceiving special education as more involved, she appeared to perceive it as something that can be overcome or remediated. I felt that it was critical to explore Lisa's perception further primarily because it was such a departure from the perceptions discussed thus far. Lisa described her understanding of disability as, "I see somebody, something, or people, I should say, who need a lot more one-on-one. Students or people who need…maybe more individualized instruction…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). She added, "Not that special needs don't but just not

to the severity or the degree of somebody who is cognitively impaired" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Lisa attempted to clarify her perception by placing it in the context of the classroom saying, "I mean cognitively impaired, I see more in one-on-one, one-on-two ratios, where special needs are just like you and me, it's just something they're not grasping as quick maybe at this time" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Not only did Lisa indicate very different conceptions of special education and disability based on perceived cognitive ability, but she also indicated that students who receive special education services could overcome their learning struggles. She explained, "...it's not to say that a year, two years from now that they're not going to overcome it, because they can. They can learn to adapt to it" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Lisa repeatedly indicated that individuals could overcome their disabilities with hard work and perseverance. For example, "You can overcome, you can live your life to the fullest in a wheelchair" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). She referred to this idea again as she discussed why image 28, a young boy with visual impairments, did not represent disability, "…it's a young student that appears to be blind. If he was recently blind and he has to learn to overcome a new [disability], then it would be a disability at first, but not after he overcomes it, as he [Stevie Wonder] did" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Lisa appeared to perceive a physical or visible disability as a temporary situation that can be overcome. She also appeared to believe that the challenges facing students with special needs could also be overcome.

It is interesting to note, that Lisa did not refer to special education in association with disability at all. She described characteristics associated with special education vaguely such as, "their minds maybe work a little differently", "they are working so fast they can't process", "they're not making those connections from the board" (Personal communication, May 10,

2013). She does not explicitly associate those characteristics with a disability, rather she describes it as, "somewhere along the line somebody has picked up the cue that they're a little bit different than the majority and have taken that step to identify them" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). She is also the only teacher that reported perceiving disability as relating primarily to cognitive disabilities, which she indicated were less likely to be overcome.

The majority of participants in this study appeared to reflect a more medical model orientation toward disability, which situates disability as a problem within the students' themselves rather than the educational systems and structures (Brantlinger, 2006) that perpetuate categorization and segregation. Many of the participants described special education in terms of student characteristics such as "slow", "needing extra support", and "struggling". "Because so many in our society buy into difference as impairment (i.e., they construct difference as negative), the normalizing discourse and resulting social structures create barriers to access for individuals with differences and frequently prohibit them from active participation in the communities in which they reside" (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004, p. 525). One way to address these barriers is by raising awareness of ableist assumptions in schools. Multicultural literature suggests that raising awareness of racist, classist, sexist, and homophobic attitudes aids in developing more culturally responsive teaching, so too will raising awareness of ableist attitudes.

The perception that special education involves more significant impairments, is a characteristic rather than a service, and requires specialized knowledge has tremendous implications for inclusion. All of the participants' perceptions of disability and special education mentioned thus far appeared to influence their perceptions of inclusion as indicated by the data collected during the interview and image sort. As I engaged in the iterative process of coding and analyzing the data exploring perceptions of inclusion, several themes emerged such as; Inclusion

is a Good Thing, Inclusion is FOR Those with Disabilities, Inclusion is the Capacity to Function

Normally, Inclusion is More Work for Teachers, and Inclusion Occurs in a Classroom. I will

discuss these themes in greater detail in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 6

PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSION

The last two decades have been marked by significant changes in special education service delivery models beginning with IDEA (1997) and its subsequent reauthorizations to No Child Left Behind (2001) with its multi-tiered systems of support component. Both have encouraged a more collaborative relationship between special and general education to meet the complex and varied needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The decades-long shift can also be explained by parents and educators who are concerned about the equitable treatment of students with disabilities that regarded inclusion as an antidote to what they considered to be exclusionary education practices (Berry, 2006).

Now, more than ever before students with disabilities are receiving the majority of their instruction in the general education classroom. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), approximately 61 percent of children and youth with disabilities spent 80 percent or more of their school day in regular classes in 2010-11, compared to just 33 percent in 1990-91. In 2010-11, sixty-five percent of students with specific learning disabilities, 86 percent of students with speech or language impairments, 64 percent of students with visual impairments 18 percent of students with intellectual impairments and 13 percent of students with multiple disabilities spent most of their school day in general classes. The increased implementation of inclusive practices has resulted in a variety of research studies exploring issues related to stakeholders' attitudes and dispositions (Hammond & Ingalls, 2003; Leatherman & Niemeyer, 2005; Cook, Cameron & Tankersley, 2007) and educational outcomes for students with disabilities (Manset & Semmel, 1997; McLeskey & Waldron, 1995). However, few studies have

explored how participants' more personal and culturally rooted conceptions of disability and/or special education influence their understanding of inclusion.

This research study was designed to explore perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion involving teachers, students, and the administrator at Parker Elementary. Parker shifted to inclusive practices approximately five years ago. The school was in the rather early stages of inclusion, which made it an interesting setting to explore individuals' perceptions of these three concepts. As previously mentioned, I used a phenomenographical, semiotic approach to studying participants' personal and professional conceptions, which included qualitative methods such as verbal interviews and photo elicitation.

Participants were asked to describe images associated with inclusion and any feelings they experienced related to inclusion. They were then asked to view 38 images involving photographs, symbols, and illustrations associated with disability and inclusion. The images involved some individuals with and without visible disabilities in school and community settings as well as, universal symbols frequently associated with disability.

As previously indicated, participant responses were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for phenomenographic and semiotic analysis. The phenomenographic analysis resulted in an "outcome space" (Barnard, McCosker & Gerber, 1999) for examination, interpretation, and discussion. The outcome space revealed several interesting themes. For example, many of the participants reported believing that "Inclusion is a good thing". Many of the participants also, implicitly revealed their perception that inclusion is something *we do* or provide *for* individuals with disabilities, which may reflect the myth that people with disabilities are dependent and should be cared for. For example, Susan explicitly stated that, "Obviously if somebody has a physical disability where they're in a wheelchair or something, it's easy to feel sympathetic, it's

easy to help them". The concept of inclusion also appeared to be associated with more work, more preparation, and more time particularly for the general education classroom teachers. Lastly, the majority of participants appeared to associate inclusion narrowly as something that primarily occurs in a school setting rather than broadly as part of a pluralist society.

The current study included some additional features designed to capture participants' deeper conceptions of disability, special education and inclusion. The initial study I conducted did not ask students to explicitly describe their understandings of inclusion, however some of their conceptions were revealed through the image sort. The initial study did not include audio recording of the image sort, however I took field notes during the image sort to aid in the interpretation of the data. The majority of the students appeared to associate inclusion with images of classroom settings and images involving more than one individual. In hopes of gaining more insight into students' understandings of inclusion, I chose to add an inclusion question to the verbal interview for this study. Four students reported not knowing what inclusion was, therefore I told them that inclusion is, "All people, regardless of height, weight, skin color, gender, age, or ability working and playing together, and included in all activities." This provided a foundation for them to interpret the 38 images as representing disability and/or inclusion. Table 6.1 below displays the images students most often associated with inclusion.

Table 6.1

Results of Images Students Associated with Inclusion

Image	Inclusion	Disability	Both	Omitted
1	4	1	2	1
2	6	2	0	0
4	7	1	0	0
9	4	1	1	2
13	4	2	1	1
14	6	1	0	1
15	5	0	0	3
19	8	0	0	0
24	7	0	0	1
26	4	0	1	3
28	4	2	0	2
30	6	0	1	1
31	4	1	2	0
32	5	0	0	3
38	6	1	0	1

* Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56.

There were minimal changes made to the interview protocol for the teacher participants. As in the initial study, they were asked to describe images associated with their conception of inclusion. As part of the current study I also asked teachers to consider any *feelings* they associated with inclusion. The first theme that I will discuss emerged from the data collected as part of the teacher interview only. I will discuss how the majority of teachers appeared to perceive inclusion as "a good thing" in the section below.

Inclusion is a Good Thing. Teachers were asked to describe images and feelings they associated with the concept of inclusion and the majority of participants either explicitly or

implicitly referred to inclusion as a "good thing". Of the 17 teachers interviewed, only one

teacher did not explicitly or implicitly refer to inclusion as a good thing. Holly, a self-contained

special education teacher, described images associated with inclusion strictly from a professional

perspective, "I just picture a classroom with lots of different kids in it…more than one teacher in

the room…maybe a parapro…" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Her initial response

seemed mechanical, however as she continued, this shifted slightly. Her tone sounded bitter as

she replied, "…the kids with more severe disabilities are in *my* room, so…I would just say its

[inclusion] students in a classroom" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). This prompted

me to ask her what inclusion looked like for her students?" She replied, "*If* [emphasis added]

they were to be included you mean?" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Though she did

not explicitly indicate a perception of inclusion as good, she did say, "I think my class could do

inclusion but Mrs. W [building administrator] chooses not to do inclusion with *my* kids"

(Personal communication, May 11, 2011). Holly's response, which did not indicate the belief

that inclusion is a good thing, could potentially be caused by feelings of exclusion. Her response,

"*If* …they were included" was delivered with a somewhat angry or sarcastic tone, indicating

potential frustration. In contrast, the other 16 teachers either explicitly or implicitly expressed

beliefs of inclusion as a good thing, which will be discussed further in the paragraph below.

Explicitly supportive statements of inclusion were reported by ten of the 16 teachers. The

statements indicated the perception of inclusion as either good for students, with and without

disabilities, or good for the teacher in some way. For example, Greg, a sixth grade teacher,

explicitly stated that inclusion is, "…good – it's good…in the long run, it's a good thing I guess"

(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He did not explicitly indicate whether he believed it

was good for students or good for teachers, however later in the interview he described it as

challenging for him as a teacher. Therefore, I interpreted his response as referring to inclusion as good for students in the long run. Marcia, a fourth grade teacher, reported being frustrated with how inclusion is being implemented at Parker, but she expressed a fondness for inclusion as a concept saying, "What I want to see is all kids working together…where kids with special needs are in with kids without special needs…they should all be working together…that's how I think it should be" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Colleen, also a fourth grade teacher, reported that inclusion is good because, "Kids feel more proud…the focus is on their abilities not their disabilities" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She appeared to believe that inclusion is good for students because being in the general education classroom allows them to feel like, "I'm not much different from other kids" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Julie, a music teacher, indicated the perception that inclusion is good for general education students because they have opportunities to help other students through "peer teaching". Julie also reported that she relies on the assistance of general education students primarily because she does not often have adult support in music class. She gave this example, "I know in my room, if I say turn to page 58, the student next to them often leans over to help them find that page" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Julie expressed an interesting perception of inclusion as potentially less beneficial for students with disabilities, which will be discussed in greater detail in another section.

Amy and Susan, both fifth grade teachers, referred more specifically to inclusion as good for teachers. Susan has taught fifth grade for more than ten years, the last five of which have involved inclusion. Inclusion at Parker elementary means that students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent or more of their day in the general education classroom and receive special education services within that setting through co-teaching with the special education teacher.

Both Amy and Susan were in co-teaching situations at the time of this study and frequently referred to that experience when describing their conception of inclusion. Susan expressed positive feelings about inclusion saying, "It is really beneficial to have that special education expertise in the classroom…as long as the special ed teacher does more than just stand around" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). Amy responded similarly, "I think my perception of inclusion has changed a lot this year because my co-teacher actually teaches" (Personal communication, May 10, 2011). She reported that in the past she did not think inclusion was that beneficial but because of the relationship she built with her co-teacher at the time of this study, she was much more optimistic. Renee, a third grade teacher with five years of experience with inclusion, also reported feeling positive about inclusion due to co-teaching, "I feel really good about inclusion. I love inclusion. I don't know if it's the fact that my co-teacher is so awesome and we get a along really well, I know that's part of it" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee also shared her perception of inclusion as good for students, which will be discussed in the paragraph below along with the remaining teachers who appeared to agree with her.

Six teachers, five general education teachers and one special education teacher indicated the perception of inclusion as being good for students. Renee expressed extremely positive feelings about inclusion particularly for students. She described inclusion as, "Including not excluding. Not pull out. Involved with regular ed kids more. Involved in the regular curriculum a lot more. Exposed to different things that they wouldn't normally be exposed to in pull out" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She went on to explain her belief that, "…all students should be able to learn and all students should be included in the regular ed classroom. I think special ed should happen in the regular ed classroom. I'm really excited about inclusion"

(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee also indicated that, although inclusion can be

hard work, it is important to make students, "…feel a part of the classroom and not different"

(Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

John, the physical education teacher, indicated the perception that inclusion is good for

students as well. He was able to provide an interesting perspective because he taught the same

group of students in two different contexts. The students in the self-contained special education

class attended gym twice a week, once with their peers with disabilities and once with their

homerooms. John described it as "more challenging" when they came to gym with their peers

from the self-contained class. He reported that, "…they're a lot better when they're in their

regular education class. When they're with the other classes, I don't have as much difficulty

because all the other kids are in there and I don't know if they want to conform to the other kids

or what, but it's not as challenging" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Carrie, a special

education teacher, expressed how difficult it was to pull kids out of their general education

classrooms to provide special education services, "…some of them would feel weird or different,

like why am I going, or they were embarrassed about it" (Personal communication, May 3,

2011). When she thinks about inclusion now, she thinks about "…the kids enjoying staying in"

(Personal communication, May 3, 2011). Jessica, a fourth grade teacher, made a similar

reference saying, "I can't believe the difference at how much these kids are benefitting compared

to when they were being pulled out because they were…missing out on a lot. And now, they're

not" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Tracy, a third grade teacher, explained her

perspective a little differently as she referred to the image of a student with Down syndrome,

"I'm assuming she has Down syndrome, which is a disability, but at the same time, ya know,

could easily be in an inclusion classroom and feel successful and grow from where she's at"

(Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Inclusion was reported by these participants as beneficial for students, however there were a few teachers who also indicated feeling positive about it on a more personal level as well.

Jessica, a third grade teacher in her first year of inclusion, excitedly responded, "It makes me feel good to see the difference from classrooms that weren't inclusion and now that I'm doing it, I have a different understanding of it than before when I was just saying, well, you know is it [inclusion] really the best thing? Some of those kids need to be taken out…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Jessica indicated that her perception of inclusion changed as a result of having experience with it. She has more than ten years of teaching experience at Parker elementary, however this was her first experience with inclusion.

Ellen is a sixth grade teacher with approximately three years of teaching experience. She expressed deeply personal emotions during the interview as she described her feelings about special education and inclusion. She reflected on individual students in her class as she described feelings associated with inclusion, "I really admire them, like Stephanie [pseudonym] has such a great attitude and she works so hard and you know there are just these moments…" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). It was evident in her responses that she was actively involved in teaching students with disabilities in her classroom. With great pride she said, "…and James, he boosted his reading level up to a sixth grade reading level this year. He scored 6th grade on a QRI by himself, filling in the answers by himself" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She added, "…it is so amazing and inspiring when you see that…it amazes me what these kids are capable of…I'm very proud" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013).

The majority of teachers appeared to believe that inclusion is a good thing, which is crucial to its success. According to Sarason (1982) teachers' beliefs regarding inclusion are a

strong influence on the success or failure of inclusion classrooms. Simpson and Myles (1993) reviewed reports describing inclusive programs written from the late 1960s to 1993 and found that supportive attitudes of general education teachers are an essential condition for successful inclusion programs. Though the majority of teachers involved in this study reported feeling extremely positive about inclusion, several also indicated that it could be very challenging. This theme will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

      Inclusion is More Work for Teachers. As the previous section indicated, the majority of participants reported perceiving inclusion as "a good thing" either explicitly or implicitly. Even though the majority of perceptions were positive, there were equally as many teachers who reported inclusion as challenging and requiring additional work. I will start this section with a discussion of the responses from the itinerant teachers because their perceptions of inclusion were similar in some respects and quite different in others.

      As was the case with John, both Julie and Kelly teach students with disabilities from the self-contained special education room on two separate occasions, once with their classmates from the self-contained classroom and once with their homerooms. This provided a unique opportunity to explore inclusion from different perspectives. For example, Kelly, a computer teacher, and Julie, a music teacher, both reported that inclusion is challenging for them, however John, a physical education teacher, indicated that inclusion "doesn't really affect me too much…" He indicated that, "…when they're with their regular class, it's not that big of a deal" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He reported that it was much more challenging when the students came to gym from the self-contained special education classroom. He described it as, "…very challenging because they've never been pushed for most of their lives outside of school…they really have to be pushed and it's kind of like a constant battle between me and

them…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee, a third grade teacher, appeared to agree with John as she described how "pull out" programs were a "pain". She said, "…it was a lot of extra work and you as a teacher didn't see any of the benefits of it or the rewards of it" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). This is an interesting perspective, however not one that was shared by the other itinerant teachers.

Julie and Kelly described their experience with inclusion quite differently. For example, Kelly, the computer teacher, described inclusion as, "A full classroom, a full, busy classroom because that's been my struggle this year, my third grade inclusion classroom. When I have them, I also have my cognitively impaired kiddos that come in. So I have a full classroom and I'm always working one on one with them" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She also indicated that this made her feel a little stressed because, "…it's more and it's not my specialty so I feel stressed because I know I need to know more…" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Kelly explained that she uses other students to help her "get through a whole lesson" but reported feeling "guilty for putting that on them sometimes" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Julie, the music teacher, indicated similar feelings, "I don't know if I am doing the best I can for them. Especially when it's inclusion" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). She reported feeling much more confident when the students with disabilities came to music with their self-contained classroom as opposed to their general education homeroom. She explained this in great detail saying, "…when they're self contained…they act a lot differently than when they're with their homerooms and they're in the inclusion setting. They tend to be willing to take risks. They're supportive of each other and they're more in their natural element" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Julie clarified that "They aren't trying to put on a show for their

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peers. They stay in their regular mode, so to speak, and we get a lot of work done. I mean good work. They are able to do what their peers do because they don't feel inhibited" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Her experience with the same students coming to music with their general education homerooms was vastly different; "it's like they put a block and a wall up and they have to put on a show almost, for their peers. So, rather than taking risks, it's more about, I hate to say it, but it's more about what poor behaviors they can display"(Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Julie, Kelly, and John were in the unique position of having the same students in two different contexts, which provided richer descriptions of their perceptions of inclusion. The other classroom teachers did not have that opportunity; therefore they described their perception of inclusion as more work from the perspective of the general education classroom only.

There were ten classroom teachers who appeared to perceive inclusion as challenging or requiring extra work. Holly, a self-contained special education teacher, indicated that if her students were included in the general education classroom it would "…be a lot harder because they are just a lot, lot lower and you would have to have more groups because there would be a lot more levels to teach" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). When Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, was asked to describe images associated with inclusion she replied, "Inclusion, to me, would normally appear chaotic. It would seem to me to be more difficult to plan and additional work for the general education teacher" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). It was interesting that Lisa chose to follow this up with the statement, "That's not my opinion but that's what I would normally see" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). At the time of this study, Lisa had several students with disabilities in her social studies class as well as a co-teacher, however she made no reference to having any personal experience with inclusion. It was unclear

why Lisa avoided drawing on her personal experience with inclusion rather than discussing it in a decontextualized manner however, her response indicated the perception that inclusion is indeed more work for the classroom teacher.

Greg and Colleen both described inclusion as a struggle. Colleen, a fourth grade teacher with approximately three years of inclusion experience, said, "Inclusion is a lot of work. It's hard because you have all different levels and you have to differentiate and make adjustments all the time" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Greg, a sixth grade teacher with approximately five years of inclusion experience, described it as, "At first it was a struggle. It still kind of is" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He went on to explain the challenges of co-teaching, "It's a balancing act of trying to teach it with a special ed teacher in the room and making it work because you have your own way of doing things and if you don't think they're teaching it the way they should be, you jump in a little too often" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Initially Greg used the word difficult to describe his experience with co-teaching but later he described it more accurately as requiring personal "restraint". He said, "It's difficult trying to hold myself back and not jump in so often" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Ellen also described inclusion as challenging in terms of the co-teaching partnership. She said, "Right now, it's kind of frustrating because I feel like its not working. I feel like a lot of it is still on my shoulders…I feel like it's all up to me, so it would be nice to have some support with that. Even though I get that support, I guess, there's another body in the room but I don't know that it's working as well as it should. So it's very frustrating" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013).

There appeared to be a range of feelings associated with inclusion from how teachers felt about it personally and professionally, to how they felt about it in relationship to both general education students and students with disabilities. A range of studies have explored teachers'

professional beliefs about inclusion, which reveal similar findings. For example, Fuchs (2009) conducted a study of teachers' beliefs and attitudes about current inclusion practices and found that teachers generally agreed that responsibilities and expectations of regular education teachers were unreasonable and they also reported feeling frustrated with the lack of support from special education staff. D'Alonzo, Giordano, and Vanleeuwen (1997) also found that when teachers were given the opportunity to agree or disagree with proposed problems or proposed benefits of inclusion, they overwhelmingly agreed with the problems posed by inclusion and had mixed reactions about the proposed benefits. The teachers in this study however, expressed more positive feelings about inclusion while indicating that it can also pose some challenges.

The teachers' perceptions of inclusion revealed in this section were not surprising, however an interesting theme did emerge from the data that I had not anticipated. Some of the participants indicated that inclusion is something *we* do *for* individuals with disabilities. I will address this theme in more detail in the next section.

Inclusion is Provided FOR Those with Disabilities. Participants were asked to view 38 images and determine whether they believed the image represented disability, inclusion, both or neither. I had asked participants to describe their thinking as they categorized the images. As indicated earlier in the chapter, some of the images were easily categorized while others appeared to provoke much more consideration. At those times, I would prompt participants to elaborate. As some participants elaborated on specific images, they sometimes indicated that an individual without a disability was "including" an individual with a disability. As if it was something that was provided to the individual with a disability rather than as their educational right. This could be a reflection of underlying myths of disability, which according to Henderson and Bryan (1997) the five most common myths associated with individuals with disabilities

include: 1) they are inferior, 2) they are totally impaired, 3) they are less intelligent, 4) they need charity, and 5) they prefer the company of others with disabilities (p. 70-75). The perception of inclusion as something we do for students with disabilities may reflect the myths of individuals with disabilities as too impaired to be in the general education classroom and needing help from their non-disabled peers. I will explore this possibility further in the paragraphs below.

There were 11 teacher participants who indicated their perception of inclusion as something "they" provided "to" students with disabilities in the classroom or as part of a program. This perception fails to embrace inclusion as an educational imperative rooted in equity and social justice. Rather, the teachers' appeared to believe that inclusion is something we *do* for students with disabilities when the conditions are right. This perception was most strongly indicated by Carrie, the lower elementary special education teacher. Therefore I will begin this section with a detailed discussion of Carrie's perception of inclusion followed by a discussion of several other teachers' responses that indicated similar beliefs.

When asked to describe images associated with inclusion, Carrie responded by saying, "Students with and without disabilities working together in the general education classroom" (Personal communication, May 3, 2011). As she proceeded through the remainder of the interview, she appeared to hold true to her initial description, however an additional perception of inclusion as something schools *provide* or *do* for students with disabilities was revealed through the photo elicitation data. Carrie categorized the images from a very personal perspective often considering her own personal role as the special education teacher in an inclusion classroom. For instance, she labored over the placement of image 12, a photograph of Marlee Matlin, saying, "I guess I couldn't say inclusion because she couldn't be in a typical classroom because I don't know sign language, nor does my co-teacher" (Personal

communication, April 30, 2013). She appeared to be deeply concerned about meeting the academic needs of students with disabilities in a general education classroom setting, however she never made reference to the social benefits of inclusion. This was evident again as she struggled to categorize image 28, a boy reading braille in a classroom, saying, "…he couldn't go into a typical classroom around here without a teacher that's trained" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Throughout the image sort, she frequently referred to inclusion as the responsibility of the special education teacher. She indicated being concerned about whether she would be qualified to "help" or "teach" particular students. For example, she revisited image 12 saying, "If I felt like, if she was a student and I could meet her needs, then she could be included" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). In other words, if she was fluent in sign language, then she would be able to include that student in the general education classroom. *She* could provide inclusion *to* that student. Carrie continued to sort the remaining images from this very personal perspective and when she finished, I challenged her to expand her conception of inclusion and consider whether she would make any changes. I prompted her to consider the possibility that additional services were available to the individuals in images 12 and 28. She quickly responded, "If I take myself out of it as an educator, like not talking about me teaching these kids, then it could absolutely be inclusion" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). It is puzzling that as a special education teacher with extensive knowledge of the supplementary aids and services available, Carrie did not consider other options for meeting the students' academic needs such as Visual or Hearing Impaired Teacher Consultants who provide professional support to both teachers and students. Carrie based the inclusion of students with disabilities only on her personal ability to support them without considering the possibility of additional supports, which are routine considerations during annual IEP meetings.

Carrie also indicated her belief that inclusion is something provided to students with disabilities and that its provision is primarily determined by the teachers. For example, she reported, "I look at inclusion as like we'll take everyone. Like we'll take any kid no matter how high, no matter how low, if they're in a wheelchair, if they're not. Except for the vision and hearing impaired, unless I can get some training on that" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). While Carrie indicated the desire to include all children (except those with vision and hearing impairments), Holly reported a different perspective. At the time of this study, she was a self-contained special education teacher whose students spent 80 percent or more of their school day in the special education classroom. When asked about her perception of inclusion, she appeared visibly annoyed saying, "I think my class could *do* inclusion. It just depends on the school and how they're *doing* it. My kids are lower and the principal chooses not to *do* inclusion with my kids, but they could" (Personal communication, May 11, 2011). So inclusion was perceived not only as a program or service that is provided to students with disabilities, but it's provision appears to be determined by the principal and/or the teachers themselves.

Todd, an upper elementary special education teacher, made very subtle references to inclusion as something we do for students with disabilities. His perception of inclusion appeared to be much broader than Carrie's as he referred to it both educationally and societally. The majority of Todd's responses indicated that he believed inclusion involves individuals with and without disabilities working and playing together. He categorized 19 images as representing inclusion. His rationale for placing 15 of them reflected his perception of inclusion as individuals with and without disabilities altogether in either educational or social settings. For example, he described image 33, a photograph of an individual using a cane, as inclusion because, "…they appear to be walking on the sidewalk with everybody…out in public with everybody" (Personal

communication, May 10, 2013). Additionally, he categorized image 34, a photograph of an individual with a prosthetic leg, as inclusion saying, "I would say inclusion because he has a prosthetic leg so he can do day to day activities, day to day life" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013).

In contrast to Carrie, Todd did not appear to sort images based on his personal qualifications or training. In fact, he appeared to think about inclusion much more broadly in terms of accessibility. He categorized image 5, the universal symbol for wheelchair access, as "…inclusion because you tend to see…like in a bathroom, you would see this picture that could be used for people who are not disabled and disabled. So, included amongst each other" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Though Todd more frequently referred to inclusion as individuals with and without disabilities working and playing together, he did refer to inclusion as something schools/teachers provided to students on three separate occasions. For example, he categorized three images uttering the phrases, "…they're *being* included", "…he seems to be *accepted by*…people his own age", and "…she has a disability but she's *being* included" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013).

There were eight additional teachers that implicitly indicated the perception of inclusion as a program schools provide to students with disabilities. Amanda, a fourth grade teacher, described inclusion this way, "I haven't actually *done an inclusion class*" (Personal communication, April 17, 2013) and Tracy, a third grade teacher, also said, "I have never *done* inclusion" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Jessica, a veteran teacher in her first year of co-teaching, described it in terms of a particular classroom called the "inclusion classroom". She also reported that "It makes me feel good to see the difference from *classrooms that weren't inclusion* and now that I'm doing *it*, I have a different understanding of *it* than before..."

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(Personal communication, April 30, 2013). While these 11 teachers all indicated some perception of inclusion as a program, there were a few who also described images of inclusion involving students without disabilities *helping* students with disabilities.

The music teacher, Julie, shared this image of inclusion, "…other [general education] students helping them [students with disabilities], like peer teaching" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). The perception that inclusion involves individuals without disabilities "helping" individuals with disabilities was a recurring theme throughout the image sort. For example, Lisa contemplated how to categorize a particular image saying, "I'm going to assume its inclusion. It looks like it might be a buddy system, pair system, helping her read the highlighted text" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Julie referred to this idea on five separate occasions during the image sort. One example of this involved image 7, a man walking hand in hand with a woman in a wheelchair, as Julie shared, "It looks like he is purposely trying to include someone with a physical handicap" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). A second example involved image 3, an accessible bus, where Julie explained, "It makes an effort to help people with disabilities ride with non disabled passengers" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Greg seemed to agree with Julie's description of image 7, saying, "He's including her in the vacation trip" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Once again, inclusion is perceived as something *we* do *for* individuals with disabilities rather than as a moral imperative for achieving educational equity for all students.

This perception of inclusion as a program or service that is provided to individuals with disabilities by individuals without disabilities has important implications. First, it implicitly situates nondisabled individuals in positions of power where they can determine who gets included, in what activities or situations, and at what times. In this way inclusion is perceived as

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a program rather than as a "moral imperative" (Baglieri & Knopf, 2004). Reid and Valle (2004) argue that "…access to general education classrooms is not an earned privilege, but a right grounded in a civil rights discourse that focuses on interactions among difference, impairment, and disability…we assume that everybody belongs and ask how educators can make general education classrooms welcoming, productive…environments for all students." (p. 8). The teachers in this study appeared to hold a narrow conception of inclusion primarily referring to nondisabled and disabled students working together in the general education classroom. They rarely discussed inclusion broadly as encompassing all areas of human diversity such as race, gender, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, and so on, which will be addressed in more depth in the following section.

Inclusion is Primarily Educational not Social, Legal or Civic. When asked to describe images that came to mind when they heard the word "inclusion", the majority of teachers described it from an educational perspective. All 17 teachers described inclusion as primarily associated with the classroom. In every case where inclusion was considered in the broader context of society, it was elicited through various photographs during the image sort. This is important because it not only revealed that the teachers in this study initially appeared to hold a narrow conception of inclusion as associated with the classroom, but it also demonstrated the power of photo elicitation as a research method. Table 6.2 shows teachers' conceptions of inclusion as indicated by the verbal interview and as elicited through photographs during the image sort.

Table 6.2.

Teachers' Conceptions of Inclusion

Teacher	Inclusion in:		
	School	Classroom	Society
Todd		V	P
Carrie		V, P	P
Holly		V, P	
John		V, P	
Julie		V, P	P
Kelly		V	
Ellen		V	
Greg		V, P	
Lisa		V	P
Amy	P	V	P
Susan		V	
Jessica		V	
Colleen		V	
Amanda		V	
Marcia		V	P
Tracy	V	V, P	
Renee		V	

* V = verbal interview, P = photo elicitation

As Table 6.2 indicates, 100 percent of the teachers in this study provided verbal descriptions of inclusion as associated primarily with the classroom. Broader conceptions of inclusion were only indicated when elicited by photographs during the image sort. Todd referred to inclusion as extending beyond the classroom during the image sort much more frequently than the other five teachers. For example, Todd described image 27 as representing inclusion because, "…it appears to be signs of those with disabilities included into the public" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). He provided a similar response for image 5, the universal symbol for wheelchair accessibility, saying, "I would say inclusion because you tend to see…like the bathroom, you would see this picture that could be used with people who are non disabled and disabled" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Todd was the only participant who mentioned how accommodations for those with disabilities can benefit individuals without

disabilities as well. This is an important concept because it highlights the benefits of inclusion for all individuals not just those with disabilities. Only one other teacher discussed the benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities saying, "…the general education kids are benefitting from inclusion too. It's a win/win situation" (Colleen, Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, also explicitly discussed inclusion in a broader context as a result of the image sort. She described some of the images of adults with disabilities as representing inclusion, therefore I encouraged her to explain her rationale. She eagerly responded, "Oh, inclusion isn't just in the classroom. It's has to be in a workforce. Inclusion has to be everywhere" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013).

Table 6.2 shows that there were six teachers that indicated a broader conception of inclusion as extending beyond the classroom, beyond the school, and into the community. This is important because inclusion began as a grass roots movement by Disability Rights activists to guarantee persons with disabilities the right to equal access to all aspects of society including public accommodations, transportation, communications, employment, recreation, and education (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Teachers must consider inclusion as related to all areas if we are truly preparing students with and without disabilities for life beyond the classroom.

Because Todd appeared to hold the broadest conception of inclusion, I decided to explore his responses further. Todd associated images 5, 7, 27, 33 and 34 with a broader conception of inclusion as occurring beyond the context of the classroom. I decided to examine the remaining teachers' responses associated with those same images to determine if other teachers interpreted them as representing inclusion in a broader context as well. The results are displayed in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3

Broad Conceptions of Inclusion

Teachers					
Todd	B	B	B	B	B
Carrie	D	N	D	N	N
Holly	D	N	D	D	D
John	O	O	D	D	N
Julie	D	N	D	D	D
Kelly	D	D	N	N	D
Ellen	D	D	D	D	D
Greg	D	B	D	D	D
Lisa	D	O	D	O	O
Amy	D	D	N	N	D
Susan	D	N	D	D	D
Jessica	D	D	D	D	D
Colleen	D	D	D	D	N
Amanda	D	D	D	D	N
Marcia	D	D	D	D	N
Tracy	D	N	D	N	N
Renee	D	D	D	D	D

* B = broad conception of inclusion, N = narrow conception of inclusion, D = disability, O = omitted

As Table 6.3 shows, Todd indicated the broadest conception of inclusion associated with those images. Greg reflected a broader conception of inclusion as extending beyond the classroom regarding image 7 as he explained, "It's inclusion because he is including her in the vacation trip" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). However, the majority of teachers not only appeared to hold narrow conceptions of disability associated with those images, but many of them identified them as representing disability rather than inclusion.

Inclusion, perceived narrowly as occurring only within the school setting, indicates that participants view inclusion as relating primarily to schools, classrooms, teachers, and students. One of the major arguments in favor of inclusive education involves consideration of post-school

experiences for individuals with disabilities. The Institute on Community Integration of the University of Minnesota considers acceptance of individual differences as one of the many goals of inclusive education.

> People in our society have many misconceptions about persons with disabilities. The best way to overcome these is by bringing people together in integrated settings. As students with and without disabilities interact as classmates and friends, their parents and teachers have the opportunity to witness successful integration in action. This new experience enables many adults to embrace the vision of a society that accepts and values the inclusion of persons with disabilities into all aspects of community life. (as cited in Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012, p.14)

The absence of a conception of inclusion as social, legal and civic contrasts with multiculturalism which is widely understood to be important socially, legally, and as a healthy aspect in a civic society. Special education and inclusion have been described as being understood through a medical model and a social model. Within the social model, political and legal issues are addressed on an individual level rather than as a practice that is widely beneficial to everyone in society. Within multicultural discourses, cultural diversity is seen as community strength. The medical model is the dominant discourse in special education, which does not consider diversity of human bodies, minds and (dis)abilities as a normal feature and an asset in democratic society. We have cross-cultural education to address issues of historical perspectives and to promote cultural understanding but not cross-ability education.

In the next chapter I will discuss some of the less common conceptions associated with disability because while they were not representative of the majority, they have important implications nonetheless. For example,

CHAPTER 7

FROM HEGEMONY TO POSSIBILITY

The previous chapters clearly indicated that participants hold hegemonic perceptions of disability and special education, however some participants indicated more equitable, complex, and democratic conceptions, which point the way towards greater possibilities for the disabled in schools and in public life. The use of poststructuralist analytical processes and techniques will produce many different readings of the texts. These readings will variously concentrate on recurring themes, contradictions, and the identification of patterns in the ways in which participant experiences are articulated. Readings will also place emphasis on absences, avoidances, inconsistencies, and contradictions. (Fawcett, 2008).

In this chapter, I will discuss some of the more complex outlier themes that emerged from participants' responses both individually and in relationship to one another. These include the notion that everyone is able/disabled; media portrayals and the perception of the supercrip; levels of awareness and discomfort with semiotic sorting; males as more medical model oriented and hegemonic; and the distinctive responses of the principal. As Frechtling & Sharp (1997) explain, "unlike quantitative researchers, who need to explain away deviant or exceptional cases, qualitative analysts are also usually delighted when they encounter twists in their data that present fresh analytic insights or challenges. The first theme that I will address emerged from several participants' responses indicating that disability is not unique to specific individuals; rather it is in all of us.

Everyone Is Able/Disabled

Participants were asked to describe images associated with disability and special education and while the majority of responses indicated hegemonic conceptions, a few responses

indicated a much broader, comprehensive conception of disability as something we all experience. Renee, a third grade teacher with five years of inclusion experience, described it this way, "So, I like to think of it as abilities and disabilities and we all have them whether we are certified [disabled] or not" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Susan, a fifth grade teacher also with five years of inclusion experience, indicated a similar conception saying, "I feel like the word disability is in every single one of us because there are things that we are talented at and there are things that we are not [talented] at…whether we are labeled or not, we are all in one together" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Both Susan and Renee expressed very positive feelings about inclusion and the desire to create inviting classrooms that acknowledge and accept differences. They were notably more positive in this regard than most other participants. However, their perception that everyone has a disability, everyone has a weakness, while intended to create more inclusive classrooms, may actually do just the opposite. For example, many preservice and in-service teachers have proclaimed being "colorblind" in their attempts to create inclusive classrooms yet, as Ullucci and Battey (2011) report, this blends into a troubling chorus of "we don't see race". Ullucci and Battey (2011) further elaborate the consequences of colorblindness as contributing to a collective ignorance, which relieves individuals of the responsibility of fighting against the impact of racism. This may also be applicable to issues concerning disability. Renee and Susan's proclamation that everyone is disabled may in fact allow them to ignore the impact of disability by indicating that it is something that everyone experiences in one way or another. This over generalization could potentially minimize and trivialize the disability experience for individuals who have legitimate disabilities, rather than mere areas of weakness. According to Rosenberg (2004), colorblindness allows people to deny that "race, especially skin color has consequences for a person's status and

wellbeing" (p. 257). Generalizing disability in such a way may also allow people to deny that disability has consequences as well.

Some multicultural studies have explored how preservice and in-service teachers who claim to be "colorblind" in their desire to create inclusive classroom communities, often further marginalize and oppress students of color (Banks, 2001; Bonilla-Silva, 2003; Cochran-Smith, 1995; Johnson, 2002). This, according to Ullucci and Battey (2011), occurs because claiming to treat everyone the same shuts down any need to discuss inequality. Truly inclusive classrooms do not deny the existence of significant differences or generalize differences across individuals, rather they acknowledge and embrace differences as a natural part of the human experience. Rosenthal (2001) suggests that promoting inclusive practices involves two main avenues to working with difference. First, it is about having conversations in order to clarify and hear about the 'other's' position, so that differences can be described and better understood. "I can stand in the other's' shoes so to speak" (p. 389). Second, it involves doing some private work inside oneself, looking at, owning and re-appraising one's perceptions, beliefs and values (p. 389). Though Susan and Renee appeared to believe that generalizing the disability experience to everyone would create a more inclusive community, it may actually stifle conversations about difference that are vital to creating and maintaining the type of inclusive classroom they hope to achieve. "To start accepting the differences between us, we first have to notice them, point them out, talk about them, explore them. With this in mind, it is not our responsibility to talk or act colorblind" (Rosenthal, 2001, p. 389).

Rather than address disability vaguely as strengths and weaknesses that everyone experiences, teachers need to have open discussions about disability that specifically address individual's unique and varied experiences with it. Susan and Renee appeared to believe that

creating an inclusive classroom environment means acknowledging that, "…we all have different abilities and different disabilities…" which is a step in the right direction. However, expanding these to include specific and intentional conversations related to all areas of difference such as, disability, race, gender, class, ethnicity, and sexual orientation would move them closer to achieving truly inclusive classrooms. Rosenthal (2001) suggests that "whilst inclusion is a laudable goal for our education system to embrace", we need to aim for a broader discussion that encompasses the core concepts of sameness and difference (p. 391). He maintains that in order to get to know one another, we need to debate and acknowledge our points of similarity to and difference from one another and that by doing this we may minimize and perhaps extinguish the misunderstandings and disharmonies we have seen so much of in our schools and communities.

Another important implication in the overgeneralization of disability is the potential to minimize or trivialize the disability experience. For example, Renee opens her classroom each school year with this:

> I have a huge conversation with my kids. It's all about family. We are all one
>
> unit and I tell them we all have different abilities and different disabilities.
>
> Mine is drawing. I cannot draw. I draw stick people, and they laugh at me at
>
> first and I know that. So, that's an area that I struggle in so when I go to
>
> draw, I may ask someone who I know is a good artist, "Could you come and
>
> Help me? Could you walk me through it? (Personal communication, April 15,
>
> 2013).

Renee indicated that her inability to draw could be considered a disability however, she did not indicate difficulties in related areas such as visual memory, spatial relationships, spelling or copying which could be associated with a visual perceptual processing disorder and thus could

actually impact her functioning as a learner or professional. She likened her challenges with drawing figures to the challenges students may experience with reading and mathematics, "It's the same with reading, we have some kids who are really high in reading…I have kids that struggle with reading…but maybe their strength is math and they may be helping you with math" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Renee excitedly shared that story and her desire to make her classroom more inclusive, which may reflect an orientation toward the social model of disability.

The social model views disability as stemming from societal and environmental barriers and individuals with disabilities are perceived as valuable, "normal" members of society (Sullivan, 2011). Renee sought to address disability as ordinary, as residing in everyone, and as not requiring specialized attention or treatment, however critics of the social model argue that casting impairment as only a neutral human difference ignores the lived realities of many individuals with disabilities (Taylor, 2005). Because not all individuals with disabilities share a common perspective, it is important to consider models that reflect the entire range of disability orientations (Darling, 2003). Some individuals with disabilities prefer to appear as normal as possible while others prefer to include disability as one part of their identity, while still others may consider their disability a point of pride (For more about disability orientations, see Darling, 2003). To create a truly inclusive classroom environment requires attention to and consideration of the many ways that individuals experience disability.

Renee and Susan were not the only participants who appeared to reflect a potential social model orientation. Several other participants indicated a similar orientation during the image sort, particularly in response to image 15, an advertisement for the film *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994). As participants' deliberated over the placement of image 15 in either the

disability or inclusion category, they appeared to hold very different perceptions, which will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

Media Portrayals and Public Perceptions

I used photo elicitation methods in hopes of obtaining a deeper understanding of participants' perceptions of disability and inclusion. The images that evoked the most detailed responses were those involving famous individuals and those involving characters from familiar movies. Teacher participants' indicated drawing on their specific knowledge of the character and the storyline when determining where to place the images. Though none of the participants indicated any awareness of the different disability models, some of their responses reflected broader conceptions of disability, which could be interpreted as representing underpinnings of the social model. Several teachers considered how societal factors such as accessibility, stereotypes, and prejudices may have contributed to perceptions of individuals as disabled. This is interesting given the fact that "the media as a whole is a major proponent of medical model views of disability, not just through language but through the overall portrayal (or lack of portrayal) of people with disabilities" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 7). This could indicate a shift in teachers' perceptions of disability from the more medical, deficit-driven orientation to the more social, ability-driven orientation, which could have significant implications for the future of inclusion. Image 15, an advertisement for the film *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994), evoked the most varied responses from teachers.ok

The film *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994), is based on the 1986 novel by Winston Groom. The author describes the main character, Forrest Gump, as an autistic savant, which refers to individuals with autism who have extraordinary skills (Edelson, n.d.). However, Roger Ebert, a famous film critic, describes Forrest Gump as a "thoroughly decent man with an IQ of

75" who is "incapable of doing anything less than profound." The apparent discrepancy between the book and the film in terms of Forrest Gump's disability could be one explanation as to why participants in this study appeared to have different perceptions, though only one participant actually referred to a specific disability when describing him. Todd, a special education teacher described Forrest Gump as autistic "just because of the things he was able to recall and he gets focused on one thing" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). Those responses that appeared to indicate an orientation toward the social model of disability are discussed below.

According to the image sort data, five teachers categorized image 15 as representing inclusion, five teachers categorized it as representing disability, five teachers categorized it as representing both inclusion and disability and three teachers omitted the image altogether. The eight teachers who categorized the image as representing inclusion or omitted the image appeared to use external factors in their decision making process. For example, Carrie, a special education teacher, said, "I don't really think he has a disability per se and I think he functions just fine in the real world" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). John, a physical education teacher, did not consider Forrest Gump disabled saying, "…he was portrayed as a little slow but did many great things, so I don't think he really had a disability" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Julie, a music teacher, categorized it as representing inclusion because "He was mainstreamed in society and not placed in a home which was typical at that time" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Lisa, a fifth grade teacher, also associated image 15 with inclusion saying, "He was productive. He was successful in his life story in the movie. He did not, he's not any different than anybody else as far as his life goals and being able to achieve them. I think he had a disability to other people but not to himself" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). These responses could indicate broader conceptions of disability as "stemming

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from societal and environmental barriers" (Sullivan, 2011, p. 3). However, they could also be espousing the myth of the "inspirational supercrip…which are people or characters who conform to the medical model by overcoming disability, and becoming more 'normal', often in a heroic and extraordinary way" (Roper, 2003, as cited in Sullivan, 2011, p. 8). Given the types of responses elicited from other images, which I will discuss in the next paragraph, and the findings discussed in Chapter Five, I am inclined to believe the latter.

Image 9 is an advertisement for the film *I Am Sam* (Nelson, 2001). The film is about a father with a mild cognitive impairment who loses custody of his young daughter because he is perceived as incapable of raising her on his own. According to the data, three teachers categorized the image as representing inclusion, five teachers categorized it as representing disability, eight teachers categorized it as representing both disability and inclusion, and two teachers omitted the image. Only six teachers reported being familiar with the movie and some of their responses indicated that context played a factor in their decision to categorize the image. For example, Ellen, a sixth grade teacher, categorized the image as representing disability and inclusion saying, "I would say maybe both because he is definitely disabled, but he is kind of working in the real world. He has to figure out how to mesh in the real world" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She is clearly drawing on her knowledge of the character and the context because there is nothing in the image itself that indicates that he is disabled.

Marcia, a fourth grade teacher, expressed intense frustration when categorizing this image saying, "I feel like I know the most about this one [image 9] and it bothers me even more. I feel like I have the most history with this one. Like to me, he has a disability but, he has done, he's overcome his disability to the best of his ability and functioning" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Again, the myth of the supercrip is indicated by the perception that he heroically

overcame his disability. According to Sullivan (2011), the amount of praise and admiration shown for the success of a person with a disability implies that one is not expected to succeed if one has a disability, the unintended outcome being the perpetuation of disability as dependent or incapable.

Image 22 is an advertisement for the film *Mask* (Starger, 1985). The film is about a boy named "Rocky" who is diagnosed with craniodiaphyseal dysplasia, which is an extremely rare disorder that causes disfiguring cranial enlargements. Six participants indicated being familiar with the movie and used that knowledge in categorizing the image as representing disability or inclusion. For instance, Amy said, "I don't even know if that would be a disability because it's just a deformed, deformality [deformity]. That's not necessarily a disability" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). She appeared to use more than visual cues of disability in determining whether the image represented inclusion or disability as she indicated that he looked physically different but that he wasn't necessarily (cognitively) disabled.

In the film, Rocky excelled academically which appeared to be a factor for some participants in determining whether the image represented disability or inclusion. For example, Carrie, a special education teacher, said, "…I saw the movie but I don't think it's necessarily a disability. He doesn't seem to be cognitively impaired just because he has a deformed face" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Greg also appeared to consider the context when categorizing this image saying, "He was included in the movie…he went to class, made fun of himself. I thought it was cool" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Tracy placed the image in the inclusion category saying, "He was mentally capable" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). These responses are also in odd contradiction to participants' assertions that disabilities are visible and physical. Competence neutralizes physical disability.

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Image 22 appeared to elicit broader conceptions of disability as some participants used more than visible cues as criteria for determining whether the image represented disability or inclusion. Though previous responses indicated some orientation toward the myth of the supercrip that did not appear to be the case with image 22. Teachers at Parker elementary appeared to reflect adherence to some disability stereotypes, though they may also be reflecting a broader conception of disability. Adherence to disability stereotypes such as the myth of the supercrip, perpetuate ableist attitudes and dispositions. Ableism can be described as the belief that it is better not to have a disability than to have one and that it is better to do things in the way that nondisabled people do (Storey, 2007). Ableist attitudes pose significant challenges to developing a culture of inclusion therefore any efforts to improve inclusive practices must involve identifying and challenging ableist assumptions.

Levels of Awareness and Discomfort with Semiotic Sorting

I chose photo elicitation as a method for exploring participants' deeply held cultural biases and assumptions about disability, which proved to be incredibly effective as noted above. I was able to obtain rich, detailed data regarding participants' beliefs about disability, however I also realized that the image sort was prompting participants to engage in critical reflection regarding their own biases and stereotypes of disability. For some, this reportedly caused feelings of anger, frustration, nervousness, discomfort, and uncertainty. Giroux (as cited in Szpara & Wylie, 2005) stated that, "education works best when those experiences that shape and penetrate one's lived realities are jolted, unsettled, and made the object of critical analysis" (p. 811). Many of the teachers expressed how sorting the images forced them to confront their beliefs about disability, which at times made them uncomfortable. It is at the intersection of awareness and discomfort that new perspectives can be developed. Szpara and Wylie (2005)

suggest that only through "deep reflection and experiential opportunities" can "peoples belief systems (including their prejudices and biases)" be influenced (p. 811).

About half of the teachers at Parker elementary indicated some awareness that they hold stereotypical perceptions of disability and reported being uncomfortable with it during sorting. When asked how participating in the image sort made her feel, Carrie replied, "…it was very uncomfortable. I mean it makes you think of things, like preconceived notions or stereotypes you've had your whole life. No one wants to do this.

You know it's uncomfortable and you don't want to think, oh this person has a disability because of this…or they can't walk" (Personal communication, April 30, 2013). Julie acknowledged that the image sort made her feel "stereotypical…the images weren't always obvious so I put them where society tells you to" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Tracy, a third grade teacher, indicated feeling "nervous, I felt judgmental. I didn't want to offend someone. I didn't want to send the wrong message about my beliefs" (Personal communication, April 18, 2013). Marcia, a fourth grade teacher, expressed the most frustration with the image sort saying, "It's hard for me to put them into categories because I think that this student may have a disability, but…yes I had mixed feelings sorting them into specific piles" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). She became increasingly agitated as she explained "Just because this represents a disability for me, doesn't mean it can't go there [points to inclusion category]. I could take all of these, if I wanted to, and put them there [inclusion category] because that's how I would like for things to be" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Marcia ended by saying, "…okay, I'll tell you what bothers me. I feel like you just put me into how the regular public perceives these things and that makes me feel uncomfortable because that is not how it should be"(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). This response was helpful in that it indicated that these teachers

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acknowledge the gap between social "regular public" conditioning and other ways of perceiving disability.

Within this category/theme, there also appeared to be a difference in perceptions based on the participants' gender. Though many of the female teachers expressed feeling uneasy, frustrated, and / or stereotypical about sorting the images into categories, the male teachers did not appear to share those feelings. This was an interesting finding that I will explore further in the next section.

Are Males More Medical Model and Oriented and Hegemonic?

Of the 17 teachers participating in the image sort, four made reference to image 26 as the stereotypical "short bus". Three of the four references belonged to the male participants. Not only did they associate image 26 with a negative stereotype, both John, a physical education teacher with more than 11 years of teaching experience, and Greg, a sixth grade teacher also with more than 11 years of teaching experience, laughed when describing the image as representing disability. For example, Greg chuckled, "The short bus would be disability. My friend had one of those. We used to go tailgating in it once in awhile. [Laughing] We had disabilities afterword" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). John simply chuckled and said, "The proverbial 'short bus'. Disability" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Todd referred to the "short bus" as representing disability "…just because of the stereotype…" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013).

Image 15, an advertisement for *Forrest Gump* (Finerman, 1994) elicited laughter from Greg as well, "[Laughing], Forrest Gump, disability *that* guy" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). John also appeared to find image 5, the universal symbol for wheelchair access, humorous, "Handicap symbol [Chuckle] just because so many people have it, I don't think it's a

disability. I see so many people use it in the parking lot and then get out and walk in with no problem" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). None of the images elicited laughter from the female participants, however this was not the only difference in responses. I will address another apparent gender-based difference that emerged from the data in the paragraph below.

Another interesting finding was that the male teachers did not express as many negative emotions associated with the image sort as the female teachers did. For example, when asked how participating in the image sort made him feel, Greg said, "It's tough. It's like you're judging people. You're judging kids. Like I shouldn't be the judge and jury about whether this kid fits into this category…they're just kids for the most part" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He did not indicate feeling stereotypical or frustrated and the image sort did not appear to stimulate any self-awareness regarding his assumptions or biases toward disability. However, his responses indicated that he might have a stronger orientation toward the medical model of disability. For example, when asked to describe characteristics associated with a typical student with special needs, he replied chuckling, "Boys. There are more boys at this point. Um, high energy it seems. I don't see any calm special ed kids. That's about it" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Greg reflected a medical model orientation toward disability throughout the image sort. He described image 27, universal symbols for disabilities, as representing disabilities because "it just represents things that could be wrong" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Greg also appeared to easily categorize 16 images as representing disability based on visual cues alone. He simply described the images such as "a guy with a knee brace", "the walking stick", "kid with Down syndrome", "lady with one leg", followed by the word "disability" as he placed the images on the template (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

Todd, a special education teacher, did not express negative feelings associated with the image sort either. He indicated being more concerned about doing it correctly, "I kept thinking, I hope I'm doing it how I should be doing it" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). The image sort also did not appear to stimulate self-reflection or raise Todd's awareness of any personal biases or stereotypes he may have associated with disability. He indicated a stronger orientation toward the medical model of disability as he categorized images as representing disability based primarily on visible cues. For example, Todd categorized image 36, a young boy playing outside, as representing disability "just because he appears to be autistic maybe" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013) and he associated image 37, a special education classroom, with disability because, "There appears to be people in the background with disabilities" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013). There were occasions however, where Todd appeared to consider the context in which the disability became meaningful particularly in association with the images involving films. While his familiarity with the film and the social context appeared to influence his perception of the image, he still indicated a more dominant orientation toward the medical model of disability. For example, Todd categorized image 9, *I Am Sam* (Nelson, 2001), as representing disability because "…the father clearly has a disability" (Personal communication, May 10, 2013), however his disability is not visible within the image itself. He also categorized image 15, *Forrest Gump* (Zemeckis, 1994), as representing disability because he perceived him to be autistic based on his ability to recall facts and focus intently on one thing.

John did not express negative feelings about engaging in the sorting activity either. He simply said, "I guess for me, there is no right or wrong answer and I want a right or wrong answer"(Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He went on to say:

I don't know, some of them were easy, some of them were – and I know that

some of them would probably overlap and I may have put one or the other. But

my biggest thing is when we do tests like this, I have a hard time with making a

choice. I don't know. Sometimes I will go one way; sometimes I will go the other

for no apparent reason (Personal communication, April 15, 2013).

He did not indicate gaining any self-awareness of his biases or prejudices toward disability even

though they were apparent in some of his responses. For example, he describes some students

with disabilities as challenging "…because they've never been pushed for most their life outside

of school" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). He also described image 36, a photograph

of a young boy outside, as representing disability because "it looks like he could be autistic"

(Personal communication, April 15, 2013) and image 10, a photograph of a young man in a

wheelchair, as, "a person in a wheelchair, obviously disabled" (Personal communication, April

15, 2013).

While there are differences among men and masculinities, there is always a prescriptive

ideal that men are held up to and "all American men must also contend with a singular vision of

masculinity, a particular definition that is held up as the model against which we all measure

ourselves" (Kimmel, 2006, p. 4). According to Kimmel, the foundation of masculinity is a fear of

scrutiny by other men that will reveal a man's masculine inadequacy and subsequently, expose

him as a fraud, i.e. 'not manly enough.' Kimmel notes that these are "the silences that keep other

people believing that we actually approve of the things that are done to women, to minorities, to

gays and lesbians in our culture…" (p.35). This analysis suggests that men are culturally less

likely to be comfortable with weakness or the weak and vulnerable.

John reflected medical model orientations toward disability by primarily using visible cues of disability in association with deficit language "he just doesn't let it [his disability] bother him, it's no big deal…" and "she looks Down syndrome-ish, so probably disability" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013). Some of his responses could have been interpreted as potentially oriented toward the social model of disability because he appeared to consider the social context in which the disability became meaningful, however it seemed to more strongly reflect an association with the myth of the supercrip. For example, he described Forrest Gump as "… a little slow but did many great things, so I don't think he really had a disability" and Stevie Wonder as not "…let[ting] his disability stop him" (Personal communication, April 15, 2013) from being successful. He categorized images of individuals using prosthetic devices for running and walking (images 18 and 34, respectively) as not disabled but categorized individuals using wheelchairs (images 10 and 35) as "obviously disabled". It appeared that the more successful or the more "normal" he perceived the individual to be, the less likely he was to categorize them as disabled.

These perceptions are important because individuals who use wheelchairs may or may not perceive themselves as more or less disabled than individuals who use prosthetic devices. Again, this illuminates the importance of increasing disability awareness in terms of disability models and various orientations toward disability so teachers can understand how disability is not a collective experience but rather a very individual and unique experience. Teachers need support in developing the kind of disability awareness that is critical to providing truly individualized educational experiences for students with disabilities.

Principal Perceptions of Disability, Inclusion, and Special Education

Few would argue that teacher attitudes and dispositions toward disability are critical to the success of inclusive practices, however studies are showing that administrative support plays a pivotal role in developing and maintaining successful inclusive practices. Praisner (2003) highlights the importance of principals in ensuring the success of inclusion by exhibiting behaviors that advance the integration, acceptance, and success of students with disabilities in general education classes. For inclusion to be successful, first and foremost, the school administrator must display a positive attitude and commitment to inclusion (Evans, Bird, Ford, Green, & Bischoff, 1992; Rude & Anderson, 1992). For this reason, I chose to engage in a focused discussion of the principals' perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion. Leatherman (2007) identifies administrator attitudes toward inclusion and the types of support offered to teachers as major factors that impact the success of inclusive programs. Additionally, Hargrave (2001) asserts that for inclusive practices to produce optimal success for all students, inclusion must be considered as part of the total belief and practice of school faculty members. Therefore, research exploring administrator attitudes and beliefs about disability are crucial.

Gretchen [pseudonym] is the principal at Parker Elementary school. She has been with Parker for just over six years. Prior to her position at Parker, she spent more than ten years as a general education classroom teacher. Gretchen reported having experience with inclusive practices as a general education teacher and spoke favorably of her experience collaborating and teaching with the special education teacher. Gretchen indicated that her positive experience with inclusion was instrumental in her decision to shift to inclusive practices at Parker. Prior to her arrival, Gretchen reported that approximately 100 percent of special education services were provided in segregated, pull out programs or resource rooms. She was determined to reverse that practice, "I wanted the [special education] teachers to be in the classrooms along with the kids. I

never like the, here let me sit you out…" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). Gretchen described the shift to inclusive practices as a gradual process beginning with two classrooms the first year and growing from there.

Gretchen indicated that the shift to inclusive practices was met with some resistance, particularly with veteran teachers. She stated, "There was quite a bit of why would we want to do that?" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013) however, with the help of a few new teachers and increased legislative support, she was able to begin the shift to inclusive practices. Gretchen demonstrated her support by providing professional development opportunities to co-teaching teams, though she admitted that she was not able to do that until a year or two later. She also reported providing them at least a small amount of time to plan collaboratively, "I gave them a small amount of time, definitely not enough, but what we could provide and offer" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). Gretchen further demonstrated her commitment to inclusion by attempting to keep their class sizes low and obtaining additional professional development opportunities. She indicated that although she feels like they are making progress, "…we still have a long ways to go" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013).

Leatherman (2007) identified several factors as critical for successful inclusion such as, additional support services, adequate resources, administrator support, appropriately trained personnel, and positive teacher attitudes. Gretchen appeared to agree with Leatherman (2007) as she reportedly supports inclusive efforts through providing increased opportunities for professional development and access to adequate resources such as collaborative planning and lower class sizes. Gretchen expressed a desire to implement inclusive practices upon her arrival at Parker only six years ago and though she reported a positive attitude about inclusion, her cultural beliefs and perceptions about disability had not been examined.

According to Sarason (1982), teachers' beliefs regarding inclusion are a strong influence on the success or failure of inclusion classrooms, however it is not only their beliefs regarding inclusion, but also their beliefs regarding disability and special education. And because the work of teaching occurs within a school culture, which is facilitated by an administrative team, it is equally, if not more, important to explore administrators' beliefs about disability and special education as well. "A group's attainments are the product not only of the shared knowledge and skills of its different members, but also of the interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics of their transactions" (Bandura, 2000, p. 75-76). To create and sustain an inclusive ideology within a school system requires collective effort on the part of administrators, teachers, and students to raise awareness of the biases and negative stereotypes associated with diverse groups. The current study explored teacher and student perceptions of disability, which were discussed in Chapter Five, however the administrators' perception of disability as related to teacher and student perceptions will be discussed below.

Gretchen identified 19 images as representing, both disability and inclusion, 11 images as representing disability only, and eight images as representing inclusion only. There were only two images that Gretchen identified as representing disability that were in contrast to other participant responses, image 13, a photograph of a self-contained special education classroom, and image 22, an advertisement for the film *Mask* (Starger, 1985). More participants categorized image 13 as representing both disability *and* inclusion rather than disability only. Gretchen identified it as representing only disability because "…there's no other [non disabled] students in the class" The majority of participants categorized image 22 as representing inclusion only or both inclusion *and* disability. As indicated previously, many of the participants appeared to use their knowledge of the film to assist them in categorizing the image. This was not the case with

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Gretchen. She indicated that she was aware of the film but had not seen it and based her decision

solely on the visible cues in the image itself. The remaining nine images that Gretchen

categorized as representing disability were in agreement with the majority of participants. Table

7.1 below shows the images Gretchen identified as representing disability and her rationale for

placement.

Table 7.1

Images Identified by Administrator as Representing Disability

Image	Rationale
5	Handicap symbol [long pause], um a physical impairment, so disability.
8	I see as sign language for a hearing disability.
13	Students what looks like that has a physical disability [long pause] and support staff and teachers. I see that as disability because there's no other students in the class.
16	Braille would be visual. I would say disability.
21	Disability.
22	From the Mask. Um, not quite sure what that physical issue was but I'm going to say disability.
23	Braces, disability.
27	Um, is a picture of visual, physical, hearing, and cognitive to me that says disability.
28	I see a student with a visual impairment using a braille book. I would put that under disability.
35	We have 4 students playing in a wheelchair, so I would, and all of them are in a wheelchair so disability.
37	Students with physical handicaps or disabilities looks like severe, I would say disability.

* Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56.

Though Gretchen disagreed with the majority of participants on two images, her

rationales indicated that she too perceives disability as primarily visible. She also indicated this

perception when asked what images she associated with disability, "I typically think of

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somebody who has a physical impairment, um that they were born with" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). As a school administrator, Gretchen has access to important student information including the number of students receiving special education services and their related disabilities. Therefore, she is aware that the majority of students in her building receiving special education services have specific learning disabilities, which are primarily invisible, yet she reported associating disability primarily with a physical or visible presence. This is important because administrators who hold narrow conceptions of disability may not realize the need to broaden teachers' understandings of disability and how critical it is to the development of an inclusive school community.

According to Baglieri & Shapiro (2012), inclusive schools aim to diversify children's experiences and peer relationships, which can allow them to develop accurate knowledge about disability and other differences. However, the majority of teachers in the current study indicated narrow conceptions of inclusion as associated primarily with disabled and non-disabled students working together in the general education classroom. And according to the data, Gretchen indicated a similar conception, which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

The majority of participants categorized ten of the 38 images as representing inclusion. The ten images involved three graphics supporting inclusive education, four photographs of a visibly disabled student engaged in an activity with a non-disabled student, and three photographs of typical classrooms. Gretchen categorized seven of the ten images as representing inclusion only, however she categorized the remaining three as representing disability *and* inclusion. Table 19 displays the ten images the majority of participants categorized as representing inclusion, Gretchen's results, and her description of each image.

Table 7.2

Images Identified by Administrator as Representing Inclusion

Images	Category	Rationale
2	Inclusion	I see a picture of what looks like to be a teacher and four students. Is she supposed to be, does she have Down's? I would say both.
4	Inclusion	Would be inclusion.
6	Inclusion	A little boy with 2 other people and a teacher playing. Inclusion.
14	Inclusion	I see a student with what looks to be like Down syndrome with a student without, so I would go inclusion.
19	Inclusion	Six children. I don't see a physical impairment nor any signs of an emotional disability, so Im going to say [long pause] inclusion. Even though it kind of goes against what Ive been doing.
24	Both	[long pause] It is appearing, there is a visual disability because of the words on the computer, might possibly be bigger, working together, I would say both.
25	Both	[whispers] Special education, inclusive education, general education, both.
30	Inclusion	[long pause] a picture of a class of students [long pause] I don't know if there's any physical, it doesn't look like there's any physical maybe emotional but I'm going to say inclusion because there is a large group.
31	Both	All Children Can Learn, I would say both because I believe kids with a disability should be included and can learn. All children.
38	Inclusion	A lot of diversity, different kids "together we're better" [long pause] inclusion

* Note. Images can be found in Figure 3.1 on page 56.

Gretchen also indicated a fairly narrow conception of disability, for example many of the

images that she categorized as representing inclusion involved an individual with a visible

disability and an individual without a visible disability such as images, 2, 6, 14, and 38. She also

indicated that perception as she determined which images did not represent inclusion, for

example when she was describing image 13 she said, "I see that as disability because there's no

other [non-disabled] students in the class" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). As Gretchen considered how to categorize image 19, six children lying on the ground with their heads together, she said, "I don't see a physical impairment nor any signs of an emotional disability, so I am going to say [long pause] inclusion. Even though it kind of goes against what I have been doing" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). Gretchen indicated feeling like the placement of image 19 in the inclusion category was not consistent with the other images she associated with inclusion, meaning there was no indication of a visible disability within the group of children. Someone with a broader conception of inclusion may have considered the possibility that this image represented different races and/or cultures. However, this was not indicated by any of the participants in this study.

There were occasions when Gretchen indicated a broader conception of inclusion such as when she was determining where to place image 11, a photograph of Stevie Wonder. She said, "Um [long pause] both because of having a disability with his visual handicap or physical disability but included in the world" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). This was also indicated in her categorization of image 34, an individual with a prosthetic leg, "[Long pause] He has a physical disability but has been included…I'm assuming he was in the army" (Personal communication, June 16, 2013). Image 34 is a photograph of an adult and there are no other individuals in the picture, yet Gretchen considered him to be included in society, which may indicate a potentially broader conception of inclusion. Although Gretchen appeared to more strongly associate inclusion with students and classroom settings, her subtle references to societal inclusion may indicate a willingness to broaden her perception of inclusion to embrace race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, class, and disability.

A principal seeking to bring about change in his or her school must do so within the everyday setting of the school – a setting which is immersed in the assumptions, values, and beliefs held by those who work there (Lucas, 2001); it may well be, then, that the principal cannot possibly bring about changes associated with reform unless he or she is also consciously working to shape the culture of the school (Kytle & Bogotch, 2000). Gretchen's beliefs and assumptions about disability and inclusion are important because, as a school leader, she is central to the development of an inclusive school culture. If she holds hegemonic conceptions of disability and inclusion, it is unlikely that she will recognize the need to challenge the ableist assumptions frequently associated with a medical model orientation of disability. While this hegemonic view is problematic for any educational professional, it may be especially problematic for an administrator who holds greater power in an institution. Inclusion is more than a classroom where students with disabilities are educated with non-disabled peers; it is more than two teachers, each with their own expertise, collaborating and co-teaching. It is a philosophy that embraces all types of diversity, not just different abilities, but different races, religions, families, and cultures. It is a philosophy, a belief system, a way of being, which cannot be forced upon teachers but rather must be cultivated through building an "atmosphere for supporting teachers in sharing their intrapersonal attitudes and beliefs" (Idol, 1997, p. 387).

Structural and Post-structural Perspectives

Structuralism allows us to research dominant cultural perceptions while post structuralism points our gaze toward outliers, margins, and exceptions. Each analysis is valuable. "Poststructuralist research practices do not look to identifying participant responses that can be seen to give rise to essentialist or uniquely privileged accounts that discover "the truth" of a

situation. Instead, emphasis is placed on identifying meanings that are context specific and that relate to the *varying [emphasis added]* discursive practices operating." (Fawcett, 2008)

This study sought to explore participants' conceptions of inclusion because as Hargrave (2011) indicated, the history of the inclusion movement has been typified by controversy due to the lack of a common definition of inclusion. The lack of a shared understanding of inclusion is both problematic and suggestive of possibility. A shared understanding of disability and special education may be lacking as well, which may have implications for inclusion. The findings indicated that the majority of participants hold hegemonic conceptions of disability and differing conceptions of special education the implications of which will be discussed in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER 8

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore how stakeholders understand inclusion, special education, and disability. Much of the research in special education assumes that stakeholders have a shared understanding of these terms, which has implications for both policy and practice. This is evident in the special education literature where the terms inclusion, integration, and mainstreaming are used interchangeably, even though they are distinctly different concepts. This study attempts to contribute to the existing special education research by investigating how stakeholders come to understand disability, inclusion, and special education. Using phenomenographic interviews and semiotic photo elicitation, I was able to explore participants' more deeply held cultural perceptions of disability and the relationship of those perceptions to their personal and professional conceptions of special education and inclusion. Below I discuss the implications of my findings for in-service and preservice teacher educators, the field of special education, and for qualitative research, however I will begin by discussing the overall implications of the hegemonic conception of disability as primarily visible/physical.

Implications of the Hegemony of Disability as Visible / Physical

All of the participants in this study had experience with individuals with learning disabilities as either a teacher or a student in a full inclusion classroom, however the majority of them did not initially associate disability with learning or cognitive impairments. They primarily associated disability with wheelchairs, canes, braces, crutches, or a visible physical condition that requires adaptive equipment or assistive devices such as sign language, braille, and/or prosthesis. These types of accommodations are reasonable and necessary for individuals to access the world around them. Using sign language or providing a hearing aid for individuals

who are deaf or hard of hearing is a reasonable and necessary accommodation. A wheelchair is a reasonable and necessary accommodation for an individual with a physical disability who cannot walk. These types of accommodations play a critical role in providing individuals with disabilities opportunities to participate in and access various life activities. The visible nature of the disability provides proof of its existence and justification for various accommodations. However, as I previously mentioned citing the case of Stephen Hawking, some individuals with severe physical limitations require assistive technologies like wheelchairs, voice amplification and/or speech to text software, but may not necessarily require instructional accommodations.

Students without such visibly obvious or physical disabilities often have equally compelling needs, but their needs, like their disabilities, are often invisible. According to McDonald, Keys, and Balcazar (2007), individuals with learning disabilities frequently encounter skepticism concerning the authenticity of their disability and are often routinely questioned as to whether they use their disability to avoid working hard (Beilke & Yssel, 1999; Kruse, 1998). This perception influences what types of accommodations classroom teachers are willing to provide, how often students are allowed to use them and in what situations. Accommodations do not change what students learn rather they are intended to change *how* students with disabilities access the information, *how* they participate in the learning process and *how* they demonstrate mastery. Accommodations are not intended to change *what* is learned. Changes in *what* is learned is considered a modification. Accommodations and modifications are routinely misunderstood and as such are often either under utilized or over utilized. Instructional accommodation is not a technology, or a "fix" and it is not visible. Research suggests that teachers too often fail to instructionally accommodate invisible disabilities, and instead provide technologies and solutions that "fix" or avoid the disability when instruction is called for. For

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example, students with reading disabilities need a range of specific, evidence-based instructional interventions, yet, instead are often given a technology such as, audio books or a reading partner. Sometimes audio books can be used instructionally but they can also be used as a replacement for high-quality instruction. There is an important distinction between accessing the curriculum and progressing in the curriculum. Accommodations allow increased opportunities for students to access the curriculum, however they do not replace targeted instructional interventions. It is important for teachers to know which situations are best responded to with assistive technology and which are not. One of the concerns raised by this data is that if disabilities are seen as primarily physical, teachers may implicitly believe there are physical solutions to fix, avoid or overcome most disabilities. This practice may be related to the deep conception of disability and the necessary accommodations as visible, technological and physical. As indicated by the data, the majority of educators in this study, perceived disability as visible even though their classroom experience has been primarily with students with learning disabilities, Autism, and/or emotional impairments. Providing accommodations, such as hearing aids, glasses, extended time on assignments, braille and so on for individuals with visible disabilities is rarely, if ever contested. The invisible nature of learning, emotional and language disabilities, however has posed some challenges to the provision of appropriate accommodations.

Individuals with disabilities in mathematics calculation, or dyscalculia may require the provision of a calculator, which would be considered an appropriate accommodation. Dyscalculia, is a learning disability that affects the acquisition of knowledge about numbers and arithmetic (Piazza, Facoetti, Trussardi, Berteletti, Conte, Lucangeli, Dehaene, & Zorzi, 2010). However, this invisible disability is poorly understood and the provision of a calculator is a highly contested accommodation amongst educators and assessment specialists. The use of an

audio text would be an appropriate accommodation for an individual with a reading disability, however this is also a highly contested accommodation amongst educators and assessment specialists due to issues of validity and reliability in assessment results. While there are a variety of appropriate accommodations available to help individuals with invisible disabilities access and participate in the general education curriculum, there is an issue with determining who is eligible for what accommodation and when it should be provided.

When classroom teachers perceive disability narrowly, as primarily visible, do they readily provide the necessary accommodations to assist students with intellectual, learning, or language disabilities in accessing the general curriculum? There is ongoing debate regarding the types of accommodations students with disabilities are eligible for when taking high-stakes tests, which has influenced the types of accommodations allowed in classrooms as well. According to Cortiella (2005) accommodations should be the same or similar across classroom instruction, classroom tests and state/district tests. Limiting access to accommodations only to those that are allowed on state/district tests, could significantly impact a students' progress within the general education curriculum. According to No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001), students with disabilities are expected to demonstrate progress within the general education curriculum and classroom teachers are accountable for ensuring their success. This requires an individualized educational approach, which cannot be achieved using a prescribed list of state or federally "approved" accommodations. The development of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a central tenant of IDEIA's provision of a free and appropriate public education for students with disabilities receiving special education services. For this reason, it was important to examine participants' perceptions of not only disability and inclusion, but also special education.

Implications for In-service and Preservice Teacher Educators

Educational policies have a tendency to focus on legal and technical issues, which distracts researchers from seeing the complexity, hegemony, and contradictions in our semiotic worlds. For example, special education policies focus primarily on the legal and technical aspects of providing services to individuals with disabilities, however very limited attention is given to examining individuals' negative biases and stereotypes toward disability and special education. Even though, as Fitch (2002, p. 463) suggests, "disability is increasingly acknowledged as a fundamental cultural signifier" and that "among all social hierarchies, disability has functioned…as a sign of and justification for inferiority and exclusion" (Baynton, 2001). Longmore (1995) asserts that ableism has been historically present in schools as well as in society at large and is tied in part to the medical model that seeks to "fix" people with disabilities. The medical model orientation toward disability that underpins the majority of special education literature, research, policies and practices maintains and perpetuates narrow conceptions of disability as deficit. The results of this study indicate that participants continue to have strong orientations toward the medical model, which left unchallenged could result in maintaining a culture of ableism rather than building a culture of inclusion. Therefore, it is imperative that teachers have opportunities to raise to consciousness their culturally rooted stereotypes and biases related to disability and special education.

Research on teachers tells us that teaching involves both professional and personal experiences, and makes reference to the past as we reflect on present challenges and keeps in mind our future hopes and expectations (Clandinin, & Connelly, 1995; Heilman, 2000; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Knowles, 1992; Knowles & Holt-Reynolds,1991; Miller Marsh, 2002; Van Manen, 1991; Vinz,1996). Multiple influences shape teacher choices and identity, including media images, school experiences, life experiences and beliefs about teaching that come from

pre-service teacher education. Knowles (1992) for example, finds four sources of teacher identity to be especially important: (1) role models, especially positive ones; (2) previous teaching experiences; (3) significantly positive or negative education classes; and (4) remembered childhood experiences about learning and family activities. Each of these sources hold tremendous possibilities for either maintaining or challenging stereotypic, negative cultural perceptions of diverse populations.

To prepare educators for work in culturally diverse settings requires both a close examination of personal beliefs and a critical analysis of professional behavior (Brown, 2006). And, though this is generally thought to apply more specifically to issues of racial, ethnic, gender, and class biases, it is equally as important to issues of disability. A major goal of multicultural education is the elimination of stereotypes (Bennett, 2003) and it is unlikely that the mere physical presence of diverse groups of students is likely to change negative attitudes or that contact alone will in itself overcome personal prejudice (Allport, 1954; Gilson & Depoy, 2000; Smart, 2001, as cited in Storey, 2007). Only through deep reflection and experiential opportunities can people's beliefs systems, including their prejudices and biases, be influenced (Szpara & Wylie, 2005).

Research shows that explicit attention to developing culturally responsive educators makes a difference (Ukpokodu, 2007; Cardona, 2005; Cochran-Smith, 1997; Derman-Sparks & Ramsey, 2006; Gay, 2000; Howard, 2006; Johnson, 2002; Nieto, 2012; Sleeter, 2001) therefore it is important to include issues of disability within multicultural education for both in-service and preservice educators and administrators. This will require going beyond what is typically offered within traditional special education teacher preparation, which has historically focused on categorical labels, characteristics and remedial instruction, to include various models of

disability that challenge stereotypes and myths of disability that have been supported and perpetuated through the medical model orientation. For example, infusing components of the affirmation model, which views disability as part of a positive social identity and a normal form of human diversity rather than as a condition that needs to be changed (Bejamin-Darling, 2010) and the social model, which considers how disability is made meaningful in social contexts (Baglieri & Shaprio, 2012) into the current in-service and teacher preparation coursework could potentially broaden perceptions of disability and develop more inclusive attitudes. Fitch (2002) recommends two approaches that could be significant in moving education beyond the politics of exclusion: (1) creating a much closer alliance between the movements for inclusive education and multicultural education and (2) making disability studies an integral part of teacher preparation programs and infusing it throughout the multicultural curricula in general (p. 472).

Implications for Special Education

According to this study, the special education teachers also held narrow conceptions of disability and special education. All three special education teachers described it in terms of student deficits. This is not surprising given the fact that special education reflects strong associations with the medical model orientation. In the field, there is tremendous pressure to adhere to the requirements of IDEIA (2004), which requires specific knowledge of each facet of the legislation and the related paperwork. Therefore, special education teachers spend a great deal of time focused on the technical issues related to special education such developing and implementing Individualized Education Programs (IEP), collecting data for Re-evaluation of Existing Data (REED), and identifying appropriate environmental and curricular accommodations to ensure students with disabilities have access to and make progress in the general curriculum.

With this type of intense, technical, professional focus on the legal aspects of special education, there is very little time for considering one's personal perceptions of special education. Kauffman and Pullen (1996) suggest that there are many myths associated with special education that find their way into the perceptions and professional practices of special educators as well as the general public. They describe myths as "alluring beliefs" that express something of our fears and hopes, which should remind us of the realities we need to address. "A myth is distinguished from reality by its overgeneralization, distortion, or misapplication of fact" (Kauffman & Pullen, 1996, p. 1), which makes it exceedingly difficult to combat. They identify one myth as the most persistent, "hard-core" myths of all social services including special education, which is "We would, if we could, eliminate labels and simply provide all students the services they need without categories or labels" (p.20). The field of special education is riddled with labels and has often been accused of having its own "special" language in terms of the abundance of acronyms used to simplify an exceedingly complex field. And while, labels can be stigmatizing, they can also raise awareness and promote understanding of particular difficulties (Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007). However, as Kauffman and Pullen (1996) assert, the real issues with labels are the meanings we attach to disabilities, not the fact that we label them.

The field of special education is driven by labels and the policies and practices associated with them, which means that special educators often become entrenched in the technical and political issues surrounding special education. According to Baglieri and Shapiro (2012), special education refers generally to the medical model as practiced in schools and encompasses the sets of procedures, services, and practices designed to evaluate and instruct students with disabilities in school settings. Therefore, education programs prepare special educators for this scientifically driven profession by focusing primarily on disability categories, characteristics, and instructional

practices aimed at remediating disabilities. Special education teachers are one of several professionals in the field who are influenced by the medical model of disability. For example, a team of professionals including school psychologists, social workers, physical and occupational therapists, mobility specialists, and speech pathologists are professionally prepared by educational programs that are heavily influenced by the medical model of disability. Special educators typically work very closely with members of this multi-disciplinary team who have rarely, if ever, been introduced to social or diversity models of disability which, aim to understand disability as a total experience of complex interactions between the body and physical, social, and cultural environments (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012).

It is critical to understand not just special education teachers' perceptions of their profession and their practice but also their personal beliefs and how they inform and influence one another. As this study indicated, special education teachers may also have a stronger orientation toward the medical model of disability. Whether this is due to deeply held personal beliefs about disability or traditional, medical model influenced, teacher preparation, or a combination of the two, is difficult to ascertain and requires additional research. However, as those in the field of multicultural education have suggested (Grant & Asimeng-Boahene, 2006; Nieto, 2004), development of a culturally responsive teaching pedagogy requires that teachers investigate their own attitudes and beliefs about other cultures. I believe that this is equally critical for special education teachers because of the unique opportunity many of them have to effect change.

The shift in special education service delivery from segregated classrooms to collaboration and co-teaching in the general education classroom could afford greater opportunities for both students and teachers beyond that of academic and behavioral support.

Collaboration and co-teaching could potentially provide opportunities for special education teachers to become change agents. According to Fullan (1993), "the moral purpose of teaching must be reconceptualized as a change theme. Moral purpose without change agentry is martyrdom; change agentry without moral purpose is change for the sake of change. In combination, not only are they effective in getting things done, but they are good at getting the *right* things done" (p. 14). The collaborative nature of co-teaching places special education teachers in the unique position of working with both students and teachers. Special educators with a commitment to inclusion and an awareness of the various disability models could become instrumental in facilitating change. Systems don't change by themselves. Rather, the actions of individuals and small groups working on new conceptions intersect to produce breakthroughs (Fullan, 1993).

According to Bandura (1997) "collective efficacy" refers to the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty, as a whole, can execute the courses of action necessary to have positive effects on students". The role of the special education teacher in developing collective efficacy around inclusive practices could be pivotal. Special education teachers in co-teaching situations have the opportunity to effect change through interactions with teachers and students in inclusive settings. However, if special education teachers, like many general education teachers, have strong medical model orientations toward disability, their ability to facilitate a shift toward developing inclusive school cultures is limited.

One way to build on the potential for special education teachers to be change agents is to provide a balanced approach to disability perspectives by infusing various models of disability into preservice and in-service teacher education. Goddard et al. (2000) asserts that it is the "teachers' shared beliefs" that "shape the normative environment of schools" (p. 502).

Expanding orientations of disability to include competing models such as the social, affirmation, and/or diversity models would provide a broader foundation on which to build inclusive attitudes. There are many in the field of disability studies that support moving away from the medical model of disability altogether, particularly as it relates to education. However, I would argue that achieving a balance between the social and medical models of disability could provide teachers the technical knowledge they need to meet the needs of students with disabilities while also attending to the broader social context in which disability becomes meaningful.

This study indicated that participants' were primarily oriented toward the medical model of disability, however there were occasions when they appeared to consider the impact of context on disability. This finding would not have been revealed had my study not involved semiotic photo elicitation methods. It was primarily through participants' descriptions and categorizations of the images that I was able to develop a deeper understanding of their perceptions of disability. This has significant implications for special education research.

Implications for Research

Image based semiotic research is valuable. Photo elicitation is very useful beyond the "typical" semiotic race, class, and gender topics as evidenced by this study. Several of the participants indicated that the images allowed them to better articulate their perceptions of disability and inclusion. For this reason, semiotic photo elicitation methods have tremendous potential for adding to the field of qualitative research, particularly special education research exploring attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions.

Harper (2002) indicates how images have the power to evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than words do. He suggests that elicitation interviews connect "core definitions of the self" to society, culture, and history (p. 1), which made it an incredibly useful method for

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exploring participants' deeply rooted, cultural perceptions of disability. According to Stockall (2013), "to study inclusion in the context of disability requires that we not only examine the signs and sign processes, but also the context of the situation that presses upon, evolves into and moves other signs to create a fracture in the system. That fracture is doubt. The ability to interpret, to reason logically and take insight into account and then change belief is dependent upon the concept of doubt. Without doubt, habit remains and reasoning fails." (p. 312). Doubt creates the impetus for seeking out those things that we do not know that we don't know and if educators believe that they know what inclusion is, then there is no need to examine practice or seek to make the familiar strange (Stockall, 2013).

I received an email from Ellen, a sixth grade teacher that highlighted the importance of photo elicitation for research but also the potential for its use as a teaching tool as well. She wrote:

> The image sort that you had me complete was really interesting. I can definitely see its value. It got me talking about what I saw and it pushed me to confront my perceptions of disability versus inclusion. I thought it was difficult to verbalize what images came to mind when you said certain words, so the image sort of helped me put my thoughts into words as I looked at the pictures. There was definitely some discomfort there but I think that it was a good thing. My discomfort came from not having a special ed background and not knowing enough about inclusion and special education to know that this is a serious but delicate subject and I didn't want to be seen as insensitive. I learned something from this study that we had been introduced to in college but it didn't really hit home with me until doing this image sort and applying what I was seeing to how I view my own students: If you see someone in a wheelchair, you know they can't use the

stairs. If you see a blind person in a cane, you know they won't be able to read a printed

text. But someone with a learning disability or emotional impairment doesn't

automatically register in a person's mind as being "unable" to function in a certain

way. That would be immensely frustrating to look like everyone else but have a brain

that doesn't work like everyone else's. They need accommodations like a blind person

needs braille, but that isn't automatically understood by the people they interact with on a

daily basis. It would never cross my mind to ask a deaf person to listen to an audiobook

and give a chapter summary. However, I find myself trying to get my learning disabled

students to do the same things that my gen. ed students can do. (Personal communication,

April 30, 2013).

Not only did Ellen find the photo elicitation method useful in helping her to articulate her

thoughts, her feedback indicated that it could potentially be used instructionally as a way to raise

awareness of disability stereotypes that can then be discussed and challenged to promote more

inclusive attitudes.

Julie, a music teacher, also indicated that at first when I asked her to describe in words

any images she associated with disability she was not sure what I meant but once she began the

image sort the question made much more sense. She said, "There are symbols around us all the

time but we become immune to them because they become commonplace. I suppose that's a

good thing because it means society is inclusive (coming from the perspective of someone who

does not face extra challenges)" (Personal communication, June 11, 2013). She also reported

that, "as I worked on the image sort, I felt I was forced (via the images) to stereotype people and

environments. I almost felt guilty labeling an image as "disabled" because I put that person or

group of people into a category. The images were easy to sort based on stereotypes but that was

all the more disturbing" (Personal communication, June 11, 2013). Julie made an interesting statement that supported the power of semiotic research saying, "In a sense, as much as we try to mainstream students, there is always a visual reminder of their differences and as much as I try to view all students as "equal", it's just not true" (Personal communication, June 11, 2013). Julie's feedback highlights the power of semiotic research in exploring perceptions of complex phenomena such as disability and inclusion.

Much of the research on perceptions of disability, special education, and inclusion involves the use of surveys and semi-structured interviews (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Cook, 2001; Cook, Cameron & Tankersley, 2007; Forlin, Douglas, & Hattie, 1996), however my study involving semiotic photo elicitation methods adds to this literature by providing additional insight into how individuals make meaning of the concepts disability, special education and inclusion.

Future Directions

The results of this study indicate that much work needs to be done to raise awareness of perceptions of disability that may pose challenges to developing inclusive attitudes and cultures. This study shows promise for future research exploring cultural perceptions of diverse populations. In a recent study, Gay (2010) emphasized the profound effect of educator beliefs on teaching and indicated that more research is needed in this area. She indicated that beliefs need to be reflected on, articulated and confronted, not only for curricula and student interaction, but for the teachers themselves. This study indicates the potential use of photo elicitation for uncovering the beliefs that Gay (2010) says need to be confronted in order to become more culturally responsive.

This study was conducted in one school in a fairly rural area; therefore future studies should consider including schools in urban areas with diverse populations, which could add not only to the special education literature, but multicultural literature as well. Baglieri and Knopf (2004) suggest that we need to work on creating a discourse of difference in which all students are allowed access, valued for their unique characteristics, and provided with opportunities to learn and perform in myriad ways that address individual needs and personal goals. Future studies that employ semiotic photo elicitation methods to explore cultural perceptions could provide the foundation for challenging the discourses of difference, which could result in more inclusive practices.

Successful reform movements require effective leadership as indicated by Kytle and Bogotch (2000) who identify the pivotal role of the administrator in developing the school culture. This study involved one administrator and though her perceptions were critical to this study, future studies like this should consider using a variety of administrators at elementary, middle and high school levels.

The findings of this study add to the special education literature on professional and personal perceptions of disability, inclusion, and special education. Not only did this study find that participants indeed have different conceptions of these phenomena but it also supports future research on effective interventions for addressing stereotypes and biases that pose challenges to inclusive education. Professional development seminars and workshops designed to develop disability awareness and introduce social models of disability could potentially influence inclusive attitudes and practices. Therefore, a follow up study at Parker could explore the impact of a disability studies oriented professional development series on participants' perceptions and classroom practices.

Conclusion

Students with disabilities have been increasingly included in general education classrooms over the last two decades, however despite the landmark legislation IDEA in 1997, the goals of inclusion in schools and society remain elusive: "On the whole inclusion in the school context is neither uniformly understood, readily accepted, nor willingly acted upon." (Ware, 2000 as cited in Fitch, 2002, p. 472). Hargrave (2001) suggests that this could be due in part to the controversy created by the lack of a shared understanding of the term "inclusion". This study found that participants at one rural elementary school appeared to have similar perceptions of inclusion as students with and without disabilities working together in the general education classroom. And though this was a common understanding of inclusion, it was also a very narrow perception of inclusion.

According to Wilson (2011), awareness predicts personal beliefs, personal beliefs predict professional beliefs, and professional beliefs and awareness predict culturally responsive practices. Following this line of thinking, it seems as though any attempt to become a culturally responsive educator would require developing an awareness of one's own personal beliefs related to diverse populations and then confronting and challenging those beliefs. The most formidable challenge however, is determining the most effective way to prepare culturally responsive teachers. Fitch (2001) suggests that one way to address this by linking inclusion and critical multiculturalism. "Critical multiculturalism avoids the contradictions and exclusionary consequences of affirmative assimilationism and serves as an appropriate rallying point for a closer alliance with inclusive education" (p. 474). Perhaps collaboration between inclusionists and multiculturalists would provide a more comprehensive approach to preparing culturally responsive teachers to meet the diverse needs of *all* students.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. General Education Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: General Education Teacher

1. I am going to say three words individually. For each word(s) I would like you to tell me what images (by images, I mean symbols, objects, people, etc) that come to mind when you hear them. For example, if I said the word 'dog' the images that come to mind might be…animal, furry, tail, four legs, etc.
    a. Special education
    b. Disability
    c. Inclusion

2. Think about the images you just described (special education/disability/inclusion), and I want you to tell me what feelings do you associate with these images/terms?

3. When you think of a typical special education student what comes to mind?

4. When you think of a typical student with a disability what comes to mind?

5. How did you feel about doing the image sort?

Appendix B. Special Education Teacher Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: Special Education Teacher

1. I am going to say three words individually. For each word(s) I would like you to tell me what images (by images, I mean symbols, objects, people, etc) that come to mind when you hear them. For example, if I said the word 'dog' the images that come to mind might be…animal, furry, tail, four legs, etc.
   a. Special education
   b. Disability
   c. Inclusion

2. Think about the images you just described (special education/disability/inclusion), and I want you to tell me what feelings do you associate with these images/terms?

3. When you think of a typical special education student what comes to mind?

4. When you think of a typical student with a disability what comes to mind?

5. How did feel about doing the image sort?

Appendix C. Student Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: Students

1. Do you know what images are? Have you ever had to imagine what something would look like? When my teacher used to read to us when I was in school, sometimes there weren't any pictures to go with the story so I had to imagine what it looked like. For example, when my teacher read a story about the farm, I imagined black and white cows, chickens, red barn, tractors, etc. Those are called images; they can be pictures, symbols, or objects in your mind or words used to describe it.

2. Let's practice one together. What images come to mind when I say 'park'?

3. Now let's try 'cat'.

4. Now let's try another one. What images come to mind when I say:
   a. Special education
   b. Disability
   c. Inclusion

5. Think about the images you just described (special education/disability/inclusion), and I want you to tell me what feelings do you associate with these images/terms?

6. How did feel about doing the image sort?

Appendix D. School Administrator Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: Administrator

1. What was special education like during your first year as principal?

2. Why did you move to inclusive practices?

3. What was the response from teachers regarding this change?

4. How did you prepare them for inclusion/co-teaching?

5. When you think of a typical special education student what comes to mind?

6. When you think of a typical student with a disability what comes to mind?

7. How are students placed in inclusion classrooms? What criteria is used?

8. Image sort updated data

Appendix E. Oral History Interview Protocol

Interview Questions: Oral History
1. What was special education like at Keicher elementary?
   a. Can you describe some of the changes that occurred over time based on federal policy changes
   b. school district changes
   c. school building policy changes?

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