IMPLEMENTATION OF QUALITY PRESCHOOL INCLUSION USING PAR AND COP: BREAKING DOWN THE BARRIERS AND PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

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Preschool programs afford young children an opportunity to engage with peers and have a 'pre' school experience. Although not mandated or required, students who have been identified with special needs prior to entering school have the same rights as students within the K-12 setting. Many important laws have been passed and amended in order to provide individuals with disabilities the rights they deserve. Several of these laws have influenced early childhood special education (ECSE). As a result of these laws, changes within early childhood special education (ECSE) programs began to emerge. Services provision is now being provided within early childhood education (ECE) programs alongside typical developing peers.

The purpose of this study was to document the experiences of preschool teachers working together through Communities of Practices to implement high quality preschool inclusion experiences for both special education and general education preschool students. This study aims to provide an empirical foundation for investigating the experiences that early childhood inclusive educators need to have in order to construct a deep and complex understanding of the knowledge base and skill sets required for providing meaningful educational experiences for children with and without special needs and their families.

To accomplish the research purpose, a qualitative study was employed. Rooted in social cultural theory, teachers participated in professional development through Community of Practices to focus on the implementation and the evaluation of best practices for inclusion

in authentic classroom contexts. The purpose of this study was to see how implementation of a collaborative effort between early childhood and early childhood special educators within an inclusive preschool setting could change teacher practices to better prepare all students within the inclusive classroom for kindergarten. Through a blending of scientific and everyday or spontaneous concepts, everyday knowledge was transformed into more abstract and theoretical associations through participation in discourse that connected the practical and scientific planes of educational research. The COP discourse provided the teachers with a systematic and organized set of practices (from a research base) that were embedded in (and stem from) everyday classroom practices as teachers adopted new ways of knowing, ways of seeing, ways of acting, and ways of thinking about inclusive practices. In turn, teachers' enactments of particular practices shaped the evolution of subsequent discourse in the COP, resulting in the construction of new meanings, tools and practices, and identities.

By actively involving teachers in the research study, conclusions were made based on how to best implement high quality preschool inclusion in order to better prepare all students for kindergarten. The findings have implications for how to support teachers as they embark on inclusive preschool experiences, how to navigate barriers that may be in place with regard to mindsets, policy, and administration, and recommended tools for teachers to use when initiating inclusive experiences. A secondary analysis of student growth was completed to support the claim that high quality preschool inclusion is effective for all students. Recommendations for further studies are made and limitations are explained.

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"You write a dissertation, not for knowledge so much as for the arts and habits; for the habit of attention, for the art of expression…..for the art of entering quickly into another person's thoughts…for the habit of working out what is possible in a given time, for taste, for discrimination, for mental courage. Above all, you write a dissertation for self-knowledge."

-Adapted from Cory, W. (1861). *Eton Reference* (Vol. II, pp. 6-7). London: Longman, Green, Longman, & Roberts.

To all of those who have allowed me to enter into your thoughts, your habits, and your expressions. Working together has turned 'self-knowledge' into 'shared knowledge' and has expanded the potential and the ability to make a greater impact on the future of children. Thank you.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

COP: Community of Practice

DEC: Division for Early Childhood

ECE: Early Childhood Education

ECSE: Early Childhood Special Education

EBP: Evidence Based Practice

GSRP: Great Start Readiness Program

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

IEP: Individualized Education Agency

LRE: Least Restrictive Environment

MARSE: Michigan Administrative Rules for Special Education

MTSS: Mult-tiered Systems of Supports

NAEYC: National Association for the Education of Young Children

NCLB: No Child Left Behind

NPDCI: National Professional Development Center on Inclusion

PAR: Participatory Action Research

PD: Professional Development

PIH: Project in Humanizing

PREK: Pre-kindergarten

OSEP: Office of Special Education Programs

RTI: Response to Intervention

UDL: Universal Design for Learning

UDLEC: Universal Design for Learning Early Childhood

USDOE: United States Department of Education

PREFACE TO THE DISSERTATION (Fall, 2013)

This collaborative project and proposal grew from a need to implement change. Although this study began as a collaborative project with Early Childhood Special Educators in 2013-14, it grew into a multi-year project involving a community of practice that included both general and special educators in pre-kindergarten programs and inclusion settings. It is this broader collaboration in the Community of Practice that takes place in the final year that is the focus of the dissertation. To understand how this project evolved, however, this Preface explains the project origins through three vignettes drawn from the first year. These vignettes show the nature of the conversations and goals that emerged in the first year of the Community of Practice, and subsequently, these conversations helped to frame the broader purposes and goals that fueled the collaborative conversations in the final year.

The first year was grounded in the idea of listening and observation. That is, myself as a researcher, carefully listening to the stories of the ECSE (Early Childhood Special Education) teachers, hearing what the struggles were, and observing students across academic settings to truly understand what the needs were and how to start to bridge the gap between the role of the ECSE teacher, and the pre-academic needs of students. I strongly felt that the teachers needed to actively be involved in the process and therefore approached this project as a Project in Humanization (PiH) (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014) that stems from what Kinloch's (2005) original term, Democratic Engagement. Democratic Engagement draws upon "the ideals of education, the values in literacy acquisition, and the principles of creative pedagogies [that encourage] conversations…(Kinloch, 2005, p.109)….". By participating in a research project alongside the teachers, and humanizing the experience (by asking the teachers to be active and constant participants in the research), the process aligned with Kinloch and San Pedro's

definition of PiH; that is, this project was a shared and collaborative experience with teachers for the purpose of educational change. We started with a conversation that led to collaboration, which led to change. Collaboration does not always mean perfection; within collaboration there is often "conflict, complications, silences, and pauses…among people as they learn to listen to each other…" (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p.29). This PiH study incorporates aspects of democratic engagement by focusing on the conversations that resulted in pedagogical change as ECSE teachers sought to shift teaching practices to better accommodate and educate students. By bringing teachers into the study, using their conversations as the catalyst to identify change, and seeking to truly understand how to implement a pedagogical shift, the study feels more 'human'; more real; and by allowing the study to unfold over the course of several years, the humanizing element takes the qualitative data in a way that preserves the creativity and individuality of the participants. Furthermore, to humanize research means emotions are let in, and the researcher truly becomes a 'worthy witness" (Winn & Ubiles, 2011) to the phenomenon that is being studied. The data becomes more real as it represents thoughts, feelings, voices, complications, and emotions; it's not a set of numbers that describe progress. To do this type of research takes time. One cannot waltz in and expect to 'hear' the stories on the first attempt; there is a dance that occurs as the participants feel out the researcher. Is this someone they can trust? Is there sustainability in the relationship? How will the researcher identify the phenomenon being observed? How will they (the participants) be revealed? To humanize the project requires more than numbers. It requires active engagement from participants and a researcher who is willing to be a part of the community that is being observed. It also requires that the researcher listen objectively, to be engaged in the conversations as they occur, as well as to make a commitment to holistically represent the participants' voices, as raw as it may be. In

its most rudimentary definition, this Project in Humanizing Research study is a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR) that focuses on the conversations that spiraled from needing to do something different; representing the participants' voices as they struggled to identify what needed to happen, exploring and constructing how to implement a change, and reflecting on the outcome and process. As with any research study, outcomes are important. This project not only identifies the outcomes, but also the deliberative processes along the way, and how the participation of teachers as active members of the study throughout the entire process encouraged change. What follows are three vignettes that describe how what could have been a very researcher-oriented project was humanized in order to promote and implement change. These vignettes provide a context for understanding the roots of my proposal, with a fuller description of the problem and related literature in Chapters 1 and 2.

Vignette 1: Dialogicality and (Mis)Representation

My challenge within this project was to engage a group of Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers in reflection and growth. The teachers were, in a sense, starting with a blank slate. There is no preschool curriculum that they are required to follow. Although there are strong curriculums available for general education preschool teachers at this age level, the industry is lacking curricula for ECSE populations. Furthermore, according to Lieber et al. (1999), the field of special education is struggling to identify best practices for teaching pre-academic skills ECSE students. Although pre-kindergarten (pre-k) curriculums are available commercially, there is not a national recommendation for which ones are the best curricula that ECSE teachers should use, or how scientifically based curricula might be implemented or modified for students with disabilities. The result is that ECSE teachers will often modify

curriculums and may even pick and choose from several different curriculums (Lieber et al., 1999).

In the face of this uncertainty, my professional role in the district was to serve as a Consultant to Early Childhood Special Education Teachers in preschool programs. Part of my role was to facilitate an ongoing professional learning group as part of the county-wide Professional Development program. Prior to this, ECSE teachers participated in individual professional development meetings, and the county decided to roll out a new professional learning model that involved Teachers Learning Together (TLT) in a professional learning community. As the program consultant for early childhood, I was assigned to facilitate the ECSE teacher group for professional learning. This was the first time the group of ECSE teachers were brought together to engage in professional development. The county's proposed professional development model mirrored the concept of a professional learning community, where a group of like-minded individuals is brought together to allow for extended learning opportunities to foster collaboration and growth (Dufour, 1998). The idea was for groups to meet once a month, to highlight a concept for professional growth, to engage in dialogue and resource sharing, and then spend an hour a week individually accessing additional resources.

Compared to the years of knowledge and experience possessed by the teachers of the group, I felt like a novice and was nervous as to how the ECSE teachers would view me. To facilitate the group meant I would be bringing ideas, suggestions, and resources to promote professional growth. Yet what if the teachers didn't like what I brought to the table; or worse, what if they refused to engage with me? I knew the teachers had extensive knowledge in their field, and I wanted to honor and value that; hence the decision to keep them as active members in

the group and eventually, the foundation for a participatory action research (PAR) study that would represent their voices, concerns, and creativity in changing pedagogical practices.

The first time I gathered the group of ECSE teachers together I engaged them in a discussion about their programs; inquiring what was going well and what challenges they faced. They didn't know why I had pulled them together or what our goal was. Just as Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) describe the dialogic spiral, I drew upon Bahktin's concept of dialogicality. This concept poses dialogue as a circle; an idea emerges and through speaking, listening, and interacting, the idea grows and emerges as something more tangible. It requires active listening, interactions between speakers, launching ideas, answering voices, and ongoing discussion. By facilitating conversation, everyone must have an opportunity to speak, to use their voice, to pose their individual ideas and concerns, and to answer or address the ideas of others. We all participated in speaking, listening, and responding to the ideas of other teachers. This was an important concept to establish early on in our collaborative work as it was important that the teachers understand that I wasn't there to tell them what to do; my role was to be part of the group and to help facilitate and support growth and change. Yet, not being a classroom teacher, I had a different perspective, or worldview, to bring to the conversation. Given my role as a consultant, I spend more time in general education kindergarten classrooms and had a little more insight into how the kindergarten teachers perform and what the expectations are for their students. However, as I actively listened to the teachers' concerns. I realized I was still an 'outsider' in a sense because I hadn't been in each of the ECSE classrooms. Just being a colleague had not given me access to their perceptions, day-to-day experiences, and concerns for specific students. As Hill points out, I had also assumed that by being a colleague and one of the staff, I would be in a position to be accepted into the group. During this first meeting, I quickly

realized that I did not hold this privilege. The conversation flowed around me, but did not include me. And although I left the meeting with pages of notes and ideas, I did not feel as though I had a true understanding of the teachers' identities, their passions, their concerns, or their successes.

In other words, I did not feel I had an authentic picture of each member as an individual, or as a group. Nor did I feel that I had involved myself authentically in a dialogic consciousness raising activity; building a relationship of care and dignity between myself and the group (Paris, 2011). I realized I had not really exposed any part of myself, nor had I asked the group to go beyond a professional stance; no one had been encouraged to explore what and why they were teaching, what their passion was, and how this impacts their role in the classroom, as well as with how they connect to the children's families on a daily basis. When asked what was going well, one teacher replied, "I feel like nothing is going well. I'm constantly battling behaviors and parent demands. To top it off, when my kids go to kindergarten and have issues, the blame is always put back on me and what I didn't do. It has become a losing battle." The others quickly chimed in and agreed. Comments ranged from, "I have other people telling me how to run my classroom" to "I feel like I'm always on someone's radar" to "I feel like I don't do anything right". After hearing the comments, I then posed the question back to the group, "What is your biggest challenge?". Not surprisingly, this was a much easier question to answer concretely. "The behaviors", responded one. This prompted another member to add, "And parents insist the behaviors only occur at school" to which another replied, "But don't they? Don't we create the behaviors?" This caused the group to break out in laughter (for which I was grateful for it showed me we had not lost our sense of humor). The conversation became silent when one teacher then replied, "But in a way, we do. We place more demands on the students

when they are at school than are often placed on them when they are at home." To which I replied, "Yes. Which is what makes your job that much more challenging. But also rewarding when you find success."

Vignette 2: Allowing Emotions In and Listening

Based on the teachers' responses within the first meeting, I came to our second group meeting with a purpose - to draw them back into why they went into education. I asked the group to share why they went into teaching; what their motivation was and what continued to motivate them each day when they stepped into the classroom. I asked them to share their most challenging teaching experience from a classroom standpoint, as well as from working with a family. To my surprise, many of them started by saying no one had ever asked them these questions. "No one has asked me that -- or at least for a long time", one stated. To which another replied, "That takes me back a long time. It's hard to even remember!" "Well, it's what we did. Women went into education-especially preschool education. I didn't think I would stay with this age. The burn-out rate in special education is huge. But I came to really like this age group and now after so long, couldn't see myself working with a different age group." The rest quickly agreed. "I could never work with high schoolers now!" After each one had a chance to share their stories, one teacher turned to me and asked me the same questions. I spoke of my passion for teaching and they were surprised to learn that I hold a teaching degree and that I have taught in the classroom. I shared my experiences of working in downtown, South Central LA. I shared my challenges of working with families within our own communities. I exposed my fear and lack of confidence in working with families – an area where I never feel I do enough. I talked about home visits where I desperately wanted to grab the kids and take them home with

me. I even cried a little when I talked about how influential my mother had been on my decision to do this kind of work. Growing up, both my parents were educators. My mother ran a day-care out of our house. She was never without a child on her hip and her unconditional love for children was one of her biggest attributes. Up until her unexpected death over ten years ago, she was the one who encouraged me to never lose hope. I told the group, "Every time I see a child I think I cannot help, I hear my mother's voice telling me to try harder -- to not give up -- that I may be that child's only chance at a better, more successful life. That's why I continue to do what I do". Not surprisingly, they each cried a little as well. It was at this moment I felt I had been accepted into the group.

Massumi (2003) describes affect as the body's response to the world; and moreover, affect is undefined and full of possibility. Bridging this perspective to incorporate personal purpose and goals, Diaz-Strong et al (2014) point out how feelings shape our investments and our motivations to create change. Drawing on affect as a catalyst for change, I pushed the group to explain why they continued to do what they do. "Sometimes I think I'm the only one that gives certain kids a hug. The first thing some of them do is run into the room and hug me." Another stated, "I think I'm the only one that reads to some of them. The look on their faces when we sing or read is priceless." "I know that no matter what, they leave me with more skills than when they started." There can be a fine line when a researcher engages in a study that embraces the idea of PiH research. On the one hand, there is the requirement that the researcher is an active member of the group; but the flip side is that the researcher is still gathering data and information. With my role, I had to navigate both sides and flow between the two. At times, more weight was given to my consultant/peer role as I pushed myself out of the researcher role in order to gain more insight from the group. In doing this, I became an active group member,

meaning that any activity or change I asked the group to do, I engaged with as well. It was important that the group view me as a member. At other times, I gave more weight to my researcher role in order to push back so there was data to show the process and to reflect on the outcome. Hill (2009) describes how his relationship to a research project "was mediated by my own struggles to negotiate the multiple forms of representation that my role as co-teacher, researcher, and mentor demanded." (p. 129). I used my position as a peer and my personal experiences to expose my own interest and motivation for engaging in the research; why I feel a desire to create change and what drives that desire intrinsically for me. Wearing two hats in a research study also afforded me the opportunity to remind the group that I was one of them, and that any change we implemented affected me as well.

As the group continued to share personal motivation, I began to gather a sense of who each teacher was on a personal level. I learned that one teacher was strong in early literacy skills and had a passion for reading aloud to her students. A second teacher had a high focus on functional skills within her classroom and challenged her students to be more independent. A third teacher felt it was important to have strong connections with the families of her students. What became apparent was that each teacher ran her classroom differently from the others. There was no cohesiveness. Although individual teaching styles are important, each teacher was sending students to a district-based kindergarten classroom that had another set of academic and behavioral expectations and structures; as well as routines that were consistent across districts. Each teacher had strengths, perspectives and successes that could be shared with the others. Furthermore, each teacher faced challenges. What is often challenging to one person may not be to another. At the same time, challenge, without support or encouragement, may begin to create feelings of inadequacy; which may lead to feelings of isolation (Paris & Winn, 2014). Working

with young children with severe needs often presents many challenges and problems that must be solved. Indeed, the teachers had often felt isolated; each one was working in a different district with different staff and administrators. There was no sense of a unified community of support. By drawing on what each one felt was a strength, exposing what we all felt was a challenge or fear, and sharing our strengths, the group began to see the necessity for change.

Vignette 3: Early Stages of Action

Participatory Action Research (PAR), according to Irizarry and Brown (2014) can consist of less traditional methods of collecting and analyzing data and "has an explicit goal of "action" or intervention into the problems being studied." (p. 64). Furthermore, "Action can take different forms…but should be authentic and relevant to the study objectives and findings and to the community's needs, concerns, interests, and ways of knowing…" (p. 65). When analyzing the challenges our ECSE students were facing in kindergarten, the focus had always been on what the kindergarten teachers were not doing. Yet, as part of this collaborative project, I was asking the ECSE teachers to make the pedagogical shift to focus on what they could modify; and to consider what ways could they alter their teaching practices and patterns to address the problem and goal of preparing their students for kindergarten.

As our meetings progressed, I started to ask the teachers to engage in activities relevant to the problem we faced; how to better prepare our special education preschool students for kindergarten. Being very aware of how they felt about 'experts' coming in their classrooms and telling them to do things, I made certain that whatever I asked them to do, I did myself as well. For our first activity, I asked each teacher to observe a full morning or afternoon of general education kindergarten classrooms. It was important that if we were looking at what to change

in our teaching practices to better prepare our students for kindergarten, we needed to have an idea of what the expectations in kindergarten were. This meant observing a minimum of two and a half hours so we had a sense of expectations across activities, lessons, and classroom transitions. We each planned to do this within the first four weeks of school so we would have a sense of what all students were like when they started school; regardless of whether or not the students had special education services. In the back of my mind, I was keeping the notion that a classroom is inclusive and expectations are set for the class, not for individual students. There would be value in observing the class as a whole, not just students with special needs. In order to make sure there was fidelity in completing the activity, we collaborated to create a kindergarten observation sheet to collect data (see Appendix A). We discussed what was important to observe. "I want to see how many verbal directions are given at once." I replied with, "How many steps did you give at a time?" The teacher replied, "No more than 2. They (the kids) can't handle it." I then asked, "How do you know they can't handle more than 2?" The teacher laughed and said, "Half the time they can't even follow 2!" As a group, we determined what was important to look at with respect to how the ECSE rooms were run and how to observe the expectations that were exhibited in the general education kindergarten classroom.

When we met after each member had completed their observation, the dialogue bounced quickly and freely among the teachers as they shared their findings. "I was amazed! Five-step verbal directions." "The kids sat in circle for 30 minutes!" "They had to independently rotate through three centers, and one center did not have an adult there to support the kids!" I did my best to keep the focus of the group on identifying the classroom expectations for kindergartners versus what the kindergarten teachers were doing (e.g., practices), or in some cases, not doing.

When I asked how each one felt personally about the experience, one teacher replied, "This was eye opening for me. I have spent time in kindergarten rooms but never to this extent. I was blown away by the level of independence required [at the start of the school year]." This prompted me to ask each teacher to sum up her observation in one word. "Independent." "Big class." "Less support." "Overwhelming." "High energy." "Scared." I asked the one teacher to expand on scared. "Scared for my students. They'll never make it." To which I replied, "But they have to -- there's no other option."

The next activity I had the group engage in was a comparison of ECSE and kindergarten practices. I paired the teachers up and had them list all the kindergarten practices based on their observations on sticky notes, as well as all their individual ECSE practices on sticky notes. I then had the pairs put their kindergarten stickies on the left side of poster board and the ECSE ones on the right. "Now move any of the notes that overlap to the center." Dead silence. One of the teachers looked up at me and said in amazement, "I can't."

By engaging the teachers in the simple act of analyzing practices from both settings- encouraging them to *participate* in the *research*, they were able to begin to identify areas of dissonance where the practices in general education and special education classrooms were distant and non-overlapping. In turn, this created opportunities for *action*. I asked the group, "So, what can begin to overlap?" Dialogue again flew back and forth amongst the teachers. "Why won't they use visuals? Can't they (kindergarten teachers) see it works? They need to decrease the amount of steps they give at once." I listened, and brought the group back to our goal by shifting the conversation from a focus on the general education teachers' practices to a focus on what actions we might take to reduce the dissonance by asking ourselves. "What can *we* do?" We looked at our comparison posters and started reflecting. One teacher said, "Well, I

know in the classroom that I observed, the kids had to independently get their snacks. They went to their lockers, got their lunch bags and came back to the table. They had to choose an item for snack, open it, and eat it. No one helped them. I know in my ECSE classroom, we provide snack and literally do everything for the students. I wonder if we could start to make this a more independent activity." To which I replied, "YES!"

Over the course of the next few sessions, the ECSE teachers drafted a letter to send home to parents outlining the change in the snack routine. They asked parents to send a snack in a lunch bag to school. The letter listed the ways the change in routine would align to the kindergarten expectation and the steps or procedures each teacher would take in order to increase student independence in this skill. Together, we created new visuals and supports to put into place to assist the students in becoming more independent with the routine. With each ECSE teacher active and involved, and by providing them with a level of support that was facilitative versus instructive, there was a change that, as Irizarry and Brown's (2014) definition of PAR includes, "...simultaneously transforms oneself and the educational system" (p. 77). Although this change may seem small to some people, the implications, and the fidelity of implementation by involving the teachers in the change process, were huge. This was only the beginning to what became a three-year journey. Starting with simple pedagogical change to foster increased student classroom independent skills, grew into a transformational journey. Not only did the teachers continue to change, but they also began to break down barriers in order to create inclusive preschool classrooms where all students were supported; where all students were working on increasing skills to be more prepared for kindergarten; and where students with special needs were full participants in general education preschool classrooms.

Reflecting on the Experience

This was only the start to our collaborative project. Realizing that the process, as well as the end, was undefined was daunting. This daunting and often overwhelming feeling that I had was on both sides as I played not only the role of the researcher, but also as a participant and member of the group. Engaging in the project with a perspective of it being a 'humanizing experience' was important; to fully engage with the participants and to look at data as more than numbers, to view it from a holistic lens where voices, emotions, and conversations were part of the experience. Without including the teachers in the process, the project would draw similarities to what had already been done; a researcher or expert coming in and making suggestions and then walking out the door. To engage the teachers encouraged action, which encouraged change. In a sense, I felt they were the experts, and I was the novice. I came to the group with ideas, but the teachers were the ones who drove the need for change. They are the ones who had to see the need for change, to come up with ways to do so, and to act with motivation to attempt something new. By working alongside and with the group, I learned the value of listening, reflecting, and the importance of identity within research. Traditional research projects take the form of a researcher who identifies the problem, an intervention that the researcher designs and presents, and a conclusion that the researcher poses. Yet the teacher participants, especially in educational research, are the ones who actually conduct the work. Whether it's students who are being observed or teachers implementing a lesson, the researcher is far removed from the underpinnings of what is truly going on. When we come to a project collaboratively, when we humanize the experience and allow emotions, voices, and encourage the idea that data can reflect more than numbers, there is more power to initiate change. I saw this within our collaborative project. By fostering, facilitating, and guiding the ECSE teachers

through the entire process, they assumed ownership of the problem and the intervention. They mutually created the procedures to implement the intervention, and no one told them what to do. This ownership increased their motivation and reinforced their fidelity to the procedures -- they actually wanted to participate in the investigation and do it well.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION (Why the need to implement change)

This chapter serves as an introduction to the problem that has been identified, provides an overview of the literature to support the problem, and identifies research questions that the current study attempts to answer. A more formal literature review follows in Chapter Three with the methodology of the study being discussed in Chapter Four. It should be noted that when referencing research that supports inclusive practices, the reported benefit for all students speaks to students who are participating within the inclusive environment. This is exclusive to students who may continue to require the intense intervention provided within an Early Childhood Special Education Preschool Classroom.

After a year of working to make personal pedagogical shifts, the ECSE teachers began to broaden their view of what kindergarten readiness skills looked like. After spending time in kindergarten classrooms, the ECSE teachers came back in 2014 with a different perspective. Each teacher shared a similar experience and reflected that time spent in general education kindergarten classrooms was as difficult as it looked like (at least to them), and that the majority of the students were struggling, regardless of whether or not it was a student identified as a student with special needs. After listening to their stories, I shared current data on the scope of a very large national problem that they had identified - students were not coming to kindergarten prepared and ready to learn.

The establishment of kindergarten dates back to 1837, when Friedrich Frobel established the child garden, an environment in which children learned through play (Lucas, 2005). The focus was primarily on developing social skills. The half-day curriculum excluded reading and writing but instead focused on the students' attention span, interest, and maternal ties (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1998). The kindergarten curriculum in the

21st century is significantly different from the curriculum in the 1800's. Students now participate in full or half-day learning experiences that include play, social, and alphabet skills (Florida State Department of Education 2009).

In order to prepare young children for what it means to 'be in school', many young children in the United States begin their school experience as a preschool student between the ages of 2 and 5. Many preschool programs aim to promote the academic skills and concepts that will help young children develop early reading literacy, which is a crucial component for future academic skill development (Elliott & Olliff, 2008; Kaderavek & Justice, 2004; Nespoli, 2011; Snow, 2004). Most experts believe that that preschoolers should be able to identify the front and back of a book, track words in a book from left to right, identify letters and sounds, recognize the difference between words and letters, demonstrate team work, play fairly, tolerate being away from parents and siblings for an extended time, listen to authority figures, have good listening skills, and follow instructions (Bishop, 2003; Catts, Fey, & Zhang, 2001; Strickland & Shanahan, 2004). All of this helps to set a foundation for what it means to be ready for kindergarten.

According to Miller and Almon (2009) learning through socialization in the early childhood years is imperative to a preschooler's physical, social, and emotional development. The lack of socialization and self-regulation has created a growing concern, thought by experts, to be contributing to the "rise in anger and aggression in young children reflected in increasing reports of severe behavior problems" (Miller & Almon, 2009, p. 11). Children today spend much of their day preparing for standardized tests and failing to learn how to properly develop executive functions that are critical for learning how to socially and emotionally navigate school experiences (Denham, et al., 2012; Liew, 2012; Willoughby, Kupersmidt, Voegler-Lee & Bryant, 2011). The lack of development of self-regulatory skills affects cognitive skills since

these students are not able to sufficiently self-regulate their own learning, leading to poor academic performance (Martinez-Pons, 2002; Tominey, & McClelland, 2011). This ability to control and regulate emotions and behaviors is critical in order for a student to perform well on tasks (Garner & Waajid, 2012; Martinez-Pons, 2002). Ziv (2013) reports direct links between social competence, expressive language and pre-literacy skills in preschool children.

All of this is important as the stakes for kindergarten are now higher than ever before. As a result of the call for an increased focus on accountability and high stakes testing, educational legislation has put the overall socio-emotional development of the preschool child at risk (Miller & Almon, 2009; Patte, 2012). President Barack Obama's Race to the Top initiative now rewards those states that are raising student achievement. For students entering kindergartens who may not have a foundation in social and emotional skills that promote a readiness to learn, academic achievement may suffer. Focusing on just academics without addressing the allied social skills of preschool students, such as self-regulation, cooperative behavior, and socio-emotional development, dampens the overall improvement in academic outcomes (Diamond, 2010). Yet currently, educational practices focus almost exclusively on high stakes testing and academic accountability without regard for the foundational skills such as self-regulation and social competencies; thereby neglecting the cornerstone skills that are necessary for a successful school experience (Liew, 2012).

In addition, policymakers use the data from standardized tests to make educational decisions based on what these tests claim to measure (Alexander, 2010). These decisions influence the evaluation of students' progress in schools, the evaluation of students' mastery of component literacy skills, and the evaluation of the teachers' and school's effectiveness. With the focus of kindergarten becoming more academic and accountable in nature, preschool

becomes an almost necessary extension of the K-5 school. There is strong evidence showing that young children who participate in high-quality pre-kindergarten programs enter school more ready to learn than their peers (Miller & Almon, 2009; Patte, 2012). Within the preschool years, children are given the opportunity to learn basic foundational skills of what it means to be in school and to acquire going-to-school behaviors, which assists in preparing them for kindergarten.

School readiness has not been formally defined, however, young children are increasingly expected to perform at predetermined levels in various developmental domains when they enter kindergarten. Informally, readiness for school refers to a child's ability to function and learn certain concepts and skills in the institution of schooling. Developmental proficiency and basic knowledge (e.g. colors, alphabet names, letter sounds, numbers, and an understanding of the conventions of reading) are assessed to determine readiness (Kessler, 1991). School readiness is also an important social justice issue because, on average, research suggests a significant percentage of children in the United States are not ready to learn when they enter kindergarten. According to a national survey of children's school readiness, teachers reported that 35% of children residing in the United States lacked the skills necessary to perform well academically upon kindergarten entrance (Boyer, 1991). In addition, Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, and Calkins' (2006) more recent analysis of a nationally representative sample of American children who participated in the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Kindergarten (1998-1999) yielded a similar percentage of children entering kindergarten with limited readiness skills. Based upon liberal definitions of "school readiness risk," 35% of the children in their study lacked skills considered important for kindergarten transition. In the same study,

more conservative indices of school readiness risk suggested that 45% of children had limited readiness skills.

Kindergarten educators view the ability of incoming students to follow and carry out directions and the ability to socially interact as a better indicator of school readiness than academic skills (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). Specifically, being non-disruptive and having the ability to communicate are considered to be vital attributes of successful learners according to kindergarten educators, as opposed to the students' ability to count to 20 or more, knowing the alphabet, names, colors, shapes, and motor skills (Lin et al., 2003). In October, 2011, Age of Learning (creator of ABCmouse.com Early Learning Academy) conducted a nationwide survey of 500 kindergarten teachers on the subject of children's preparedness for kindergarten. The survey revealed that two-thirds of America's kindergarten teachers believe most young children are academically unprepared for school when they enter kindergarten (Age of Learning, 2012).

In the long term, school readiness, retention, and academic achievement can influence a child's development and an individual's life chances (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, Yeung, & Smith, 1998; Hair et al., 2006; Haskins & Rouse, 2005). More specifically, research indicates a correlation between lower intellectual assessment scores of preschool-aged children and lower academic achievement in the elementary grades through high school; higher incidences of adolescent pregnancy; engagement in criminal behavior; increased rates of unemployment; and more frequent occurrences of depression in adulthood (Haskins & Rouse, 2005). Readiness to learn is a national concern as the implications go beyond the preschool years.

Yet, there is a lack of consensus on what is required of children upon entering kindergarten because different groups of parents, educators, community members, researchers, practitioners, and legislators see the issue of readiness from different perspectives (Pianta, 2002).

Many feel that school readiness is a developmental issue. Readiness is not a static event, but rather "a process that spans a critical period of early learning and development" (Graue, 2003, p. 147). Child development is a dynamic process that involves cognitive, socio emotional, psychological, and physical/biological changes taking place over time (Miller, 2002). These processes are assessed and considered vital to a child's ability to learn in school.

Historically, age has been the major criteria used to determine when a child should enter formal schooling. Chronological age has been a key factor in determining the maturity level of a child, dating back to 1836 when laws requiring children of predetermined ages to participate in formal schooling were established (Cubberley, 1947). Ages of mandatory entry varied by state, but on average, this age was somewhat older than the current age requirements of today. Children did not initially begin a formal school experience until they were able to read and write, with 8 years old being the typical age children started school (Cubberley, 1947). Chronological age continues to remain a significant factor in determining readiness. In 39 states, children are eligible for kindergarten entry if they are 5 years of age prior to mid-October of the school year (Snow, 2006). The age for kindergarten entrance has changed even more recently and now, across the nation, 32 states (United State Department of Education, 2014) have identified a cut-off date of September 1st or earlier. Thus, a child must be five years of age on or before September 1 in order to enroll in kindergarten. The implication of this is that kids are starting school even older and should be more developmentally ready to tackle kindergarten. Stipek (2006) suggests that the increasing age of children entering kindergarten is a trend that has emerged since the enactment of the NCLB Act in hopes that getting children into school later will allow for more maturation prior to beginning school. Social science and educational research has generally constructed school readiness in terms of maturation (biological unfolding

of psychomotor and cognitive functioning) *and* relevant experiences and skills that center on child competencies at the time children begin school (Graue, 1992; Snow, 2006). Thus, age and pre-academic readiness are important when determining age of entry into formalized education. Researchers have conceptualized school readiness in multiple ways. For example, the National Education Households Survey conducted in 1999 conceptualized school readiness skills as children's: ability to recognize all letters of the alphabet, rote count to 20, write his or her name, and read or pretend to read storybooks (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000b). Other definitions typically focus on the two-dimensional nature of school readiness which includes readiness to learn a particular concept or subject and readiness for school in terms of entering an institution expecting and requiring certain skill sets (Boyer, 1991; Diamond, Reagan & Brandyk, 2000). Pianta (2002). In addition to these pre-academic skills, researchers agree that children need skills in social and emotional areas. School readiness is more than knowing your ABCs. "Children who communicate effectively, who follow directions and cooperate, who are attentive, enthusiastic, and actively involved in classroom activities, and who can ask for and receive help demonstrate a cluster of skills we could call teachability" (Pianta, 2002, p. 3). Graue (2003) conceptualized readiness as the following: "Readiness typically connotes an age range when most children are deemed old enough to benefit from formal school experiences. Readiness also connotes a constellation of skills considered precursors to school success. These skills combine a complex set of physical/biological maturation, prior experience, and dispositional qualities" (p. 147).

Teachers working within the context of school policies and practices make daily decisions and assessments regarding children's readiness and abilities to achieve, therefore their conceptions of school readiness are particularly important to explore. Though diverse, teachers

and early childhood practitioners discuss readiness multi-dimensionally as well. For example, a national study of teachers conducted through the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching outlined school readiness as preparedness for formal schooling, which involves "physical well-being, social confidence, emotional maturity, language richness, general knowledge, and moral awareness" (Boyer, 1991, p.7). Teachers primarily focus on social and emotional skills in their conceptualizations of school readiness (Hains, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989; Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In a study conducted by Hains et al. (1989), the most highly ranked skills among kindergarten and preschool teachers were related to social and emotional domains. Educators in this study considered being proficient in communication, self-care, social interaction, following instructions, and displaying good conduct as important for school readiness. While they noted children's academic abilities, making transitions and participating in large group and independent work were least important. In a separate study, teachers held children's approaches to learning in terms of interest and engagement more highly than children's basic knowledge upon kindergarten entrance (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000). Wesley and Buysse (2003) conducted focus group interviews with preschool and kindergarten teachers. Data also revealed an emphasis on social and emotional development among their participants. Being confident, creative, curious, and attentive were among several of social skills discussed as being important for children to display when they entered kindergarten. Academic skills were expected to be easily promoted secondary to presence of social and emotional skills. On a more local level, the county where the present study was conducted tracked kindergarten readiness across the entire county and across all students (i.e. no students were omitted from the statistics secondary to presence of a disability or language barrier) for three years (see Appendix B).

Results indicated growth in core academic concepts (letters, numbers, pre-reading), and a drastic decline in social-emotional, self-regulation, and pragmatic skills. This aligns with what the country, as a whole, is reporting; namely, that kids are not ready to start kindergarten on a mature social emotional level. The interesting fact to me, as a researcher, was that the data was inclusive of all kindergarten students, regardless of whether or not the child was identified as having a developmental disability. This meant that as a whole, the county was struggling with student behaviors, student social emotional skills, and students who were not ready to learn upon entering the school doors in the fall.

Preschool programs afford young children an opportunity to engage with peers and have a 'pre' school experience. Although not mandated or required, students who have been identified with special needs prior to entering school have the same rights as students within the K-12 setting. Many important laws have been passed and amended in order to provide individuals with disabilities the rights they deserve. Several of these laws have influenced early childhood special education (ECSE), beginning with the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act of 1968. This law established programs for early childhood education that involved parents, provided training to teachers, and evaluated the success of both students and the program. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504 ensured that all children have the right to access federally funded programs. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act mandated the rights of young children with special needs across settings (day care, child-care) and not just in preschools. NCLB 2001 placed higher expectations on state testing, which indirectly impacts early childhood educators who prepare students for kindergarten; this placed a larger academic task on early childhood educators to 'get kids ready for kindergarten.'

Early education in the US takes on many forms. States and local school districts are required by federal law to educate preschool age children with disabilities in typical early childhood programs alongside children who do not have disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate. Thus, preschool programs across a spectrum or continuum must be available. This continuum ranges from programs that provide special education services in a general education environment (early childhood education-ECE) to programs that are exclusively special education (early childhood special education-ECSE). Regardless of the setting, the goal remains the same - to educate and prepare preschool age children for entry into kindergarten.

As a result of these laws, changes within early childhood special education (ECSE) programs began to emerge. Services provision began to involve inclusive settings with typically developing peers within early childhood education (ECE) programs. An increase in hands-on meaningful experiences, including caregivers and support staff such as occupational therapists and speech therapists was noted. Research-based programs based on standards and the documentation of student progress and achievement through data-based evidence were enforced. Universal Design for Learning fostered multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement across ECSE classroom lessons. This increased access to learning by reducing physical, cognitive, intellectual, and organizational barriers. With all the changes in policy and law, ECSE programs have been constantly evolving. Yet this is nothing new. For over 35 years, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) and federal early childhood programs (i.e. Head Start), have encouraged special education services be provided in general education classrooms with typically developing peers (Musgrove, 2012 OSEP LETTER), or more specifically stated, students with disabilities should be *included* with typically developing peers.

In 2003, in the United States, 48% of all children with special needs had been placed inside the general education classroom (U. S, Department of Education, 2003). More recently, the US Department of Education (2005) identified 701,625 children who were eligible for services under IDEA between the ages of 3 and 5; and furthermore, 239,082 (34.08%) of those children spent greater than 80% of their time in a general education setting. The following year, the government reported that 692,452 children between the ages of 3 and 5 were eligible for services, but 308,069 (44.49%) of those children were spending the majority of their day in a general education early childhood classroom setting (Department of Education, 2006). By 2010 the Department of Education had identified 735,245 children in this category, and 462,292 (62.88%) of those children were receiving services in general education settings. This means that every year, a greater percentage of an ever-increasing number of identified young children with disabilities were enrolling in school and being served in general education early childhood classrooms. That is, until the child count data collected in 2012.

There has been a little progress within the area of inclusion and special education services being provided within a general education preschool classroom. During 1984 through 1985, the USDOE (1987) reported 36.8% of children with disabilities, aged 3 to 5 years, received their special education services in a regular EC classroom. According to U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), in 2012, across all states, fewer than half (i.e., 42.5%) of children with disabilities, aged 3 to 5 years, received their special education and the related services in a regular EC classroom (USDOE, 2012). Comparing the 1985 data with the 2012 data, providing special education to children with disabilities, aged 3 to 5 years, in regular EC environments appears to have increased by merely 5.7%. Despite the definitions of settings and reporting methods by states having changed slightly over time, the

numbers are comparable and indicate that efforts to support and promote high-quality inclusion have been somewhat successful at best.

Although mandated by state and federal law under LRE, with increased opportunity to provide inclusion as more general education settings have been funded, and with research to support the benefit for all students engaged within an inclusive setting (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys & Sam, 2010; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Odom, et al., 2004; Strain & Hoyson ,2000), current data reflects a decrease in time spent in inclusion over the past 15 years.

Inclusion is not a new concept. Stemming from the 1970s as 'mainstreaming', inclusion has been highlighted in the research literature as well as supported legislatively by Public Law 94-142. Momentum gained in 1993 when the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Associate for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) issued a joint position statement on the inclusion of young children with special needs in typical early childhood environments. In 2009, a revision of this statement was issued and more clearly defined how to provide high quality preschool inclusion.

With the joint position statements, researchers began investigating why inclusion was not occurring. With the original joint position statement in 1993, Rose and Smith conducted a survey to understand the challenges that created barriers to preschool inclusion. Results indicated that personnel policies were the greatest barrier to promoting preschool inclusion. Additional challenges included: attitudes and beliefs, fiscal/contracting policies, program quality, different curriculum, and transportation policies (Rose & Smith, 1993). In 2015, a similar study was conducted to get at the core of why preschool inclusion was on the decline versus the rise. The number one challenge in 2015 to promoting preschool inclusion related to attitudes and

beliefs, with personnel policies falling to the bottom (Barton & Smith, 2015). Hence, new procedure and policy have helped to shape and break down barriers to preschool inclusion, but attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions continue to be the biggest challenge.

Problem Statement: Inclusion is not happening

In summary, with new academic rigor and high expectations, many preschool aged students are not demonstrating adequate kindergarten readiness skills in order to have a successful academic experience within the early years of entering formalized schooling. This issue is not specific to students with disabilities, but spans all students, regardless of ability. Research supports that all students benefit when students with disabilities are educated alongside their typically developing peers (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys & Sam, 2010; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Odom et al., 2004; Strain, & Hoyson,2000). Until recently, there was an upward trend of students with disabilities participating in general education preschool settings. In 2012, this trend reversed and the United States saw a decrease in students with disabilities being educated alongside their nondisabled peers. Multiple theories emerged as to the reason behind the decline; among them, lack of collaboration between early childhood and early childhood special education staff, feelings of inadequacy from early childhood teachers, and an increase in attitudes and beliefs that students would not be successful within inclusive preschool settings (Barton & Smith, 2015). Yet, the data regarding students lack of kindergarten readiness skills and being prepared for school continues to rise. Preschool inclusion has legislative support, research to support its' effectiveness for all participating students to help prepare them for kindergarten, and ample availability within typical settings to provide inclusion (Camilli, Vargas,

Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Guralnick, 2001; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009; Strain & Bovey, 2011). Yet, it is clearly not happening with a high degree of fidelity. And it was clearly not occurring within our current setting for this study.

The revision of the joint inclusion position statement from DEC/NAEYC included recommendations for how to promote high quality inclusion, as well as a definition of preschool inclusion that supports the idea that kindergarten readiness is more than being academically ready: "Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports" (DEC & NAEYC, 2009, p. 2). With the focus on *access, participation, and supports*, the early childhood community now had a framework for implementing high-quality inclusion.

The concept of *access* encourages the use of universal design principals to promote child learning. *Participation* embraces the concept that teachers use a range of instructional practices and individualized accommodations, modifications, and adaptations to support active participation and belonging for all children. *Supports* references all adults have access to high quality professional development and ongoing collaboration and coaching. A large aspect of preschool inclusion is including students with disabilities within typically developing preschool programs; thus merging the fields of ECSE and ECE.

This merger of ECSE and ECE has occurred in response to inclusion, but the practical side has not been thoroughly flushed out (Darragh, 2007). It is critical that both ECSE and ECE providers have a level of skill and knowledge to promote successful preschool inclusion experiences. To create a hybrid that blends the best practices in the ECSE and ECE programs, collaboration is essential. A large component of inclusion involves the provision of special education services within the general education setting. Thus, ECSE providers must work alongside and with ECE providers. To be successful, collaboration is key.

Statement of Purpose: Coming full circle

What started in the fall of 2013 as a small group of ECSE teachers wanting to promote kindergarten readiness and success for ECSE students quickly morphed into something bigger. After our initial year of changing practices and shifting mindsets in special education classrooms, we began our work in 2014 with a new idea. With a desire to promote inclusion for ECSE students, the ECSE teachers spent a year focused on Evidence Based Practices, and strategies to promote academic and social emotional growth for ALL students - the *participation* aspect of inclusion. Backed by research that indicates when inclusion is properly implemented, all students will benefit socially and academically (Britsch & Meier, 1999; Buysse & Bailey Jr, 1993; Kim, 2005; Leatherman, 2007; Odom, 2000; Odom, Buysse, & Soukakou, 2011; Smith & Smith, 2000), the ECSE teachers, wanted to better prepare their students for kindergarten by including them with typically developing peers. As a researcher and agent of change, I began to work on the *access* side of how to support full inclusion of ECSE students alongside typical developing peers on a daily and consistent basis.

Hence, the purpose of this study was to see how implementation of a collaborative effort between early childhood and early childhood special educators within an inclusive preschool setting could change teacher practices to better prepare all students for kindergarten. With a year of shifting mindsets on what ECSE students COULD do, coupled with a year on identifying accommodations, modifications, and individualized instructional practices, the ECSE teachers were ready for the next stage---inclusion in ECE preschool programs.

The study is being conducted within a local educational agency that spans 5 school districts. There is no local definition of preschool inclusion. At the state level, preschool inclusion is supported under governing rules that allow special education preschool students' access to typically-developing peer environments, but this also comes with stipulations. To be deemed appropriate for an inclusive preschool setting, students who would typically be placed within a special education preschool program (exclusively special education) have access to a Great Start Readiness Preschool program with a minimum of 72 hours of special education support across the school year. These special education supports must be overseen by a special education teacher, but may be provided by special education ancillary support staff (speech, occupational, or physical therapy) (MARSE, 2013). An Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting must be held to establish special education services as well as related goals and to determine a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) in accordance with Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) that indicates a general education setting with a minimum of 72 hours per year of special education support.

With a large growth in access to district-run, typically-developing early childhood settings, and with administrative support, at the end of the 2014-2015 school year, the teachers shifted 17 students from a special education preschool classroom, to a typically developing

preschool environment for the 2015-2016 school year. What follows is the story of the journey, the process, and the growth of these teachers as they participated within inclusion programs in order to better prepare all students for kindergarten. The study focuses primarily on the experience and growth of the EC and ECSE teachers with regard to their participation in professional development activities, and through this collaboration in the community of practice, what factors led teachers to adopt new practices and beliefs that were reflected in their early childhood inclusive programs.

Yet with the need to promote inclusion in addition to the drive to better prepare ALL students for kindergarten, research has consistently identified inclusive settings to be beneficial for every child. Hence, a secondary focus will look at the rate of growth for the students identified with special needs as they transition into a preschool classroom with typically developing peers.

Rationale

It is difficult to identify specific research publications with procedures and goals similar to what this study hopes to pursue. The Midwestern school district where this specific research was conducted had some experience with what it meant to 'mainstream' students with disabilities into typically developing preschool environments. That is, students with disabilities participated in some activities with typically developing peers, but the majority of the preschool experience was within an exclusive and segregated special education program. The district administration was seeking to expand preschool inclusion in order to align with best practice recommendations from research that cited more growth for all students when students with disabilities were fully included with typical developing peers. But in order to do this, supports

needed to be established and a framework needed to be drawn that included a high level of scaffolding for all early childhood staff. Drawing from a collective body of research that demonstrates the benefit of communities of practice (COP), as well as supporting staff with high quality professional development that combines collaborative teaming with ongoing coaching and feedback, this mixed methods study will employ in-depth individual and group interviews, field notes, artifacts, and quantitative pre/post test data to determine how much growth students with disabilities can make towards kindergarten readiness skills when included with typically developing peers, and how COP can work to break down attitudes and beliefs that inclusion is not possible.

The special education teachers will collaborate and support the Great Start Readiness Program teachers for ALL students within the class following the DEC/NAEYC definition of inclusion that speaks to *access, participation, and supports.* Field notes and interviews will be conducted ongoing from September through March. The teachers will collectively participate in ongoing professional development activities (both provided by the researcher as well as district provided PD), coaching, and feedback. Classrooms will be designed to employ Universal Designs for Learning and teachers will grow in the use and implementation of Evidence Based Practices within their teaching. The hope is that regardless of whether or not the student has been identified as a student with a disability, all students will grow in social emotional and self-regulation skills in order to be better prepared to enter kindergarten. The focus will be on preparing the classroom and content for every student, compared to modifying the classroom and content for students with special needs.

Research Questions

Drawing from the recent Barton & Smith (2015) survey, attitudes and beliefs were the number one challenge that presented as a barrier to preschool inclusion. This study attempts to engage early childhood educators in participatory action research to address what and why there are barriers between ECE and ECSE that are impacting students' ability to successfully transition into kindergarten and how to break the barriers down. Using communities of practice to employ new pedagogy of teacher practice for preschool inclusion as defined by DEC/NAEYC, the following questions will be addressed about the nature and processes of change in the teacher-learning community. As the COP is at the root of the study, the history and evolution of the COP impacts the research questions that focus on teacher change of practice and student impact.

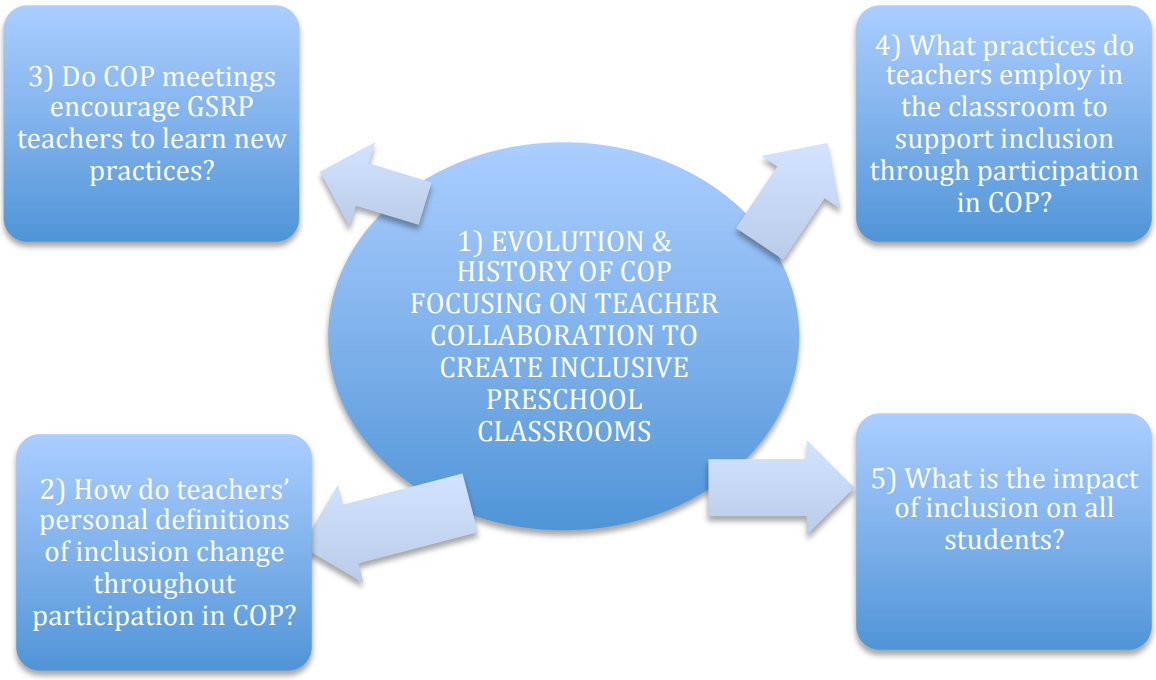


Figure 1: Visual representation of research question connection

Research Questions

1) Impact of history and evolution of COP on inclusive preschool classrooms.
2) How do teachers' personal definitions of inclusion change throughout participation in COP?
    a. How closely do definitions align with inclusion definition from NAEYC and NPDCI?
    b. What barriers can be identified through these personal definitions?
3) Do COP meetings encourage GSRP teachers to learn new practices?
    a. What changes were made to promote inclusion? (Did every teacher feel supported to implement changes in teacher practice?)
    b. How do communities of practice support teacher professional development to facilitate successful inclusive classrooms? (What evidence is there to support teacher growth?)
4) What practices do teachers employ in the classroom to support inclusion through participation in COP?
    a. How do COP support teacher PD to facilitate successful inclusive classrooms to shift attitudes and beliefs?
5) What is the impact of inclusion on all students?

Significance of the Study

Wesley & Buysse (2001) state that within the field of early intervention and early childhood, professional roles have significantly changed over a short period of time. This transformation now supports providing more than just direct service to a child, but encompasses

all those who engage with young children. The days of pull-out speech therapy are gone and therapists now provide consultation to not only teachers, but parents and family members as well. Special educators can no longer work in isolation and expect students' skills to generalize beyond the classroom doors. "What is missing in current practice is the role and responsibility of participation in a community of people whose goal is to engage in mutual analysis of each other's experiences and observations as a way to continually refine practice. The early intervention field could profit in at least three critical areas by the expansion of professional roles to include such reflection and collaborative inquiry: closing the gap between research and practice, reducing the isolation of early intervention practice, and optimizing the translation of principles (e.g. high-quality care and intervention…)...A promising approach to this type of shared inquiry and learning is to build communities of practice based on diverse expertise…" (Wesley & Buysse, 2001, p. 115). This study attempts to do just that: close the gap between research and practice by employing participatory action research, bringing best-practice special education interventions into settings with typically developing peers to better support all children, and to provide high-quality intervention and principles to support new growth in teacher practices that are sustainable and transferable.

By teachers working, learning, and implementing change together, collaborative and shared inquiry is crucial for changes to be sustainable and effective. Given the growing number of inclusive early childhood programs that are available to students with special needs, how we go about implementing preschool inclusion needs to be carefully thought out and reflected upon, with stakeholders supporting the process. If teacher attitudes and beliefs prevent preschool inclusion from being successful, we are potentially limiting a child's ability to grow, both academically and socio-emotionally.

This issue of inclusion has attracted almost more attention than what children are being taught. At the preschool level, there is no mandated curriculum; what is mandated is access to least restrictive environment with typically developing peers. Hence, the importance of *how* teachers are teaching is almost more important than *what* they are teaching with regard to the preschool level. With the push to provide more inclusion of students with special needs, more preschool teachers will be expected to teach to a room of various abilities, yet the majority of them feel inadequately prepared to do so; teachers working in these inclusion classrooms must have the ability and knowledge to work with all students under their care (Smith & Smith, 2000). It is clear that when the teacher is more experienced, has more training with students with disabilities, and continues with professional development activities, all students in inclusion classrooms show growth (Argyropoulos & Nikolaraizi, 2009; Buysse & Wesley, 1999; Campbell, et al., 2001; MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007; Mogharreban & Bruns, 2009). Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) suggest inclusion in practice alone is not enough and there needs to be a shift in thinking about inclusive education. Instead of adding accommodations and modifications to existing educational structures that are targeted towards most students, Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) call for an inclusive pedagogy in which the "development of a rich learning community characterized by learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life" (p. 814).

Thus, it appears that the most appropriate way to implement successful preschool inclusion programs is to learn through collaboration and analyzing experiences of those who are teaching within the classroom. This study aims to provide direct and practical information for current and future early childhood providers and administrators who are struggling to understand how to make inclusion work successfully and effectively. The study meets the need for research

on this topic by using empirical and practical data, providing data for future inclusive educators, and supports the relationship between quality early childhood education and professional development.

Much research has been done indicating the need for inclusion, and the need for studying inclusion. But little research has been done on how to break down the barriers to implementing inclusion to a high level of not only fidelity and success, but also in diminishing attitudes and beliefs that inclusion "won't work". Few studies have described the reality of inclusion, the day-to-day aspects of implementing it, within early childhood education programs. Many studies speak to the *how* and make recommendations, but few, if any, have followed the lives of teachers doing the work within the preschool setting to compare models of preschool inclusion. Erwin, Puig, Evenson,& Beresford (2012) conducted participatory action research, which gained from the perspectives of families, practitioners, researchers, graduate students, and administrators at an inclusive university-based, early-childhood center where inclusion was already occurring. Walker (2014) utilized PAR to investigate whether the participation in an inclusive educational setting improved the academic achievement of fourth-grade students with specific learning disabilities. Uranga (2014) conducted a survey to identify challenges facing early childhood special education teachers, supplemental service specialists, and program administrators who were attempting to use collaboration to achieve full-inclusion in state-funded preschool programs, but did not compare models to make recommendations pertaining to how to break down barriers involving limited resources and attitudes and beliefs.

By drawing on the DEC/NAEYC (2009) definition of inclusion, including early childhood teachers as participants, and providing high quality professional development that is research based and supports ALL students regardless of ability, this study seeks to add to the

existing research on how to best implement an inclusion program model for children within the preschool environment despite perceived barriers, attitudes, and beliefs.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature related to the three key elements of this study: 1) early childhood inclusion, 2) professional development within early childhood, including best practice guidelines, and 3) collaboration and professional development through communities of practice. First, a more conclusive definition of inclusion is given, along with the historical components of preschool inclusion. An overview of the literature regarding professional development within the early childhood population is provided as well as more recent literature regarding best practices for promoting success for all students participating within a preschool inclusion environment. Finally, research regarding the effectiveness of communities of practice on teacher practices is reviewed.

Early Childhood Inclusion

In the past five decades, many important laws have been passed and amended in order to provide individuals with disabilities the rights they deserve. Several of these laws have influenced early childhood special education, beginning with the Handicapped Children's Early Education Assistance Act of 1968. This law established programs for early childhood education that involved parents, provided training to teachers, and evaluated the success of both students and the program. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 Section 504 ensured that all children have the right to access federally funded programs. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act mandated the rights of young children with special needs across settings (day care, child-care) and not just in preschools. NCLB 2001 placed higher expectations on state testing, which indirectly impacts early childhood educators who prepare students for kindergarten; this placed a

larger academic task on early childhood educators to 'get kids ready for kindergarten.' NCLB 2001 also broached the subject of evidenced based programs, which was expanded to include early childhood programs and teachers in the 2004 Public Law 108-446 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. Additionally, Universal Design for Learning is referenced in the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This placed emphasis on equal access to the school curriculum in order to accommodate all learners.

IDEA 2004 does not require inclusion, but does stipulate that children with special needs should be educated in the "least restrictive environment" that is appropriate to meet their needs. This requires that school districts have a continuum of environments available to meet individual students' needs. School placements may range from general education classrooms to residential settings. A team determines LRE, including the parent and the child. Special education services may be provided within the general education classroom, or may be supported through an exclusively special education classroom. Although not explicitly stated, IDEA strongly recommends that all students with special needs be educated with typically developing peers to the maximum extent possible (Musgrove, 2012). Further, separate classes, education, or removal of students with disabilities from the general education environment may only be done when the severity of the disability is not able to be accommodated for within the general education setting. Thus, inclusion of students with special needs is a mandated aspect to LRE.

There has been significant historical controversy regarding the definition of inclusion. Previously, inclusion referred to "placement", which referenced various degrees of inclusion. One definition for inclusion describes a placement or educational setting in which children with disabilities are enrolled in programs that are designed for typically developing children (Buysse

& Wesley, 1999; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998; Leatherman, 2007; Odom, 2000; Rafferty, et al., 2001; Souto-Manning & Mitchell, 2010). In this version of an inclusive classroom, the children with disabilities have the ability to interact with their nondisabled peers. The environment and the curriculum are adapted, modified, and otherwise differentiated to fit the individual needs of the students with disabilities as warranted. Services may be provided within the classroom, through a resource room/pull out model, or in a self contained classroom with opportunity to spend limited time with non-disabled peers. Fuchs & Fuchs (1998) referenced a continuum of services from special homes to full time general education placements, and Stainback & Stainback (1984) believed that full inclusion in the general setting is the only true option.

More recently, inclusion is not considered a placement but describes the process that happens in a classroom with peers (Tutt, 2007). Hence, this definition looks at inclusion as a purposeful way to help a child with disabilities to become part of the community in which they live and interact (Belk, 2005; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010; Nind, et al., 2010; Odom, et al., 2011; Soukakou, 2011). Proponents of this definition of inclusion argue that it is not enough to merely put a child with disabilities in an environment designed for typically abled children, but one must work to ensure the child's participation in activities, which involve the development of relationships with peers and adults. The term should convey that children with disabilities are an integral part of their classrooms, accepted by their classmates, and desired by their friends. This shift of focus to the social experience of children with disabilities in general education environments is a noted recent paradigm shift in the field of both sociology and special education and may be correlated to the

shift of kindergarten preparation being more inclusive of socio-emotional well being compared to academic readiness skills. (Nind, et al., 2010; Odom, et al., 2011; Soukakou, 2011).

Yet a third interpretation has also appeared: inclusive pedagogy (Hazel-Allen, 2013). Much of this can be traced back to the concept of pedagogy -- the method and practice of teaching. The work of Paulo Freire can be used as a foundation for defining the concept of pedagogy. Although Freire (1970/2000) does not offer a concrete definition for pedagogy, he suggests that educators can either promote growth or have a responsibility in limiting growth by how they teach. The National Research Council's Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy (2001) defined pedagogy as the culmination of three aspects: (1) the content of what is being taught, (2) the methods of how it is being taught, and (3) the cognitive socialization or affective characteristics and skills that children are learning along the way. This takes the idea of instruction (being a piece of inclusion) beyond being directed only towards the students with special needs, but instead considers it a pedagogy that is designed to be accessible by all students (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Florian, et al., 2010; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009). Inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011) supports the achievement of all children in the classroom, regardless of ability or disability. An inclusive classroom is characterized by universal accessibility of both the environment and the curriculum, as well as social experiences. The general curriculum (content of what is being taught) does not need to be modified to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) describe current additive inclusion practices as the "process of providing for all by differentiating for some" (p. 826). Jordan et. al (2009) found that meeting the needs of all students on individual levels is good practice and will serve to benefit all students in inclusive classrooms, both those who have disabilities and those who are typically developing. This aligns

with the concept of inclusion involving membership to a community, rather than a visitor as many students with special needs are considered when they are 'pushed in' or 'mainstreamed for limited periods of time (Halvorsen, 2009).

Although not exclusively defined by law, the requirements support inclusion in three areas: placement with typically developing peers, participation in the standard or developmental curriculum, and participation in non-academic activities. Thus, aligning with the idea of inclusive pedagogy. This idea of inclusive pedagogy also aligns with the definition of inclusion from the DEC/NAEYC (2009) joint position statement on preschool inclusion that identified the following recommendations for how to support inclusive practices:

1. Create high expectations for every child, regardless of ability, to reach his or her full potential.
2. Develop an agreed upon program philosophy on inclusion.
3. Establish a system of services and supports that follows a continuum, but keeps inclusion at the forefront.
4. Revise program and professional standards to incorporate key components of high quality inclusion.
5. Develop an integrated professional development system across all early childhood staff.
6. Revise federal and state accountability systems to reflect the needs of all students within inclusive settings.

In summary, inclusion within preschool programs is not a new idea. For over 35 years IDEA (2004) and federal early childhood programs have promoted the concept that services for preschool students with disabilities should be provided within general education settings alongside typically developing peers. Research supports the benefit of preschool inclusion,

indicating that all students within a class achieve higher outcomes (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan, & Barnett, 2010; Guralnick, 2001; Pianta, Barnett, Burchinal, & Thornburg, 2009; Strain & Bovey, 2011). High-quality inclusive classrooms with higher ratios of more competent peers, in particular, are related to positive outcomes for children with disabilities (Justice, Logan, Lin, & Kaderavek, 2014; Strain & Bovey, 2011). Recently, guidelines and recommendations have been made on how to provide high quality preschool inclusion based on inclusive pedagogy, with definitions and frameworks (Barton & Smith, 2015; Belk, 2005; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010; Florian, Young, & Rouse, 2010; Nind, et al., 2010; Odom, et al., 2011; Soukakou, 2011).

Early Childhood Professional Development

Professional development is the term used in education to describe activities to enhance the knowledge and skills of those in the workforce. A comprehensive system of professional development consists of many interrelated elements, including needs assessments, onsite coaching, technical assistance, follow-up, evaluations, and dissemination (Bruder & McCollum, 1992; Striffler & Fire, 1999; Winton & McCollum, 2008).

The research has overwhelmingly indicated that teachers feel the need for more training, professional development, and education in order to support students with disabilities in their classrooms (Bruns & Mogharreban, 2007; Campbell, et al., 2001; Cross, et al., 2004; Kim, 2005; Leatherman, 2007; Lieber, et al., 1998; Odom, 2000; Odom, et al., 2011; Smith & Smith, 2000). Leatherman (2007) found that although teachers felt successful with inclusion, they also felt that more training was necessary for them to be more efficient in their jobs. Jordan (2009) indicates that this feeling of inadequacy is a direct result of the need for supports and has a significant

impact on their perceptions and therefore beliefs about inclusion and inclusive pedagogy or practices. Florian & Black-Hawkins (2011) warns that "both the relocation of specialist provision and the disregard for approaches based on categorical differences between groups of students raise questions about what constitutes good practice, what counts as evidence of such practice and how it can be known" (p.814). It becomes difficult to discern what inclusion looks like in detail on a classroom level (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Britisch (1999) suggests that a teacher's strength lies in the ability to incorporate strategies that will foster interaction and ownership for all students in the classroom, thus promoting inclusion. Jordan (2009) argues that effective inclusion correlates with effective teaching and that improving inclusive practices will benefit all students. The presence of children with disabilities in general early education settings is perceived as an arrangement that will provide positive outcomes for those students and is a growing and learning experience for everyone involved (Leatherman, 2007; Odom, et al., 2011).

A major challenge to the field of early childhood intervention is the provision of ongoing professional development opportunities to support the need for more education, especially with regard to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Bruder, Morgo, Wilson, Stayton, & Dietrich, 2009).

Given the growing number of inclusive early childhood programs that serve young children with disabilities and their families, it is critical that professional development activities target both general and special early educators. Yet, until 2008, there was no definition for professional development within early childhood. The absence of a definition of professional development in early childhood likely contributes to the lack of a common vision for the most effective ways of organizing and implementing professional development to improve the quality of the early childhood workforce (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009). There is a growing

consensus that existing early childhood professional development efforts at the national, state, and local levels are fragmented at best (Winton & McCollum, 2008). Professional development opportunities can range from a single workshop to a semester-long academic course. Recently, a variety of approaches, such as technical assistance, coaching, consultation, mentoring, and communities of practice, have gained national attention as key components of professional development for providing practitioners with guidance and feedback (Buysse & Wesley, 2005, 2006; Buysse, Wesley, Snyder, & Winton, 2006; Dinnebeil, Buysse, Rush, & Eggbeer, 2008; Hanft, Rush, & Sheldon, 2004; Winton, 2006).

PD in early childhood has two primary objectives; (1) to advance the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices of early childhood providers in their efforts to educate children and support families; (2) to promote a culture for ongoing professional growth in individuals and systems (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009). To achieve these two goals, Trivette (2005) and Winton (2006) have suggested that effective PD: (1) be grounded in specific practice-focused content; (2) be intense, sustained over time; (3) be organized around sequenced approach to learning; (4) emphasize application to real life situations; (5) build on learner's current level of understanding; (6) include guidance and feedback to the learner; and (7) be aligned with instructional goals, learning standards, and curriculum materials.

The National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) reviewed the literature as the first step in developing a definition and conceptual framework of professional development. This review led to six key assumptions about professional development:

1. The term professional development encompasses all types of facilitated learning opportunities, for example, those that result in college credit or degrees as well as those that generally are less intensive and do not yield credits or degrees; those that

occur largely through formal coursework and those that are more informal and situated in practice.

2. The early childhood workforce constitutes a group of professionals who are widely diverse with respect to their roles (e.g., teachers, teaching assistants, care providers, paraprofessionals, disability specialists, consultants, technical assistance providers, family support providers, administrators); organizational affiliations (e.g., Head Start, child care, pre-kindergarten, preschool, and public school programs); qualifications, education, and experience; and racial, ethnic, socio-economic, cultural, and linguistic characteristics. They serve diverse young children who vary widely in terms of their abilities, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, culture, and language.
3. Families of young children are essential partners in all aspects of early education and intervention, including professional development. Families can play key roles as both recipients and providers to enrich professional development for all learners. The role of families should be acknowledged in planning, delivering, and evaluating professional development, even though the term professional is used in the definition.
4. The role of learners in professional development is to actively engage in learning experiences that lead to the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions and the application of this knowledge in practice.
5. The roles of providers in professional development are to organize and facilitate learning experiences that respond directly to problems in practice.
6. Conceptualizing professional development as three intersecting components (the "who," the "what," and the "how") can be used as an organizing framework for planning and evaluating professional development. Although a comprehensive

> system of professional development must take into account a variety of other factors such as access to learning opportunities and incentives to participate, the "who," the "what," and the "how" may be viewed as the core of a professional development framework aimed at promoting highly effective teaching and intervening.

In response to concerns about the fragmented nature of many early childhood professional development efforts (Winton & McCollum, 2008) and the absence of an agreed-on definition of professional development in the early childhood field and based on the assumptions from the literature review, the National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI) developed a definition and framework for professional development across all sectors of the early childhood field (Buysse et al., 2009; NPDCI, 2008). The definition of professional development proposed by NPDCI is as follows: "Professional development is facilitated teaching and learning experiences that are transactional and designed to support the acquisition of professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions as well as the application of this knowledge in practice. The key components of professional development include: (a) the characteristics and contexts of the learners (i.e., the who of professional development, including the characteristics and contexts of the learners and the children and families they serve); (b) content (i.e., the what of professional development; what professionals should know and be able to do; generally defined by professional competencies, standards, and credentials); and (c) the organization and facilitation of learning experiences (i.e., the how of professional development; the approaches, models, or methods used to support self-directed, experientially oriented learning that is highly relevant to practice)" (p. 3). This can be broken down more simplistically into the WHO, the WHAT, and the HOW.

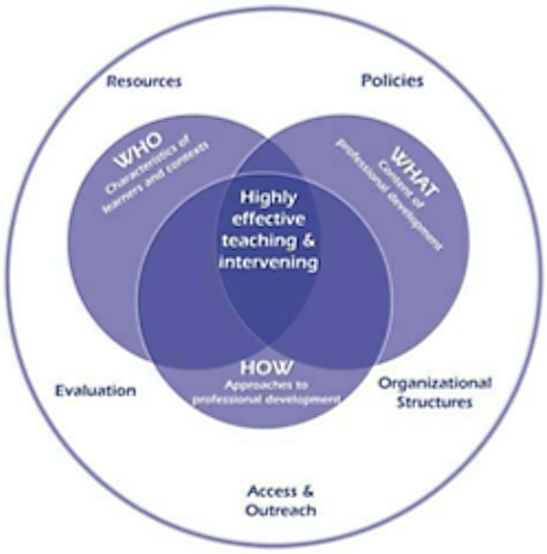


Figure 2: NPDCI framework for Professional Development in Early Childhood

Figure 2 shows the NPDCI conceptual framework for professional development (Buysse et al., 2009). Although a comprehensive system of professional development must take into account a variety of factors, such as access to learning opportunities and incentives to participate, the who, the what, and the how can be viewed as the core of a professional development system aimed at promoting highly effective teaching and intervening. The NPDCI framework can be used to plan and organize professional development in early childhood on a broad range of topics, including high quality inclusive programs and practices.

More concisely, the definitions of each element in the conceptual framework (NPDCI, 2008) can be explained as:

• The Who: Describe the characteristics of learners in terms of their qualifications, roles and experience, along with the characteristics and contexts of the children and families they serve.

• The What: Describe the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that will be the focus of PD, along with any standards or competencies related to this content area.

• The How: Describe the PD approaches that will be used to organize and facilitate learning, including methods for providing ongoing support, collaboration, guidance, and feedback on specific practices.

PD efforts need to promote high quality approaches and use evidence-based practice (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009). PD should not simply be a seminar, workshop, or consultation because there are multiple systems and sectors—in other words, there are multiple WHOs, WHATs, and HOWs in terms of the conceptual framework, each overlapping and connecting. Some of the PD terms--coaching, consultation, mentoring, lesson, reflective supervision, technical assistance, and communities of practice—have appeared in a concept paper that supports collaboration and change in early childhood (Buysse, Winton, & Rous, 2009). Yet, the authors also noted that there is little agreement on how these methods can enhance PD or how they can be effective in improving professional practices.

In summary, as inclusion practices increase, there is a need to provide additional professional development and training to support early childhood staff (the who) on best practices for creating inclusive pedagogy (the what). Approaches to providing professional development (the how) vary with regard to process, procedure, and effectiveness, but one method stands out for effectiveness and positive regard from participants.

McLesky (2011) proposes one key characteristic of professional development is to provide participants with novel skills or strategies for instruction. Improving upon teacher practice has been correlated to improved student outcomes (Englert & Rozendal, 2004; Fuchs &

Fuchs, 2001). McLesky (2011) summarizes that although there are many forms of professional development that are widely used, few result in changes in teacher practices. The predominant method of PD has historically been based on an expert-centered model (Choy, Chen, & Bugarin, 2006) with much research to indicate it is not effective in changing classroom practice (Butler, Lauscher, Jarvis-Sellinger, & Beckingham, 2004; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Richardson & Placier, 2001; Sprinthall, Reiman, & Thies-Sprinthall, 1996; Waldron & McLeskey, 2010).

Most structural definitions of early childhood professional development identify it by its various forms of organization. Broadly, professional development efforts have traditionally taken five forms: (a) formal education; (b) credentialing; (c) specialized, on-the-job in-service training; (d) coaching and/or consultative interactions; and (e) communities of practice (COPs) or collegial study groups (Zaslow & Martinez-Beck, 2006).

Much is now known about the five forms of professional development. Originally it was thought that higher levels of formal education related to improved outcomes (Pianta, 2006; Tout et al., 2006). However, a comprehensive review by Early et al. (2007) of seven large-scale studies found little correlation between teachers' level of education and academic outcomes for children. A recent meta-analysis found that specialized training - not in the form of advanced education - does in fact improve the competencies of early childhood teachers, including their attitudes, knowledge, and skills (Fukkink & Lont, 2007). More effective training programs strive to ensure opportunities for participants to practice key skills in the training environment (Joyce & Showers, 2002) and provide feedback on the practice of new teaching skills immediately or later on the job (Maloney, Phillips, Fixsen, & Wolf, 1975). Behavioral rehearsal (e.g., practice, role playing) of new skills and individualized feedback are often recognized as important phases in staff development efforts (Blase, Fixsen, & Phillips, 1984; Joyce & Showers,

2002; Kealey, Peterson, Gaul, & Dinh, 2000). Additional meta-analysis on the outcomes of different training methods for teachers (not limited to early childhood educators) revealed that multidimensional methods of training yielded positive effects in knowledge and skill acquisition (Joyce & Showers, 2002). In addition, various components of training are dependent on the goal of professional development. For example, when disseminating knowledge is the objective of training, information combined with demonstrations, practice, and feedback increases knowledge more considerably (effect size = 1.31) compared to information-giving alone (effect size = 0.5; Bennett, 1987; Showers, Joyce, & Bennett, 1987). When skill development is the main goal, the inclusion of practice often results in effect sizes of 1.18 versus 0.5 without practice. When coaching is added, skill acquisition continues to increase and transfer of learning to work with children is more likely. Transfer of learning to the work setting is not achieved in isolation, but requires some ongoing support following training (Davis, 1995; Joyce & Showers, 2002). All of this has lead to an evolution of professional development into more learner centered, based more on professional growth and collaboration, active learning, and with ongoing practice, reflection and feedback (Desimone, 2009; Elmore, 2002; ; Hawley & Valli, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lawless & Pelligrino, 2007; McLeksy, 2011). This is often referred to as a 'community of practice'.

Communities of Practice within Early Childhood

Working with children with and without special needs involves collaborating with a diverse group of professionals (Miller, Fader, & Vincent, 2001). Collaboration requires the sharing of team member resources such as information, skills, equipment, and materials (Deboer & Fister, 1995-1996). Collaboration has been described as a process rather than a product

(Friend & Bursuck, 2002; Kennedy, Higgins, & Pierce, 2002). Bruner (1991) and Pugach & Johnson (1995) defined it as a process to use for reaching goals that cannot be attained efficiently by acting alone, and what occurs when all members of a team are working together and supporting each other to achieve a specific goal.

One way to incorporate effective professional development based on learner-centered growth and collaboration is through communities of practice. Communities of practice are a form of ongoing professional development that is becoming more widely known in the field of early childhood education and intervention (Helm, 2007; Wesley & Buysse, 2006). Communities of practice are defined as groups of individuals who come together on the basis of a common professional interest and a desire to improve their practice in a particular area by sharing their knowledge, insights, and observations (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002).

This model of participation in a community of learners stems from Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (1999) work that defined several models of teacher learning that have strong implications for connecting teacher knowledge and practice. The concept of 'knowledge of practice' draws upon research knowledge and how it is integrated into a classroom through the use of teacher inquiry, collaboration, and participation (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Recently, more teachers and researchers are employing knowledge of practice frameworks to bridge the gap between research and teacher practice (Barab, Barnett, & Squire, 2002; Cobb, McClain, de Silva Lamberg & Dean, 2003). In this format, knowledge of practice pulls research knowledge into classroom practice and includes teachers as central to the experience. Collaboration, inquiry into the process, and how teaching pedagogy shifts is the framework for using a concept that through research promises to be effective within the classroom environment but can then be implemented

to determine practicality or real life effect. Through sharing experiences, success, and challenges, teachers may determine the need to change the practice or to hail it as a success.

As Lave and Wenger (1991, p.98) theorize, membership in a community of practice implies 'participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities'. It requires the participation of the people involved in: inventing and adapting customs, participating in discourse practices and tools, and reifying traditions as individuals move in their participatory roles from the periphery to more central roles of participation in the community. "In the end, members of the community of practice learn from their efforts to develop the principles and practices for themselves" (Rogoff et al., 2001, p.10). Therefore, participation in a community of learners necessitates 'intersubjectivity' (sharing understanding) amongst members, informed and developed by members' efforts to appropriate, invent, transform, and distribute cognitive tools and resources related to the problems and discourse practices of the community.

Wenger (1998) roots COP in social theory of learning, which integrates four components. Learning must have:

1) Meaning: A way of talking about the experience and the how it has meaning to our life
2) Practice: A way of talking about shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can help sustain mutual engagement with the experience

3) Community: A way of talking about the social configurations to define the worth of the experience and recognizing the importance of participation

4) Identity: A way of talking about how learning changes who we are and how we perform within the context of the community.

From a social-constructivist viewpoint, the role of social learning theory within a COP comes to play and is situated and instantiated within a COP. Social learning theory is critical in explaining how the perceptions, practices, and knowledge are constructed in the COP, as well as in shaping the collective thinking and identities that emerge through the social interactions and participation of members in the COP. In an educational COP, the emphasis is on putting 'knowledge into practice', which requires: that the *construction of meanings* be meaningful and practical (making the experience relevant to what teachers do); that it is focused on *developing shared tools and practices* that can be sustained in the classroom (tools that help sustain the work, and a framework with a set of principles and goals to guide participants' thoughts and actions); that it be developed and tested through *participation in a community* (a group of like-minded individuals who work together and support one another in the COP, and by extension, take into account the student participants in the inclusion classrooms); and that the COP form new *identities* (acknowledging how a broader and newfound sense of knowledge may transform teaching pedagogy and identities; which will be reflected in one's deeper involvement and participation in the COP, as well as in broader contexts with children, peer teachers and educators).

A community of practice framework also requires the full participation of the people involved in: inventing and adapting customs, participating in constructing and employing discourse practices and tools, and reifying traditions as individuals move in their participatory roles from the periphery to more central roles of participation in the community (Lave & Wenger, cite). In this model, participation in the COP not only shapes the mind and transforms everyday knowledge and concepts into scientific concepts (Daniels, 2001), but draws teachers into more central roles of participants and co-researchers within the community as they share, construct, and expand upon the scientific concepts they are acquiring, and participate in the very enterprise of doing research related to studying their inclusive practices in early childhood contexts.

In a COP that focuses on the implementation and evaluation of best practices for inclusion in authentic classroom contexts, there emerges a much clearer set of relationships that connect the practical and scientific planes of educational research. Scientific concepts are formed on the foundation of systematic, organized, hierarchical thinking, which is embedded in everyday references and thought. Thus, there is a blending of scientific and everyday or spontaneous concepts (Daniels, 2001), as everyday knowledge is transformed into more abstract and theoretical associations through participation in an academic discourse. Social learning theory provides the teachers with a systematic and organized set of practices (from a research base) that are embedded in (and stem from) everyday classroom practices as teachers adopt new ways of knowing, ways of seeing, ways of acting, and ways of thinking about inclusive practices as members of the COP. In turn, teachers' enactments of particular practices shaped the evolution of subsequent discourse in the COP, resulting in the construction of new meanings, tools and practices, and identities. There is an appropriation of ideas that is created within the

COP, enacted within the classroom, and then transformed into everyday practice. Students within the classrooms are part of the bridging of drawing research into practice as the teachers broker specific stories, artifacts, and examples from their classrooms. In a sense, students are a sub-members of the COP that inform the larger COP. Students are impacted by the COP through the transformation in teachers' practice. Gavelek and Raphael (1996) describe this as a harvesting of information. Through the COP, teachers' previous knowledge has been transformed and through enactments within the classroom, this transformation is harvested by the students, who in turn inform the ongoing COP. It is a cyclical event that continues to move as transformations occur.

Not only is it cyclical, but the COP is layered as well. The larger COP, comprised of ECSE teachers and myself, had been previously established. Once inclusion became our main goal, sub COPs of grew as each ECSE teacher worked with different GSRP teachers and ancillary staff. A third layer involved students as part of the COP as this is who harvested the transformation of teachers' new skills and knowledge. A final layer involved stakeholders who attended three COP meetings over the course of the school year where the entire group (all COPs) were brought together. Figure 3 depicts the multiple layers of participants within and across COPs and who was involved.

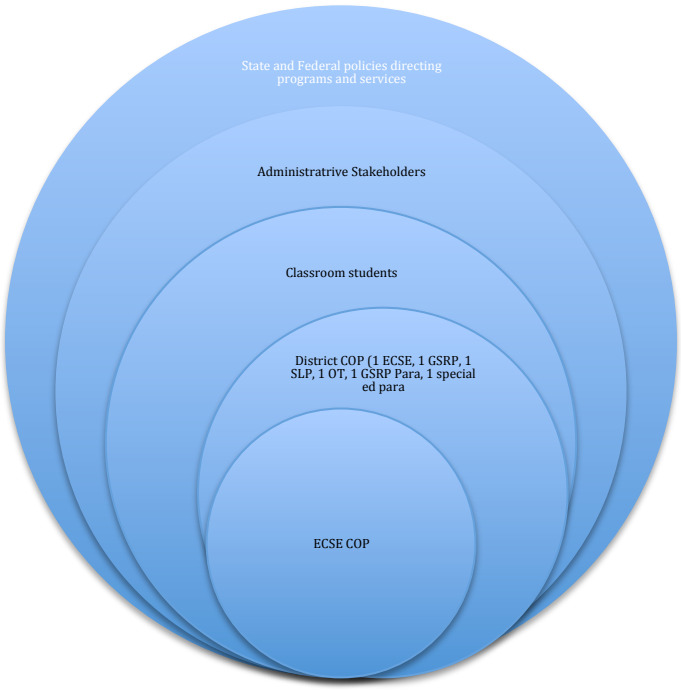


Figure 3: COP layers

An abundance of literature suggests ways for establishing collaboration through a community of practice. The most often mentioned factors are communication, time for common planning, establishing shared visions for instructional goals and strategies, and managing the classroom environment (Smith & Leonard, 2005). The nature of collaborative knowledge, skills, and dispositions can improve working relationships, service delivery, and learner outcomes. Recent investigations cover many topics; for example, the value of collaboration and cooperation (Dettmer, Thurston, & Dyck, 2002); the elimination of special education's stigma and the benefits of children without special needs receiving individualized instruction and modifications (Keefe & Moore, 2004); the engagement level of children with special needs compared to that of children without special needs (Hunt, Soto, Marier, & Doering, 2003); and higher attendance rates (Rea et al., 2002).

COPs are not new to the field of early childhood (Bray, Lee, Smith, & Yorks, 2000). Groups can include organization-specific members or a mixture of agency employed teachers and external facilitators. COP meetings require an expert facilitator who has relevant experience and practical wisdom and who can help the group to ask questions, connect and build ideas, expand key points, provide history and useful resources, and stay on task (Kennedy, 2004). "In COP meetings, participants focus on issues, problems, and successes that emerge from authentic situations in their work. This allows for the experience to be highly relevant and applicable for participants. Many groups use a formal protocol for guiding participants in offering reactions, raising questions, and brainstorming next steps. The participants can create and reflect on specific plans and feedback for their own work settings. The goal of these communities is to reduce the research-to-practice gap as well as create self-sustaining networks of stakeholders focused on translating, applying, and in some cases producing new evidence in early education by integrating research findings from scientists with experiential knowledge from practitioners" (Sheridan, Edwards, Marvin, & Knoche, 2009, p. 383).

Research also speaks to the effectiveness of COPs. Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, and Birman (2002) conducted a longitudinal study that replicated and extended cross-sectional national findings and provided research of the link between focusing on specific teaching interventions in professional development and having teachers implement the specific classroom interventions. The data indicated that "professional development is more effective in changing teachers' classroom intervention when it has collective participation of teachers from the same school, department, or grade; and active learning opportunities, such as reviewing student work or obtaining feedback on teaching; and coherence, for example, linking to other activities or building on teachers' previous knowledge" (p. 102), i.e., a community of practice. It is

interesting to note that Desimone et al. (2002) also found that active learning opportunities for teachers increased the effect of the professional development on teachers' instruction (p. 81). Borko (2004, as cited in Wiliam, 2006) states that research on teacher learning indicates that professional learning communities (PLCs), or communities of practice, provide the most effective process for teacher change. Further studies of PLCs or COPs have determined that when teachers are involved in a collaborative process to examine teaching instruction and are provided an opportunity to engage in dialogue with other teachers, student achievement increases more quickly than when teachers are not involved in this type of process (Darling-Hammond, 1995). Yet this is not without some tangible tool that is implemented, used, or taught.

COP Tools and Practices for Effective Inclusion

An effective COP often begins with agreed-upon tools and practices related to their shared goal. Wertsch & Tulviste (2005) describe human mental functioning as being inherently social and that it incorporates socially organized cultural tools. Thus, human action is mediated by tools (cultural tools) and signs (psychological tools). Psychological tools can be used to direct the mind and behavior to influence change. Cultural tools are used to bring about changes in other objects within the environment. However, tools and practices in a collaborative community are directed at achieving a shared or common goal.

This is exactly what occurred within this study. Teachers came together to commit to a shared goal (inclusion), and in the process, they examined their teaching methods, their pedagogy of instruction, and engaged in dialogues regarding how to shift teaching practices to promote inclusion. In addition, aligning with a social constructivist theory, a set of tools guided the COP to provide the members with new ways of knowing, seeing, acting, and thinking in

order to help the participants attain their shared goals. These tools were introduced within the COP where several members, who were more knowledgeable than others, were able to lead the development of other less-knowledgeable members, as they demonstrated how to put the specific tools into everyday practice.

The first tool was that utilized was an article on promoting high-quality preschool inclusion (Barton and Smith, 2015). This article helped to establish a framework for developing a common language, shared assumptions, assumed constraints, and a collective understanding about the shared COP goal. Two tools that were also quickly identified (additionally serving as scientific concepts to be utilized within the COP; and secondary to administrative push and GSRP resources), were Universal Designs for Learning Early Childhood (UDLEC) and the use of Evidenced-Based Practices (EBP). Through the use of EBP, teachers were able to create and promote UDLEC principles in order to achieve the shared goal of inclusion. Shifts in teacher pedagogy were mediated through the use of tools (EBP and UDLEC), within a social collaborative learning experience (COP) where members shared knowledge to develop new skills to take back to the community as a whole. The role of EBPs in this study will be discussed later in Chapter Four.

The tools were introduced during COP meetings and as part of the state- and county-wide professional development requirement. Several members from each district COP, along with the core ECSE COP, also participated in statewide EBP training that highlighted the following EBP concepts: behavior/self-regulation strategies, communication strategies, visuals, effective classroom practices, and structuring play. This information was brought back to the rest of the COP members where new knowledge was shared, discussed, and eventually, enacted within the classroom practices of specific teachers.

The Conn-Powers et al. 2006 article, *The Universal Design of Early Education: Moving Forward for All Children*, served as an additional tool to grow the idea of creating learning environments to be inclusive for all students from the start, without the need to modify or adapt for specific students. This article laid the groundwork for the use of EBP across entire classroom environments and encouraged teachers to think about how to adopt teaching practices to be inclusive, rather than modifying teaching to provide accommodations.

Additionally, in the fall of 2015, NAEYC issued an Infographic that depicted three strategies to promote preschool inclusion. Ironically, EBP and UDLEC, along with offering structured choices (which is also an EBP), were the three identified strategies in the Infographic. Sharing the Infographic periodically throughout the COP meetings helped to validate that the work we were doing was research based, supported by stakeholders at the federal level, and that we were not creating or inventing something new, but that we were following guidelines and recommendations to implement a recommended change in practice.

Summary

In 2001, Wesley and Buysse posed a solution to the early childhood community struggles of connecting theory and research with practice, reducing professional isolation, and translating principles into action. This came at the height of the preschool inclusion research that was indicating an increase of students with special needs participating in general education environments with typically developing peers. Preschool inclusion was becoming more predominant, with more general education teachers involved in the education of students with special needs. Yet, few felt qualified or prepared to do so. Wesley and Buysse (2001) suggested the use of communities of practice to expand professional roles and share knowledge in order to

benefit all students within a classroom setting. The authors suggested that the field of early intervention could benefit from "closing the gap between research and practice, reducing the isolation of early intervention practice, and optimizing the translation of principles (i.e. intervention) into concrete policies and practices" (p. 115). This aligns with the social constructivist COP viewpoint; that professional development through COP is rooted in social collaboration. Professional development through COP is seen as 'participation anti-thesis' compared to more dated models of professional development which were isolative and seen as 'internalization thesis'. This idea that professional development through COP as a social learning experience fosters the idea that adults can create a setting (COP) in which new knowledge (tools) are utilized through a collaborative act. Bringing individual experiences, previous knowledge, and specific expertise, each member in a COP becomes, in a sense, a knowledgeable other in which to assist and support the COP participants into new knowledge and skill. By allowing each COP to maintain their voice, shared knowledge became scientific concepts that were distributed and constructed by all member of the group, reifying concepts into everyday practice.

Clearly, the best practice is to create a model of professional development between and amongst early childhood staff in order to share knowledge, change pedagogy to reflect best practice interventions and use of strategies beneficial for all students within the environment in order to create a setting where all students are successful. A collaborative model that also includes reflection, implementation practice, and feedback, as well as meaningful hands on experiences is critical. Through the use of tools that were mediated within the COPs, brokered by teachers, and enacted within the inclusive classrooms, individual teaching practices were

transformed and new knowledge was spread throughout the community on how to best support teachers for promoting high quality preschool inclusion.

CHAPTER THREE: FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Qualitative Study Utilizing Humanizing PAR

By utilizing the NPDCI Conceptual Framework for Professional Development in Early Childhood layered with the definition of inclusion from the DEC/NAEYC joint position statement, both early childhood and early childhood special educators will engage and participate in collaboration through a community of practice to promote high quality inclusion to support the notion that inclusion is best practice for all students.

This study is rooted in Participatory Action Research and employs a qualitative methodology research design to better understand human experience as well as to make recommendations to stakeholders on the most effective model for supporting teachers who are participating in inclusive preschool classrooms.

The literature surrounding early childhood inclusion and the implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood settings is overwhelmingly qualitative in nature. Beliefs, perceptions, practices, and roles of teachers cannot be measured as easily as prescribed academic outcomes. In order to understand how teachers facilitate inclusion or implement interventions, researchers must look in-depth at what is happening in inclusive classrooms and be able to interpret the findings in an unbiased fashion. Qualitative researchers try to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and describe what those meanings are (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). According to Branlinger et al. (2005), qualitative research is a way to represent how someone interacts and interprets his/her view of situations. It is used to discover insights and interpretations rather than to control a set of variables or to test a hypothesis (Merriam, 1988). It allows the researchers to interpret and bring to light an understanding of particular subjects and events (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

As the purpose in this study is to explore a phenomenon while comparing data on student academic achievement across three different preschool inclusion models, some quantitative data will be gathered. By definition, mixed methods is a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and "mixing" or integrating both quantitative and qualitative data at some stage of the research process within a single study for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of the research problem (Tashakkori & Teddlie 2003; Creswell 2005). When used together, quantitative and qualitative methods complement each other and allow for a more robust analysis, taking advantage of the strengths of each (Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Green & Caracelli, 1997; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Hence this study does not necessarily meet the criteria as a mixed methods study.

Although quantitative data will be gathered, within the current study, the qualitative components will have a greater emphasis and the quantitative methods will be used in a secondary role. Yet, concurrent timing will occur as quantitative data will be taken at the start and the end of the study for comparison while qualitative data will be collected and analyzed throughout the study. Data from the quantitative and qualitative data points will be combined during the final step of the research process, once the data has been collected and analyzed. Conclusions or inferences will be drawn that reflect what was learned from the combination of results from the two aspects of the study, through a synthesis of the results in a discussion. In keeping with accordance to the principles of a mixed methodology design, what was learned will be a culmination of both data sets (Adamson, 2004). To the researcher's knowledge. no other study has employed this type of qualitative metholodogy during research with preschool inclusion. Although the focus is on teacher practice and will be analyzed through qualitative methods, the importance of documenting growth across student achievement is an important

component for stakeholders. This quantitative information will be gathered, but will not be the focal point of the current research study.

The study will utilize a variety of data generation techniques (semi-structured interviews, observations, documents, and field notes, as well as pre and post test standardized developmental achievement scores within a 6 month time frame). The following graphic represents the overall framework of the study, which stems a social cultural learning theory framework and utilizes PAR to obtain qualitative data that humanizes the experience. By analyzing the teachers' voices, ideas, thoughts, and conversations, the data goes beyond a number, and allows for a rich, detailed description of how the teachers interacted with one another to promote inclusion as a way to better prepare their all preschool age students for kindergarten.

Figure 4 illustrates how social cultural theory provided a framework for the current PAR research study through the use of COP.

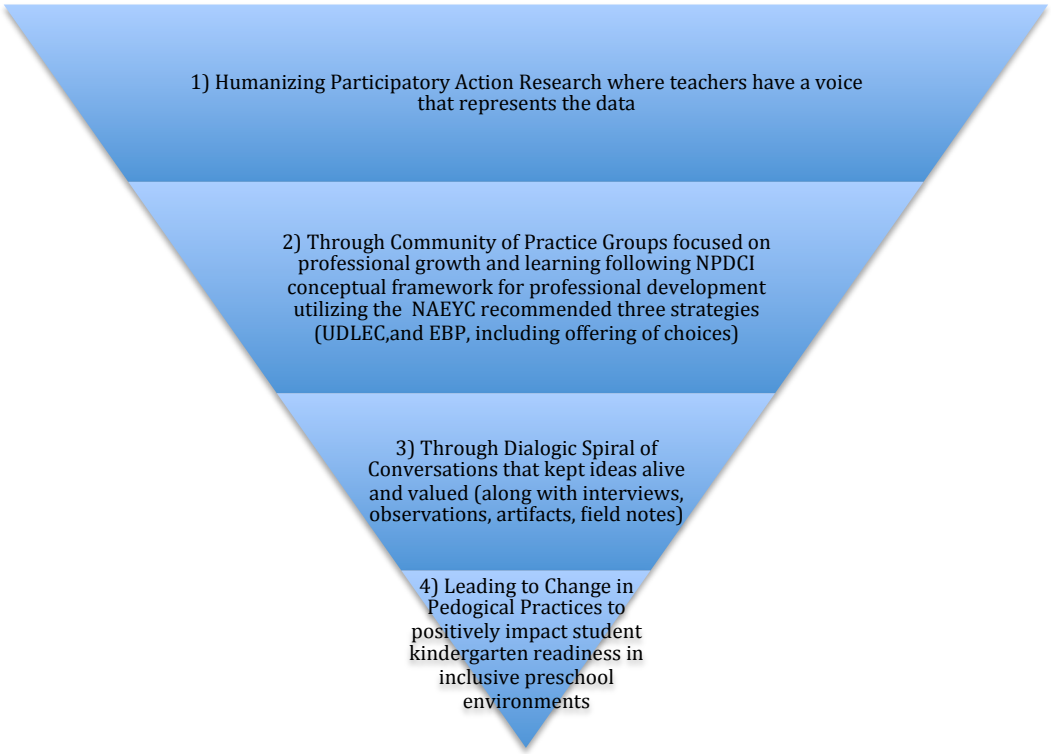


Figure 4: Methodology framework

1) The promotion of teacher voices (multi-voicedness) is the dialectical means by which knowledge and practices are constructed in the COP. This multi-viscidness gives other members' access to the practices of more knowledgeable others; as well as the contradictions of practice that gave birth to growth, change, and development in the community; 2) The tools of the COP that mediated performance began with the UDLEC and EBP informational texts; 3) Practices/problems were used to reify knowledge and practices in the talk that was brokered by teachers in the COP, and negotiated further through the teachers' implementation and adoption of practices in the classroom. These reified and transformed into new practices, involving new ways of knowing, new ways of talking, and new ways of acting; 4) Change was further

negotiated, brokered, and realized through the discourse and conversations among members in the COP that were tied to implementation efforts and problem-solving activities.

Role of the Researcher

Irizarry and Brown (2014) define Participatory Action Research (PAR) "as a pedagogical approach…problem-based and learner-centered, as researchers identify, conceptualize, and investigate problems. PAR projects capitalize on researchers' existing knowledge while building new knowledge and skills, and they are guided by the needs, interests, perspectives, and experiences of local researchers" (p. 65-66). Our work was very much rooted in PAR. A problem was identified and investigated by the participants. Collaboratively, we drew upon collective past knowledge and existing knowledge. Together, we built new knowledge and skills guided by a need in order to make a change. The action was initiated by identifying the problem. Our ECSE students were struggling to find success when they transitioned to general education kindergarten classrooms. In order to investigate the problem, we engaged in research, observation, reflection regarding existing knowledge, and discussion. From there, we implemented a change in teaching practices -- a pedagogical shift-guided by the needs of the students and that built new knowledge and skill sets. Turnball (2002) describes how allowing teachers to make decisions about the programs they implement encourages teacher "buy in". Veg and Wold (2005) expand on this and found that programs that are most successful involve teachers in the development stage of the program. When teachers see the need to change and truly believe in the need, they are more likely to do the work to make a difference.

Kindon (2005) expands on PAR as a research framework that encompasses a group who works together to generate and analyze information to help transform thinking.

Glesne (2011) adds that when a researcher becomes an insider, there is a higher potential for developing, collaborating, reflecting, and analyzing data to contribute to a change within one's own community. As the researcher in this study, this is exactly what I hope to do. By participating alongside the participants, it demonstrates that I am vested in the work and willing to do what other teachers are doing in order to promote change and growth.

As the sole researcher for this study, I was involved in several different ways. Not only was I facilitating the professional learning through organizing and being involved in the COP, I was also an active participant. I began by carefully listening to the stories of the ECSE (Early Childhood Special Education) teachers, hearing what the struggles were, and observing students across academic settings to truly understand what the needs were and how to start to bridge the gap between the role of the ECSE teacher, and the success of students. I strongly felt that the teachers needed to actively be involved in order to have buy in to a much needed educational changes. Therefore, I approached this project with the notion that the teachers had to be actively involved. Step one was to employ a Participatory Action Research study that kept the teachers at the forefront of what we were working on as a group. As I was also a member of the group, I wanted to maintain the humanizing aspect that would ensure the data was more than numbers, that the voices of the teachers were clear and consistent. By participating in a research project alongside the teachers, and humanizing the experience, the process aligned with Kinloch and San Pedro's definition of PiH; that this project was an experience with people with the purpose for educational change and encouraged collaboration for a change (2014). We started with a conversation that led to collaboration, which led to change. Collaboration does not always mean perfection; within collaboration there is often "conflict, complications, silences, and

pauses…among people as they learn to listen to each other…" (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014, p.29).

Both PiH research and Communities of Practice encompass listening as an essential aspect of learning. Schultz (2009) adds to the concept of listening in research; that listening is essentially about being in relationship to one another and through this relationship change or transformation occurs; "that listening and teaching are both fundamentally about being in relationship with another, creating the conditions where both parties are open to change or transformation" (Schultz & Smulyan, 2007). Therefore, it made sense to start the project by listening. This project is also grounded in Bhakti's concept of dialogism-but with Kinloch and San Pedro's twist of the dialogic spiral. Kinloch and San Pedro (2014) identify the dialogic spiral as "the construction of a conversation between two or more people whereby the dialogic process of listening and speaking co-creates an area of trust between speakers" (p. 30). One speaker spurs ideas for the next speaker. This was essential to this project. In essence, we were given a blank slate and asked to fill it. As with any group, there were voices that were louder than others. Yet, as the researcher and facilitator, it was my job to bring balance to the voices, and to ensure that the conversation was sustainable. If the teachers were to essentially stop talking, a COP would not longer exist. So it was vital that the voices continued to speak and the conversation continued to flow. Conversations require active participants on two levels: listening and speaking. There is a balance required between listening to another's' voice and then speaking ones' own voice. Without these two aspects, a conversation cannot be fluid and the COP would fall apart. It was my job to not only maintain this balance, but also to keep the conversation and learning flowing, as well as be an active participant alongside the teachers.

Context of the Study

Selection of Participants

Neither random nor systematic probabilistic sampling is appropriate for the selection of participants because qualitative research does not aim for generalizability, in a quantitative sense. In considering a selection process most suited to qualitative research, purposeful sampling is a salient component. According to Patton (1990), the logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study in depth. Erlandson et al. (1993) indicated that purposive and directed sampling through human interaction increases the range of data exposed and maximizes the researcher's ability to identify emerging themes that take into account contextual conditions and cultural norms. Because this study was concerned with gaining a deeper understanding of the teachers' experience, a purposive sampling approach was selected to address the intensity desired and create the maximum variation (Patton, 1990).

In identifying the participants, it may be helpful to provide background information on the origin of the study. With the Kindergarten Observation Survey 2014 publication of statistics highlighting that ALL (not just students entering kindergarten with an IEP in place) were struggling with social-emotional skills that were impacting academic performance, the county identified areas of improvement. Early Childhood became a focus. With more and more research to support the growth of all students within inclusive early childhood programs, stakeholders within the county decided to push for more inclusion opportunities at the preschool level. After identifying the state policies that would allow and encourage inclusion practices, it was determined that the 2015-2016 school year would look very different regarding early childhood education programs. As my passion for early childhood was known, and inclusion was something I had been striving for within my own role, I was asked to help support the

initiative on a county level. At the end of the 2014-2105 school year, I brought together the four ECSE teachers with whom I had been working with in our COP and piloted the idea of ECSE students enrolling in typically developing early childhood programs for the 2015-2016 school year. Logistics for this were messy, but everyone was motivated to do something different in order to promote kindergarten readiness for ALL students. Since our Local Educational Agency (LEA) for which we were all employees also funds preschool programs, it made sense to start with our fellow preschool colleagues. The preschool programs funded by the LEA included preschool programs under the Head Start umbrella. Both special education services and Head Start programs are centralized within the Local Educational Agency's scope of services that were offered to individual districts across the county. Although there are district and private run preschool programs across the county, to maximize collaborative efforts, we sought out fellow peers and colleagues in order to embark on the journey of initiating preschool inclusion. It was also easier and more manageable to attain administrative support when all staff worked for the same employer. Yet, we didn't want to start with three year olds as developmentally, these students are entering school (whether it is a special education preschool program or not) for the first time and often require more specialized intervention within a more self-contained program. To expand on our work with kindergarten readiness skills, it made sense to target the older students in our ECSE programs who had already completed a year of an ECSE experience and had one more year before they would be enrolling in kindergarten programs. Under the Head Start umbrella, there are various types of preschool programs that will enroll students from three years of age up to kindergarten age. We decided to target the preschool programs that were more academic in nature with a focus on kindergarten readiness. We were not alone in this idea as recently, the governor had promoted a new act to encourage exactly what we were hoping to do.

Great Start Readiness Programs (GSRP) are under the Head Start umbrella, are state funded, and have been in existence since 1985. The programs are designed to provide high quality preschool programming to at risk students. Students are eligible for GSRP enrollment based on a number of risk factors, with identification of a developmental disability being one of these factors. Recently, Public Act 196 of 2014 (PA 196), signed by Governor Snyder on June 24, 2014, enacted several changes for GSRP eligibility. GSRP Eligibility PA 196 identified categorical eligibility for GSRP for some children. Children in foster care, those experiencing homelessness, and *children with an individualized education program (IEP) recommending placement in an inclusive preschool setting* are automatically eligible for GSRP, regardless of other enrollment requirements. This meant we could access the GSRP programs and have guaranteed enrollment for our ECSE students.

As a COP, we started by identifying which students would be appropriate to attend a full day, four day a week typically developing preschool program, taught be a general education preschool teacher, with a minimum of 72 hours of special education service across the course of the school year (in accordance with Michigan Department of Education rules and regulations). Students were identified based on the following criteria:

1. Must be four years of age by December 1 (Great Start Readiness Program enrollment date).
2. Must be independent in the bathroom and toilet trained.
3. Must have a level of language to be able to ask for basic wants and needs.
4. Must have the ability to follow single step, verbal directions.
5. Parents must be on board to agree to a change in placement from a special education preschool room to a general education preschool room

This short descriptor list yielded 18 potential students across four districts. One of the districts had been running an inclusion program for two years previously, but with a limited number of students (2-3) who were pulled back into the ECSE classroom two days a week for a specialized instruction rather than receiving all the special education service time within the general education classroom. The ECSE teacher for this district contacted the parents of students who meet the criteria within her district; I contacted parents of students from the remaining three districts. Not one parent declined; the offer of free, all day preschool with snacks and lunch provided was easy to promote. With the change of program to a general education setting, we were required to complete new IEPs for each student. I worked with each teacher to help write new IEPs and attended each IEP at the end of the 2014-2015 school year to answer questions or concerns parents or staff might have had regarding the change in program.

Historically within the county, preschool students with high special education needs participated in an ECSE classroom, two and one half hours per day, four days per week over the course of the school year. Across the county, four teachers taught 8 half-day ECSE sections as illustrated by the Table 1:

Table 1: Previous ECSE staffing

District One (2 ECSE teachers)	District Two (1 ECSE teacher)	District Three (1 ECSE teacher)
Two AM ECSE sections	One AM ECSE section	One AM ECSE section
Two PM ECSE sections	One PM ECSE section	One PM ECSE section

Although the county has five local districts, two districts were small enough that any preschool age student requiring an ECSE program was bussed to one of the three districts housing ECSE programs within local elementary schools. This had become problematic as one

district had a high number of students being bussed in to one of the ECSE programs, so administration made a change in the ECSE programs for the 2015-2016 school year, as reflected by Table 2.

Table 2: Proposed ECSE staffing 2015-2016

District One (2 ECSE teachers)	District Two (1 ECSE teacher)	District Three (1 ECSE teacher shared between two districts)	District Four (1 ECSE teacher shared between two districts)
Two AM ECSE sections	One AM ECSE section	One AM ECSE section	
Two PM ECSE sections	One PM ECSE section		One PM ECSE section

When our ECSE COP group identified 18 potential students that were being removed from ECSE classrooms and enrolled in general education classrooms, another layer of difficulty was added. Keeping in mind that in order to make this move, students coming from an ECSE classroom, by law, were required to have the following:

1. An IEP to determine a general education setting with a minimum of 72 hours of special education support across the school year.
2. Special education support could be provided by special education teacher or ancillary service provider but must be overseen by an early childhood teacher with a special education endorsement (i.e. case manager).
3. Students could not be removed from the classroom in order to receive special education support as GSRP maintains specific attendance policies that require students attend in full.

Within our ECSE COP, we discussed ways this would be possible. We knew that what we were proposing to do was outside of the box and that our students with high needs

would require a high level of support within general education settings in order to be successful; and that the general education preschool teachers would need support and guidance on how to provide best practice instruction to students with special needs. The one ECSE teacher who had previously pushed her students into a GSRP class expressed a preference for pulling the students back into the ECSE classroom two days a week. Conversation occurred within the COP about the difference between 'visiting' a classroom and being a full member of the community. The teachers all felt they wanted to be the main person to support students in a general education environment, but the barrier was having to remain in their own classrooms to teach additional ECSE students in the special education program. After much dialogue and spiraling of conversation, I proposed an idea to administration to reduce the number of ECSE classrooms and allow the ECSE teachers to team-teach and collaborate with the GSRP teachers. After more dialogue with administration, the following changes were made for the 2015-2016 school year.

Table 3: Final ECSE staffing 2015-2016

District One (previously 2 ECSE teachers)	District Two (previously 1 ECSE teacher)	District Three (previously 1 ECSE teacher shared between two districts)	District Four (previously 1 ECSE teacher shared between two districts)
1 AM ECSE sections/1 AM team-teach section	One AM team-teach section	One AM ECSE section with teacher consulting 2x week to team teach	
Two PM ECSE sections	One PM ECSE section		One PM ECSE section

Logistically, two ECSE teachers were released to provide the maximum amount of support to GSRP programs where our ECSE students would be enrolled. One ECSE teacher would remain teaching solely ECSE sections, and one teacher would drive between two districts to teach ECSE programs, but provide a minimum amount of support to a GSRP program where

the majority of service time would be provided through ancillary (speech and OT) support. This meant that two ECSE teachers would team with GSRP teachers to support all students in a classroom, including ECSE students four mornings a week. In analyzing a GSRP daily schedule (as seen in Appendix C), the majority of higher academic and transition related content occurred in the morning, compared to the afternoon schedule of lunch, story, rest, outdoor play, snack, and going home. It was thought that based on the developmental level of all students, the morning would potentially be the more difficult part of the day where student expectations were higher. Hence, it made more sense for ECSE teachers to be present in the morning to team and collaborate with the GSRP teachers.

Additional GSRP enrollment rules require families to participate in an enrollment appointment, to meet with the teacher prior to starting school via home or community based visit, and to fill out paperwork. Further, up to 16 students can be enrolled within a GSRP program with a recommendation that no more than 25% (i.e. 4) students in the class be identified as a student with special education services established through an IEP. I worked with both parents and GSRP staff over the summer to hold enrollment appointments, to group ECSE students into specific programs to ensure our ECSE teachers would be teaming with no more than two GSRP teachers per week, and to prepare GSRP teachers for some of the potential needs the ECSE students may require (medical, dietary, physical). Additional consideration was taken into account to place students within their local district GSRP program, if possible. Hence, transportation to the GSRP program would be shorter and students would be attending a preschool program with peers that, on most accounts, would also be fellow future kindergarten peers. The following table reflects the established teams:

Table 4: GSRP and ECSE teacher teams

DISTRICT ONE	DISTRICT TWO	DISTRICT THREE
2 GSRP Classrooms within the same building location	1 GSRP classroom	1 GSRP classroom
5 students in room 1 5 students in room 2	5 students in room	2 students in room
1 ECSE teacher between 2 GSRP classrooms	1 ECSE teacher for the 1 GSRP classroom	1 ECSE teacher consulting 2x per week; ancillary staff in GSRP room daily for 30-60 minutes

District Two had the team of ECSE and GSRP teachers who had previously teamed and collaborated. District One and Three were new teams of teachers who had not previously worked together. The fourth District, secondary to logistics of having one GSRP program within the district and an ECSE teacher who was traveling between two districts to teach an AM and PM ECSE class, it was not feasible to place a team of ECSE and GSRP teachers. Two students from this district were bussed to District One in order to participate.

GSRP teachers were told that an inclusion practice would be initiated for the school year. Yet, which GSRP teachers who were to participate were not identified until the start of the 2015-2016 school year secondary to establishing class lists and enrollment of ECSE students into specific GSRP programs. All of the GSRP teachers had experience with ancillary staff coming into their classrooms to provide discipline specific intervention and were very open to teaming with special education staff to support all students' needs. As a participant, I had experience consulting with each of the GSRP teachers, but on a small scale. I knew them by name and had had some professional contact with each previously, but this was also new to me as I would be more actively involved as a consultant across each setting.

Each teacher has varying levels of education and experience. The following table provides background on the teaching partners with regard to education and experience.

Table 5: Teacher qualifications and years of experience

DISTRICT ONE	DISTRICT TWO	DISTRICT THREE
ECSE teacher with MA in Early Childhood, over 20 years of experience	ECSE teacher with MA in Early Childhood, over 20 years of experience	ECSE teacher with MA in Early Childhood, over 20 years of experience
GSRP teacher with BA in Early Childhood Education, 3 years experience	GSRP teacher with BA in Early Childhood Education, over 10 years of preschool experience	GSRP teacher with BA in Early Childhood Education in year one of teaching career
GSRP teacher with BA in Early Childhood Education with 15 years of teaching experience, 4 at the preschool level		

In addition, the make-up of the students varied across programs and settings. The following table illustrates student demographics and previous early childhood special education experience.

Table 6: Student demographics

Eligibility	DOB	Race	Sex	Prior ECSE intervention
ECDD	12/24/10	White	F	1.5 years
SLI	5/8/11	White	M	.5 years
OHI	9/20/11	White	F	1 year
ASD	10/3/11	White	M	1 year
ECDD	8/19/11	White	M	1 year
ECDD	10/6/11	White	F	1 year
ASD (changed from ECDD mid year)	3/8/11	White	M	1 year
ASD (changed from ECDD mid year)	3/8/11	White	M	1 year
ECDD	9/8/11	White	F	1 year
ECDD	1/9/11	White	M	1.5 years
ECDD	4/27/11	White	M	1 year
OHI	11/21/11	White	F	.5 years
ECDD	8/2/11	White	M	1 year
SLI	3/18/11	White	M	1 year
ECDD	10/12/11	White	M	1 year
ASD (changed from ECDD mid year)	4/13/11	White	F	1 year
ASD	5/6/11	White	M	1 year

Setting

The study took place in a midsize county in Michigan. As previously stated, GSRP programs were identified in three of the local districts where ECSE teachers were currently teaching ECSE programs. The setting for District One's two GSRP programs were identified within the Local Educational Agency administration building in the early childhood wing. The wing contained 4 early childhood classrooms and offices for additional staff. An enclosed playground was accessible as were student bathrooms.

The setting for District Two was housed within the community education building of a local district within an early childhood corridor. Three early childhood programs (one special education and 2 general education preschool programs) spanned the hallway, with access to an enclosed playground as well as bathrooms within the classrooms. The ECSE and GSRP classrooms in District Two were next door to each other within the same building. Hence, the two teachers were familiar with one another.

The setting for District Three was housed within an early childhood wing of an old elementary building that was being rented out by state-run educational programs. The wing contained an early childhood special education classroom (ECSE), a classroom for special education staff serving as office/work space, and two GSRP classrooms. Access to the bathrooms were within the preschool classrooms and an enclosed playground was accessible through doors at the end of the hallway. The recently relocated ECSE classroom to this district (as stated from above a shift in program location occurred secondary to an increase in ECSE student population and an ECSE AM section moved to District Three) was down the hall from the GSRP classroom.

With the recently signed Public Act 196 of 2014 (PA 196), students with IEPs were automatically eligible for GSRP programs. Yet, as previously stated, the IEPs required that a minimum of 72 hours of special education services must be provided over the course of the school year. Across each of the three settings, this meant a minimum of 2.5 hours of special education service per week, but does not require that these services be provided solely by an ECSE teacher.

The following table illustrates how the special education service was provided within each setting:

Table 7: Schedule for special education service delivery/teaming in GSRP classrooms

	District One-Classroom 1	District One-Classroom 2	District Two	District Three
ECSE Teacher	M/W 9-10:30 T/TH 10:30-12	M/W 10:30-12:00 T/TH 9-10:30	M/T/TH 9:15-11:45	M/W 11:45-12
Ancillary	SLP: M 12-4 W 9-12 OT: T 10-10:30	SLP: M 9-12; W 12-4 OT: TH 10-10:30	SLP: M/TH 10-10:30 OT: W 10-11	SLP:M-TH 9:30-10:30 OT: T/TH 11 12
Total time per week offered	13.5 hours	13.5 hours	9.5 hours	6.5 hours

Although ancillary staff were part of the special education service that was provided, the ECSE and EC teachers were the main participants in this study. The majority of special education ancillary staff have additional assignments that often span beyond the preschool population and are considered more 'itinerant' in nature. In other words, ancillary staff provide special education support and services to several buildings across each district. It was not feasible for them to participate in every COP meeting secondary to schedules and time constraints. Hence, sub COPs were established between each ECSE teacher and the local GSRP staff. As previously noted, the focal COP consisted of ECSE teachers. As these ECSE teachers pushed out into teaming with GSRP staff, new COPs were formed at the district level and began to include paraprofessionals and additional teaching staff.

Participants engaged in several different COP groups. As one large COP group, every teacher, ECSE and EC, participated in bi-monthly two-hour COP meetings. These also included myself and two other administrators (throughout the year) who were stakeholders in promoting early childhood inclusion. Initially, these meetings focused on establishing common themes,

ideas, and perceptions about inclusion. Over the course of the year, monthly meetings provided regular opportunities for collaborative reflection and dialogue in order to develop a shared view of inclusion. Each month, a different topic was explored related to Universal Designs for Learning, pre-literacy skills, student self-regulation, and evidenced based practices to promote academic growth for all students.

The ECSE teachers and myself also met once a month for three-hour COP meetings. The primary purpose of these meetings was to check in and make sure each teacher was feeling supported; to make sure each one had the resources they needed in order to be successful for collaborating; and to share challenges, ideas, and successes. Additionally, the purpose of these monthly meetings was to continue our work together as we had formed a strong COP over the past two years and the teachers wanted a forum to be able to continue this; as well as it was mandated by our employer as our professional growth time.

Additionally, each district COP met 2-4 times a month as a local district team in order to discuss individual student needs/concerns. As the county-wide program consultant, I participated in these building meetings infrequently, attending only when I was invited. From a researcher standpoint, I felt it was important for the building teams to have space to work with their peers with whom they interacted on a daily or weekly basis and to build that bond and working relationship as a team. Each building team created working agreements that served as group norms for how they interacted, collaborated, met, and worked together, as well as how to resolve conflict should it occur.

Data Collection

Qualitative research does not fit neatly within the boundaries of any single scholarly field (Riessman, 1993). There is no one method for conducting this type of research; it is said to be as diverse as the researchers themselves. According to Patton (1990), a combination method of data collection procedures and techniques for gathering and analyzing data are desirable. This study uses interviews group and individual), observations, and documents to record the stories. Given the main purpose of this study—to hear the experiences and perceptions of the teachers—the interview, observation, and field note process suited this researcher's needs.

In order to investigate the research questions posed by this study, four data sources were utilized; (1) group interviews, (2) individual interviews and teacher self reflections, (3) observations in the classrooms, playground, and staff meetings and during professional development activities (with field notes), and (4) documents/artifacts. As a participant and researcher, I was an active member in each classroom at least twice a week for a minimum of 30 minutes in order to observe, take notes/photos/videos, to review implementation of specific strategies from UDL and evidence based practices, as well as to provide support/consult for any child or teacher who may be struggling. The following table is a guideline of how data was collected specific to each research question.

Table 8: Data collected to address research questions

RESEARCH QUESTION	DATA	FREQUENCY COLLECTED
How do teachers' personal definitions of inclusion change throughout participation in COP?	Individual Interviews Classroom observations Teacher Reflections/Inclusion Definitions COP meeting agendas Feedback and Ongoing dialogue with teachers	Monthly Bimonthly 3 times a year Monthly Weekly
How do COP meetings encourage teachers to learn from each other?	Teacher reflections COP dialogue during meetings with focus on HOW this was done (i.e. modeling? Co-teaching? Peer feedback?)	Monthly Monthly, weekly in COP working classroom team meetings
What practices do teachers employ in the classroom to support inclusion through participation in COP? And How do COP support teacher PD to facilitate successful inclusive classrooms to shift attitudes and beliefs?	Observations, video, photos, field notes, checklist Teacher reflections and ongoing dialogue with teachers Conversation analysis post COP meetings and classroom observations, teacher survey	Biweekly Biweekly to Monthly

Quantitative research addresses the preselected factors of successful inclusion and teacher collaboration (Riessman, 1993). Given that one objective of the study is to determine which type of inclusion model is most effective in preparing students for kindergarten, a developmental standardized assessment was administered at the start of the school year, and 6 months later. All students enrolled in a GSRP classroom are assessed every fall, winter, and spring utilizing the Teaching Strategies Gold (TSG) curriculum. TSG is a researched curriculum-embedded assessment to help teachers document and evaluate children's skills, knowledge, and behaviors by using actual classroom-based experiences, activities, and products. The results inform and improve instruction while fitting into the existing curriculum. It is based on seven categories, or

domains, of classroom learning and experience: personal and social development; language and literacy; mathematical thinking; scientific thinking; the arts; physical development and health.

Although quantitative data is helpful in obtaining a number for comparison, there are still voices behind the numbers and factors. Hence, the qualitative methodology approach.

Data Collection Procedures

The study took place from September to March during a calendar school year. Data was collected from multiple sources and in multiple ways. Interviews, observations, and document analysis are all used in qualitative studies either in isolation, or in some combination form (Creswell, 2009). Yet, often in qualitative case studies, all three are frequently used together (Merriam, 1998). The holistic nature of this study leads the researcher to require more data on deeper, richer levels in order to understand the experiences of the participants. In order to get to the depth of the experience, I collected data in the form of conversation analysis (semi-structured individual and group interviews), classroom observations, community of practice group observations, field notes from professional development activities, documents/artifacts, and quantitative measures from administration of a developmental standardized assessment.

Data Analysis

Data analysis relies on organizing what you have seen, heard, read, and collected in order to make sense of the experience (Glesne, 2011). Relying more on the qualitative aspect of the study, much of the data was gathered through conversation analysis and thematic analysis and will be subjected to ongoing analysis throughout the study. Within conversation analysis, data is generally gathered through talk in everyday occurrences. This happened frequently through the

study, especially during community of practice activities. "Conversation analysis studies the various practices adopted by conversational participants during ordinary, everyday talk….how failures are dealt with and how conversations are opened and terminated" (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 39).

A second form of analysis that was employed involved thematic analysis. Here, the researcher engages in ongoing analysis of the data to seek out themes and patterns (Glesne, 2011) that relate to conflict between teachers as they navigate a new inclusive pedagogy. Bogdana and Biklen (1982) as cited in Ryan and Bernard (2003) suggest to examine the context and setting, perspectives of information and the participants ways of thinking about people, objects, and relationships. Analyzing conversations to determine the presence of possible conflict or tension is beneficial in also resolving conflict as quickly as possible in order to maintain effective and positive teacher working relationships. By examining the ways in which the teachers talked to teach other, about each other, and with one another, the hope was that any potential conflict would be quickly be addressed through the conflict resolution agreements each team had created in the fall.

Field notes and observations were analyzed to seek out patterns as teachers engage in a new way of not only working together, but redefining teaching practices as well. Specifically, with the alignment with a community of practice model of professional development, the researcher looked for patterns where the potential for an 'expert centered' model has taken over. It may be easy for ECSE teachers to slip into a role that is more characteristic of the 'expert' telling others what to do versus learning alongside their colleagues. Similarly, it was crucial to observe EC teachers in order to identify patterns of potentially holding back and allowing others

to take over. The study at its' core, seeks to implement inclusive classrooms where everyone, teachers and students, are seen as equal participants with equal contribution.

In anticipation of a large volume of data from multiple data points, the researcher will attempt to identify the following themes after each encounter, based on the data collected, in order to answer the proposed research questions: pedagogical change, sense of community, equal participation and engagement across students and teachers. More specifically, the following questions assisted in guiding the interactions/observations. Baseline data was taken in the fall, and into March, upon initial COP meetings and biweekly classroom observations conducted by the researcher.

- What change in practice was observed?
- What growth in teacher practice was observed?
- Was there a sense of 'community' within the classroom? Were all staff working together without conflict and using language to reflect inclusion?
- Were all students active and engaged? Did any student 'stand out' or was any student observed to work in isolation?
- Was there a level of equal participation from both teachers?
- Were the teachers supporting one another?
- Were teachers using language to reflect collaboration and inclusion?

Conclusively, an interpretivist inquiry approach will be taken. As the researcher, and participant, I plan to actively listen in order to understand the experience. From what I see and hear, I can interpret the perspectives of others' going through the experience in hopes of identifying meaning and validity in order to inspire others to change for the benefit of every child entering kindergarten.

It is also essential that I note any personal bias that I, as a researcher and participant, may bring to the study. As a speech and language pathologist, I had been providing services within local preschool classrooms for several years and had witnessed on a first hand basis the benefits of providing special education services within general education settings. Although the students I was primarily providing service to were not as developmentally or social delayed as the students within the current study (based on standardized assessments), the models that students within typically developing programs provided to students with speech and language delays often had a positive impact on language growth for those students who had been identified as having communication deficits. Backed by research that identifies growth amongst students within inclusive settings, I brought to the table a strong passion and belief that inclusive preschool settings could positively impact student growth and development. Additionally, stakeholders and administration were advocating for preschool inclusion secondary to low performance indicators from the Continuous Improvement & Monitoring System State Report that provides local educational agencies with data on how well locals performed on indicators within the Annual Performance Report. Recent reports indicated that the local district where the study was conducted had not met target percentages that were established by the state in the areas of preschool inclusion. Hence, there was motivation for preschool inclusion to happen, and to be successful.

Data Quality

Validity in qualitative research is a debated topic (Glesne, 2011). Creswell (1998, p 201-203) suggests eight procedures for establishing "trustworthiness", which many researchers equate as a valid way to making claims their work is plausible or credible:

- Prolonged engagement and persistent observation
- Triangulation or the use of multiple data-collection methods
- Peer review and debriefing
- Negative case analysis
- Clarification of researcher bias
- Member checking and sharing data
- Rich, thick description
- External audit

The following table demonstrates how the researcher will address each component:

Table 9: Analysis of data to ensure qualitative work is credible

COMPONENT	RESEARCHER ACTION	EXAMPLES
Prolonged engagement and persistent observation	participation with the group for over 2 years	PAR research model
Triangulation or the use of multiple data-collection methods	observations within COP settings and classrooms, semi-structured individual and group interviews, documents	notes, memos, artifacts to verify themes
Peer review and debriefing	external reflection and input from participants	ongoing meetings with spec ed admin

Table 9 (cont'd)

COMPONENT	RESEARCHER ACTION	EXAMPLES
Negative case analysis	seeking out and interviewing colleagues who hold differing opinions on inclusion practices	notes, personal reflective journal entries
Clarification of researcher bias	monitoring my own personal bias regarding positive outcomes by transcribing and seeking for themes ongoing throughout the study that are contradictory to what we are hoping to find; it may be easy to see and hear only what I want to see and hear in order to validate my belief	journal entries, documentation of nonverbal language and interactions amongst staff; any presence of emerging strong and personal feelings not related to the purpose of the study, will be written down in a journal or the margins of my field notes to gave me the opportunity to acknowledge what I am feeling or thinking and to evaluate whether or not it is relative to the study
Member checking and sharing data	sharing of information throughout the study	open door policy for participants to read/see any notes or documents
Rich, thick description	writing that allows a reader to enter the field; using enough context and description to engage the reader	notes, memos, video taken
External audit	feedback from colleagues, mentor, and peers throughout the process	mentor meetings, debriefing with peers

From the quantitative perspective, the primary objective is for all students enrolled within the class to be successful. There is value in demonstrating how a shift in pedagogy and practices may correlate to academic growth for all students. The hope is that by working together, the strengths that both EC and ECSE teachers have will collectively help all students and that student growth will occur. This is also important for stakeholders who have promoted the change in preschool programming to allow for inclusive programs. Tracking student progress through the GSRP curriculum, which includes developmental domains and social-emotional

skills, we can determine whether or not students have made substantial growth by participating in an inclusive preschool program. Historically, students with significant special needs were placed in an exclusive special education classroom for up to two years prior to starting kindergarten. A major shift in expectation and mindsets had to occur to encourage parents to enroll their child within a typically developing preschool setting. Thus, it is also important to show that students with special needs were able to grow and gain developmental and academic skills to be better prepared for kindergarten.

CHAPTER FOUR: COP TOOLS

Introduction and Background on COP tools

In the fall of 2015, just as our COP groups were being formed and established, NAEYC created an Infographic (see Appendix D) that depicted three strategies to highlight individualized instruction based on children's strengths and needs, with examples for the preschool level. This infograph was distributed by the Office of Great Start as a resource to support the notion of inclusive practices within preschool settings. The three strategies depicted were: Universal Designs for Learning, Response to Intervention, and the offering of choices. Through dialogue with administration, it was thought that this Infograph could help support our COP work as ECSE teachers had a strong background in UDL and Evidence Based Practice for intervention based on the previous two years work of professional learning where 2013-2014 had a focus on increasing kindergarten readiness through UDL components, and 2014-2015 learning focused on Evidence Based Practices. The offering of choices is prevalent within all preschool settings and GSRP teachers follow a curriculum that maintains the idea of choices and following the child's lead; ECSE teachers are used to directing children with special needs. By bringing the teachers together in a COP, each subset could learn from one another on how to best instruct all children within a classroom environment. Hence, the three components aligned with the COP work that we began in 2015-2106.

The first year of professional learning through a COP for the ECSE in 2013-2014 had a focus on Universal Designs for Learning. We, myself included as researcher and participant, spent the school year learning what UDL was, how we already incorporated aspects of UDL into our classrooms, and how we could do more-hence the movement to engage with increased student independence. Since our work two years ago, UDL within early childhood settings to

promote inclusion has become more mainstreamed and prevalent.

Universal Design for Learning

Although published several years prior, the article *The Universal Design of Early Education: Moving Forward for All Children* (Conn- Powers, Cross, Traub, & Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006) sparked the movement that applied the principles of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning to the field of early childhood education. The goal of applying these frameworks to younger students included the idea that early education programs should meet the needs of all learners within a common setting and begin to move away from self-contained special education programs. The authors stipulate that various early childhood programs are foundational in providing support across levels of ability and need and have been successful in identifying strategies for educating children who may struggle to learn because of health or other medical needs, emotional or behavioral problems, and/or disabilities. This sparks the movement away from specialized programs where children are removed from peers in order to receive intervention. When already established programs have been successful in providing support and identifying strategies, and research supports growth for all children when kids with developmental disabilities are educated with peers, why is there a need for specialized programs? The Universal Design for Early Childhood Education (UDECE) is a framework that "suggests that instead of creating a curriculum and then adapting it to meet the needs of individual children in the program, it is better to start off with an instructional design which provides learners with a variety of ways to access and process information and demonstrate what they have learned" (Blagojevic, Twomey, & Labas 2002). This framework calls for early educators to value the importance of planning learning environments and activities for a diverse population from the beginning. Ultimately creating universally designed settings in which all children can participate

and learn.

Yet, it can be challenging for teachers to understand how UDL or UDECE 'fits' into a classroom where students will have different learning and instructional needs. Creating an UDECE environment doesn't mean taking anything away to create a one-dimensional classroom. It doesn't mean that a teacher should make her instruction more global to be more universal. There is a belief that with UDL, there is no place for differentiated instruction or individualization of learning. Differentiated instruction at its core has the goal of making learning accessible for every student. There is a recognition that learners are all different and in order to attend to these differences, teachers need to approach each student by their unique readiness, interest, and level. Teachers can choose from a variety of strategies that may be appropriate to help each student learn and engage. Universal Design for Learning (and UDECE) is based on the idea that no two brains learn in the same way and that learner variability is the norm. Content is presented through multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement in the curriculum. The idea is that from the beginning, the teacher is engaging in a variety of ways to instruct and engage students to account for the variety of ways people learn. Options are available for every student, but the goal for every student is the same. With UDECE, the idea is the same. Options are still available, but the end goal is not modified for any one child – it is the same for every student regardless of whether or not the child has special education services or support. The ECSE teachers had spent considerable time identifying with how UDL could fit within ECSE and Early Childhood, and how providing options would enable every child to learn.

Evidenced Based Practices

Additionally, the ECSE teacher spent the 2014-2015 school year in a COP focused on identifying, learning about, and implementing EBP. Although each ECSE teacher has a strong background in how to educate students with special needs, there was hesitation on how to best implement practices. Hurth, Shaw, Izeman, Whaley, and Rogers (1999) concluded that, although effective educational interventions for young children, Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers do not always use and implement these interventions. Instead of employing researched-based interventions, teachers often use interventions that have no research base and that have no positive effect on these students with specialized needs. Upon questioning the teachers why they were using certain practices, they couldn't pinpoint a specific reason, hence, the focus on EBP during our second year of work. Following the National Professional Development Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders updated 2014 report on best practices for educational interventions for students with ASD, many changes were identified as to what currently constitutes as EBP. It was important for our COP to identify current EBP and implement these with high fidelity across the classroom. Each teacher took on a different EBP, researched it, identified how to implement the practice with fidelity in the classroom, and created an instructional video in order to teach others (i.e. other teachers, parents, paraprofessional and ancillary staff) how to implement the practice. Through the 2014-2015 COP, we had a years' worth of information to share with GSRP teachers on EBP and how to incorporate best practices universally within a classroom to align with UDLEC principles to promote academic success for all students within an inclusive setting.

Offering of Choice and Creative Curriculum

Within the GSRP curriculum, teachers promote the offering of choices. The Creative Curriculum is based on 38 objectives for development and learning that are aligned with the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and state early learning standards. Each objective is integrated into every lesson that makes up the curriculum. Additionally, this curriculum offers daily opportunities to individualize instruction by helping teachers meet the needs of every learner, with a particular focus on English language development. Throughout the day, students are offered structured choices for play, books, manipulates, and objects. By offering students choices, the students are working towards following developing autonomy. There are several reasons that giving children choices throughout the day is beneficial, even crucial to their development. Providing choices for children is a fundamental aspect of high-quality early childhood curriculum (Hendrick, 1996). In order to provide children with a number of choices, the teacher must understand the importance of choices, and be willing and able to allow a variety of activities and behaviors in the classroom. This approach to learning is child-centered, rather than teacher-centered. Erikson (1950) believed that at the second level of psychosocial development, beginning soon after one year of age, young children must resolve the conflict between autonomy and shame and doubt. Children who do not develop autonomy are liable to remain dependent on adults or to be overly influenced by peers. Gartrell (1995) called this phenomenon "mistaken behaviors". Children who fall into "mistaken behaviors" may feel doubtful of their abilities, and be unable to take the risks that lead to real learning (Fordham & Anderson, 1992; Maxim, 1997) or challenge themselves to achieve at ever higher levels. In addition, they may feel hostility toward adults who allow them little freedom to choose (Edwards, 1993). Learning to be autonomous and self-reliant takes time and

practice. When we offer children choices, we are allowing students to practice the skills of independence and responsibility, while we guard their health and safety by controlling and monitoring the options (Maxim, 1997). ECSE teachers are used to providing structured choices for play and often combine choice making with a picture or visual to accommodate a students' limited language. Additionally, one of the effects of offering children choices throughout the day is the reduction of conflict among children and between children and adults. When adults direct a child's behavior most of the day, the child's natural desire to be independent is thwarted and feelings of resentment or rebellion may arise (Edwards, 1993). This can often be the antecedent to a behavior meltdown and something that ECSE teachers face daily in the classroom. By offering choices, and treating children with the same respect (Kostelnik, Soderman & Whiren, 1993), teachers are acknowledging that students have individual needs and interests. By providing students with choices, students have the opportunity to choose what is best for themselves at any given time. GSRP teachers have built this into the day and are able to offer students choices consistently throughout the entire school day. Within a GSRP classroom there are peer models of students who are able to make a choice and to stay with an activity as their attention span will likely be longer if they choose an activity than if they work at a task assigned by the teacher (Fromberg, 1995; Maxim, 1997). Making choices helps children learn persistence and task completion. GSRP teachers are trained in this and are able to model for ECSE teachers how offering choices may be able to support student compliance and independence.

The structure of how these tools were introduced, utilized, and harvested by the teachers for enactment within the classroom was supported through participation in the Early Childhood Statewide Autism Research and Training Intensive Workshops. Members from the COP groups

attended five days of training from September 2015 to March 2016. Each day of training focused on a specific subset of behaviors and skills, with specific evidenced based practices to support and promote early childhood education. Part of every day of training included creating Action Plans to identify evidenced based practices, ideas, and supports that would be taken back and harvested with in the classroom to support all students within the preschool environment. The idea that universal supports benefit every student, not just students with special needs, was a key concept throughout the trainings, and supported the use of UDL within the classroom. Many of these practices aligned with offering students' choices, the use of UDL, and the idea of working with students to promote growth through Response to Intervention first, prior to identifying students through an IEP process. With the increase in special education support within the typical developing preschool programs, the hope was that students would demonstrate more growth and that students who may be struggling (academically, behaviorally, socially, or a combination), may show gains through implementation of START strategies, practices, and ideas without the need for a full IEP evaluation or plan. The Action Plans also helped to serve as a reference for what changes in practice were occurring within the classroom as well as aiding in accountability.

Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist

In addition, the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist (see Appendix E) was completed by myself, as well as a second rater (a colleague who was not a participant in the study, but who was familiar with UDL, the use of evidenced based practices, and was a teacher), in September, December, and February. This instrument was designed by the Heartland Equity and Inclusion Project, and is supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). It was modeled and based on the DEC/NAEYC 2009 joint inclusion

definition that identifies high quality inclusive programs have a foundation in Access, Participation, and Supports, and that UDL is a critical component of high quality early childhood inclusive services and programs. The purpose of this checklist was to identify areas of change within teaching practices that promoted the use of UDL through specific classroom-based evidenced based practices that supported the definition of inclusive early childhood programs. It also afforded the opportunity to identify areas of improvement with regard to EBP and implementation within each individual classroom and a systematic way to observe changes in teaching practice and use of strategies, practices, and ideas from the START trainings. A second rater was used to triangulate the data and to minimize bias from the researcher.

Secondary to large amounts of qualitative data, the study draws upon data from the original COP group as they experienced working within inclusive settings. Secondary data from additional COP is included as appropriate and when necessary. What follows is a timeline of events, data, artifacts and analysis from the COP that included three ECSE teachers working within four inclusive settings. It should be noted that the COP groups overlapped and that shared and co-constructed learning occurred across and within COPs. Yet this specific COP encompassed the largest amount of data.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS COP MEETINGS (presented chronologically)

Background and Barriers

Prior to establishing COP, the breaking down of barriers began in the 2014-2015 school year. When it was decided that 17 students would be moving from ECSE environments to typical developing peer preschool programs, questions and concerns began to fly fast and furiously. The motto of 'learn as we go' became imperative. The first barrier was to find a way to continue to provide transportation to the 17 students to ensure each child had access to be able to participate within the typical developing program.

I began to work with administration and transportation. Efforts to secure independent transportation (i.e. a separate bus) for the inclusion students were unsuccessful secondary to cost and availability. By working with administration, ECSE class times were altered to align with GSRP start and end times and the two programs, ECSE, and GSRP, shared transportation in order to ensure that all students could access the preschool environments. This was not an easy task and involved approval from many different levels of administration and staff. Yet, the motivation to engage with preschool inclusion practices was strong and aided in making a dramatic change to historical ECSE program times. This shift of ECSE (to start at 9:20 and run to 11:50, then a PM section to start at 1:40 and run until 4:10) affected teachers, ancillary staff, para-educators, and parents. Previous times (9-11:30am and 12:30-3:00pm) had been set for years. New times had to work around employee contracts, facility/building regulations, and staff and families. Yet, it became clear that to link the GSRP and ECSE bus runs was the only way to provide transportation to allow for access to the typical developing preschool environments.

Additionally, there was not a surplus of funds in which to hire new staff to provide the minimum amount of special education support that was required in order to enroll a student from

ECSE into GSRP (a yearly minimum of 72 hours of service overseen by a special education teacher). To break down the barrier of limited staffing resources, two ECSE teachers were pulled from their traditional ECSE classroom to co-teach with GSRP teachers in the typical developing program. Since 17 ECSE students were being shifted to the GSRP program, this allowed ECSE teachers the flexibility to 'leave' their classrooms in order to work alongside GSRP staff. This was again a mindset shift that required support from various levels of administration and staff. The following graphic represents a visual timeline of the history of the COP and can also be found in the Appendix.

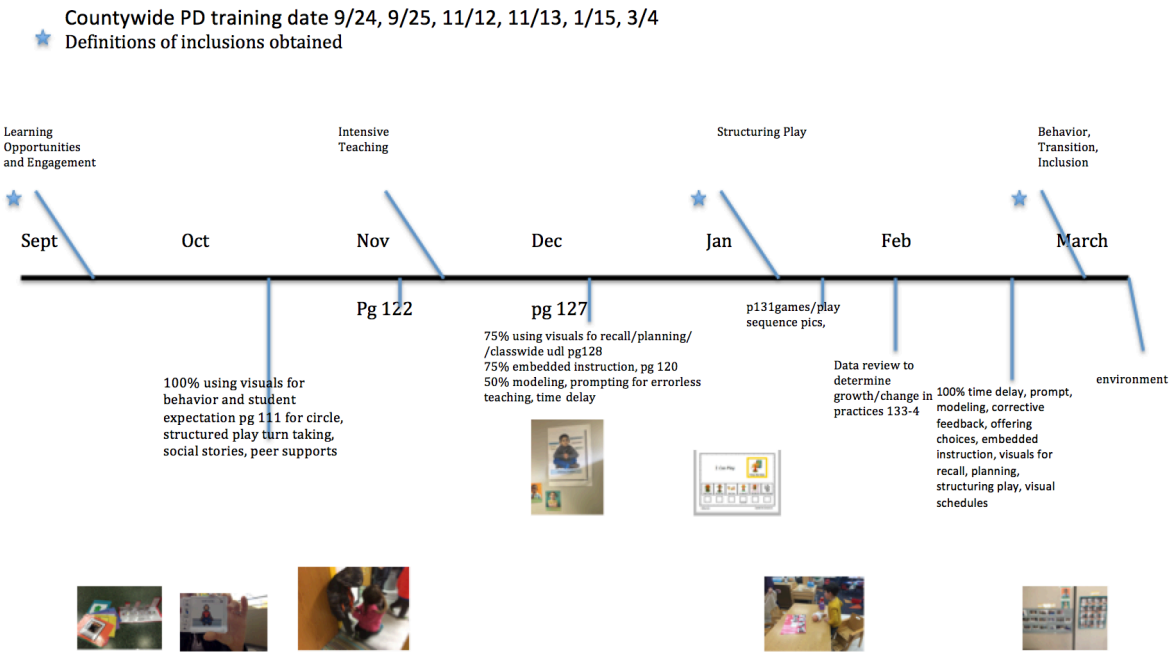


Figure 5: COP history and timeline

September

"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." – Nelson Mandela

The start of a new school year signifies a fresh start. New students. New staff. Sometimes new content. For the teachers in the current study, the start of the 2015-2016 school year brought new experiences, knowledge, and awareness.

In September, with the excitement of a new year ahead, we had our first COP with every teacher. With the plan of introducing each other, the idea of inclusion, and the 'how' we were going to embark on this journey, the group sat in chairs around a table in a circle. For many, there were new faces as well as familiar faces.

Knowing that in order to have teacher buy in, it is often best practice to gather teacher input before jumping into action. We started with introductions and an overview of why inclusion was on the table for discussion. I tried to make it clear that there was no single path for embarking on this journey; that this was a journey we were taking together, working at together, and doing together, no one was directing a specific process, yet we were learning the work by doing and engaging with the work. We then proceeded to a reflection activity where each teacher wrote her individual definition of inclusion. Upon sharing these, it was clear that each teacher was motivated, yet that there were also level of knowledge, assumptions, and ideas of what inclusion was and what it should be.

As previously noted, DEC and NAEYC collaborated to define and publish a joint statement to advocate for interdisciplinary and inclusive early childhood education. This has assisted state and local agencies by providing a framework for how to engage in critical dialogue

regarding high quality inclusive education for children with disabilities.

The position statement defines early childhood inclusion and makes recommendations for how to develop high quality inclusive programs. DEC/NAEYC (2009) defines early childhood inclusion by the following: "Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports" (p. 9).

Appendix F highlights examples of the COP participants' definitions of inclusion in September. A reoccurring theme amongst staff was the use of "all"; all children being provided the opportunity to succeed. Although this was exciting to see as it meant the majority of staff understood the concept and idea, when digging deeper into discussion, the idea of 'all' meant something different.

"Inclusion means that students with special needs are included with their general education peers in a general education setting with appropriate supports and materials".

"All children provided access to program and materials".

"Learning and playing together".

When pressed what this would look like, the group was quiet.

One GSRP teacher voiced her concerns. "I guess I don't really know. I never know what the kids will be like at the beginning of the year. I've had students with challenges and IEPs before, but haven't done anything really differently for them. Will I need to do something? What if I don't know what to do?"

Additionally, although staff wrote that inclusive practices meant 'all', when comparing this simplistic definition to the joint position statement definition from DEC/NAEYC, it was apparent that no one had truly engaged with this type of work and that staff were not clear on what it meant to provide high quality preschool inclusion. No one had mentioned "a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships… development and learning to reach their full potential….(DEC/NAEYC, 2000, p. 9)". And no one spoke to access, participation, and supports.

This provided the perfect opportunity to share background information on how, from an administrative level, our educational agency had chosen to pursue inclusive preschool programs. The following table was shown as an example of how support may be provided within the GSRP classroom:

Table 10: GSRP Special Education support examples

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday
9:15-10:30	ECSE Teacher	ECSE Assistant	ECSE Teacher	ECSE Assistant
10:30-11:45	ECSE Assistant	ECSE Teacher	ECSE Assistant	ECSE Teacher
As Scheduled	SLP	OT	SLP	

This outline was just an example of one way the GSRP teachers would work with special education staff, in a collaborative manner, to support all students within the classroom, not just students with an IEP. As the majority of the academic portion of the curriculum occurred in the morning, it was determined that special education staff would collaborate in the AM to assist

with the higher classroom student expectations. With higher expectations comes more likelihood for increased student behaviors, so it made more sense to support the GSRP programs more in the morning compared to the afternoon. Staff agreed with this and visibly felt relieved.

"So it looks like I'll have an extra person every morning to help? That will be huge!".

With the start of a new year, there was more excitement and motivation than anxiety or stress. Not exactly knowing what we were getting ourselves into or what it would look like could have increased anxiety, but the reassurance that we were all in this together proved to be enough to quell fears.

We reviewed the regulations and requirements and then the teachers moved into the groups based on their local teams and buildings. Each group was given a protocol to start to work on group norms, ways for dealing with conflict, and a blank outline to brainstorm how special education support would be provided and when local/building teams would meet on a biweekly basis.

Again, a new year provides a fresh start. Each local COP established group norms and defined how they would deal with conflict. Each group established bi-weekly meetings to touch base, and established schedules for when special education support would be provided. Given the variances in locations and buildings, not every team had the same schedule for support. One team had more ancillary support than special education teacher support based on the classroom location and staff allocation of time.

As with anything new, there is often a honeymoon period where all seems to be well.

Each COP team started the year off full of excitement and motivation. Often change, when one is ready for it, can be the catalyst that creates a shift in mindset, expectations, and outcomes.

I met with the ECSE COP group at the end of the September. We informally chatted about how the experience was going for each teacher. Teacher A, who was supporting two GSRP classrooms and 10 prior ECSE students was ecstatic. "I'm loving this! I am seeing so much growth in the kids. They are interacting more and participating. I wasn't so sure about this but I see it's working!" I pressed on and asked how she knew students were experiencing success. "I see more language, more peer interaction, and more play. The longer day allows for more time in play and kids with higher language provide more of a model."

The other two ECSE teachers expressed similar viewpoints. Teacher C who was providing minimal support to the GSRP classroom (with two prior ECSE students), was quieter and did not have as much to share. When I inquired, she said she felt she didn't have enough time in the room and that it was hard to talk to the GSRP teacher. I asked the group if they felt the same way and if they were experiencing any frustrations.

"I kind of feel like another teacher assistant. In GSRP they refer to the teacher as the lead teacher. I'm used to being the teacher and it can be hard to take off that hat. But I don't know the curriculum and I don't know what the lesson plans for the day are. I find that I stand back and wait to be told what to do. When the kids are melting down, they all look at me to solve the problem."

This simple statement made it clear to me that we had hit our first barriers – collaboration is not about standing back and not knowing what to do in a situation. I asked the group, "What have you done to be a part of the classroom community?" This was met with blank stares. "I

show up and am there", one teacher replied. I pressed on, "What have you offered to do? Have you asked to see any lesson plans? The curriculum? Offered to do part of the center or group? What have you suggested for preventing meltdowns? We want to be mindful of not coming in as experts and to remember that we will learn from each other. GSRP teachers have a lot of knowledge about curriculum to share. You have a lot of knowledge about behavior management and self-regulation to share. We need to start to view this as a team, not independent contractors."

I had each ECSE teacher identify a concern/barrier. We then put plans into action on how to address these barriers. For Teacher A, it was the use of a schedule to help set the day and to help students with transitioning between activities. For Teacher B, it was to use visuals to help with taking breaks and calming. For Teacher C, it was to help with sharing and peer turn taking during a playtime. As a whole, the group established how they would reach out to the GSRP staff to become more knowledgeable about the curriculum and the classroom routines.

From an observation standpoint, I had observed in each classroom and felt as if teachers were tiptoeing around each other. No one seemed to want to offer suggestions or ideas for fear of offending one another. Teacher A (between two GSRP classrooms) was actively involved with all of the students where as the other two ECSE teachers focused primarily on the students who were identified as special needs. This in itself presented another barrier. If inclusion was to promote a sense of belonging for all students, we should not be isolating students with IEPs out for any particular reason. I observed the use of language that referenced "students with a rule 55 IEP", "special education students", "your kids", "how can I get an IEP for that student"….all of the language that we had attempted to put an end to at our first meeting. It was clear that just throwing the teachers together wasn't enough to facilitate a cohesive working relationship that

was supportive for all students. Although staff were motivated, there was still a lack of understanding as to why inclusion was occurring and how all staff could support it. One of the GSRP teachers felt that several of her other non IEPed students should be found special education eligible. Despite individual conversations between the teacher and myself to attempt to again explain how a child should be found special education eligible and that there was already a high level of special education staff support in her classroom, she struggled with the traditional mindset of what special education looked like. Although we had spent time explaining inclusion, there was still a mindset that special education was separate from general education. To me, this was the first barrier that needed to be broken down; and it needed to be broken down quickly.

September barriers that were noted included isolating or separating out students with IEPs, ECSE teachers acting as paraprofessionals in the classroom, lack of sharing of knowledge, and minimal use of basic UDL classroom-wide supports. This was evident from teacher comments, classroom observations, and concerns that had been brought up during COP meetings. Not wanting to allow these barriers to create discord amongst the staff, these became the topics to address in October's COP meetings.

October

"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone" - Neale Donald Walsh

We began October with highlighting the positive features. In our ECSE COP meeting, each ECSE teacher spoke to how she felt things were going after a month of 'doing the work'.

Our agenda highlighted the concept of change and how to thrive in a world where change is constant and inevitable. Within the world of preschool, we had operated as though we were separate silos – typical developing programs as one silo; and special education programs as another. Now we were finally merging the two and it was anticipated that there would be concerns and issues. But that there would also be positive benefits.

Teacher A described a peer interaction. "One of my students from last year, who never talked, wandered around the perimeter of the classroom, and was difficult to engage, went up to a peer and asked if he wanted to play cars. I was floored! No one modeled this for him or prompted him- he did it all on his own. I sat back and watched. Although he didn't stay with the peer for very long, just the fact that he initiated it on his own was huge."

"I also watched several girls approach Mary (names have been omitted to protect confidentiality) and invite her to play in the kitchen as part of a birthday party. Although she held back, she closely watched everything that was going on. I think I need to help her become more confident with playing with other kids."

Teacher B detailed a student who engaged in a turn-taking sequence with a peer. "Although I had to really prompt and support it, Sarah was able to go back and forth to share a toy with a peer. I think it helped that the peer already knew how to share. But it was good because it allowed her a model for how to share."

Teacher C spoke about a student who showed improvements in being able to follow a schedule and routine.

Each teacher spoke positively about the students and what they were observing socially

among student peers. When I inquired about the challenges, the conversation took a different tone.

> "There is still no use of visuals. I can't get them (the staff) to use the pictures!"
>
> "The process they use for consequences is way too difficult for any kid to understand. There is no place in the classroom for kids to go to calm down."
>
> "There isn't a strong team-it's constantly changing and revolving. People come in and out of the classroom all the time. Some of the behaviors the kids have are crazy. They don't give any warning for changing activities. The play time is so long!".

I took a moment to think about their responses. These ECSE teachers were used to directing others. They were used to being in charge of their own classrooms and setting the rules. To step into someone else's room, and be asked to support students with special needs in a classroom that was not set up to reflect a variety of student need and ability, was a barrier in itself. I was asking the ECSE teachers to step away from being a classroom teacher, and to be in more of a consultant role. But that also meant the GSRP teachers had to be open and willing to change. Drawing on the vast body of work that speaks to teacher professional development and implementation of new practices, I knew that in order to change, teachers had to buy in and believe in the efficacy of a practice.

Joyce and Showers (2002) found that 0% of teachers will use a new practice in their classroom following training and discussion in the theory, with and without demonstration of the practice. When teachers are asked to practice and receive feedback on the new teaching practice, 5% of them will apply the practice in their classrooms. When teachers use the practice in their

classroom and receive ongoing coaching and feedback, 95% of them will consistently use the practice within the classroom (Joyce & Showers, 2002). Hence, the application in tandem with feedback and support is the critical combination to ensure teachers will effectively and confidently employ a new skill in the classroom.

One of the largest concerns with implementing inclusive classrooms was that the GSRP rooms would begin to 'look like special education preschool classrooms.' This was voiced at the September COP meeting and was a comment that I overhead as I was observing in GSRP classrooms. GSRP teachers wanted to maintain their autonomy and structure of the classrooms, yet they also were struggling with the makeup of students represented within their classrooms. GSRP, in its' infancy, was designed to provide high-quality preschool to students who were determined to be 'at risk of educational failure'. Given the severity of at risk factors, many of the special education strategies or tools could support educational gains for all students within the programs. But the challenge was to get buy-in from the GSRP teachers to facilitate the use of strategies and tools.

In anticipating there would be a need for learning new skill sets, on both ends, I had arranged for the teams to attend Early Childhood intensive trainings. The GSRP teachers would need to learn new skills for implementation of evidenced based strategies to support all students, and ECSE teachers needed to craft skill sets in order to provide more consultation on the implementation (or the how) of evidenced based strategies. Although the first two days of training occurred in September, it was the very end of the month and staff carried over the implementation of practices into the beginning of October.

The first two days of our intensive training focused on increasing engagement within the

classroom. Knowing that professional development can often be overwhelming, I asked the teams to identify one specific evidenced based practice they felt they could implement within the classroom to support all students. The use of visuals was quickly identified as being a universal strategy that could be implemented across all classrooms, with all students, and within activities. As part of the trainings, I had teams create Action Plans (see Appendix H) as a way to provide accountability for what we decided to implement. This also afforded me the opportunity to know what each team was planning to do, to be able to support the use of coaching and feedback (not only from myself, but to support the ECSE teachers as they were also providing feedback on the use of evidenced based practices that were often very familiar to them; most ECSE classrooms are full of visuals and strong in the use and implementation of visuals to support behaviors, transitions, and student instruction), and to know what to look for when I was observing in the classroom. The use of visuals also aligned with ideas for Universal Design for Learning in Early Childhood settings.

I wanted to ensure that all staff had the same definition of visual supports. During our September training meeting, we defined visual supports as concrete cues that may be paired or used in place of verbal cues to help a child with a routine, activity, behavior expectation, or skill set (based on Harris, 2015). The ECSE teachers listed visuals as pictures, words, objects, or even classroom arrangement/environment as well as scripts or stories as examples of visual supports. Teams identified areas where visuals could be implemented to help support student expectation, behavior, or skills (see Appendix I).

I sat back and let the teams identify where they felt they needed to implement this evidence based practice. The team with ECSE Teacher A identified the use of visuals during structured play to support turn taking and peer interactions as a need. The team with Teacher B

decided to implement visuals during circle time to help with student off task behaviors. The team with Teacher C decided to work within the environment and wanted to use visuals to label areas within play, to define student spaces, and to use visuals during circle time to support student behaviors. Each team completed the Action Plan with who would be responsible for what (i.e. creating materials, taking pictures, laminating, when visuals would be introduced and by whom).

As the ECSE teachers expressed these concerns in the start of October, I reminded them of our Action Plan. We reviewed the plan and discussed how this might help with some of their frustrations. We also used some of our meeting time to create the visuals that were needed and role played how to 'teach' the GSRP staff how to incorporate the use of visuals into daily practice. I felt part of my role, as both participant and as researcher, was to make sure all staff had the tools they needed in order to be successful. I viewed time as a tool as well. By giving the teachers time to create the tools they needed for the classroom, we were able to support one another and share resources. Instead of creating everything individually, we were able to share the workload (see Appendix H).

Wanting to be able to support staff and students, I went in and completed the Quality Inclusive Practices classroom checklists, utilizing a UDL EC checklist from DEC (2009) to assess high-quality preschool inclusion based on *Access, Participation, and Supports*. These observations were completed the second week of September. I met with each team the first week of October to review the checklists, to review the Action Plan items from our September intensive trainings, and to support the ECSE teachers as they walked GSRP staff through the implementation of the visuals each team had identified for implementation. We used the checklist to identify areas where the visuals would be implemented that had been noted as

lacking based on the classroom checklist.

The team with Teacher A had identified the use of visuals during structured play to support turn taking and peer interactions as a need. This was also an area of weakness under Participation on the classroom checklist. "Tools and strategies are used to support each child's meaningful engagement in the classroom community "as well as "Practioners support per social relationships." Both of these had been checked "No" and were identified to be areas with room for improvement. The use of visuals during structured play aligned with areas for improvement based on the need to improve peer interaction and classroom sense of community.

The team with Teacher B identified the use of visuals during circle time to help with student off task behaviors. This aligned with the lack of flexible methods to present and motivate students during instruction (under UDL on the classroom checklist). Visuals could be used to support student expression through a variety of methods, as well instruction delivery in a variety of ways to engage students. For example, the use of a visual representation for First-Then (first we do calendar, then we sign ABCs) was one of the recommended visuals to support a student who was struggling to learn the classroom routine and verbal instruction had not proven to be effective.

The team with Teacher C decided to work within the environment and wanted to use visuals to label areas within play, to define student spaces, and to use visuals during circle time to support student behaviors. This fell under Access and Participation. The classroom environment had not proven to be established with environmental expectations that were relatable to preschool students. There was a lack of expectation for where activities were to take place. For example, circle time was not defined as a time or as being held in a specific space in

the classroom. This was creating student behaviors that interfered with the teacher's ability to successfully complete activities within circle time.

At the end of October, I went in and completed brief observations to see how the teams were doing. The team with Teacher A had created play-sequence visuals to help with peer interactions as well as mini schedules for how to rotate through activities during structured play and how to make choices based on what was available. I observed the ECSE teacher using the visuals and structuring the play routine. The GSRP teacher was watching and standing back, almost tentative to engage with the kids. I asked her how she felt the visuals were helping or if she had noticed any change. "I feel it is helping keep the kids at play. We are still struggling with hitting and throwing. I don't really understand what to do with the pictures." This statement indicated that she needed more support in learning *how* to use the visuals. It also told me the ECSE teacher needed more support in *how* to teach someone else for mastery and implementation of a new skill, versus just awareness.

The team with Teacher B created visuals of the circle time expectations and put the visuals on their lanyards so the pictures were easily and quickly accessible. I observed both the ECSE and GSRP teacher using 'sit', 'stop', 'wait', 'cross legs', 'voices quiet' during circle time. The GSRP teacher was leading the circle and the ECSE teacher was circulating the floor to support all the students. Both teachers referenced the visuals and utilized the pictures at appropriate times.

The team with Teacher C changed the environment of the classroom to support 'areas'. A circle area was designated by the window. A play area was created with dress up clothes, a kitchen, and a shelf with blocks and cars. An art station was created and a science exploration

area was established. Each area was clearly labeled with a picture and student and adult expectations were posted in each area. The teachers expressed a huge change. The GSRP teacher indicated less student behavior challenges, an increase in instructional time, and more student engagement.

In reflection, the barriers that were evident in October had shifted away from labeling of students, and more to teacher identity. Although there was a noted increase in the use of UDL and evidenced-based strategies to support all students, there was still a lack of teacher collaboration for instruction. I observed the GSRP teachers to be teaching the curriculum and the ECSE teachers to be doing more of the implementation of specialized instruction. Although the GSRP teachers noted positive changes in student behavior, expectations, and outcomes with the use of visuals, and were open to having visuals implemented within the classroom, they were not necessarily taking ownership to use the visuals independently. On the flip side. I had not observed ECSE teachers to be active in classroom or curriculum instruction.

November

"Can you make me a social story for not hitting or throwing?" – GSRP Teacher

Although this question thrilled me as it meant the teachers saw value in what was being implemented, the concept of professional development involves mastery of skill for independence. The idea to create COP was to support new learning and implementation of new practices. This question brought me back to the idea that the transfer of learning to the work setting is not achieved in isolation, but requires some ongoing support following training (Davis,

1995; Joyce & Showers, 2002). That our work as COPs members needed to be focused around professional development that was more learner centered, based more on professional growth and collaboration, more active learning, and with more ongoing practice, reflection and feedback (Desimone, 2009; Elmore, 2002; Hawley & Valli, 2000; Joyce & Showers, 2002; Lawless & Pelligrino, 2007; McLeksy, 2011). As a researcher, I felt I needed to pull back to the original early childhood professional development definition that focused on the WHO, the WHAT, and the HOW. We had easily identified the early childhood staff as the WHO. We had also identified the WHAT as the best practices for creating inclusive pedagogy. But we were struggling with the HOW with regard to process, procedure, and effectiveness. In a sense, the teachers were adopting the language and tools (the WHO and the WHAT), but the challenge continued to be the HOW; the ways of acting with the tools (the routines and practices) were less visible. This construction of implementation is a critical piece of harvesting new skills for enactment within the classroom to support a shift in teaching pedagogy. It involves observation of the learner's, in this case each teacher, observation of the tools in practice and in situated contexts in conjunction with drawing on new knowledge and metacognition to know how to implement a new skill. Simply drawing upon new language and tools does not necessarily mean a teacher is able to harvest newfound skills in the classroom; the demonstration of the harvesting of new information is constructed as the teacher reflects, observes, and engages in dialogue rooted around the implementation of new tools or strategies and begins to take ownership of how the new knowledge can be enacted within situated contexts. [Good! Is it the case that they picking up the language and tools, but the ways-of-acting with the tools (routines and practices) is less visible and accessible? The Object/Material is apparent, but not the HOW – Remember

that this is why the apprenticeship is important. Apprenticeship involves the learner's observation of the tool in practice – in situated contexts – together with the inner thinking.

Rather than embarking on something different in November, I chose to remain with the use and implementation of visuals as the foundation to our COP meetings. When the ECSE teachers COP met, we talked about the HOW to teach an adult a new skill. I did an activity with them where I taught them a new skill. As a 20 year yoga practioner, I introduced a simple yoga posture, tree pose, and step by step, taught them how to stand like a tree. With each teacher requiring a different level of physical support, we talked about variations and adaptions for how to successfully stand in tree pose. After much laughter and some challenges with balance, we were able to take a photo of everyone in their variation of tree pose.

We then engaged in a discussion of how difficult it is to learn something new and how as adults, we require a different level of support than students might require. I related it back to teaching GSRP teachers how to use visuals. I asked the group how they felt when I demonstrated tree pose and then asked them to perform it without any other verbal instruction or support. I asked them how they felt when I provided support and feedback on where to put their feet or their hands; positive feedback on how they held their arms; questioned them on why they were holding their breath; asked them what they needed or had questions about; encouraged them when they were doing well. We engaged in a discussion of how important it is to provided feedback and coaching.

"I never thought of it that way! I assumed all teachers knew how to use visuals. I just get frustrated when they don't use them! So if I do more than just model and ask them how they feel, maybe they'll use them more?". To which I replied, "Yes!". In wanting to stay away from

an expert-centered professional development model, I wanted to make sure the ECSE teachers were also learning from the GSRP teachers.

I asked the ECSE teachers what was preventing them from having a more active role with classroom instruction and content delivery. "I'm not trained in the Creative Curriculum. I don't feel I could!". The others agreed. I pressed on and asked, "But you have now been an active part of the classroom for two months. What have you taken away or gleaned? Don't you feel you have skills that could enhance the Creative Curriculum?". One teacher replied, "Sort of…I really don't know the Creative Curriculum goals though." I asked if it would be helpful if we were to spend time reviewing the Creative Curriculum goals in order that we have a more formed idea of what the classroom instructional content involved. They each enthusiastically answered, "Yes". I asked if they thought this would be a good way to gain GSRP teacher respect and support; by having the GSRP teachers educate the ECSE teachers so that it was more of a collaborative relationship rather than a one-way working relationship. Again, each ECSE teacher responded positively.

We spent time brainstorming how the ECSE teachers could be more active partners in the classroom instruction. Each teacher identified an area of the daily schedule where she felt she could ask if it was ok to be more of a co-teacher than an assistant. Teacher A felt she could be more active with reading stories. Teacher B felt she could run a center. Teacher C felt she could facilitate structured play. I promised to obtain and bring the Creative Curriculum goals to our next ECSE COP meeting in December.

We were also scheduled in mid November to attend another two-day intensive training. The focus for this meeting was on the supports that might be provided for students with special needs, specifically, students with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I took the opportunity with all the

ECSE and GSRP members present to spend a few minutes before the training started to set the tone for the two days as I was afraid our GSRP team members may not see the relevance in participating in what could have been viewed as a special education training.

I encouraged the group to see where the strategies that were being taught may be implemented within the Creative Curriculum to support all students. Using the UDL framework and reviewing the classroom checklists where we had identified areas of weakness or challenge, I tried to facilitate both sets of teachers, GSRP and ECSE, as partners who worked together to identify areas in the curriculum where special education supports could be embedded in order to facilitate learning for all students.

As part of the training, each team identified two students to target for data collection with regard to an area of independence and to an area of engagement. Each team identified when and who would collect data, sharing the responsibility equally. I created data sheets (see Appendix J) to help with collecting and tracking data. After three data points were taken, the teams were to sit down and determine if the student was successful in being independent /engaged in the activity. If no, a plan was put into place of what should be changed and what supports could be introduced to help the student. This activity brought the teachers together to problem solve. I encouraged them to identify students with whom there was a challenge and tried to stress that it didn't need to be a student with an IEP; that we were all there to work together to support all students within the inclusive setting.

Over the next few weeks as I was present in classrooms, I saw teachers working together in a more collaborative way to problem solve. By choosing a student to focus on and developing a plan together that involved accommodations to instruction, daily routines, or modifications to how content was delivered, the teachers were able to see how special education supports could

be embedded within the GSPR curriculum. For example, one team developed play sequence pictures to represent the theme of the week that was being taught as part of the Creative Curriculum. One team created visual mini-schedules for the end-of-the-day routine and placed the pictures in every student cubby. One team created social stories for how to say goodbye to mom and dad as part of a social emotional lesson from the Creative Curriculum and posted the visual story by the front door to the classroom. Once the teachers were able to approach the curriculum from the aspect of supporting students, instead of centering on what the adults did as part of the lesson, things began to quickly change.

As with any collaborative relationship, there will be moments of conflict and disagreement. This is where the teams were referred back to their working agreements that they established in September that laid out how each team was to handle conflict.

The team working with Teacher C approached me and expressed the concern that they weren't getting enough special education support. I quickly set a meeting with all the members of this team to hear and address concerns.

"What you presented in our initial meeting isn't what is happening", the GSRP teacher stated. "I don't have a special education teacher in my room every day." I quickly reminded the teacher that what was presented was just an example and that her building looked differently; that she had more time with ancillary support secondary to the location of her program. We were able to problem solve to determine that her concern stemmed from several of the students acting out during certain parts of the day and she felt inadequate to handle their behaviors. We were able to rearrange staff schedules to allow the ECSE teacher more time for collaboration and observation within the GSRP classroom during the difficult times. After a few weeks, I checked

in with the GSRP teacher and she expressed gratitude at the additional support and the ideas that had been offered to her in how to handle the off-task student behavior.

The team working with Teacher A continued to express concerns with student behavior and asking for students to have an IEP in order to have more special education support. I scheduled an individual meeting with the teacher and listened to her concerns. During the meeting, it became clear that the teacher thought she would get additional staff time if she had more students identified as special education eligible. She was struggling with student behaviors in the afternoon when the special education staff were not present in her room. When I explained that it didn't work that way, we problem solved to identify a specific situation where the area of concern truly was (it ended up being related to students not wanting to take a rest time, and constantly getting up from their cots and wandering around the room). She was able to self identify a strategy to implement to support the desired behavior (a visual schedule to identify that rest happened first but was then followed by outdoor play and snack, both areas of high motivation for this student). I supported the teacher in creating the visual and offered feedback after observing her implement it. By engaging in dialogue with her and asking her to identify what the specific problem was, what was working in other areas of the day, and connecting how we could use the areas of motivation to support the desired behavior and being part of the problem solving process, not just asking her to change her way of thinking, she was more willing to try something new. Also by reviewing policy and dispelling the belief that more adult support would come if more special education students were identified, the teacher realized that she had to try something different to change the student behaviors. As a researcher, I saw the opportunity to listen and communicate openly with the GSRP teacher in order to involve her within the problem solving process, rather than simply provide her with a strategy. I facilitated

her ability to self analyze the situation and come up with a solution that she was willing to initiate.

So our goal in November was to move away from an expert-driven model and to establish more cohesive collaborative working relationships. The ECSE teachers felt there was less isolation of students. In my classroom observations I didn't hear language that referenced "your students/my students", which suggested joint ownership for all the students. I also had the opportunity to sit in on three IEPs that were held where GSRP and ECSE teachers both participated. Each of the three families expressed huge gratitude and overwhelmingly positive feelings regarding the move from an ECSE classroom to an inclusive setting. One parent stated, "My son comes home and talks about school. He talks about his friends!" Another parent teared up when talking about her daughter and the level of support the GSRP staff had provided. "I never would have thought it was possible. Sam has such physical needs I didn't think she would be accepted. But when I heard the other kids call her name and want her to play with them, I can't even begin to tell you how that feels."

In reflection, the barriers we identified in November didn't change much from what was identified in October. Yet HOW we were going about addressing the barriers was different. We had moved away from concerns related to segregating students as 'special needs' or 'students with IEPs' into concerns about how to collaborate with one another on an adult level. Identifying how teachers could support and learn from one another was critical in establishing positive working relationships that would support ALL students in inclusive settings. The goal in December became more aligned with coaching and feedback between the sets of teachers – with ECSE teachers providing feedback to GSRP teachers on the use of visuals; and with GSRP teachers providing feedback on Creative Curriculum components. This required observation of

each other, written feedback that was supportive and positive, and coaching on how to best deliver the evidenced-based practice or instructional content.

December

"To teach is to learn twice over." – Joseph Joubert

Our ECSE COP focus in December became focused on HOW to teach teachers. This may sound simple, yet teaching adults requires a very different skill set than teaching preschool children. Knowing that each group of teachers was motivated to increase their use of visuals supports in the classroom, we chose to stay focused on the use of visuals as the evidenced based practice for promoting more academic and social success within the classroom. The ECSE teachers continued to express frustration with the GSRP teachers' lack of visuals or use of visuals. I asked them why they thought the GSRP teachers continued to struggle with implementing more visual supports in the classroom.

"I don't know. It's frustrating. They [GSRP teachers] ask for help and when I offer it, they don't want to use it. They just want the behavior to go away. Or they try it once and it doesn't work so they won't try it again." "I feel like I've given her everything-she has visuals on the wall, around her lanyard, on the tables. But she never uses them or references them. I have spent hours laminating and cutting and Velcro-ing and the pictures just sit there."

"It always seems to fall to me-I'm the one pulling out the picture, or pointing to the schedule or reading the social story. It doesn't seem to happen unless I do it."

That statement made me think. I wanted to ensure the ECSE teachers held their voice and felt like I was hearing them, but I didn't want the meeting to turn into a gripe session where

negativity was reinforced. When the ECSE teacher commented that she felt the use of visuals always fell to her, I began to wonder how much time we were allowing before jumping in and just doing. I asked the group how much they prompted the GSRP teachers, if they were giving GSRP teachers wait time, and if they provided positive feedback. Similar to how we teach a preschool child a new skill. "When we teach our students, we model, we may engage in hand over hand demonstration, we then prompt by asking the child to do the behavior and give ample time for the child to do what is asked, and then we positively reinforce when we see the child engaging appropriately. Are we using those same ideas? How often are we just jumping in and *doing* vs. *teaching* and giving the GSRP teachers time to implement what is a new skill to them? They aren't trained the way you as ECSE teachers are trained. It doesn't come natural to them to wear a set of visuals around their neck or to whip out a visual schedule to use at center time. It's second nature for you! Not for them." I asked the ECSE teachers to reflect on how they could teach instead of do. And how they were going to take this idea back to the GSRP classrooms on a collaborative level. I wanted to bring back the idea of what the GSRP teachers could teach the ECSE teachers so there was no expert only; that between the two teachers, both individuals were learning something new and both would be teaching something familiar and known.

I spent time in each classroom observing the GSRP teachers and identified, what looked to me, like a strong skill that each GSRP teacher was passionate about and energetic about when engaged with students. I then asked each GSRP teacher if this was a skill set she felt very confident about when teaching in order to reinforce that what I observed was something the teacher felt good about using in the classroom. The teacher working with the ECSE teacher from Team A felt that her area of 'expertise' was academic instruction. "I feel I do a good job teaching a concept in a small group." I agreed. The GSRP teacher was always organized and

ready for her small group instruction. She had materials prepared, examples to show, and would engage students on an individual level. For example, when observing, I watched the GSRP teacher lead a small group about the concept of same and different. She had toys that were the same and toys that were different. She had foods and items of clothing. She asked the students to sort items into categories and then to do a bird's eye view around the room for items that were same and different. She provided positive reinforcement when students were engaged and provided individual instruction to each student in the small group. She knew which student needed more support and which student could be challenged. She made sure every student was successful in identifying a set of items based on similarities and differences. After the lesson, I asked her how long it took to plan her small group. "Sometimes it takes forever! I want to make sure what I bring to the table is appropriate for each child and allows for success for each one. That means I have to be ready for a range of skill and ability." Knowing that the Creative Curriculum lays out themes and lessons, I asked her how much time she felt she had to take to supplement the Creative Curriculum materials in order to truly 'individualize' for her class. When she replied that it look a lot of time, I asked her if she wanted help with this. She replied, "Yes!"

After this interaction it became clear to me, as the researcher and as a participant, that one of the barriers we were encountering was workload and time. The GSRP teachers were focused on curriculum and instruction and asking them to add another layer of instruction on top of a lesson (by incorporating visuals) was adding stress and anxiety. The ECSE teachers had focused the use of visuals around improving on task behavior as this was the more observable behavior. Yet, within an ECSE classroom, there is no required curriculum. There are expectations and guidelines, but what is taught varies. Basic academics and concepts are reinforced, but the main

point of participation in an ECSE classroom is almost always secondary to behavior or low developmental level.

I began to wonder if we were approaching the implementation of visuals as a behavior support from the wrong angle or lens. I asked the ECSE teachers to choose one part of the curriculum and to create a visual for that part of the day. The GSRP teacher working with Teacher B was struggling with her students during Recall. This part of the Creative Curriculum has students coming together in a large group to recall and describe what they did during the hour of play. Students are asked to identify what center or area (art, blocks, kitchen, discovery, books, etc.) they play in, who they play with, and what they did. This particular class had several students who struggled to stay on the carpet during the large group, who couldn't recall what they had done or who they had play with, or what they were suppose to say. The GSRP teacher struggled with this part of the day and during my observations, she always appeared to be frustrated with the lack of structure during this activity. I asked her if we could create something to help with this time, to which she expressed gratitude and was receptive to some support. I helped the ECSE teacher create a visual that had pictures of the classroom, clips with a headshot of each child, and a visual script that had the prompts: "I played in; I played with; and I did". Together, we took it to the GSRP teacher and asked her if we use it during her next Recall time and if she would help us follow the format of the Creative Curriculum for this specific activity. We did a quick role play/demo before the students came in for the day where the GSRP teacher held the visual, identified a student to come up to the front, had the student identify his/her own clip, then with the help of the ECSE teacher, use the visual to place the clip on the board next to an area where he played and use the sentence strip to tell the class, "I played in cars. I played with Sam. I did a race." We talked about having the students with higher recall skills go first so

that this would provide the students who struggled with a visual cue for recall. For example, if there were three clips already next to kitchen and a student identified that area for recall, a visual cue would be there for who the child played with. By giving each teacher a role with implementing the use of this visual, and by incorporating the visual into an activity that the GSRP teacher self identified a need for support with, each teacher had ownership and a clear idea of what her role was within the activity. There was no need to jump in and do-each teacher knew and had a clear expectation of how to perform her role.

Previously, the ECSE teacher had been going around the large group showing pictures to support appropriate behaviors (quiet mouth, listening ears, sitting with crossed legs, hands to self, etc.). Once we looked at HOW we were using the visuals and changed it to become a universal support that every child utilized, the overall group behavior changed. The activity ran with less distractions, better language, and took less time to complete. When I talked to the GSRP teacher afterwards, I praised her on her effective use of visuals, and how she implemented the visual chart. "You mean that counts as using a visual?", she asked. I stepped back and allowed the ECSE teacher to respond. "Yes. We can do more like that if it's helpful."

We did similar things in the other classrooms. ECSE teachers worked with the GSRP teachers to identify areas of the Creative Curriculum that were a struggle secondary to student behaviors. The GSRP teacher working with Teacher A identified large group time as an area of concern. The ECSE teacher created a visual choice board for different musical songs that the students often chose from and asked if Song Choice could become a daily job title. This would cut down on the battle for who was able to choose the song when music was played for large group time and would also provide some structure to making a choice. The GSRP teacher was very receptive to this idea. I asked the ECSE teacher to make sure the GSRP teacher had a role

in using the visuals. Again, this became a universal use of visuals to support positive student behavior and to structure the Creative Curriculum activity. Each teacher had a role; the GSRP teacher was going to place five choices on a song board and ask the Song Choice student to select two. The ECSE teacher was going to place the two choices on a First-Then board to help the rest of the class know which song was coming first and which was coming second. This may seem very simple, yet the impact of both teachers working together and using the evidenced based practice within the curriculum was the first step in establishing a collaborative working relationship.

By making the use of visuals functional and relative to what the GSRP teachers identified, instead of looking at it from an individual student behavior in an attempt to increase on task behavior, actually aligns more so with the UDL philosophy. The implementation of visuals from a class wide perspective is universal. Allowing teachers to identify when and where encouraged more ownership and facilitated fostering the working relationships between ECSE and GSRP teachers. Of course this did not distinguish student behaviors, but I felt it was a step in the right direction of identifying areas where the teachers could support one another through the use of a universally implemented evidenced based practice. By the GSRP teachers identifying the area of the curriculum, with the ECSE teachers creating visuals, and both sets of teachers having a role in implementing the practice, no one was jumping in taking over; it was a mutually established collaborative activity and allowed the GSRP teachers to implement the use of a new practice.

I gave each ECSE teacher another copy of the UDL for Early Childhood article and asked them to take it back to their GSRP teacher as a point of discussion on what other areas of the curriculum the GSRP teachers felt they could implement the use of visuals as a universal

support, versus as a individual support to address behavior. I strongly felt that this needed to be a conversation between the teachers, and that they needed to build on the working relationships and spend time together, without my interference or facilitation. The overall goal of the collaborative relationships shouldn't require my presence to facilitate the work; I wanted the teachers to have autonomy and to be able to begin to do this work on their own, with each other.

I explained to the ECSE teachers that we would debrief in our January COP and to be ready to share their experiences, as well as where they were headed to help promote UDL and evidenced based practices within the Creative Curriculum.

January

"Play is the highest form of research." – Albert Einstein

Having felt like we had made a huge break through in establishing collaborative working relationships, I was eagerly anticipating our January COP meeting and was excited to have the ECSE teachers share their experiences. As it happened, we had another Early Childhood full day training just prior to our ECSE COP meeting. That allowed the GSRP and ECSE teachers to have time together to reflect on how things were going in the class. I sat back and listened to the conversation flow around me.

> "I finally get it-all along I felt like I was being pushed to use pictures instead of teaching….it makes sense now to use pictures along with what I want to do. It's kind of like a stop signal on the road that makes the beeping noise. There is a visual piece and a

beep to hear and it's presented together."

"I found it easier to use the recall board because it was part of the lesson-it wasn't an additional piece I had to remember to pull out or reference or use. That really helped me!"

"To me this is totally different than having pictures on a board to represent my schedule. I really like that kids can make a choice and I really like having the song choice person be a job-that takes away the arguments on the carpet about who gets to pick. Since the kids already understand the concept of classroom helpers, it was really a good idea to build this into the job routine."

As individual teachers started to talk, other teachers started to ask questions. "Explain that to me-you have song choice as a job? Why?" and "Isn't it hard for kids to wait for placing their clip on the recall board? How do you do that?". The conversation flowed and ideas were shared. Although each ECSE and GSRP teacher had implemented something different, they were all able to share ideas to support one another and to talk away with more ways to incorporate the use of visuals into their classrooms.

The focus of our January intensive training centered on the idea of play. I was curious to see how the GSRP teachers would take this idea. Within the Creative Curriculum, there is an hour of play and exploration time. Kids are able to choose where and what to play with and can move between activities. Adults are present to facilitate play, but do not structure, limit, and set boundaries. This hour of play had been a cornerstone of complaints from the both groups of teachers from the beginning of the year. Knowing that the intensive training would focus on structuring play, one including and promoting the offering of choices, as well as increasing

learning opportunities during and through play, I didn't foreshadow the day but sat back to let the teachers listen and learn, and was hopeful that they would walk away with something to help structure this hour of play that often became chaotic, stressful, and full of inappropriate student behaviors. An hour can be a long time for a child to make independent choices for play, to engage in turn taking and waiting, and to remain focused on specific areas of interest to stay engaged.

At our first break in the morning, I asked the whole group what they felt their role was in structuring the play. "I put out the toys and make sure the centers are full."; "I like to sit and play with the kids!"; "I try to engage them in games and turns." Each teacher had an appropriate response. But when I asked them what they felt their role was for delivering instruction during play and I was met with blank looks. I pressed on and had the teachers describe their frustrations with this hour of play time. Since I spent time in the classrooms as well, I wasn't surprised by the answers. "Some of the kids don't know how to play. It's like they can't share or take turns." "Some don't even know what to do with the toys!". Although I was grateful that no one had signaled out a student with special needs as being the culprit for not knowing how to play, it was obvious that the kids with developmental delays were the ones really struggling during this time of play.

I referenced the group back to research that supports the importance of play and reminded them that play has been described as the primary occupation of children (Bundy, 1992), and it is through social experiences that more mature adaptive behavior develops (Cohen, Sparling-Cohn, & O'Donnell, 1993; Hartup, 1983). That, for most children, success in play enhances learning through the development of higher-order skills such as initiative (Reynolds & Jones, 1997).

Both initiation and response to initiations made by a peer are important and desirable elements of interactive play. I reminded them that peer play is considered a central aspect of childhood play, beginning in toddlerhood and continuing throughout the life span (Simon & Daub, 1993), but from a developmental perspective, it is particularly important during the preschool years. I referenced them back to the Creative Curriculum that fosters natural opportunities for social interaction – which are often considered the cornerstone in childhood play (Goldstein, English, Shafer, & Kaczmarek, 1997; Yang, Wolfberg, Wu, & Hwu, 2003). But that these natural opportunities may not be successful in meeting social interaction goals for all children with special needs (Buysee & Bailey, 1993). And that this was one of our lofty goals; to improve social interactions for all students participating in the classroom.

As the day went on, part of the intensive training highlighted the importance of games for promoting peer and social interaction. All of a sudden a light bulb went off in my head. At our next break, I asked the GSRP teachers if they had games in their classrooms. "I used to, but it's been a long time." "Now that you mention it, no!". I acknowledged to the group that I knew I wasn't in every classroom every day, but that I had yet to see a game in any of the rooms. "It's not part of the Creative Curriculum materials." I asked if it was prohibited to use games during the hour of play and no one responded otherwise. I quickly outlined my thoughts to the group. "What if the ECSE teachers brought in a tabletop game to play with kids during the hour of free play? Kids could choose to come and play so it would still be student driven, but the teacher could have visuals and supports and scripts to model language, turn taking, waiting, and prompting, all the skills we are struggling with during the play time. By having a high level of excitement, and a full 60 minutes of time, we can be fairly sure that the majority of kids will come and attempt at least a few minutes of a game for social interaction with peers that is adult

structured and modeled." Conversation picked up around me and the teachers agreed and each team documented on their Action Plans which games and what scripts/visuals were needed to implement a 'game center' during play.

When our ECSE COP met the following day, the ECSE teachers expressed excitement at finally feeling like they were part of a team. I gave them time to create their language scripts for the game centers and scheduled time to observe within the following week.

I went in to observe the following week. What I saw was a little chaotic, but made it very clear that this was a much-needed activity. In the first classroom I observed, the ECSE teacher sat at a kidney shaped table and had a Connect Four game in front of her. Several of the students came up to explore and asked her how to play. She struggled with getting the group of four students to take turns in order to play the game. Two of the children quickly walked away and lost interest in participating in the game. I observed a similar situation in the second classroom. It was clear that the children were struggling with waiting to take a turn as well as with following specific directions to play a game. One room had CandyLand out and the students was not able to follow the rules; one child wanted to play the traditional way and another child wanted to just match cards. The visuals and scripts we had created within our ECSE COP meeting were not clear or specific enough; in other words, we had created scripts that were too generic.

Knowing that time is always lacking, and keeping in mind that I wanted to ensure that I was still part of the group and not just the researcher, I created specific scripts and visuals for five different games that could be rotated through the classrooms. I set up game boxes with the game, visuals, and specific scripts for the adult that included how to prompt the children for waiting and turn taking. My plan was to distribute and rotate the game boxes between the

classrooms in hopes of facilitating more social interaction amongst the kids in the class – both the students with special needs and the students without special needs. This also was a huge piece of 'participation' under our inclusion model. It was also something I was looking at as part of the classroom observations. I decided to wait until our February ECSE COP meeting to share the boxes so that we could talk about why this idea of playing games was important to our work.

February

"Learning is finding out what you already know." – Richard Bach

At our ECSE COP February meeting, we started by reviewing student data. I asked each ECSE teacher to reflect on how they felt students were learning. Was this working for kids? "I see more language growth. All the kids are talking more." "I see a little more independence and kids asking for things. One of the kids is now asking to go and use the bathroom. He never did that before." "I still have one that had a lot of behavior issues and I know it's irritating the GSRP teacher. She can't seem to control him, but I can't either!"

I asked about learning and how they felt the students were doing with the curriculum. "I still feel it's not very academic. They do fun things, but we spent a whole unit on cardboard boxes." "I'm seeing a lot of social gains and some academic gains. But it's hard when everything is still very much about following the childs' lead. I feel I have to sneak things in! Like matching colors or sequencing numbers. Aren't those things important, too?" I brought the teachers back to an idea that we had started with at the beginning of the year. I pulled out the kindergarten observation survey and we looked at the results again.

I told the group that, based on the kindergarten survey, the social emotional pieces were the largest area of challenge for kindergarten teachers. I reminded them that this process was about supporting all students within a classroom in order to be better prepared for kindergarten. One way to help with this was too address on the social emotional aspect. I had heard more complaints from kindergarten teachers about students lack of ability to sit and remain on task; lack of ability to self regulate emotions; and limited ability to engage in turn taking activities with peers. What I hadn't heard much of (and what was supported by the results from the kindergarten observation survey) was teacher frustration with students' lack of knowing colors, numbers, shapes, and letters. I reminded the teachers that our goals was for students with special needs to access, participate, and be supported in an environment with typical developing peers; an environment that was structured to prepare them for kindergarten. It wasn't our main goal to make sure the academics were strong. That was a piece of it, but all kids within the GSRP programs were getting the same curricular exposure. I asked the teachers, "Isn't it most important that we support kids to be able to access and navigate a kindergarten environment socially? To teach them how to ask for help? To be more independent? To be able to share and take turns? To be able to follow a schedule and routine? Aren't those pre-academic skills as well?" This was met with silence. I felt maybe I had pushed a little too far and had taken on too much of a researcher role. One of the teachers looked up and said, "Yes. But it's still really hard to do that in a classroom where I don't feel I have control or the ability to put things in place. I do see the kids making progress. But I still feel there needs to be more consistency with practices when I am not there. Consequences for behaviors are still not happening and the way it is handled is not really working. How is that going to prepare for next year? The behaviors are still there."

At this point, I asked the teachers to take out their data forms. Each teacher, in accordance with new teacher evaluation components from the state, was required to show growth for every student on her caseload. Not wanting to overwhelm the teachers, I had been trying to align this with our work. Being of preschool age, a growth could be in an area of development rather than academics. We had been taking data on each student in the area of social emotional growth and I wanted to chart and graph the data points to see if we were seeing growth and if we were on track to make our growth indicator. Every single one of our students with an IEP, whether they were enrolled in an ECSE (special education) or a GSRP (typical developing program) classroom was assessed three times throughout the year using the Brigance Developmental Inventory. I asked the teachers to pull out one Brigance form and to open it to look at what the measure was evaluating. "How much of this is academic compared to developmental measures? How much of it is self help skills? Social skills? How many questions even ask about academics?" I also pulled out a GSRP and an ECSE classroom expectations checklist. "What's so different about these? Where have we gotten the idea that kindergarten readiness is purely academic? Our kindergarten observation survey supports what we already know and what our classroom checklists speak to – that part of being ready for kindergarten is being socially and emotionally ready. But this is the hard part. It's easier to focus on colors and shapes and numbers. It's hard to focus on behavior and self-regulation and turn taking and sharing. And we are each still coming to that from a very different angle."

In looking at the data, we were seeing growth socially emotionally and with regard to independence. We plotted data points and found that students were making progress. One student, the particular one the ECSE teacher had previously spoken about with regard to behavior and consequences, was not making as much growth. I decided to have a private

conversation with the ECSE teacher about this and we scheduled a time for later on in the week.

I wanted to loop back to the concept of games in the classrooms during our COP meeting and wanted to distribute the game boxes. I asked the teachers why we couldn't do everything at once. Couldn't we work on turn taking through a game that focused on colors or letters or numbers? We talked about how learning at the preschool age is truly through play. This discussion brought us back to what we already knew; that it should be about following a childs' lead, but that we could structure that to facilitate and support growth that centered on both pre-academic skills as well as social emotional skills. I introduced the game boxes and asked the teachers if they felt this might help with both pre-academics as well as building social emotional skills through play and following the lead of the child. "Can't hurt to try" was the response I received.

This meeting felt disjointed to me and I spent some time reflecting on what the teachers had expressed. It can be hard to sustain the excitement of something new and I think I was feeling the frustrations of the teachers with regard to wanting to do more in the classrooms. Although things were going fairly well and no one was refusing to work with each other and kids were all making progress, there was a lack of excitement and passion. I also think the teachers were starting to feel the anxiety of the end of the year approaching. Being the first year that we had implemented inclusion between ECSE and GSRP, I think there was pressure to make sure it all worked. I realized some of that pressure was probably coming from me. The passion I have for this work and for wanting all children to succeed drove me to want to incorporate inclusion. And although I strove to make myself a member of the COP and not just a researcher, I wasn't a part of the daily experience that the ECSE teachers had when they were in the GSRP classrooms. Not wanting to step on any toes, my message to the ECSE teachers had been to work

collaboratively with the GSPR teachers. But there really hadn't been a message to the GSRP teachers about how they were suppose to work with the ECSE teachers. Rather than establishing norms within the classroom, we had spoken about norms for meetings and how to handle conflict. In reflection, I thought that maybe we needed to go backwards in order to go forward and to ask the GSRP teachers how the ECSE teachers could be more active within the classroom. Now that trust had been established between the two groups, maybe it was time for the ECSE teachers to have a more active role in the instructional part of the classroom environment. My hope was that by doing a game during the hour of play, the GSRP teachers may see the value in having the ECSE run a small group or a center.

I met with the ECSE teacher who was still struggling with her time within the GSRP classroom and not feeling that it was supportive enough for the particular student who continued to have behavior challenges. We discussed what had been attempted and what was still a challenge with regard to putting strategies in place within the classroom. The ECSE teacher indicated that although things were going well, she was still frustrated at the lack of carryover with visuals and behavior strategies when she was not in the classroom. I asked her if it was hard to let go of the need to be in charge. This was an extremely talented ECSE teacher who had years of experience. She was paired with a first year GSRP teacher. We talked about how hard it must be to walk into someone else's classroom, but to have more knowledge about several of the students (as she had been their teacher the year before when they attended ECSE). She expressed concern about the particular student in question and about how she and the GSRP teacher were not on the same page with the recommendation for next year. She felt the student should have another year before moving to kindergarten and the GSRP teacher felt the student could move ahead. I offered to meet with both of them and to look at data and why each one was

making the recommendation that she was making. The GSRP teacher would most likely have academic and curricular data; the ECSE teacher would have progress on levels of student independence and social engagement. I thought that perhaps, with everything laid on the table, they might be able to come to a mutual agreement.

Before this meeting could be scheduled, the GSRP teacher put in her notice. She had been struggling with family and health issues and decided that she needed to put herself and her family in the forefront. With the teacher leaving, I started to really question how we had gone about implementing the change in classroom practice to provide inclusive services. We truly learn the work by doing the work and I wanted to learn from this particular experience. I wasn't sure we had supported the GSRP teachers enough, or that we had explained the process or the role of the ECSE teachers. In reflection, it really did feel like we had thrown people together and hoped it would all work – and although it was working, the relationship side of things needed to be addressed. Knowing that a new teacher would be put into the classroom, I wanted to take it as an opportunity to be more intentional about building the relationship between the GSRP and ECSE teachers.

February proved to be a rough month where ECSE teachers didn't see as much value in their roles within the GSRP environment. The underlying feeling was that they wanted to be more of a part of the classroom, rather than a support person.

March

"From every ending comes a new beginning." - Lurlene McDaniel

Knowing that the time for data collection was coming to a close, but also knowing that the project and the intention of creating inclusive classrooms was just beginning, I took a step back and spent time just observing the GSRP classrooms. I tried to take off my researcher hat and attempted to simply watch the social and communicative interactions in each classroom. These interactions included teacher to student, teacher-to-teacher, and peer to peer. What I witnessed was incredible. Despite my frustration at my own lack of awareness in working to educate the teachers on their roles in the classroom and spending the majority of the time working on how to best support all students in an inclusive classroom, I observed each of the four classrooms to have a strong sense of community. Teachers were calling each other by name; students were doing the same. Not one student stood out from another and despite the frustrations that the ECSE teachers had voiced regarding their lack of ability to go beyond the role of a paraprofessional, I witnessed teachers teaching. Maybe not in the traditional sense that one would assume, but incidental teaching, using real life examples in the moment to teach, playing off one another to create a joyful environment, and supporting one another in front of children.

All of this made me realize that we had created our own boundaries and had placed constraints or limits on our own definitions of teaching. We had been so focused on defining inclusion that we lost sight of what our whole purpose truly was, to create a community of diverse learners who were all supported in able to grow, learn, and play together. Teaching is multidimensional and we had limited our definition of teaching to be purely instructional. Any good teacher acknowledges that to teach also means to counsel, to support, to model, and to encourage. The past seven months had centered around how to change teaching pedagogy to create supported inclusive high-quality preschool classrooms. Despite barriers, both perceived

and created, we had accomplished what we set out to do.

In one classroom, I observed a GSRP teacher use a personal example to model how to deal with conflict after a student reached out in an attempt to grab a toy from another child. "Remember how I asked Ms. M [the ECSE teacher] if I could borrow her puppet when I wanted to have a turn? I didn't just grab it, I asked her. Can you ask if Sarah if you can borrow her toy?" Although this may sound simple, it demonstrates that the ECSE teacher was an active part of the classroom. It reflects an interaction between the teachers, in front of students, that was used as a model for teaching a child.

I also witnessed a GSRP teacher and an ECSE teacher reading a story together. They each had a copy of the same book and were taking turns reading the pages and acting out the story. One teacher sat on either side of the carpet holding the book for the students to see. No one asked them to do this; yet it was an incredibly effective way to hold students' attention, to incorporate higher levels of student engagement as the students had a better viewpoint of the story and were actively engaged with the notion of hearing both teachers read the story and act out the characters, as well as helped to support on task behavior. When one teacher picked up the story, the other could help remind students to remain quiet in order to hear the story. The teachers appeared to be enjoying themselves and laughing at the story of the big bad wolf, which assisted in keeping the students engaged. To me, it was definitely an example of two teachers leading a lesson, supporting one another, and supporting students to create a sense of community where all students were engaged.

I observed students approaching both GSRP and ECSE teachers for help with classroom situations. Students were not just approaching the GSRP teacher, but also seeking out the ECSE

teacher for support. And it wasn't just students with IEPs approaching the ECSE teachers. In fact, when I randomly asked students in each classroom who the teacher was, students in all four GSRP classrooms identified both the GSRP teacher and the ECSE teacher.

The power of reflection and being able to take a step back to see the broader picture had been under utilized. When we met for our March COP, I started the meeting by asking the ECSE teachers to reflect on the use of games in the GSRP classrooms.

> "Oh, it's been a lot of fun! The kids love the games and we have to take turns for waiting for a turn to come to the table to play!"
>
> "I've been having the kids use each others' names as they take turns. In my own ECSE classroom, the students rarely call each other by name but in GSRP, the language ability is higher so I can facilitate that. It's been neat to see the kids then call each other by name in the classroom and outside. One parent even told me her son came home and was talking about his friend Matt and his friend Bella."
>
> "I've been working with a couple of the kids on how to wait for their turn. Impulsivity is so high! So I used the wait and my turn visuals with one group and had them teach it to the next group. The GSRP teacher noticed and asked me if I thought we could use the wait visual and strategy for when we line up at the bathroom. That's always a hard time!"

I inquired if they had spoken with the GSRP teachers for feedback on the use of games. "She said they used to use games all the time and she had forgotten how engaging it was." "The teacher I work with said we should put it in the Recall Activity because so many kids were

coming to the table to play." "She liked how I was using the visuals to help with waiting and turn taking and sharing." I also asked if there was an observable change in the classroom dynamics during this hour of play. "I guess it felt a little less chaotic. I mean, the kids could choose to come to my table and when they did, they knew what we were doing and the steps for how to play were laid out in front of them. Having it run kind of like a center activity gave a little structure to the hour of play. It also kept the kids at the table a little longer. Some of the other table activities during play don't really have a clear start or ending. It's all up to the child. But a game has a start and a finish. A few kids didn't want to stay to complete the game but having the visual of how to play the game and what it looked like at the end helped to keep them there. I think having an adult at the table also helped. I just think we will need a lot of new games!"

As the teachers had been talking, I had been writing down some of the phrases they were using. At a break in conversation, I turned my paper around and had them read several of the phrases back to me: teaching how to wait, structuring the game, facilitating use of names, supporting and modeling turn-taking, encouraging the use of praise and peers praising each other, celebrating effort and attempts, modeling language, expanding on vocabulary, teaching self-regulation, working on pre-academics. In essence, they were teaching and instructing. In doing so, they had created an activity within the structure of the class schedule and routine that allowed for them to have a more central role for participating in the GSRP classroom. Not only were they working with students, but they were also modeling strategies for the GSRP teachers and had created opportunities to rebalance the collaborative nature of working with the general education teachers. This hadn't required training in the Creative Curriculum, but it had required careful observation of when and where it was appropriate within the context of the GSRP daily

schedule to incorporate teachable moments. The ECSE teachers were taking a tool from the COP and implementing it within the classroom. This allowed for the facilitation of the transfer of knowledge, the *HOW*, to be modeled so that the GSRP teachers could see the tool from the COP put into action in the classroom. This scaffolding of stepping back to model the tool allows for the GSRP teachers to now take the concept and implement it on their own. This appropriation of the tool is harvested through a collaborative effort. The COP discourse initiated the idea (of using games), the ECSE teachers were able to step in to implement strategies that are evidenced based and proven to be effective for teaching young children (use of visuals, expanding on wait and time delay, embedding instruction, using prompts and corrective feedback, and modeling expanded language) in order to then scaffold back to allow the GSRP to harvest the new knowledge and skill. By incorporating these strategies into an existing part of the daily schedule, nothing had to change with regard to curriculum and both groups of teachers, ECSE and GSRP, were part of instruction. This simple act had lead to the establishment of a collaborative partnership that is crucial for success of an inclusive classroom. Each teacher felt valued and part of the classroom. From an observer viewpoint, students were actively engaged and learning, data was indicating student growth across all four classrooms, and teachers had constructed and harvested new skills and knowledge for implementation in the classroom setting. Teachers were modeling and learning from each other, engaging in discourse regarding tools and strategies within the COP meetings, and putting new practices into action.

A COP involves apprenticeship and although I wanted to avoid an expert model where the ECSE teachers informed the GSRP teachers on best practices for working with students with disabilities, on a small scale, there had to be some level of teaching and scaffolding in order to construct new skills. In reflection, it would have been hard to walk in the door at the start of the

year knowing when and where in the schedule new skills could even be implemented. This would have likely uprooted any chance of establishing a collaborative working relationship between the GSRP and the ECSE teachers. The ECSE teachers needed time in the classroom, learning the daily schedule and routines as modeled by the GSRP teachers in order to observe the classroom. This observation of the classroom, the environment, the routine, as well as the dynamics of the students, was crucial in identifying how, as the special education staff, we could support the GSRP teachers in order to create an inclusive learning environment that would have benefit for every student in the room. The observation of taking time to stand back and watch the GSRP teacher interactions with students was also important for the ECSE teachers to observe so that there was knowledge of individual teaching styles and the best way to support each GSRP teacher based on her own unique teaching style. The art of establishing these relationships needed to be grounded in respect for each other and for the students. By taking the time to learn about one another, the ECSE teachers could then identify areas to support – not take ownership of – and had the ability to engage in dialogue with the GSRP teachers in order to broker specific COP tools. GSRP teachers then appropriated these tools and strategies into their practice, into their daily schedules, and within the context of their own teaching styles.

When I pointed out to the ECSE teachers that when we started this journey, the idea was to better prepare students for kindergarten. When we expanded our work to incorporate students and peer teachers beyond the walls of our ECSE classroom, we broadened the circle of who we had the potential to positively impact. By sharing knowledge, and learning from peer teachers, we had the ability to impact more than the 12 students within our ECSE classrooms. I asked them if we had achieved what we set out to do. One reply was the culmination of responses. "Yes. But it never stops. What's next?"

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS 'CHANGE IN TEACHER PRACTICES'

Introduction

In initiating the creation of an inclusive preschool program, it was important that what we created be of high quality; that the preschool experience should not be lessened or diminished with the addition of students with special needs. Although the research indicates that when students with special needs are included in a typical developing program, each child in the classroom benefits in some way (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys & Sam, 2010; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Odom, et al., 2004; Strain & Hoyson, 2000), it was important to ensure that the staff had adequate knowledge of how to teach to a diversified class. The Universal Design for Early Childhood Education (UDECE) was the framework that we accessed to help guide teachers in creating classrooms that had an emphasis on providing learners with a variety of ways to access and process information and demonstrate what they learned (Blagojevic, Twomey, & Labas 2002). Establishing a UDL environment encouraged teachers to shift pedagogical practices as the idea was to create inclusive educational environments for every child, rather than to adapt the classroom for individual needs. A large aspect of this shift was that the GSRP teachers were being asked to implement the changes to include all students, rather than to have students with special needs be taken out of the classroom to receive the specialized support. For some, this notion of having to teach differently was a tough mindset to change. Yet, the nature of working with young children requires flexibility and creativity, and having the support of an ECSE teacher to help model and guide pedagogical shifts made the work a little easier.

Keeping in mind that the primary objective was to create a preschool environment that would truly be 'universal' and be inclusive for every child, regardless of whether or not there

was an IEP for special education services, meant that some changes had to occur. This idea of UDECE doesn't mean that individualization doesn't occur, but rather it not be highlighted or overtly expressed. For example, individualized instruction may still occur, but it also is available to any child, not just a targeted student. It can be difficult to determine how to create a classroom that highlights the idea of UDECE, but still allows for individual student learning needs. I drew upon the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist to help establish UDECE environments, to help identify areas of teacher change in practices, and to help with guiding mindset shifts of what it meant to teach in an inclusive setting.

Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist

The Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist was developed around the idea of UDECE from *The Universal Design of Early Education: Moving Forward for All Children* (Conn-Powers, Cross, Traub, & Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006) and structured the content around the joint inclusion definition from DEC and NAEYC (2009) that speaks to Access, Participation, and Supports. Each subarea included targeted questions to determine whether the environment met expectations for an inclusive classroom through Access, Participation, and Supports, all under the guise of UDECE. This fit in with the content from the current research study. The primary objective was to document the experiences and shifts of teachers and their practices as they created inclusive environments based on the joint DEC/NAEYC inclusion definition. An inclusive preschool environment that highlighted UDECE principles to support the notion that every child learns differently and that teaching practices should reflect how to engage students with school content and material in order to be successful learners.

The Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist was completed three times: at the start of September, December, and February by two reviewers. The second reviewer's checklist served

to support an unbiased review from the researcher. The second reviewer was a special education teacher, knowledgeable in UDL and who had been a co-teacher at the high school level for over 10 years and was familiar with the teaching practices and evidenced based practices that were being implemented from the START training. After each completion, the checklists were reviewed with the ECSE and the GSRP teacher and together, we identified target areas where teaching practices could be changed or altered, and we reviewed any discrepancies between the two reviewers. We also identified teaching strategies that were being used and evidence of how the environment was aligning to that of an UDECE space.

One ECSE teacher was splitting her time between two GSRP classrooms (classrooms A and B), with two different GSRP teachers; hence there were four different environment checklists that were completed, between three ECSE teachers and four GSRP teachers. Similarities were noted across each classroom as every GSRP teacher utilizes the same curriculum and each GSRP teacher had limited experience teaching students with special needs. Checklist results from the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist from all four GSRP classrooms are compiled below. Based on the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist, the GSPR classrooms were observed three times across the duration of the study regarding components from the inclusion definition of Access, Participation, and Supports. The following table identifies EBP and provides commentary on how material that was introduced connects back to the DEC/NAEYC definition of inclusion. The PROs are what were observed based on the checklist sections, including specific evidenced based practices, and the CONs were areas that were noted to be improved upon in order to more closely align with the definition from DEC/NAEYC. The NOTEs are running commentary regarding what was implemented to help support staff in promoting high-quality inclusive preschool classrooms.

Table 11: Summary across classrooms from Quality Inclusion Checklist

MONTH	ACCESS Including UDL supports	PARTICIPATION	SUPPORTS Including models of collaboration	NOTES
SEPT	PROS: different cultures represented; expectations clearly communicated; children able to access program CONS: Limited evidence of flexibility in use (unique needs of students supported through varied use of environmental design and materials); limited use of pictures to define space, *tolerance for error* not defined, layout of room not conducive for all children to interact with materials and environment, lack of *multi-sensory ways for learning*, limited way for children to *express ideas* (all verbal), lack of *intentional teachin*g	PROS: adults supporting peer relationships and facilitating collaborative problem solving between children; universal screenings occurring and progress monitoring CONS: limited naturally occurring activities to support IEP goals; limited evidence of *embedded instruction*; limited tools/strategies to support *student engagemen*t; limited *incidental* and *intentional* teaching; no *structured transitions* between tasks; minimum evidence of scaffolding strategies (*modeling, prompting, corrective feedback*), limited evidenced of tiered models of instruction to allow all children to reach the same desired outcome/goal (no *differentiated instruction or explicit data based instruction*)	PROS: staff participating in professional development together, all team members participating during IEPs and conferences, respect for cultural competences CONS: lack of orientation process for staff, although participating in START, no other ongoing in house staff development specific to inclusion, limited collaboration with community agencies, limited family involvement	Introduce concepts of: EBP (visuals) to support ACCESS and PARTICIPATION; teaching practices of embedded instruction (for more structured transitions, and to increase learning opportunities), and strategies to increase student engagement in materials

Table 11 (cont'd)

MONTH	ACCESS Including UDL supports	PARTICIPATION	SUPPORTS Including models of collaboration	NOTES
DEC	PROS: use of choice boards for structured play, break area in classroom created where kids can 'take a break' when needed, re-arrangement of classroom space to define areas for play, table top, circle CONS: still; limited with ways for multi-sensory expression and learning	PROS: created a sensory transition and wrote it into weekly lesson plan that incorporates embedded instruction of prepositional concepts, visual schedules implemented in the room; visuals during play to increase peer interactions; choice board for songs using pictures was implemented CONS: Limited evidence of scaffolding and explicit data based instruction, better student engagement, but still lacking for multisensory experiences	PROS: more actions from START trainings being implemented; GSRP teacher asking more questions and wanting to have a better understanding of IEP process CONS: no defined roles in classroom or with families	Incorporate: multi-sensory learning, tolerance for error, introduce scaffolding (models, prompts, feedback), specific data based/explicit based instruction through centers, more offering of choices to promote student independence

Table 11 (cont'd)

MONTH	ACCESS Including UDL supports	PARTICIPATION	SUPPORTS Including models of collaboration	NOTES
FEB	PROS: more evidenced of use of visuals, ease of access to environment and materials for students, teachers both feeling more confident in use of visuals and supports CONS: nothing that could be identified, all students in class accessing the environment	PROS: offering of choices for play, songs, books, ECSE teacher modeling prompt hierarchy, embedded instruction during game centers, ECSE teacher sharing data with GSRP teacher and making recommendations during circle time for ways to increase student engagement (time delay, use of prompt, use of visuals with a story and song), CONS: limited naturally occurring opportunities to support IEP goals, all students expected to express ideas orally, behaviors continue to be a challenge with participation despite use of breaks, social stories, and direct models and teaching	PROS: START trainings facilitated new ideas for recall strategies; ECSE teacher running a center in the room CONS: Still not clear as to roles for adults in the room	More coaching and feedback; less tension in classroom

Through the use of the checklist, we were able to determine areas that were successful, and areas that required improvement. It was eye opening for me to look at the three areas under Access, Participation, and Supports. I feel that across the board, the participants had done an

amazing job of ensuring Access. We had facilitated enrollment into the GSRP classrooms, provided transportation, and created classrooms that were easily accessed and navigated (both physically and visually with the use of pictures to define spaces). Classrooms included a wide range of activities that supported learning in multiple ways: through play and embedded instruction, through physical movement, through music, through hands on activities, and through both direct and explicit based instruction.

For the GSRP teachers, it was easier to accept the EBP use of visuals to support the classroom environment. Pictures were implemented to define spaces in the classroom, to help students know when an area was not open for play, and for making individual requests (such as to use the bathroom or to get a drink). Large pictures were used to depict the daily classroom schedules and to help structure the routine of the day.

Under the area of Participation, we saw room for multiple ways to improve upon teaching practices. It is one thing to be granted *access* to an environment, but that doesn't automatically ensure equal participation. Young children are impulsive, spontaneous, and unpredictable. This can make it hard to follow through on even the best-constructed plan or lesson. Add students with special needs, and participation takes on a new definition. For the GSRP teachers, ensuring that all children participated in classroom activities required a level of flexibility and creativity. In attempting to create a UDL classroom, the objective was to be prepared for any type of learner to walk through the door. This meant that all students would have the option of learning and expressing through various modalities. The use of visuals for participation meant that teachers had to interact with the strategy; therefore teachers had to implement and use visuals during instruction. This is harder than it sounds and requires a new skill set,

Each GSRP teacher had a different level of confidence with implementing the use of visuals to support student learning and outcomes. As a researcher, I drew upon each teacher's level of interest and targeted where in the daily schedule to have the ECSE teachers model the use of visuals to increase student participation in classroom activities. With the mindset to start small to go big, I was hopeful that no one would feel too overwhelmed at learning a new skill. The ECSE teachers spent time modeling the use of visuals: for two it was during play, for another during circle, and another during a large group recall activity. With the use of visuals during instruction, not only did student participation as a whole class improve, but disruptive behaviors decreased as well.

With the Creative Curriculum, the content is very structured and explicit; it can be considered intentional instruction. There is a goal and a purpose and under UDECE, every child should be expected to meet the objective. For the GSRP teachers, the idea of how to scaffold or facilitate the learning of a child with significant developmental delays was daunting. When looking at the checklist, it was apparent that embedded instruction, the use of incidental instruction, and the modeling of skills was not part of the Creative Curriculum to a level that would ensure equal outcomes for every student. Through the COP with ECSE teachers, we identified specific teaching strategies that would support this notion that all students meet the same Creative Curriculum goal. Specifically, increasing student learning opportunities would facilitate more exposure to a task and result in a higher potential for the child to have success at meeting the overall outcome. This teaching strategy was also identified through our START training so it was a concept the GSRP teachers were being exposed to outside of the classroom as well. We decided during the 60 minutes of free play, teachers would target different students to model, prompt, and provide corrective feedback (also strategies from the START training) to

increase learning opportunities. Coupled with visual supports and errorless teaching strategies, students would be getting a range of educational approaches to support engagement with the learning objectives. Done during play, the strategies would be embedded into everyday activities and transitions. At first, this appeared to be a huge undertaking. But by supporting the ECSE teachers and encouraging them to go in and try for a few weeks, the intent was that the GSRP teachers would begin to pick up the strategies on their own once they saw how effective these evidenced based practices could be in increasing student engagement and learning outcomes.

Although improvements were noted, and evidence of the GSRP teachers incorporating more embedded instruction and use of incidental teaching was noted, the mentality in the classrooms continued to be of the mindset that the ECSE teachers were present to help the students with special needs. And although the classrooms were more reflective of UDL principles, there was still an overall sense that the strategies were only being used with the students with special needs, or the students with behaviors, and not being offered or incorporated for all students. Keeping in mind that these were new skills and strategies the GSRP teachers had to enact and utilize in the classroom, the expectation should not have been one of complete mastery in a short time; hence the need for the support aspect of inclusion.

Under the area of Supports, there is room for improvement. The GSRP teachers continuing to view the ECSE teachers as support personal versus co-teachers or facilitators can be directly linked with the how new teaching practices were being enacted within the classroom. Although ECSE teachers were modeling, providing feedback, and coaching the GSRP teachers, there was still the notion of the expert being present to step in and take charge. The ECSE teachers were continuing to manage student behaviors and only one ECSE teacher was actually running a small group center for instruction. In reflection, the idea of two teachers working

collaboratively together to support all students in the classroom may need to include a stronger definition of each role. The purpose of this study was to document the experiences and changes and although this has been done, there are many things that, moving forward, would be initiated differently. Although there was an initial meeting to establish norms for meetings and how to handle conflict between teachers, there wasn't an initial training for either the GSRP or ECSE teachers on how to support all students. GSRP teachers were limited in their knowledge of how to support students with special needs and ECSE teachers were limited in their knowledge of the Creative Curriculum and how to provide instruction from the core content and material. Just navigating the classroom environment together was not enough to draw upon one another's knowledge. In a sense, each teacher continued to act within her own comfort level. By not defining roles or expectations, or assigning teachers specific classroom tasks, each teacher naturally gravitated toward where she felt the most confident and competent. Being the first year of implementation of an inclusive preschool program, this may have been effective as teachers were able to observe one another; but in moving forward, it may be helpful to have more distinct roles for each teacher in the classroom that span the entire student population and level.

Although the GSRP teachers were able to utilize the tools and demonstrate shifts in teaching pedagogy, the limitation came with the application of more than one shift at a time. For example, every GSRP teacher was able to incorporate the evidenced based practice of using visuals to support choice making, structure, and for language expression and comprehension. Embedded instruction was incorporated into meal times where teachers worked on name recognition, prepositional concepts (on, under, top, bottom, next to, in front of), and turn taking. Intentional teaching was already a strength as it was a component of the Creative Curriculum. The more complex practices of incidental teaching, scaffolding, increasing engagement, and

increasing learning opportunities were a little more challenging to enact in the classroom. Often these practices require a teacher to be in the moment and to know when to incorporate these practices; it's not as simple as handing someone a visual and telling them to use it at circle time. These practices require teachers to already have the skill at the forefront of their teaching toolbox, and to draw upon the strategy at a moment's notice, often layering the practices on one another. Increasing learning opportunities also involve modeling, prompting, and errorless teaching. GSRP teachers were able to recall these strategies, but did not appear to feel natural in doing so. It took until February for the GSRP teachers to implement these strategies independently. And even then, it wasn't without encouragement and prompting from the ECSE teachers. The connection between the goals and needs of students, teachers, and the professional development of teachers is an important construct of effective professional development (Birman et al., 2000; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin 2011; Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009a, 2009b; Davidovich, 2011; Desimone, 2011; Dufour, 2004; Dufour et al., 2004; Penuel et al., 2007). Birman et al. (2000) suggests that "an activity is more likely to be effective in improving teachers' knowledge and skills if it forms a coherent part of a wider set of opportunities for teacher learning and development" (p. 31). In their study of 454 teachers in the GLOBE professional development program, Penuel et al. (2007) found that teachers had more change in their classroom practice if there was coherence between their job and their professional development. Because we had failed to provide an initial training on how to teach to students with special needs, and had acted under the assumption that the GSRP teachers would absorb and glean from watching the ECSE teachers, the missing component had been between GSRP teachers seeing the coherence between their work and their participation in the START trainings; when the ECSE teachers continued to be a strong presence in the room,

there was less expectation for the GSRP to fully harvest and enact on the strategies they were learning through the professional development attendance.

Response To Research Questions

How do teachers' personal definitions of inclusion change throughout participation in COP? (How closely do definitions align with inclusion definition from NAEYC and NPDCI? What barriers can be identified through these personal definitions?)

In September, each participant completed an activity where she was asked to write out her personal definition of inclusion. These definitions were very broad and ranged from two to three words (all kids included) to longer definitions (of all children learning and playing together). Mid year, when asked to again define inclusion, there were more responses that spoke to kids accessing the environment and participating with peers. Evidence that participants were honoring the joint inclusion definition from DEC/NAEYC. At the conclusion of the study, when asked to define inclusion, responses centered more around the idea of community, acceptance, and a sense of belonging.

The joint inclusion definition is as follows: "Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports" (DEC & NAEYC,

2009, p. 2). The concept of *access* encourages the use of universal design principals to promote child learning. *Participation* embraces the concept that teachers use a range of instructional practices and individualized accommodations, modifications, and adaptations to support active participation and belonging for all children. *Supports* references all adults have access to high quality professional development and ongoing collaboration and coaching. The individual definitions of inclusion started by speaking to broader concepts/themes: all, equal, together. But as time went on, these ideas shifted to more specific and tangible themes: being ready for all, ensuring access, facilitating participation, teaching multiple ways. The definitions began to evolve as the participants began to learn what it meant to work in an inclusive setting and that it wasn't just about making sure that everyone was included, but that it was about how to promote inclusion without isolating any particular student. Using the framework of the definition of inclusion gave participants a more concrete way of how to represent an inclusive classroom, not just the intangible idea of what it should be.

Barriers were identified as on the original definition cards, terminology was used that separated students into two categories: those with IEPS and those without. With strong administrative support, participants were asked to not use labels or terms that would separate students into one group over another. Aligning with a UDECE environment, the idea was that all students were working toward the same goal. There were no students with IEPs or students with special needs who were playing or learning with other kids. It was a classroom of students learning together. This took some time to shift away from using certain labels, but by the end of the year, there was no reference amongst staff to 'your students' or 'my students'; it was 'our students.'

The following table provides an overview of each GSRP teachers' personal definition of inclusion. When looking at the change over the year, there is more emphasis on acceptance, collaboration, and students and less reference to special education.

Table 12: GSRP teacher personal definitions of inclusion

SEPTEMBER	JANUARY	MARCH
Learning and playing together	Special education students being a part of the classroom community	Inclusions means ALL-meeting everyone where they are and being intentional about supporting growth
All children provided access to program and materials	Inclusion to me means all to the greatest extent possible…at preschool it takes on a new meaning because of the importance of typical developing peers	Not limiting anyone's potential-teacher or student! We work together to learn from one another to support and promote growth for every child equally toward the same goal
Being together	Working together to support everyone	Giving the opportunities for children of all abilities to learn, grow, mentor, in the same classroom with supports for all abilities
Inclusion to me means all to the greatest extent possible…at preschool it takes on a new meaning because of the importance of typical developing peers	Students are not 'visitors' to the classroom, they are part of the community and we all work together to encourage growth	It shouldn't have to be defined-it's what we make our classroom to be-a community of all learners that embeds all kinds of supports

Although teachers within the study fully accepted every child into the classroom, there were some barriers with learning new teaching strategies that would have a universal benefit for all students in the classroom. To learn a new skill takes time, effort, and acceptance that mastery does not always happen on the first attempt. Coaching and feedback can be critical when learning something new. Although teachers participated in a high quality ongoing professional development that spanned the entire school year, it was still a challenge to generalize what was being taught in the professional development workshops into the classroom environment. Some

of this may have been attributed to GSRP teachers' lack of confidence, of not wanting to provide the strategy incorrectly in front of another teacher, or even of not recalling how to implement the strategy or practice once they were back in their own classroom. ECSE teachers were present to serve as coaches and mentors, but it was not a defined role that was explicitly stated to them. As part of the study, the large COP that involved the ECSE teachers and myself met monthly and I provided encouragement and support to the ECSE teachers on how to continue to model and coach the GSRP teachers; nevertheless, it was a new skill for the ECSE teachers and one that may require more professional development or training. As one ECSE teacher stated, "Teaching teachers is really different than teaching kids!".

Do COP meetings encourage GSRP teachers to learn new practices? (Did every teacher feel supported to implement changes in teacher practice? How do communities of practice support teacher professional development to facilitate successful inclusive classrooms? What evidence is there to support teacher growth?)

Participation in professional development alone was not enough to implement change. It was the information and tools that were introduced within the professional development that were then harvested through the COPs that afforded a change in teaching pedagogy. The Action Plans served as a catalyst for COP members to initiate conversation around items to implement. The professional development spanned five days over the course of seven months. It was through the COP meetings that members were able to engage in dialogue about what pieces of the information should be harvested and implemented to enact change within the classroom setting. Participation in the professional development alone would have made it difficult for the teachers to come back and initiate change; through the COP dialogue, teachers were able to

engage with the strategies and tools a second time in order to select which ones to harvest within the classroom.

It was important to me as a researcher, as well as a participant, that the teachers felt the importance and value of a COP. To simply bring teachers together to discuss issues would not equate with a COP; to send teachers to professional development did not equate with a COP. The difference between teachers seeking or attending professional development to hone teaching practices and participating in a COP was the discussions and cultivation of new knowledge that was secured and harvested within the COP settings. A critical aspect for COP is that the COP provides an ongoing backdrop for teacher learning (Lieberman & Grolnick, 1996; Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999). The ongoing nature of the COP meetings, utilization of shared resources and tools, and structured ongoing dialogue created an environment that differed from a 'teacher meeting'. Communities of practice, by definition, are groups of individuals who come together on the pretense of a common professional interest and a desire to improve their practice in a particular area by sharing their knowledge, insights, and observations (Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). The COP groups within this study attempted to bring together groups of individuals with a shared purpose of improving teaching practices to support inclusion. Wesley & Buysse (2001) go on to state that COP should be built on shared inquiry and that member participation be based on diverse expertise and knowledge. By layering the COPs, this study also attempted to bridge the gap between research and practice, in addition to closing the gap between special education and general education practice. By pulling research knowledge into classroom practice and including teachers as central to the experience and allowing teachers to identify which practices to utilize and implement based on the practicality or

applicability, there was collaboration, inquiry into the process, and structure to how teaching pedagogy shifted.

The ECSE COP was well established and maintained. This group of teachers had researched and put into practice new knowledge and skills within their own special education classrooms. At the start of the 2015-2016 school, with the expansion of early childhood programs to support inclusion, the ECSE teachers were put into roles where they took knowledge to others; knowledge to share and harvest within a new setting. New COP between the EC and ECSE staff and ongoing professional development to reduce the isolation of special education practices and optimize the transfer of practices into a general education setting to support students with varying levels of need was established. These joint COPs consisted of members of diverse expertise and had the goal of advancing knowledge, skills, and teaching practices so that all teachers felt confidence and competent for working with varying levels of student need.

To ensure that the meetings were not akin to teacher or staff meetings, the following principles from Trivette (2005) and Winton (2006) served as a framework for the COP meetings: (1) be grounded in specific practice-focused content; (2) be intense, sustained over time; (3) be organized around sequenced approach to learning; (4) emphasize application to real life situations; (5) build on learner's current level of understanding; (6) include guidance and feedback to the learner; and (7) be aligned with instructional goals, learning standards, and curriculum materials.

To establish whether or not teachers felt supported throughout the process, as well as to have teachers self-identify the use of new skills or strategies that were implemented secondary to participating in COP meetings with ECSE teachers as well as participation in intensive professional development training, the teachers were asked to fill out a satisfaction checklist in

November, January, and March. The checklist asked teachers to rate the following questions on a scale of 1-5 with 1 being extremely dissatisfied and 5 being highly satisfied:

Do you feel the COP meetings tools are relevant to you as a preschool teacher?

Do you feel the COP meetings have been frequent enough to meet your needs as new learner?

Do you feel the COP meetings have been organized to build upon new knowledge and your level of understanding?

Do you feel the COP resources and strategies are applicable to your classroom environment and teaching materials?

Do you feel the feedback from the COP supports your use of new skills and teaching practices?

Do you feel confident with implementation of new practices?

What new practices have you used?

Results are as follows:

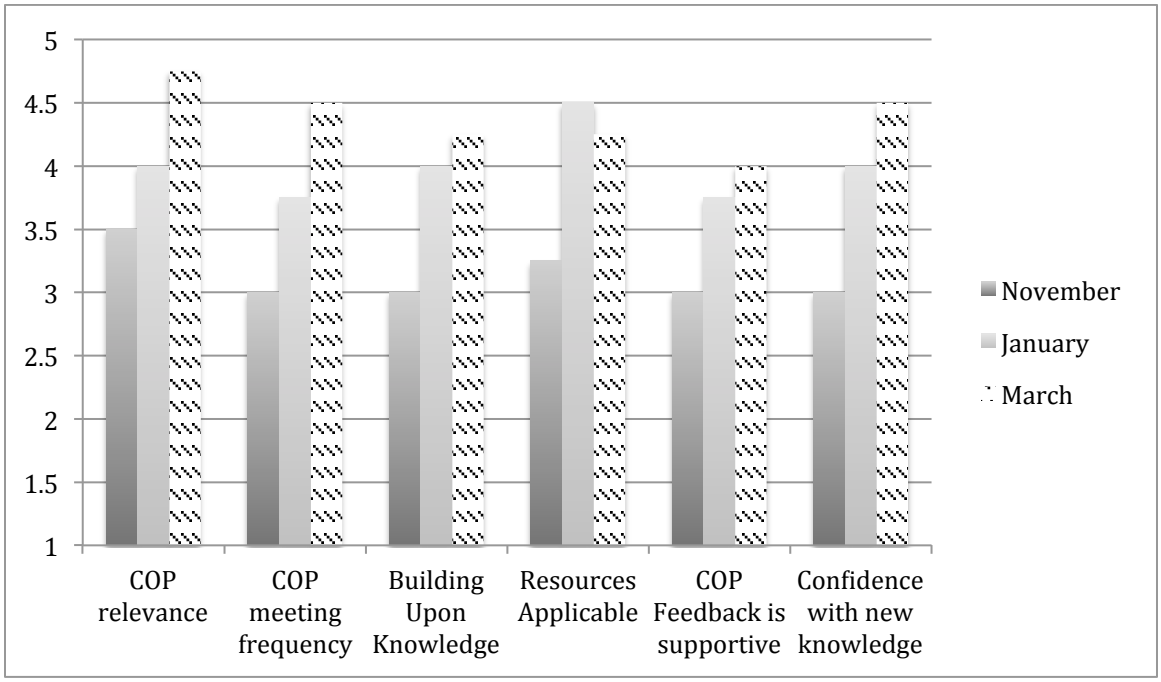


Figure 6: GSRP teacher survey results

Additionally, the implemented strategies and practices that GSRP teachers listed were as follows: 1) November: each one listed visuals or pictures; 2) January: social stories, play sequences via pictures with expanded play scripts, time delay and prompting, use of transitions to support behavior, embedded instruction in meal times, direct modeling of skills with task analysis/breakdown; 3) March: corrective feedback, errorless teaching.

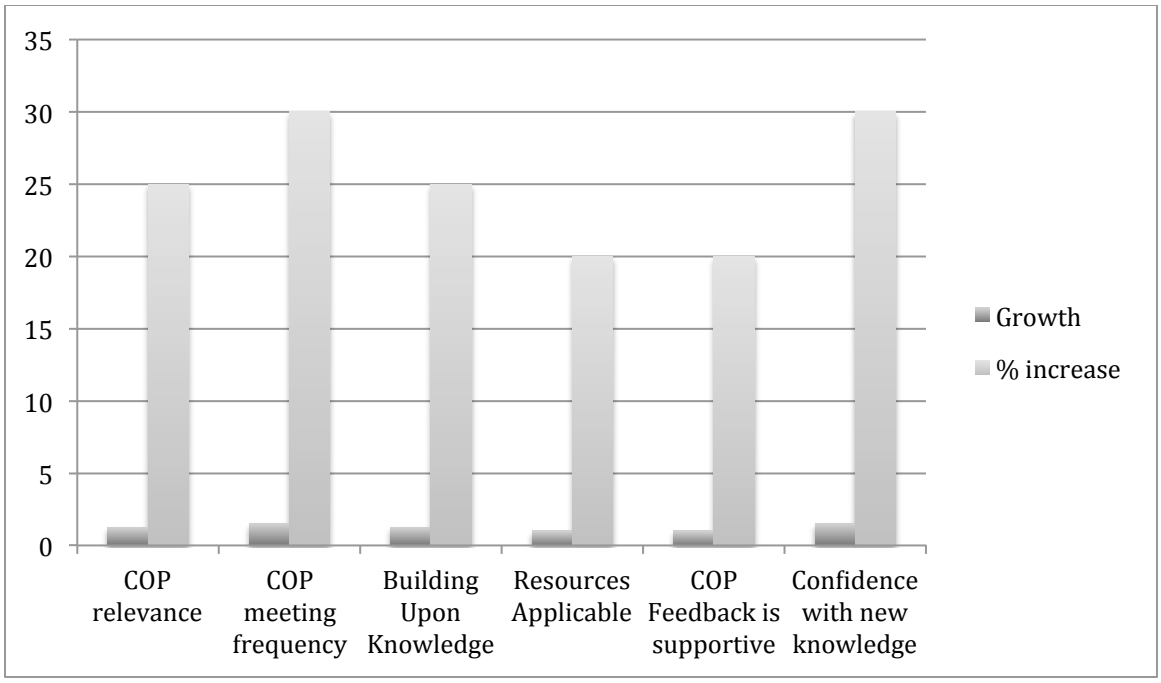


Figure 7: GSRP teacher survey results analysis

By looking at the change in percentage, it can be determined that GSRP teachers saw the most gains in growing confident with the new knowledge they were receiving. Teachers felt the frequency of meetings was adequate, yet the resources being applicable was not as high. This may be attributed to the fidelity of implementation of new practices and the relevancy some of the practices may have had within the classroom. For example, if the GSRP teachers did not see the value in a resource, the fidelity of implementation when the practice was introduced in the classroom may not have been high and may have had an impact on the teachers' perception of whether or not it was a useful practice. For practices the teachers saw value in, confidence was also high. Although a practice that had been modeled and attempted in the GSRP classroom, GSRP teachers struggled with the concept of errorless teaching. The fidelity of implementation of this practice may not have been the strongest, hence the teachers may not have seen the applicability of the practice to their classroom environment. As all teachers bring individual

styles and personalities to teaching, not all every resource that was brought to the COP was a perfect match for every teacher.

Through sharing experiences, success, and challenges, teachers may determine the need to change the practice or to hail it as a success. This was the framework for the present study and COP meetings. It was through collaboration and inquiry into the process, teachers expressed a feeling of support and confidence. One GSRP teacher told me, "I didn't know about errorless teaching…I don't think I would have understood if you just told me about it. I needed to see it, do it, and get feedback on it. It still doesn't feel comfortable, but I understand the meaning behind it and how it is suppose to work." Not every strategy implemented was a success and often, through the discourse in the COP meetings, teachers were able to problem solve together how to modify or adjust a strategy in order for a more successful implementation based on the unique characteristics of the classroom. For example, one GSRP teacher preferred a large picture of a real child sitting cross-legged on the floor compared to the small BoardMaker style icons that had been introduced. She felt it was more effective to have the larger photo style picture on the board at the front of the room where circle time was held so she could reference it. The class agreed on a name for the child in the photo, and the teacher would reference the children back to 'Timmy' and how well he was sitting and listening. Not only was this effective use of the visual, but she would also employ the use of rewarding positive behavior by giving the children who were sitting like 'Timmy' a high five or a special positive 'shout out' during circle time. She had taken the strategy modeled by the ECSE teacher, engaged in dialogue within the COP about needing something larger, and created a visual that worked with her personality and within her classroom. The ECSE teacher helped to broker the use of the strategy by modeling how to reference it during circle and how to use is to promote the desired behavior (sitting cross

legged on the floor). By March, the GSRP teacher had successfully implemented using the strategy and reported feeling confident in doing so.

What practices do teachers employ in the classroom to support inclusion through participation in COP? How do COP support teacher PD to facilitate successful inclusive classrooms in order to shift attitudes and beliefs?

One might ask why anything needs to change for the purpose of implementing a preschool inclusion program. Since early childhood inclusion is for children with and without special needs, there must be professionals capable of meeting both student needs in various ways. To meet the different types and different intensities of need, these professionals must also have different knowledge and skills for dealing with each child. Neither EC nor ECSE educators alone can meet the challenge of all those children with and without special needs. Therefore, they need to work nearby each other to cultivate and provide appropriate education (Cavallaro & Haney, 1999). Although there have been some improvements regarding collaboration, both sides need to move from parallel to more cooperative interaction. McLean and Odom (1993) highlight seven themes that demonstrate how EC and ECSE programs are alike and how they differ.

1. *Inclusion.* Both ECE and ECSE practice refer to the individual appropriateness and age appropriateness of strategies to use with young children with special needs. The DEC (1993) stated that inclusion is a concept associated with young children having special needs, supporting the basic right of all young children to full and active engagement in their communities. However, there is also a different point of view on inclusion. The DEC recommended practices identifies inclusionary programs as placeholders on the continuum of service delivery models

and recognizes that families and IEP teams will choose which setting is optimum and most natural for them.

2. Family involvement. This is an area in which the practices that EC and ECSE support differ in relation to emphasis. Both sides address and support family involvement. However, EC puts more value on the importance of communication between families and child care providers as well as strategies to support this communicative link within the classroom, while ECSE is more strongly focused on family centeredness and family and child advocacy to support the family's active role in the assessment and intervention processes, rather than classroom involvement.

3.Assessment. Both EC and ECSE recommend that assessment be used for instructional planning, identification of children with special needs, and program evaluation. Both require that assessments have purpose and result in benefits for the child and family. Both support the use of socio-ecologically valid assessment procedures and the right of families' access to all assessment information related to themselves and their child. However, ECSE gives more specific consideration to a systematic set of procedures for information gathering. The use of assessment has a broader range in ECSE and includes screening, eligibility, program planning, monitoring, and evaluation. Moreover, ECSE provides additional guidelines to determine the acceptability of assessment materials and the use of family information related to concerns and priorities as a guide to planning the assessment.

4. *Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSP) and Individualized Education Programs (IEP)*. I n both EC and ECSE recommended practices, the purpose of an IFSP/IEP is to specifically tailor and individualize education programs. However, the difference between practices lies in the level of specificity. EC professionals do pay attention to the diverse needs of the children whom

the program serves and use a curriculum that incorporates continual planning, implementation, and assessment. ECSE's IFSP must specifically address family priorities, concerns, and resources and include desired outcomes for the children and their families. An IEP provides precise goals and objectives for the child as well as a plan for achieving them and monitoring progress toward them.

5. Curriculum and intervention. EC and ECSE practices demonstrate a joint perspective in recommending that curricular strategies: (a) meet the needs of a broad range of children, (b) engage and promote positive relationships with members of the child's family, (c) are meaningful and functional for the child and the child's family, (d) actively support the engagement of young children within their environment, and (e) support children's physical concerns. The main difference between the two fields of practice is the attention given to process and outcomes. EC supports a focus on the cognitive and psychological processes that a child experiences. ECSE, however, promotes a greater emphasis on learning outcomes as demonstrated by a child's performance of a developmental skill. Many ECSE programs follow a thematic curriculum that targets facilitation and growth of developmental skills.

6.Service delivery. EC identifies environments that are nurturing, safe, and accessible for young children and that meet the physical needs and support the development of young children. On the other hand, ECSE promotes an expansion of the typical EC program that is often smaller, shorter in length of daily hours of attendance, and incorporates more time with ancillary and special education support staff.

7.*Transition*. Both ECE's and ECSE's transition practices identify strategies for supporting young children and their families as they move between programs, services, and environments.

However, for young children with special needs, a strong emphasis is placed on formal interagency agreements and well-planned transition programs that use precise steps and procedures, as well as development of new IEPs for new environments.

The early childhood field comprises many diverse branches with diverse knowledge and skills. All can learn from each other in the quest to educate all young children successfully in inclusive environments. As Bredekamp and Rosegrant stated, "It is clear that each field needs to learn from the other as we work closely together to ensure individually appropriate practice for each child" (1992, p93). Both fields need to accept that there is no one right way to provide appropriate, high quality inclusive early childhood education. The guiding paradigm is not 'either-or' but 'both-and' (Johnson et al., 1998). Each child changes in unique ways depending on the child's developmental level and particular characteristics, and both contribute to how the child changes over time. This perspective emphasizes the importance to program planning, childcare, and education practices of both the individual differences among children and the developmental age of children (Bredekamp, 1991; Johnson & Johnson, 1992). Implementation of developmentally and individually appropriate practices, then, requires knowledge of individual children, their families, and the nature of specific developmental tasks and contexts, as well as appreciation of the variety of EC and ECSE practices. Hence, the merger of the two field of practice (EC and ECSE) within this study required change and flexibility. Following the idea that teachers will be more willing to enact on new strategies from professional development when they are invested in the outcome (Joyce & Showers, 2002), our ECSE COP targeted activities and classroom practices where the GSRP teachers were motivated to change; where student behaviors were impacting teaching; and where the GSRP teachers indicated the need for support. By supporting the GSRP teachers, through modeling and being a presence in the

classroom, GSRP teachers were able to utilize the tools and implement changes in teaching practice to support the entire makeup of the classroom.

As previously stated, Lave and Wenger (1991, p.98) theorize that membership in a community of practice implies "participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning what they are doing and what that means in their lives and for their communities". It requires the participation of the people involved in: inventing and adapting customs, participating in discourse practices and tools, and reifying traditions as individuals move in their participatory roles from the periphery to more central roles of participation in the community. "In the end, members of the community of practice who learn from their efforts to develop the principles and practices for themselves" (Rogoff et al., 2001, p.10). It's not a one-time support or trial; there is conversation regarding a change and support from the COP. With varying levels of COP, there was much support to be offered to all participants in the study. The ECSE teachers' COP had been well established and each teacher was able to go and form a COP with her building team and serve as a leader or catalyst to promote a change in teaching practice. But, teachers also had the opportunity to come back monthly to the ECSE COP and discuss challenges, efforts, harvest new information, and engage in the dialogic spiral that continued to feed the cycle of change. The shared understanding that was created within the ECSE COP was taken back to the GSRP teacher/building COP and distributed in order to invent and transform teaching pedagogy in the classroom to support all learners, which necessitated change in the EC philosophy. This notion that ECSE students do not need to be ready for EC, but that EC programs should be ready to support all children stems from DEC/NAEYC 2009 joint position statement on inclusion and was the foundation for the implementation of change. Yet, change can be difficult and hard, and individuals respond to it differently. Therefore, participation in a

community of learners was critical to identify WHAT needed to change, HOW it needed to change, and WHO needed to change. The COP allowed teachers to have ownership in change, to create a shared understanding of what needed to change that was informed and developed by members' efforts to appropriate, invent, transform, and distribute cognitive tools and resources that defined the worth of the experience as new teacher identities were formed.

Drawing from the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist, a deeper analysis indicates the growth for the quality of inclusive practices (including teaching practices) for each GSRP teacher. By taking the three sub areas of the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist, there are 14 possible areas of evidence for Access, 16 for Participation, and 11 for Supports. Each area of evidenced is marked as a yes or a no. By combining and averaging the two independent raters who completed the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist, the following graphs depict the change in individual GSRP teaching practices to reflect inclusive classroom components (as defined by DEC/NAEYC) based on Access, Participation, and Supports.

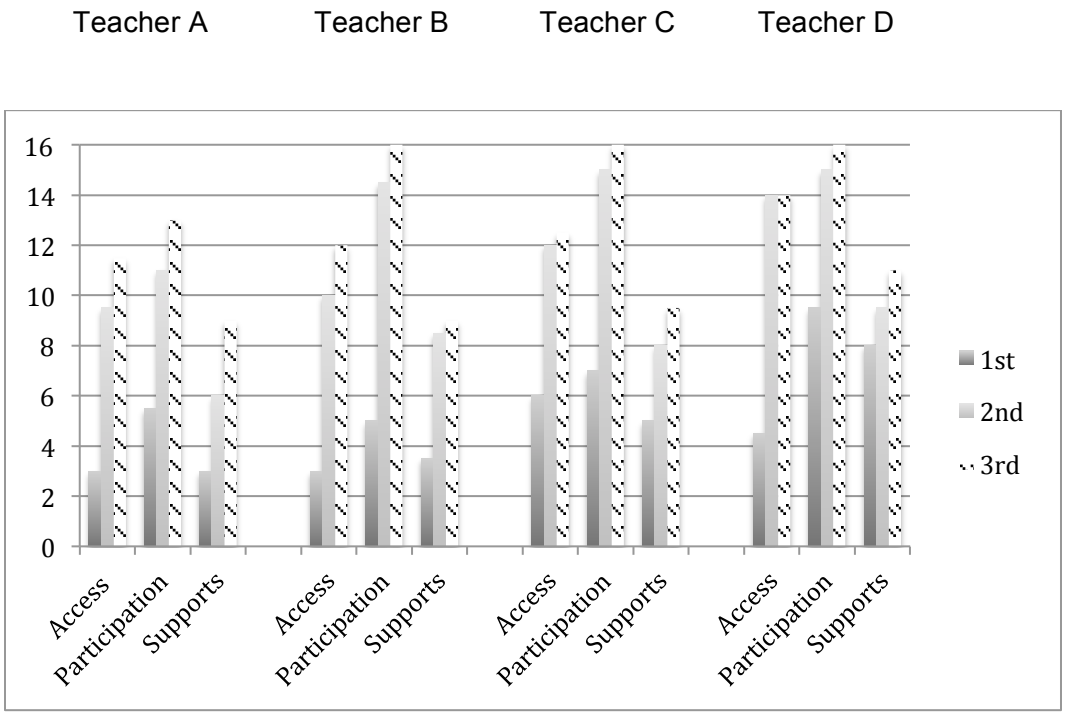


Figure 8: GSRP teacher rating across the year on Access, Participation, and Supports based on the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist.

Early in the year, Participation was strong across all four classrooms and teachers, as was Access. Supports was noticeably lower. As the year went on, each teacher and classroom showed marked improvement across Access, Participation, and Supports. Under each area, teaching practices that were highlighted during professional development were listed. These were the practices embedded within the COP. Over time, each teacher demonstrated an increase in the use of these practices as observed by both independent raters, thus demonstrating an increased on the Checklist as well.

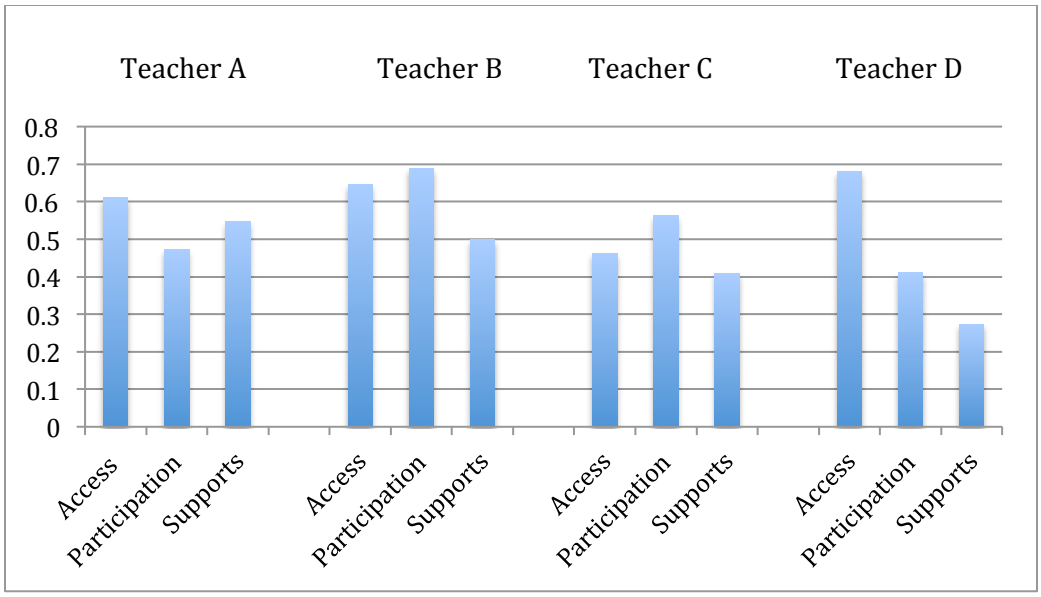


Figure 9: GSRP teacher Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist Percent Change from 1st to 3rd Observation.

Each GSRP teacher demonstrated growth from the first to the third observation. Teacher B saw an almost 70% growth in Participation. Teacher D saw small growth in Supports, yet this was the GSRP teacher who left at the end of the study to take a different position.

This layering of COP afforded the teachers to take ownership of change. The ECSE teachers were able to continue their participation in a well defined established COP and to support one another as each member went back to her community to harvest the new knowledge and information and disseminate it to others in a second level COP. This second level COP of an ECSE teacher with the GSRP staff were able to take the knowledge from the ECSE teacher COP and implement new teaching practices within their own classroom community and to engage in dialogic spiral conversations regarding the efficacy of the strategies that were being harvested. Being able to take information from a broader COP down to a more local level where members could choose what tools to harvest within the classroom allowed all members to have more

ownership in the experience, ultimately making it more of what each teacher needed and wanted. Hence, each member was more invested in the experience and teacher growth, through demonstrated use of new skills and strategies was documented on the Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist secondary to classroom observations, as well as through teacher report on the survey.

There wasn't necessarily a huge shift in attitudes and beliefs; the teachers were all open to the experience and willing to participate. The change in beliefs came when they saw the fruits of their efforts having a positive impact on students. In late February, I took one of the GSRP teachers to an ECSE classroom to meet some of the students that we were recommending for the inclusion program for the following year. While we drove, she said, "I tell anyone who will listen how great this is. I think all the time about Mary (name has been changed) who started the year not talking much, crying, and being really shy. She's gained confidence and is telling other kids 'no' and playing with friends. She doesn't cry much at all and is able to tell us things in complete sentences. Do you think she would have grown so much without the rest of the peers in the class?"

Her question prompted my response, "I'm not sure. I think having other kids talk to her and interact with Mary forced her, in a positive way, to expand on her language in order to participate and play. If no one is expecting you or asking you to engage in dialogue or conversation, and you are shy and withdrawn, there is less opportunity to grow in your communication skills."

Her response was thoughtful. "I agree. This process has been amazing. No one treats anyone any different. I've learned so much and feel my skills as a teacher have improved. It can feel isolating being a teacher. There are people in and out of my classroom all day long, but no

one besides my teacher assistant stays for an extended period of time. And no one is really a teacher. Having Amy (name has been changed) with me every morning has been like having a mentor teacher I get to see how she interacts with the kids and how she deals with situations that come up in the classroom. I like that. Not every teacher may like that, but Amy is really mindful about us being a team and I appreciate that. I didn't know how this would work, but it worked out really well."

The change in attitudes and beliefs that actually came through were not necessarily about the students or even the process of implementing an inclusion program. The more defining change revolved around the teachers' attitudes and beliefs about working together. For the four GSRP teachers involved, three spoke of positive experiences, feeling supported, and learning from the ECSE teachers. The fourth GSRP teacher was a first year teacher paired with a seasoned ECSE teacher and the dynamic between the two was often tense. Although each had the best interests of the students at heart, it was a challenge for each teacher to let go of her personal teaching style. The GSRP teacher was often reluctant to follow through on the ECSE teachers' suggestions, yet the ECSE teacher also struggled with taking suggestions from the GSRP teacher. Each teacher had strong opinions about what was effective in the classroom.

This GSRP/ECSE teacher combination required more support on my end; both on how to problem solve and what strategies to implement. I found myself often leaning toward the GSRP teacher based on her interests, and then, working with the ECSE teacher on how to incorporate specific strategies into the spaces of the curriculum where the GSRP teacher was willing to implement changes and grow. In January, the GSRP teacher was still struggling with classroom management. She felt that student behaviors were still over the top and was at the end of her patience, and floundering with what to try. Despite multiple suggestions from the ECSE teacher

over the course of the year, the GSRP teacher had only been willing to adopt a few. Whereas the GSRP teacher had increased her use of visuals, as well as incorporated more embedded instruction and intentional teaching in her classroom, student behavior was still a challenge. The ECSE teacher agreed as she was having a hard time as well.

I met with both of them and we talked about self-regulation and how to teach the students strategies for self-calming, as well as how to identify when a student may need to take a break before escalating into a meltdown. I reminded the two teachers that these students were of preschool age and every teacher struggled with similar problem behaviors; and that this was not necessarily specific to their classroom. I asked the GSRP teacher what she thought helped and then asked the ECSE teacher what she thought improved the student behavior. As we listed their ideas and suggestions, we were able to see that several ideas actually overlapped, including: the use of breathing, a calming area designated in the classroom, incorporating more movement breaks during the day, and the use of social stories to address specific behaviors.

We created a working contract (as this aligned with what they had specified in the beginning of the year as to how they would manage conflict) and each teacher agreed to the use of these strategies. The GSRP teacher wanted to incorporate yoga as a way to calm students, so I suggested pairing this with teaching the breathing strategies that our ECSE COP had previously identified and implemented in ECSE programs. The previous year when the ECSE COP had focused on evidence-based practices, we had created video models of four specific preschool age breathing exercises that were used to help calm the body when a student was either upset or becoming upset. The GSRP teacher liked the idea of using technology to present and model the exercises. We also designated a space in the classroom where students could go when they became upset. The ECSE teacher created visuals, as well as a classroom-wide social story to

address specific behaviors that was read daily as part of circle time.

Two weeks later, I went back to the GSRP teacher and briefly met with her alone to ask her she felt it was going. "I just feel like all Erin (name has been changed) does is come in and show the kids pictures. When Tim (name has been changed) acts out, she wants to pull him into the hallway and wants to have a consequence. The protocol I am supposed to use tells me to talk to the child about the problem. But he doesn't understand me. The kids won't sit on the carpet and we are having a hard time keeping them under control when we go to the bathroom. I need a third person all the time because it is too much."

I was reflective when I responded, "Do you view Erin as another teacher in your room or as another adult? You both have a lot to share with one another. She's not there to evaluate you or tell you what to do. Do you feel her role in your classroom is not supportive?"

The GSRP teacher started to backtrack a bit. "No it's not that. I think I just don't know what to do. All the kids are having a hard time." I replied, "Do you feel it has gotten better or worse?" She responded, "Oh it's better than when we started the year. I just feel that I have the curriculum to teach and it is really hard to manage the kids and teach them!" I asked her if she felt supported. "Yes, but I still feel I need more adults in the room to help me." I asked her what additional adult support would look like and what they would do. "I'm not really sure. Maybe run a small group or help set things up so I didn't have to do it all." I encouraged her to talk to the ECSE teacher about running a small group and that it would be beneficial on both ends; that it would give the ECSE teacher more purpose for being in the classroom. As with the human experience and knowing we all handle challenge in accordance with our unique personalities, this particular GSRP teacher was also facing personal challenges outside of work. She was a

dedicated teacher and was motivated to do what was best for students, yet decided in mid February that she was going to leave the position and would not be retuning in March. This was her first year of teaching, she was newly married, and decided that her heart may not be in teaching. Although she had worked as a long-term substitute the previous year, she had walked into classrooms with already established schedules, routines, and expectations. For a first-year teacher, it was up to her to establish these parameters within her own class, and she found it to be too much of a challenge.

The attitude and belief that the ECSE teacher was there as an additional adult was a difficult belief to change. Even over the course of the year, the ECSE teachers within our COP continued to express concern about their purpose in the classroom. As the year progressed, this did improve and the ECSE teachers slowly became a more integral part of classroom instruction, but not without having to ask and inquire. It was almost as if they had to prove themselves first before stepping into a teacher role. Part of this may be attributed to their lack of knowledge regarding the class curriculum. But I also think it was partially attributed to not wanting to walk in and step on a GSRP teachers' turf. Transcending turf problems and professional vanity was not something we had originally addressed. Our focus had been so strong on students and promoting attitudes and beliefs in the efficacy of inclusion that we neglected to mandate the adult side of working together. Just participating in a COP may not be enough to address how two teachers, who don't know each other, can establish and grow a working relationship. All the COP tools that were utilized were specific to student instruction or intervention. In order to advance our belief of the efficacy and value of inclusion, we needed to be able to work side by side, to collaborate, and to set agendas for how to engage in the work. For instance, the more we design and conduct investigations dealing with co-teaching, group dynamics in heterogeneous

classrooms, curriculum and assessment, partnerships with parents and communities, the more we realize how much we do not yet know or understand very well. This revelation should prompt us to examine further how we can help each other to learn as we move forward.

What is the impact of inclusion on all students?

Although not a primary focus of the current study, there is still value in looking at the teacher reported data that is taken on every student utilizing the Teaching Strategies Gold. This assessment tool can be used with any developmentally appropriate early childhood curriculum and is based on 38 research-based objectives that include predictors of school success. It is aligned with the Common Core States Standards, state early learning guidelines, and the Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework and can be used to support all types of learners, including students with special needs.

Three times a year, teachers document artifacts to support student growth across seven developmental domains: social-emotional, gross motor, fine motor, mathematics, language, cognition, and literacy. A snapshot report may be generated based on individual students, specific classrooms, or the entire county as a whole.

To ensure that there was benefit to all students participating in an inclusive preschool environment, I generated two snapshot growth reports for comparison. Each report generated data to indicate whether the group of students was meeting or exceeding criteria in the age appropriate developmental domain. On one report, I generated a growth report comparing Fall 2015 data to Winter 2016 data for the students with special needs and in the second report, I generated data for the rest of the students in the classrooms. The figure below depicts the growth noted for students with IEPs regarding meeting or exceeding age appropriate norms.

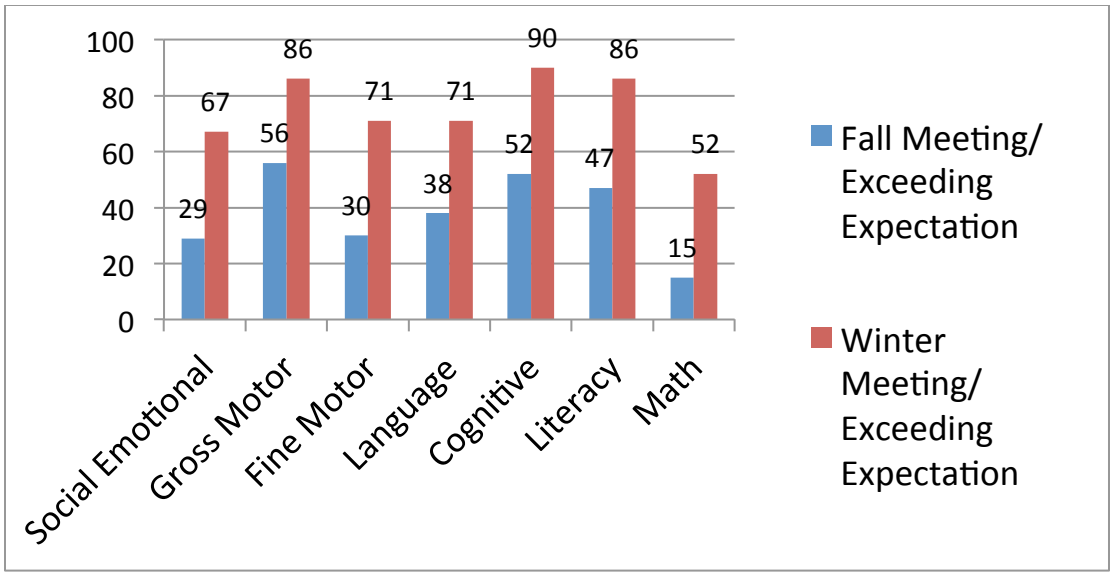


Figure 10: Teaching Strategies Gold Growth Report, students with IEPs

In every developmental domain, student growth was indicated from fall to winter. The figure below indicates that the students without IEPs participating in an inclusion setting also demonstrated growth across developmental domains throughout the course of the school year.

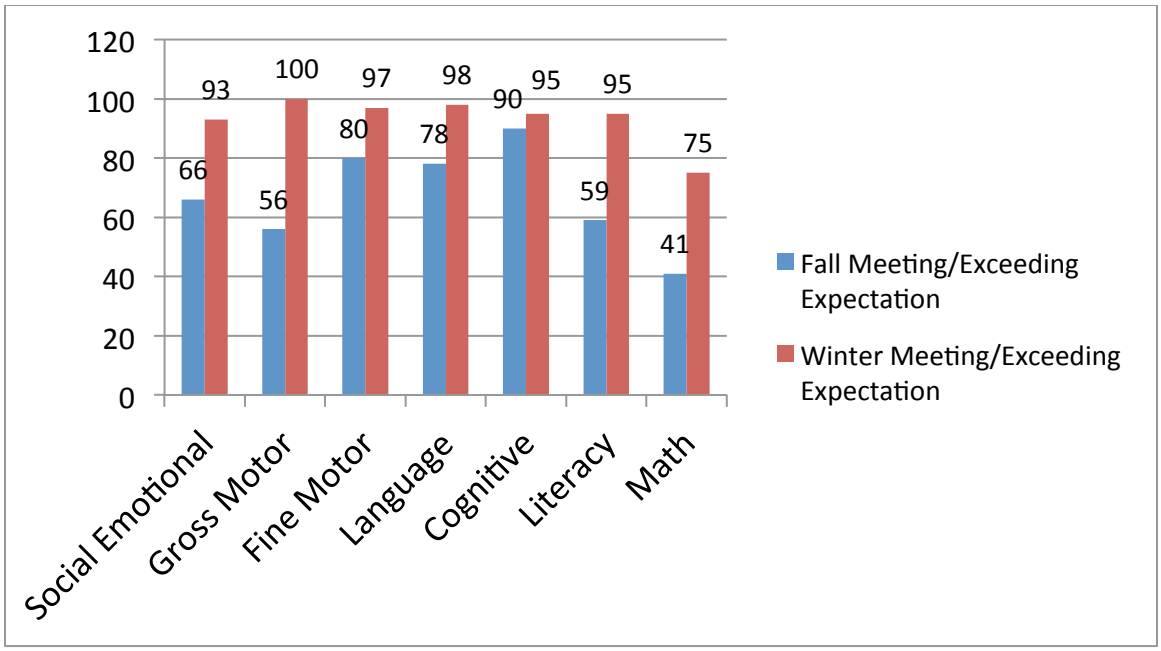


Figure 11: Teaching Strategies Gold Growth Report, typical developing peers

It should be noted that the data is generated from teacher reports and observation and requires that GSRP teachers access, input, and utilize the Teaching Gold software and online program. The requirement is seasonal (fall, winter, spring), but is not connected to a specific date within the season. The data reported was pulled on April 4, 2016 and was the most current data available at that given time.

CHAPTER SEVEN: LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Assumptions

Various assumptions and fears can be drawn from the findings of the study. The first one is rooted in teacher identity and expertise and the need to create new teacher identities. The implementation of new teaching practices does not require a teacher to assume a completely new identity but rather to grow and expand within the current identity. Promoting preschool inclusion meant that GSRP teachers required new training to add in to their present teaching repertoire. It didn't require a complete transformation, but an expansion of knowledge and skill. By participating in a COP with ECSE teachers who provided the acquisition and facilitation of new knowledge, and by including the GSRP teachers in decision making about which practices to implement, all participants were vested in creating an inclusive classroom that would benefit all students. By honoring and acknowledging that GSRP teachers didn't need to necessarily change how they taught, but that they could add new strategies that would support every child, the GSRP teachers still held on to their primary teaching identity. By combining an ECSE and a GSRP teacher into one room, and acknowledging that each teacher had strengths to share with the other, the objective was not to have one teacher be the expert and one teacher being a novice. The objective was to have teachers participate in ongoing dialogue about strategies that would best promote an inclusive environment that was adequately prepared for all levels of learner. This required the participation of an ECSE teacher to support the implementation of evidenced based practices and strategies for working with students of varying needs. It also required the participation of a GSRP teacher to model the curriculum and to maintain growth toward equal academic outcomes for all students. Through COP meetings, the teachers were each able to expand on their own teaching identities and to learn from each other. As the primary researcher,

but also a participant as the study is rooted in PAR, I felt it was important to be a presence in the classrooms and to be a part of the START/professional development trainings and to support the GSRP/ECSE COP meetings, as appropriate. I truly wanted the teachers to assume the responsibility for sharing knowledge and resources within these COP meetings and wanted them to take ownership of the practices that were being implemented, rather then feel that it was being dictated to them. But I also wanted them to feel supported as they embarked on reifying new concepts in practice. Walking this fine balance between wanting to support and wanting to not control, I attempted to observe the process through my classroom observations and interactions. Specifically, as I interacted with staff outside of COP meetings, within the classroom environment and with students, I was observing with the following questions in mind:

- What change in practice was observed?
- What growth in teacher practice was observed?
- Was there a sense of 'community' within the classroom? Were all staff working together without conflict and using language to reflect inclusion?
- Were all students active and engaged? Did any student 'stand out' or was any student observed to work in isolation?
- Was there a level of equal participation from both teachers?
- Were the teachers supporting one another?
- Were teachers using language to reflect collaboration and inclusion?

From September to March, I watched teachers grow and harvest 'new' teacher identities that expanded on what they already knew. This was not without challenge and even at times, confrontation. Not only were changes in practice observed, but also changes in interactions with students were observed. From the start of the year, there was very little observable dialogue

separating or isolating students into two groups, those with IEPs and those without. The sense of community within the classrooms, that every student belonged, was strong. In a sense, this speaks to the Head Start and GSRP philosophy. These programs exist to give students a 'head start', students who may typically be disadvantaged or under privileged. The addition of students with special needs into a GSRP classroom continues to reflect this philosophy. Typically, students with IEPs have developmental disadvantages and require additional support to be better prepared for a kindergarten experience. As an observer, it was clear that the students in the classrooms knew no different; no one treated a peer any differently and it was clear that every child felt as if he or she were a member of the class. I watched all students playing together, both inside the classroom and outside on the playground. At various times within the study, I took different school administrators on classroom visits and each time was asked, "Now which are the kids that came from our ECSE programs?". The sense of community and belonging in each classroom was strong enough that to an outside eye, no one knew one student from another- which was our ultimate inclusion goal.

Part of this may have been strongly attributed to the change and growth in teacher practices. Teachers were asked not to change for one particular child, but to change for the whole class. Essentially, they were asked to incorporate UDL aspects in order to be ready for all levels of ability and skill, not to accommodate teaching practices to target a subset of students. This ties into a second fear or assumption: that in order to engage with inclusive practices, the classroom should look more like a special education room.

This was an avid concern at the beginning of the study. The isolation of EC and ECSE has led to separation of practices and a mindset that an ECSE room looks and is structured differently than an EC classroom. By combing the two groups of teachers into one classroom,

and employing best practice strategies to create an environment that would be inclusive, not to create or add individual modifications for students, GSRP teachers were able to dispel this belief. "I didn't really ever think of using pictures to label my center areas-it actually helps me with organization, too!" Another one stated that having classroom-based visuals was helpful, "I was afraid I would have to create those little schedules for every child. It was a huge relief that I only had to use a large class size!" This was in response to using a picture of a child sitting appropriately in circle time that was placed next to the teacher station; the teacher only had to reference it to the whole class in order to ask students to sit for circle, rather than having to show pictures individually to specific students in order to promote the desired student behavior.

This was a general mindset shift across classrooms. By following the idea that no student should be singled out or isolated, and that all practices should be universally implemented, classrooms were truly able to be ready for all children and teachers were not asked to accommodate or 'make' children ready to be included. This was why the idea of UDECE was critical to the efficacy of the study. Previously, a student with an IEP also came with various accommodations and modifications that were recommended in order for the child to access the classroom and the curriculum. By flipping this idea and making the classroom ready for every child, teachers were not required to be adept in special education instruction.

The idea that students with special education services may need specialized instruction was an additional fear or assumption. Through the use and implementation of teaching strategies that focused on embedded instruction, intentional teaching, and by taking data to establish explicit data based instruction to support all students' ability to reach the same outcome, specialized instruction took on a different meaning. It wasn't necessarily individualized instruction but became more intentional to target various levels of student need. This also tied in

with a fourth assumption that the ECSE teacher was solely responsible for the IEP student goals. For example, embedded instruction during mealtime was quickly identified as an easy way to embed IEP goals, as well as classroom content and instruction. As the idea of inclusion was to promote social emotion growth, many of the students had IEP goals that incorporated turn taking, sharing, and back and forth conversation. Embedding this during mealtime was efficient and easy for any staff involved. It allowed the GSRP teachers the opportunity to work on IEP goals without having to add something in to their current curriculum or lesson plan. Additionally, the idea of using breathing strategies to practice self-management calming skills was implemented and modeled while students stood in line waiting for the bathroom. Again, this was something the GSRP teachers could do with an entire class of students that promoted the learning and awareness of how to self-regulate. Working together, the teachers were able to create an inclusive environment based on new teaching practices, not by adding materials, or tangible tools that would make the appearance of the classroom look any different than a normal, typical developing preschool classroom.

One of the largest assumptions was that ECSE teachers would step into an expert role and dictate change within the GSRP classrooms. I worked diligently with the ECSE teachers through our ECSE COP to ensure that this would not happen. It very easily could have, but by constantly engaging in conversation with the ECSE teachers about what they were learning from this experience, and asking them to go back to the GSRP teachers to inquire about a specific piece of curriculum or classroom material, the intent was to keep the relationship on equal footing where both groups of teachers were learning from each other. This is also where the COP supported teachers' ability to engage in ongoing conversation about what tools and strategies to implement, to decide together as a team and for both the ECSE and GSRP teachers to have active roles in the

implementation of new strategies. This afforded the GSRP teachers the ability to change and grow as teachers; while the ECSE teachers were able to support an inclusive environment that was adequately prepared for various levels of learners.

Ascribing to the assumption that the ECSE teachers were dictating the learning, through their participation in the START professional development trainings, they were also exposed to or reminded of teaching practices that would support student engagement. Although trained or exposed to evidenced based practices as part of their education to be an ECSE provider, evidenced based practices have evolved and new practices have been recently identified. The START professional development trainings identified EBP that may have not yet been identified, or perhaps forgotten by ECSE teachers for lack of use or implementation. ECSE teachers, therefore, were also expanding on their own teaching practices and were implementing new practices alongside the GSRP teachers. The Action Plans, as well as my role as a researcher and participant, helped to provide feedback to the ECSE teachers as they also implemented and sought to support the implementation of teaching practices to promote an inclusive environment. The use of errorless teaching was a 'forgotten' strategy as one ECSE teacher recalled. In addition, increasing learning opportunities was a strategy that the ECSE teachers felt they did naturally, but to take it to a different setting and to try to define and model it, as well as remember to implement it, was a challenge in itself. "It's easy to just say I'll do it, but it's hard to remember to do it. Having another teacher there to remind me is helpful."

In trying to maintain a collaborative working relationship, I also instilled in the ECSE COP that the ECSE teachers should ask to be educated on the Creative Curriculum and what it entailed. This was important so that student IEP goals could be targeted to align with class instruction and content. It was also crucial to the collaborative nature of the relationship so that

both groups of teachers felt they were learning from each other. It was also key in GSRP teachers being able to embed IEP goals into the classroom environment. Writing goals to align with the Creative Curriculum standards afforded the GSRP teachers the knowledge and ability to tie goals into the daily activities of the class, and not to feel pressured on how to address the IEP goals in the classroom. This was also connected to our goal of creating UDECE environments. Everything needed to overlap. For example, a child may need increased learning opportunities to reach the same academic outcome that is the expectation for the entire class; the child may also require a higher level of prompting and if an IEP goal is written to align with the class curriculum, both teachers can work on increasing learning opportunities as well as prompting to support the students' growth and embed the support within the context of the lesson or daily activity. The student would not need to leave the room in order to work on the goal, but the room and the staff support the students' goal through measures that are already in place and being implemented.

Reflection and Recommendations

Coming back to what I, as a researcher and participant, considered to be the forefront of the study, I continuously reflected on the quote from Wesley & Buysse, (2001): "What is missing in current practice is the role and responsibility of participation in a community of people whose goal is to engage in mutual analysis of each other's experiences and observations as way to continually refine practice...Expanding roles…. The early intervention field could profit in at least three critical areas by the expansion of professional roles to include such reflection and collaborative inquiry: closing the gap between research and practice, reducing the isolation of early intervention practice, and optimizing the translation of principles (e.g. high-

quality care and intervention…)...A promising approach to this type of shared inquiry and learning is to build communities of practice based on diverse expertise…" (p. 115).

When this project started in 2013, I didn't know where it would take us; it wasn't the intention to move towards preschool inclusion. The intention was to create a community of learners where we could learn from each other and cultivate a deeper and more sincere appreciation of what we could offer one another. I didn't envision it to even go this far. By actively involving the teachers through Participatory Action Research, I truly believe they became more invested. Through the COP, they continued to learn from one another, continued to hone their teaching craft, and continued to push their own boundaries and comfort zones. But they felt supported to do so. It was exciting and challenging to see the new knowledge and the new insights that were being crafted through the COP. This lead to the ECSE teachers wanting to do more and with my own passion for early childhood and desire to create a broader continuum of services and supports, we found ourselves on the path to preschool inclusion.

In retrospect, one can see where the journey was moving when looking at the roadmap. Research has strongly supported preschool inclusion. Policy has been written to support it and state regulations are reporting on the number of students with special needs who are serviced in programs with typical developing peers. Yet, caution should be taken when reviewing the research, as not every preschool age student with special needs is appropriate to participate in a full preschool inclusion program. It is important to maintain a continuum of services and programs to support all levels of need and ability.

What is not highlighted with a great emphasis in this study is the amount of work that was done prior to implementing inclusion programs. The *access* component was huge and required administrative and stakeholder support. Collapsing special education and general

education into one setting is not an easy task; it literally requires the breaking down of what have historically been considered two separate silos or entities in education. Support was not only needed from the special education side, but the general education side as well.

In order to even float the idea of preschool inclusion, it took careful planning on how it would look, work, and be successful. I was under the strong opinion that transportation should still be provided for any student we were taking from an ECSE classroom (where specialized transportation is an option for families) and recommending a GSRP placement. This spoke to *access*. It required new IEPs for every child as the least restrictive environment was changing. It required education for parents, staff, and administrators on the rules and regulations for the amount of special education service that was required for students to be eligible for a GSRP program. And it required a restructuring of staff in order to meet the minimum special education service allocation time.

It required shifting staff, not adding, and shifting program times. ECSE class times were changed significantly in order to share transportation between ECSE and the students who were recommended to participate in the GSRP inclusion classrooms. It meant that two ECSE sections were no longer ECSE as the teachers pushed into GSRP classrooms rather than teach their own ECSE class. The carryover effect of this was that ECSE class make up was more diverse with age ranges and with a reduction in sections, it meant that remaining five ECSE sections across the county consisted of three, four, and five year olds. Historically, three year olds were in the morning sections and older students were in the afternoon sections. By removing two morning sections, the remaining ECSE student population was dispersed. This presented challenges within ECSE as the teachers struggled with adapting to fit the needs of very different levels and abilities across different age groups.

As with anything new, in the beginning challenges can often seem overwhelming and broad. Ironically, no parents or families struggled with any of the changes, and the teachers' ability to be creative and flexible was critical to maintaining the solid structure of an ECSE program, as well as in establishing a new joint working relationship with the GSRP team. As previously stated, the more critical aspect of the study kept student interest and well-being forefront, as it should have done. But the underlying tension that surfaced between adults was also a recurrent theme in the study.

Simply putting like-minded individuals together to work for the greater good of students, although altruistic at heart, is not as simple as one would want it to be. The hope that by participating in a COP, teams would be able to find a collaborative ground from which to build a working relationship. Although this did happen, I feel what was learned from documenting the experiences of the teachers, can have a positive impact for those moving forward.

Much work has been done on how to implement a preschool inclusion program, but no one, to the knowledge of this researcher, has documented the experience, let alone a three-year representation of how inclusion came to fruition. The DEC/NAEYC (2009) joint position statement on preschool inclusion identified the following recommendations for how to support inclusive practices:

1. *Create high expectations for every child, regardless of ability, to reach his or her full potential*. Through the use of UDECE and establishing the belief that the preschool classroom should be ready for all levels of learners working toward the same outcomes, high expectations were set for every child. No child was treated differently or given room to perform at a lower level. Through the use of evidenced based practices and increasing learning opportunities, every child was able to reach the same academic

outcome. This doesn't mean that some didn't surpass, but every child across the settings demonstrated academic, social emotional, and communicative growth (as determined by standardized measures).

2. *Develop an agreed upon program philosophy on inclusion*. This was established when the educational agency decided to embark upon an inclusion program. One classroom (the district that had already been doing a form of inclusion) was the exception where students returned to the ECSE room for no more than an hour a week (and this was then faded out by February) to receive targeted instruction in a small group. The rest of the classrooms, and every classroom by February, participated in full inclusion. There was no pull out for services or removal of students from the GSRP class. This was important, as a large part of the process was to build and sustain a sense of community within the classrooms. If students only attended GSRP for part of the day, and then returned to an ECSE or separate program to receive special education services, we were still separating and isolating the two programs; there would not have been any carryover or generalization or learning from one another. Our silos in education would have permeated. Our philosophy was to maintain the notion that every child was a fixture in the classroom, not a visitor to the experience of being with same aged peers. The one classroom that was the exception housed the two teachers who struggled to establish an intentional collaborative working relationship. Each teacher had strong opinions on teaching and it took effort and sustained effort on my end as a research and a participant to encourage conformity with the philosophy. Once it did happen and the students were fully included in the classroom, the entire sense of community shifted. This also may have been partially attributed to the change in teachers in March.

3. *Establish a system of services and supports that follows a continuum, but keeps inclusion at the forefront*. Inclusion was definitely at the forefront of the study as every tool and strategy we implemented was to support inclusion and sustaining a sense of community and belonging for every child.
4. *Revise program and professional standards to incorporate key components of high quality inclusion.* Early childhood programs were revised in order to accommodate an inclusion program and preschool classrooms that were already deemed to be high quality (per state guidelines) were targeted. All GSRP classrooms must meet standards of quality to remain licensed. Thus, creating inclusive programs within already established high quality GSRP meant students with disabilities had access to high quality early childhood programs.
5. *Develop an integrated professional development system across all early childhood staff.* Through participation in START trainings to highlight evidenced based teaching practices and harvesting the information through participation in COP meetings, professional development and the support of all staff involved were critical components to embarking on the journey of starting an inclusive program.
6. *Revise federal and state accountability systems to reflect the needs of all students within inclusive settings*. This may have been a little beyond our control, but I took it as an opportunity to establish connections between IEP goals, the Creative Curriculum, and the Teaching Strategies Gold Assessment that is used in GSRP classrooms to highlight student performance based on developmental domains. ECSE teachers were expected to write IEP goals with input from the GSRP team so that the goals could easily be embedded within the activities that were part of the GSRP curriculum and assessment. It

was helpful on a number of levels: 1) it encouraged conversation between the two teachers, 2) it highlighted how GSRP teachers could embed more strategies universally in order to support IEP goals in naturalistic, daily activities, and 3) it held both teachers accountable for student growth so the expectation was not on one isolated teacher.

With the vast amounts of literature speaking to positive effects of preschool inclusion for all students who participate in the experience (Boyd, Odom, Humphreys & Sam, 2010; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002; Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi, & Shelton, 2004; Holahan & Costenbader, 2000; Odom, et al., 2004; Strain & Hoyson, 2000), and the literature that speaks to how to go about implementing a high quality preschool inclusion program (Bricker, 1995; Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2003; Guralnick, M. J.,2001; Odom, S. L., Buysse, V., & Soukakou, E., 2011; Piper, A., 2007; Purcell, M. L., Horn, E., & Palmer, S.,2007; Stayton, V. D., 2015), there still exists a large gap between what the literature and research suggests and the applicability and documentation of actually following the recommendations.

With the research that has been done indicating the need for inclusion, and the need for studying inclusion, and the gap in the literature that demonstrates how to break down the barriers to implementing inclusion with a high level of not only fidelity and success, this study attempts to fill in some of the missing pieces. Stemming from 1993 when the original DEC/NAEYC joint position statements was released, researchers began investigating why inclusion was not occurring. Rose and Smith's survey attempted to understand the challenges that created barriers to implementing preschool inclusion and indicated that personnel policies were the greatest barrier to promoting preschool inclusion. Additional challenges included: attitudes and beliefs, fiscal/contracting policies, program quality, different curriculum, and transportation policies

(Rose & Smith, 1993). In 2015, a similar study was conducted to get at the core of why preschool inclusion was on the decline versus the rise. The number one challenge in 2015 to promoting preschool inclusion related to attitudes and beliefs, with personnel policies falling to the bottom (Barton & Smith, 2015). Hence, new procedure and policy have helped to shape and break down barriers to preschool inclusion, but attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions continue to be the biggest challenge. This study attempted to gain further insight into attitudes and beliefs about why inclusion was not occurring. What was found was a little different.

Riding on the policy and program changes that encouraged and fostered inclusion, I sought to seek a deeper understanding of why attitudes and beliefs circled around the demise of inclusion and why the general sense was that it would not work, despite research supporting that it would yield positive outcomes. Even the research here contradicts itself; on one hand, researchers claim inclusion works and is beneficial, but the gap between research and practice indicates that those who are in the field don't believe in it. When we started the COP at the start of the 2015-2016 year, motivations and energy levels were high. There wasn't a sense of this 'not working'. We relied on the research that indicated the positive effects. The message from administration was always one of strong support and we set up an inclusion program that was more akin to co-teaching than asking GSRP teachers to provide instruction and special education staff to continue to work in isolation outside the classroom walls to provide service.

By modeling an inclusion program after Florian and Black-Hawkins (2011) concept of inclusive pedagogy in which the "development of a rich learning community characterized by learning opportunities that are sufficiently made available for everyone, so that all learners are able to participate in classroom life" (p. 814), the intent was to build an inclusion program where staff felt supported and could work together to support all students in the classroom. The

attitudes and beliefs that came through were not targeted to the process, but more so on how to work together.

In a sense, the two teachers were co-teaching or team teaching in a preschool classroom. No student was isolated out for specialized instruction and teachers were asked to go beyond their comfort zone of teaching and to incorporate new strategies and skills into their teaching practice in order to create an inclusive environment that would meet the needs of all students. In attempting to blend the general and special education teaching worlds, the idea was that by putting both teachers in a classroom together four full mornings a week, each teacher would take turns modeling and implementing strategies, concepts, and instructional practices that would support and benefit every child in the classroom. When co-teachers instruct, they become joint owners of the classroom. In co-teaching, both teachers share instructional and behavioral accountability for all students (Conderm an et al., 2009). When the general education teacher is taking the lead in the classroom instruction; the special education teacher should take on a supportive role to help students find understanding in the lesson. The same is true for the lessons when the special education teacher is leading the classroom instruction; the general education teacher should take on the supporting role. By alternating between the lead role and the supportive role, each teacher takes an active and equal role in classroom management, rather than one teacher being viewed as the lead teacher and the other teacher as a helper in the eye of the students. When not in the leader role, there are many ways to actively support children's education. The first way is to roam around the room and check for student understanding and focus on those students who are possibly struggling to keep up with the large group instruction. By moving around the room, the support teacher will give struggling learners the immediate attention they need to correctly learn the presented material. The support teacher can also keep

students on tack by cuing students to follow along; this helps the lead teacher to continue teaching, rather than stopping the entire class to redirect. The support teacher can also monitor and observe student behaviors and look for behavioral patterns (Wilson, 2008).

The attitudes and beliefs that were prevalent in the current study did not align with Barton and Smith's 2015 survey results indicating a disbelief in the ability of inclusion to work, but were more specific to teachers not viewing one another as a professional peer or co-teacher. It took until almost February for the ECSE teachers to have a more active role in classroom instruction. Although the teachers were together a large part of the day, the attitude continued to be that the ECSE teachers were there to support, document, or deal with behavior; thus taking on the more subservient role of a co-teacher.

With the GSRP/ECSE combination where ancillary staff provided the majority of support and the ECSE teacher was more of a consultant and spent less time in the classroom with the GSRP teacher, this made more sense. The GSRP teacher relied more on a consultative relationship with the ECSE teacher. Strategies were still implemented and the GSRP teacher still shifted her teaching, but had to be more self-sufficient and less reliant on the ECSE teacher due to the decreased frequency of interactions. Not to say that this model is better as the GSRP teacher early on expressed concern with the lack of support in her room, but it still came down to the issue of not having an additional adult in the room compared to the other GSRP programs where the ECSE teacher spent four mornings a week in the classroom.

This attitude and mindset that the ECSE teachers were more teaching assistants dealing with student behaviors with less of a role in classroom instruction was not something I anticipated. The focus had been so strong on changing internal policy and programs to grant *access* and then focused on the implementation the COPs in order to work on the *participation*

and *support* pieces of inclusion, my assumption had been that the COP would provide enough support to the adults. In acknowledging that the adults would require learning new skills, the focus here had been on instructional skills. Nowhere in the research does it speak to working with the adults on the practicality and reality of working together and co-teaching or team teaching. This was flushed out in the qualitative data when we attempted to bridge the gap between research and practice. As is often the case, we are all painfully aware of the unfortunate gap that exists between educational research and practice. Researchers blame the educators for not reading the literature or following the implementation guidelines, and educators accuse the researcher of not studying questions that would be of most help to them (Bleach, 2013). This is a true testimony to what happened; information and recommendations were taken from the literature on how to best implement an inclusion program, but once actively engaged in the process, new issues, beliefs, concerns and attitudes emerge.

In moving forward, for those that wish to pursue preschool inclusion, there is value to following recommendations and guidelines, and there is value in honoring those that are doing the work. In coming full circle, by including the teachers as researchers and by engaging in the project myself as both a researcher and a participant, I was able to start and finish the battle of local policy and program change to embark on starting an inclusion program, but I was then also able to watch, listen, observe, and suggest changes along that way. By being very actively involved and rooted with the participants, there was not an option of letting something go; I saw how teachers interacted in the classrooms, I observed how students engaged with class material and content, and I witnessed pedagogical shifts in teaching practices.

Documenting the experiences of the teachers, observing students in the classrooms, and interacting with families and staff, has led to the following recommendations.

1) More emphasis needs to be on the adults. This should start with an orientation process for staff on the unique aspects of working in an inclusive classroom and should happen prior to students starting in the classroom. Staff should have an opportunity to review IEPs, to set expectations, and to engage in team building activities to help establish strong and connected working relationships. Although we thought we did this in the beginning of the year by bringing the staff in before the school year started and attempting to engage them in discussions regarding inclusion and their personal definitions of inclusion, we missed the component of what inclusion means with regard to special education. COP teams were formed but not given enough structure. Tools were distributed and used, but did not incorporate ongoing tools or strategies for adults working and learning together.

2) More clearly defined teacher roles need to be established at the onset of the year as well as more intention between the pairing of teachers. Not wanting to rock the boat too much, we didn't structure the roles of each teacher. Simply pairing teachers together and letting them define roles lead to one teacher often standing back, rather than both teachers working together. Following this, each teacher group should have had more knowledge of the others' craft. ECSE teachers needed more information and education on the Creative Curriculum and instruction, and GSRP teachers needed more education on the IEP process and how to incorporate IEP goals into the classroom activities. Again, since this was

not a main piece of the COP, which focused on tools and strategies for implementing a change in teacher practice to support inclusion, it was lost and overshadowed in the process.

3) Having ongoing professional development in tandem with COP was critical for establishing and implementing change in teaching practices. Without the tools from professional development and the Action Plans that created accountability that were referenced in COP meetings, it would have been easy to coast through the year without changing anything. We won't know how this would have worked or not worked, but the assumption is that without the implementation of strategies and tools to change teacher practices, students may not have made as much growth and teachers would not have felt as supported.

4) Taking time to observe and establish relationships in order to co-construct ideas about what and where change and the implementation of new tools and strategies should occur. This requires a sustained effort by the ECSE teachers to be a permanent part of the classroom, without being in control or in charge. By spending quality time within the GSRP settings, the ECSE teachers demonstrated their level of commitment to supporting the GSRP staff. This allowed for more collaboration and positive ownership by both sets of teachers. In an expert driven model, the ECSE teachers could have driven the areas of change, but it may have impacted the desirability of the GSRP teachers to incorporate new skills. By taking time to observe teaching styles, classroom dynamics, and to engage in

ongoing discussion regarding what was observed in the classroom, and by demonstrating the commitment to be a part of the classroom community, the ECSE teachers were able to establish relationships with the GSPR staff. This was a critical component to the study as the GSRP and ECSE teachers had not previously spent much time together, let alone working with one another to support students.

5) Include all members as part of problem-solving process. As was often the case, within the ECSE COP meetings, dialogue would spiral regarding problems and solutions. It was easy to sit back within our meetings and pose solutions to problems we observed. It was important to ensure that GSRP teachers also shared the viewpoint that there was a problem that was impacting the classroom community, and that it needed a solution. We attempted to approach the problem-solving process as collaborative and not demanding. By engaging in conversation with each other, approaching GSPR staff with questions, asking for their input, and co-constructing a plan, there was more of an opportunity for shared responsibility rather than direct ownership by one teacher. By being part of the work to solve the problem, and having an active role, the ECSE teachers were able to demonstrate their willingness to be a part of the classroom community, supporting all learners.

6) Truly view the classroom as a community. By removing the language of 'our students' or 'students with IEPs', and focusing on supporting every child within the classroom, there was more of a shared responsibility

> between the ECSE and the GSRP teachers. Incorporating the aspects of Universal Designs for Early Childhood Education and highlighting the importance of community through a full inclusion (compared to programs where students may attend for part of the day or one day a week) model, every student in the class was part of the classroom community and working toward the same goal: kindergarten readiness. Using student names, or often removing the name altogether and simply stating, 'a student in my class' when referencing children become the norm and allowed us to focus on how to support and problem solve an issue, rather than to put blame or frustration on whether or not it was a child with special needs.

Limitations and Strengths of the Study

This study generated data from four different early childhood inclusive programs. Based on what was available as an option for pairing a GSRP and an ECSE teacher, one pair had limited time in the classroom together, but only two students with special needs were placed in the GSRP class; every other program had five students and an ECSE teacher with a GSRP teacher for daily-extended periods of time. The high level of administrative support, the ability to meet during work hours for professional development and COP meetings, as well as the ability to make changes in local policy and programs to accommodate establishing an inclusive program may not make the results easily transferable to other early childhood inclusive programs or environments. A large component of administrative support centered on needing and wanting to expand the continuum of early childhood programs and services at a county level. Much of this was prompted by the ISD state strand reports that indicated a need for improvement in providing

special education services to preschools in an environment with typical developing peers. Something had to be done and implementing an inclusion program was seen as a potential solution without having to add staff or cut other programs. Not every ISD may have the resources or the student population to do so.

Additional limitations came into play with the turn over of one of the GSRP teachers near the conclusion of the study. Although not specifically stated, it cannot be ruled out that part of the reason she left the position may have been attributed to the addition of five students with developmental needs as part of her class make up. Although these students were part of the 16 students a GSRP classroom can enroll, to this particular teacher, it may have felt overwhelming and she may have felt inadequately prepared to provide instruction. Consequently, a GSRP program exists to give all students a head start on school, particularly those that stem from disadvantaged backgrounds or environments. As with any teacher, GSRP teachers aren't aware of who enrolls in the their class prior to the start of the year. As special education requires a parent or guardian permission, there is always potential for a parent to refuse special education services and apply to enroll a child in a GSRP program without any additional support. Hence, there is always potential for a child with significant needs to walk in the classroom door and the teacher may not have the support of an ECSE teacher. Thus, losing a teacher is never easy and her departure may have been correlated with the lack of training prior to starting the school year. This was also evident from the data from the Quality Inclusion Checklist and was a recommended component of what to do when establishing an inclusion program. Not following this recommendation, and assuming that learning new skills and strategies, harvesting them through COPs, and reifying in the classroom would have been enough to support GSRP teachers, was a limitation that could have been avoided.

The largest limitation to the study can be viewed through a Critical Theory lens. Being an active participant in the study meant that as a research, I also inherently brought issues if power, privilege, and position to the context of what we were trying to achieve. Without my involvement, if I had been a sole researcher and not a participant, and perhaps more importantly, not also employed by the district, there most likely would not have been such a high level of support for the program, the teachers, or the students. I was quick to use my position of authority to jump in and problem solve, to take over, to leverage program changes, staff assignments, locations, and even student access to GSRP. Without the ability to drive the study in the way that I did, the results may have been dramatically altered.

Being a colleague also meant I brought a level of trustworthiness to the table. Being an insider meant I knew staff, students, and families on a more personal level. Having worked with the students prior to the initiation of the study, I also had personal investments in wanting to see high level of achievement.

For any educators wanting to embark on this journey, in it's inception, a strong level of support and motivation must be present. Someone to help guide, oversee, and encourage staff, as well as to step in to do procedural or 'access' pieces is critical. Teachers wanting to jump in and teach together within an inclusive environment is not enough to develop an inclusive preschool classroom environment. Much needs to be done prior to get to students access to the program, paperwork completed, staff reassigned, parents and families on board, and education for all parties involved.

Additionally, there is concern for what remains in the Early Childhood Special Education classrooms. When the traditionally older four year old students, who have had at least a year of intensive intervention, are moved out of the ECSE classroom, the students that are left are most

likely lower functioning and now have even fewer opportunities for peer models. In the district of residence for the present study, the remaining ECSE students started the year in a smaller class setting with a higher adult to student ratio, thus more opportunities for individualized and intense interventions. As is the case every year with students being found eligible throughout the year, the ECSE programs expanded over time. The interesting observation noted with this study, was that the ancillary staff who provide support to the GSRP programs were all the same ancillary staff who provided support to the ECSE programs. Without my knowledge, staff used much of the same material across both settings. Mid March I walked into an ECSE class and observed the ECSE speech therapist using the same game and visual script we had created for GSRP with her ECSE students. There may be benefit to looking at how teaching practices and expectations within ECSE have shifted due to the new knowledge and insight that the ECSE staff gained from working with GSRP students and staff. They may have been carryover into the ECSE room where many of the students who had remained in ECSE this year (secondary to not being old enough or having more significant cognitive impairments) had been exposed to similar concepts and materials that the GSRP students have been exposed to throughout the year. Caution should be taken that the students who remain in ECSE continue to have a rich experience in which developmental gains can continue to be made.

Despite these limitations, the study presents several strengths in terms of gathering in-depth data, listening and documenting the voices and experiences of the teachers who participated, and of being able to make recommendations for stakeholders and others who wish to embark on a similar journey. By including myself as a participant and actively being involved, afforded me 'insider access'. I wasn't just a researcher coming in and interviewing teachers, I was doing the work alongside them. I became familiar with teachers and students and

could help guide the GSRP/ECSE teams towards which COP tools/strategies could be the most appropriate based on the needs of the students and the make up of the particular classroom. It allowed me to do some of the work of creating visuals and knowing what to inquire about when talking to ECSE teachers about how they were modeling and providing feedback or coaching to the GSRP teachers. It allowed me insight in the needs of the students, not just the students with special needs, and enabled me to provide ideas from a UDECE standpoint on how to best implement strategies from a classroom wide perspective. Through my participation, I was able to witness teacher tension, limitations, and conflict prior to anything erupting into an issue that had the potential to be unresolved. For example, when the ECSE teachers expressed their concern regarding feeling more like a teacher assistant rather than a teacher, I had immediate access and ability to see if this was true. Subsequently, I also had immediate access and ability to go about attempting to resolve the concern. Being a part of the classroom environment also meant that the GSRP teachers developed respect and confidence in my ability to support them, as well as to make suggestions and recommendations.

The study is able to add to the research through the documentation of the teachers' voices and experiences. Simply going into classrooms and observing teachers together would not have been adequate; data would have been one dimensional and from one perspective. Using the COP meeting notes, agendas, transcribing teacher interviews, documenting classroom observations, and noting teacher reflections layers the data to provide detailed experiences that have the credibility and the ability to make recommendations for future educators wanting to embark on establishing or redefining preschool inclusion.

The study can also add to the body of research on how to move forward with implementation of an inclusive preschool environment. In the early stages of inception, it is

critical to have someone oversee the process. To help frame the recommendations for future educators, it may ne helpful to align the steps for implementation of an inclusive preschool program with the three core components that DEC/NAEYC use to define inclusion: access, participation, and supports. Someone at the head of access, working in the background to secure spaces in a GSRP program, to align IEP compliance provisions, and to begin to bridge the relationship between GSRP and ECSE is crucial for setting the terms for implementation. Teachers cannot be expected to work behind the scenes with administration to secure programs, possible transportation, staff allocations, and change of assignments. All of this speaks to access; it is important that someone be the voice of access so that eligible students can participate. Also, it is critical to keep in mind that access is not necessarily an open door and that there are requirements that must be met for access. Having someone knowledgeable about the process, the regulations, and how to break through the initial barriers of access, even down to the individual decisions of a district on whether or not to provide specialized transportation, requires a person behind the scenes working to 'active the access'. Once the groundwork for the access has been established, participation is key. Speaking with teachers and families on how participation in an inclusion program can be beneficial is a critical step. When something new is introduced, there can be anxiety about the change as the change is often unknown. This is where building relationships with staff and family members is also critical to the successful implementation of an inclusive preschool program. Educating those involved on the purpose, the research to support, and the long-term benefits of participation are a few examples that were used in the present study in order to increase 'participation'. Once the logistics of the access piece (identifying and securing program locations, staff, student IEP changes to reflect inclusion,

procuring transportation, and obtaining administrator support), the participation piece is almost instantaneous.

With the participation, though, it is important that all staff involved have an invested outlook; if morale and attitudes are of the mindset that success is not possible, the potential for an inclusive program to be successful may not be warranted. Participation is important on both the adult and the child level. The adults involved should be as active in participating in new learning opportunities in order to better engage students with disabilities. This flows into the supports piece. Staff involved should also receive training and be provided with opportunities to expand their own knowledge. A key piece to the present study was the collaboration of new learning. Both groups of teachers participated *together* in high quality professional development that was ongoing throughout the course of the school year. Not only did this help staff hear the same message, but it also provided staff with additional opportunities to come together outside of the classroom to problem solve, brain storm, and collaborate on what was happening in the day to day aspects of the classroom environment.

In trying to make recommendations, a limitation presents itself as my dual role in the study was critical to the successful implementation of inclusive preschool programs. Having support behind the scenes is critical. And not just at the implementation phase. Having teachers learn together in an ongoing fashion was critical. Setting aside time to meet through a COP was critical. This provided the teachers the opportunity to engage in ongoing discussion, to share ideas, to problem solve, and to refine what they were learning through professional development activities in order to re-culture their classrooms.

Concluding Remarks

What started as a group of teachers working together to change teaching practices in order to better prepare preschool students for kindergarten, transformed into something much bigger. The journey began with wanting to better prepare ECSE students for future kindergarten environments, but as knowledge was constructed and shared, and continued inquiry into 'what else can we do' transpired, the process evolved and resulted in a broadening of the continuum of services and supports that are currently available in order to better prepare all preschool students for future academic endeavors. By broadening the scope of the continuum of services and supports, students with special needs were able to participate in an intensive preschool setting for a year, transition to a typical developing program with continued special education services but alongside peers for a second year of preschool, and then transition to local district kindergarten programs, and in some cases, with less anticipated special education support.

Just as in 2013, when the ECSE teachers first formed a COP, the present study continued to put emphasis on the voices of the participants, with continued emphasis on representing the experiences of implementing something new. The voices continued to follow a dialogic spiral and continued to illustrate emotions, feelings, fears, and beliefs – all of which contributed to the depth of the experience of participating in a study where recommendations were made and followed, but that at the heart of the data, it was the qualitative aspect of shifting mindsets, changing teaching practices, and doing work that had the potential to positively impact a child's future.

No study is perfect and as is the case with much qualitative research, we learn the work by doing the work. What we learned not only over the past year, but also encapsulating the work over the past several years, was centered on the value and importance of collaboration. Inclusive

practices require teachers to work together and through COP events, and with sustained professional development that was specific to the COP that included meaningful and relevant tools and strategies, the teachers in the present study were able to engage in providing instruction from a UDECE perspective and to truly embrace the idea that we need to be ready for any child who walks through our classroom door, not to expect the child to change for us.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Kindergarten Observation Sheet

Date and Location

1) How does teacher promote self-regulation within the classroom?
    a. Track/tally how often it is implemented (i.e. wiggle time, Brain Gym, etc.)

       _____

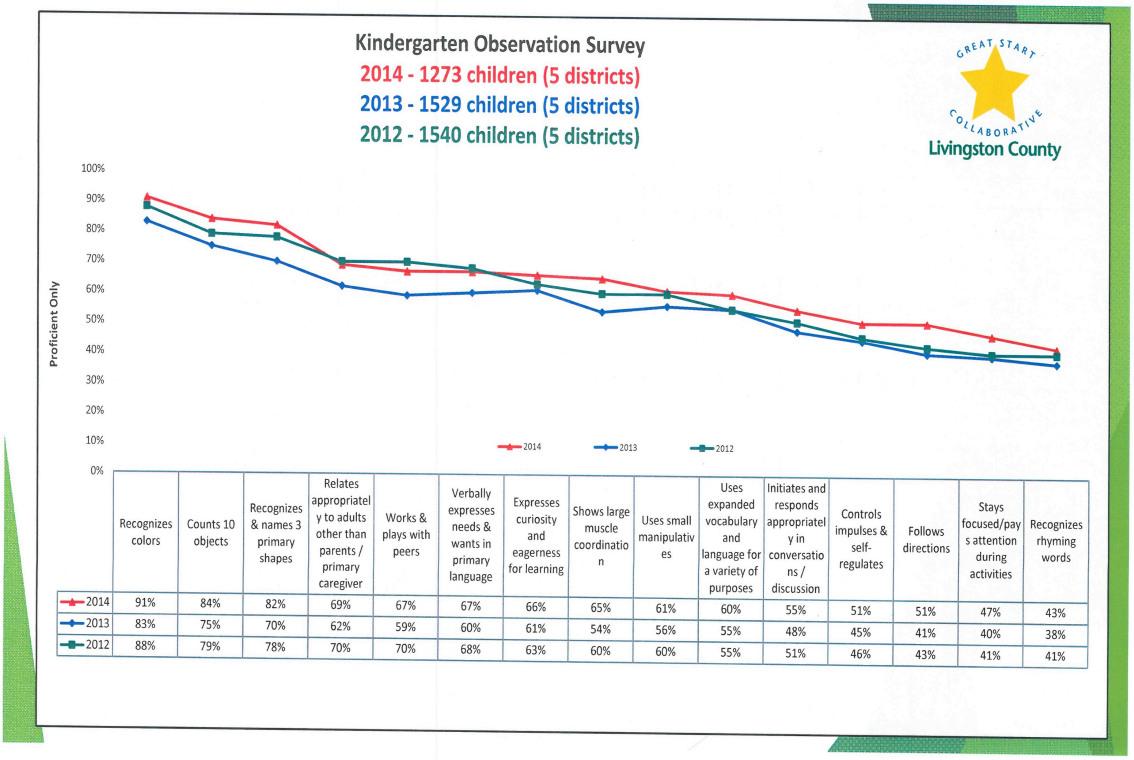
2) Length of teacher verbal directions
    a. How many steps?
    b. Amount of instruction (steps)
    c. Visual paired with instruction
    d. Repetition of instruction

3) Length of sitting (mins)
    a. Circle
    b. Table
    c. Sustained attention to task
    d. Task completion

4) What is kindergarten schedule?
    a. Posted and where
    b. Visually representation?
    c. Referenced by teacher/adults (tally)?_____
    d. Amount of time (mins):
        i. In whole group
        ii. Individual work
        iii. Small group

5) Classroom makeup
    a. How many students in the room? How many adults?
    b. Size of small groups
    c. Size of large group
    d. Size at tables/center
    e. Additional comments on class environment

6) Level of independence required for:
    a. Transitions between activities within class/*how many*?
    b. Transitions out of room/*how many*?
    c. Sitting in circle
    d. Using bathroom
    e. Asking for help
    f. Following verbal directions
    g. Accessing class materials



	Recognizes colors	Counts 10 objects	Recognizes & names 3 primary shapes	Relates appropriatel y to adults other than parents / primary caregiver	Works & plays with peers	Verbally expresses needs & wants in primary language	Expresses curiosity and eagerness for learning	Shows large muscle coordinatio n	Uses small manipulativ es	Uses expanded vocabulary and language for a variety of purposes	Initiates and responds appropriatel y in conversatio ns / discussion	Controls impulses & self-regulates	Follows directions	Stays focused/pay s attention during activities	Recognizes rhyming words
2014	91%	84%	82%	69%	67%	67%	66%	65%	61%	60%	55%	51%	51%	47%	43%
2013	83%	75%	70%	62%	59%	60%	61%	54%	56%	55%	48%	45%	41%	40%	38%
2012	88%	79%	78%	70%	70%	68%	63%	60%	60%	55%	51%	46%	43%	41%	41%

2 weeks in to school year & through mid October

Figure 12: County Wide Kindergarten Readiness Data

APPENDIX C: GSRP Daily Schedule Examples

9:15-9:40 Arrival/Breakfast/Greeting Time
9:40-10:10 Outside/Gross Motor
10:10-10:25 Large-Group Time (Morning Message)/Music and Movement
10:25-10:40 Small Group/Planning
10:40-11:40 Free Choice
11:40-11:45 Cleanup Time
11:45-11:50 Recall
11:50-11:55 Restroom/Wash Hands/Prepare for Lunch
11:55-12:25 Lunch
12:25-12:35 Restroom/Rest Prep Children prepare their mat for rest time.
12:35-12:45 Yoga/Cool Down/Story
12:45-1:45 Quiet/Rest Time
1:45-2:50 Wake up/ Plan/Free Choice/Cleanup/Recall
2:50-3:05 Large Group (Second Step)
3:10-3:15 Restroom/Wash Hands/Prepare for Snack
3:.5-3:35 Snack/Brush Teeth
3:35-4:15 Outside/Dismissal

APPENDIX D: Infographic

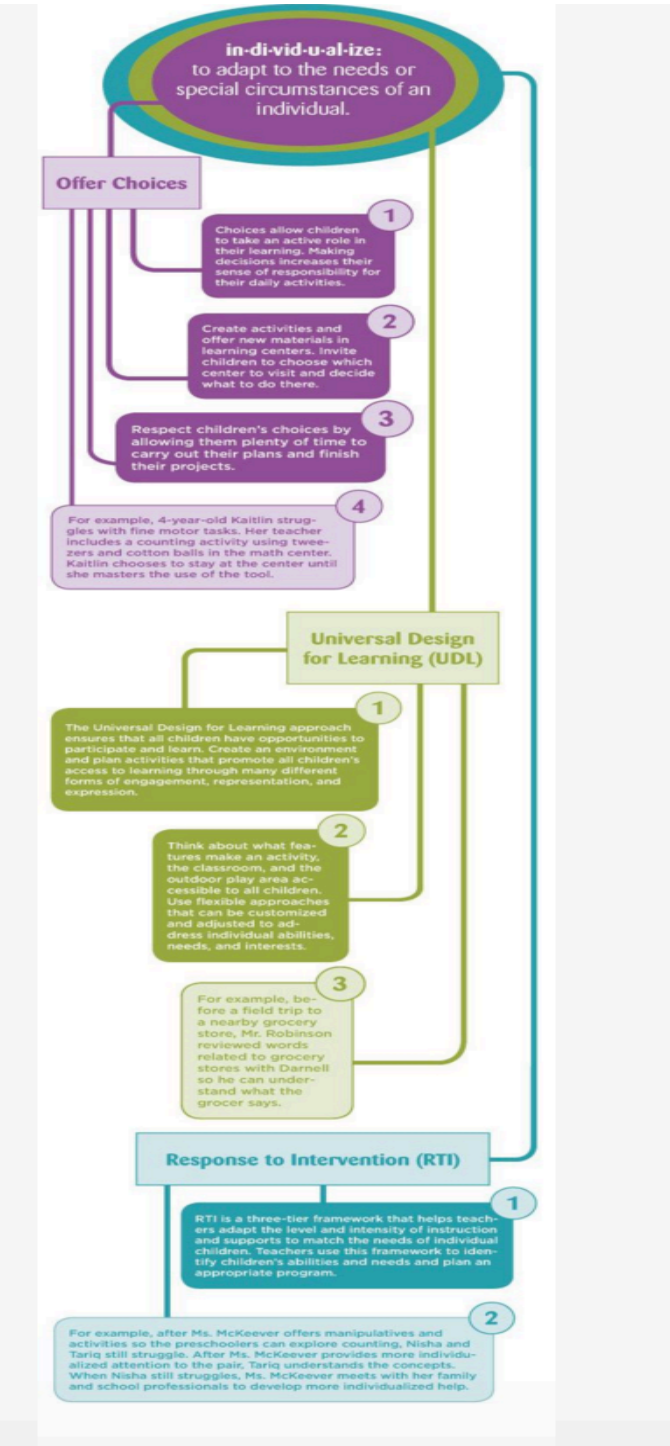


Figure 13: Individualizing Instruction

Quality Inclusive Practices Checklist

*This instrument is designed to assess quality inclusive practices within early childhood environments. The features used to define high-quality, inclusive early childhood programs and services are **Access**, **Participation**, and **Supports** (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). The framework for this checklist builds upon these features. Access, Participation, and Supports are measured by a variety of evidence-based indicators.*

Click on ***highlighted terms*** to access a full glossary definition.

Click on the word "toolbox" under the  to access articles, online application activities, and resources that support knowledge of the instrument indicators.

IDEAs that Work
U.S. Office of Special Education Programs

*Developed through **Heartland Equity and Inclusion Project** and supported by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the position of the U.S. Department of Education.*

Observation Information	
Setting Name:	
Address:	
Phone Number:	
Director / Principal:	
Date:	
Reviewer:	

Figure 14: Face sheet for classroom observations of inclusive practices

APPENDIX F: Personal Definitions of Inclusion Examples

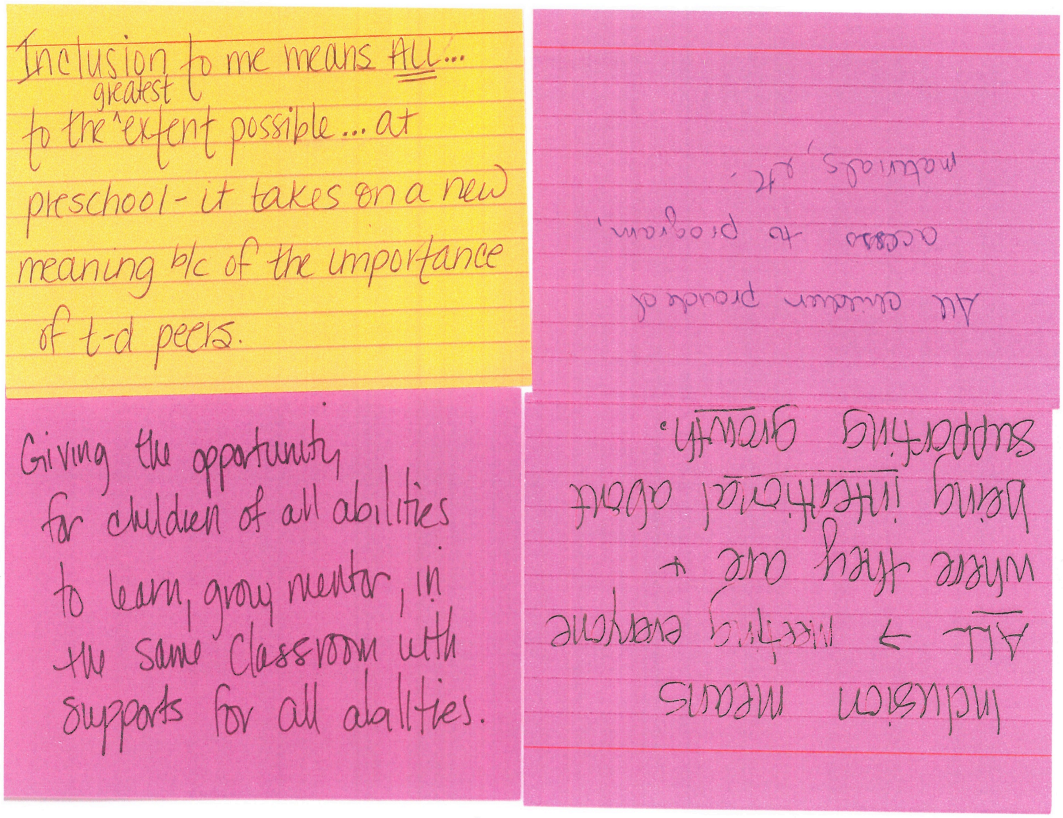


Figure 15: Teacher inclusion definitions

APPENDIX G: Initial Sept COP Meeting Agenda

Early Childhood Collaborative Work Session
9-11-15

1. Introductions

2. Written reflection

Our Mutual Learning Opportunities

3. Our Language choices are important:

Your kids My kids Rule 55 kids			Those kids
Your job My job	Special Ed.		Gen Ed

Do not support our goals!

Our kids	Child's name	Our job	Preschool Classroom

Support our goals!

4. Reflect

In triads, reflect on the first week.
What was your biggest smile maker?
We are giving you a "do over opportunity". What one thing would you do over?

5. Create

As a team, create your working agreements
Each group will shares out their team agreements.

6. Discuss

How do you want to approach:
~planning
~communication
~resolving conflict

7. Plan

Look at your next two weeks and hatch a plan!

Think about our work together and be ready to share with the group:

What can you help us to learn this year? What experience and skills have you acquired that could help others to grow? What do you have to share with us?

What do you need to learn from the group:

What do you need to learn from each other:

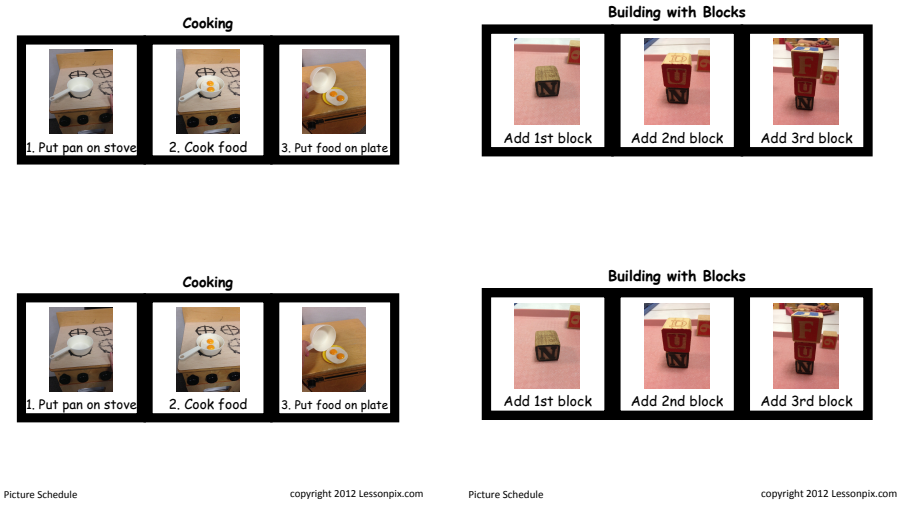
What do you need to learn from the experience:

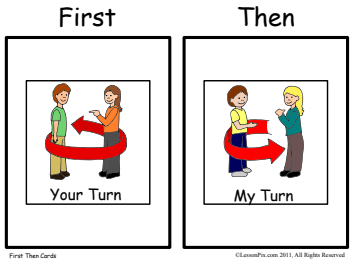
APPENDIX H: Action Plan Examples

Table 13: Professional Development accountability

WHO	WHAT	WHEN	Initial/Date	SEPTEMBE	WHO	WHAT	WHEN	Initial/Date
Everyone	change structured play to teacher directed play based instruction	10/5/2015	x		x	talk to Ali about interest areas/where materials are located in the room	10/5/2015	x
Everyone	increase learning opp; PRESENT/RESPONSE/REACTION; share this concept with ALL staff in class	10/1/2015	x		x	intentionally teach about center materials during small group activities in ECSE room	9/28/2015	
Everyone	Lay out childhood expectations within timeframe for goal setting	1/1/2016	ongoing		x	review later how the 'new plan' of labeling a students' space is working in large open space/circel time area	10/20/2015	
XX	post expectations in classroom	10/11/2015	RK-given to teachers		x	social story for expectations in water play (1st-then)	9/28/2015	Completed 9/28/2015
XX	more visuals and adult support in play based instruction	10/20/2015			x	mini play schedule for giving car to a friend to promote allowing others into play	10/5/2015	x
xx	real photos for play based instruction	10/20/2015	RK-10/12 for PCS		x	use visuals consistently/support teaching staff	ASAP/NOW	X
xx	First-Then cards for each activity in centers, play, snack. circle	10/9/2015	x		x	take pictures of GSRP play areas for mini schedules during choice time	10/10/2015	I have some pictures of the Brighton GSRP areas that I can send you. Not sure if they are the same, but I think most of them are Lakeshore.
xx	wait and help visuals to all ECSE teachers	10/9/2015	x		x	post expectations in classroom/start collecting data-2 points per kid per week	10/1/2015	X

APPENDIX I: Visual Examples





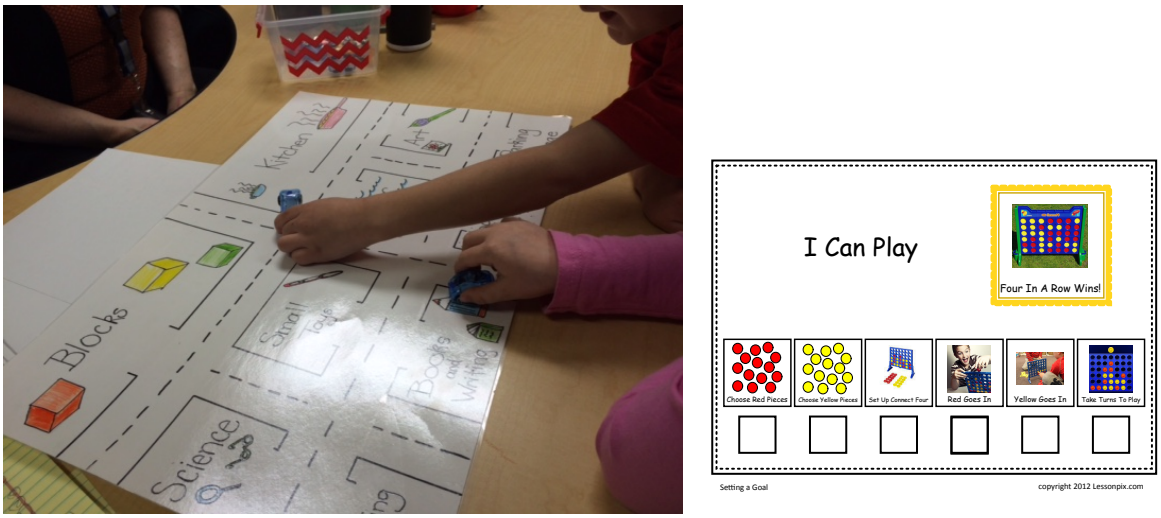


Figure 14: Classroom play visuals

APPENDIX J: Classroom Structure Visuals

Figure 17: Supporting behavior and routines in the classroom

APPENDIX K: Data Sheets

Table 14: Professional Development Progress Monitoring form

Student Name: ___________________________ Observer 1: _________________________

Class/Teacher: ___________________________ Observer 2: _________________ IOA: ______

Routine/Activity and Length of Time	**Date**																	
Engagement: 1 = Attended 0-1 min(Attended little or none of the activity) 2 = Attended 2-3 min(Attended ¼ of the activity) 3 = Attended 4-5 min (Attended half of the activity) 4 = Attended 6-8 min(Attended ¾ of the activity) 5 = Attended 9-10 min (Attended all or the majority of the activity) **Target Engagement Behavior:**	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S	5 4 3 2 1 S
Independence: Steps of Routine/Activity 4=Independent 1=Partial or Full Physical 3=Visual / Gestural S=Step not completed by student 2=Verbal	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
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	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S
	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S	4 3 2 1 S

Table 14 (cont'd)

Engagement Instructions:

- Select a classroom instruction time of 15 minutes, for either and/or group and individual instruction, that is problematic for the student (i.e. student is rarely engaged)
- Start the timer as soon as you observe the student engaged in the activity
- When the student stops engaging, pause the timer
- When the student starts engaging, start the timer
- Continue pausing and starting the timer as needed until the activity has ended
- Based on the number of minutes showing on the timer, circle the number that corresponds
- Collect engagement data during this **same** classroom activity for 2-3 days across two consecutive weeks
- After every third data point, analyze the data; determine if engagement is improving or declining; and then, based on your analysis of the data, develop a corresponding plan
- For easier analysis, draw a line connecting each day and insert a phase line when intervention is implemented or is changed

Independence Instructions:

- Select a daily routine to observe that is problematic for the student (e.g. arrival, putting away materials, lunch, dismissal, toileting, task completion, etc.)
- Task-analyze the routine (i.e. indicate the steps necessary for completing the routine) and list in the left column of the data sheet (e.g. Arrival: get off the bus, come into the school, go to the locker, get materials needed for 1st class, go to class).
- Observe the routine, and for each step, circle all prompts needed for the student to complete the step
- Collect independence data on the same routine for 2-3 days across two consecutive weeks
- After every third data point, analyze the data; determine if independence is improving, staying the same, or declining; and then, based on your analysis of the data, make a corresponding plan
- For easier analysis, draw a line connecting each day and insert a phaseline when intervention is implemented or is changed

Data Analysis:
Based on the past 3 data points, this routine is: ***Improving Staying Same Declining***

WHY?

□ Doesn't seem to understand the task
□ Doesn't seem to like the task
□ Task doesn't involve preferred content
□ Doesn't seem to know how to ask for help
□ Low frustration tolerance
□ Doesn't wait his turn
□ Doesn't seem to like group work
□ Seems distracted by others
□ Becomes easily upset by others mistakes and errors
□ Doesn't seem to know how to comment on activity
□ Seems to want access to a particular item/activity that's not available
□ Difficulty with transition (e.g. preferred to non-preferred activities)
□ Difficulty with change (e.g. change in curricula, subject, group formation, etc.)
□ Not enough individual opportunities to respond delivered
□ Not enough group opportunities to respond delivered
□ Becomes easily upset by his/her own mistakes and errors
□ Other: _____

- Task needs to be broken down into smaller steps
- Prompting is occurring too quickly
- Prompting is occurring too frequently
- Prompting is too delayed
- Current prompt is not effective at getting step to occur
- Step is dependent on a prompt (prompt dependency)
- Step seems like it could occur without a prompt
- Reinforcer is not motivating enough
- Reinforcer was not delivered following completion of routine

Plan of action:
Consider antecedent, teaching, and responding strategies

- Break down the task into smaller steps
- Wait to provide a prompt on steps: _____
- Remember to provide only one prompt for steps: _____
- Provide a more immediate prompt on steps: _____
- Need to start with higher level of assistance on steps:_____
- Need to fade level of prompt on steps: _____
- Provide no prompt on steps: _____
- Find a new reinforcer
- Deliver reinforcer
- Other: _____

APPENDIX L: COP History and Timeline

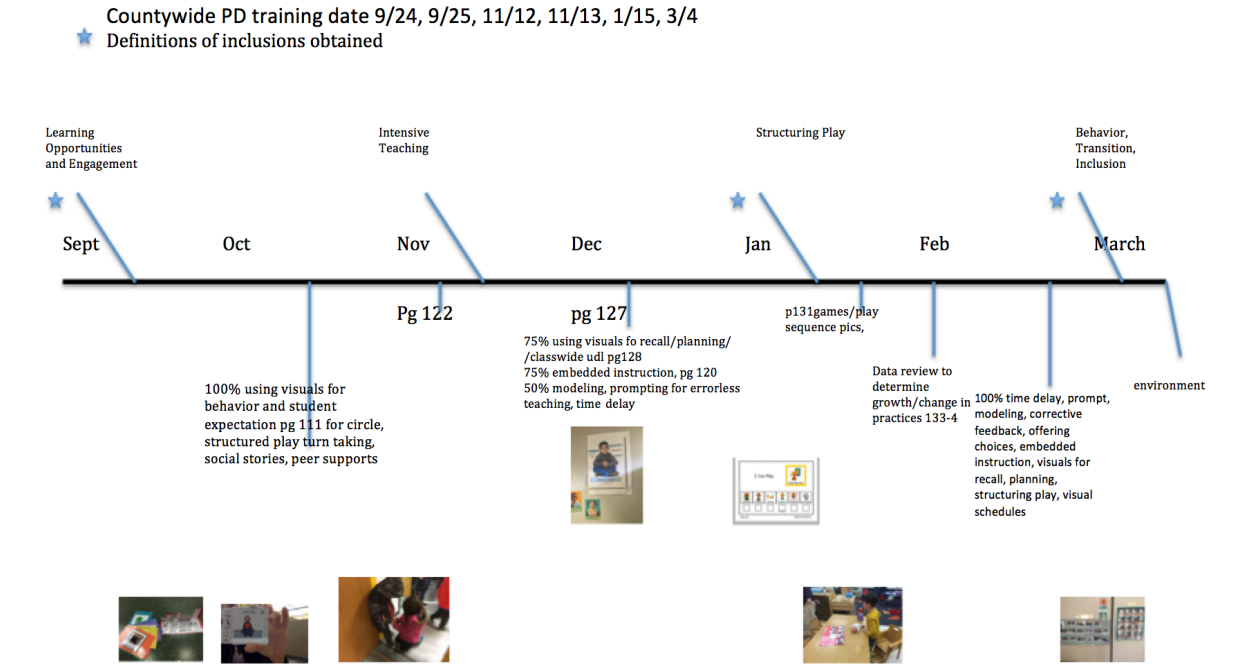

Figure 18: Overview of timeline

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