

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

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By

Stephanie Nicole Bowens

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Dissertation Committee Members:

Dr. Judith Stull, Dissertation Chair, Department of Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies

Dr. Christopher McGinley, Department of Policy, Organizational, and Leadership Studies

Dr. Katherine Burke, Department of Teaching and Learning

Dr. Jean Boyer, External Member, Department of Teaching and Learning

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ABSTRACT

This study attempted to address gaps in how the perceptions of special education teachers had an effect on how they taught, and the support they receive from their leadership. The purpose of the study was to examine how the perception of special education teachers affects how they approach teaching career readiness attitudes and skills that are embedded in the hidden curriculum, and their perception of the support from leadership that they receive. This is an important issue because as students navigate through school and look toward post-secondary opportunities, having been exposed to the “soft skills” they will need to be successful in a vocational setting is essential. Also, the perspective of the special education teacher is important because they can provide insight and work in collaborative manners with both other teachers and leaders.

Data were collected through surveys and interviews from current special education teachers or from those who previously were special education teachers. This latter category does include respondents who transitioned from teaching to administrative positions. There was a total of 11 survey participants and 20 interviews were conducted. The survey was based on the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) and the ECLS program (2020). These two surveys have been used by researchers to capture teacher attitudes and behaviors related to the topic at hand. For example, Merlin (2021) used the NTPS data to capture the pre-service experiences of a nationally represented sample. Jennings and DiPrete (2010), analyzed ECLS data and found that some aspects of academic achievement are a function of teacher effects on social and behavioral skills. Breinholt and Jaeger (2020) found a positive relationship between teachers focusing on

developing students' cultural capital and their educational performance. Other researchers used these data to understand better classroom experiences for students with disabilities (Bowling et al, 2017; Jung & Bradley, 2006; Rhinehart, et al., 2022). The majority of the survey respondents felt that it was important to cover class content, and fewer thought that helping students work with others or including work readiness skills were important. The survey provided the foundation to dig deeper into the experiences of special education teachers. The interviews provided an elaborate account of the experiences and perceptions of special education teachers. The results provided themes that could answer the research questions.

The findings provide insight into how special education teachers and other educators teach and work with students with disabilities. The implications of this study can inform policy and practice for special education teachers and school leadership. It can also help build collaborative efforts between leadership, special education teachers, and general education teachers. Additional research is needed to further examine how the perceptions of other educators, and school leadership affects the teaching of students with disabilities.

DEDICATIONS

This dissertation is dedicated first to my family. My family has watched my educational journey and has always supported me. They have always remained supportive even when the anxiousness of due dates and speaking in front of my class took over my mood. They have listened to me practice presentations countless times to prepare, and no matter how much I felt I messed up, made me feel like I did amazing, so I could believe I could get through.

Specifically, I am dedicating this dissertation to my little brother. Having the drive to better understand how I can be a better sister to him is what continues to drive me forward. He has taught me everything I know about Autism. He has taught me how important it is to have support and to be fearless and happy in who they are. Through our life experiences and watching him navigate through school, it is learning how to better help him that began my love for special education. It has also driven my desire to want to always be an advocate for individuals with disabilities.

I lastly want to dedicate this dissertation to 2 of my mentors: Dr. Donna Hodge and Dr. David Weathington. Both have pushed me to be better both professionally and personally. They are both always present for my successes and also to help me navigate through the hard times and failures. Dr. Hodge has been my mentor since I was in my bachelor's program. She has helped me navigate both my educational and personal journey by always being supportive and providing advice. Dr. Weathington became a mentor when I landed my first job after college. It was always his advice that I continue school and not let anything get in my way. He always empowered me to be the best that I could be despite whatever anyone else thought. I would not have made it this far without either of them, and I am always beyond grateful.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Failing to earn a high school diploma, once considered merely a personal problem, is now considered the result of embedded structural inequalities such as a lack of resources, socioeconomic differences, and lack of motivation (Campbell, 2015). Racial/ethnic patterns persist as minority students are more apt to leave school before graduating. In Philadelphia, nearly 25 percent of students drop out of high school before graduating (philasd.org). Leaving school without a degree might seem like a solution in the short run, but the long run prognosis is bleak. High school dropouts are three times more likely to be unemployed than graduates and are more likely to live in poverty (Bridgeland, et al., 2006). This is an especially important issue for students with disabilities. According to NSBA's Center for Public Education (2019), students with disabilities graduate on time at a much lower rate than students without disabilities. The average graduation rate of students with disabilities that are served by IDEA was 67.1% (Cohen, 2019). That is 17.5% lower than the 84.6% of all students who graduated.

A key factor in whether a student graduates or not is a function of the quality of teaching experienced. Teachers deliver the content while also serving as important role models as within the school day, student spend more time interacting with them than any other adult figure. Research has indicated that teaching students with disabilities require the teacher to focus on not only teaching the explicit academic curriculum, but also the implied skills and attitudes of the hidden curriculum (Fernandes, et al, 2021). The explicit

curriculum is defined as the formal curriculum in which students learn from and what teachers are expected to use (Hoover, 1987). The hidden curriculum is a topic that aligns with educating the whole child and ensuring the students are learning the required and necessary skills that will help them be successful in the global economy. The hidden curriculum is defined as the unstated enforcement of certain behavioral patterns, standards, and social beliefs while navigating a learning environment (Alsubaie, 2015).

Berg, et al (2017) conducted a study that looked to understand the experiences of young adults with intellectual disabilities transitioning to post-secondary education programs. The researchers discussed how a major challenge for students with intellectual disabilities is the limited exposure to and opportunities to understand the hidden curriculum that is found in post-secondary institutions (Berg et al.,2017). The researchers found that post-secondary education can be an option for students with disabilities, however, adaptive behavior and life skills proved to continue to be a challenge for many of them. Although there were supports available for the students, many were unprepared to navigate post-secondary opportunities. Therefore, instructional leaders' awareness of hidden curriculum components becomes important as there can be both negative and positive effects on all students (Bond & Hebron, 2016; Scott, 2019).

Elements of the hidden curriculum are often referred to as “soft skills” in the workplace. Heller and Kessler (2022) explored how employers value soft skills in their employees who face higher unemployment and disconnection rates: low-income and minority youth. Using a survey, the researchers found that communication skills are important along with dependability measures such as being on time, responsible and trustworthy. The skills that were described in this study are skills that were embedded in

the hidden curriculum Understanding the factors at work within the learning environment in the school or the classroom is a growing area of interest for instructional leaders working with students with disabilities (Garwood & Van Loan, 2017).

In a variety of environments, students with disabilities can face the challenge of navigating social situations such as at school or in the workforce both of which involve implied skills and norms (Doyle & Arnedillo -Sánchez, 2011). Because students with disabilities may have these challenges, it becomes difficult for them to feel comfortable in different environments. In school, it can become hard to focus on learning. Within the education system and stated in the student's IEP (Individualized Education Plan), there are interventions and strategies that special education teachers have to provide for students so that the students will receive the academic help that they need, as well as learning the social skills, and career readiness skills that are needed (Lindsay, et al., 2013).

Some argue that general educators and school administrators sometimes do not have the necessary knowledge of the contexts and challenges of special education. Due to this, the special education teacher serves as an essential participant in ensuring that the school is planning and implementing the interventions that are needed to better educate students with disabilities (Maggin, et al., 2020). Special education teachers are responsible for providing a comprehensive and differentiated education for each of the students in their class. Special education teachers are in direct contact with students and know their students' strengths and weaknesses (Lindacher,2020). They are also responsible for managing and implementing the IEP for each individual child. In order to have success in providing an education for their students, special education teachers have

to have experience with implementing IEPs, the ability to work in a collaborative effort with other educators and related service providers, and a positive school climate that makes them feel involved, and a supportive administration.

Background

Special education teachers continue to play a critical role in providing students with instruction and helping their general education colleagues educate the students (Olson & Roberts, 2020). The role of special education teachers is complex because they need to work in a collaborative manner for the betterment of their students. When it comes to planning, developing, and implementing curricula and designing and implementing IEPs, it is critical that special education teachers have a voice in determining what materials the students will learn and how, both academically and socially (Al-Shammari & Hornby, 2020). In regard to the hidden curriculum, it can be found in the organizational structure of the classroom, and the school (Hoover, 1987). These expectations, values, and processes can affect their educational outcomes within and without the school (Alsubaie, 2015).

School Climate and Support

Working in schools requires teachers to work in a climate that provides a productive, positive experience when educating the students and interacting with other teachers and staff. For this to occur, there has to not only be support and collaboration from other teachers but also from administrators as well. School leaders must be well informed about the current trends that are happening in special education and what is needed to provide support to not only students with disabilities, but to the special education teachers who provide instruction for the students (Huang, et al., 2018).

As a school leader, it is important to have experience in handling matters in special education and to support teachers so that they can best meet their students' needs. However, school leaders have to focus on the institution as a whole and must rely on the expertise of the staff and teachers for advice and details. The special education teachers are more knowledgeable about the codes, procedures, and mandates that pertain to special education.

While examining the necessity of having school leaders who understand special education, it is also important to understand how principals impact the school's climate and how that can directly affect the teachers that work in the building. Mailool (2020) conducted a study that examined the relationship between the decision-making, organizational commitment, and school climate of vocational high school teachers and their performance. This study found that the principal's leadership in establishing the school climate contributed to improving teacher performance. When the principals paid attention to the school needs, they were able to provide the needed supports to improve teachers' performance (Mailool, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

The specific issue at hand is how to best meet the demands of students with disabilities as they confront ever-changing workplace expectations and demands. One significant challenge that students with disabilities can face is being able to navigate appropriately through various social situations they encounter (Doyle, et al., 2011). The challenge for these students is to be able to appropriately interact with others in their educational and vocational settings. It is the responsibility of the special education teacher, in accordance with the students' IEP, to be able to plan and implement social

skills and career readiness lessons that are intended to teach students the appropriate social skills to use in different situations.

Some special education teachers encounter difficulties because of the fact that some school administrators have limited knowledge, or experiences to support teachers who are striving to cover both the explicit and the hidden curriculum (Cobb, 2014). Due to this, the special education teacher's perspective on what is needed is important and needs further consideration.

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory and the related Social Capital theory present a solid framework when examining this area of study as it provides a guide to how people think and their behaviors in society. According to Sweetland (1996), Human Capital Theory places an emphasis on developing the individual's potential for economic growth. Teachers are key figures here because it is the explicit curriculum that is focused on developing a student's potential. Students with disabilities who are struggling in school and dropping out will not develop human capital unless they are educated effectively by an effective teacher (Gillies, 2015). Social Capital Theory focuses on those connections, trust, mutual understanding, and shared values and behaviors that bind members of human networks together (Portes, 1998). In education, Social Capital Theory is focused on hidden curriculum components and the role they play in motivating students to achieve (Acar,2011). Therefore, using both theoretical frameworks will be useful for this study

In summary, whole the global issue is that subcategories of students appear to be underperforming in comparison to others, all will confront changed and changing

workplace demands. It is perhaps the time to look again on what is being done in school to develop the human capital that is needed upon graduation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Role of the Educational Leader

School leaders and administrators have a duty and responsibility to ensure that all students are receiving a proper education, which includes ensuring that the climate in the school is conducive for learning. School climate is based on the patterns of peoples' experiences of school life and reflects norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures (Thapa, et al., 2013). Those factors are important in providing students and teachers with an environment where they are able to teach and learn together. School climate can also shape the quality of interactions that take place between students, teachers, and administrators which reflect the norms, values, and goals of the school (Wang & Degol, 2015). This can be important for students with disabilities especially with respect to the hidden curriculum.

An important factor for school leaders to consider in establishing school climate is the principal and teacher relationship. Sezer and Uzun (2020) examined the relationship between the school principal's social emotional education leadership and the teachers' organizational trust and job performance from to the teacher's perceptions. They found that while the principal's social emotional education leadership is important in establishing and maintaining organizational trust and collaborative efforts, other factors such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational justice, and organizational culture have an impact on the teachers' job performance as well.

School leaders often play an important role in establishing educational goals. However, having to work with limited resources and different power dynamics, leaders

have to prioritize their goals (Lee & Lee, 2020). Ethical dilemmas in special education can occur when the leader is forced to choose among competing interests (Shapiro, 2016). Bon and Bigbee (2011) studied how using professional ethics and ethical paradigms affected how school leaders made decisions with respect to special education dilemma. The study found that there is a relationship between professional and personal codes of ethics and the best interests of children. It also pointed out that with special education teachers rely on their professional and personal code of ethics when faced with ethical dilemmas (Bon and BB,2011).

Principals and school leaders are expected to make decisions that are for the best interest of the students. These decisions are a combination of following policies that are in place but also considering how to ethically resolve the problem and serve the students who require the services. Specific elements that affect how decisions are made include personal experiences and existing policies. Principals who make these decisions describe their experiences as a “balancing act.” They are trying to make decisions that not only serve the best interest of the collective whole, but also of the individual students (Frick, et al., 2012).

To have a better understanding of how to support students with disabilities, the principal has to appreciate and support the special education teachers who provide the academics and career readiness skills that they need to be successful. The special education teachers are important because they have a better understanding of what the students need and help the principal appreciate them. This is especially the hidden curriculum. With the skills that the students are learning being a significant factor to consider, it is the teacher who is responsible for teaching to the whole child that includes

moral issues and ideologies (Kohlberg, 1983). This is best done when the principal has set the appropriate school climate.

Hidden Curriculum

In education, the curriculum is an essential part of the success of schools and students' progress in learning. According to Hoover (1987), there are three types of curricula: explicit, absent, and hidden. The explicit curriculum, while important is defined as the formal curriculum that students learn and what teachers are expected to teach. The absent curriculum is what educators choose not to teach in schools or classrooms. The hidden curriculum are components and skills are not included in any standardized text. All three types of curricula are needed to educate all students both those in the mainstream and those who are in special education classes. In this project the focus is on the hidden curriculum, especially the work readiness "soft skills" components.

The hidden curriculum is defined as the unspoken or implicit values, behaviors, procedures, and norms that exist in an educational setting (Alsubaie, 2015). According to Lee (2011), the importance of being able to understand and abide by social rules across areas such as home, school, and the community, cannot be pushed to the back due to the fact that doing so can have a negative impact on the student's daily life. Hoover (1987) stated that factors that go into the hidden curriculum are academic and behavioral patterns and routines, classroom structure, and reinforcement systems. The way in which teachers arrange the instructional groups is also an example of the hidden curriculum. Lane, et al., (2004) considered the expectations that schoolteachers had for teaching social skills to their students and which skills were critical for success in their classrooms. The results showed that special education teachers as compared to the

general education teachers found assertion and self-control skills to be important. The difference appeared in terms of cooperation skills. It was also noted that special education teachers did not place as much emphasis on cooperation skills as they concentrated on more challenging areas. Having the appropriate classroom management skills as a special education teacher is important to teaching the students the required “hidden” skills for them to be successful and for the students to learn in a classroom and within their school climate.

Actions and behaviors that are performed by teachers, along with the expectations that the teachers have for students, play a role in the students learning the hidden curriculum. The teachers’ teaching styles, classroom rules, and extracurricular activities are all ways in which the hidden curriculum is able to teach, although indirectly the students the skills and behaviors that they need to be successful in the global economy (Cubukcu, 2012). The hidden curriculum can be found in both the organizational structure of the school and in the classrooms. Norms and expectations that are indirectly taught, have an effect on the flow of how the school and its classrooms are run.

Gustavsson, et al. (2021) examined the school to work transition that took place in Norwegian secondary education and employment studies. The purpose of their study was to understand the contradiction between the goal of employment and what actually takes place. They found that they identified a hidden curriculum that was based on the “realistic” goals that set the foundation for post graduate life. The study also identified that within the upper secondary schools, in regard to students with disabilities, the students were being geared away from the labor market and closer to welfare services.

This study shows that the climate within schools can affect how lessons are taught to students, and how that can affect the perspectives of the teachers.

In considering the perspective of the special education teacher, it is important to consider the level of preparedness that they have for when they teach students with disabilities. Their level of experience or training can have an impact on how well they are able to interact and teach their students. It is also important to consider the level of knowledge that the teacher has of special education policy and inclusion. Werner et al., (2021) conducted a study that explored the association between self-efficacy as defined by Bandura, et al., (1999, and attitudes towards inclusion in elementary school teachers. It also examined the teachers' self-efficacy as a variable between the teachers' knowledge of inclusion, the school's support. Self-efficacy beliefs are defined as future-oriented beliefs that relate to the individual's confidence and perceived ability to perform a certain behavior or to complete task. (Werner et.al, 2021) The results found that the more knowledgeable the teachers were in regard to inclusion policy and support of the school, their self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is important when considering the perspective of special education teachers due to the direct impact that their level of confidence has on the success of the students they teach.

Ruppar, et al., (2016) examined special education teachers' perception of preparedness to implement the recommended practices for students with severe disabilities. Using a vignette-style survey, the researchers asked the teachers collected demographic data and their extent of experience in teaching special education. The teachers were then provided with three vignettes where they were asked to rate how comfortable they felt using ten recommended practices in reference to the vignettes that

described students who would typically be classified as having severe disabilities. The researchers found that many of the special education teachers who participated felt the most prepared to complete IEPs and to collaborate with their colleagues. They felt the least comfortable supporting students' medical and physical needs, incorporating universal design for learning, and using assistive technology. It was also found that teaching experience had an impact on the teacher's perceptions of preparedness. Special education teachers who have more experience or advanced education degrees felt more comfortable teaching students with severe disabilities.

Further, Aldabas (2020) examined the level of preparedness of special education teachers in Saudi Arabia in teaching students with severe disabilities in inclusive classrooms. In this study, Aldabas provided a survey to the 382 teachers to gauge their level of preparedness. He found that many of the teachers felt they were confident in their abilities to teach students with these disabilities. The findings also showed that the teachers who were not confident in their ability to teach had the shortest amount of working experience, had taught students with moderate to severe disabilities, taught lower grades, and who already taught in the general classroom. These studies are both important due to the fact that they examine how the level of experience plays a major role in their ability to connect with these students.

Edgerton, et al., (2020) conducted a study that examined the level of understanding in district administration, principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers had in the most recent college and career-readiness standards with students with disabilities versus other learners. This study took place in 3 states using quantitative methods. The results varied depending on the state, overall, it showed

that in 2 out of 3 of the states that students with disabilities are continuing to receive less grade level content but are also served by educators who do not believe the standards are appropriate. One of the states showed some consistencies between the teaching of the standards across all students (Edgerton et.al, 2020). Understanding college and career readiness standards is important for all levels of educators to understand in regard to teaching the hidden curriculum, especially special education teachers.

Special Education Teachers and the Hidden Curriculum

Special education teachers have to be knowledgeable in curricula areas to be able to provide an education that is individualized and differentiated to meet the needs of the students. They have to be aware of the types of curricula not the least of which is the hidden curriculum which includes skills that are not necessarily included in the explicit curriculum such as social skills and career readiness skills (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Moyses and Porter (2015) looked at the experiences with the hidden curriculum that girls with Autism had in mainstream elementary (primary) schools. Their findings indicated that the girls struggled in four key areas while in school: following class rules; working collaboratively with others; completing tasks and interacting with peers. The girls had difficulties both in and out of the classroom as the rules and expectations were not always consistent. Also, they also were not consistently checked to see if they understood what was expected from them (Moyse & Porter, 2015). This study showed that for students with disabilities there has to be consistency on the part of the teacher to ensure that the students are understanding what is occurring around them. Due to the fact that students with disabilities already have difficulties” picking up on social cues,” teachers have to be consistent in enforcing classroom rules and realistic in their expectations in order to

effectively teach the students the norms and skills that they will need to go into the workforce or other postsecondary opportunities.

Cubukcu (2012) investigated activities supportive of hidden curriculum elements and views of students who were participating in these specific activities. Using the case study approach, he looked at a working group that consisted of 40 students in the 5th, 6th, and 7th grade. He found that the hidden curriculum was important in identifying the values to use in character education and activities. This is important as special education teachers have to construct and modify the different types of activities to teach the hidden curriculum. Whether these findings generalize to other grade levels needs to be considered. They have to be prepared for when those students go through situations where they do not understand the “unspoken rules” that other students learn to understand at a faster pace (Lee, 2011).

For students with disabilities, culture plays an important role in the students’ understanding of the norms that are around them. Since many schools, especially those in urban areas have students who come from diverse cultures, the “unspoken rules” will vary across cultures (Lee, 2011). According to Kendall (211) culture is “the knowledge, language, values, customs, and material effects that are passed from person to person and from generation to the next in a human group or society” (p. 72). Cultural factors that have to be considered, have to be considered twice with students with disabilities. Special education teachers have to consider each students’ cultural background, they have to also consider the culture of the disabilities that their students may have. Students with disabilities may have problems with displaying appropriate social behaviors with their peers. According to Lee (2011), an example of this could be if a male student who had a

disability such as autism was having trouble with his peers in the gym as he did not understand the culture that takes place in the male gym locker room. This student may have difficulty picking up the social cues that would help him to interact appropriately with his peers. The hidden curriculum comes into effect during these types of social situations that students with disabilities can encounter. Educators have to be ready to acknowledge that students with disabilities will have those deficits and be able to find innovative ways in which they can structure their classrooms and the classroom or school's climate and culture to be able to indirectly teach their students the necessary social skills needed to be successful in school (Lee, 2011).

Sher-Censor, et al., (2019) examined how the classroom climate and how special education teachers' narratives and attachment styles affect students with disabilities' academic performance and socioemotional adjustment. Sher-Censor et al. found that if the teachers were avoidant they tended to deal with their students in a similar manner and had trouble relating to their students. The level of attachment or investment that special education teachers have in their school's environment or climate has to do with the level of support and training that is provided to them. Professional development is essential to helping educators grow in the profession. Woulfin and Jones (2021) conducted a study that examined the experiences of special education teachers in regard to professional development and how those experiences, the structures, and the nature of the professional development shapes the identity of special education teachers. The qualitative study showed that while their professional learning opportunities were present early in their careers, and were somewhat specialized, they were typically shorter and there were

structural issues in induction programs which had consequences for special education teachers and their development as professionals in the classroom.

Classroom management is important in teaching students these “hidden” skills, as the students require the teacher to be able to plan and accommodate all of the students in the classroom and teach them the skills necessary. MacFarlane and Wolfson (2013) looked at teacher’s attitudes and behaviors towards students who have disabilities or behavioral difficulties in mainstream schools. They used the Theory of Planned Behavior to look at the relationships that existed between teachers’ attitudes and their behaviors towards students with disabilities. They found that teachers who were more positive and able to manage the behaviors of their students were more likely to be more inclusive in their classroom practices (MacFarlane & Wolfson, 2013). They also found that teachers looked to their principals for support in how their classrooms should be managed, and that the input and cooperation of the principals was important. This is essential to teachers, as it can help improve teacher practice, and the initial training that teachers receive when they first start their careers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine A.) how the perception of special education teachers affects how they approach teaching the career readiness skills that are embedded in the hidden curriculum and B.) their perceptions of their principals’ support. This will be explored by providing special education teachers with surveys and conducting interviews. These two data collection methodologies will give a more complete picture than either of them alone. Gaining a better understanding of the special education teachers and their perceptions is critical to school leaders so that they will be

able to support their teachers in planning, developing, and implementing curriculum and instructional strategies for students with disabilities.

While there is literature on perceptions of special education teachers and on the hidden curriculum in education, there is a gap in the literature regarding the special education teacher's perspective on teaching the skills embedded in the hidden curriculum and its impact on their instructional practices.

Research Questions

The research questions that will be focused on will be:

1. How do special education teachers perceive their pre-service training prepared them for teaching students with disabilities what is included in the Hidden Curriculum?
2. Are there differences in teacher self-efficacy with respect to addressing Hidden Curriculum elements that vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and experience in teaching students with disabilities the Hidden Curriculum?
3. From the teacher perspective, what accommodations are needed in addressing Hidden Curriculum elements with students with disabilities?
4. From the teacher perspective what supports are needed to address Hidden Curriculum elements with students with disabilities?

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study focused on the experiences that special education educators have faced in teaching students with disabilities the “hidden curriculum” that takes place in their educational environments. It also provides school leaders with insight into how to better support special education teachers.

Data were collected through surveys and interviews from current special education teachers or teachers and administrators who had experience teaching students with disabilities or from those who previously had experience. This latter category does include respondents who transitions from teaching to administrative positions. Data were collected through surveys and interviews. In the first case, leaders were asked to distribute surveys to those teachers who were involved in educating students with disabilities. In the latter case interviews were conducted to capture a deeper level of understanding of the needs of students with disabilities. The survey data provided context and the interviews deepened understanding. The perspective of those involved in providing special education programming and services to students with disabilities is critical because the norms, attitudes, and social skills that are learned during those years by the students provides the foundation for the rest of their educational and workplace careers.

Data Collection

Data collection methods have strengths and limitations according to Babbie (2020) who writes, “...certain concepts are more appropriately studied by some methods than others...and taking advantage of their different strengths” (pp. 118-119). Surveys,

suffer lack of depth and nuance, but can afford generalizing results. Interviews constrain making any generalizations or supporting policy recommendations but do result in greater depth of knowledge. The survey data collection instrument was a survey based on two US Department of Education surveys: 1) The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) which is a system of related questionnaires that provide descriptive data on the context of public and private elementary and secondary education. and 2) The ECLS program includes four longitudinal studies that examine child development, school readiness, and early school experiences. The Special Education Teachers survey was the instrument used.

The content questions centered primarily upon facets of student needs in order to learn more about the participants' understanding, interactions, and experiences. Interview content questions included what the respondents' expectations were for their students, for the climate of the school in which they were working, and a consideration of how students with disabilities interface with the hidden curriculum.

Survey

The survey used had 24 questions and covered categories such as years of experience, experience in special education, support from colleagues and leadership, and classroom management. Examples of questions asked were: 1) What types of professional development have you experienced, 2) In the past few years have you made significant changes in your teaching style, and 3) How familiar are you with the needs of students with special needs? The sample questions are worded as they were in the survey. Thus, while the professional discourse is now students with disabilities, the former wording has been maintained in these questions, in interviewee responses, and in journal

title. The purpose of the survey questions was to learn the experiences of the participants. The complete survey is located in the appendix.

Interview

The second method of data collection was semi-structured interviews of participants who indicated an interest in an interview. The interviews were held on Zoom or via telephone with all interviewees. Interviews began with open-ended questions in order to let participants reference the subject matter they viewed as relevant. The interviewees were asked to reflect on their teaching experiences, their perception of success, factors that they felt contributed to success, as well as academic satisfaction. All of the interviews were held in a conversational style. The length of the interviews varied from 30 minutes to 60 minutes. The interview protocol is located in the appendix.

The interviews began with identifying administrative components in the field notes for each recording such as time, date, location, interviewer name, and interviewee's name. This was followed by an introduction and discussion of the purpose of the study. The interviewees were assured the information from the interview was kept confidential and anonymous. Following this, the interviewees were asked if they had any questions. Following, the interviewees were asked demographic questions, and about factors that would keep them at a particular school. The goal of the opening question was to start informally and prompt the participant to begin thinking about their experiences.

The content questions order and type varied on the direction of the interviewee's responses. On occasion, interviewees were asked to clarify or elaborate their responses to include details, explanations, and information mentioned. The interview ended with the

interviewer thanking the interviewees for their time and information and reminded that the information will remain confidential.

Recruitment

The focus of the study was on the perspectives of those who are currently or who have been involved in teaching students with disabilities in mainstream school settings. An introductory email was sent out to school leaders in Pennsylvania. They were asked to distribute the attached survey to the teachers. An introductory email was also sent out to educators to recruit others interested in participating in the interview. A copy of the email sent to school leaders is located in the appendix. All respondents were provided with information about the purpose of the study and were sent further information about participating in it. A copy of the consent form can be found in the appendix.

Unfortunately, the transition to virtual learning due to the pandemic had a significant negative effect on the response rate. Whether this was due to principals or teachers being overwhelmed or both cannot be determined. As a result, greater weight was put on the interview data than was initially thought to be the case. Further, in addition to survey respondents being invited to be interviewed, a modified snowball sampling approach was used. Respondents were asked to contact others they thought wanted to be interested in participating and to provide these individuals with the study materials.

Data Analysis

The guiding framework for data analyses of the interviews was through the phenomenological method. Phenomenology focuses on understanding the meaning of a group of individuals who share the experience of a specific phenomenon (Creswell &

Cresswell, 2017) The purpose of doing so was to describe the “universal essence” of a specific phenomenon by examining the commonalities among experiences, perceptions, and meanings of individuals who have all encountered the particular phenomenon examined (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). A phenomenological approach to analysis in this study allows for a more thorough view into and deeper understanding of the backgrounds, happenings, and meaning-. Following the phenomenological method, the data analysis for this study included: epoch, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis.

Data analysis occurred throughout the entirety of the study. A research log was kept detailing all activities related to the study such as correspondence, interactions, meetings, and interviews. The interviews and interview notes were transcribed and saved. As data were collected, phenomenological reduction was ongoing. This was a cycle of reviewing the data and focusing on key material on the phenomenon to inform or shape the study. Horizontalization was used to identify overlying concepts. Horizontalization involves highlighting significant segments of data that “provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon), resulting in “clusters of meaning” (Creswell & Creswell, 2017, p. 61). Open coding which involves naming and creating categories to organize the highlighted clusters of data was the next step. Based on the categories and subcategories found, themes were identified. Next, imaginative variation was used to write a structural description of the significant themes found. The structural description focused on the constructs that informed the how and what of the phenomenon like space, time, relationships, and causality (Moustakas, 1994). Resulting in the contextualization of how the phenomenon was experienced in the study (Creswell and

Creswell, 2017). The findings captured the “essence” of the specific phenomenon for the readers (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

All 20 of the interviews were conducted via Zoom and telephone. Notes were taken of the responses to the interview questions. Additional field notes that corresponded to each respective participant were taken as well. Through reading through the interviews, initial ideas were generated and grouped together based on what research question the response would answer. Tables were made to organize the ideas and words so that coding could take place and initial codes were made into themes. When applicable, the initial themes were examined again to be able to answer the research questions. Table 4.1 lists the themes that were generated in the study.

Survey Sample Characteristics

In this initial survey data collection phase, there were 11 respondents all of whom had earned bachelor and master’s degrees and 3 of whom had doctorates. The mean age was 33.8 with a standard deviation of 7.35 indicating a moderate degree of dispersion. Most of the respondents (9, 81.8%) were Caucasian. Fulltime direct contact with these students ranged from 1 year to 21 years with a mean of 9.8 year and a standard deviation of 7.5 years. The respondents felt that they were familiar or very familiar with the needs of students with disabilities. Seven schools were represented on of which was a high school.

Interview Sample Characteristics

As can be seen in Table 3.1 most of the interviewees were female (15, 75%) and most had an MS/MA degree (17, 85.0%). Further, on a percentage basis, females were better educated than males.

Table 3.1

Crosstabulation of Highest Degree Earned by Gender.

	Highest Degree Level		Total
	BA/BS	MASTERS/MASTERS +	
Male	1 (20.0%)	4(80.0%)	5(100%)
Female	2(13.3%)	13(86.7%)	15(100%)
Total	3(15.0%)	17(85.0%)	20(100%)

As can be seen in Table 3.2 most of the interviewees were Caucasian (17, 85.0%). Further, on a percentage basis, Caucasian interviewees were better educated. See Table 3.2 for further details.

Table 3.2

Crosstabulation of Highest Degree Earned by Race/Ethnicity

Race	Degree Level	
	BA/BS	MASTERS/MASTERS +/HIGHER
Caucasian	1(7.2%)	12(92.8%)
African American	2(33.3%)	4(67.7%)
Asian American	0(0%)	1(100%)
Total	3(15.0%)	17(85.0%)

Across many of the interviews, interviewees felt the same in regard to the rewards as an educator. The experience of the respondents varied. The interviewee with the least

amount of experience was in their first year, and the interviewee with the most experience has worked in education for 34 years. Across the board, most of the interviewees were looking for similar rewards to come from teaching.

As shown in Table 3.4, teaching in the middle grades was the modal category. On a percentage basis, males were more apt to teach in these grades than were females. It can be seen in table 3.3 that the interviewees who are currently teaching and the grades they teach are sorted by gender. It shows that more of the respondents both male and female currently teach middle school.

Table 3.3

Grades Currently Teaching by Gender

	Elem(K-5)	Middle (6-8)	High (9-12)
Male	1(25.0%)	3(75.033.33%)	0(0%)
Female	3(25.0%)	6(50.0%)	2(25.0%)
Total:	4(26.7)	9(60.0%)	2(13.3%)

* Participant F teaches Elementary and Middle 4-7

. Table 3.4 shows the distribution of Grades taught by Race/Ethnicity.. On a percentage basis, Caucasian interviewees taught middle grades.

Table 3.4

Grades Currently Teaching by Race

	Elementary K-5	Middle 6-8	High 9-12
Caucasian	2(14.3%)	10(71.4%)	2(14.3%)
African American	2(67.7%)	1(33.3%)	0(0%)
Asian American	1(100%)	0(0%)	0(0%)
Total:	5(29.4%)	11(64.7%)	2(11.7%)

*

Table 3.5 shows the distribution of roles by gender. More of the interviewees were teachers (14, 73.6%) than administrators (5, 26.4%). On a percentage basis, females were more apt to be teachers (11, 78.5) than administrators. See Table 3.5 for further details.

Table 3.5

Distribution of Respondents by Role and Gender)

Role	Female	Male
Teacher	11(78.5%)	3(60.0%)
Administrator	3(21.5%)	2(40.0%)
Total:	14(100.0%)	5(100.0%)

*Participant B took a year off but was a teacher.

See Table 3.6 for the profiles of the interviewees who participated in the project. The table provides information in regard to years of experience, and degree level obtained by the participants.

Table 3.6

Interviewee Profile

Interviewee	Age	Profile
A	Unknown	Female Caucasian with a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction and certifications in k-6 instructional 2 cert, k-12 ESL, and 6-8 ELA. She currently teaches 7 th and 8 th grade and students who receive special education services are mainstreamed into her classroom.

Interviewee Profile (continued)

B	31	Female Caucasian with a B.S in unified elementary and special education with a certification in k-12 special education, and k-6 elementary. She is not teaching this school year due to taking time off to raise her son. 8 th grade was the highest grade she has taught, with experience in k-7 as well.
C	27	Female African American with a bachelor's degree. She is currently in a program where she is working towards her certification in special education. She's currently teaching 6 th -8 th grade emotional support.
D	31	Female Caucasian with a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis in reading, and has certifications as a reading specialist, special education, and elementary pre-pre-k 4. She currently teaches 3 rd -5 th grade
E	47	Male Caucasian with a masters+ with certifications in special education k-12 and elementary education. He currently teaches 7 th and 8 th grade
F	Unknown	Male African American. He has a bachelor's degree, and a certification in counseling. He came out of retirement to teach. He currently teaches 4 th through 7 th grade.
G	45	Caucasian male with an EdD in Educational Leadership. He holds certifications in secondary education S.S 7-12, 6-9 math, 6-9 language arts, ESL k-12, and SPED k-8. He currently teaches 6 th – 8 th grade.
H	25	Caucasian female with a master's degree in school psychology. She currently teaches 8 th grade.
I	33	African American female with a master's degree in educational leadership k-12. She is currently in an EdD program. She also has her principal certification. She currently is a principal in her 7 th year.
J	31	African American female with a master's degree in teaching with a certification of 7-12 ELA. She currently teaches 5 th grade.

Interviewee Profile (continued)

K	44	Caucasian female with a masters in English and is working to complete her sped certification. She has worked in special education for 4 years; prior she had a different profession. She currently teaches the 11 th grade.
L	40	Caucasian female with a master's degree in special education. She holds certifications in SPED 7-12, English 7-12 (PA), SPED K-12, and Highschool SPED (VA). She currently is a 12 th grade case manager.
M	46	Caucasian female with a master's +30 credits and holds certifications in SPED k-12; and currently teaches k-5 learning support (pullout).
N	58	Caucasian female with a masters + and holds a technology certification. She currently is a principal.
O	43	African American female with a master's degree in social work and holds a principal certification. In the last year she was a principal and has made the transition into central administration.
P	38	Caucasian female with a master's degree in adolescent English education and holds an ELA certification. She currently teaches 8 th grade.
Q	38	Caucasian female with a master's degree in education, and holds certifications in Spanish k-12, all subjects 4-6, middle school Ela, and science 7-8. She currently teaches 8 th grade science.
R	32	African American male with a master's in elementary education and a principal certification. He currently is an assistant principal.
S	32	Cambodian female with a master's in education, prek-4, and sped. She holds a certification in Edu prek-4. She currently teaches 5 th grade.
T	42	Caucasian male with a master's in educational leadership and holds a principal certification with other minor certifications. In the last year he was a principal but has transitioned to a secondary supervisor for his school district.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This study focused on examining the perception of teachers and administrators who are or who have taught students with disabilities in inclusive or main-streamed classrooms affects how they approach teaching the career readiness skills that are embedded in the hidden curriculum. In addition, the support of educational leaders is considered. This was planned to be a mixed-method study that needed to be modified in emphasis because of COVID-related effects. As a result, the project became an interview study with a limited survey presence to focus the interviews. The study used a phenomenological method. The following research questions focused the discussion:

1. How do special education teachers perceive their pre-service training prepared them for teaching students with disabilities what is included in the Hidden Curriculum?
2. Are there differences in teacher self-efficacy with respect to addressing hidden curriculum elements that vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and experience in teaching students with disabilities the Hidden Curriculum?
3. From the teacher's perspective, what accommodations are needed in addressing the Hidden Curriculum elements with students with disabilities?
4. From the teacher's perspective, what supports are needed to address Hidden Curriculum elements with students with disabilities?

Survey Analysis

When asked about changes that these respondents have made in the past few years, 5 of the respondents indicated that they have whole-class discussions regularly, have students write descriptions of their reasoning, work on real-world issues, and make connections to other classes. Few of the respondents have students complete assignments that involve complex solutions or write papers 5 pages or longer. Specific comments from respondents include:

- Due to the pandemic, I had to refine my teaching for online work and in person work. It enhanced my lessons to be more succinct when writing curriculum.
- More hands-on and data-driven
- With the advent of remote instruction during the pandemic, my repertoire has grown to include methodologies that encourage success virtually.

Respondents were generally satisfied with their schools and what they were teaching. They thought that they received needed technology and other support but would have liked more classroom autonomy and support for student assessments.

When asked about professional development programs they experienced, all indicated workshops, and fewer reported taking short courses. Also, respondents were asked about what and how they met the needs of their students. While the majority felt that it was important to cover class content, fewer thought that helping students work with others or including work readiness skills were important.

Interview Analysis

The 20 interviewees were asked a series of interview questions to gather more information on their experiences in teaching the career readiness skills and attitudes that are found in the hidden curriculum effects students with disabilities, and the support the teachers receive. In all, 4 research questions guided the study. The themes that emerged from the interviews provided insight into how factors can affect how the educator believes that they can best do their job. The responses suggest that although there were varied experiences, there were similarities in the attitudes expressed. Further, there were some race/ethnicity and gender differential patterns

Themes

To focus the discussion, the results were divided into two major categories in the analysis of the interviews: 1) Education Experiences and 2) Personal Experiences. The first category was further organized into two subcategories: 1) Teacher Issues and 2) Student Issues. These two subcategories were further broken down into more subcategories to describe the experiences of the interviewees. See Figure 4.1 for further details.

Figure 4.1

Interview Analysis Themes

Education Experiences	Teacher Issues	A: Teaching Assignment
		B: Expectations of Teachers
		C: Leadership Support
		D: School Climate
		E: Reward for Educator
		F: Growth and Experience
	Student Issues	G: Programming (Curriculum and Transition Planning)
		H: Skills
		I: Wellness (Home Environment and Mental Health)
		K Trainings (Interventions, Technology, Socio-emotional skills)
Personal Experiences	L: Lifestyle Choices	

The ensuing discussion is organized around the four research questions with Figure 4.1 providing the larger map of the themes that emerged in the analyses of the interviews. Each research question will be considered in turn.

Research Question 1: How do special education teachers perceive their pre-service training prepared them for teaching students with disabilities what is included in the hidden curriculum?

The two subcategories that emerged to address this question are: B) Expectation of Teachers and K.) Lifestyle Choices. The responses to this research question varied in how the interviewees felt in regard to their training.

B) Expectations of Teachers

The interviewees shared how their training as teachers connected with their expectations of being a teacher. There were interviewees who made the connections between what the expectations of teachers as they are based on educational programs and how that helped them in their practices. Interviewee R, who is an administrator in an urban high school stated that:

Teacher education programs are theoretical, and the experiences are what really teaches. School teaches and gives strategies, but your environment and what you teach changes when it goes into practice.

Interviewee T, who is an administrator in the suburbs had a similar experience.

He stated:

No, they did not. Had one really good methods professor. Was not practitioner based enough it was all theory...thinks it should be remodeled more to benefit practicum, student teaching, and the practicum wasn't good enough.

In contrast their response, Interviewee S, a teacher in an urban school responded praising the university that she graduated from stating that it was one of the best schools and she learned from the "masters". She also stated that it prepared her to work with

students with disabilities. However, she did feel that preservice programs need to be revised in light of the pandemic and how it changed teaching.

There were interviewees who described finding their actual experiences in teaching to be more helpful in teaching them what is expected of them. Interviewee O, an administrator in an urban school district, stated: “School training as helpful for sure, but more was learned in it.” Other experiences described more was learned with experience, but there was at least one course that was found to be helpful. For example, Interviewee Q, who is a teacher in an urban setting described that she learned more from experience than classwork. Clearly, more consideration of revisions that need to be made is warranted as by and large the interviewees were not entirely satisfied with their preservice programs. Given how fast the world is changing, upgrading, and extending knowledge and skills needs to be ongoing.

K) Lifestyle Choices

Another subcategory that emerged in the data was Lifestyle Choices. Interviewees described how choices that they made in their lives affected how they taught. There were interviewees who discussed how experiences in their personal lives prepared them for teaching students with disabilities. Interviewee L, who is a teacher in an urban school stated that:

No, because it may have been because I did it backwards. I started at a religious institution with the 3rd grade after a career change...Learned a lot while doing the job, SPED classes didn't prepare enough like having a son with special needs.

While Interviewee N, who is an administrator at a private religious institution, had a similar experience. She shared:

It has changed a lot; I feel like I have an advantage because I have a son with special needs. Training today needs to focus on lessening the use of technology so that they are not always stimulated.”

The above responses illustrate the experiences of the interviewees regarding how they perceived their pre-service training in preparing them for teaching students with disabilities. While there were interviewees who believed that their course work provided them with adequate pre-service training, there were others who believed that their experiences in the classroom and their personal experiences prepared them better to teach students with disabilities. These responses are in line with existing research. For example, Tuppar, et al., (2016) that teaching experience had an impact on the teacher’s perceptions of preparedness. Further, they found that special education teachers who have more experience or advanced education degrees felt more comfortable teaching students with severe disabilities. The project’s findings are not unexpected given the fact, as was shown in Chapter 3, the interviewees are a well-educated group. That there were differences among the interviewees needs further consideration and will be revisited in Chapter 5. Not all of the interviewees believed it was expectations that shaped their training and practices. There were also interviewees who based it on their lifestyle choices. This could result from the level of experience of the interviewees or where they went to school.

Research Question 2: Are there differences in teacher self-efficacy with respect to addressing hidden curriculum elements that vary by gender, race/ethnicity, and experience in teaching students with disabilities the hidden curriculum?

The subcategories that emerged that answered this research question were A) Teaching Assignment, E) Reward for Educator, F) Growth and Experiences, and K) Lifestyle Choices.

A) Teaching Assignment

Another subcategory that emerged was the Teaching Assignments that the interviewees had during their careers. There were interviewees who described the assignments earlier in their career as significant experiences for them, and interviewees who discussed growth in their teaching assignments and positions. When describing their experiences, Interviewee A, a teacher in a suburban school stated, “Yes, when I taught in a school in the city for 2 years, loved the kids but was drained because students had so many needs that needed to be met.” Similarly, Interviewee E, a teacher at an urban school described her experience by stating:

Yes, those first 2 years. Taught at a religious school at first time and it was good but didn't pay, but first full-time year was hard and an eye-opener. Taught 11th and 12th grade and there were harsh realities. Had to adjust norms and expectations because it was a different culture.

In contrast, there was an interviewee that in their experience felt that their assignment was important to the students. Interviewee F, a teacher in an urban school described his experience by saying, “No, because I was all about the kids, and the kids I had at the school in the city. I couldn't leave them hanging. Waited until the students graduated.”

Overall, however, Caucasian interviewees described teaching assignments earlier in their careers that were difficult and affected them more than was the case for the non-Caucasian interviewees who described their roles with the demands placed on them and

their relationships with the administration that affected how they felt about their teaching assignment.

Further both male and female interviewees had teaching assignments that affected how they felt about teaching and moving forward with teaching. It is also important to note that this study had a small sample size that was not as diverse as initially intended. Overall, A common response among the interviewees was that as hard as it got, they still chose to stay.

E) Reward for Educator

Interviewees were asked about how they felt about teaching such as: Have you ever considered leaving teaching. Or Have you ever considered leaving your current school? These then were followed with questions such as one which asked about the important factors which helped them to decide to stay at their school, and if the school climate had any effect?

A theme that emerged from these responses, was the Reward for the Educator. The response that was found across all the interviews was that teaching was a profession that one had to be passionate about. For example, Interviewee J, a teacher, stated that: “Yes, it is a lot of work. Teaching is something that you have to be passionate about and pay long hours.” Similarly, Interviewee T, an administrator in a suburban school district, responded to this by stating:

Is it rewarding? Very rewarding profession under good circumstances, it is the tradeoff that teachers have. If the condition is right, that is what keeps people there.

In contrast, some interviewees did leave jobs or considered doing so due to the lack of reward. Interviewee B, a teacher in an urban school mentioned, “Yes, I left 2 teaching jobs. The first in a different state I worked in. I left due to lack of salary, resources, and the location was too far.” The contrasting points showed that interviewees had different views on what would have made them stay at a particular school.

F) Growth and Experience

During the interviews, responses provided insight from interviewees on their desires to grow in their careers. When discussing growing within the profession, there were comments about not wanting to remain stagnant. Interviewee I, an administrator in an urban school described, “Yes, there’s a certain level of comfort, but as a young professional, I still wanted to grow and if I am staying, I might not put my best foot forward.” Interviewee T, an administrator in a suburban school district, had a similar experience stating:

Wanted to keep growing, in the past, I had a job that was awesome, and I loved it. After 5-6 years, contemplated doing something else to not be stale. Knew they didn’t want to teach the same grade subject for 30 years, wanted to evolve...

Other responses provided insight into the different paths taken to become an educator.

Some interviewees did not take the traditional route to become a teacher. Interviewee O, an administrator in an urban district described how she got into teaching:

Taught very non-traditional, so it was a part of my job and not the whole picture, so I had a balance. Taught 2nd and 6th-grade half day, and counseled ED students rest of the day.

K) Lifestyle Choices

Revisiting the subcategory of Lifestyle Choices, some interviewees described how choices made in their lives affected them as educators as well as throughout their careers.

Interviewee A, a teacher in a suburban school, discussed how her first placement encouraged her to make choices for the sake of her career, she stated:

Yes, first placement in urban school. Felt unprepared in so many ways. Met my husband there, so there are fond memories. Had a hard time prioritizing school needs versus basic human needs.

Other interviewees compared how they are as an educator with having children of their own. Interviewee E, a teacher in an urban school mentioned: “Being a parent is important in understanding being a teacher...what school can I best utilize what I can do... I look for admin with children, so they understand both sides.”

The responses suggest that, more female interviewees made a direct connection with outside factors in their lives with how they felt as teachers, than males who did not. There were no racial/ethnic differences. All the interviewees had lifestyle choices and situations that affected how they functioned as educators. There was no notable difference in their descriptions regarding the experience of the interviewee.

These responses support existing research findings. For example, regarding the literature, Werner et al. (2021) conducted a study that examined the association between self-efficacy and feelings towards inclusion in elementary school teachers. The results showed that the more knowledgeable the teachers were about teaching students with disabilities, the higher their self-efficacy.

Research Question 3: From the teacher’s perspective, what accommodations are needed with addressing hidden curriculum elements with students with disabilities?

Educator’s views on if students with disabilities can be successful in the workforce were examined in the interviews. Interviewees provided their views on what they believed would be needed for the students to have success working. The following subcategories emerged from the data: G) Programming (Curriculum and Transition Planning; H) Skills; I) Wellness (Home Environment and Mental Health).

G) Programming

When interviewees were asked questions such as: Do you think students with disabilities can be successful in the outside workforce or What skills do you think students with disabilities need to be successful in the workforce and how do you think these skills can be taught in the classroom? Interviewee provided different perspectives. Many of the responses described how curriculum and its use are important to teaching students with disabilities. Interviewee T, an administrator in a suburban district noted:

We have to make school fun again. Keeping the ability to be inspired, we have to raise students to have the ability to be inspired. It’s important to have students around adults who are inspired and motivated.

In connection to that Interviewee F, a teacher in an urban school described how this could be taught to students in a way that they could understand. He shared: “Videos, guest speakers, trips to show trades, going out into the community, internships, volunteers, finding jobs to give students chances.”

To further the point, Interviewee Q, a teacher in an urban school, also described how teachers could teach career readiness in the classroom. She stated, “Discussion, less emphasis on testing and more real-world applications...doing best with differentiation and making it on student level.”

While these interviewees thought about this issue in the broad context, none of the responses were as finely grained as they need to be. They were just too general. This will be revisited in Chapter 5.

A related issue that emerged was the importance of transition planning for students. In Pennsylvania, a more serious emphasis on transition begins at the age of 14 to help plan out students’ futures once they are done with school. Interviewees emphasized that the transition is important at all stages for a student to be successful. Interviewee G, a teacher in a suburban school stated, “Earlier transition planning, not just the basics, deep conversations about trajectories to take once done school.” Transparent discussions in class with students may have a positive impact on their transition planning.

H) Skills

An issue that was present across many of the interviews was the skills that interviewees believed the students need to be successful. The skills varied between academic skills as well as social skills that are imperative for the students to have. Regarding academic skills, Interviewee D, a teacher in a suburban school believes reading is an important skill. She said, “Reading ability, biggest struggle because you need it for everything, very specific reading curriculums and tricks to be able to maneuver.” Another emphasis that was made during the interviews was on the

importance of the skills and using those skills throughout schooling. Interviewee L, a teacher in an urban school described that experience stating:

As students go through k-12, has to be embedded, encourage development of skills, some can be explicitly taught. To foster the skills, if taught in a bigger group, it has to be taught more organically.

Many of the interviewees across the board responded that social skills were important for the students to be able to have to be successful at work. Interviewee I, an administrator in an urban school, described what she believed is needed for the student to have that success. They recalled, “Yes, with the right supports, coach, manager, advocate, and environment that supports the individual’s needs.” This point suggests that there are specific skills that the student needs to be able to work on, as well as the skills of others that would need to be in place to help the students.

I) Wellness

Wellness was another concept that came up during the interviews. Most of the interviewees described how the student’s home environment had a direct impact on their interactions and behaviors in school. From those discussions, mental health was another sub-category that emerged under wellness.

When interviewees were asked: What is the most significant challenge your students face? What do you think can help them overcome it? Most of the interviewees responded that poverty was what many of their students dealt with, and how it affected their relationships, and engagement with parents. Interviewee R, an administrator in an urban school described his experiences within his school stating, “Poverty, within

poverty there brings other issues and factors...parental support and engagement, and not having exposure to things outside the community.” Similarly, Interviewee M, a teacher in an urban school described interactions with students experiencing poverty and how they are learning about their lives:

Their home environments, in smaller groups, there is more of a chance to learn about their lives, and some are hungry, homeless, different traumas, that impact them being productive at school.

The responses suggest that for educators to help the students, they have to show support and teach the students the skills needed. Interviewee S, a teacher in an urban school described:

Community and home environment. Students weren't taught and can feel shut out...teaching them skills for their daily routine so they can learn socio-emotional skills are super important.

Mental health is unfortunately related to poverty that their students face, also described how it affects the students. The outside forces that had this impact affected the interests that families were able to have for education. Interviewee H, a teacher in an urban school described this by sharing, “Community factors, immediately outside. Families don't take interest in schools, and then also, gun violence.

The responses provided insight and acknowledged that educators must be able to work with the students and be sensitive to what they are experiencing. Interviewee K, a teacher in an urban school, noted: “Teachers need to understand ability and frustration level...be aware of socio-emotional style, coping strategies, and managing behaviors.” These responses suggest that as an educator, there needs to be an understanding of the

circumstances in which the students attending the school deal with, and the mental health component is just as important as academics.

The subcategories that emerged from this section emphasize that the students have needs that must be met to be successful. The programming during their education provides the foundation for the skills they need to learn. For the students to have a chance to get to where they want to go, their wellness then becomes an essential component.

Again, the interviewee responses, while showing caring and sensitivity, were more emotional than intellectual. Again, there is a lack of specificity. That said, here is research that exists that describes what accommodations are needed to address hidden curriculum elements for students with disabilities. Based on the data that was provided, there is a lot of planning and understanding that has to come from the teacher to accommodate and teach the necessary skills to their students. Lane, et al., (2004) considered the expectations that teachers had for teaching social skills to their students and which skills were critical for success in their classrooms. They found that special education teachers, compared to general education teachers, found assertion and self-control skills to be important. Difference appeared in terms of cooperation skills. Special education teachers did not place as much emphasis on cooperation skills.

This research connects to the study because it examined how the expectations that the teachers had helped them in teaching their students social skills and being able to accommodate their needs. Many interviewees described to accommodate the needs of the students, there had to be adequate planning and programming. There also had to be an understanding of the students and what they were going through so that they would be able to learn This could be due to the relationship-building that has to take place between

the teacher and student for the teacher to get to know the student so that they can properly teach them.

Research Question 4: From the teacher's perspective, what supports are needed to address hidden curriculum elements with students with disabilities?

During the interviews, support was a concept that came up many times. All of the interviews provided what was believed to be needed in terms of support to help students with disabilities. They were categorized by if they provided support to the teachers directly, or to the students. From the data, the following themes emerged: B) Expectations for Teachers; C) Leadership Support; D) School Climate; and K) Training: (Interventions, Technology, and Socio-emotional Skills).

B. Expectations for Teachers

Regarding support, the expectations of the teachers also served as a subcategory to address this research question. There were interviewees who discussed and highlighted the importance of the expectations that were placed on them. As a subcategory, expectations emerged when teachers were discussing what is needed in their classroom and what they believed training should be geared towards. For example, Interviewee R described the shift within classrooms for students who receive special education services. He shared:

A big change has been moving from self-contained to more inclusion-based and teachers not being able to differentiate their lessons and receiving training to be able to better assist students with IEPs (Individualized Education Program).

When discussing trainings and what was expected, Interviewee G shared a similar statement:

So much is focused on general education... all teachers regardless of certifications should have professional development in SPED expectations, procedures, IEPs, SDI (Specially Designed Instruction), modification and accommodation. Everyone should be getting this training, not just special education teachers.

The demanding nature of the expectations on the special education teacher has an impact on the supports that are needed for the teachers. Being able to provide differentiated instruction and have teachers across the board have a better understanding of how to work with students with disabilities is important regarding what supports are needed. It also has a direct connection to another subcategory that emerged from the interviews, leadership support.

C) Leadership Support

For schools to run and for teachers to have success with students in their classrooms, there must be support from the administration and leadership. For teachers, throughout the interviews, many of the interviewees wanted their administrators to be more supportive and to be more present. When discussing students, many shared that they would want the administrators to be present in the class and to know the students.

For example, Interviewee A shared:

Being present in the class during instructional times, having an understanding of who students are (knowing student body), supporting a school-wide vision for what appropriate instruction feels like.”

Similarly, Interviewee K believed similar, stating:

Provide more people in class... provide more grace to students... have an understanding of students...more focus on meetings with special education teachers and general education teachers to get on the same page.

D) School Climate

A concept with a direct connection to support from leadership is school climate. From the data, this was the final subcategory to emerge. Regarding teachers, the idea that came from the interviews was for the school climate it was important to feel that support from the administration and to have good morale in their classrooms. Interviewee S discussed this by stating, “Have support in classes, positive climate in place, creating good morale, accountability from students and parents, and listen to the teachers’ needs...Interviewee L, an educator in an urban school, shared a similar statement, emphasizing the relationship between teacher and administrator:

Disconnect has to get bridged between being in the classroom and not.

Administration has to visit the trenches to know what is happening and to do it often. Actually, listening to teachers and not the agenda.

During the interviews, supports that would directly help students were discussed as well. Providing a sense of community and structure may help students going through school and their future. Interviewee B shared what they believe would help the students. “Providing better community outreach, opportunities, and consistent schoolwide climate and rules.” Interviewee O, an administrator in an urban school district, also shared a similar thought, stating, “Providing time for what students need to be successful, curriculum that works, and having the correct adults with students that care and are passionate.”

Training, Expectations of Teachers, Leadership Support, and School Climate are the major themes that emerged from the data when discussing supports that are needed for teachers and for the students to have success. The data suggest that for teachers, supports that are needed to begin to address hidden curriculum elements are adequate training, clear expectation and collaboration, and a positive school climate that allows them to help their students and grow as an educator. For students, the supports that are needed are for leadership to be present and understand the students in which they serve, and a positive school climate where they believe that they can succeed.

Regarding the literature review and past research, there is research that looks at professional development (training and support for teachers) and how that can shape the teacher. Woulfin and Jones (2021) conducted a study that examined the experiences of special education teachers in regard to professional development and how those experiences, the structures, and nature of the professional development shape the identity of special education teachers. This study found that while their professional learning opportunities were present early in their careers, and were somewhat specialized, they were typically shorter and there were structural issues in induction programs that had consequences for special education teachers and their development as professionals in the classroom. This connects to the study because it describes what the interviewees were explaining in the interview. There were interviewees that emphasized the importance of adequate training, and trainings that were targeted to what the expectations of them were. This could be due to throughout their careers, the training not being adequate and influencing how they teach, or how they feel they are supported.

Regarding leadership, past research describes the need for leaders to be supportive of their teachers. Sezer and Uzun (2020) examined the relationship between the school principal's social-emotional education leadership and the teachers' organizational trust and job performance from the teacher's perceptions. They found that while the principal's social-emotional education leadership is important in establishing and maintaining the organizational trust and collaborative efforts, other factors such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, organizational justice, and organizational culture have an impact on the teachers' job performance as well. This relates to the study because it shows that along with other factors within a school, the relationship and support from administrators are important in working with teachers and providing support. Many of the interviewees felt that leadership needs to be present to be able to support them and the students. This could be due to principals and other administrators having to pay attention to a broader picture, and not being able to always be present.

K) Trainings (Interventions, Technology, Socio-emotional Skills)

Training was a concept that was discussed across the board with the interviewees. Through their responses, training in interventions, technology, and socio-emotional skills were brought up in how they could better provide support to students. The interviewees were also looking for professional development trainings that were useful to where they could learn something from it. Interviewee R, an administrator in an urban school described the types of trainings his school could use for teachers sharing:

Multi-tier system of supports, creation, and implementation of interventions, differentiation, and scaffolding strategies... using data in classrooms (progress monitoring).

Having trainings that pertained to interventions to use, may then help them work with their students. When discussing interventions, Interviewee F noted: “Behavior modifications and incentives, ways to praise students.”

With trainings that are geared towards interventions to help the students, having trainings that are geared towards learning and implementing socio-emotional skills may be important as well. Interviewee O, an administrator in an urban school district emphasized the importance of understanding the population that is being served, they stated, “Understanding needs of other types of students, standards, and understanding pedagogy, and engaging parents.”

Having these trainings and gaining a better understanding of the students, can help teachers build relationships with students and their families. As a teacher, it is important to have the support of families to have success with the student. Interviewee O, an administrator in an urban school district describes what is needed from those trainings to help the students by saying: “Collaboration with family, de-escalation strategies, and warm but firm expectations.”

Building those relationships is important and may help teachers with their classroom management. During the interviews, classroom management came up as something important, especially when working with students with disabilities. Trainings that are geared to having control of the classroom are important to model for teachers. When asked, Interviewee J shared what they believed would be needed in the training,

shared, “Classroom management, learning different procedures (modeling it), and how their classrooms are structured”.

The last subcategory that emerged under training was technology-based trainings for teachers. Having technology training has become essential due to the current dependence on technology in society. Also, during the COVID-19 pandemic, using technology within education became a very important subject. Interviewees shared that having those trainings is important, especially with classrooms becoming more modernized. Interviewee M described this by saying, “Technology-based (especially due to classroom modernization) ...interactive professional development for virtual activities that are also interactive.”

Conclusion

Overall, the use of both survey and interview methods helped draw a bigger picture into the understanding of the perception of the special education leader. Having this information allows for further discussion of how the perception of the special educator is important across different topics such as policy, implementation, and curriculum. Interviewees were thoughtful. The single overall summary of the findings is that the interviewees were committed to their positions, accepted challenges while looking for stronger leadership.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

The graduation rate of students with disabilities and their level of preparation for going into the workforce are an ongoing problem. There is past research that focuses on other post-secondary opportunities such as higher education once students are done with school, and their level of preparedness for it. Research has shown when in post-secondary school environments, students with disabilities often struggle with having the social skills and confidence to be successful in that environment (Berg, et.al,2017).

In other studies, the focus is typically on the students. One area that is lacking research is the perception of a special education teacher. Their perception is important because they use those perceptions in how they approach teaching career readiness attitudes and skills that are found in the hidden curriculum. There is also past research in how school leadership or administration supports their teachers overall.

There is a need for further research on how school leadership supports their special education teachers in teaching the skills that are embedded in the hidden curriculum. The purpose of this study was to examine how the perception of special education teachers affects how they approach teaching career readiness attitudes and skills that are embedded the hidden curriculum, and the support that is provided from leadership

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted at various schools in the mid-Atlantic region. It included educators who have experience in working with students with disabilities. This was initially a mixed-method study., however, due to the small number of respondents it is an interview study, with a survey presence. Initially, the survey was sent out that was based on two US Department of Education surveys: 1) The National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) and The ECLS program: Special Education Teacher Survey. It was initially sent out to school principals to distribute to teachers. Due to the pandemic with principals and teachers feeling overwhelmed, this may have been a reason for the lack of responses. Due to that, the interviews took on a more significant role. There were 20 interviews that were conducted. The educators were contacted through email to see if they were interested in participating. The respondents were special education teachers, general education teachers who have experience working with students with disabilities, and school leaders. Due to the pandemic, the interviews were conducted via Zoom or the telephone. The interview questions focused on an in-depth look into the perception of the educators in teaching career readiness skills and attitudes that are embedded in the hidden curriculum and their perception of leadership support.

The theoretical framework used while conducting the study was human capital and social capital. Both frameworks were important in understanding how the role of the special education teacher was important and the purpose of their role in regard to educating their students. Social capital focuses on connections, trust, and shared values in behaviors that binds humans together (Portes,1998). It has a direct connection to hidden curriculum components that are necessary when teaching career readiness skills and attitudes. Human capital focuses on developing an individual's potential for economic

growth (Sweetland,1996). This theory focuses on the direct relationship between the teacher and the student. It is the responsibility of the special education teacher to foster the growth and teach the student the career readiness skills and attitudes that are embedded in the hidden curriculum so that they have the skills they need to be able to enter the workforce, or other post-secondary opportunities.

Summary of the Findings

Various themes emerged in the analyses. These themes were divided into those directly related to education experiences and those that were personal experiences. Given the focus of this project not unexpectedly the former category was more robust and was further subdivided into two domains, those relating to teacher issues and those related to student issues. See Figure 4.1 for the details.

In general, respondents gave thoughtful and thought-provoking comments throughout. That said, it appears that there is more to do, but first to the summary of findings. On the whole, while some of the respondents faced challenging schools and classes at the start, all were satisfied with their decision to work with students with disabilities. The respondents found this to be a demanding but fulfilling career choice., one that demands passion. Further, some of the respondents noted that family issues, both theirs and those of their students, affected how they did their work. Here respondents with relatives with a disability made them more committed. Families of students with disability needed to be brought into the educational process. Lastly, some respondents their challenges as ever changing and looked for continual professional development opportunities. Many of the respondents were satisfied with the way they were teaching

and believed that teaching class content was more important than teaching elements of the hidden curriculum such as working with others.

Lastly, despite the fact that the respondents felt that planning for transitions was important, specifics were sorely lacking here. Further, while the respondent did feel that the hidden curriculum should be included, again specifics were lacking as to how and under what conditions this should be done.

Some school leadership issues emerged as well. Some respondents saw school climate as a factor in their decision to stay or leave a school. Some did and some did not. Obviously, school climate is a function of the quality of the school's leaders. More needs to be done here.

Virtually all of the respondents wanted school leaders to have a greater presence in their schools and interestingly in their classrooms. Certainly, one can speculate as to why this is the case as it relates to the different roles in a school. While school leaders face limited budgets, they must focus on the school as a whole and allocate funds accordingly. Teachers, on the other hand, focus on the needs of the students they teach and most certainly all the things they need should be funded. Tough decisions need to be made. Thus, one way to make a case for spending is to have a school leader in one's classroom so that the needs are just that much more apparent.

Limitations of the Study

As always in a research project of this type, there are limitations that need to be mentioned. Firstly, data were collected from very small samples which really

compromises the ability to make any generalizations of the findings. The key to making generalizations is to be mindful of to what degree the sample is representative of the population to which the generalizations are to be made. While large size per se is not a guarantee, the larger the sample size the greater the probability that it does.

Secondly and related to the first limitation, is the fact that the respondents were not as diverse a group as hoped for. Among the issues here is gender, race/ethnicity, school role, and geographical location. Again, this limits generalizability of findings. Having a more diverse population sample would have provided more rich experiences of educators of different backgrounds and levels of experience.

Thirdly, data were collected at the height of the pandemic which may have affected respondents who may have been experiencing fatigue due to isolation and the demands of learning and using technology. Teaching virtually brought a whole new set of demands and expectations on everyone's part. Respondents had to spend a lot of time interacting with students and their families in the virtual environment while may have reduced their willingness to participate in a research study or do anything extra outside of what they were already required to do.

Fourthly, with any study that requires consent, self-selection bias is always a problem. Self-selection bias is defined as the problem that results when survey respondents are allowed to decide for themselves if they want to participate in a study (Lavrakas,2008). This is certainly the case with this project as the respondent pool is so small. While the views of those who participated are known, those of the individuals who did not choose to participate are not. How can any generalization of findings be made

under these conditions? Are the respondents representative of the whole? In general, participants tend to be at either end of the spectrum. Was this the case here?

The last limitation relates to the way the data were collected. Both surveys and interviews can affect respondents comments just by virtue of being asked a question. Respondents react to what is asked, not what is unasked. Thus, the whole picture may not be captured. Also, in the case of interviews, an additional issue is “interviewer bias” which is when characteristics of the interviewer may affect responses. In any event responses may be skewed.

Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Given the fact that the majority of the respondents believed that students with disabilities can be successful in the workforce this study could be helpful to schools in a variety of ways. For school leadership and administration, this study provides insight into what special education teachers need to better their students. This includes greater collaboration between teachers, school leaders, and parents focused on planning for students with disabilities transition to the workforce, curricular needs, and ongoing professional development. Based on the study, having input from special education teachers about what is needed for their students and what community support and outreach is needed, can be helpful for the students and going into work in the long run.

As is always the case with research, more questions occur during the project than are answered in the project. Thus, there are a number of possible “next step.” First, while the focus was on the needs of students with disabilities, data were not captured by specific types of disability. Thus, focusing on a specific disability or category of

disability would be an excellent project as while there are similarities among the disabilities, there are differences that apply to the individual and the perception of those in the larger society. Secondly, enhancing the sample size is greatly needed as generalizing findings would be on more solid ground. For the surveys, a greater pool of responses would create a stronger foundation for exploration using interviews or generalizing with the survey data. Having an increased number of interviews would provide an even more in-depth exploration into the perception of special education teachers.

Thirdly, collecting more specific strategies as to how to what skills and knowledge need to be implemented to enable students with disabilities make a more successful transition to the workplace is needed. Further research could dig deeper into other hidden curriculum elements that are present in educational environments that students with disabilities struggle with as well. Career readiness skills are important because they prepare the students for post-secondary opportunities. However, within schools, there are hidden curriculums that are unique to the climate of schools or school districts that could be explored.

Fourthly, related to the suggestion above, to have a more thorough understanding of the perception of special educators on career readiness skills and attitudes found in the hidden curriculum, future research should expand on the population it focuses on. There should be exploration into the perceptions of related service providers such as speech therapists, counselors, occupational therapists, and physical therapists. They spend a significant amount of time in working with students in refining specific skills or teaching

skills that are required in the workforce. Having that input can create a full picture into how to better train teachers in working with students with disabilities.

Fifthly, another potential area for study would be to explore the perceptions of school administration and leadership more in depth and examine what in their perceptions has an effect on their relationships with special educators in their schools in regard to career readiness for students. Having additional research on this topic may be beneficial in having a more collaborative effort when educating students with disabilities. It may also help to build a stronger relationship between administration, special education teachers, and general education teachers

Lastly, future research can also be conducted in gauging the perceptions of parents of students with disabilities and their understanding of career readiness skills and the hidden curriculum. This would be important for future research as it can help special education teachers and leadership better engage with parents and be able to collaborate to educate the whole child. It can also provide other parents who may not have a solid understanding of special education services and what would best help their child, insight onto accommodations and supports that are needed.

Recommendations

The Covid-19 pandemic changed education, especially in terms of special education and providing services to students with disabilities. During this time, both teachers and school leaders have had to become creative and innovative in ways to not only relate and educate the students but also how to support the teachers. Throughout the study, interviewees described what is needed to teach students with disabilities the elements that are found in the hidden curriculum. Because the limitations discussed

above, any recommendations made must be taken as tentative and suggestive only. More robust study is needed before any consideration of the implementation of any recommendation.

Suggested Recommendation 1

Since educators come from different schools and have different lives and work experiences, it is imperative that when teachers begin working at schools and continuing throughout their careers, school leaders provide continuous professional development opportunities to further the skills of their teachers. Based on the experiences of the teachers, school leaders should also work to collaborate with teachers on what professional development would be appropriate for them. Also, as a school leader, it is important to consider the different levels of experience that their teachers have and how that has to be considered during training.

Suggested Recommendation 2

Regarding the self-efficacy of teachers and their views of how they do their job, it is important for school leaders to pay attention to different factors such as gender, and race. For example, the findings showed that females make more direct connections with outside factors than do males. Thus, school leaders need to be knowledgeable and sensitive when working with diverse groups.

Suggested Recommendation 3

For some of the teachers out-of-school experiences helped shape what and how they met their career obligations. Leaders might consider how these experiences can be incorporated into the functioning of the school. Overall, it is important for

school leaders to collaborate and provide an environment and training to keep the teachers informed and in turn

Suggested Recommendation 4

With teaching students with disabilities, there has to be specific curriculum that is present to be able to not only educate the student but to also address any academic or behavioral deficits that the student may or may not have. It is important for school leaders to ensure that in their school's the curriculum is not only up to date but also reflective of the populations they serve. As a school leader having materials and resources that are compatible and sensitive to the students would benefit both the students and their growth, as well as their teachers.

Suggested Recommendation 5

Another concept that school leaders have to pay attention to is transition planning for students, specifically those 14 and over. In order for students to learn the skills necessary, teachers have to be able to plan for their transition. Using different curricula and providing community partnerships so that students can have internship opportunities, should be a priority for school leaders. It is essential to provide the students with these skills so that they are more successful in their post-secondary opportunities.

Suggested Recommendation 6

It is necessary for school leaders to be present in their schools and know what is occurring with their teachers and students. Interviewees in the study described how being collaborative, and having the leader have a significant presence in the school was important to the school climate and the overall flow of the school

operations. It can also make the relationship between teachers and their teachers stronger and get more buy-in if the school leader pays attention to the needs of teachers and students.

In conclusion, while more is known about how teachers of students with disabilities think about their positions and what is needed for them to improve what they do, there is yet more to do. Given the limitations of this research project, the first step would be to attend to the suggested research and then based on those findings, to design and implement the needed plans.

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APPENDIX A-SURVEY

Q1 What is your gender?

Male (4)

Female (5)

Other (6) _____

Q2 In what year were you born?

Q3 What is your Race/ Ethnicity?

African American or Black (1)

Asian Pacific Islander (2)

Latinx/ Hispanic (3)

Caucasian (4)

Other (5) _____

Q4 Please indicate the degrees you have earned.

	Yes (1)	No (2)
Associate's degree (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Bachelor's degree (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Master's degree (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Doctoral degree (e.g., Ph.D., EdD., MD, JD) (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q5 How familiar with the needs of students with special needs?

- Very familiar, I have taught or now teach students with special needs. (1)
- Somewhat familiar from my coursework or professional development. (4)
- Not as familiar as I would like to be (5)
- Other. Please explain. (6)

Q6 How many years of fulltime teaching experience do you have?

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40 45 50

Click to write Choice 1 ()



Q7 Please list up to five certifications you have earned.

Q8 What is the name of the school you are currently teaching in?

Q9 Currently what grade do you teach? If you teach more than one grade, list all that you teach.

Q10 What grades have you taught?

Kindergarten (1)

1st (2)

2nd (3)

3rd (4)

4th (6)

5th (7)

6th (8)

7th (9)

8th (10)

9th (11)

10th (12)

11th (13)

12th (5)

Other (14) _____

Q11 To what extent do you agree with the following statements with respect to your current school?

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
The school administration's behavior toward the staff is supportive and encouraging. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am satisfied with my teaching salary. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The level of student misbehavior in this school (such as noise, horseplay or fighting in the halls, cafeteria, or student lounge) interferes with my teaching. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I receive a great deal of support from parents for the work I do. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Necessary materials such as textbooks, supplies, and copy machines are available as needed by the staff. (6)

Routine duties and paperwork interfere with my job of teaching. (7)

My principal or school head enforces school rules for student conduct and backs me up when I need it. (8)

Rules for student behavior are consistently enforced by teachers in this school, even for students who are not in their classes. (9)

Most of my colleagues share my beliefs and values about what the central mission of the school should be. (10)

The principal or school head knows what kind of school he/she wants and has communicated it to the staff. (12)

There is a great deal of cooperative effort among the staff members. (13)

Q12 In the past few years have you made significant changes in your teaching style?

No (1)

Yes (2) _____

Q13 In your current teaching, how often do you...

	Never (1)	Seldom (1-2 times a semester) (2)	Occasionally (1 - 3 times a month) (3)	Sometimes (Once or twice a month) (4)	Regularly (Once a week or more) (5)
Work with other students where the whole group gets one grade (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Participate in whole-class discussions during which you talk less than the students (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Write descriptions of their reasoning. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work on problems or issues related to real world or practical issues. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
perform investigative activities that include data collection and analysis. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Make connections to other classes. (6)

Complete assignments that involve complex solutions (7)

Complete assignments that include papers of 5 typed pages or longer. (8)

Q14 What types of professional development have you experienced? Please check all that apply.

Short courses (1)

Workshops (2)

Other (3) _____

Q15 In your opinion, to what extent is each of the following a problem at your school?

	Almost every day (1)	Moderately often (2)	Somewhat often (3)	Regularly (4)
Student tardiness (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student absenteeism (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teacher absenteeism (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student apathy (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Lack of parental involvement (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poverty (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Poor student health (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q16 Please indicate how effectively your principal is doing each of the following:

	Extremely effective (1)	Very effective (2)	Moderately effective (3)	Slightly effective (4)	Not effective at all (5)
Communicating respect for, and value of teachers (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encouraging teachers to change pedagogy if students are not doing well (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with staff and teachers to meet curriculum standards (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Encouraging professional collaboration among teachers (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with teachers to solve school or department problems (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Working with teachers on the school's mission (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Encouraging
professional
development
(7)



Q17 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly agree (1)	Somewhat agree (2)	Neither agree nor disagree (3)	Somewhat disagree (4)	Strongly disagree (5)
The stress and disappointments involved in teaching at this school aren't really worth it. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The teachers at this school like being here; I would describe us as a satisfied group. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I like the way things are run at this school. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave teaching as soon as possible (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I think about transferring to another school. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching. (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

I think about staying home from school because I'm just too tired to go.
(7)

Q18 In terms of meeting the needs of your students, how important are the following?

	Not very important (1)	Somewhat important (2)	Important (3)	Very important (4)
Covering the course content (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ensuring the students have work readiness skills (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Helping students to work with others (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Work attitude (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q19 We'd like to ask about you experience teaching and the school you are currently teaching in. Please how important the following are.

	Extremely important (1)	Very important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
Satisfaction with my job description or assignment (e.g., responsibilities, grade level, or subject area). (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Classroom autonomy (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
satisfaction with workplace conditions (e.g., facilities, classroom resources, technology, within school safety) (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Satisfaction with the school administration. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities for leadership roles or professional advancement. (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q20 Please indicate your satisfaction with the following

	Very satisfied (6)	Somewhat satisfied (7)	Not satisfied (8)
How helpful was the support you received in preparing your students for their assessments? (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How fair the formal evaluation was for you? (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
How useful was the feedback from the formal evaluation? (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q21 Please rate the following issues as they relate to your teaching experience conditions. conditions.

	Very important (1)	Important (2)	Neither important nor unimportant (3)	Unimportant (4)	Very unimportant (5)
Classroom behavior (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student work attitudes (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Student academic achievement (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Family involvement and communication (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Salary (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Required special education paperwork (IEPs, etc.) (7)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grading requirements (8)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Potential for job advancement (9)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Retirement plan offered (10)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
progress monitoring plan (11)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Current administration (12)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other (13)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q22 Please rate the student outcomes listed below in terms of importance.

	Very unimportant (1)	Unimportant (2)	Neither important nor unimportant (3)	Important (4)	Very important (5)
Willingness to assume responsibility (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mastery of course/class content (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Good attitude toward work (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ability to work with others (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Willingness to take initiative (5)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Willingness to participate in class activities (6)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Q23 Is there anything you would like to add?

Q24 Would you be willing to be interviewed? This is to help us better understand the survey responses. No names will ever be attached to any comments made. if you answer yes, please list you full name or email address.

Yes (1) _____

Sorry, not at this time. (2)

End of Block: Default Question Block

APPENDIX B-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Questions

- How many years of teaching experience do you have?
- What is the highest degree level you have obtained? Certifications?
- How much experience do you have working with students with disabilities?
- What is the name of the school you currently teach at?
- What grade do you currently teach?

Interview questions

- 1. Have you ever considered leaving teaching? Why or why not?**
 - a. As a teacher, what are the most important factors that help you decide to stay at a particular school?
- 2. Have you ever considered leaving your current school? If so, why, or why not?**
 - a. Were you ever torn between leaving the profession due to the climate of the school?
- 3. Do you think that students with disabilities can prosper in the outside workforce? Why or why not?**
 - a. What skills do you think students with disabilities need to be successful in the workforce?
 - b. How do you think these skills can be taught in the classroom?
- 4. What is the most significant challenge your students face? What do you think can help them overcome it?**

- a. What lessons in the classroom can help with these challenges? Would you say it is more academic or social skill related?

5. Have you ever discussed any classroom issues with your principal? How helpful was this?

- a. What issues have directly impacted students with disabilities, and how does your principal handle it?

6. What do you think your school leadership can do to help you meet your classroom challenges?

- a. How involved are principals in redirecting your students?

7. What type of professional development would benefit you the most?

- a. From where you received your teaching degree, did they prepare you well for teaching students with disabilities?

I've covered a lot of material, is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX C-SURVEY EMAIL TO PRINCIPALS

Good morning,

My name is Stephanie Bowens. I am a doctoral student at Temple University in the Educational Leadership program. For my dissertation research, I am interested in the perspectives of teachers in regard to teaching their students the skills in the educational setting that are not explicitly taught but are understood by the students. I want to gain a better understanding of what teachers need to better support their students and then to provide leaders and administrators with ways in which they can provide support and assistance to their teachers. At the end of the survey, the teachers will be asked if they are willing to be interviewed. If yes, I will collect the contact information. Otherwise, participation will be anonymous. The survey should take 15-20 minutes to complete, and the interviews will be 30-60 minutes.

This research will be conducted under the supervision of my dissertation chair, Judith Stull, Ph.D. You may contact either me or her (stullj@temple.edu)for further details. Please feel free to contact me at 610-931-2814 or TUD21225@temple.edu. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

APPENDIX D-INTERVIEW EMAIL TO PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

My name is Stephanie Bowens. I am a doctoral student at Temple University. For my dissertation research, I am examining how the perception of special education teachers affects how they approach teaching the career readiness attitudes and skills that are embedded in the hidden curriculum and what they feel they need to do their jobs. I was provided your email address because one of your colleagues believed you would be able to provide great insight. Would you be interested in participating in my study via an interview? I hope that you would be interested in talking with me. I am attaching the consent form for your review and consideration.

Thank you,

Stephanie Bowens

APPENDIX E-CONSENT FORM

Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study Page 1 of 2 *Title of research:*
The Hidden Curriculum: The Special Education Teacher Perspective (28682)

Investigator and Department: Stephanie Bowens, College of Education and Human Development, Temple University

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

We invite you to take part in a research study because of your position as a special education teacher in Pennsylvania. You are well placed to provide an in-depth point of view of the perspective of the special education teacher in regard to teaching the hidden curriculum.

What should I be aware of for this research?

- Someone will explain this research to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- You can choose not to take part without any negative consequences.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

Who can I talk to about this research?

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints, or think the research has hurt you, contact Stephanie Bowens, by telephone at 610-931-2814, or via email at tud21225@temple.edu.

This research has been reviewed and approved by an Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may talk to them at (215) 707-3390 or e-mail them at: irb@temple.edu for any of the following:

- Your questions, concerns, or complaints are not being answered by the research team.
- You cannot reach the research team.
- You want to talk to someone besides the research team.
- You have questions about your rights as a research subject.
- You want to get information or provide input about this research.

Why is this research being done?

The hidden curriculum is a topic that aligns with educating the whole child and ensuring the students are learning the required and necessary skills that will help them be successful in the global economy. Research has indicated that teaching

students with disabilities requires you to focus on not only teaching the explicit academic curriculum, but also the implied skills and attitudes of the hidden curriculum. Understanding the factors at work within the learning environment in the school or the classroom is a growing area of interest for instructional leaders working with students with disabilities.

In a variety of environments, students with disabilities can face the challenge of navigating in social situations such as at school or in the workforce which involve implied skills and norm (Doyle and Arnedillo -Sánchez, 2011). Because students with disabilities may have these challenges, it becomes difficult for them to feel comfortable in different environments. You continue to play a critical role in providing students with instruction and to help their general education colleagues educate the students (Olson and Roberts, 2020).

Data for the research will be gathered primarily through interviews. The interview will provide the in- depth experiences. The research aims to provide school leaders and other instructional leaders with a better understanding of how to support special education teachers and students with disabilities. This information has implications for helping schools ensure that their climate is inclusive and prepared to serve students with disabilities.

Permission to Take Part in a Human Research Study Page 2 of 2 *How long will I be in this research?*

The interviews will take 30 – 60 minutes.

What happens if I agree to be in this research?

The data gathering process of the research will be done over a period of 3-4 months. If you wish, please provide your contact information for an interview which will be conducted via Zoom, SKYPE, etc. where you will be asked to describe experiences that you have had in your teaching career in regard to the hidden curriculum and your instructional practices. The interviews will not be recorded, and all information will be kept confidential.

The process will require time set aside for both the researcher and the participant in order to be able to complete the interview, and to set up Zoom or SKYPE meetings that work for both the participants and researcher's schedule.

Is there any way being in this research could be detrimental for me?

It is not expected that there could be any negative consequences of participating in this study All data will be presented in aggregate form and no personally identifiable information will appear in any form. Participation is entirely voluntary.

What happens to the information collected for this research?

To the extent of the law and protocol, the information collected in this research will be limited to those who have to review it. Complete anonymity cannot be promised. IRB, and Temple University may inspect and copy your information. For the purpose of the research, identifiers such as the name and age of participants will be maintained but will be stored separately from the data on a password protected computer.

APPENDIX F-HIDDEN CURRICULUM RESOURCES

- Autismclassroom resources.com: teaching students to discover the hidden curriculum
- Study.com Hidden Curriculum Examples & Characteristics
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6664286/>
- <https://autism-society.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/hidden-curriculum.pdf>
- <http://www.easterseals.com/chicago/shared-components/document-library/autism-resources/c-the-hidden-curriculum.pdf>
- <http://www.stephen-hinkle.com/joomla/index.php/hiddencurriculummenuitem>
- <https://www.n2y.com/webinars/edxchange-apr-2021/>
- <https://www.myaspergerschild.com/2016/02/explaining-hidden-curriculum-to.html>
- <https://do2learn.com/SocialSkills/overview.htm>
- https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1240&context=honors_theses
- <https://www1.udel.edu/educ/whitson/897s05/files/hiddencurriculum.htm>
- <https://par.nsf.gov/servlets/purl/10111521>
- <https://samforsk.brage.unit.no/samforsk-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2982136/Educated+for+welfare+services+The+hidden+curriculum+of+upper+secondary+school.pdf?sequence=1>
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