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Inclusive Education in Early Childhood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of the Successes and Barriers Impacting Successful Early Childhood Inclusive Education

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Each and every person I know has supported me along this journey, and each text, call, and passing comment has helped me reach the finish line. I appreciate the support more than I can express, and I thank you for believing in me.

ABSTRACT

Inclusive Education in Early Childhood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study of the Successes and Barriers Impacting Successful Early Childhood Inclusive Education

by Cynthia Hartshorn

Purpose: This qualitative phenomenological study aimed to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion. This study sought to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. Finally, this study sought to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Methodology: The study methodology was conducted using semistructured interview questions with 11 teachers who taught in either early childhood education (ECE) or early childhood special education (ECSE). Interview outcomes and an artifact collection and review were used to further analyze how ECE and ECSE teachers described the barriers to inclusive education.

Findings: This study revealed four key findings. First key finding was the primary barrier to the implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood is a lack of familiarity with inclusive practices. Second key finding was the key strategy to the successful implementation of inclusive practices is ownership of all students by teachers and site administration. Third key finding was prospective ECE teachers require

preservice preparation in the implementation of inclusive education. Third and fourth key findings were ECE teachers require both preservice preparation and in-service preparation paired with in vivo coaching to successfully implement inclusive education.

Conclusion: Relevant literature review and an analysis of data led to conclusions regarding the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood and the strategies to successfully overcome these barriers. This study also identified implications for ECE preservice preparation and in-service professional development that support inclusive education.

Recommendations: An analysis of the findings of this study revealed recommendations for future research and implications for action. The recommendations address the need for ECE teachers to be provided with robust preservice preparation and in-service training and coaching to allow them to be familiar with educational strategies for diverse learners and to take ownership of all students in their classrooms.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background

Early childhood education (ECE) can be traced to Europe as far back as the late 1700s when a school for children under the age of 6 was opened by Johann Friedrich Oberlin in 1767 (Morgan, 2011). Federal funding for ECE in the United States was formally introduced in the 1960s, coinciding with the civil rights movement. Funding for Head Start programs began in 1965 and continues today (Morgan, 2011). The creation of the Head Start program opened the doors of ECE to middle- and low-income families nationwide and has led to the widespread availability and acceptance of early childhood educational programs (Morgan, 2011).

Foundations of ECE Education

Although the first ECE classrooms in the United States date as far back as to the early 1800s, these classrooms did not include students with disabilities. In most cases, students with disabilities were denied enrollment in public schools and were cared for at home by their parents (McLean et al., 2016). The passage of the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) in 1968 provided funds for model demonstration programs nationwide, sparking the beginning of what is known as a formal network of state and federally funded programs for students with disabilities (McLean et al., 2016). Mills et al. (1998) found that when comparing inclusive, segregated, and mainstream preschool classrooms, integrated settings resulted in the most significant gains in the area of language for students with disabilities. However, despite this funding, students with moderate-to-severe disabilities continued to be placed in a segregated classroom initially in preschool and through their elementary school experience (Hanson et al., 2001).

Influence of Federal and State Mandates in ECE

California is currently home to a disparate group of early childhood programs, including programs funded by a combination of federal, state, local, and private entities. Melnick et al. (2017) outlined how this system of ECE programs has grown incrementally into a labyrinth with varying requirements and expectations. Approximately 27% of publicly funded preschool programs in California are funded by Head Start or the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), and the remaining are funded by state and local grants and private pay (Kim et al., 2022). Each program independently selects the Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS) that will measure the program's effectiveness. This has led to a confusing system that can result in competing interests while increasing the reporting and data collection requirements for agencies that are funded by more than one source (Melnick et al., 2017; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

ECE Quality Indicators

State and federally funded early childhood programs are required to provide evidence of compliance with quality measures (Gordon et al., 2015). ECE programs typically administer at least one of multiple QRISs aimed at measuring both the physical environment and the quality of student and teacher interactions (Melnick et al., 2017; Murray, 2019). Agencies may adopt one or more of these assessments to measure progress. This lack of a consistent assessment makes comparison between programs more challenging.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to systemic practices that allow all students to participate as a member of the general education community with the supports and services needed to ensure access to the general curriculum (Kurth et al., 2018; Odom, 2000). Inclusive education requires more than placing a student with a disability in a general education classroom; successful implementation of inclusive education requires transformational changes in mindset and culture by school site administration and educators (Choi et al., 2020; McCart et al., 2014). Students with moderate-to-severe disabilities in inclusive settings experience higher learning outcomes than their peers in separate locations; however, most continue to be educated in segregated classrooms (Cole et al., 2004; Dell'Anna et al., 2020; Downing et al., 2004).

Inclusive Education in Early Childhood

Inclusive education has been demonstrated to provide improved outcomes for students with disabilities. However, many current early childhood special education (ECSE) models provide fewer opportunities for inclusive education than kindergarten through 12th-grade education. Preschool is an ideal time to focus on inclusive opportunities because the programs are designed to provide developmentally appropriate instruction in a play-based model (Baker, 2019; J. Chen et al., 2019). According to Ogelman and Secer (2012), prosocial skills improved in both students with disabilities and neurotypical students educated in inclusive settings. Researchers agreed that schools with successful inclusive education programs include evidence-based features, such as administrative leadership, multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), Universal Design for

Learning (UDL), family and community engagement, and an inclusive policy structure (Jiménez et al., 2007; McCart et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Multi-Tiered System of Support

MTSS refers to a student-centered framework that incorporates the California Common Core State Standards with tiered and differentiated academic supports, social-emotional learning, and behavioral systems. Interventions in the MTSS framework are defined through three tiers: Tier 1 supports are available to all children, and Tier 2 supports provide targeted interventions. Finally, Tier 3 supports are individualized to specific students based on their unique needs (Choi et al., 2020; Coogle et al., 2022; Murray, 2019). In early childhood settings, MTSS provides an opportunity for teachers to respond to a child's specific needs within a developmentally appropriate educational setting (Coogle et al., 2022).

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is a framework that, when implemented with fidelity, guides teachers to design engaging lessons and provide options for students to access the material and demonstrate mastery of concepts. One core tenet of the UDL framework is that instructors need to embrace variability. Novak (2022) posited that "all students are different, with their own unique mixes of strengths and weaknesses. However, our teaching methods, materials, assessments, and classrooms are all too often created in a one-size-fits-all fashion" (para. 3). By developing lessons to be accessible to all, the stage is set for instruction that is universally accessible and does not need to be modified for students with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010).

ECE Teacher Preparation

ECE teacher preparation programs are generally split into two separate pathways. General education teachers progress through a certificate program, and ECSE teachers progress through a credential program (Mickelson et al., 2022; Murray, 2019; Pugach et al., 2009). Blended teacher education programs produce teachers trained and certified to work with students in both general and special education. Teacher preparation can be organized into two main types: preservice and in-service preparation (Aykan & Dursun, 2021). Preservice education is provided during teacher preparation programs while teachers work toward earning their certifications whereas in-service professional development is provided to teachers who have already entered the teaching profession.

Impact of Preservice Preparation on Inclusive Education

Prospective teachers completing general education preservice preparation programs that connect theory to real-world teaching practices report feeling more prepared for employment as a teacher (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). According to the Government Accountability Office report, despite attempts to increase the focus on instruction of students with disabilities, many early childhood teacher preparation programs leave teachers unprepared for future work with neurodiverse students (Murray, 2019).

Impact of In-Service Preparation on Inclusive Education

Teachers report increased confidence in their abilities to work in an inclusive classroom when professional development, coupled with ongoing coaching, is provided (Coogle et al., 2022). Coogle et al. (2022) also noted that although professional

development increases knowledge, ongoing coaching increases the likelihood that learned strategies will be implemented with fidelity.

Theoretical Foundations

Child Development Theories

Teaching strategies implemented in early childhood classrooms are largely rooted in theories of child development. Developmental theories can be classified in five areas: maturationist, constructivist, behaviorist, psychoanalytic, and ecological (Saracho, 2023). Such theories seek to better explain how children develop and the meaning of their behavior (Saracho, 2023). These theories also serve as the foundation for inclusive education practices (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Zaretsky, 2005).

Maturation Theory

Maturation theory focuses on a child's development rather than chronological age and maintains that children must be provided with developmentally appropriate activities to foster growth (Hunt, 1961; Saracho, 2023). G. Stanley Hall was the first to introduce the idea of developmentally appropriate practice (Saracho, 2023). Arnold Gesell built on Hall's work and eventually developed the first timetables of child development (Saracho, 2023). Developmentally appropriate practice continues to be a hallmark of ECE today (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2020).

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory is also based on child development and asserts that children interpret knowledge about the outside world to adjust their understanding of their environment (Saracho, 2023). The research of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner has bolstered the constructivist theory that development is rooted in a child's

interactions both with the environment and with others (Saracho, 2023). According to Jones and Brader-Araje (2002), constructivist theory influences education through the idea that knowledge is gained through processes rather than products.

Behaviorist Theory

Behaviorist theory is based on a focus on reinforcement and associations to shape learning (Saracho, 2023; Schunk, 2021). B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Ivan Pavlov have all contributed to the foundation of behaviorist theory (Saracho, 2023). B. F. Skinner's work on operant conditioning influences teaching practices in special education such as applied behavior analysis and is often used when teaching students with autism (Ali & Fazil, 2022).

Psychoanalytic Theories

Psychoanalytic theory explains human behavior by helping people understand how a child's unconscious explains the child's behavior and feelings (Saracho, 2023). It also theorizes that unconscious childhood memories can alter adult personality (Saracho, 2023). Research conducted by Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson contributed to the foundation of education by recognizing that a child's experiences impact their mental health and development and that children require an encouraging environment to thrive (Saracho, 2023).

Ecological Theories

Ecological theory is based on the interactions individuals have with their environment. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's theories are based on an understanding that children need to be explicitly taught to understand the environment and the role they play in it through short educational segments (Feriver et al., 2022; Saracho, 2023). The

interconnection of parents, teachers, the community, and culture during early childhood is demonstrated in Bronfenbrenner's theories (Saracho, 2023).

NAEYC Key Guidelines for Early Childhood Professionals

The NAEYC (2020) is a professional organization focused on defining and supporting the implementation of high-quality ECE practices. An integral element of high-quality ECE classrooms is the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). NAEYC defined DAP as "methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning" (p. 5). At its core, the NAEYC framework provides engaging, high-quality instruction to all students in a format that meets their developmental and educational needs. NAEYC has identified six key areas of developmentally appropriate practice that are consistent with the professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators and that form the foundation of successful early childhood programs.

Theoretical Foundations

In 2016, Booth and Ainscow developed a framework known as the Index for Inclusion. Designed to support the implementation of inclusive education in schools, this index includes a self-evaluation tool and a framework for school leaders to use to guide their transition to inclusive education (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Sánchez et al., 2019). Booth and Ainscow's (2016) index includes three main dimensions: creating inclusive cultures (Dimension A), producing inclusive policies (Dimension B), and evolving inclusive education (Dimension C). These dimensions combine to create a framework that ensures all a sustainable transition to inclusive education.

Dimension A

In Dimension A, creating inclusive cultures, Booth and Ainscow (2016) outlined the construct that inclusive education is rooted in a culture that is secure, accepting, and welcoming of all learners. These values guide all decisions made within the school community and set the stage for the development of coherent inclusive policies. This dimension also focuses on ensuring the integration of change within the school culture to create sustainability.

Dimension B

In Dimension B, producing inclusive policies, Booth and Ainscow (2016) focused on the development of school policies that include all students from the moment of enrollment. In addition to the emphasis on inclusion, this dimension also focuses on the minimization of exclusionary policies. It is designed to support the development of policies that value the participation of all members of the diverse school population.

Dimension C

In Dimension C, evolving inclusive education, Booth and Ainscow (2016) shifted the focus from policy to practice. In this dimension, Booth and Ainscow focused on the structure of learning activities to ensure they are universally designed to meet the needs of all learners. They also focused on the construct that children should be active learners who serve as resources for each other. Finally, they focused on the need for adults to work together to take responsibility for the learning outcomes of all students.

Summary of Theoretical Foundations

An analysis of the literature on inclusive education programs indicated that successful programs are based on theories of child development and include evidence-

based features, such as administrative leadership, MTSS, professional development, instructional coaching, family and community engagement, and an inclusive policy structure (Coogle, 2022; Jiménez et al., 2007; McCart et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Yang et al., 2022). Despite research indicating improved outcomes for students educated in an inclusive setting, early childhood students with disabilities are more frequently placed in segregated settings than in inclusive settings (Hanson et al., 2001). Universally designed early childhood classrooms provide a foundation for students of all ability levels to grow socially and linguistically in their preschool years and beyond (Coogle et al., 2022). Providing prospective teachers with direct instruction on how to teach students with disabilities also contributes to the creation of successful inclusive programs (Florian & Linklater, 2010).

Statement of the Research Problem

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that students with disabilities be educated in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent appropriate. However, according to the Center for Public Education (n.d.), preschoolers with disabilities are placed in a self-contained special day class to a greater degree than their school-aged counterparts. Research indicated that preschoolers with disabilities who are placed initially in a segregated setting are more likely to remain in a noninclusive setting in elementary school (Hanson et al., 2001; Lundqvist et al., 2015). Access to inclusive ECE programs can vary depending on the geography and demographics of a community and the organization's leaders and teachers who value inclusive education (Lieber et al., 2000). However, as of 2015, just seven state licensing

requirements included a blended teacher preparation program that provides both ECE and ECSE coursework (Mickelson et al., 2022).

Research demonstrated that inclusive ECE classrooms lead to increased performance on measures rating social skills and interactions of preschool students with disabilities (Barton & Smith, 2015; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). Teachers in inclusive early childhood classrooms have been observed to use intentional strategies to foster relationships between students with and without disabilities, setting the foundation for successful peer relationships in elementary school and beyond (Barton & Smith, 2015; Buysse et al., 2003), and research has also indicated that the benefits of inclusive education also extend to children without disabilities. Ogelman and Secer (2012) found that the social skills of students with disabilities and neurotypical students improved when educated in an inclusive setting.

Similarly, Rafferty et al. (2003) concluded that the language development of students with disabilities participating in inclusive early childhood settings is greater than that of peers enrolled in segregated classrooms. Justice et al. (2014) showed that the individual language development of children is influenced by the skills of the children they go to school with, that is, children who attend a program with peers whose language is more advanced than their own make greater gains on linguistic measures. Mills et al. (1998) found that students enrolled in integrated settings demonstrated the highest growth in language abilities.

The NAEYC (2020) key guidelines for DAP are recognized as forming the foundation for well-designed ECE programs. However, Barton and Smith (2015) indicated that research focused on the ecological and social outcomes of students enrolled

in inclusive early childhood classrooms is limited. Likewise, although research points to a relationship between education in an inclusive setting and improved outcomes, additional research exploring the short- and long-term benefits of inclusive early childhood programs is needed (Barton & Smith, 2015).

Research has indicated that well-designed inclusive early childhood classrooms result in improved outcomes for children. However, Stayton (2015) noted that limited research has been conducted in the areas of blended preservice and in-service teacher preparation. Successful inclusive ECE classrooms are based on theories of child development and are taught by teachers who have received preservice and in-service training to work with students with disabilities (Coogle, 2022; Jiménez et al., 2007; McCart et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Stayton, 2015; Yang et al., 2022). Additional research on quality preservice and in-service teacher preparation programs from the perspective of teachers who are successfully implementing inclusive ECE programs can provide valuable data about best practices for designing and supporting such programs.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive policies. A further purpose of this study was to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. A final purpose of this study was to identify the preservice and in-service

experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to investigate the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood, the strategies for overcoming these barriers, and the preservice and in-service preparation that early childhood teachers receive to support the implementation of inclusive education:

1. What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education?
2. What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education?
3. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?
4. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

Significance of the Problem

School districts throughout the country are responsible for providing students with disabilities meaningful access to the core curriculum in the LRE. For the 2022–2023 school year, the California Department of Education (CDE, 2021) set a target that 45% of preschool students with disabilities should participate in a regular ECE program. California falls short of this target, and only 36.9% of preschool students with disabilities met this criterion as of 2019 (CDE, 2021). According to Lieber et al. (2000), a child's access to an inclusive ECE program is dependent on both the geography and

demographics of the child's neighborhood and the presence of an organizational leader who values inclusive education. For this reason, public school districts need to focus on the development of high-quality inclusive ECE programs to meet the social, developmental, and linguistic needs of preschool students with disabilities while remaining in compliance with IDEA.

One way to increase the availability of high-quality inclusive ECE programs is to increase the number of teachers prepared to teach students with disabilities and to increase the preservice and in-service training that prospective early childhood teachers receive. Boyd et al. (2009) indicated that connecting theory to practice results in improved perceptions of preparedness to teach students with disabilities. However, few early childhood teacher preparation programs include coursework related to students with disabilities beyond an introductory course (Murray, 2019). Coogle et al. (2022) found that professional development paired with ongoing coaching resulted in the improved implementation of inclusive education strategies. This study highlighted the importance of preservice and in-service training for early childhood educators to meet the increasing population of preschool students with disabilities.

Although research supported that high-quality inclusive early childhood classrooms improve the social and linguistic outcomes for children, barriers to the design and implementation of inclusive ECE programs reduce the number of programs available to preschool-aged children (Jiménez et al., 2007; Ogelman & Secer, 2012; Olson & Ruppar, 2017). This study focused on exploring the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education based on Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion. An additional focus of this study was to identify the preservice and in-service

experiences perceived by teachers to be the most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

The results of this study can help inform future school administrators about the ideal characteristics and composition of an inclusive early childhood program (Barton & Smith, 2015). In addition, this study can inform the decision-making state and federal legislative officials for the Head Start and state preschool programs as to the barriers of successful implementation of federal and state mandates for inclusive education. Stayton (2015) noted that few studies have investigated the benefits of blended preservice and in-service teacher preparation; additional research in this area can inform universities and teaching institutions about best practices for designing and supporting quality inclusive ECE programs. This study can also help to guide best practices for teachers preparing to work or who currently work in inclusive early childhood programs. Of more importance, this study may lead to expanded access to inclusive early childhood programs, ultimately leading to improved outcomes for preschoolers with disabilities and their general education peers.

Definitions

Early Childhood Education (ECE). ECE includes any part- or full-day group program in a center, school, or home that serves children from birth through age 8, including children with special developmental and learning needs (NAEYC, 2020).

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE). ECSE includes individuals with exceptional needs between the ages of 3 and 5 years, inclusive, who are identified by the local educational agency as requiring special education and services (California Education Code Section 56440, 2017).

Inclusive Education. In this study, inclusive education is defined as (a) access to a wide variety of learning opportunities, (b) individualized modifications that facilitate participation with adults and peers, and (c) systems-level supports that undergird classroom efforts (NAEYC, 2009).

Index for Inclusion. The Index for Inclusion is designed to facilitate the self-review of the operations of a school to identify barriers to inclusive education and opportunities for improvement. The index includes a review of playground activities, staff lounges, classrooms, and common areas throughout the school. It encourages the development of an inclusive education development plan to be designed collaboratively with all educational partners (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

In-Service Preparation. In-service education is defined as coursework and related activities through which teachers improve their professional knowledge and skills in the teaching profession (Osamwonyi, 2016).

Preservice Preparation. Preservice preparation describes the education and training individuals receive when enrolled in a university program to earn a teaching credential or license that prepares them to work in the teaching profession (Early Childhood Personnel Center, n.d.).

Delimitations

This study was conducted with the following delimitations:

1. The study was delimited to teachers working in a publicly funded ECE or ECSE classroom.
2. The study was delimited to teachers who have experience with inclusive education and who were referred to the researcher.

3. The study was delimited to teachers who have students with disabilities enrolled in their classrooms.
4. The study was delimited to Riverside County and San Bernardino County in California.

Organization of the Study

This study was organized into five chapters. Chapter I presented an introduction on the limited research in inclusive education in ECE and how inclusive education relates to positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities. Chapter II provides a comprehensive overview of relevant literature related to the history of ECE and how it relates to the current system of education from birth to 5 years. Chapter III discusses the methodology and rationale for choosing a qualitative, phenomenological research design for this study. Chapter IV provides an overview of the data collected through interviews, an analysis of the data and artifacts, and the findings from the analysis of the data and artifacts. Chapter V provides the conclusion, implications to the field, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive policies. A second purpose of this study was to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. A final purpose of this study was to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

This chapter is organized into five sections and reviews current literature about the foundations of early childhood special education (ECSE), quality in early childhood education (ECE), inclusive education, ECE teacher preparation, and theoretical foundations at the core of early childhood educational planning. In addition, Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion and its framework for the successful creation and development of inclusive schools is reviewed.

Foundations of ECSE

Although the first ECE classrooms in the United States date as far back as the early 1800s, these programs did not include students with disabilities. In most cases, students with disabilities were denied enrollment in public schools and were cared for at home by their parents (McLean et al., 2016). The passage of the Handicapped Children's Early Education Program (HCEEP) in 1968 provided funds for model demonstration

programs nationwide, sparking the beginning of what is known as a formal network of state and federally funded programs for students with disabilities (McLean et al., 2016). Mills et al. (1998) found that when comparing inclusive, segregated, and mainstream preschool classrooms, integrated settings resulted in the most significant gains in the area of language for students with disabilities. However, despite this funding, students with moderate-to-severe disabilities continued to be placed in a segregated classroom initially in preschool and through their elementary school experience (Hanson et al., 2001).

Influence of Federal and State Mandates in ECE

California is currently home to a disparate group of early childhood programs, including programs funded by a combination of federal, state, local, and private entities. Melnick et al. (2017) outlined how this system of ECE programs has grown incrementally into a labyrinth with varying requirements and expectations. Approximately 27% of ECE centers are funded by Head Start or the California State Preschool Program (CSPP), and the remaining are funded by state and local grants and private pay (Kim et al., 2022). Each program independently selects the Quality Rating and Improvement Systems (QRISs) that will measure a program's effectiveness. In California, public school districts often operate a combination of programs funded by Head Start and the CSPP. This has led to a confusing system that can result in competing interests while increasing the reporting and data collection requirements for agencies that are funded by more than one source (Melnick et al., 2017; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018).

In California, educational programs for students in transitional kindergarten (TK) through 12th grade are regulated by the CDE. Likewise, ECSE preschool programs are

also regulated by the CDE. However, CSPP and community preschool programs are licensed and regulated by the Community Care Licensing Division of the Department of Developmental Services. According to CDE (2023), Community Care Licensing Title 22 regulations include mandates designed to safeguard the safety of children, but that also create barriers to how and when students with disabilities can be included in these programs. These regulations create barriers that local educational systems must navigate while endeavoring to remain in compliance with the IDEA and state mandates and regulations.

Influence of Funding in ECE

The federal government first provided funding for ECE in the 1930s with the passage of the Aide to Dependent Children provision of the Social Security Act of 1935 (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). The role of federal funding was expanded during the Depression when President Roosevelt allocated funding for nursery schools to be established throughout the country. This effort recognized the need to consider the "physical and mental well-being of preschool children from needy, under-privileged families" (Cahan, 1989, p. 26). Federal funding continued through World War II, and the Lanham Act of 1940 provided early childhood care for the children of mothers working in the defense industry (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2018). Although this funding ended at the conclusion of World War II, mothers worked outside the home more frequently after the war, and the need for quality early childhood programs continued to evolve.

Today, early childhood programs in California are funded through a combination of federal and state funding. As a result of having been built throughout the last 50 years,

Melnick et al. (2017) described California's ECE system as a "complex hodgepodge of programs" serving over 500,000 children per year (p. 6). With the exception of ECSE preschool programs, students served in publicly funded early childhood programs are generally socioeconomically disadvantaged.

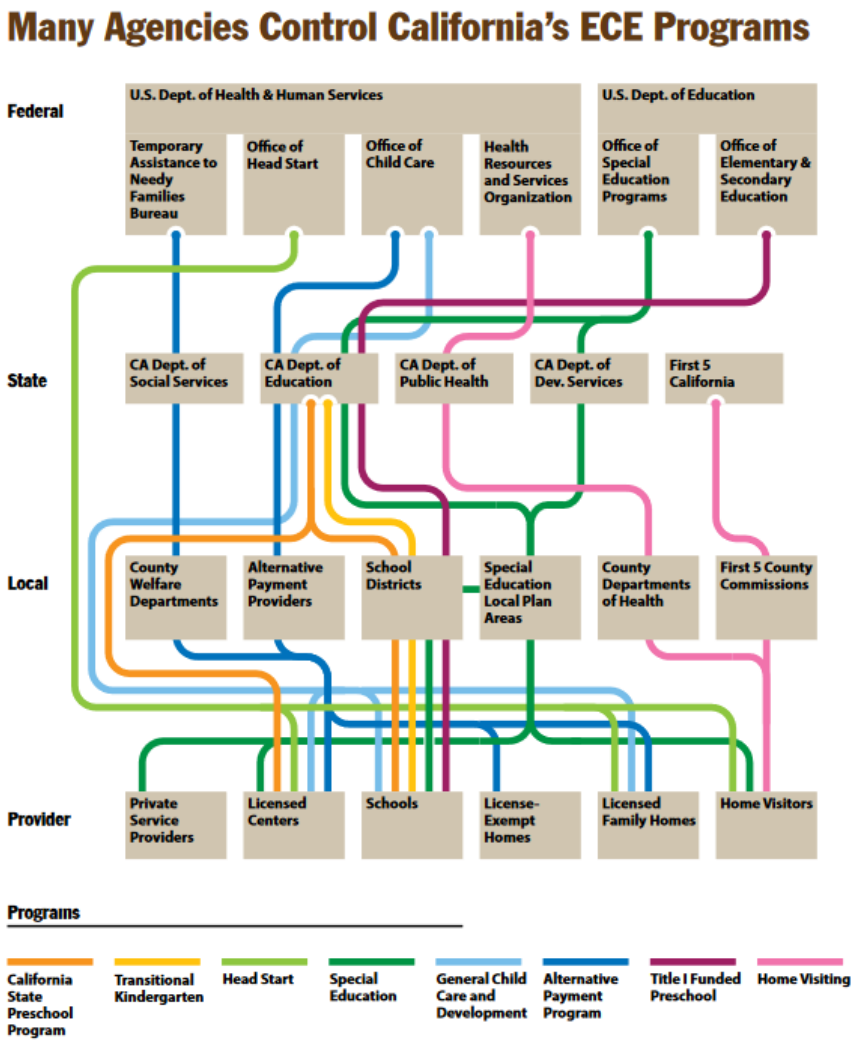
Nearly all ECE programs in California operate with at least partial federal funding, combined with state, local, and private funding. As a result, oversight of these programs is provided by a complex web of federal, state, and local mandates (Melnick et al., 2017; see Figure 1). ECE program administrators are responsible for reporting on a labyrinth of quality measures to a myriad of responsible agencies, which often have competing interests (Melnick et al., 2017).

Quality in ECE

State and federally funded early childhood programs are required to provide evidence of compliance with quality measures (Gordon et al., 2015). ECE programs typically administer at least one of multiple QRISs aimed at measuring both the physical environment and the quality of student and teacher interactions (Melnick et al., 2017; Murray, 2019). Agencies may adopt one or more of these assessments to measure progress. This lack of a consistent assessment makes comparison between programs more challenging.

Figure 1

Agency Oversight of State and Federally Funded Early Childhood Education (ECE) Programs in California



Note. From *Understanding California's Early Care and Education System*, by H. Melnick, T. T. Ali, M. Gardner, A. Maier, & M. Wechsler, 2017, Learning Policy Institute (https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Understanding_CA_Early_Care_Education_System_BRIEF.pdf). In the public domain.

Quality Measures

Early childhood educators, policymakers, and researchers agree that access to high-quality ECE programs is essential for all children (Pelatti et al., 2016). Likewise,

research indicated that inclusive ECE programs are correlated with higher linguistic, social-emotional, and academic outcomes for all students (Coogle et al., 2022; Ogelman & Secer, 2012). IDEA (2004) requires that public agencies place students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) to the maximum extent practical. Despite these factors, minimal research has examined measures of quality in inclusive ECE programs (Pelatti et al., 2016).

Desired Results Developmental Profile

To have a universal method for rating the quality of early childhood programs in California, CDE (2015) developed the Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP). The purpose of the DRDP is to inform instruction and program development (CDE, 2015). Developed with an aim to ensure that the DRDP is a fair and accurate measurement system for all students, CDE incorporated the principles of universal design into the assessment tool. The DRDP comprise eight domains that reflect the acquisition of knowledge, skills, or behaviors. The DRDP is designed as an observational tool, meaning that the rater can incorporate direct observations, observations by others, and other documentation, such as videos or pictures (CDE, 2015).

Assessment results are submitted directly to the CDE's Early Education and Support Division for students in general education and to the Special Education Division for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) two times per school year. Early childhood programs receive aggregated outcome data designed to inform instruction and measure the overall impact and quality of the early childhood program (CDE, 2015). CDE provides Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs) with an annual rating of performance toward key indicators, including those rated on the DRDP.

Although the DRDP is not implemented nationwide, it provides early childhood programs in California key information to assist in the assessment of program quality.

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale

Nationally, funding for early childhood programs is often tied to outcomes on quality measures such as the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (ECERS). First published in 1980, the current ECERS-R reflects a focus in ECE on child-initiated activities and a whole-child approach to instruction (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Gordon et al., 2015). This holistic approach to scoring presents a challenge to program policymakers to extract specific aspects of quality from the rating scale results (Gordon et al., 2015). In addition, Gordon et al. (2015) found that a lack of domain specificity makes using the ECERS-R for program measures such as closing the achievement gap an ineffectual measure but that it is more relevant for domains measuring emotional maturity.

Autism Program Environmental Rating Scale

The Autism Program Environmental Rating Scale (APERS) is designed to support the creation of classroom settings that are responsive to the needs of students with autism and other developmental disorders. Unlike the ECERS and the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) quality review measures, the APERS specifically analyzes program quality as it relates to accessibility by students on the autism spectrum. According to Odom et al. (2018), the APERS was developed in response to a lack of quality measures that review all of the programmatic areas recommended by the National Professional Development Center (NPDC). In addition, Odom et al. (2018) noted that

previous quality measures have not been tested for reliability and validity and do not provide formative feedback on the implementation of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs).

Originally designed to measure program quality in autism-specific special day classes, the APERS has been revised to be applied in any learning environment (Odom et al., 2018). This allows educators and school administrators to consider program quality within the range of placement options to ensure that those working with students with autism implement EBPs into their physical classroom setup and instruction. Rather than a final quality measure, the APERS is designed to be used as a starting point in conjunction with rigorous implementation of EBPs and high expectations for all students (Odom et al., 2018).

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education refers to systemic practices that allow all students to participate as a member of the general education community with the supports and services needed to ensure access to the general curriculum (Kurth et al., 2018; Odom, 2000). Inclusive education requires more than placing a student with a disability in a general education classroom; successful implementation of inclusive education requires transformational changes in mindset and culture among site administrators and educators (Choi et al., 2020; McCart et al., 2014). Students with moderate-to-severe disabilities in inclusive settings experience higher learning outcomes than their peers in separate locations; however, most continue to be educated in segregated classrooms (Cole et al., 2004; Dell'Anna et al., 2020; Downing et al., 2004). Despite increased funding intended to expand access to ECE, inclusive early childhood educational programs have not

experienced proportional growth (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education [USDHHS & USDOE], 2023).

Foundations of Inclusive Education

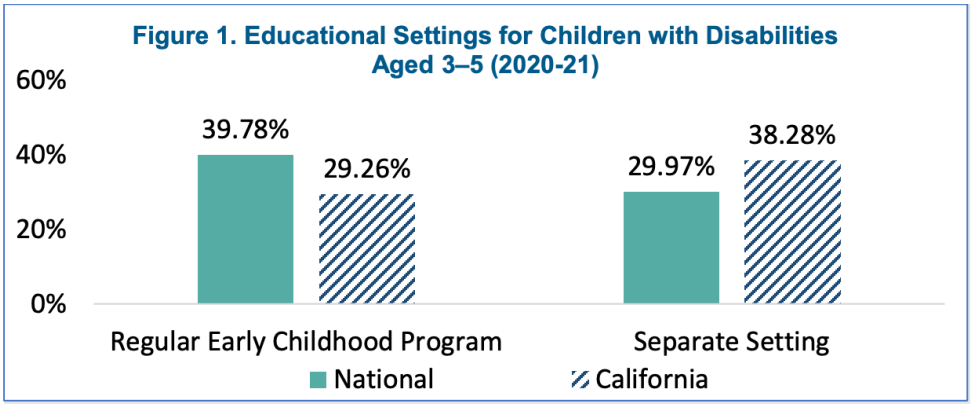
Frankel et al. (2010) found that although teachers may agree with the concept of inclusive education, real-world implementation is more complicated. Teacher confidence, funding, administrative support, training, and regulatory barriers all contribute to the research-to-practice gap (Brotherson et al., 2001; Frankel, 2004, 2006; Frankel et al., 2010). Administrative support for inclusive education extends to the hiring process. Marks et al. (2014) found that administrators who value inclusion are more likely to hire new teachers who share this interest.

Although the IDEA (2004) requires that students receive their education in the LRE, fewer students in California participate in inclusive educational settings than in other states. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education, 39.78% of students with disabilities ages 3–5 participate in inclusive educational settings (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). In California, this number is just 29.97%, and 38.28% of students participate in separate, or segregated, settings (see Figure 2).

Designing and implementing inclusive education at the preschool level has been challenging for public school districts in the absence of universal preschool. Access to inclusive ECE programs can vary depending on the geography and demographics of a community (Lieber et al., 2000). In addition, creating inclusive early childhood settings can depend on the leaders in the organizations themselves; teachers, principals, and directors who value inclusive education may be the impetus to initiate a program (Lieber et al., 2000).

Figure 2

Educational Settings for Children With Disabilities in the 2020–2021 School Year



Note. The totals in the figure do not sum to 100% because other settings are also reported. From *Potential Fiscal Barriers to Prekindergarten Through Third Grade Inclusion for Students With Disabilities: Executive Summary*, by California Department of Education, 2023 (https://thearcca.org/california-students-pre-k-through-third-grade-are-potentially-excluded-from-inclusive-settings-due-to-existing-barriers-according-to-new-report-from-the-california-department-of-education/). In the public domain.

Inclusive Education in Early Childhood

Inclusive education has been demonstrated to provide improved outcomes for students with disabilities. However, many current ECSE models provide fewer opportunities for inclusive education than kindergarten through 12th-grade education. Preschool is an ideal time to focus on inclusive opportunities because the programs are designed to provide developmentally appropriate instruction in a play-based model (Baker, 2019; J. Chen et al., 2019). According to Ogelman and Secer (2012), prosocial skills improved in both students with disabilities and their neurotypical peers educated in inclusive settings. Researchers agreed that schools with successful inclusive education programs include evidence-based features, such as administrative leadership, multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), family and community

engagement, and an inclusive policy structure (Jiménez et al., 2007; McCart et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017).

Multi-Tiered System of Support

Signed in 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) advanced the implementation of MTSS in public school districts for students who were not meeting standards (Knoff et al., 2018). MTSS refers to a student-centered framework that incorporates the California Common Core State Standards with tiered and differentiated academic supports, social-emotional learning, and behavioral systems. According to Knoff et al. (2018), ESSA also acknowledges that the academic and behavioral needs of students cannot be separated and must be addressed within a comprehensive, schoolwide system. Interventions in the MTSS framework are defined through three tiers: Tier 1 supports are available to all children, and Tier 2 supports provide targeted interventions. Finally, Tier 3 supports are individualized to specific students based on their unique needs (Choi et al., 2020; Coogle et al., 2022; Murray, 2019). The introduction of MTSS in ESSA marked the beginning of a focus on the whole child through a preventative approach (Goodman & Bohanon, 2018). Designed to meet the needs of all students, MTSS shifts the focus to a proactive model that addresses student need as it arises, including students performing above grade level as well as struggling students who may not meet eligibility criteria for special education services. In early childhood settings, MTSS provides an opportunity for teachers to respond to a child's specific needs within a developmentally appropriate educational setting (Coogle et al., 2022).

Universal Design for Learning

UDL is a framework that, when implemented with fidelity, guides teachers to design engaging lessons and provide options for students to access the material and demonstrate mastery of concepts. One core tenet of the UDL framework is that instructors need to embrace variability. Novak (2022) posited that "all students are different, with their own unique mixes of strengths and weaknesses. However, our teaching methods, materials, assessments, and classrooms are all too often created in a one-size-fits-all fashion" (para. 3). Instruction designed to allow for learner variability creates an educational environment that accounts for all students. By developing lessons to be accessible to all, the stage is set for instruction that is universally accessible and does not need to be modified for students with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010). In addition, UDL provides the educator with a roadmap to help design instruction that considers three core tenants: the why of learning, the what of learning, and the how of learning (Center for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2018).

Evidence-Based Interventions

ESSA (2015) requires that public school districts implement educational programs and interventions grounded in research. This requirement is designed to ensure that formal research has demonstrated that the selected interventions and strategies are expected to lead to the desired outcomes. ESSA categorizes evidence into four tiers; Tier 1 demonstrates strong evidence, and Tier 4 demonstrates a rationale. These tiers provide a foundation to guide public agencies in the selection of curricula and interventions.

Similarly, the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice has researched a much more comprehensive range of practices to provide educators, private practitioners, and parents with a review of strategies that are rooted in research and are effective practices for learners on the autism spectrum (Hume et al., 2021). The project has identified 28 EBPs that can be implemented in various settings and has further broken down the EBPs by domain and age range (Hume et al., 2021).

In California, the multiagency network California Autism Professional Training and Information Network (CAPTAIN, n.d.) has been "developed to support the understanding and use of Evidence-Based Practices for individuals affected by Autism Spectrum Disorder" (About tab, para. 1). Although identified specifically for individuals with autism, EBPs have been found to be effective in supporting a wide variety of students with executive function deficits (Wilkins & Burmeister, 2015). Using implementation science, CAPTAIN seeks to expand the use of EBPs to school staff and community members to create a network of support for students with autism and executive function deficits (Suhrheinrich et al., 2022). When integrated with the UDL framework, EBPs are powerful tools that can remove the barriers that prevent students with disabilities from participating in inclusive educational settings.

ECE Teacher Preparation

ECE teacher preparation programs are generally split into two separate pathways. General education teachers progress through a certificate program, and ECSE teachers progress through a credential program (Mickelson et al., 2022; Murray, 2019; Pugach et al., 2009). Blended teacher education programs produce teachers trained and certified to work with students in both general and special education.

In 2014, President Barak Obama held the White House Summit on Early Education, which aimed to foster collaboration between state and local policymakers as well as school and community representatives (The White House, 2014). This summit resulted in increased investment into ECE programs for all students. The following year, USDHHS and USDOE (2023) released guidance on inclusive education in high-quality early childhood educational programs. According to Mickelson et al. (2022), varied regulations and results have led to an ongoing disconnect between general and special education teacher licensing throughout the United States. In 2019, Sindelar et al. found that 40 states have set requirements for ECE and ECSE licensure; of these for 40 states, only eight offered blended or dual certification programs. California does not offer blended ECE/ECSE certification and instead requires dual licensure and certification to teach in both general and special education early childhood programs.

In addition to licensure, the number of years of educational preparation required to earn teaching certification varies between ECE and ECSE programs. According to C.-I. Chen and Mickelson (2015), most ECE teacher preparation programs require undergraduate level preparation whereas ECSE credentialing requires graduate level coursework. This discrepancy has resulted in little support from the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for blended ECE/ECSE teacher preparation programs (Mickelson et al., 2022).

When considering preparation to teach in an inclusive setting, preparation can be categorized into two main types: preservice and in-service (Aykan & Dursun, 2021). Preservice education is provided during teacher preparation programs while teachers work toward earning their certifications whereas in-service professional development is

provided to teachers who have already entered the teaching profession. One way to improve the preparation that teachers are provided to work in an inclusive setting is to emphasize both types of preparation. In-service preparation provides for ongoing engagement of best practices and real-time coaching in addition to the pedagogical preparation teachers receive during their preservice preparation (Aykan & Dursun, 2021).

Impact of Preservice Preparation on Inclusive education

Prospective teachers completing general education preservice preparation programs that connect theory to real-world teaching practices report feeling more prepared for employment as a teacher (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Florian and Linklater (2010) noted that prospective teachers participating in preservice preparation programs that combine seat-based learning focused on inclusive methodologies with in-class teaching observations and practice reported greater confidence in their ability to teach in an inclusive classroom. According to the Government Accountability Office report, despite attempts to increase the focus on instruction of students with disabilities, many early childhood teacher preparation programs leave teachers unprepared for future work with neurodiverse students (Murray, 2019).

Impact of In-Service Preparation on Inclusive Education

Teachers report a higher level of confidence in their abilities to work in an inclusive classroom when professional development, coupled with ongoing coaching, is provided (Coogle et al., 2022). Coogle et al. (2022) noted that although professional development increases a teacher's knowledge, ongoing coaching increases the likelihood that learned strategies will be implemented with fidelity. Yang et al. (2022) found that

online coaching improved scores on scales measuring the quality of relationships between teachers and students. Likewise, language and literacy measures improve in a coaching environment (Lonigan et al., 2011).

Theoretical Foundations

Child Development Theories

Teaching strategies implemented in early childhood classrooms are largely rooted in theories of child development. Developmental theories can be classified in five areas: maturationist, constructivist, behaviorist, psychoanalytic, and ecological (Saracho, 2023). Such theories seek to better explain how children develop and the meaning of their behavior (Saracho, 2023). These theories also serve as the foundation for inclusive education practices (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; Zaretsky, 2005).

Maturation Theory

Maturation theory focuses on a child's development rather than chronological age and maintains that children must be provided with developmentally appropriate activities to foster growth (Hunt, 1961; Saracho, 2023). G. Stanley Hall was the first to introduce the idea of developmentally appropriate practice (Saracho, 2023). Arnold Gesell built on Hall's work and eventually developed the first timetables of child development (Saracho, 2023). Developmentally appropriate practice continues to be a hallmark of ECE today (NAEYC, 2020). Maturation theory's alignment to UDL's individualized approach makes it a valuable construct when designing inclusive classroom environments.

Constructivist Theory

Constructivist theory is also based on child development and asserts that children interpret knowledge about the outside world to adjust their understanding of their

environment (Saracho, 2023). The research of Jean Piaget, Lev Vygotsky, and Jerome Bruner has bolstered the constructivist theory that development is rooted in a child's interactions both with the environment and with others (Saracho, 2023). According to Jones and Brader-Araje (2002), constructivist theory influences education through the idea that knowledge is gained through processes rather than products. Vygotsky also posited that learning occurs during social interactions (Saracho, 2023). When combined with research demonstrating that inclusive ECE results in improved social-emotional outcomes for all students, the constructivist becomes an important component of inclusive early childhood classrooms (Coogle et al., 2022; Ogelman & Secer, 2012).

Behaviorist Theory

Behaviorist theory is based on a focus on reinforcement and associations to shape learning (Saracho, 2023; Schunk, 2021). B. F. Skinner, John Watson, and Ivan Pavlov have contributed to the foundation of behaviorist theory (Saracho, 2023). B. F. Skinner's work on operant conditioning influences teaching practices in special education such as applied behavior analysis and is often used when teaching students with autism (Ali & Fazil, 2022). One component of behaviorist theory is Thorndike's law of effect. Thorndike theorized that students learn through the creation of habits (Saracho, 2023). Engagement with neurotypical peers provides students with disabilities an opportunity to form social and linguistic habits from an early age. Research supported that students with disabilities who begin their educational program in an inclusive early childhood program are more likely to remain in full or partial inclusion programs through early elementary school, elevating the importance of the formation of prosocial habits (Guralnick et al., 2008; Hanson et al., 2001).

Psychoanalytic Theory

Psychoanalytic theory explains human behavior by helping people understand how a child's unconscious explains the child's behavior and feelings (Saracho, 2023). It also theorizes that unconscious childhood memories can alter adult personality (Saracho, 2023). Research conducted by Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson contributes to the foundation of education by recognizing that children's experiences contribute to their mental health and development and that children require an encouraging environment to thrive (Saracho, 2023). Today's early childhood programs are rooted in play as a primary approach for teaching young students (Baker, 2019). Psychoanalytic theories emphasize the importance of allowing children to express themselves through play and other forms of expression. Fostering the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education early childhood programs provides them with the opportunity to learn through play alongside their neurotypical peers.

Ecological Theory

Ecological theory is based on the interactions individuals have with their environment. Specifically, Bronfenbrenner's theories are based on an understanding that children need to be explicitly taught to understand the environment and the role they play in it through short educational segments (Feriver et al., 2022; Saracho, 2023). The interconnection of parents, teachers, the community, and culture during early childhood is demonstrated in Bronfenbrenner's theories (Saracho, 2023). Thus, high-quality early childhood classroom settings can play an important role in the development of all children as they prepare for kindergarten through 12th-grade education.

Impact of Child Development Theories on ECE

Today's early childhood classrooms are heavily rooted in child development theories. High-quality early childhood classrooms move from theory to practice as they integrate elements of maturationist, constructivist, behaviorist, psychoanalytic, and ecological theories. According to Al-Shammari et al. (2019), effective inclusive educational programs leverage these theories when making curricular and programmatic decisions for students. The UDL framework successfully integrates learner variability into its framework, further bolstering the impact of child development theories on best instructional practices. One way to move from theory to practice is through the use of developmentally appropriate practices (DAP) in the planning and development of inclusive early childhood educational settings (NAEYC, 2020).

NAEYC Key Guidelines for Early Childhood Professionals

The NAEYC (2020) is a professional organization focused on defining and supporting the implementation of high-quality ECE practices. An integral element of high-quality ECE classrooms is the implementation of DAP. NAEYC defined DAP as "methods that promote each child's optimal development and learning through a strengths-based, play-based approach to joyful, engaged learning" (p. 5). At its core, the NAEYC framework seeks to provide engaging, high-quality instruction to all students in a format that meets their developmental and educational needs. NAEYC has identified six key areas of developmentally appropriate practice that are consistent with the professional standards and competencies for early childhood educators and that form the foundation of successful early childhood programs.

Theoretical Framework

In 2016, Booth and Ainscow developed a framework known as the Index for Inclusion. Developed as an interactive tool, the purpose of the index was to support the development of inclusive educational opportunities and was designed to serve as a launchpad for collaborative conversations among educational partners (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Booth et al., 2015; Sánchez et al., 2019). Booth and Ainscow (2016) included three main dimensions: creating inclusive cultures (Dimension A), producing inclusive policies (Dimension B), and evolving inclusive education (Dimension C). Through the evaluation of these dimensions, educational institutions are provided with a framework to identify and remove barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Rather than focusing solely on structured academic activities, The Index for Inclusion examines all aspects of an educational program, including unstructured locations such as recess. In addition, it guides users to consider a plan of action for the entire school, including in staff break rooms, the office, and in conversations with parents and caregivers.

In its entirety, the Index for Inclusion serves as a catalyst for a paradigm shift for the entire school community. Rather than being designed to address the needs of one specific group of children, the Index for Inclusion is designed to bring access to all members of a school community and, by extension, society (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). Booth and Ainscow (2016) identified inclusive values that are at the core of a mindset shift toward inclusive education and that drive the dimensions of the index: equality, participation, community, respect for diversity, and sustainability (Figure 3). An understanding of how values affect structures can guide educational institutions to focus

on sustainable organizational change instead of simply enrolling more students with disabilities into general education classrooms (Booth & Ainscow, 2016).

Figure 3

Booth and Ainscow's Framework of Values

Figure 2 Inclusive values

Structures	–	Relationships	–	Spirit
Equality		Respect for diversity		Joy
Rights		Non-violence		Love
Participation		Trust		Hope/optimism
Community		Compassion		Beauty
Sustainability		Honesty		
		Courage		

Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 22, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

School Development Cycle

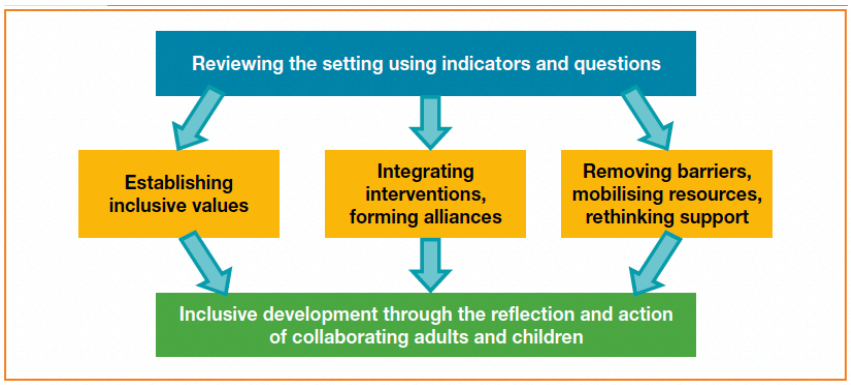
The Index for Inclusion provides structured supports for schools and educational organizations that help to develop an inclusive culture. Booth and Ainscow (2016) focused on three main questions, which guided the development of the index and its three dimensions:

- What are the implications of inclusive values for action in all aspects of a school?
- How can we draw together principled approaches to the development of education?
- How can we remove barriers to learning and participation and mobilize resources to support learning and participation for all? (p. 51)

Figure 4 provides a visual representation of the systems change envisioned by Booth and Ainscow.

Figure 4

Supporting Inclusive Development With the Index for Inclusion



Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 51, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

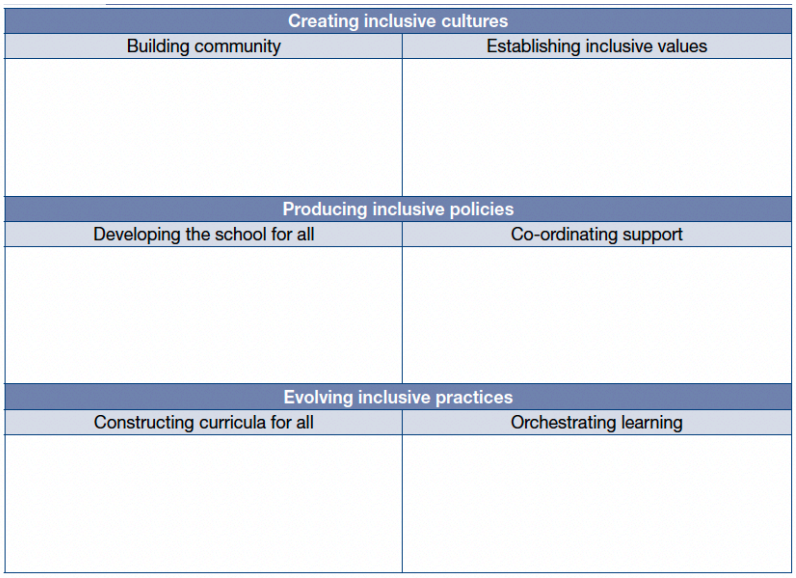
To provide schools and educational organizations with structured supports to facilitate systems change, the Index for Inclusion includes questionnaires to facilitate collaborative conversations in each of three change dimensions. Booth and Ainscow (2016) further provided a planning framework that schools can complete as they explore the guided questions provided in each dimension. Figure 5 shows the planning framework developed by Booth and Ainscow.

Each dimension in the Index for Inclusion is divided into subcategories; each subcategory includes a series of questions designed to serve as the base for collaborative conversations among educational partners when they design inclusive schools or programs. Combined, the dimensions and corresponding questions and structuring

devices provide educational organizations and programs with scaffolded guidance when developing inclusive schools and programs.

Figure 5

Index for Inclusion's Planning Framework



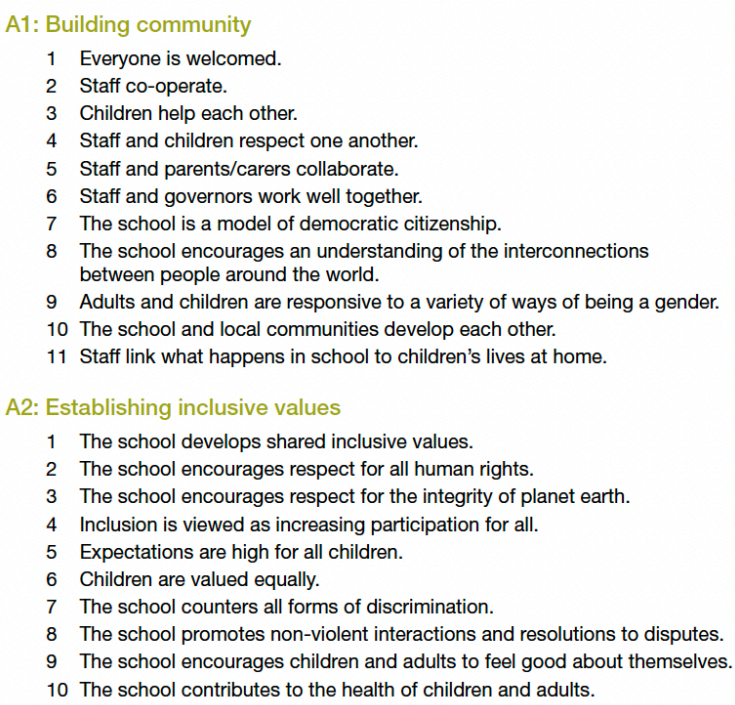
Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 48, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Dimension A: Creating Inclusive Cultures

Dimension A, creating inclusive cultures, is broken down into two main subcategories: building community (A1) and establishing inclusive values (A2). Each subcategory is further expanded with guiding principles. Dimension A focuses on community and values and highlights the importance of an inclusive mindset when designing inclusive programs. Figure 6 highlights the two subcategories of Dimension A and the guiding principles for each subcategory.

Figure 6

Index for Inclusion Dimension A



A1: Building community

1 Everyone is welcomed.
2 Staff co-operate.
3 Children help each other.
4 Staff and children respect one another.
5 Staff and parents/carers collaborate.
6 Staff and governors work well together.
7 The school is a model of democratic citizenship.
8 The school encourages an understanding of the interconnections between people around the world.
9 Adults and children are responsive to a variety of ways of being a gender.
10 The school and local communities develop each other.
11 Staff link what happens in school to children's lives at home.

A2: Establishing inclusive values

1 The school develops shared inclusive values.
2 The school encourages respect for all human rights.
3 The school encourages respect for the integrity of planet earth.
4 Inclusion is viewed as increasing participation for all.
5 Expectations are high for all children.
6 Children are valued equally.
7 The school counters all forms of discrimination.
8 The school promotes non-violent interactions and resolutions to disputes.
9 The school encourages children and adults to feel good about themselves.
10 The school contributes to the health of children and adults.

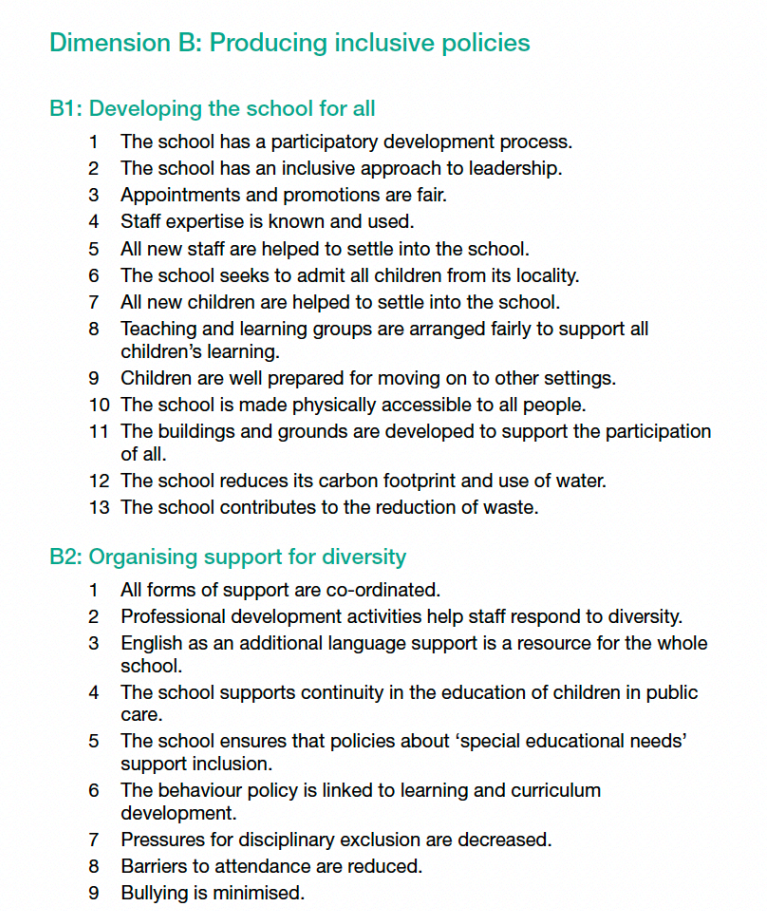
Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 14, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Dimension B: Producing Inclusive Policies

Dimension B, producing inclusive policies, is broken down into two main subcategories: developing the school for all (B1) and organizing support for diversity (B2). Each subcategory is further expanded with guiding principles. Dimension B focuses on diversity and universal access and prompts schools and programs to consider social, emotional, physical, and academic access for all students. Figure 7 highlights the two subcategories of Dimension B and the guiding principles for each subcategory.

Figure 7

Index for Inclusion Dimension B



Dimension B: Producing inclusive policies

B1: Developing the school for all

1 The school has a participatory development process.
2 The school has an inclusive approach to leadership.
3 Appointments and promotions are fair.
4 Staff expertise is known and used.
5 All new staff are helped to settle into the school.
6 The school seeks to admit all children from its locality.
7 All new children are helped to settle into the school.
8 Teaching and learning groups are arranged fairly to support all children's learning.
9 Children are well prepared for moving on to other settings.
10 The school is made physically accessible to all people.
11 The buildings and grounds are developed to support the participation of all.
12 The school reduces its carbon footprint and use of water.
13 The school contributes to the reduction of waste.

B2: Organising support for diversity

1 All forms of support are co-ordinated.
2 Professional development activities help staff respond to diversity.
3 English as an additional language support is a resource for the whole school.
4 The school supports continuity in the education of children in public care.
5 The school ensures that policies about 'special educational needs' support inclusion.
6 The behaviour policy is linked to learning and curriculum development.
7 Pressures for disciplinary exclusion are decreased.
8 Barriers to attendance are reduced.
9 Bullying is minimised.

Note. From Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools (4th ed.), pp. 14–15, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

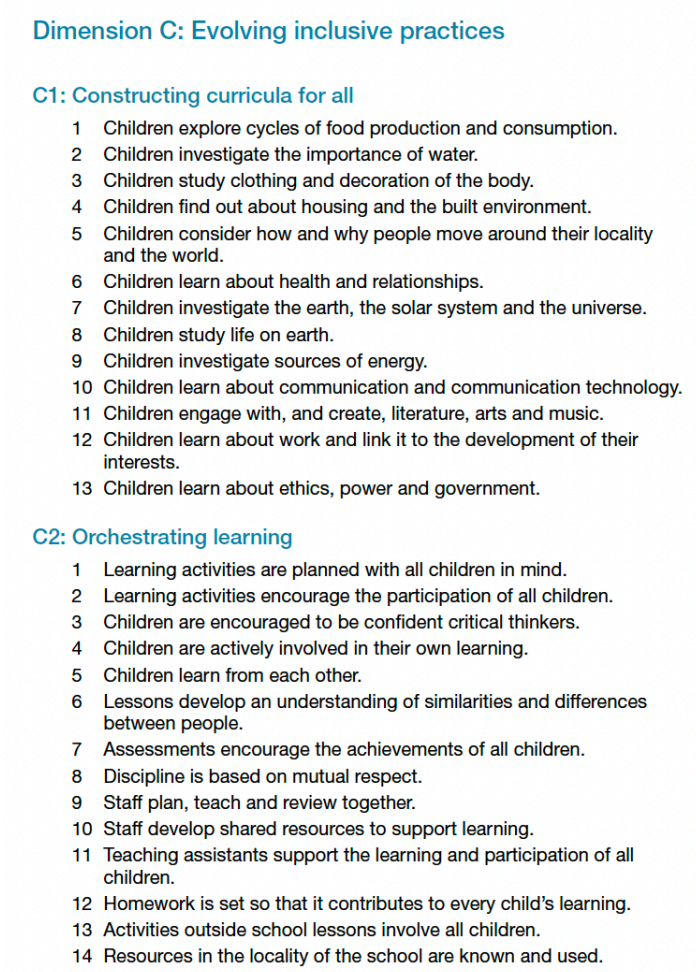
Dimension C: Evolving Inclusive Policies

Dimension C, evolving inclusive policies, is broken down into two main subcategories: constructing curricula for all (C1) and orchestrating learning (C2). Unlike Dimensions A and B, Dimension C includes an outline for schools to consider when reviewing curricula. Rather than providing specific questions in each subcategory for consideration, this dimension focuses on unnumbered questions in each curricular area

and is focused on learning that is "active, critical, and reflective" (Booth & Ainscow, 2016, p. 121*).* Figure 8 highlights the two subcategories of Dimension C and the guiding principles for each subcategory.

Figure 8

Index for Inclusion Dimension C



Dimension C: Evolving inclusive practices

C1: Constructing curricula for all

1 Children explore cycles of food production and consumption.
2 Children investigate the importance of water.
3 Children study clothing and decoration of the body.
4 Children find out about housing and the built environment.
5 Children consider how and why people move around their locality and the world.
6 Children learn about health and relationships.
7 Children investigate the earth, the solar system and the universe.
8 Children study life on earth.
9 Children investigate sources of energy.
10 Children learn about communication and communication technology.
11 Children engage with, and create, literature, arts and music.
12 Children learn about work and link it to the development of their interests.
13 Children learn about ethics, power and government.

C2: Orchestrating learning

1 Learning activities are planned with all children in mind.
2 Learning activities encourage the participation of all children.
3 Children are encouraged to be confident critical thinkers.
4 Children are actively involved in their own learning.
5 Children learn from each other.
6 Lessons develop an understanding of similarities and differences between people.
7 Assessments encourage the achievements of all children.
8 Discipline is based on mutual respect.
9 Staff plan, teach and review together.
10 Staff develop shared resources to support learning.
11 Teaching assistants support the learning and participation of all children.
12 Homework is set so that it contributes to every child's learning.
13 Activities outside school lessons involve all children.
14 Resources in the locality of the school are known and used.

Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 15, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

Summary

An examination of the literature on inclusive education programs revealed that successful initiatives are rooted in theories of child development. Evidence-based components, such as strong administrative leadership, MTSS, ongoing professional development, instructional coaching, engagement with families and communities, and an inclusive policy framework are also imperative when designing inclusive programs (Coogle, 2022; Jiménez et al., 2007; McCart et al., 2014; Olson & Ruppar, 2017; Yang et al., 2022). Despite research indicating improved outcomes for students in inclusive settings, ECE students are more often placed in segregated settings than inclusive settings (Hanson et al., 2001). Universally designed early childhood classrooms serve as a foundation for social and linguistic development for all students throughout their preschool years and beyond (Coogle et al., 2022). Providing in-service preparation to prospective teachers on EBPs for students with disabilities also plays a crucial role in establishing successful inclusive programs (Florian & Linklater, 2010). The Index for Inclusion developed by Booth and Ainscow (2016) provides educational organizations and programs with a structured framework to guide policy, practice, and the universal design of programs and curricula.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research design to discover the perceived barriers for the implementation of inclusive education as identified by early childhood teachers. A thorough research review revealed that early childhood students with disabilities are more commonly placed in segregated, rather than inclusive, early childhood classrooms (Hanson et al., 2001). According to the CDE (2021), just 36.9% of preschool students with disabilities participate in general education early childhood programs. Stayton (2015) noted that limited research has been conducted in the area of blended preservice and in-service teacher preparation despite research indicating that inclusive early childhood programs produce improved outcomes for all children.

This chapter presents the research methodology and purpose statement for this study. After restating the purpose statement and research questions, this chapter details the rationale for the selected research design. Next, the population, target population, and sampling methods are outlined. Following this section, the validity and reliability are detailed, including the data collection and data analysis procedures. After describing the study's limitations, this chapter closes with a summary of study methodology.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive education. A further

purpose of this study was to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. A final purpose of this study was to study to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to investigate the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood, the strategies for overcoming these barriers, and the preservice and in-service preparation that early childhood teachers receive to support the implementation of inclusive education

1. What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
3. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?
4. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

Research Design

Qualitative research can be conducted in a variety of formats, such as ethnography, phenomenology, case study, grounded theory, and critical studies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To conduct this study, I first analyzed these qualitative research designs. In phenomenological research, the researcher collects data on how an

individual experiences and makes sense of a situation (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Williams (2021) stated that the purpose of a phenomenological design is to "convey the nuances of experience amongst interlocutors" (p. 374). A phenomenological approach culminates in the summary of the lived experiences of a group of individuals who all experience a common phenomenon and a subsequent common meaning of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Prosek & Gibson, 2021.)

Qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the social dynamics and experiences of the study participants. Qualitative phenomenological research collects data through the use of direct observations that are recorded as well as through interviews, the results of which are then categorized into themes (Patten & Newhart, 2018; Patton, 2015). In this study, I sought to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of early childhood teachers as they implement inclusive education in early childhood education (ECE) settings. Thus, a qualitative phenomenological methodology was the most appropriate design for this study. I conducted semistructured interview questions and collected artifacts. Through the use of inductive analysis, researchers employing qualitative phenomenological research designs identify patterns, themes, and categories from the collected data (Patton, 2015). Through an analysis of this data, I showed the relationship of these data patterns, themes, and categories.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is "a group of elements or cases, whether individual, objects, or events, that conform to a specific criterion and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). The population for this study was Head Start, California State Preschool Program (CSPP), and

Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) teachers in California. There were approximately 4,100 Head Start teachers, 5,150 CSPP teachers, and 3,300 ECSE teachers in California (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021); thus, the population for this study was 12,550. A population this large is not practicable to study; therefore, a target population was identified to reduce the population to a smaller, more manageable size.

Target Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), a target population is the population to which the research results are generalized or extrapolated. The target population for this study was teachers in Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE in Riverside County or San Bernardino County in California. There were approximately 420 CSPP teachers, 119 Head Start teachers, and 96 ECSE teachers in Riverside County and approximately 34 CSPP teachers, 170 Head Start teachers, and 130 ECSE teachers in San Bernardino County. Thus, the total population for this study was 969. However, this target population was too large for the resources available for this study, so a sample from the target population was taken.

Sample

The study sample is defined as the group from whom the data will be collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A purposeful sampling technique was used to find the teachers interviewed for this study. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is "strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 265). Practical purposeful sampling, or the practice of setting a minimum number of samples, allows the

author to plan for a specific number of responses yet still be flexible as the research unfolds (Patton, 2015).

The following criteria were used to identify participants in this study:

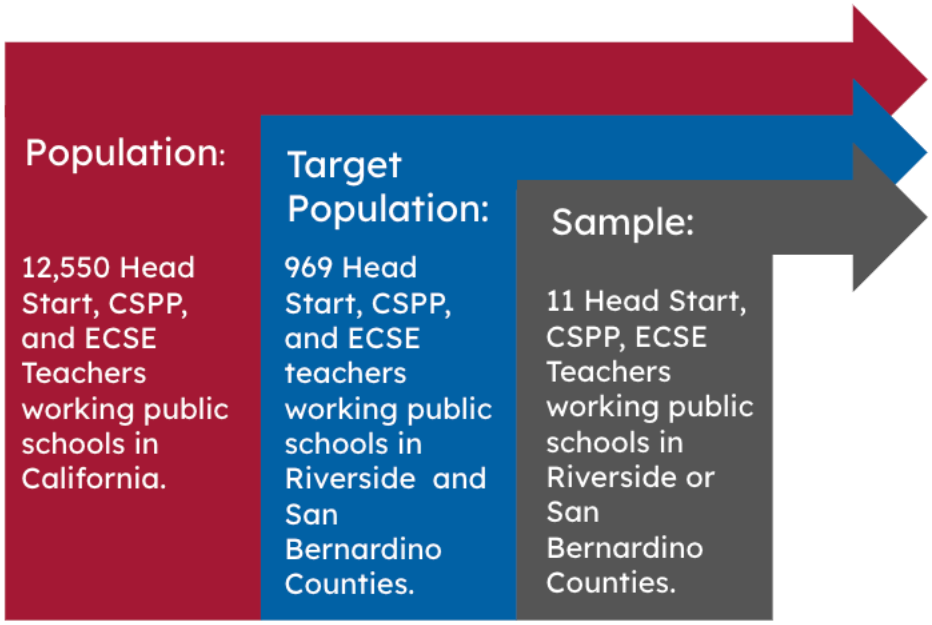
1. They taught in an early childhood classroom.
2. They had at least 2 years of teaching experience.
3. Their school was in Riverside County or San Bernardino County.
4. They were in a Head Start, CSPP, or publicly funded ECSE classroom.
5. They had students with disabilities enrolled in their classroom.
6. They were known for their knowledge and experience about inclusive education.

Sample Size

Qualitative researchers must ensure enough data are collected to allow for generalization of the results to the population. Creswell (2014) suggested researchers identify at least 25 participants in qualitative studies. Alternatively, Patten and Newhart (2018) found that although the average sample size in qualitative research studies is 13, there are few studies that definitively identify the ideal number of participants. I set a minimum number of 11 participants with at least three each from Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE. Figure 9 illustrates the sample selected for this study.

Figure 9

Population, Target Population, and Sample



Sample Selection Process

I employed reputational sampling to describe the lived experiences of early childhood teachers implementing inclusive education. Eleven early childhood teachers were selected using the process described in this section. I first reviewed the staff listings for school districts, Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs), and the County Office of Education in Riverside County and San Bernardino County to identify key leaders in each organization.

The staff listing review revealed several well-respected special education and early childhood administrators in Riverside County and San Bernardino County who were used to help me identify school sites and teachers implementing early childhood inclusive education. The experts included SELPA directors, ECE coordinators, ECE directors, and ECE site administrators who have knowledge of and access to ECE and

ECSE teachers. The identified experts assisted me with the identification of potential participants who met study criteria.

I met with the identified experts via Zoom or telephone and/or exchanged emails to discuss the research questions and the purposeful sampling criteria. The experts identified educators in their organizations whom they recommended as exemplary teachers implementing inclusive education in early childhood. After the experts made an initial contact with their identified teachers, I contacted each potential participant to discuss their participation in the study.

Contact Procedures for Study Participants

The exemplary teachers identified by the experts who agreed to participate in the study received follow-up communication in the following format:

- They were sent an email with a copy of the participation request letter (Appendix A), research proposal, informed consent form (Appendix B), and the audio recording and release form (Appendix C).
- After they completed the informed consent and audio recording and release forms, they were sent a copy of the Interview Protocol and Questions (Appendix D), and an interview date and time was set.
- They were confirmed to participate after completing all required procedures.

Instrumentation

In this phenomenological study, semistructured interview questions were used to conduct interviews aligned with the research questions regarding the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood and the strategies for overcoming these barriers. Prior to collecting data, I conducted an extensive review of

literature related to inclusive education in early childhood. A synthesis matrix was employed to determine the selection of the key authors, Booth and Ainscow (2016), and the three dimensions of their Index for Inclusion as the framework for this study.

Interviews comprised the primary form of data collected for this study. Artifacts were used to support and triangulate the interview data. The interview questions and artifacts collected investigated the preservice and in-service preparation that teachers received to support the implementation of inclusive education in ECE according to the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion (Figure 10).

Figure 10

Booth and Ainscow's Index Dimensions of Development

Note. From *Index for inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools* (4th ed.), p. 45, by T. Booth & M. Ainscow, 2016, Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. Copyright 2016 by Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education.

The three dimensions set the foundation for the study and interview questions:

- Dimension A: Creating inclusive cultures
- Dimension B: Producing inclusive policies
- Dimension C: Evolving inclusive education

For this study, seven interview questions were developed based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion. I reviewed the interview questions and the Index for Inclusion to ensure alignment. Based on this review, I revised the interview questions prior to the initiation of the first interview. I field-tested the interview guide and questions with an early childhood educator who was not a study participant as an added layer of review of the interview question effectiveness. The primary form of data collection for this study was interview questions and the collection of relevant artifacts.

Interviews

According to Patton (2015), interviews allow the researcher to investigate topics that cannot be directly observed in order to understand the participant's perspective. In this study, scripted, open-ended interview questions were designed prior to the initiation of the study and were designed to gain a clear understanding of the experiences of early childhood teachers as they implement inclusive education in their classrooms.

The following interview best practices outlined by Patton (2015) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) were applied:

- establish genuine rapport,
- establish trust,
- maintain eye contact, and
- convey that the researcher connects with the participant through tone and rhythm.

Patton (2015) noted that semistructured interviews combine the strength of carefully crafted interview questions with the ability to probe for additional information as needed to gather rich data. In this study, semistructured interview questions were

combined with probing questions for additional information to elicit detailed data from the participants about their experiences, knowledge, and thoughts (Patton, 2015). Interviews were conducted face-to-face when feasible or via Zoom and were recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure accuracy of data and to obtain responses from participants.

Interview Guide Procedures

To ensure consistency in the interviews, an interview guide was developed that was provided to each participant prior to the scheduled interview. The following best practices outlined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010) were included in the interview guide: a statement of the research focus and purpose, a copy of the research questions, and the definitions of key terms. Prior to beginning the interview, I introduced myself and provided a summary of my background to ease interview-related discomfort and to build rapport with the participants. The seven interview questions were developed based on the three dimensions of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2016). Interviews were scheduled for 60 min and on average lasted from 30 to 45 min.

I began the interview by thanking the participants for their participation in the study and for providing helpful information about their experiences implementing inclusive education in early childhood classrooms. I then introduced the purpose of the study and asked the participants whether they had questions about any of the included documents. Last, prior to initiating the interview questions, I reviewed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) documentation with the participants, including the Participant's Bill of Rights, the participant consent form, and a confidentiality agreement.

The use of an interview guide and semistructured interview questions was designed to reduce variability in understanding of the interview questions by participants. This method also maximized efficiency in interviews, thereby creating the ideal format to evoke rich responses from each participant.

Artifacts

According to McMillian and Schumacher (2010), three types of artifacts are collected in qualitative research: personal documents, official documents, and external communications. Relevant artifacts related to the research questions were collected to validate interview data. To improve the validity of this study, I conducted an artifact review to triangulate the artifacts and interview data. In addition, I cross-referenced data to strengthen the validity of the identified themes and findings. Artifacts were collected to supplement interview transcriptions.

Background information was collected from the participants at the time of the interview, including the number years of experience teaching and what type of program the participant taught. In addition, interview-related communications were preserved as artifacts. Participants were also asked whether they had any additional artifacts of importance to share during the interview.

Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative research design, the researcher serves as the data collection instrument (Patton, 2015). Creswell and Creswell (2020) noted that the background and personal views of the researcher can lead to bias and affect the research.

At the time of the study, I worked as a coordinator overseeing pupil services and SELPA, leading a transition toward inclusive education in transitional kindergarten (TK)

through 12th grade in the district. I had previously taught in a segregated, self-contained early childhood special day class for 8 years and in a cotaught inclusive early childhood classroom for 1 year. In addition, I led the district's 5-year plan to increase early childhood inclusive education. As a result, I currently have personal experiences with the benefits and challenges of inclusive ECE and, therefore, may have developed insight into and potential bias related to inclusive ECE.

For this study, to mitigate bias, I collaborated with a panel of experts in the development of the interview protocol. In addition, the interview method was rehearsed with a pilot interview participant, thereby reducing the impact of potential bias. I personally conducted all interviews, including the field testing, to collect data. Interviews were conducted in person and via Zoom, depending on the availability and location of the participants.

Validity

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), data collection and analysis form the foundation of qualitative research. To ensure this study's credibility, I conducted an in-depth review of literature related to inclusive education in early childhood. A synthesis matrix (Appendix E) was employed to determine the selection of the key authors, Booth and Ainscow (2016), and the three dimensions of their Index for Inclusion as the framework for this study. In addition, I asked a doctoral candidate with knowledge in the selected framework and qualitative research to review the framework and interview questions for alignment.

Additional steps to ensure the validity of this study were incorporated. First, I ensured that the participant selection met the sample selection process. Next, I checked

the interview question alignment to ensure the interview questions satisfied the purpose of the study and the research questions (Appendix F). I then provided each study participant with a copy of the interview question guide. I further sought validity by triangulating the interview questions. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), triangulation of data refers to "cross-validation among data-sources [and] data collection strategies" (p. 370). I coded the participant responses into themes and compared the responses and themes for patterns. Finally, I transcribed the interviews and provided them to participants to check for accuracy. Combined, these methods satisfied the triangulation method of establishing validity as outlined by McMillan and Schumacher.

Pilot Testing

In qualitative research, pilot testing contributes to the reliability and validity of the study by allowing researchers to refine their research design and methodology while checking for biases (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A pilot test is defined as a practice interview with a participant who matches the demographics of the study participants and is observed by a qualitative researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Pilot testing involves the use of identical procedures and questions as in the study interviews. Pilot testing helps to establish a foundation for the collection of valid and reliable data. I reviewed the interview guide and questions with the observer after the pilot test interview to evaluate for clarity and alignment to the research questions and completed the feedback reflection questions (Appendix G).

At the conclusion of the pilot interview, feedback was sought from the pilot participant (Appendix H). Adjustments were made to the interview guide and questions

based on this feedback. For this study, an ECSE teacher was interviewed as the pilot participant.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency of the researcher's approach and instrumentation among study participants (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, I collected data through document review and interviews. Collecting and comparing multiple data sources supported the reliability of this study. I developed semistructured, open-ended questions aligned to the research questions, asked the questions to each participant in the same order, and compared and analyzed the responses for accuracy. In addition, all interviews were recorded and stored in a secure drive available only to me. Finally, I field-tested the interview protocol and questions on an early childhood educator who was not a study participant. Field-testing the study questions allowed me to ensure that the questions were well developed and easy to understand and resulted in similar responses as the participants.

Intercoder Reliability

Patton (2015) recommended that researchers implement intercoder reliability procedures to increase validity and reliability and reduce bias in qualitative studies. Intercoder reliability refers to having at least two coders analyze the data and themes. In this study, I increased reliability by selecting a doctoral researcher to serve as a second coder for at least 10% of the collected data, including the review of one transcribed interview. I set a requirement of 80% or greater agreement between the intercoder and me to enter the data into the study.

Data Collection

Human Subjects Consideration

I gathered data through interviews, artifacts, and observations. I was granted permission to conduct the study with human subjects from UMass Global University Institutional Review Board (Appendix I) and completed the CITI Program course for Human Subjects Research (Appendix J). Participants were provided with the Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix K) and were asked to review and consent to an informed consent letter (Appendix B).

I reviewed and followed established data collection procedures throughout the data collection process. Eleven interviews were conducted either in person or virtually on Zoom. Procedures for the interviews included the following:

- Participants were emailed communication explaining the purpose of the study and inviting them to participate.
- Participants provided written consent to the voluntary participation, audio recording release, and confidentiality of the study.
- Participants were sent follow-up email communication verifying their voluntary participation in the study and their selected interview time and provided the interview guide.
- Participant interviews were conducted using semistructured, open-ended questions.
- Participants' identities were masked through the assignment of a numeral code throughout the interview and data collection process.

Participants were provided with the Interview Protocol and Questions, which included my background, contact information, and an overview of the study. I maintained

confidential copies of the informed consent forms and interview transcripts. Consent for interview recording was obtained from each participant. In addition, each participant was provided with a form to request copies of the interview transcripts.

I ensured participant privacy throughout the study by securely storing the study data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Each participant was coded with a letter to maintain confidentiality of personal information in the study. The only individuals with knowledge of participant identifying information included me and my dissertation chair. The study data, including interview transcripts and artifacts, were stored securely for 3 years and subsequently destroyed.

Interview Process

Prior to each interview, participants were provided with the interview guide. The interview guide contained a summary of the purpose of the study, the interview questions, and key definitions. The seven interview questions were developed based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion. I designed semistructured, open-ended interview questions that were reviewed by experts for this study.

Prior to beginning each interview, I thanked the participants for their participation and shared an overview of the study. My background was also shared with participants. I reviewed participants' confidentiality agreement, and they were reminded of the voluntary nature of the interview. With their consent, each interview was recorded and subsequently transcribed. I further reminded participants that they were free to terminate the interview or their participation in the study at any time. Interviews ranged from 30 to 45 min per participant. At the conclusion of the interview, I thanked the participants for

their willingness to participate in the study. After each interview, the audio recording of the interview was transcribed. Participants were asked to review the transcription for accuracy. I used an electronic qualitative analysis program called NVivo to assess and code the data.

Artifact Collection

I requested the participants to bring self-identified relevant artifacts with them to their interviews. Artifacts gathered for this qualitative phenomenological study included email communications scheduling the interviews, daily classroom schedules, visual supports for inclusive education, and flyers for training opportunities for families. With participants' permission, I took pictures of their classrooms to include as artifacts.

Data Analysis

I reviewed the data collected during the 11 interviews. The interview recordings were first transcribed. Participants were asked to review the interview transcripts for accuracy prior to data evaluation. I used an electronic qualitative analysis program called NVivo to assess and code the data. Data for each research question were grouped into codes, data segments, and themes. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), selecting themes is the first level of induction in qualitative analysis as the researcher uses inferential reasoning to interpret meaning from data segments. Similarly, Patton (2015) described coding as the way researchers discover patterns and frequencies in the data and group them into themes, categories, and assertions.

The following data analysis procedures were followed for this study:

- I scanned the data for themes related to the research questions.
- I identified the themes related to the research questions.

- I coded the data using NVivo software and examined the frequency of the themes related to the research questions.
- I established intercoder reliability by asking an expert in qualitative phenomenological research to review the data and verify that it had been coded appropriately.
- I generated a frequency table to display common response patterns among all participants.

Data Representation

Data were reviewed multiple times throughout the study period to ensure identification of emergent themes. A table identifying the highest frequency count themes for each research question was developed. Displayed data included frequency counts for each theme, the highest number of participants who responded to that theme, and artifact counts for each theme. A data analysis that consisted of representative participant comments from each theme was also provided.

Limitations

In qualitative research, limitations refer to the impact of study characteristics, such as time, reduced generalization, geography, sample size, and personal opinions (Creswell & Creswell, 2020; Patton, 2015). In this study, the researcher as an instrument of the study, time, sample size, and self-reported data were all considered limitations.

Researcher as Instrument

I limited potential bias in this study through the use of an interview guide; structured interview procedures; and open-ended, structured questions. In addition, intercoder reliability was employed to ensure accuracy of the thematic coding of the data.

Time

Qualitative research involves the use of interviews as a primary form of data collection (Patten & Newhart, 2018; Patton, 2015). Time is required to travel to each participant for in-person interviews, to conduct the interview, to transcribe the interview, and to code the interview. I scheduled off-duty days and conducted interviews after work and on weekends to ensure enough time was allocated for the collection and analysis of data for this study.

Sample Size

Patten and Newhart (2018) found that although the average sample size in qualitative research studies is 13, there are few studies that definitively identify the ideal number of participants. I set a minimum number of 11 participants with at least three each from Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE. The small sample size limited generalization of the study's findings to larger populations.

Self-Reported Data

In qualitative research, study participants self-report their lived experiences during a semistructured interview. I mitigated the impact of self-report through the triangulation of data with the responses of other participants and artifacts.

Summary

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to describe the lived experiences of early childhood teachers implementing inclusive education. This chapter outlined the study and research questions, the data collection process, data analysis procedures, and possible limitations of the study. An expanded description of the data collection process is included in Chapter IV along with data findings for the study.

The final analysis in Chapter V summarizes the research findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV describes the methodology used in this study, including data collection and data analysis. This chapter also presents the research methodology and purpose statement and the population, sample, and demographics. The main objective of this chapter is to present the study findings, specifically qualitative data describing the lived experiences of early childhood education (ECE) teachers as they implement inclusive education in ECE settings. Additional data findings related to the preservice and in-service preparation that has been provided to early childhood teachers who implement inclusive education are presented.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive education. A further purpose of this study was to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. A final purpose of this study was to study to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to investigate the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood, the strategies for overcoming

these barriers, and the preservice and in-service preparation that early childhood teachers receive to support the implementation of inclusive education:

1. What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
3. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?
4. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to investigate the lived experiences of ECE teachers as they implement inclusive education in ECE settings as well as the preservice and in-service preparation they have received to teach in inclusive ECE classrooms. I conducted semistructured interviews with 11 ECE teachers who taught in either Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Head Start, or California State Preschool Program (CSPP) classroom. Each participant had at least 2 years of experience teaching in an early childhood classroom in Riverside County or San Bernardino County. Interviews were conducted either virtually or in person and were recorded with the consent of each participant. I stored the study's data on a secure drive.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is "a group of elements or cases, whether individual, objects, or events, that conform to a specific

criterion and to which we intend to generalize the results of the research" (p. 129). The population for this study was teachers in Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE in California. There were approximately 4,100 Head Start teachers, 5,150 CSPP teachers, and 3,300 ECSE teachers in California (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021); thus, the population for this study was 12,550. A population this large was not practicable to study; therefore, a target population was identified to reduce the population to a smaller, more manageable size.

Target Population

According to Patten and Newhart (2018), a target population is the population to which the research results are generalized or extrapolated. The target population for this study was teachers in Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE in Riverside County or San Bernardino County in California. There were approximately 420 CSPP teachers, 119 Head Start teachers, and 96 ECSE teachers in Riverside County and approximately 34 CSPP teachers, 170 Head Start teachers, and 130 ECSE teachers in San Bernardino County. Thus, the total population for this study was 969. However, this target population was too large for the resources available for this study, so a sample from the target population was taken.

Sample

The study sample is defined as the group from whom the data will be collected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A purposeful sampling technique was used to find the teachers interviewed for this study. According to Patton (2015), purposeful sampling is "strategically selecting information-rich cases to study, cases that by their nature and substance will illuminate the inquiry question being investigated" (p. 265). Practical purposeful sampling, or the practice of setting a minimum number of samples, allowed

me to plan for a specific number of responses yet still be flexible as the research unfolded (Patton, 2015).

The following criteria were used to identify participants in this study:

1. They taught in an early childhood classroom.
2. They had at least 2 years of teaching experience.
3. Their school was in Riverside County or San Bernardino County.
4. They were in a Head Start, CSPP, or publicly funded ECSE classroom.
5. They had students with disabilities enrolled in their classroom.
6. They were known for their knowledge and experience about inclusive education.

I employed reputational sampling to identify participants who met the sample criteria. Eleven early childhood teachers were selected to participate in this study. I first reviewed the staff listings for school districts, Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs), and the County Office of Education in Riverside County and San Bernardino County to identify key leaders in each organization.

The staff listing revealed several well-respected special education and early childhood administrators in Riverside County and San Bernardino County who were used to help me identify school sites and teachers implementing early childhood inclusive education. The expert administrators identified included SELPA directors, ECE coordinators, ECE directors, and ECE site administrators who have knowledge of and access to ECE and ECSE teachers. The experts assisted me with the identification of potential participants who met study criteria.

I met with the identified experts via Zoom or telephone and/or exchanged emails to discuss the research questions and the purposeful sampling criteria. The experts

identified educators in their organizations whom they recommended as exemplary teachers implementing inclusive education in early childhood. After the experts made an initial contact with their identified teachers, I contacted potential participants to discuss their participation in the study.

Intercoder Reliability

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), intercoder reliability refers to the degree of agreement between two or more coders when evaluating data. Higher levels of agreement lead to more reliable study conclusions. In this study, a second doctoral student with knowledge on inclusive education, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and ECE served as a second coder for 10% of the data. I set a goal of 80% or greater intercoder agreement to ensure study reliability.

Demographic Data

Eleven participants matched eligibility criteria and completed all necessary steps of the study including the interview. Interviews were conducted and recorded on Zoom. The interviews were also recorded and transcribed through a recording and transcribing platform to ensure that I had a backup copy of the recording. Participants were described with specific demographic information, including the number of years of teaching experience, the program they taught in, and their employing school district, and county. Table 1 lists the demographic data for the participants, identifying them by a letter from A to K.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant	Total years as an ECE teacher	School district county	Program taught	% of students enrolled in the district	
				Race/ethnicity other than White	SED
A	13	Riverside	ECSE	57.0	21.3
B	10	Riverside	CSPP	96.3	88.5
C	25	Riverside	ECSE	96.5	96.9
D	18	Riverside	CSPP	94.8	28.2
E	28	Riverside	ECSE	57.0	21.3
F	6	San Bernardino	ECSE	84.5	88.3
G	33	Riverside	CSPP	83.0	82.3
H	22	Riverside	Head Start	92.5	89.8
I	5	Riverside	Head Start	-	-
J	2	Riverside	Head Start	96.4	81.0
K	16	Riverside	Head Start	89.9	83.5

Note. No school population information was available for Participant I for race/ethnicity or SED. ECE = early childhood education; SED = socioeconomically disadvantaged; ECSE = early childhood special education; CSPP = California State Preschool Program.

Presentation and Analysis of the Data

I assembled and analyzed data from 11 participants to learn about their experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive education. I conducted semistructured interviews designed with open-ended questions rooted in the Index for Inclusion as well as information gathered during an in-depth literature review. Participants answered the research questions through an extensive analysis of qualitative data gathered through

virtual and in-person interviews. I spent 5 and a half hr conducting interviews and 7 hr analyzing the data.

Data Analysis for Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?" The following sections summarize the qualitative data from 11 interviews with ECE teachers that were categorized into themes. The information presented came primarily from Interview Questions 1, 2, and 3. Each subsection that follows reflects responses by participants to Research Question 1. Each theme and the frequency of occurrence is listed in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes, Participants, and Highest to Lowest Frequency for Research Question 1

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. Lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities	8	13
2. Rules and regulations	7	12
3. District resources, including fiscal and personnel	6	13
4. Lack of communication	4	9
5. Attitudes toward inclusive practices	2	9

Eight of the 11 participants identified lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities as the most significant barrier toward inclusive practices, with a frequency count of 13. Seven participants identified rules and regulations as the second most frequently cited theme, with a frequency count of 12. The third most frequently cited barrier was district resources, including fiscal and personnel, with six of 11 participants mentioning this theme, with a frequency count of 13. The

fourth most frequently cited barrier was communication with four participants referencing it nine times. Finally, attitudes toward inclusive education was mentioned by two participants referencing it nine times. This information was primarily obtained from first and second interview questions. The next sections provide an analysis of the themes related to Research Question 1 based on the individual experiences of the study participants.

Theme 1: Lack of Familiarity and/or Training in Inclusive Practices and Students With Disabilities

The first interview question for this study asked participants to describe the barriers to learning and participation by all students that arise within the school. The second interview question asked participants to identify who experiences barriers to learning and participation by all students. An analysis of the data suggested that the primary challenge to the successful implementation of inclusive practices is a lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities. Eight of 11 participants mentioned ways in which inadequate training and a lack of awareness of inclusive practices impacted the successful implementation of inclusive education. Table 3 shows the data for this theme.

Table 3

Research Question 1, Theme 1: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. Lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities	8	13

Although federal and state regulations require that students with disabilities participate in general education to the maximum extent practicable, many school districts fall short of compliance with this requirement. Many ECE teachers are therefore unfamiliar with inclusive practices, the accompanying strategies, or the supporting research. Participants B, C, D, E, and F all made note of a lack of awareness of strategies for interacting with students with disabilities as a barrier for the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Participant C commented, "Sometimes the gen ed practitioners are not always familiar with some of the strategies we use. So their knowledge of students with special needs is very limited." Participant B, a general education teacher, discussed that she has training to work with students with disabilities but that her instructional assistant does not, making it difficult for her to meet the needs of all students in the classroom.

Head Start and CSPP enroll students with identified and suspected disabilities and serve students with varying linguistic, social-emotional, and developmental backgrounds. Lack of familiarity with positive behavioral interventions was noted by Participants B, D, E, F, G, and R. Participant E commented that the behaviors of students with disabilities can be a challenge in general education settings and stated, "A lot of times, people aren't trained on how to deal with behavior." Participant G, a general education teacher, noted, "We really don't know how to help them." Participant G further noted that this can result in students with disabilities being held to different expectations because she did not have the training or experience to meet their needs. Participant R, a special education teacher, commented, "Some of them have behavior, some of them just have language difficulty … when they get a student that has special needs, they are not trained for it."

Theme 2: Rules and Regulations

The first three interview questions focusing on barriers that teachers experience in the implementation of inclusive practices yielded 12 references by seven of 11 participants related to the theme of rules and regulations. Table 4 shows the data for this theme.

Table 4

Research Question 1, Theme 2: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
2. Rules and regulations	7	12

Head Start and CSPP have strict licensing requirements in place. Although designed to ensure student safety, these regulations can also create barriers to the implementation of inclusive education. Participant G shared, "We're not allowed to comingle, like, for recess. Sometimes she [the general education teacher] would send me a couple of her students, and sometimes I would send her a couple of mine, but that was the extent of that." Similarly, Participant F stated,

> We are always allowed to have the shared playground, but we are limited to 30 minutes. We were planning to coteach, but then we had to pull back because of some barriers that they didn't have waivers put in place, and they thought they did.

Participant J also mentioned waivers:

> My school has a satellite special education preschool classroom next door. And we always want to do a lot of collaboration and working together. But what stops us is the preschool licensing policies and regulations. And we can't just have them

> come in … we have to have our waiver. So even with the waiver that we have, we can only play together outside for only like 30 minutes.

Barriers were also described in fee-based preschool programs. Participant E stated, "Part of the deal with them being a paid preschool is there is no interaction between their kids and our kids. So it's like, how does that help us?"

In addition, some districts run fee-based preschool programs that must also comply with licensing regulations. Participant A noted,

> We now have a gen ed preschool that's through community care licensing. That's at one of our sites. But the kids are not allowed to interact. Their licensing, it makes it that much all the more difficult to be able to do.

Participant H noted that the barriers are both literal and figurative: "I think there's restrictions in place for our licensing. Where I'm at, there's actually like, a gate … we have a fence."

Theme 3: District Resources, Including Fiscal and Personnel

The first research question asked participants about their experiences related to barriers affecting the successful implementation of inclusive practices. District resources, including fiscal and personnel, was the third most frequently cited barrier and was mentioned 13 times by six participants. Responses included in this theme referenced staffing and funding shortages as barriers to the implementation of inclusive practices. Table 5 shows the data for this theme.

Table 5

Research Question 1, Theme 3: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
3. District resources, including fiscal and personnel	6	13

Head Start and CSPP have enrollment targets for students with disabilities. Likewise, students in ECSE programs should be participating in general education to the maximum extent practicable under federal IDEA guidelines. However, six participants mentioned fiscal and staffing shortages as a barrier to inclusive education.

Participants A and E discussed a lack of funding for general education programs in their districts, resulting in a lack of access to general education programs for their students with disabilities to engage with. Participant A shared,

> [We] do not have the ability to have a general education preschool on site to … have gen ed preschool out on the playground so they can play together or anything like that. And I think it comes with budgeting. The school districts don't have the money or resources, I guess, in order to have that.

Participant E noted that lack of funding for general education ECE programs results in lack of access for students with disabilities currently and in the future:

> We don't have a gen ed preschool we can mainstream into. So when I think she can go into gen ed kindergarten, the admin is like no, we should probably keep her in SDC because we have no proof she can mainstream.

Staffing shortages in districts were noted by Participants C, E, G, and H. Participant G, a general education teacher, referenced a monthly planning meeting for

ECE teachers. She stated that often, outside sources and/or trainers are brought in to provide professional development to the teaching staff. However, Participant G noted,

> I have only attended one TLC so far because my shift is 9:30 to 6:00, so it's really hard to shift cover and so I haven't been able to go. So even you have a barrier just being able to access the training.

Similarly, Participant H shared that even when teachers can collaborate, staffing shortages result in a lack of accountability: "We don't see an accountability in a continuum of the collaboration. Nobody really comes in and does a scheduled check-in on how things are going."

Participant E shared how staffing shortages have impacted her ability to teach her students with disabilities the precursor skills they need to successfully participate in an inclusive setting:

> Having the correct staffing can be a barrier, because if you have two or three kids with a behavior support plan and you only have two adults in the room, you can't do their behavior support plan and implement it with any fidelity because you don't have enough hands.

Participant D, a general education teacher who taught in a blended classroom, mentioned the ability to meet the needs of all her students: "My high gen ed kids aren't getting what they need, and her [the special education teacher] low kids aren't getting what they need. You can differentiate instruction, but how do you do that when you've got so many different levels?"

Theme 4: Lack of Communication

The first three interview questions, focusing on barriers teachers experience in the implementation of inclusive practices, resulted in nine references from four of 11 participants, highlighting the theme of lack of communication as a barrier. Table 6 shows the data for this theme.

Table 6

Research Question 1, Theme 4: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
4. Lack of communication	4	9

Four of 11 interview participants mentioned the theme of a lack of communication as a barrier to the implementation of inclusive practices. The specific types of communication varied with site administrators, parents or caregivers, and other teachers. Participants H and I commented on how ineffective communication impacts the successful implementation of inclusive education beginning with enrollment through the referral process for students with identified or suspected disabilities. Participant H shared, "The communication should begin at first meeting or right at the moment of enrollment. And I feel like there's a gap between that, the social service coordination part, [and the] connection with the teachers." Participant H expanded, "And I feel like with the early childhood part of it, we don't see an accountability in a continuum of the collaboration. Nobody really comes in and does a scheduled check-in on how things are going." Likewise, Participant I expanded on this concept with the impact of ineffective communication when students are in need of behavioral supports:

> If I have a child with behavior issues, and I submit a mental health referral and the clinician is in contact with the parent and that person submits to the CST, I think for me it is important to be part of that meetings because I am the person who is teaching in the classroom. The clinician is only going to see that child once or twice throughout the entire year, one or two observations.

Participant I further expanded, "They maybe meet with the parent six times, but with the parent. But that person is not really going to know how the child is behaving in class."

Participants D and G commented on ineffective communication between site and/or district administration and themselves. Participant G commented,

> I think one of the biggest barriers, to be honest, is the lack of communication between admin and teachers. We find ourselves … either you're in limbo or you're just doing your own thing. I definitely feel lack of communication is the biggest barrier we have.

Participant D shared how this lack of communication impacts her daily practice:

> They kind of rolled out this program in our district without really setting down a foundation of what the special ed teacher responsibilities are and what the state preschool teacher responsibilities are, who does what. This school district really needed to lay out the foundations of the rules and regulations, and whose responsibilities are whose.

Adding to the challenge was a lack of communication from the district office related to best practices to support the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Participant D commented, "I've had zero professional development to help support the inclusion program."

Theme 5: Attitudes Toward Inclusive Education

Two of 11 participants mentioned the theme of attitudes toward inclusive education nine times in response to Interview Questions 1 and 2 related to the barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Table 7 shows the data for this theme.

Table 7

Research Question 1, Theme 5: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
5. Attitudes toward inclusive education	2	9

The theme of attitudes toward inclusive education was mentioned by only two of 11 interview participants nine times and yielded powerful information about how staff attitudes can impact the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Beginning with site administration, Participant C stated,

> I felt like I had to fight just for my children to be seen. With the state preschool, I did not necessarily get the supports I needed. It came down to the principal and her attitude to inclusive and integrated activities. What was not there was the willingness to open these spaces.

Participant F experienced these attitudes directly from other on-site teachers:

> Some of the teachers don't like me coming in with my [special education] students, so there's that. Only certain teachers are willing. This year, one of the associates that was in the class that I was coteaching in really didn't want me in there. I would say a lot of the barriers that I'm seeing is staff not wanting inclusion.

Participant C stated that attitudes toward inclusive education impacted access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities:

> So, going back to my children who have Down's Syndrome, because of their proneness to having more upper respiratory problems … they tend to have a lot more nose drain. And it was kind of like, their nose is running. No, they can't be with our kids.

Participant C summed up these interactions with this statement: "What is not there is the willingness to open these spaces."

Data Analysis for Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?" The following sections summarize the qualitative data from 11 interviews with ECE teachers that were categorized into themes. The information presented came primarily from Interview Questions 3 and 4. Each subsection that follows reflects responses to Research Question 2. Each theme and the frequency of occurrence are listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Themes, Participants, and Highest to Lowest Frequency for Research Question 2

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. Ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administration	5	18
2. Teacher collaboration	5	11
3. Implementation of evidence-based practices, including curricula	5	7
4. Teacher training and coaching	4	13
5. Student acceptance	3	5

When asked questions designed to elicit information about participants' experiences with strategies that supported the successful implementation of inclusive practices, participants' answers centered on five main themes. The most frequently cited theme that supported teachers in the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood was ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administration, mentioned by five participants 18 times. The second most frequently cited theme was teacher collaboration, mentioned by five participants 11 times. The third most frequently cited theme was implementation of Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs), including curriculum, mentioned by five participants seven times. Responses included in this theme were strategies that research has demonstrated to be effective ways to support positive attention and behavior. In addition, implementation of a differentiated curriculum was also cited as a way early childhood teachers successfully supported students with disabilities in an inclusive setting. The fourth most frequently cited theme was teacher training and coaching, mentioned by four participants 13 times. Finally, the fifth most frequently cited theme was student acceptance, mentioned by three participants five times. This information was primarily obtained from the third and fourth interview questions. The next section provides an analysis of the qualitative data related to Research Question 2 based on the individual experiences of the study participants.

Theme 1: Ownership of Inclusive Education by Teachers and Site Administration

The third interview question for this study asked participants to describe how barriers to learning and participation by all students could be minimized. The fourth interview question asked participants what resources to support the learning and participation by all students are available. Both interview questions were designed to

elicit responses from participants related to Research Question 2, experiences with strategies that supported the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Five of 11 participants mentioned ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administration a total of 18 times, making this the most frequently referenced theme related to Research Question 2. Table 9 shows the data for this theme.

Table 9

Research Question 2, Theme 1: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. Ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administration	5	13

When considering the power of ownership of inclusive education by teachers, Participant C shared,

> The teachers on that site also took ownership of the integrative process. It wasn't like the other teachers were like go get your students. It was kind of, hey, I have a free hand. Let me go in over here and support this child.

Participant J shared ways teachers can take ownership of all students in their classroom: "So I feel that really helps me look at every single thing in my classroom and understanding what I'm doing and if it's working for my students. Can everyone access everything in our classroom?" Participant B also referenced self-reflection on teaching strategies: "You just have to differentiate the way you introduce the activity so they could enjoy it and be motivated to participate." Participant B reflected further: "I think just my biggest thing that I found this year that has worked for me is just creating an environment that everybody feels they belong because if you do that, they all gravitate towards you."

Participant K also shared how teachers taking ownership of all students is enhanced by teachers planning together: “So they are not going into two separate classes and going oh, this teacher does this and you go there, teacher does this. So it flows well.”

Participant C shared how ownership by teachers on the school site resulted in expanded access for students with disabilities: “There’s a difference between integrated activities and mainstream … we’re not mainstreaming. It’s integrative activities. To the point where 4 and 5 days out of the week we actually went in.” Participant J also discussed the ways that teacher ownership can result in self-reflection and a shift toward more inclusive practices:

> A big thing for many teachers is to be willing to be flexible and willing to let things change in your classroom. I feel like it’s ok for your student not to be following what everyone else is doing. How do you react to the changes? And how can you still include everyone and make sure they are learning?

Participant K explained how students who are undergoing testing to determine special education eligibility can be included in activities:

> We do have a couple who are being tested now; we still have some that are nonverbal. I just remind the kids, they can hear you. We’re teaching them how to understand. We’ll just show them how we play. And then the kids mimic.

Participant K also shared how inclusive education is beneficial for students with and without disabilities: “And then it helps because they know that they’re big leaders and that we have to be leaders so we can show our new friends how they need to be at school.” Participant C summed up the experiences with inclusive practices: “Education,

teaching, integration. It's not a spectator sport. You have to experience it. And that's the same thing with inclusive practices."

Ownership of inclusive education by site administrators was also cited as an important factor in the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Participant F shared,

> It's mostly the admin. Even though we weren't coteaching, they've allowed us to meet weekly and get paid for those meetings. So they've supporting us still meeting and planning together and giving the students access to the general ed curriculum.

Participant F also shared how programs can find success by embedding inclusive practices into their daily operations: "I know we had to add stuff to the handbook … so just making it part of the program. I think that would be one way to address those barriers of not allowing them access." Participant C shared the support from site administrators: "One of the things that really helped to facilitate that smooth transition is that we were included at the ground level. It wasn't my kids, your kids. It was our kids, and it actually started with the director." Participant C also described how this went beyond outdoor activities such as recess: "The director was like … we want to make sure that not just our playground is welcoming, but that our classrooms are welcoming as well." Participants B, C, F, J, and K expressed the powerful impact that teacher and site administrator ownership can provide to an ECE program implementing inclusive education.

Theme 2: Teacher Collaboration

The theme of teacher collaboration was mentioned 11 times by five participants and was the most frequently used strategy to support the successful implementation of

inclusive practices in early childhood in response to Interview Questions 3 and 4, making this theme the second most commonly cited strategy to support the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Table 10 shows the data for this theme.

Table 10

Research Question 2, Theme 2: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
2. Teacher collaboration	5	11

Teacher collaboration was referenced by five participants as an integral part of the implementation of inclusive practices in ECE. General and special education early childhood teachers share common goals yet also have specific educational outcomes in each program. Participant F expressed,

> She [the general education teacher] takes her curriculum because she has a certain curriculum she has to go by. And then we kind of mesh it together to formulate what we want to do as far as in the daily plans. I think it's just because myself and the other teacher had the same mindset.

Participant D had several experiences with inclusive education in early childhood and expressed her thoughts on teacher collaboration: "They need to do more trainings together so that maybe we can collaborate, maybe we can discuss. I feel like her and I need some collaboration time … to kind of bounce ideas back and forth." Participant C also expressed value in teacher collaboration: "One of the things that really made these inclusive settings work is that we were able together to come up with these lessons and these opportunities that worked to their strengths."

Participants H and I shared how site-level and even district-level collaboration was beneficial to support the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Participant I stated, "As an educator, collaborate with others and establish a connection with other coworkers and admin. I think we are all there to support better outcomes for our program, for our kids, and for us as professionals." Participant H also stressed the importance of system-wide collaboration: "I think it really begins with more collaboration with the people involved, if we can do something to connect the gap between enrollment before the child starts in the classroom." Participant I shared the importance of teacher collaboration and participation in the referral process, noting that it is important for early childhood teachers to participate in the child study team process as well as Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings when applicable: "We have CST, child study teams, for the kids. We use the CST process to see what the kids need." Participant H expressed that having an outside expert observe the classroom can bring powerful information to drive collaboration: "Collaborating with other teachers, we all agreed that this year, having someone from [a local school district] come in and observe our classrooms, because it's nonbiased."

Theme 3: Implementation of EBPs, Including Curricula

Five participants referenced the implementation of EBPs, including curricula, as the most frequently used strategy to support the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood in response to Interview Questions 3 and 4, making this theme the third most commonly cited strategy to support the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Table 11 shows the data for this theme.

Table 11

Research Question 2, Theme 3: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
3. Implementation of evidence-based practices, including curricula	5	7

EBPs include a group of instructional strategies designed to support students with autism spectrum disorder and executive function deficits ((Wilkins & Burmeister, 2015). Public school districts in California are also required to implement research-based curricula that include differentiated lessons or strategies to meet the needs of a wide variety of learning styles. Combined, EBPs and curricula implementation are two ways that participants mentioned as supporting the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood settings. Participant J shared how these tools support the learning needs of all students:

> The resources I have in my classroom would be my curriculum and my supplemental curriculum. It gives me components for students who are English language learners or who have special needs. It's an easy way for me to get ideas to be able to reach these different students.

Similarly, Participant E shared that she does not experience barriers related to materials she requires: "We have technology, we have a curriculum. We have lots of things for art projects and manipulatives. There's usually money in the budget to buy things if we need them." Participant G also referenced the program's adopted curriculum as a strategy she uses to meet the needs of all students in her classroom.

EBPs were also discussed as strategies that support inclusive education in early childhood. Participant B stated, "Our visual schedule. Everything that has helped me is

visuals, a lot of visuals, and verbal praise. And they just gravitate towards me. And then the learning is fun. They feel like they're just playing and learning." Participant I implemented the use of a calming corner: "Sometimes I tell [the student], you have two options. Go to the safe place or join us. Breathe. Later she goes and breathes, and then she can enjoy herself." Participant B also incorporates praise and movement into activities:

> We do a lot of praise. We do a lot of movement. I present activities in different ways to get that motivation going. I introduce everything in a different way … at a different pace, I would say, because kids with different abilities have even shorter attention spans.

Participants B, E, G, I, and J referenced the implementation of EBPs and/or curricula as an integral component of the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood programs.

Theme 4: Teacher Training and Coaching

Four participants referenced teacher training and coaching eight times as an important component in the successful implementation of inclusive practices. This theme was the fourth most frequently cited component in the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood. Table 12 shows the data for this theme.

Table 12

Research Question 2, Theme 4: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
4. Teacher training and coaching	4	8

General and special education early childhood teachers experience differing pathways toward licensure and credentialing, resulting in varying degrees of knowledge among classroom teachers. Participants B, D, G, and J all mentioned teacher training and coaching as vital components of inclusive practices in early childhood. Participant J stated, "I would say even more training to teachers as well, to be able to work with their students and those students who have exceptional needs and how we can work together." Similarly, Participant B shared, "I feel there should be more training if they want to be inclusive. The staff needs to know how to make that student feel comfortable." Participant D, who worked in a coteaching environment, stated,

> I've gone to several trainings … I feel like they need to do more trainings with both teachers. Like me and her need to go to trainings together so maybe we can collaborate, maybe we can discuss, hey, I feel this way.

Participant D further expressed, "Maybe we need to go to some kind of thing that actually supports just specifically preschool inclusion."

Teacher coaching was referenced by Participants D, F, and J as another component within this theme that supports the successful implementation of inclusive practices. Participant J stated,

> We had someone come in and they … worked with us and watched me and how I do things, and they would literally tell us oh, I think he's doing this because of this. So having that hands on and in the moment training … really helped me see the connection between what was going on.

Similarly, Participant G shared, "We have a coach that comes in if we need it. She'll come in and give us techniques on how to manage our time, how to minimize the

behaviors in the classroom." Participant D shared about a newly hired instructional coach: "The inclusion coach has come on board. We get 30 minutes of time with her a month, both of us, if we choose to ask questions. I'm all for it because I need to figure this out myself."

Theme 5: Student Acceptance

Three participants referenced student acceptance five times as an important component in the successful implementation of inclusive practices. This theme was the fifth most frequently cited component in the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood. Table 13 shows the data for this theme.

Table 13

Research Question 2, Theme 5: Participants, and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
5. Student acceptance	3	8

Although mentioned by fewer participants, the information shared related to student acceptance as an important factor in the successful implementation of inclusive practices was a powerful description of the impact inclusive education in early childhood can bring for all students. Participants A, C, and F shared experiences with students demonstrating leadership and developing friendships in inclusive early childhood classroom settings. Participant C shared, "He [student] had this opportunity to experience what it's like to be a kid from other kids. Same class, our best friends. And so just from there, an opportunity to talk about diversity in a very organic way." Participant C further shared how the students in general and special education classrooms formed friendships by the end of the school year:

> We have this whole wonderful lesson … and my children felt included. And the rest of that year, we had the best time. [The general education teacher] came back and she said, my kids were talking about the end of the year celebration, and they want your kids. The kids invited these other children and really celebrated them, talked about how they were their friends.

Participants A and F shared how students without disabilities model social skills and can serve as role models for students with disabilities. Participant A stated,

> When a student's having a behavior—they don't want to transition, they don't want to do something we're asking them to do … I'll have my typical peer go … help him, go hold his hand, ask if he wants to come. And they'll be more apt to do it. Learning to play and share. They need to learn from each other, not just the adult facilitation all the time because that becomes prompt dependent.

Participant F described an experience with a student who thrived when mainstreaming in a general education classroom setting but because of licensing requirements had to pause with mainstreaming until a waiver could be obtained. Participant F shared how this impacted the student's behaviors:

> One specific student of mine that were in the class with the state preschool students, and he was doing great. When I had to pull back—he's on the autism spectrum—then he had to relearn the routines and he had a lot of aggressive behaviors that he'd never had before. He was talking about, "Where are the children? Where's my friends?" So, when I pulled him back into my class, then we experienced a tremendous amount of behaviors that I've never seen before.

These shared responses highlight the importance of providing students in ECE programs with consistent opportunities for learning in inclusive environments.

Data Analysis for Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?" The information presented came primarily from Interview Question 6. The following sections summarize the qualitative data from 11 interviews with ECE teachers that were categorized into themes. Each subsection that follows reflects responses to Research Question 3. Each theme and the frequency of occurrence is listed in Table 14.

Table 14

Themes, Participants, and Highest to Lowest Frequency for Research Question 3

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. College coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	6	8
2. Minimal preservice coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	7
3. Teacher mentorship	2	3

Interview Question 6 was designed to elicit information about participants' experiences with preservice preparation to teach in inclusive ECE settings. The responses centered on three main themes. The theme of college coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities was the most frequently cited theme related to preservice preparation to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. This theme was referenced by six participants eight times. The theme of minimal preservice coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities was the second most frequently cited theme.

This theme was referenced by five participants seven times. Finally, the theme of teacher mentorship was the third most frequently cited theme. This theme was mentioned by two participants three times. The next section provides an analysis of the qualitative data related to Research Question 3 based on the individual experiences of the study participants.

Theme 1: College Coursework Specific to Teaching Students With Disabilities

Research Question 3 guided me to learn more about the preservice education early childhood teachers received that led to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Six participants referenced this theme eight times. Information on this theme was gained from Interview Question 6. Table 15 shows the data collected for this theme.

Table 15

Research Question 3, Theme 1: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. College coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	6	8

Participants A, D, E, H, I, and J all referenced courses taken during their preservice preparation that supported the implementation of inclusive practices in their current classrooms. Participant J shared,

> I did take a couple courses regarding students with challenging behaviors or students with special needs. And they all showed us understanding the behavior, knowing how to first identify what's going on, how to keep track of the behavior, and then different ways we can work with students.

Likewise, Participant H also described the benefit of preservice coursework related to behavioral interventions:

> When I went for my bachelor's, I did intentionally go for a behavioral intervention [degree]. So I have that background and knowledge on how to implement and support the students and the family. But I know for a fact not all early childhood teachers are required to take those.

Participant D shared that she took general courses related to working with students with disabilities:

> When I went for my bachelor's degree … in order to get a child development degree, you had to go through four special education classes. So I did specific classes that we had to take, and then I got my master's and I actually opted to take some special education classes.

Participant A shared that her early childhood credential included one or two classes specific to UDL. Participant E shared that she took classes designed to train educators to differentiate instruction: "There were a few things where we talked about special ed, a little bit about autism. We had a class about different abilities." Participant E further shared that preservice classes included information on visual supports for both English learners and students with disabilities. Participant E summed up her preservice experiences: "I felt like a lot of the special ed stuff was just in the books that we were reading, but not of the training necessarily." Participant I shared that she received training in High Scope, a curriculum focusing on high engagement and self-directed learning, before she became a licensed ECE teacher, preparing her to be able to teach students with different educational needs.

Theme 2: Minimal Preservice Coursework Specific to Teaching Students With Disabilities

Research Question 3 helped me to learn more about the preservice education early childhood teachers received that led to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Five participants referenced the theme of minimal preservice coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities seven times, making this the second most frequently cited theme. Information on this theme was gained from Interview Question 6. Table 16 shows the data collected for this theme.

Table 16

Research Question 3, Theme 2: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of Theme
2. Minimal preservice coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	7

Five of 11 participants stated that they received minimal preservice preparation for teaching in inclusive settings. Participants B, F, G, I, and K all discussed the fact that although they may have received some minimal training, it was not robust enough to inform their instruction. Participant B stated, “Not in very much detail like I would have wanted. It was just like part of a chapter, it wasn’t like, not even a whole course.” Likewise, Participant I stated that the only class taken focused on teaching and educating all students in inclusive settings was a practicals class. Participant G’s only experience with courses specific to students with disabilities came through voluntary courses taken annually as part of licensing requirements. Participant G described how early childhood

educators must take 104 clock hr of professional development every 5 years to renew their licenses; these courses are self-selected. Participant G stated,

> It has to be related to the population you serve. So that kind of helps when we do that because we're current on how the behaviors are arising or how to have better class management on our lesson plans, how to write them out, our curriculum … because there's always new things to learn in child development.

Participant F explained that she took coursework related to general and special education ECE to be prepared to teach all students: "As far as inclusion specifically, I think I had to go back and we briefly touched on it. So I don't recall if there was actually a class that prepared me specifically for that."

Theme 3: Teacher Mentorship

Two participants mentioned mentoring by lead or master teachers as part of their preservice education, adding to the preparation they received to teach students with disabilities in inclusive settings. Research Question 3 helped me to learn more about the preservice education early childhood teachers received that led to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Two participants referenced this theme three times. Information on this theme was gained from Interview Question 6. Table 17 shows the data for this theme.

Table 17

Research Question 3, Theme 3: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
3. Teacher mentorship	2	3

Participant A described how receiving preservice education in a small town in which inclusive education was the only option provided her with opportunities that she might not have otherwise had:

> In a little town, they have no choice but to have integrative services, because you have an old school and your special needs population may be less than, 1%, right? So it becomes the job of the special education teacher to support that student in those integrative settings.

Participant A further stated, "For the rest of the semester, I think I learned the most from that woman. She's like, you can't ask if those kids can participate. This is their right." Similarly, Participant I had preservice experience as a paraeducator that prepared her for teaching students with disabilities in inclusive early childhood settings: "She is the teacher who I learned the most from … I really absorbed everything that she guided me to do with the kids."

Data Analysis for Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?" The information presented came primarily from Interview Question 7. The following sections summarize the qualitative data from 11 interviews with ECE teachers that were categorized into themes. Each subsection that follows reflects responses to Research Question 4. Each theme and the frequency of occurrence is listed in Table 18.

Table 18

Themes, Participants, and Highest to Lowest Frequency for Research Question 4

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. In-service training provided by the school district specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	6
2. No in-service experiences specific to teaching students with disabilities	4	5
3. In-class coaching and training	2	5

Theme 1: In-Service Training Provided by the School District Specific to Teaching Students With Disabilities

The theme of in-service training provided by the school district specific to teaching students with disabilities was cited by five participants six times, making this the most frequently mentioned theme for Research Question 4. Participants B, F, G, I, and K all mentioned this theme in their interviews. Table 19 shows the data for this theme.

Table 19

Research Question 4, Theme 1: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
1. In-service training provided by school district specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	6

Monthly training opportunities were mentioned by Participants B, G, I, and K as one way they learned the skills necessary to successfully teach in inclusive ECE classrooms. Participant B shared, “We have staff development every month. They’re bringing in all the behavior, different ways of teaching strategies, which are very helpful. And sometimes there’s just courses they’re offering and they just send us the

information." Likewise, Participants G and K referenced monthly training as benefitting their instructional strategies. Participant G shared, "We have what is called TLC. … I believe it's once a month. They will usually bring in an outside source." Participant K similarly stated,

> We have our professional development monthly or every other month, and we have had several about diverse teaching and inclusion. And then we also did have a lot of social and emotional training … it just taught us how to include those things through the different trainings that we had for our in-service preparation on inclusion.

Participant I shared that in addition to professional development offered by the school, she was enrolled in a stipend program for professional development. Through this program, she took trainings specific to behavior intervention strategies and similar coursework that meets the needs of her students. Participant I stated, "I look for a lot of stuff that will help me prepare myself and how to approach these kids." Participant F expressed her gratitude that when she started a coteaching classroom model, her district provided her with a seminar on coteaching: "So they already had that set up, so we were able to go when they had the coteaching seminar."

Theme 2: No In-Service Experiences Specific to Teaching Students With Disabilities

Four participants mentioned they had received no in-service experiences specific to teaching students with disabilities. This theme was cited four times, making this the second most frequently mentioned theme for Research Question 4. Participants A, C, D, and E mentioned this theme in their interviews. Table 20 shows the data for this theme.

Table 20

Research Question 4, Theme 2: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
2. No in-service experiences specific to teaching students with disabilities	4	5

The theme of no in-service experiences specific to teaching students with disabilities was mentioned five times by four participants. Participant C shared,

> In terms of on-the-job training, no. It's one of those things where we sit at the IEP table and we say yes, 5% of our activities are going to be integrated, and it's up to the teacher to figure out how that happens.

Participant A shared that although her district provides professional development, it does not apply to teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms: "We always have professional development … we talk about what we can do more to enhance the learning of our students more. If we're going back to inclusivity stuff, not so much. We don't have anything for that." Likewise, Participant D shared,

> We get three professional development days a year that are specific to our actual early learning program but not specific to special education. I would say zero. I've had zero professional development within my school district to help support this, to help support the inclusion program.

Participant E referenced a lack of professional development specific to supporting inclusive education in early childhood:

> I think we get a lot of training. We've done some really good in-services this year. More on, like, conflict resolution between kids, how to make kids accountable for

their actions. Not that TK is universal, our age [group] has gone down. I used to teach 4 and 5 year olds, and now [the kids I'm teaching] just turned 3. So it's not that the training isn't valuable, it's just that it's not practical for the age group that I teach.

Theme 3: In-Class Coaching and Training

Two participants mentioned receiving in-class coaching as being an important factor in their implementation of inclusive education in early childhood. This theme was cited five times, making this the least frequently mentioned theme for Research Question 4. Table 21 shows the data for this theme.

Table 21

Research Question 4, Theme 3: Participants and Frequency

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
3. In-class coaching and training	2	5

Participants H and J described experiences when they received in-class coaching and training that helped support their implementation of inclusive education in an early childhood classroom. Participant J shared, "What really helped was how I was able to actually connect what I was learning to what was actually going on in the classroom. I feel like that hands-on training actually helped and experience it for myself." Participant J further shared,

> We have a CLASS observation. It basically observes our interactions with the students, and it has different domains and how you react to your students? How do you manage behavior? And I feel like that really helps myself. It really helps me look at every single thing in my classroom and understanding what I'm doing

> and if it works for my students. We also have ECERS environmental rating. That helps us to ensure that we're exposing our students to different cultures, different ages, different perspectives. Can everyone access everything in the classroom? So I feel that helps a lot to have that inclusion within our classroom.

Likewise, Participant H shared,

> It's more like the CLASS aspect. The environment, like part of the ECERS, the PQA [Program Quality Assessment]. Someone comes in and administers the CLASS. There's only a couple of times where somebody from outside the agency comes in and observes the classroom; other times it's one of the supervisors that comes in.

Summary

Chapter IV included the purpose statement, research questions, and the data collection process. This chapter also detailed the population and sample. I presented an analysis of the data, consisting of 11 interviews. It is critical to understand the barriers and successes that ECE teachers experience when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings to know how to successfully design and operate successful inclusive programs. Early childhood teachers described the barriers they experienced, the successful strategies to overcome these barriers, the preservice preparation they received to teach in inclusive settings and the in-service preparation they received that supports their implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood programs.

Early childhood teachers described the lack of familiarity with inclusive practices as a primary barrier to the implementation of inclusive education, followed by rules and regulations as well as district resources. They also described how these barriers can be

successfully overcome through the implementation of EBPs and ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administrators. Teacher collaboration and teacher training and education were also both referenced as successful strategies to overcome the barriers associated with the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood.

When considering how preservice and in-service preparation equipped participants for the successful implementation of inclusive practices, some only mentioned experiences with preservice or in-service preparation. The remaining participants did not receive any preservice or in-service preparation for teaching students with disabilities in inclusive settings or received minimal preparation for teaching in inclusive settings.

Five themes emerged that described the barriers early childhood teachers experience in the implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood classrooms. Five themes also emerged for strategies to overcome the barriers associated with the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood. Three themes emerged to describe the preservice and in-service preparation early childhood teachers reported receiving to successfully implement inclusive practices in early childhood classrooms. Table 22 summarizes the themes for each research question.

Chapter V of this study summarizes the significant findings. It also describes the study's unexpected findings and my conclusions. Finally, this chapter includes implications for action, future research proposals, and concludes with my thoughts and remarks.

Table 22

Themes, Participants, and Highest to Lowest Frequency by Research Question

Theme	Number of participants	Frequency of theme
Research Question 1:"What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education?"		
1. Lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities	8	13
2. Rules and regulations	7	12
3. District resources, including fiscal and personnel	6	13
4. Lack of communication	4	9
5. Attitudes toward inclusive practices	2	9
Research Question 2: "What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the successful implementation of inclusive education?"		
1. Ownership of inclusive education by teachers and site administration	5	18
2. Teacher collaboration	5	11
3. Implementation of evidence-based practices, including curricula	5	7
4. Teacher training and coaching	4	13
5. Student acceptance	3	5
Research Question 3: "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?"		
1. College coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	6	8
2. Minimal preservice coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	7
3. Teacher mentorship	2	3
Research Question 4: "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?"		
1. In-service training provided by the school district specific to teaching students with disabilities	5	6
2. No in-service experiences specific to teaching students with disabilities	4	5
3. In-class coaching and training	2	5

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V summarizes the findings, conclusions, and recommendations identified in this study. In addition, this chapter discusses key and unexpected findings and the conclusions drawn based on the key and unexpected findings. It also discusses the implications of action highlighting the barriers early childhood education (ECE) teachers experience when implementing inclusive education in early childhood classrooms, the key strategies that early childhood teachers can implement when teaching students with disabilities in inclusive ECE settings, and the preservice and in-service preparation that best prepares early childhood educators for employment in an inclusive early childhood classroom. This chapter discusses the recommendations for future students to improve the field of research in the area of inclusive education in early childhood. The conclusion of this chapter includes my thoughts and observations.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive education. A further purpose of this study was to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. A final purpose of this study was to study to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were designed to investigate the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood, the strategies for overcoming these barriers, and the preservice and in-service preparation that early childhood teachers receive to support the implementation of inclusive education:

1. What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
3. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?
4. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

Methodology Review

A qualitative phenomenological methodology was employed to investigate the lived experiences of ECE teachers as they implement inclusive education in ECE settings as well as the preservice and in-service preparation they have received to teach in inclusive ECE classrooms following Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion framework. This methodology was selected to gain information related to the four research questions outlined in this study.

I conducted semistructured interviews with 11 ECE teachers, each of whom taught in an Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE), Head Start, or California State Preschool Program (CSPP) classroom. Each participant had at least 2 years of experience

teaching in an early childhood classroom and taught in Riverside County or San Bernardino County. Interviews were conducted either virtually or in person and were recorded with the consent of participants. I stored the study's data in a secure drive.

The population for this study was teachers in Head Start, CSPP, and ECSE in California. There were approximately 4,100 Head Start teachers, 5,150 CSPP teachers, and 3,300 ECSE teachers in California (Friedman-Krauss et al., 2021); thus, the population for this study was 12,550. A population this large is not practicable to study; therefore, a target population was identified to reduce the population to a smaller, more manageable size. There were approximately 420 CSPP teachers, 119 Head Start teachers, and 96 ECSE teachers in Riverside County and approximately 34 CSPP teachers, 170 Head Start teachers, and 130 ECSE teachers in San Bernardino County. Thus, the target population for this study was 969. The population was further narrowed through the use of a sample derived from the target population. Reputational sampling helped identify participants who met the sample criteria. I sought the expertise of 11 early childhood teachers who were selected. I first reviewed the staff listings for school districts, Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPAs), and the County Office of Education in Riverside County and San Bernardino County to identify key leaders in each organization.

Key Findings

Research data were reviewed, analyzed, and coded into themes to help me identify the key findings for this study, the successes and barriers ECE teachers experience when implementing inclusive education, and the findings related to the preservice and in-service preparation early childhood teachers received to teach in inclusive early childhood classrooms. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth,

semistructured interviews with study participants. I determined that answers coded to five or more participants at least five times were determined to be a theme. In some cases, I also included themes derived from fewer participants but still considered to be important factors related to the research questions.

The first two key findings describe the successes and challenges ECE teachers experience when implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies to overcome these barriers. The last two key findings summarize the preservice and in-service preparation ECE teachers received to prepare them to teach in an inclusive early childhood classroom environment.

Key Finding 1

Lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities significantly impacts the ability of ECE teachers to implement inclusive education in early childhood classrooms.

Research Question 1 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?" The first key finding of this study was that 73% of the ECE teachers participating in this study agreed that a lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities creates the biggest barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood classrooms. Guidelines associated with IDEA, Head Start, and CSPP require that students with disabilities participate in general education (CDE, 2021). For the 2022–2023 school year, CDE (2021) set a target that 45% of preschool students with disabilities should participate in a regular ECE program. Researchers found that students with moderate-to-severe disabilities who were educated in inclusive classrooms experienced higher learning

outcomes than their peers who participated in segregated settings (Cole et al., 2004; Dell'Anna et al., 2020; Downing et al., 2004). However, the findings of this study suggested that the majority of ECE teachers are not equipped to support students with disabilities in their classrooms, creating a significant barrier to the successful implementation of inclusive practices in early childhood programs.

Participants B, C, D, E, and F noted a lack of awareness by teachers of strategies for interacting with students with disabilities as a barrier for the successful implementation of inclusive practices. In addition, lack of familiarity with positive behavioral interventions was noted by Participants B, D, E, F, G, and R. Research demonstrated that inclusive ECE classrooms lead to increased performance on measures rating social skills and interactions of preschool students with disabilities (Barton & Smith, 2015; Phillips & Meloy, 2012). Research has also indicated that the benefits of inclusive education also extend to children without disabilities. Ogelman and Secer (2012) found that the social skills of students with disabilities and neurotypical students improved when they were educated in an inclusive setting. Despite the state and federal mandates to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in inclusive early childhood classrooms, the findings of this study suggested that the majority of early childhood teachers are not equipped to do so.

Key Finding 2

Ownership of all students by teachers and site administrators is vital to the implementation of inclusive education.

Research Question 2 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive

education?" The second key finding identified in this study was that the most effective strategy to overcome the barriers associated with the successful implementation of inclusive practices was ownership of all students by teachers and site administrators, which was cited by 45% of participants 18 times. Although other themes related to this research question were also cited by 45% of participants, the frequency of those citations was fewer, leading me to determine that this was the key finding associated with Research Question 2.

Participants B, C, F, J, and K all expressed the powerful impact that teacher and site administrator ownership made in the successful implementation of inclusive practices in their ECE classrooms. Marks et al. (2014) found that administrators who value inclusion are more likely to hire new teachers who share this interest, making administrative support for inclusive education during the hiring process imperative. Research also found that teacher confidence, funding, administrative support, training, and regulatory barriers all contribute to the research-to-practice gap (Brotherson et al., 2001; Frankel, 2004, 2006; Frankel et al., 2010).

Creating inclusive early childhood settings can depend on the leaders in the organizations themselves. Lieber et al. (2000) found that teachers, principals, and directors who value inclusive education may be the impetus to initiate a program. Furthermore, Booth and Ainscow (2016) outlined the construct that inclusive education is rooted in a culture that is secure, accepting, and welcoming of all learners. These values guide all decisions made within the school community and set the stage for the development of coherent inclusive policies. Booth and Ainscow also found that integration of change in the school culture is required to create sustainability. The second

key finding of this study suggests that a culture of ownership of all students by teachers and site administrators is an essential strategy to remove the barriers associated with the implementation of inclusive practices in ECE settings.

Key Finding 3

College coursework specific to teaching students with disabilities is necessary for the successful implementation of inclusive education but is not regularly provided to all ECE teachers.

Research Question 3 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?" The third key finding identified in this study was that although only 55% of participants received preservice education on the needs of students with disabilities or the foundations of inclusive education, those who did receive this preparation found the coursework was effective to support the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood. Researchers established that prospective teachers who complete general education preservice preparation programs that connect theory to real-world teaching practices report feeling more prepared for employment as teachers (Boyd et al., 2009; Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005).

Participants A, D, E, H, I, and J all referenced courses taken during their preservice preparation that supported the implementation of inclusive practices in their current classrooms. These participants cited courses, such as general information about special education, behavioral training, UDL, and curricular adaptations that can support students with disabilities or other unique needs. Participants who received preservice preparation in special education or inclusive education reported an increased level of

confidence when working with students with disabilities and were able to apply theory into practice. Researchers have established that by developing lessons to be accessible to all, the stage is set for instruction that is universally accessible and does not need to be modified for students with disabilities (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Florian & Linklater, 2010). Two participants also referenced ways that preservice preparation related to students with unique needs met the needs of their classrooms overall, finding that this preparation enabled them to teach students with disabilities, English learners, or others with individualized learning needs. The findings of this study indicated that preservice preparation specific to teaching students with disabilities resulted in increased confidence in the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood classrooms.

Key Finding 4

In-service training and coaching provided by school districts specific to teaching in inclusive classrooms, including general information about teaching students with disabilities, is a necessary component of the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood.

Research Question 3 asked, "What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?" The fourth key finding identified in this study indicated that although only 45% of participants reported receiving in-service training specific to students with disabilities, those who did reported that this training was an important component of the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood.

Participants B, F, G, I, and K all cited the benefits of the increased knowledge they gained through in-service trainings provided by their school districts. Training

received by participants included instruction on the coteaching framework, monthly training sessions for all ECE staff, social-emotional teaching strategies, and training specific to behavioral interventions. Coogle et al. (2022) found that professional development paired with ongoing coaching resulted in the improved implementation of inclusive education strategies. Several of the participants who received in-service training specific to students with disabilities also reported receiving real-time coaching as part of the support provided by their school district. The findings of this study indicated that in-service preparation specific to teaching in inclusive classrooms, including general information about teaching students with disabilities, resulted in increased confidence in the implementation of inclusive education in early childhood classrooms.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected Finding 1

Rules and regulations were not cited as the primary barrier to the implementation of inclusive ECE. Head Start and CSPP contain licensing restrictions that make the implementation of inclusive education more challenging. Although this was the second most frequently cited barrier, I expected rules and regulations to be the primary barrier experienced by early childhood educators.

Unexpected Finding 2

Pay disparity was not mentioned as a barrier to the implementation of inclusive ECE. ECE and ECSE teachers participate in different preservice preparation programs, and teachers with ECSE teaching credentials require more coursework than ECE teachers. Subsequently, ECSE teachers are typically placed on the credentialed teacher pay scale and are compensated at a higher rate of pay than licensed ECE teachers. One participant

briefly mentioned the pay discrepancy; otherwise, no study participants referenced pay disparity as a barrier to the implementation of inclusive ECE.

Unexpected Finding 3

Few general education teachers have an in-depth knowledge related to teaching students with disabilities. School districts and educational organizations continue to strive to teach students in inclusive educational environments, and in doing so some districts provide ECE teachers with training on teaching in inclusive classroom environments. The results of this study found that few general education teachers have had any training or instruction on the general educational and social-emotional needs of students with disabilities. It will be difficult for teachers to implement inclusive education if they do not have a foundational knowledge of the needs of students who have diverse learning needs.

Conclusions

The key findings resulted in four conclusions drawn from the experiences of 11 ECE teachers as they implemented inclusive education in their classrooms. Qualitative data and a review of literature were used as evidence to support the four conclusions.

Conclusion 1

The primary challenge to the successful implementation of inclusive practices is a lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities.

Based on the findings, I conclude that the most significant barrier facing educators implementing an inclusive ECE program is a lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities. Participants who cited this key finding described experiencing barriers in the implementation of inclusive practices as a

result of the lack of training or experience with students with disabilities. According to the Government Accountability Office report, despite attempts to increase the focus on instruction of students with disabilities, many early childhood teacher preparation programs leave teachers unprepared for future work with neurodiverse students (Murray, 2019). Likewise, although the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) acknowledges that the academic and behavioral needs of students cannot be separated and must be addressed within a comprehensive, schoolwide system, the results of this study indicated that ECE teachers have not been provided with the training required to successfully implement inclusive education.

ECE teachers experience real-time challenges when they work with students with disabilities without adequate training. Participants found it difficult to successfully support students with significant behavioral or social-emotional needs without in-depth training on research-based behavioral interventions. Evidence-Based Practices (EBPs) have been found to be effective in supporting a wide variety of students with executive function deficits (Wilkins & Burmeister, 2015). IDEA (2004) requires that students receive their education in the least restrictive environment (LRE). However, in California few students participate in inclusive educational settings, and only 29.97% of ECE students participate in inclusive educational classrooms (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The results of this study indicated that lack of training or experience working with students with disabilities directly contributes to the lack of inclusive ECE classrooms statewide. This is supported by qualitative data collected through semistructured interviews during the investigation phase of this study.

Conclusion 2

The successful implementation of inclusive practices in ECE requires all staff to take ownership of all students in the classroom.

Based on the findings, I conclude that staff ownership of all students, including students with disabilities, is a required component of a successful inclusive early childhood program. Inclusive education requires more than placing a student with a disability in a general education classroom; successful implementation of inclusive education requires transformational changes in mindset and culture of site administrators and teachers (Choi et al., 2020; McCart et al., 2014). Participants B, C, F, J, and K all cited the importance of staff and administration ownership of all students in their successful implementation of inclusive education. Specific instances of support by administrators referenced by participants included being provided planning time with partner teachers, creating opportunities for joint activities, and ensuring equal access to common areas such as playgrounds.

Booth and Ainscow (2016) found that administrators who value inclusion support the development of policies that value the participation of all members of the diverse school population. In addition, Marks et al. (2014) found that administrators who value inclusion are more likely to hire new teachers who share this interest. Participants B, C, J, and K all cited successful collaborative experiences with on-site or partner teachers who took ownership of all students as an important component in the success of their inclusive ECE program. The results of this study indicated that successful inclusive ECE programs include site administrators, teachers, and support staff who value inclusive practices and

take ownership of all students at the school site. This is supported by qualitative data collected through semistructured interviews during the investigation phase of this study.

Conclusion 3

Based on the findings, ECE teacher preparation programs must include specific coursework related to teaching students with disabilities and inclusive practices.

Based on the results of this study, I conclude that coursework related to teaching students with disabilities and inclusive practices is necessary for the development and implementation of inclusive ECE programs. Participants A, D, E, H, I, and J all referenced courses taken during their preservice preparation that supported the implementation of inclusive practices in their classrooms. Although 55% of early childhood educators in this study received coursework related to teaching students with disabilities, 45% reported receiving minimal to no such coursework. According to Mickelson et al. (2022), varied regulations and results have led to an ongoing disconnect between general and special education teacher licensing throughout the United States. In 2019, Sindelar et al. found that 40 states had set requirements for ECE and ECSE licensure; of these 40 states, only eight offered blended or dual certification programs. California does not offer blended ECE and ECSE certification and instead requires dual licensure and certification to teach in both general and special education early childhood programs. The majority of participants in this study earned either an ECSE credential or an ECE license but not both.

The Government Accountability Office reported that despite attempts to increase the focus on instruction of students with disabilities, many early childhood teacher preparation programs leave teachers unprepared for future work with neurodiverse

students (Murray, 2019). The results of this study reflected this finding, and less than half of the study participants reported receiving minimal to no preservice coursework related to teaching students with disabilities. This conclusion correlates with Conclusion 1, which stated that early childhood teachers reported a lack of familiarity and/or training in inclusive practices and students with disabilities as a significant barrier in the implementation of inclusive education. The results of this study found that coursework related to teaching students with disabilities and inclusive practices is necessary for the development and implementation of inclusive ECE programs. This is supported by qualitative data collected through semistructured interviews during the investigation phase of this study.

Conclusion 4

Based on the findings, successful inclusive ECE programs include the provision of in-service training and real-time coaching that expands instructor knowledge and understanding of best practices when teaching students with disabilities.

Based on the results of this study, I conclude that in-service training and coaching is a necessary component of successful inclusive early childhood programs. Participants B, F, G, H, I, J, and K all described participation in district-sponsored staff development and/or real-time, in-class coaching as an important factor in their ability to successfully implement inclusive education in their early childhood classrooms. Coogle et al. (2022) established that teachers report a higher level of confidence in their abilities to work in an inclusive classroom when professional development, coupled with ongoing coaching, is provided. The results of this study corroborated this finding, with 64% of ECE teachers reporting that professional development and real-time in-class coaching was a vital factor

in their ability to work with students with disabilities in inclusive environments. I also note that 36% of study participants received no district in-services or coaching related to working with students with disabilities; however, all participants had students with disabilities enrolled in their classrooms. This study highlights the importance of in-service training for early childhood educators to meet the increasing population of preschool students with disabilities.

In addition, Coogle et al. (2022) noted that although professional development increases a person's knowledge, ongoing coaching increases the person's likelihood that learned strategies will be implemented with fidelity. The results of this study indicated that although 45% of participants received in-service trainings by their school district, just 18% reported receiving real-time coaching to further support the implementation of EBPs. Yang et al. (2022) found that online coaching improved scores on scales measuring the quality of relationships between teachers and students. Likewise, language and literacy measures improve in a coaching environment (Lonigan et al., 2011). The results of this study found that in-service training, including real-time coaching, is a required component of successful inclusive ECE programs. This is supported by qualitative data collected through semistructured interviews during the investigation phase of this study.

Implications for Action

Implication for Action 1

School districts must hire site administrators and teachers who value and take ownership of inclusive education in ECE.

The data and literature from this study explored strategies that overcome the barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in ECE. Based on the conclusion that the successful implementation of inclusive practices in ECE requires all staff to take ownership of all students in the classroom, it is recommended that school districts hire site administrators and ECE teachers who see the value of inclusive education and take ownership of all students in their program. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

1. Create a district or program-wide equity definition that includes the expectation that every student is provided with what they individually require to learn and succeed.
2. Train all existing site administrators and ECE teaching staff and support personnel on equity, equal access, and research supporting the benefits of inclusive education.
3. Include interview questions designed to elicit feedback on the interviewee's position in inclusive education when interviewing site administrators, teachers, and support staff to work in ECE classrooms and only hire personnel who support the implementation of inclusive practices in ECE.

Implication for Action 2

ECE teacher preparation programs must include coursework designed to prepare all educators to work in inclusive ECE classrooms.

The data and literature review from this study explored the pathways to credentialing or licensure available to prospective ECE teachers. Based on the conclusion that ECE teacher preparation programs must include specific coursework related to

teaching students with disabilities and inclusive practices, it is recommended that ECE teacher preparation programs include coursework specific to multi-tiered system of support (MTSS), UDL, and teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

1. Every ECE preservice preparation program must add coursework in the principles of UDL, MTSS, behavioral interventions, and EBPs into ECE licensing and ECSE credentialing programs to support students with disabilities.
2. University programs in California must begin to build dual pathways to credentialing and licensure that allow prospective educators to graduate from college prepared to teach all students who enroll in their classrooms.
3. ECE and ECSE educators who did not receive preservice preparation in the principles of UDL, MTSS, and EBPs should be required to earn an added authorization that includes coursework in these three areas.

Implication for Action 3

In-service training and real-time coaching must be provided to ECE teachers to sustain successful inclusive early childhood programs.

The data and literature review from this study explored the type and amount of in-service training that ECE teachers receive to support the implementation of inclusive education. Based on the findings that successful inclusive ECE programs must include the provision of in-service training and real-time coaching that expands instructor knowledge and understanding of best practices when teaching students with disabilities, it is recommended that all school districts that provide ECE programs develop regular and

ongoing in-service training related to UDL, MTSS, and EBPs as well as real-time coaching experiences. To accomplish this, the following actions are recommended:

1. Every school district in California that provides ECE programs must provide annual ongoing training to early childhood educators, support staff, and site administrators in the principles of UDL, MTSS, and EBPs.
2. Every school district in California that provides ECE programs must hire an inclusive practices specialist or teacher on special assignment whose sole role is to provide coaching and real-time resources to ECSE teachers in the implementation of inclusive education.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study presented findings and conclusions based on the literature and an analysis of data on the barriers and successes to the implementation of inclusive education experienced by ECE teachers. This study further presented finding and conclusions on the preservice and in-service opportunities provided to ECE current and prospective teachers that prepare them to teach in an inclusive ECE classroom. Because the body of research in this field is limited, this study further contributed to the findings and conclusions of literature related to successful implementation of inclusive education in ECE. This study has the potential to stimulate future research into the challenges associated with the implementation of inclusive education in ECE, strategies to successfully overcome these barriers, and best practices for preservice and in-service preparation and professional development provided to ECE teachers. Recommendations for possible future research include the following:

1. It is recommended to conduct a larger scale Delphi study related to the perceptions associated with inclusive education in ECE statewide to further understand mindset barriers and successes in the implementation of inclusive ECE programs.
2. It is recommended that future studies investigate the longitudinal outcomes of ECE teachers who were trained in a blended preservice education model.
3. It is recommended that future research focus on longitudinal student-level data to add to the limited body of research on the outcomes for students with disabilities who are educated in inclusive versus segregated ECE settings.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

My experience of conducting this study provided a challenging opportunity to meaningfully contribute to the field of best practices in ECE. The study coursework, research, and writing process created an avenue for me to challenge myself personally and professionally while engaging in a deep dive into a passion project. This study highlighted the existing barriers to the implementation of inclusive education in ECE and successful strategies to overcome those barriers. It also investigated the preservice preparation early childhood teachers receive when participating in teacher preparation programs as well as the type and frequency of in-service preparation ECE teachers receive. The sacrifice of time and sleep was well worth the contribution to the field of research and most importantly to the potential creation of inclusive programs for future students. Sincere gratitude is extended to my husband, children, family, colleagues, cohort mentor, cohort members, and dissertation chair for the support and encouragement during the last 3 years.

As I reflect on my journey through this study, I am excited with the reception that this research has received in the field. This study is a launching point for the next phase of my personal journey, which includes continued advocacy for equity and equal access for all students in ECE and beyond. My mission is to ensure equity, build capacity, and gain sustainability in ECE programs throughout the state, and this study is one step forward toward this mission.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Participation Request Letter

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: A QUALITATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE SUCCESSES AND BARRIERS IMPACTING SUCCESSFUL EARLY CHILDHOOD INCLUSIVE EDUCATION.

[Date]

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative phenomenological study investigating the successes and barriers impacting successful early childhood inclusive education. The main investigator of this study is Cynthia Hartshorn, Doctoral Candidate in University of Massachusetts Global Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are an early childhood teacher in California, who met the criteria for this study because of your known expertise as an early childhood teacher and you have at least one student with a disability enrolled in your class.

Twelve early childhood teachers from California will participate in this study through an electronic interview. Participation in the interview should require about one hour of your time which is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

PURPOSE: This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion, creating inclusive cultures producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive policies. This study also seeks to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. Finally, this study seeks to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, you will be sent an email link to meet via Zoom. A virtual interview (via Zoom) will be scheduled that will last approximately one hour. For the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as an early childhood teacher based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion while you

respond to the successes and barriers of working with students with disabilities in your classroom. The interview session will be audio-recorded and transcribed.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange time for the interview questions, so for that purpose, enough time will be given to you to schedule the interview according to your availability.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, but your feedback could help identify the barriers for the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood classrooms. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me by email at chartsho@mail.umassglobal.edu. You can also contact Dr. Tim McCarty, dissertation chair by email at tmccarty@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (928) 246-5268.

Respectfully,

Cynthia Hartshorn
Doctoral Candidate, UMass Global

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: Inclusive Education In Early Childhood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Of The Successes And Barriers Impacting Successful Early Childhood Inclusive Education.

University of Massachusetts Global

16355 Laguna Canyon Road

Irvine, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Cynthia Hartshorn, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant's Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion, creating inclusive cultures producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive policies. This study also seeks to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. Finally, this study seeks to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview. The interview will take a minimum of 1 hour and will be audio-recorded. The interview will take place via Zoom. During this interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow you to share your experiences as an early childhood teacher who has at least one student with a disability enrolled in your classroom. Additionally, you will be asked to share your professional resume.

I understand that:

1. There are no known major risks or discomforts associated with this research. The session will be held via Zoom. Some interview questions may cause me to reflect on barriers and support systems that are unique to my lived experience and sharing my experience in an interview setting may cause minor discomfort.
2. There are no major benefits to me for participation, but a potential benefit may be that I could help identify the barriers for the successful implementation of

inclusive education in early childhood classrooms. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

3. Money will not be provided for my time and involvement; however, I will receive a gift of appreciation from the researcher following the interview.
4. Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Cynthia Hartshorn, UMass Global Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Ms. Hartshorn may be contacted by phone at (xxx) xxx-xxxx or email at chartsho@mail.umassglobal.edu.
5. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.
6. I understand that the study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project.
7. I understand that the audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interview. Once the interview is transcribed, the audio, and interview transcripts will be deleted.
8. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent re-obtained. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact this study's dissertation chair, Dr. Tim McCarty, tmccarty@umassglobal.edu or phone (916) 769 2453. Additionally, you may write or call the office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass Global, and 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedures(s) set forth.

_____	_____
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party	**Date**
_____	_____
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)	**Date**
_____	_____
Signature of Principal Investigator	**Date**

UMass Global IRB (MONTH) 2023 CHANGE DATE LATER

APPENDIX C

Audio Recording Release & Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: Inclusive Education In Early Childhood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Of The Successes And Barriers Impacting Successful Early Childhood Inclusive Education.

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Cynthia Hartshorn, Doctoral Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission. I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded. In the event that I do agree to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed after three years. The written transcription of the audio file will be stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed I will be so informed and my consent obtained.

I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Cynthia Hartshorn to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: _____Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol and Questions

Hi, my name is Cynthia (Cyndi) Hartshorn, and I am a doctoral candidate at UMass Global in the area of Organizational Leadership.

First and foremost, I want to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your answers will help fill a gap in research around the barriers for the successful implementation of inclusive education in early childhood classrooms, based on Booth and Ainscow's (20167) Index for Inclusion. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers, policymakers, and educators.

I am conducting a study to explore the experiences of early childhood teachers as they inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion: creating inclusive cultures, producing inclusive policies, and evolving inclusive policies. I am also studying what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. Finally, I seek to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

I am conducting twelve interviews with early childhood teachers such as yourself. The information you provide, together with historical and archival data, will help provide a snapshot into the lived experiences of early childhood teachers implementing inclusive education.

I will be reading most of what I say. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating early childhood teachers will be conducted in the most similar manner possible.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

I will like to remind you that any information obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail to check that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You received the Informed Consent and UMass Global Bill of Rights in an email and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. However, I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent to ease our discussion and accuracy.

Prior to this interview, you received information concerning the purpose of the research, a copy of the interview questions, a copy of Booth and Aiscow's (2016) Index for Inclusion, the UMass Global's Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Informed Consent form. After reviewing the protocols, you were offered an opportunity to ask questions concerning the research and the consent process. At that time, you provided verbal consent to be a participant in the interview. For purposes of verifying your consent, would you again provide a verbal yes as to your consent that will be included in the recording of this interview? Thank you.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

Let us get started then, and thank you again for your time.

Here are the three dimensions of Booth and Aincsow's (2016) Index for Inclusion:

Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion

1. **Dimension A**: **Creating Inclusive Cultures.** Inclusive education is rooted in a culture that is secure, accepting, and welcoming of all learners. This dimension also focuses on ensuring the integration of change within the school culture in order to create sustainability.
2. **Dimension B**: **Producing Inclusive Policies**. This dimension focuses on the development of school policies that include all students from the moment of enrollment. It is designed to support the development of policies that value the participation of all members of the diverse school population.

3. **Dimension C**: **Evolving Inclusive Education.** This dimension shifts the focus from policy to practice. It focuses on the structure of learning activities in order to ensure they are universally designed to meet the needs of all learners. This dimension also focuses on the construct that children should be active learners who serve as resources for each other Finally, it focuses on the need for adults to work together to take responsibility for the learning outcomes of all students.

Interview Questions

1. What barriers to learning and participation arise within the school community?
2. Who experiences barriers to learning and participation?
3. How can barriers to learning and participation be minimized?
4. What resources to support learning and participation by all students are available?
5. How could additional resources to support learning and participation be implemented?
6. What preservicepreparation did you receive to support learning and participation by all students?
7. What in-service preparation do you receive to support learning and participation by all students?

Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of my research are known, I will send you a copy of my findings.

APPENDIX E

Synthesis Matrix

SOURCE INFORMATION			Themes	Early Childhood Education			Inclusive Education			Teacher Preparation		Theoretical Foundations					Theoretical Framework NAEYC Key Guidelines					
				Foundations of ECE	Influence of Federal/State Mandates	ECE Quality Indicators	Inclusive Education in ECE	MTSS	UDL	Pre-service Preparation	In-service Preparation	Maturation	Constructivist	Behaviorist	Psychoanalytical	Ecological	Caring Community of Learners	Reciprocal Partnerships with Families	Assessing children's development and learning	Teaching to enhance development and learning	Planning and implementing engaging curriculum	Demonstrate professionalism
Ali, H., & Fazil, H.	2022	Journal												X								
Al-Shammari, Z., Faulkner, P., & Forlin, C.	2019	Journal																				
Aykan, A., & Dursun, F.	2021	Journal								X	X											
Barton, E. E., & Smith, B. J.	2015	Journal																				
Baker, M.	2019	Journal					X															
Boyd, D.J., Grossman, P.L., Lankford, H., Loeb, S., Wyckoff, J.	2009	Journal								X												
Buysse, V., Goldman, B. D., & Skinner, M. L.	2003	Journal																				
California Department of Education (2021, November)	2021	Meeting Agenda																				
Center for Public Education	nd	Fact Sheet																				
Chen, J., Lin, T.-J., Justice, L., & Sawyer, B.	2019	Journal					X															
Choi, J. H., McCart, A. B., & Sailor, W.	2020	Journal					X	X														
Cole, C. M., Waldron, N., & Majd, M.	2004	Journal					X															
Coogle, C., Storie, S., & Rahn, N. L.	2022	Journal						X			X											
Darling-Hammond, L.	2009	Journal								X												
Dell'Anna, S., Ianes, D., Pellegrini, M., & Vivanet, G.	2020	Journal					X															

SOURCE INFORMATION			Themes	Early Childhood Education			Inclusive Education			Teacher Preparation		Theoretical Foundations					Theoretical Framework NAEYC Key Guidelines					
				Foundations of ECE	Influence of Federal/State Mandates	ECE Quality Indicators	Inclusive Education in ECE	MTSS	UDL	Pre-service Preparation	In-service Preparation	Maturation	Constructivist	Behaviorist	Psychoanalytical	Ecological	Caring Community of Learners	Reciprocal Partnerships with Families	Assessing children's development and learning	Teaching to enhance development and learning	Planning and implementing engaging curriculum	Demonstrate professionalism
Downing, J. E., Spencer, S., & Cavallaro, C. (2004).	2004	Journal					X															
Feriver, Ş., Olgan, R., Teksöz, G., & Barth, M.	2022	Journal														X						X
Florian, L., & Black-Hawkins, K.	2011	Journal							X													
Florian, L., & Linklater, H.	2010	Journal							X													
Gordon R.A., Hofer, K.G., Fujimoto, K.A., Risk, N., Kaestner, R., & Korenman, S.	2015	Journal				X																
Hanson, M. J., Horn, E., Sandall, S., Beckman, P., Morgan, M., Marquart, J., Barnwell, D., & Chou, H.-Y.	2001	Journal		X																		
Hunt, J.M.	1961	Book										X					X					
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004. §300.114	2004	Legal Document																				
Jiménez, T. C., Graf, V. L., & Rose, E.	2007	Journal					X															
Jones, M. G., & Brader-Araje, L.	2002	Journal											X					X				
Justice, L. M., Logan, J. R., Lin, T. J., & Kaderavek, J.	2014	Journal																				

SOURCE INFORMATION			Themes	Early Childhood Education			Inclusive Education			Teacher Preparation		Theoretical Foundations					Theoretical Framework NAEYC Key Guidelines					
				Foundations of ECE	Influence of Federal/State Mandates	ECE Quality Indicators	Inclusive Education in ECE	MTSS	UDL	Pre-service Preparation	In-service Preparation	Maturation	Constructivist	Behaviorist	Psychoanalytical	Ecological	Caring Community of Learners	Reciprocal Partnerships with Families	Assessing children's development and learning	Teaching to enhance development and learning	Planning and implementing engaging curriculum	Demonstrate professionalism
Kim, Y., Montoya, E., Austin, L. J. E., Powell, A., & Muruvi, W.	2022	Report			X																	
Kurth, J. A., Miller, A. L., Toews, S. G., Thompson, J. R., Cortés, M., Dahal, M. H., de Escallón, I. E., Hunt, P. F., Porter, G., Richler, D., Fonseca, I., Singh, R., Šiška, J., Villamero, R., Jr., & Wangare, F.	2018	Journal					X															
Lieber, J., Hanson, M. J., & Beckman, P. J.	2000	Journal																				
Lonigan, C. J., Farver, J. M., Phillips, B. M., & Clancy-Menchetti, J.	2009	Journal																				
Lundqvist, J., Mara, A. W., & Siljehag, E.	2015	Journal																				
McCart, A. B., Sailor, W. S., Bezdek, J. M., & Satter, A. L.	2014	Journal					X															
McLean, M., Sandall, S.R., & Smith, B.J.	2016	Book Chapter		X			X															
Melnick, H., Ali, T. T., Gardner, M., Maier, A., & Wechsler, M.	2017	Research Brief			X	X																
Mickelson, A. M., Correa, V. I., & Stayton, V. D.	2022	Journal			X					X												

SOURCE INFORMATION			Themes	Early Childhood Education			Inclusive Education			Teacher Preparation		Theoretical Foundations					Theoretical Framework NAEYC Key Guidelines					
				Foundations of ECE	Influence of Federal/State Mandates	ECE Quality Indicators	Inclusive Education in ECE	MTSS	UDL	Pre-service Preparation	In-service Preparation	Maturation	Constructivist	Behaviorist	Psychoanalytical	Ecological	Caring Community of Learners	Reciprocal Partnerships with Families	Assessing children's development and learning	Teaching to enhance development and learning	Planning and implementing engaging curriculum	Demonstrate professionalism
Mills, P. E., & Cole, K. N.	1998	Journal		X																		
Morgan, H.	2011	Book																				
Murray, M.	2019	Dissertation				X		X		X												
NAEYC	2020	Position Statement															X	X	X	X	X	X
Backes, E., & Allen, L.	2018	Book			X																	
Novak, K.	2022	Book							X													
Odom, S. L.	2000	Journal					X															
Ogelman, H. G., & Secer, Z.	2012	Journal					X															
Olson, A. J., & Ruppar, A. L.	2017	Journal					X															
Phillips, D. A., & Meloy, M. E.	2012	Journal																				
Pugach, M. C., & Blanton, L. P.	2009	Journal								X												
Rafferty, Y., Piscitelli, V., & Boettcher, C.	2003	Journal																				
Saracho, O. N.	2021	Journal										X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Schunk, D.	2021	Book												X					X			
Stayton, V. D.	2015	Journal																				
Yang, W., Huang, R., Su, Y., Zhu, J., Hsieh, W. Y., & Li, H.	2022	Journal																				
Zaretsky, L.	2005	Book																				

APPENDIX F

Alignment Table

Research Study Title

Inclusive Education In Early Childhood: A Qualitative Phenomenological Study Of The Successes And Barriers Impacting Successful Early Childhood Inclusive Education

Purpose Statement

This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore early childhood teacher experiences regarding the successes and barriers of implementing inclusive education with general education and special education students based on the three dimensions of Booth and Ainscow's Index for Inclusion, creating inclusive cultures producing inclusive policies and evolving inclusive policies. This study also seeks to identify what preschool teachers perceive to be the greatest barriers to implementing inclusive education and the most effective strategies for overcoming these barriers. Finally, this study seeks to identify the preservice and in-service experiences that teachers perceive as most effective in supporting the successful implementation of inclusive education.

Research Questions

1. What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
2. What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?
3. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

4. What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?

Alignment Table

Research Questions	Interview Question	Artifact
What do early childhood teachers identify as the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?	• What barriers to learning and participation arise within the school community? • Who experiences barriers to learning and participation? • How can barriers to learning and participation be minimized?	• Interview question responses coded for trends in responses • Themes identified in interview transcripts • Trends analyzed, charted, and graphed • Results presented in tables, charts, and graphs
What do early childhood teachers identify as the strategies to overcome the perceived barriers to the implementation of inclusive education?	• What resources to support learning and participation by all students are available? • How could additional resources to support learning and participation be implemented?	• Interview question responses coded for trends in responses • Themes identified in interview transcripts • Trends analyzed, charted, and graphed • Results presented in tables, charts, and graphs

What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective preservice experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?	• What preservice preparation did you receive to support learning and participation by all students?	• Interview question responses coded for trends in responses • Themes identified in interview transcripts • Trends analyzed, charted, and graphed • Results presented in tables, charts, and graphs • Copy of University course of study
What do early childhood teachers identify as the most effective in-service experiences that support the successful implementation of inclusive education?	• What in-service preparation did you receive to support learning and participation by all students?	• Interview question responses coded for trends in responses • Themes identified in interview transcripts • Trends analyzed, charted, and graphed • Results presented in tables, charts, and graphs • Copy of employer Professional Development course descriptions

APPENDIX G

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Both the Interviewer and the Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Complete the form independently from each other, then discuss your responses. Sharing your thoughts will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?

2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the interviewees were unclear?

3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the interviewees?

4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did the interviewer appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: From your observation did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview?

6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

10. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

11. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX H

Field Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview, the interviewer should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation**. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe your experiences as an early childhood teacher who has students with disabilities enrolled in your classroom?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok? Was the pacing appropriate?
3. Were the questions mostly clear or were there places where you were uncertain of what was being asked?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview?

APPENDIX I

IRB Approval

Cyndi Hartshorn <chartsho@mail.umassglobal.edu>

IRB Application Approved: Cynthia Hartshorn

1 message

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu> Tue, Oct 24, 2023 at 1:19 PM
Reply-To: webmaster@umassglobal.edu
To: chartsho@mail.umassglobal.edu
Cc: dlong@umassglobal.edu, tmccarty@umassglobal.edu, irb@umassglobal.edu

Dear Cynthia Hartshorn,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

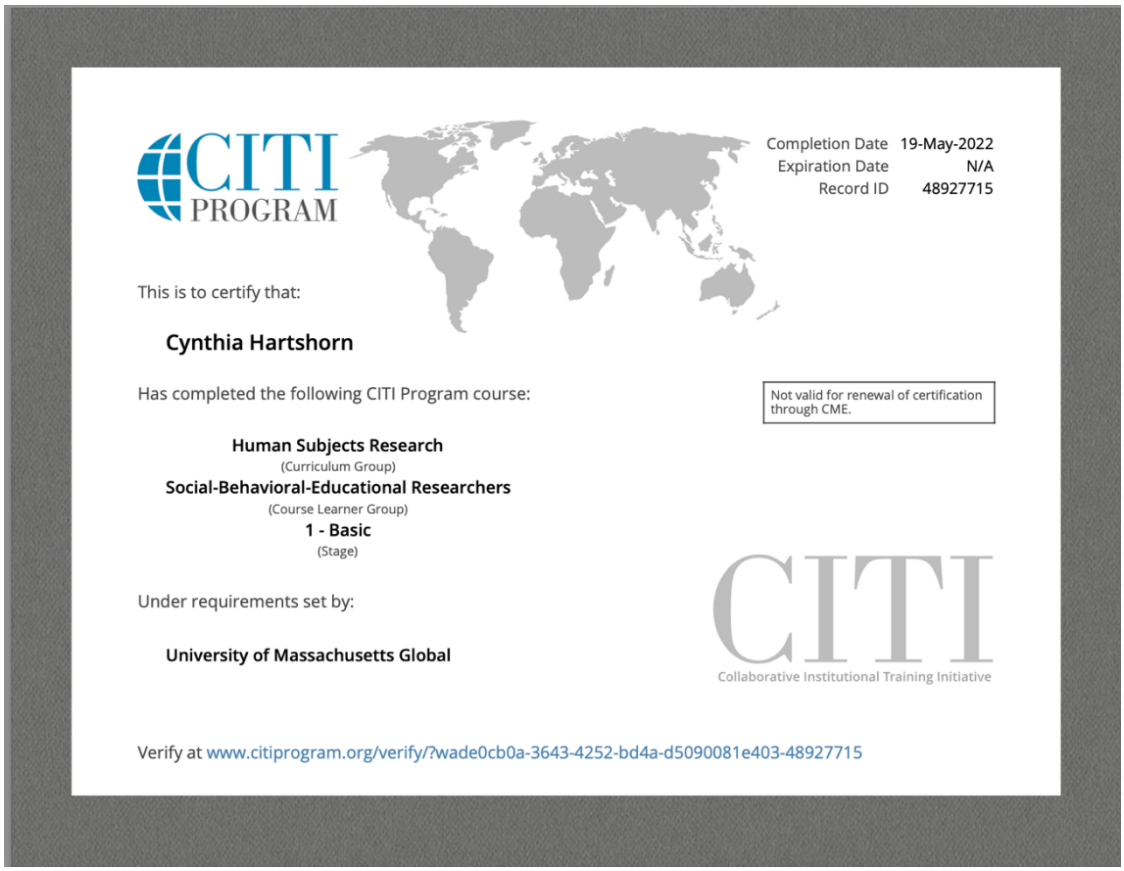
Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX J

CITI Certificate



CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 19-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48927715

This is to certify that:

Cynthia Hartshorn

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wade0cb0a-3643-4252-bd4a-d5090081e403-48927715

APPENDIX K

UMass Global Research Participant's Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

UMASS GLOBAL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.