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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES THAT TEACHERS EXPERIENCE AS A RESULT OF IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-BASED INSTRUCTION PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Suzan Radwan

A Dissertation

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Department of Educational Services and Leadership
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at
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Dissertation Chair: Ane Turner Johnson, Ph. D

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Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my husband, Jamie, for your endless support throughout my journey and for your faith in me. You held all the moving parts of our family together so that I could have time to conquer this endeavor. Thank you for being my partner in life and for sharing every increment of success with me.

To my children, Jasmin, Jena, Julisa, and Gabriel, you inspire me to be the best person I can be; everything I do is for you. Thank you for being my cheerleaders, my happiness, and for allowing me to sacrifice our family-time to accomplish this goal.

To my parents, Fatmeh and Taysier, for always believing in me and encouraging me to strive higher in life. Thank you for instilling in me the importance of hard work and dedication.

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Abstract

Suzan Radwan
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING OUTCOMES THAT TEACHERS EXPERIENCE AS A RESULT OF IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY-BASED INSTRUCTION PROGRAM: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY
2017-2018
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Doctor of Education

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in a New Jersey school district. The study was viewed through the theoretical lens of disabilities studies in education, which posits that the term disability is a socially constructed concept that leads to the systematic social and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities

The sample included public school teachers who have participated in a community-based instruction program for students with disabilities in Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews and graphic elicitations. It was found that teachers experienced teacher learning outcomes such as flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving skills as a result of implementing community-based instruction. Teachers were better able to assess the needs of their students and consequently altered their teaching practices to promote the development of skills that are needed for transition into adulthood in society.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), the U.S. previously led all industrialized nations in having the highest college graduate rates. Over the past generation, this statistic has significantly declined, as the U.S. has dropped from 1st place to 12th place in the world (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). With regards to educational performance, the U.S. continues to slip further behind other advanced nations. More specifically, a significant gap exists between America's top students relative to the top students in other parts of the world, as the U.S. has the smallest proportion of students achieving high levels of proficiency and has lower average test scores than 17 other countries (McKinsey & Company, 2009). This achievement gap has profound implications for our students, including lower postsecondary earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of incarceration (McKinsey & Company, 2009). Furthermore, high school graduation rates, college attendance and completion, and ultimately earnings are impacted by the achievement gap. Only 80% of U.S. high school students earn a diploma, and one third of students take remedial courses in their 1st or 2nd year of postsecondary education to make up for coursework they should have mastered in high school (McKinsey & Company, 2009).

Consequently, there is an increased need to educate the person as a whole and to make connections between subject content and real-world application so that students graduate prepared to have fulfilling careers (McKinsey & Company, 2009; Noddings, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education (2014) has made it a priority to focus on increasing college degree attainment, improving effective teaching and learning, and

ensuring equitable educational opportunities to address the achievement gap that exists for U.S. students in relation to the rest of the world. Therefore, educational institutions should be focusing on teaching and learning that extends beyond the classroom and provides students with an opportunity to apply and integrate the skills they are taught in the classroom setting into real-world environments to prepare them for our new global economy (November, 2010).

Investing in the education of our youth is of utmost importance, and it has become widely accepted that high-quality teachers are the most important asset for schools (Hanuscheck, 2011). According to the U. S. Department of Education (2013), there is a national effort to develop high-quality teachers, which may ostensibly assist America's students in achieving their full potential. The idea of focusing on teacher quality was a major tenant of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) (2002), which called for teachers to be highly qualified. A highly qualified teacher would possess a bachelor's degree, full state certification, and demonstrate that they were proficient in the subject matter they taught (NCLB, 2002). Furthermore, in a summary report, the U. S. Department of Education (2006) described teacher quality as a critical component to strengthening our nation's competitiveness in the global marketplace. As a consequence of promoting the need for highly qualified teachers, improving teacher quality has become regarded as one of the key factors that contribute to student achievement and should be the focus of national education plans (Hunt, 2015; Rowe, 2003). Focusing on improving teacher quality is important because the global economy, on which the financial stability of our country relies, is largely contingent on the educational preparedness of our youth. Highly qualified teachers are the vehicles for ensuring this preparedness.

While there is a national need to foster high-quality teachers to increase the academic achievement of our students, this need is compounded for students with disabilities, who account for approximately 5.7 million American public school students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Research suggests that the most important school-based determinant of student achievement is teacher quality (Sass & Feng, 2012). Poor teacher quality is directly related to the low achievement of their students (Futernick, 2007). In the U.S., there is a high percentage of special education teachers who do not meet the required standards for teaching, which has led to a national shortage of highly qualified special education teachers (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; U. S. Department of Education, 2016). According to Boe, Cook, and Sunderland (2006), over 12% of special education teachers in the United States are not fully certified compared to 10.5% of general education teachers who do not meet the required standards for teaching.

In the U.S., more than three-quarters of students with disabilities score below the mean achievement level, compared to half of students in the general population (U. S. Department of Education, 2006). Despite federal efforts to oversee Special Education in the U.S., the achievement gap for disabled students remains (Murphy, 2014). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), a 27 percentage-point gap exists between general education and special education students on fourth grade standardized measures of reading and math. By eighth grade, the achievement gap increases to a 31 percentage-point difference for students with disabilities (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). The achievement gap continues to widen in middle and high school for students with disabilities, and the gap can span 36 to 41 percentage points across the U.S. (Albus, Lazarus, & Thurlow, 2015). This culminates at the end of high school, where a

high school graduation rates for students with disabilities is 12% lower than rates for general education students (The Advocacy Institute, 2015).

Furthermore, according to the National Center for Special Education Research (2015), four years after graduation, students with disabilities were less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs, less likely to enroll in four-year college, less likely than peers to be working, and less likely to have a checking account or credit card when compared to the general population. Eight years after graduation students with disabilities have lower post-secondary completion rates, are less likely to complete four-year college, earn a lower average wage, are less likely to live independently, and are less likely to be married (National Center for Special Education Research, 2015). Therefore, while the focus of national education plans has increasingly been to improve teacher quality so that students are better prepared for a global economy, the trajectory that students with disabilities are on is not in alignment. That is, students with disabilities are being educated by teachers who are not adequately certified, and as a result, are making less academic progress than their general education counterparts. This dichotomy is contributing to students with disabilities receiving unequal access to high quality education and are consequently less prepared by our educational institutions to become competitive contributors to our economy. Furthermore, this disparity contributes to the achievement gap that exists between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

Overall, unequal access to high-quality education exists for students with disabilities when compared to their non-disabled peers. According to critical disability studies scholars, the concept of disability can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon that leads to the assumption that people with disabilities are biologically

inferior and subordinate (Baynton, 2013). People with disabilities are then placed in hierarchies constructed on the basis of whether they are perceived as capable of being educated or not (Davis, 2013). This leads to perpetuating the exclusionary status of people with disabilities by affording them unequal access to high-quality education through school systems (Erevelles, 2000). Consequently, schools become institutions that contribute to the systematic, social, and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities (Hosking, 2008; Taylor, 2006).

Special Education in the United States

The rights of students with disabilities to equal access to education dates back to 1975, when U.S. Congress passed the Education for All Handicapped Children's Act, Public Law 94-142 (P.L. 94-142). The purpose of this law was to ensure that students with disabilities were provided a free and appropriate public education, and it required school districts to provide students with academic and related services to meet their individual needs. The passing of this law also afforded both students and parents of students with disabilities assurance that their rights would be protected and ensured that states and local school districts provide all the necessary supports students with disabilities need to access their education. Additionally, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 states that individuals with disabilities should not be excluded from participation in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance solely because of their disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (2009) asserts that it is illegal for people with disabilities to be excluded from participation in public activities. Overall, a great deal of legislation has been passed to protect the rights of students with disabilities and to ensure that they have equal access to high quality

education. Disability rights are intended to facilitate equality, bolster educational services, and to promote academic achievement for students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (2004) was reauthorized in 2004. IDEA (2004) governs the education of students with disabilities at a federal level. School districts are held accountable to the provisions of IDEA (2004), which has led to a greater focus on providing students with disabilities an inclusive education in the least restrictive environment in the United States. According to IDEA (2004) Part B Section 300.114-120, students with disabilities are expected to be educated with their non-disabled peers to the fullest extent appropriate in the least restrictive environment. Additionally, removing students with disabilities from their general education setting should only be done if the students could not achieve success with the supplementary aides and services according to IDEA (2004). Consequently, students with significant academic, emotional, and behavioral disorders who may have previously been educated in private institutions or self-contained classrooms are now being educated in public schools and, in some cases, in the general education setting (Ryan & Peterson, 2004).

This issue has come to a head in many states, resulting in legal action forcing schools to provide appropriate educational environments to students with disabilities. In *Disability Rights New Jersey et al. v. New Jersey Department of Education et al.* (2014), the court found that New Jersey schools were not educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment in accordance with IDEA (2004). Consequently, a settlement agreement was reached whereby the NJDOE was mandated to provide professional development, training, and technical assistance to NJ school districts that

were found to be non-compliant with regards to educating students in the least restrictive environment.

Special Education in New Jersey

While State Departments of Education across the nation address the need to have inclusive practices, such as educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, New Jersey in particular has made this an area of focus. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) includes policy in the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.2, 2004) that is consistent with the national least restrictive environment requirements. It's important to recognize that the rights of students with disabilities are explicitly stated at both the federal and state levels to ensure that local school districts provide equal access to high-quality education. That is, there is a responsibility for school districts to afford students with disabilities a high-quality education that will prepare them to for the global economy and to be productive contributors to society, which is in line with the focus for their non-disabled counterparts.

However, despite the abundance of policy at both the national and state levels relating to educating students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, New Jersey's greatest problem area is the over-segregation of children with disabilities, which contributes to the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers in New Jersey (New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2004). Students with disabilities ranging from fourth to 12th grade continue to perform between 27 and 41 percentage points lower than general education students on standardized assessments. Additionally, the graduation rate of students with disabilities is 10% lower than that of their non-disabled peers (Advocacy Institute, 2012). Furthermore, more than

11% of the nation's students with disabilities in segregated placements live in New Jersey, even though New Jersey accounts for less than three percent of the total U.S. population (New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2004). Therefore, despite the policies meant to protect and support students with disabilities, New Jersey continues to fall short in providing a high-quality education. Without addressing the disparity in high-quality education between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, the achievement gap will continue to grow and, more importantly, students with disabilities will be less prepared to contribute to society.

Given the achievement gap that exists for students with disabilities when compared to their non-disabled peers, it is imperative to focus on developing high-quality teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Hunt (2015) elaborates on fostering student achievement and explains that high-quality teaching, in addition to teacher learning, is at the core of ensuring that children gain the knowledge, values, and skills they will need throughout life. Meirink, Meijer, Verloop, and Bergen (2009) conceptualize teacher learning as alterations or changes of knowledge and skills. According to Brakknes, Vermunt, and Wubbels (2010), teacher learning outcomes are defined as changes in knowledge and/or beliefs in teaching practices. Saroyan and Trigwell (2015) describe teacher learning as activities that compel teachers to think differently or develop new skills. Focusing on teacher learning outcomes facilitates the development of high quality special education teachers and helps to close the achievement gap that exists for students with disabilities. Consequently, they will develop skills that better position them to become productive members of society after they graduate.

Teacher Learning Outcomes and Community-Based Instruction

An important component of fostering high quality teachers is providing them with professional learning experiences that help shape the way they teach. Akiba, LeTendre, and Scribner (2007) explain that in order to understand professional learning, one must consider the types of local knowledge, problems, routines, and aspirations that shape teacher learning. Teacher learning can be conceptualized as a complex system rather than an isolated event (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). However, research has primarily focused on the teacher learning outcomes of isolated events, such as professional development experiences, rather than ones that take place in more complex social learning environments (Meirink et al., 2009).

Teacher learning occurs when teachers are placed in situations that require them to think critically about teaching, such as in community-based instruction, which occurs in a student's natural environment (Sheull, 1990). When teachers extend learning outside of the classroom and into real-world settings, they are forced to be problem solvers and critical thinkers and interact with their environment in a complex way (Nathan & Sawyer, 2014; Rogoff, 2003; Sheull, 1990). Community-based instruction puts teachers in situations that are novel and need to be problem-solved. The interaction between teaching and the natural environment engenders learning for teachers that cannot be replicated in the sterile environment of a classroom. Therefore, it is important to explore the teacher learning outcomes that are acquired as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs when focusing on developing high-quality teachers to decrease the achievement gap for students with disabilities.

Community-based instruction is sustained and repeated instruction that takes place in the community rather than in the school building and affords students with disabilities an opportunity to generalize the skills that are taught in a classroom setting to real-world situations including those in the home, work, and community settings (Baker & Freeman, 2014). Community-based instruction programs embody the core concepts of constructivist learning, which promotes learning through complex interactions that elicit problem solving, reasoning, thinking and conceptual understanding skills (Resnick, 2010; Sawyer, 2014). However, just as students benefit from the constructivist learning approach that is inherent in community-based instruction programs, teachers may similarly benefit from the experience.

Requirements exist for school districts to have transition programs that include community-based instruction for students with disabilities in both federal (34 CFR 300.703[b][1]) and state regulations (N.J.A.C 6A:14, 2004). However, in the state of New Jersey, the implementation of community-based instruction programs for the purpose of transition is not explicitly stated as a requirement in the N.J.AC. 6A:14, which governs the provision of services for special education. While community-based instruction is regarded as an evidence-based strategy to facilitate transition (Baker & Freeman, 2014) and the benefits of community-based instruction are well-documented in the literature, school districts are not mandated by federal or state regulations to implement community-based instruction as part of their transition programming. To promote this initiative, the NJDOE offers community-based instruction training that meets once a month throughout the course of the school year to support districts that intend on implementing community-based instruction.

Community-based instruction can be perceived as a means of affording teachers with professional learning outcomes that lead to enhanced teaching and learning practices. That is, implementing community-based instruction programs can potentially engender teacher learning outcomes that result in a change of knowledge and teaching practices for teachers. Ultimately, this leads to reducing the disparity in access to high-quality teaching for students with disabilities. We know little about teacher learning outcomes in complex situations, such as the implementation of community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities at the high school level where there is a need to better prepare youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school to adulthood (Walker, Uphold, Richter, & Test, 2010).

Problem Statement

In order to strengthen our nation's competitiveness in the global marketplace, there is a need to focus on teacher quality, which is recognized as one of the key factors that contribute to student achievement (Hunt, 2015; Rowe, 2003). Focusing on high-quality teachers is considered a factor in helping P-12 students achieve their full potential (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). However, considering the high percentage of special education teachers who do not meet the required standards for teaching, the need to foster high-quality teachers is compounded for students with disabilities (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006). Although research supports the notion that teacher quality is one of the most critical factors in student achievement, there continues to be a national shortage of highly qualified special education teachers (Sass & Feng, 2012; U. S. Department of Education, 2016).

This disparity contributes to the achievement gap that exists for students with disabilities when compared to their non-disabled peers, as teacher quality is directly related to low achievement (Futernick, 2007). Consequently, students with disabilities end up functioning below the mean achievement level and have poorer postsecondary outcomes in life, including being less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs, less likely to be working and supporting themselves financially, and less likely to be living independently (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Therefore, the lack of high-quality teachers and segregated learning environments coupled with the achievement gap contributes to the unequal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities.

The concept of disability can be understood as a socially constructed phenomenon that leads to the assumption that people with disabilities are biologically inferior and subordinate (Baynton, 2013). The exclusionary status of people with disabilities becomes perpetual as a result of affording them unequal access to high-quality education (Erevelles, 2000). School systems become institutions that lead to the systematic, social, and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities (Hosking, 2008; Taylor, 2006). That is, providing students with disabilities unequal access to high-quality education leads to an achievement gap that has long-term implications. By maintaining poor quality education for students with disabilities, schools become a vehicle for perpetuating the disparity in postsecondary outcomes when compared to their non-disabled peers (Erevelles, 2005).

New Jersey has a disproportionately high percentage of students with disabilities who are educated in segregated settings and without access to highly qualified teachers,

which contributes to the achievement gap between students with disabilities and their typically developing peers (New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities, 2004). At the core of student learning is the combination of both high-quality teaching and teacher learning (Hunt, 2015). When teachers are provided with learning opportunities, they grow professionally and become better equipped to impact the academic achievement of students. Consequently, this helps to bridge the achievement gap by providing students with disabilities access to high-quality teaching.

Teacher learning outcomes are alterations or changes in knowledge and skills that lead to a change in teaching practices (Brakknes et al., 2010; Meirink et al., 2009). Ultimately, teaching practices are enhanced as a result of the professional learning that teachers experience (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015). Teacher learning outcomes can be conceptualized as occurring as part of a complex system rather than an isolated event, which is consistent with a constructivist learning model (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). However, studies have primarily focused on the teaching learning outcomes of isolated events, such as professional development experiences, rather than ones that take place in more complex social learning environments (Meirink et al., 2009; Walker et al., 2010). Focusing on the teacher learning outcomes that are acquired through the implementation of community-based instruction programs could impact teaching practices and ultimately lead to reducing the disparity in access to high-quality teaching for students with disabilities.

Despite the seemingly apparent connection between teacher learning outcomes and the implementation of community-based instruction programs, there is an absence of research relating to the teacher learning outcomes that occur as a result of implementing

community-based instruction programs. Studies of teacher learning often focus on the learning processes rather than on the outcomes of these processes (Meirink et al., 2009). Therefore, this study will build upon earlier research relating to teacher learning outcomes and explore the professional learning outcomes that teachers experience as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs for students in New Jersey.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study is to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities. The sample includes public school teachers who have participated in a community-based instruction program for students with disabilities in Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey. Methods included semi-structured interviews and graphic elicitations.

The study is viewed through the theoretical lens of disabilities studies in education, which is nested in the broader context of critical disability theory, which posits that the term "disability" is a socially constructed concept that leads to the systematic social and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities (Hosking, 2008). More specifically, this instrumental case study explores whether professional learning outcomes are acquired through the implementation of a community-based instruction program (Stake, 2006).

Research Questions

1. What professional learning outcomes do Mountainview Public Schools' community-based instruction teachers report acquiring as a result of their program implementation?
2. How does the implementation of a community-based instruction program improve the quality of special education teachers' teaching practices?
3. In what way does the implementation of community-based instruction programs change beliefs about teaching students with disabilities?
4. What changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities occurred as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs?

Theoretical Framework

Critical Disability Theory

The unequal access to high quality education that results in an achievement gap for students with disabilities when compared to their typically developing peers can be explored through the theoretical lens of critical disability theory (Hosking, 2008). Critical disability theory posits that disability is a socially constructed concept that leads to the systematic social and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities, fosters social hierarchies, and is arguably produced for political reasons and to maintain dominance (Bayton, 2013; Hosking, 2008; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Therefore, the goal of critical disability studies is to deconstruct ideas about disability and to explore how they have come to dominate our perceptions and ideologies about people with disabilities

(Vehmas & Watson, 2014). This is accomplished by critically engaging the ideas used to construct the disability problem (Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Disability Studies in Education

Baglieri, Valle, Connor, and Gallagher (2011), explain that disability is the product of social, political, economic, and cultural practice. Giroux (2003) elaborates on this notion by explaining that disability studies in education examine disability in a social and cultural context. In doing so, ideas about disability become unsettled and our assumptions are challenged (Taylor, 2006). That is, existing borders of domination can be challenged and redefined (Giroux, 1992).

More specifically, people with disabilities are not the problem, but rather, the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the problem of people with disabilities (Davis, 2013). Promoting the ideal of normalcy implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm or conform to a set of normal standards (Davis, 2013; Garland-Thomson, 2002). Unfortunately, establishing a normalcy inevitably divides the total population into standard and nonstandard subpopulations that function to validate the "privileged" (Davis, 2013; Garland-Thomson, 2002). Forging the notion of normalcy leads to the perception of a "defective class" (Davis, 2013, p. 7). Consequently, disability comes to function as a justification for inferiority and inequality (Bayton, 2013). Therefore, in order to develop a consciousness about disability issues, there will be a need to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to promote alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal (Davis, 2013).

Davis (2013) explains that normalcy is an ideal that must be constantly enforced. People with disabilities often receive a separate and unequal education in segregated

settings on the premise that their individual differences prevent them from acquiring educational gains in general education settings (Erevelles, 2000). Although the focus of unequal access to high-quality education is usually centered on the disparity between advantaged and disadvantaged students (Goldhaber, Lavery, & Theobald, 2015), it is prudent not to overlook the discrepancy that exists for students with disabilities.

Therefore, school systems can be perceived as institutions that are inherently responsible for reproducing social inequality by perpetuating the exploitation of class hierarchies, which contributes to the reproduction of the positioning of people with disabilities in society (Erevelles, 2000; Macleod, 1995). Essentially, schools foster the existence of an unequal social division of labor and attribute the source of economic failure to the disabled individual (Erevelles, 2000). That is, schools socialize people with disabilities to accept responsibility for their inability to become productive members of our economy, which in turn prevents them from adequately meeting even their own basic needs (Erevelles, 2000).

Teacher Learning

However, teachers can play a vital role in the amelioration of unequal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities. Teacher learning activities can help to foster new skills in teachers and compel them to think about teaching and learning (Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015). Essentially, teacher learning occurs in complex settings and is bolstered by opportunities for teachers to learn alongside their students (Kelly, 2006). Therefore, collaborative experiences, such as community-based instruction, afford teachers an opportunity to learn with their students. This yields professional learning outcomes that influence the quality of the teaching they provide to students with

disabilities (Kelly, 2006). Teacher learning impacts how teachers think and feel about their role as a teacher (Brakknes, et al., 2010). Furthermore, teacher learning leads to changes in what a teacher knows and alters their teaching practices in a way that improves their teaching (Meirink, et al., 2009; Brakknes et al., 2010). The connection between teacher learning theory and critical disability theory will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Delimitations

The results of this study may be useful to teachers implementing community-based instruction programs in other districts, but it is important to note that the findings of this study are specific to community-based instruction teachers in Mountainview Public Schools and therefore should be generalized with caution. Value can be found in transferring from one case to the next on the basis of matching the underlying theory (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The decision to transfer findings is made based on the conceptual underpinnings of the case rather than its representativeness (Miles et al., 2014).

Additionally, as a reflective researcher, I have been conscientious of potential influences by stepping back and taking a critical look at my own role in the research process (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I took into consideration that I directly supervise the participants and explored the extent to which that may have impacted either their willingness to participate in the study or their transparency during the interview. It was essential for me to foster an open and trusting environment during the interview and look out for incongruities in their interviews that may suggest that their response was

influenced by issues of power or by my role as their administrator (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009).

Since the focus of the sample was on teachers, as opposed to students, I have been cognizant of the issues associated with conducting research in my own organization (Creswell, 2014). Because the interviewed teachers were those who I directly supervise, the accuracy of the data may have been compromised and the research could potentially jeopardize the working relationship (Creswell, 2014).

According to Creswell (2014), researchers should assume that a power imbalance exists between the researcher and the participants during interviews and observations. More importantly, this potential power imbalance must be respected (Creswell, 2014). This has been of particular importance in this study, as the participants were supervised by the researcher in their work setting. I was cognizant of how stressful the interview process could be for participants, how critically the interviewees were questioned, and whether the participants had a say in how the data was interpreted (Creswell, 2014). At no point were participants exploited in this study, as I made efforts to engage in a reciprocal process with participants and convey the findings to them following the study (Creswell, 2014).

Significance

Policy

The requirement for school districts to have transition programs for students with disabilities exists in both federal (34 CFR 300.703[b][1]) and state regulations (N.J.A.C 6A:14, 2004). However, the implementation of community-based instruction programs for the purpose of transition is not explicitly stated as a requirement. While community-

based instruction is regarded as an evidence-based strategy to facilitate transition (Baker & Freeman, 2014) and the benefits of community-based instruction are well-documented in the literature, school districts are not mandated by federal or state regulations to implement community-based instruction as part of their transition programming. Passing such legislation on community-based instruction might engender support for school districts from the federal and state levels and would facilitate teacher learning outcomes that could lead to the alignment of 21st-century teaching and learning for students with disabilities.

Practice

There is a need to better prepare youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school to adulthood (Walker et al., 2010), and special education teachers are charged with ensuring that they are providing high-quality education to accomplish this goal. Community-based instruction can provide teachers professional learning that leads to enhanced teaching and learning practices. The teacher learning outcomes that are acquired as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs results in a change in knowledge and teaching practices for teachers. Ultimately, this leads to reducing the disparity in access to high-quality teaching for students with disabilities.

Research

Considering the achievement gaps that exist for students with disabilities when compared to their typically developing peers, it is imperative that special education teachers be afforded the training and support they need to improve their teaching practices (Murphy, 2014). While implementing a community-based instruction program that fosters an opportunity to acquire professional learning outcomes for teachers, the

extent to which educational leaders are fostering additional opportunities is unclear. Future research should explore the extent to which educational leaders are fostering opportunities for special education teachers to engage in activities that lead to professional learning outcomes, which in turn bolsters their teaching practices.

Additionally, considering the high-stakes testing for students that is emphasized in legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2016), future research should focus on the relationship between teacher learning outcomes and students' achievement on standardized assessments. Given the teacher learning outcomes such as changes in knowledge and teaching practices that result in enhanced teaching and learning, future research should explore the extent to which this has an impact on students' performance on standardized assessments.

Outline of Chapters

A review of the literature relating to critical disability theory, disabilities studies in education, community-based instruction, constructivist learning, and teacher learning outcomes are explored in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 provides a methodological overview of this study, which includes the research design, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations of conducting the study. In Chapter 4, the results of the qualitative data collection are discussed. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the data analysis and potential directions for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

This chapter discusses the relevant research on critical disability theory, disability studies in education, the social construction of people with disabilities, community-based instruction, and teacher-learning outcomes. The chapter starts with a discussion of the social construction of people with disabilities, particularly as it relates to educating students with disabilities. Next, community-based instruction as a means to increasing the preparedness of students with disabilities for their postsecondary transition will be explored. Additionally, the process of teacher learning and the idea of professional learning outcomes for teachers will be discussed. Furthermore, the connection between teacher learning outcomes and increasing teacher quality will be reviewed. The chapter will also include a discussion of the systematic oppression of people with disabilities and its connection to unequal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities. This chapter closes by examining the gaps in the existing literature that support the need for this study.

Social Model vs. Medical Model

The notion of disability can be understood in the context of both the medical model and the social model, which distinguishes the notion of disability from the notion of impairment (Bickenbach, Chatterji, Badley, & Us-tun, 1999; Marks, 1997; Shakespeare, 2013; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002). The medical model conceptualizes the idea of disability as an individual deficit that is a function of a physical, mental, or sensory impairment that requires medical intervention (Bickenbach et al., 1999; Shakespeare, 2013). The social model, on the other hand, conceptualizes disability as

something that is imposed onto people with impairments, by isolating them and excluding them from society (Shakespeare, 2013). More specifically, according to the social model, people with disabilities become limited in their opportunities for education, employment, housing, and transportation because of social barriers, such as negative attitudes and neglect, rather than their inherent impairment (Bickenbach et al., 1999). While the social model doesn't necessarily capture the complex struggles that people with disabilities face daily, it is a critical perspective for the empowerment and civil rights of people with disabilities (Marks, 1997; Shakespeare, 2013). However, it is important to note that according to Shakespeare and Watson (2002), focusing solely on the social model and excluding the medical model may result in a lack of acknowledgement of differences between people, which is an important aspect for people with disabilities.

Critical Disability Theory

Critical disability theory advocates for the interrogation of the language used to describe the idea of disability and posits that disability is a socially constructed barrier for people with disabilities (Baglieri et al., 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Hosking, 2008; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). A socially constructed idea is one that operates as if it was real in a social context and often functions to perpetuate human oppression (Woehrle & Coy, 2000). Human rights and equality are at the core of critical disability theory, and the notion of disability can be understood as a consequence of how society portrays the relationship of an individual relative to the larger society (Rioux & Valentine, 2006). The focus of critical disability theory is on addressing the structural barriers that society creates for people with disabilities as a

means to ameliorating their marginalization in society and the workforce (Malhotra, 2006; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). That is, critical disability theory demands that the notion of difference be challenged and asserts that perpetuating the idea of differences leads to societal exclusion (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Furthermore, forging the concept of difference engenders systemic inequality and prohibits the full inclusion of people with disabilities into society (Brookfield, 2005; Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Hosking, 2008; Taylor, 2006).

Critical disability theory perceives society as a means to perpetuating inequality by constructing categories that segregate and oppress people (Davis, 2013; Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Gillborn, 2015; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). Furthermore, people with disabilities are disadvantaged as a result of mainstream society's unwillingness to adapt to different and non-traditional ways of doing things (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). By ignoring the voices of people with disabilities, they are portrayed as passive victims (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Rocco, 2005). Through the lens of critical disability theory, society is challenged to acknowledge the differences of people without creating hierarchies based on those differences (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). Additionally, critical disability theory advocates for disabled and non-disabled people to join forces and be mutually accountable for preventing the socially constructed concepts that serve as barriers for people with disabilities (Devlin & Pothier, 2006; Rioux & Valentine, 2006).

Disability Studies in Education

Historically, the concept of disability has functioned to justify inequality for disabled people and served as a sign of inferiority (Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Differences between disabled and non-disabled people are

seen as being socially produced in order to maintain dominance (Baglieri et al., 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Our construction of the normal world is based on a radical repression of disability because the pathology of the disabled gives form to the normal, which in turn fuels the value that underlies the political, social, and economic structures (Erevelles & Minear, 2010). Dominance is maintained by those in power and perpetuates the idea of normal by oppressing a variety of groups including people with disabilities (Robbins, 2011). The culture of disability is defined by the recognition of differences rather than in spite of differences (Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000). Essentially, disability is the product of judgement and social, political, economic, and cultural practice (Baglieri et al., 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Disabilities and the Notion of Normalcy

It is important to note that a consequence of forging the idea of the norm is that the population becomes divided into standard and substandard populations (Davis, 2013). Garland-Thomson (1997) used the term "normate" to describe individuals who have the potential to step into roles of authority based on their body composition, which supports the notion that the population becomes divided based on their perceived ability (p. 8). The concept of a norm implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of that group (Davis, 2013; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Consequently, disability is described as a disruption of normativity that leads to the notion of a defective class (Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). This ideology of disability justifies and maintains social hierarchies by regulating and controlling

inequality (Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Therefore, the problem can be traced back to how the concept of normalcy was constructed rather than succumbing to the idea that the disabled person is the problem in and of itself (Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

People with disabilities "have not yet fully succeeded in refuting the presumption that their subordinate status can be ascribed to an innate biological inferiority" (Davis, 2013, p. 29). That is, people with disabilities have struggled to disrupt the normative ideals that have been created for them from the social world around them. (Baglieri et al., 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Arguably, the pursuit of justice of disabled people will not require the deconstruction of categories of difference (Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Rather, in order to develop consciousness of disability issues, we will be forced to "reverse the hegemony of the normal" and begin employing alternative ways of thinking about people with disabilities (Davis, 2013, p. 12).

Social Institutions and People with Disabilities

The term disability did not exist as a social category prior to the 18th century, even though impairments were present in the population before that (Braddok & Parish, 2001; Covey, 1998). It was largely understood through a religious perspective as a condition that was unchangeable (Covey, 1998). During the medieval times, various forms of disability were thought to have supernatural or demonic origins and often led to the persecution and execution of people with disabilities (Braddok & Parish, 2001). In the latter part of the middle ages, institutions began to emerge as a result of the influence of Arabs who had been using asylums for their disabled, and people with disabilities were

segregated form the general population (Braddok & Parish, 2001). Institutionalizing people with disabilities in segregated settings continued well into the 1970s, when there was a movement demanding that people with disabilities be afforded rights as citizens (Pfieffer, 1993).

Therefore, there is a need to redefine the concept of the ideal and the normal in relation to the general population (Davis, 2013). This is particularly important because people with disabilities are categorized as non-citizens by the very social institutions that are designed to protect and empower them (Baglieri et al., 2011; Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Taylor, 2006). Constantly enforcing the notion of normalcy perpetuates inequality through social institutions (Davis, 2013). This highlights the need to rethink the scope of democracy, the meaning of democratic institutions, and the parts of democracy that are being undermined (Giroux, 2003).

Schools are social institutions that help to sustain the stratification of society and exploit class hierarchies through administrative and curricular practices, particularly for students with disabilities (Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Hosking, 2008; Macleod, 1995; Taylor, 2006). More specifically, through segregated learning environments and unequal access to high-quality teaching, the education that students with disabilities receive is not commensurate with that of their non-disabled peers. Therefore, schools may be understood as institutions that fail to meet the needs of all citizens equally (Erevelles, 2000; Giroux, 2003). Instead of individualizing education programs to meet the needs of all students, schools segregate students with disabilities because they disrupt the normal functioning of schools, which further reinforces the notion of standard and substandard populations (Davis, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010).

Therefore, schools socialize people with disabilities to internalize the idea that they are responsible for not being able to adequately meet their own needs (Erevelles & Minear, 2010).

Segregated School Settings for People with Disabilities

The segregated classroom setting contributes to a disparity in skills that students with disabilities learn, which has an impact on their ability to become productive members of society (Erevelles, 2000). Students with disabilities are less adept at interpreting social situations and making decisions and have underdeveloped adaptive skills in the areas of communication, social skills, motor skills, life skills, and problem solving (Beakley, Yoder, & West, 2003). As a result, people with disabilities are excluded from the economy because of the thought that their physiological and cognitive differences will impede the productivity of their labor (Erevelles, 2000). Consequently, people with disabilities become employed in jobs that are at the lowest rung of the labor division, if employed at all (Erevelles, 2000). More specifically, four years after high school graduation, students with disabilities were less likely than their peers to enroll in postsecondary programs, less likely to enroll in four-year college, less likely to be working, and less likely to have a checking account or credit card when compared to the general population (National Center for Special Education Research, 2015). Eight years after graduation, students with disabilities have lower postsecondary completion rates, are less likely to complete four-year college, earn a lower average wage, are less likely to live independently, and are less likely to be married (National Center for Special Education Research, 2015). Therefore, the segregated school setting serves to create a disparity in skills that are used to function as productive members of society.

Since school plays such a large role in teaching hegemonic values, ideas, and practices, hegemony should be understood as an educational phenomenon (Baynton, 2013; Brookfield, 2005). Hegemony explains the way in which people are persuaded to embrace dominant ideologies as being in their own best interest (Brookfield, 2005). The perceptions of people with disabilities can be understood as a result of the hegemony of normalcy that must be reversed (Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013). Therefore, equal access to curriculum and learning opportunities are essential to learning environments, such as in community-based instruction (Baglieri et al., 2011; Baker & Freeman, 2014; November, 2010).

Achievement Gaps for Students with Disabilities

According to Kosiewicz (2008), significant achievement gaps exist between disabled and nondisabled students, and therefore, schools should focus on creating learning environments for people with disabilities that foster productive members of society. Consequently, the U.S. Department of Education has announced an increased effort to gather and analyze data relating to the gap that exists for special education students on achievement measures as well as high school graduation rates relative to general education students (Murphy, 2014). Furthermore, at the federal level, there is an initiative to increase the oversight of how states are educating students with disabilities, focusing primarily on compliance to regulations (Murphy, 2014). The achievement gaps for students with disabilities can begin to close when we align general education and special education curriculum standards, with an emphasis on inclusive practices, high standards for achievement, and effective teaching (Murphy, 2014).

Students with Disabilities and Teachers

At the federal level, the need for special education teachers can be found in legislation, as they play an integral role in providing instruction and ensuring the success of students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004; Shepherd, Fowler, McCormick, Wilson, & Morgan, 2016). While special education teachers are currently expected to meet the demands of educating students with a wide range of disabilities, historically, as far back as the 1970s, special education teachers were primarily focused on teaching to specific types and levels of disabilities (American Academy of Special Education Professionals [AASEP], 2006; Shepherd et al., 2016). In the 1980s, the role of the special education teacher expanded to include behavioral approaches to instruction that occurred both inside and outside of the classroom setting (Shepherd et al., 2016). This came at a time when special education teachers were increasingly expected to encourage the participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting to the fullest extent feasible (Shepherd et al., 2016; Youngs, Jones, & Low, 2011). Consequently, this meant special education teachers were required to collaborate with general education teachers more frequently in order to align the curriculum across both settings (Shepherd et al., 2016; Youngs et al., 2011). With the passing of NCLB (2002), special education teachers were faced with the demands of increased accountability, which meant that they played an integral role in helping students with disabilities perform on standardized assessments (Shepherd et al., 2016; Wasburn-Moses, 2005).

Today, special education teachers are responsible for being well versed in a wide range of disabilities and are required to differentiate instruction, modify course content, and provide accommodations to students with disabilities (AASEP, 2006; Laframboise,

Epanchin, Colucci, & Hocutt, 2004; Shepherd et al., 2016; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011). Essentially, special education teachers are accountable for student outcomes on standardized assessments, similar to their general education counterparts, and need to ensure that students with disabilities are exposed to and have equal access to content standards (Shepherd et al., 2016; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). This requires them to use evidence-based instruction, collaborate with general education teachers, and specifically design instruction to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities (AASEP, 2006; Laframboise, Epanchin, Colucci, & Hocutt, 2004; Shepherd et al., 2016; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011).

Special education teachers have a legal obligation to implement the goals and objectives of IEPs, provide modifications and accommodations, and maximize the time students with disabilities spend in general education classrooms (Youngs et al., 2011). However, novice special education teachers report that their instructional expectations are often ambiguous and no clear guidance is provided on how to truly modify curriculum (Laframboise et al., 2004; Youngs et al., 2011). Furthermore, this leads to heightened feelings of isolation and results in special education teachers defining their roles as they go (Laframboise et al., 2004; Youngs et al., 2011). Therefore, an important component to educating students with disabilities is to afford special education teachers opportunities to collaborate with general education teachers in order to align curriculum and work together to meet the needs of students who are educated in both settings (Laframboise et al., 2004; Shepherd et al., 2016; Wasburn-Moses, 2005; Youngs et al., 2011).

Community-Based Instruction

Community-based instruction can be used to ameliorate the perpetual and systematic disadvantage of students with disabilities as well as close the achievement gap that exists for students with disabilities (Hoskings, 2008; Kosiewicz, 2008; Murphy, 2014). Baker and Freeman (2014) explain that community-based instruction can be used to bridge the gap between 21st century teaching and learning for students with disabilities and can help to transfer student skills from the classroom to real-world situations, including those in the home, work, and community settings. Essentially, community-based instruction is sustained and repeated instruction that takes place in the community rather than in the school building (Baker & Freeman, 2014). It is important to note that community-based instruction is not a field trip, which is an isolated occurrence and happens once. Rather, community-based instruction is instruction that occurs multiple times a week throughout the school year and is a means to implementing curriculum and teaching outside of the school setting (Baker & Freeman, 2014). This is accomplished by teaching individual and small groups of students during activities that are relevant to them and occur naturally in community settings.

Essentially, through experiential, supervised, in-depth learning experiences, the students engage in rigorous activities out in the community that are integrated into the curriculum and that provide them with opportunities to demonstrate and apply a high level of academic and/or technical skills and develop personal, academic, and career goals (N.J.A.C. 6A:19-1.2, 2004). That is, community-based instruction is a research-based practice that facilitates the transition to adult life for students with disabilities and provides "real life" opportunities to teach aspects of the Common Core (Baker &

Freeman, 2014). Through community-based instruction, teachers plan lessons for students with disabilities that are taught out in the community (Baker & Freeman, 2014). For example, a math lesson may be taught in a supermarket rather than in the classroom. Although the lessons are planned in advance, they are more spontaneous and contextualized in the real world. Therefore, teachers are required to respond to students outside of their controlled classroom environment.

Community-Based Instruction: An Effective Practice for Transition

Community-based instruction is identified as an effective and valuable practice for transitioning students with disabilities into adulthood and is considered best practice for fostering the skills needed to live, work, and participate in an integrated community (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Bates, Cuvo, Miner, & Korabek, 2001; Beakley, Yoder, & West, 2003; Cihak, Alberto, Kessler, & Taber, 2003; Kamens, Dolyniuk & Dinard, 2003; Kim & Dymond, 2010; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012). Through community-based instruction, independence in the community setting and positive post-school outcomes increase for students with disabilities (Agran et al., 1999). According to Cihak et al. (2003), by providing students with disabilities an opportunity to practice their skills in a natural environment, they are more likely to generalize what is taught in the classroom setting into the real world. Studies suggest that teachers support the literature on the effectiveness of community-based instruction as they also perceive it to be highly beneficial for students with disabilities and feel that it successfully prepares them for life after school (Kamens et al., 2003; Kim & Dymond, 2010; Pickens & Dymond, 2015). More specifically, teachers perceive community-based instruction as a

valuable approach to teaching functional skills in the community setting (Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012).

Community-Based Instruction & Schools

Community-based instruction is linked to students' individual education plans and is systematically taught in the community under the supervision of school personnel rather than in the classroom setting (Pickens & Dymond, 2015). The lessons promote learning in an inclusive environment and affords students with disabilities a balance between general education and special education settings (Agran et al., 1999). More specifically, students with disabilities have the opportunity to interact with non-disabled peers during community-based instruction, which helps to bolster their social skills and eventually expand their social networks at school (Agran et al., 1999). The natural environment is considered the optimal location to teach functional skills that are outlined in students' individualized education plans (Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012). Furthermore, the benefits of community-based instruction extend across the continuum of disabilities and are viable for students with both mild and moderate intellectual impairments (Bates et al., 2001).

Obstacles to Community-Based Instruction

Traditionally, issues of liability were identified as a primary concern when including students with disabilities into the community and workforce (Kim & Dymond, 2010). However, the current trend focuses on different obstacles that teachers experience when implementing community-based instruction (Kim & Dymond, 2010). Currently, the primary areas of concern for teachers center around funding, limited resources, access to transportation, need for additional staffing, and need for great preparation time (Kim &

Dymond, 2010; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012). Additionally, lack of administrative support and contending with students' challenging behaviors were identified as obstacles to implementing community-based instruction (Kim & Dymond, 2010; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012). Furthermore, with the increased focus on high-stakes testing in the legislation, teachers report that they are finding it more difficult to align the standards-based curriculum to the vocational and functional goals of students (Kim & Dymond, 2010).

Transition from School to Adulthood

The notion of early transition planning is essential for students with disabilities (Walker et al., 2010). However, the focus on college preparation often overshadows workforce readiness in most U.S. high schools, which leads to a need to better assist students in identifying their strengths and interests so that educational plans can be geared toward developing their skills (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). Early transition planning is emerging as a factor that leads to successful outcomes for students with disabilities, as it can have a positive impact on post-school outcomes, such as obtaining employment, increased independent living, and greater life satisfaction (Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Walker et al., 2010). More specifically, successful transition planning is characterized by adequately preparing students with disabilities for the work force, which is an important role for schools when developing individualized plans (Levinson & Palmer, 2005).

The successful adult outcomes for students with disabilities, such as employment and independent living, largely depend on the programmatic decisions that are made throughout the student's course of study, which should include developing academic

skills, daily living skills, personal/social skills, occupational skills, and vocational skills (Levinson & Palmer, 2005; Walker et al., 2010). That is, preparation for transition into adulthood for students with disabilities should focus on "academic skills needed for specific occupations" and "instruction in social skills necessary for survival in the community" (Sitlington & Frank, 1990, p. 111). Therefore, successful transition into the community involves not only preparation for employment but also adequate preparation for residential, social, and interpersonal competencies (Sitlington & Frank, 1990).

Students with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed and have lower paying jobs and less job satisfaction, which indicates that there is a need to better prepare youth with disabilities to successfully transition from school to adulthood (Dunn, 1996; Walker et al., 2010). Decisions that are made for transition planning will have long-term consequences for students with disabilities. Consequently, by the age of 14, almost 90% of students with disabilities have transition planning incorporated into their individualized programming (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004). This is in alignment with best practices in transition planning, as the focus should be on developing an individualized plan that leads to the identification of desired life outcomes and coordination with adult service agencies (Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

At its core, successful transition planning helps students with disabilities identify the key elements of workforce preparation, such as gaining awareness of interests and aptitudes, being exposed to career options, and assessing/building skills (Levinson & Palmer, 2005). Furthermore, a major component of the transition process is establishing a comprehensive transdisciplinary team that includes the student, parents, school staff, and community agency members (Cameto et al., 2004; Levinson & Palmer, 2005; Shogren &

Plotner, 2012; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). When parents are actively involved in the transition planning process, they report greater satisfaction with their students' post-school outcomes (Shogren & Plotner, 2012). However, despite the research that supports the need for a collaborative approach to the transition process, community agency representatives continue to be infrequent members of the planning process (Cameto et al., 2004; Levinson & Palmer, 2005).

Overall, special education services play a major role in the transition of students with disabilities, and it is important for educational leaders to build capacity among their staff so they can adequately help students with disabilities determine what vocational and life skill training is warranted in their educational programming (Levinson & Palmer, 2005; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Coursework and instruction should be specifically designed to help students transition from secondary education to adulthood by providing 21st-century teaching and learning that extends beyond the classroom and provides students with an opportunity to apply and integrate the skills they are taught in the classroom setting into real-world environments as part of their transition planning (Cameto et al., 2004; Noddings, 2013). Curricular initiatives such as community-based instruction can help to facilitate the instructional needs of transitioning students by teaching them how to think more critically, creatively, skillfully, independently, and spontaneously (Baker & Freeman, 2014; Costa & Kallick, 2010).

Constructivist Learning in Community-Based Instruction

Constructivist learning is contextual learning whereby the learner constructs meaning through interactions with their environment (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). That is, learning is not a passive experience, but one that requires the learner to actively

engage their environment in order to obtain deep meaningful learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Shuell, 1986; Vygotsky, 1980). Constructivism is rooted in the works of Piaget, Dewey, and Vygotsky, who asserted that learning is a product of constructing meaning, that learning is the result of interacting with one's environment, and that learning is constructed though social interactions and language, respectively (Merriam & Bierema, 2013). Incorporating constructivist learning into school settings maximizes learning, makes for an authentic learning environment, and is a highly regarded educational practice (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

According to Sawyer (2014), in constructivist learning environments, students acquire a deeper understanding, experience greater motivation, and are more proficient at generalizing what has been learned as a result of being active participants in constructing their knowledge. When using a constructivist approach, students become active participants in constructing their own knowledge, and deeper and more generalizable learning occurs (Sawyer, 2014). Therefore, teaching and learning should be thought of as an active rather than passive experience for learners (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Nathan & Sawyer, 2014). This is accomplished by engaging learners in a collaborative experience whereby they become constructive participants in the discussion and by designing learning environments that are engaging, motivating, and interesting (Järvelä & Renninger, 2014).

Community-based instruction programs incorporate the core concepts of constructivist learning, which promotes learning through complex interactions that elicit problem solving, reasoning, thinking, and conceptual understanding skills (Resnick, 2010; Sawyer, 2014). Learning that occurs in complex social environments and social

interactions is perceived as a primary driver of intellectual development, which can contribute to learning (Nathan & Sawyer, 2014). Providing teachers an opportunity to learn through the implementation of community-based instruction programs is consistent with a constructivist perspective on learning, which Shuell (1990) describes as an active process. Essentially, constructivist learning involves thinking, social relations, and experiences (Rogoff, 2003). Therefore, community-based instruction can be understood as a learning experience that embodies complex social interactions to impact teacher learning and ultimately teacher quality.

Community-based instruction is fundamentally consistent with constructivist learning by encouraging learners to become active participants in constructing their own knowledge (Sawyer, 2014). In doing so, they acquire a deeper understanding, experience greater motivation, and are more proficient at generalizing what has been learned (Nathan & Sawyer, 2014; Sawyer, 2014; Vygotsky, 1980). Constructivist learning occurs when teachers are engaged in organized activities of learning in a school setting (Hoekstra, Brekelmans, Beijaard, & Korthagen, 2009). Teacher learning, such as in community-based instruction, is essentially an active, goal-oriented process for the learner, which is consistent with a constructivist perspective (Shuell, 1990).

Teachers and Community-Based Instruction

Special education teachers can provide instruction in a variety of different settings, always with the goal of providing access to the curriculum and content standards for students with disabilities (Shepherd et al., 2016). In some cases, special education teachers can provide instruction in a self-contained setting that consists of a separate classroom where students are only exposed to students with disabilities in a general

education school (AASEP, 2006). Moving toward a less restrictive environment, special education teachers can provide instruction in a resource classroom wherein students are pulled out of their general education classrooms for certain subjects to receive instruction with other students with disabilities in small group settings (AASEP, 2006). Additionally, special education teachers can provide modifications and accommodations to the curriculum by co-teaching in a general education classroom that has both students with and without disabilities (AASEP, 2006). Special education teachers who implement community-based instruction programs have a unique opportunity to provide instruction outside of the classroom setting altogether and expose students with disabilities to the curriculum in a natural environment out in the community (Beakley et al., 2003).

Special education teachers play a critical role in the planning and execution of community-based instruction programs which facilitate the effective transition for students with disabilities (Kamens et al., 2003; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). They are primarily responsible for developing lessons that are in alignment with the content standards and can be implemented out in the community (Baker & Freeman, 2014; Beakley et al., 2003; Shepherd et al., 2016; Youngs et al., 2011). More specifically, community-based instruction teachers are responsible for assessing students' strengths and weaknesses so that an instructional plan can be developed and implemented out in the community (Beakley et al., 2003). In order to do so, community-based instruction teachers need to be adept at fostering relationships between the school and community agencies as well as skilled at facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration among various stakeholders (Kamens et al., 2003). After instructional lessons have been implemented

out in the community, the teachers repeatedly practice the skills until they are mastered and become part of the students' repertoire (Beakley et al., 2003).

While special education teachers believe that community-based instruction is an important aspect of transitional education and often advocate for its implementation, they reportedly feel overwhelmed when having to implement the programming (Beakley et al., 2003; Westling & Fleck, 1991). More specifically, community-based instruction teachers are faced with fulfilling their teaching duties while managing a great deal of planning that is required for community-based instruction programs (Beakley et al., 2003). Community-based instruction teachers expend a great deal of energy and time planning for learning out in the community, which can compromise the amount of time that they actually spend implementing the programs (Beakley, et al., 2003).

Teacher Learning

Community-based instruction is a means to implementing curriculum by teaching the goals and objectives of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) outside of the school setting (Baker & Freeman, 2014; Beakley et al., 2003). Teachers use the IEP to implement community-based instruction by linking the student to the community and helping them to master individual instructional goals (Beakley et al., 2003). Goals and objectives of an IEP must be implemented by a certified teacher considering the need to be in alignment with curricular standards (Beakley et al., 2003). Consequently, special education teachers are responsible for overseeing the implementation of community-based instruction programs. That is, special education teachers play a critical role in the planning, effectiveness, and evaluation of transition programs, such as community-based instruction, as they need to be skilled in modifying general education curricula to meet

the needs of students with disabilities (Beakley et al., 2003; Bettini, Benedict, Thomas, Kimerling, & McLeskey, 2017; Kamens et al., 2003). While community-based instruction programs include multiple stakeholders such as teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members, the responsibility of implementing the program falls on the special education teacher (Beakley et al., 2003; Kamens et al., 2003; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Community-based instruction teachers are responsible for developing the sequence of instruction, analyzing student skills, and developing an instructional plan to practice and/or master skills out in the community (Kamens et al., 2003).

The experiential learning that occurs for teachers of community-based instruction programs has been shown to be extremely beneficial to their professional growth by contributing to the confidence and reflective thinking of teachers (Kamens et al., 2003). Furthermore, special education teachers engage in problem-solving skills while implementing community-based instruction programs, as they are not able to anticipate all of the problems they may encounter while out in the community (Beakley et al., 2003). However, despite its benefits and potential to enhance teaching, teachers report that their training programs do not adequately prepare them to create, establish, and implement effective transition programs such as community-based instruction (Beakley et al., 2003; Kamens et al., 2003).

More specifically, teachers report that their preservice programs do not effectively train them to develop and implement transition programs, which end up being a requirement for them in their roles as special education teachers (Kamens et al., 2003). Teachers require a unique set of training when implementing community-based

instruction programs, as the skills teachers need for community-based instruction differs from what they receive in their traditional training (Langone, Langone, & McLaughlin, 2000). For example, teachers are required to employ a variety of interpersonal skills when engaging non-educators in the community and are required to use teaching strategies that are specific to community environments when implementing community-based instruction (Langone et al., 2000). The exchanges that teachers will have while teaching their students out in the community will differ from those of a traditional classroom setting and will require teachers to have a different set of supports (Langone et al., 2000; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Sitlington & Frank, 1990).

Therefore, it is critical that community-based instruction teachers have administrative support (Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Sitlington & Frank, 1990). Administrative support for teachers is an essential part of developing and maintaining high-quality community-based instruction programs. Moreover, lack of administrative support is cited by teachers as one of the main reasons teachers are unable to successfully implement community-based instruction programs (Pickens & Dymond, 2015). Consequently, instructional leaders will need to be integral parts of the implementation of community-based instruction programs by collaborating with teachers (Pickens & Dymond, 2015). Through instructional leadership, administrators can work alongside teachers to cultivate an inclusive culture that will begin to shape the trajectory that we put students with disabilities on when entering the "real world" (Preus, 2012).

Through instructional leadership, administrators can foster teacher growth by ensuring that they are acquiring learning outcomes as part of their professional growth plans. Teacher learning outcomes are defined as changes in knowledge and/or beliefs

about teaching, alterations in teaching practices, and activities that result in enhancing teaching and learning by compelling teachers to think differently or develop new skills. (Brakknes, et al., 2010; Meirink et al., 2009; Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015; Shuell, 1986). Teacher learning outcomes have the potential to impact how teachers think and feel about their role as a teacher and help to foster new skills by compelling teachers to think differently about teaching and learning (Brakknes et al., 2010; Kwakman, 2003; Saroyan & Trigwell, 2015). Essentially, professional learning outcomes result in lasting changes in behavior and influence the quality of instruction that teachers provide to students with disabilities (Kelly, 2006; Shuell, 1986).

A critical component to teacher learning is the construction of their own knowledge when placed in complex social learning environments, such as community-based instruction, which leads to improved teacher quality (Kwakman, 2003; Meirink et al., 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Teacher learning occurs in complex settings and is bolstered by opportunities for teachers to learn alongside their students (Kelly, 2006; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). Collaborative experiences, such as community-based instruction, afford teachers an opportunity to learn with their students and to "learn by doing" (Hoekstra, et al., 2009, p.665; Kelly, 2006). Therefore, teacher learning is not merely a transfer of knowledge where the teacher is a passive recipient of knowledge, but rather, it occurs when teachers are placed in learning environments where they can direct their own learning (Kwakman, 2003; Meirink et al., 2009).

While the ultimate goal is to improve teaching in the classroom setting, teacher learning can take place in a wide variety of settings including outside of the classroom (Eraut, 2004, 2007; Kwakman, 2003). The majority of workers' informal learning takes

place in the workplace and is the most suitable to the learner when it occurs in this way because learning is acquired in practice (Eraut, 2007; Hoekstra et al., 2009; Kwakman, 2003). More specifically, teacher learning can take place in schools and in the community, similar to what would occur during community-based instruction (Kwakman, 2003). Incorporating diverse learning activities across multiple settings, both in and out of the classroom, is important to helping teachers develop and plays a major role in their learning (Kwakman, 2003; Putnam & Borko, 2000).

Teacher Quality

Teacher learning outcomes result in changes that influence the quality of teaching that teachers provide to students (Kelly, 2006). The notion of teacher quality is relevant to educating students with disabilities and is regarded as an important determinant of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Hanuscheck, 2011; Sass & Feng, 2012). Moreover, high quality teachers are the most important asset a school can have and contribute to the overall school's effectiveness (Hanuscheck, 2011; Rowe, 2003). That is, low academic achievement for students can be directly attributed to poor teacher quality (Futernick, 2007). Darling-Hammond (2000) explains that not only is teacher quality a strong determinant in student learning but the impact of teacher quality far exceeds the effects of class size and heterogeneity. Additionally, it has been found that students have significantly lower achievement and academic gains when they have several ineffective teachers in a row when compared to those who are assigned to several highly effective teachers in a row (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

This problem is compounded for students with disabilities, as there is a national shortage of special education teachers who are highly qualified, and many students with

disabilities are being educated by uncertified teachers (Billingsley, Fall, & Williams, 2006; U. S. Department of Education, 2016). Over 12% of special education teachers in the United States are not fully certified compared to 10.5% of general education teachers who do not meet the required standards for teaching (Boe et al., 2006). Furthermore, according to Miller, Brownell, and Smith (1999) underqualified teachers are less likely to stay in their positions and have attrition rates that are twice as high as teachers who are better prepared to teach. Consequently, the nation has prioritized their efforts to prepare teachers so that America has highly qualified teachers to help students reach their full potential and is focusing on policies that ensure that children gain the knowledge, values, and skills they will need throughout life (Hunt, 2015; U. S. Department of Education, 2013).

Conclusion

While the learning outcomes for students with disabilities who participate in community-based instruction is well documented in the literature (Walker et al., 2010), there is an absence of research relating to the teacher learning outcomes that occur as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs. This may be because studies of teacher learning often focus on the learning processes rather than on the outcomes of these processes (Meirink et al., 2009). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore professional learning outcomes that teachers experience as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs for students in high school. This instrumental qualitative case study explores professional learning outcomes that teachers experience as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program for students with disabilities (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 2006). This idea is

examined by conducting an analysis of interviews that focus on the teacher learning outcomes in Mountainview Public School's community-based instruction program (Brakknes et al., 2010).

Therefore, the study will explore the professional learning outcomes teachers experience as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in high school settings. More specifically, what professional learning outcomes do Mountainview Public Schools' community-based instruction teachers report acquiring as a result of their program implementation? How does the implementation of a community-based instruction program improve the quality of special education teachers' teaching practices? In what way does the implementation of a community-based instruction program change beliefs about teaching students with disabilities? And what changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high quality education for students with disabilities occurred as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs?

Context

in Mountainview Public Schools, community-based instruction is first implemented in fifth grade and continues through the students' post-graduate years. All of the programming is implemented by certified special education teachers with the support of paraprofessionals who are assigned to the classroom or who work individually with students. The community-based instruction is largely driven by the students' readiness to participate as well as the degree to which they have begun incorporating transition skills into their individualized programming.

Prior to high school, community-based instruction occurs less frequently, as students are still learning foundational skills in the classroom setting. Currently, there is one classroom at the intermediate school (fifth and sixth grade) and one classroom in the middle school (seventh and eighth grade) that primarily educate students with autism and are implementing community-based instruction throughout the year. As students enter high school, community-based instruction is incorporated into their lessons on a daily basis. There are four community-based instruction teachers at the high school. Community-based instruction occurs for students in ninth through 12th grade as well as for post-graduate students who will remain in high school until they are 21 years of age. At the high school level, students who participate in community-based instruction have a diverse array of disabilities and are primarily on track to attend school until they are 21 years old.

While most of the community-based instruction program occurs out in the community and off of school grounds, there is a great deal that occurs in the school building with the school community itself. There are many students who develop their skills by taking on tasks throughout the high school offices, athletic department, and cafeteria. For those who are leaving school grounds, the community-based instruction occurs in places such as local restaurants, supermarkets, retail stores, and the food pantry. A combination of school bussing, public transportation, and walking are used to transport the students to their sites.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in a New Jersey school district. The sample included public school teachers who have participated in a community-based instruction program for students with disabilities at Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey. Methods will include semi-structured interviews, graphic elicitations, and analytic memos.

The study was viewed through the theoretical lens of disabilities studies in education, which is nested in the broader context of critical disability theory and posits that the term "disability" is a socially constructed concept that leads to the systematic social and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities (Hosking, 2008). More specifically, this instrumental case study sought to explore the professional learning outcomes that teachers acquire through implementing a community-based instruction program (Stake, 2006).

1. What professional learning outcomes do Mountainview Public Schools' community-based instruction teachers report acquiring as a result of their program implementation?
2. How does the implementation of a community-based instruction program improve the quality of special education teachers' teaching practices?
3. In what way does the implementation of a community-based instruction program change beliefs about teaching students with disabilities?

4. What changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities occurred as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs?

Rationale for and Assumptions of Qualitative Methodology

Qualitative research can be used to gain a deep understanding of human experiences and to learn about the complexities of human interactions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The goal of qualitative research is to describe and analyze a pattern of interrelationships (Miles et al., 2014). Qualitative research is an interactive and humanistic process that involves talking, listening, and watching people in order to better understand them (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive and focuses on description, analysis, and interpretation rather than measurement and prediction (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). An assumption of qualitative research is that a detailed understanding of human experience is gained by exploring these complex social systems (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). It is emergent and loose rather than predetermined and tightly prefigured (Miles et al., 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Qualitative research takes place in the natural world and its purpose is to influence social change with the information that is gathered through systematic inquiry. When information is used to improve the human condition, it is considered knowledge (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Since qualitative researchers generate knowledge that is used to influence society, it is critical that they engage in reflective practices (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). That is, it is imperative to be aware of the interplay between one's self and others and reflect on who they are as a person (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Furthermore, qualitative researchers are expected to be comfortable with ambiguity, have a deep

respect for the experiences of others, be sensitive to complexity, and be creative, analytic, and evocative (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Through systematic inquiry, the researcher gathered, analyzed, and interpreted the data relating to teaching learning outcomes (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The meaning that teachers gave to this social phenomenon was explored and consequently better understood (Creswell, 2014). This qualitative case study was used to study the experience of real teachers operating in real situations in their natural setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2012; Stake, 2006). Considering the nature of this study, the focus on human interactions and interrelationships that define qualitative research made it an appropriate methodological approach.

Strategy of Inquiry

Case study research is used to understand the larger phenomenon or societal unit by examining a specific case in great detail (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Case studies can be used to describe complex experiences of people and are useful for exploring solutions to practical problems (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The purpose of case study research is to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations (Stake, 2006). Value can be found in transferring from one case to the next on the basis of matching the underlying theory, which can be understood as naturalistic generalization (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014; Stake, 2006). In case study research, there is a concentration on each particular case while maintaining the interest of the collection of cases (Stake, 2006). All of the individual cases are purposive and distinct but are categorically bound together in some way (Stake, 2006). The similarities and differences in the cases are closely examined in order to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2016).

The strategy of inquiry for this study was an instrumental single case study design whereby the researcher developed an in-depth analysis of one or more individuals or cases that are bound by time and activity (Creswell, 2014; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Single case studies are of particular interest because they belong to a particular collection of cases that are somehow categorically bound together and are primarily instrumental (Stake, 2006). The goal of case study research was to understand a group, category, or phenomenon, which Stake (2006) refers to as "quintain." The quintain is a common thread that runs through all the cases and is the condition of interest that is being studied (Stake, 2006). In this particular study, the notion of teacher learning outcomes that teachers acquire as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program was the common factor that was studied in all participants of the study. This is consistent with Stake (2006), who explains that cases need to be similar in some way and should have a strong interest in a particular quintain.

Qualitative case studies usually draw on a purposeful sampling of cases that are tailored to the particular study (Stake, 2006). Although each teacher in the case study was considered its own entity, they are all bound by related contexts and issues (Stake, 2006). That is, each case involved a teacher who has implemented a community-based instruction program and who spoke to the teacher learning outcomes they have acquired as a result of this implementation. In order to assure that accurate information and interpretations were drawn from the data, the process of triangulation was employed (Stake, 2006). Triangulation helped to confirm the meaning of the data as well as to gain clarity on the extent to which those meanings may be interpreted differently by others (Stake, 2006).

Typically, case study findings need to have at least three confirmations of assurance that key meanings are not overlooked, such as repetitious data gathering, critical review of what is being said, and verification of the interpretations that have been made (Stake, 2006). Therefore, detailed information pertaining to the teacher learning outcomes for teachers who have implemented a community-based instruction program was verified as part of the case study using a variety procedures, including semi-structured interviews, analytical memos, graphic elicitations, and member checks (Creswell, 2014; Stake, 2006).

Context & Participants

This study took place in Mountainview, New Jersey and involved teachers who have implemented community-based instruction programs in the Mountainview School District.

Participants

Sampling strategy. With regards to sampling, the selection of participants was purposeful and contributed to responding to the research questions (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Community-based instruction teachers from Mountainview Public Schools were asked to participate in the study. Furthermore, in order to focus on the case's unique contexts, strategic and purposeful sampling was used (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). This is consistent with Stake (2006), who explains that case studies tend to be purposeful because individual cases are of particular interest to the researcher because they belong to a collection of cases that are somehow categorically bound together. By studying these information-rich cases, a more in-depth understanding of professional learning outcomes as a result of implementing community-based instruction was

examined (Patton, 2002). Therefore, a maximum variation (heterogeneity) sampling strategy was used to capture information about a central theme that cuts across a variety of samples (Patton, 2002). More specifically, any teacher who implemented community-based instruction across all of the schools in the district was selected to participate. Consequently, the teachers had a wide range of experiences related to the age and grades they taught, the types of students with disabilities they worked with, and number of years of experience they had implementing community-based instruction.

Participant description. Mountainview Public Schools has approximately 130 special education teachers and approximately 10 teachers who implement community-based instruction programs. Participants who had experience with a variety of disabilities, taught varying grade levels, had diverse experience implementing community-based instruction programs, and were at different stages of their professional careers were selected. All participants were teachers from Mountainview Public Schools that have implemented a community-based instruction program.

Recruitment strategy. Considering the nature of this study, I recruited Mountainview teachers who have implemented community-based instruction programs to participate in the study. As part of the recruitment process, I provided the potential participants with information about the nature of the study, the expectations of them as a participant of the study, the timeline associated with the study, and the benefits/barriers to participating in the study. Additionally, I actively sought out a sample that is diverse by emailing potential participants and followed up with them in person if necessary to further discuss the parameters of the study. Teachers with various experiences with community-based instruction, such as having taught different grades, having worked with

a variety of disabilities, and being at varying levels of their career, were contacted to participate. By expanding the study to include all teachers across the district who implement community-based instruction programs, I was able to capture a diverse sample. The diverse attributes were not specifically sought out, but rather inherent characteristics of the teachers implementing community-based instruction.

Data Collection Methods

Semi-Structured Interviews

This qualitative study focused on the depth rather than the breadth of professional learning outcomes and sought to understand the specific situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important to professional learning outcomes for teachers implementing community-based instruction (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The primary tool that was used for this qualitative research is in-depth interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A semi-structured interview was selected in order to narrow the focus of the research questions and to gain more in-depth information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, the semi-structured interview consisted of predetermined questions as well as follow-up questions, which were formulated as the interview progressed (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). All interviews were audio taped so that they could be transcribed.

Graphic Elicitation

Graphic elicitation techniques are useful for collecting and analyzing data in qualitative research and can be used to represent a participant's conceptualization of a domain (Copeland & Agosto, 2012; Crilly, Blackwell, & Clarkson, 2006). Graphic elicitations are considered an arts-based technique that involves drawing and the use of diagrams, which are produced by the researcher or by the participants (Bagnoli, 2009).

The use of graphic elicitations can encourage an alternate form of expression, stimulate reflection on behalf of the participant, and offer an opportunity to investigate experiences that are not easily captured in words (Bagnoli, 2009). They aid in eliciting emotional experiences, as participants become more aware of their own thoughts, opinions, and emotions following the creation of drawings (Bryans & Mavin, 2006; Copeland & Agosto, 2004; Kearney & Hyle, 2004). Graphic elicitations should be used in conjunction with a semi-structured interview so that the data derived from them are not decontextualized (Bagnoli, 2009; Copeland & Agosto, 2012). Interviews can facilitate feedback from the participant that gives the researcher insight into the underlying meaning associated with the visual representations (Crilly et al., 2006). Furthermore, deeper and more complex data can be collected when graphic elicitations are used in conjunction with interviews and other non-graphic techniques (Copeland & Agosto, 2004). Therefore, graphic elicitations that were developed by the researcher were used in conjunction with a semi-structured interview.

Instrumentation

Interviews

A 10-question protocol was used to conduct the semi-structured interviews. The questions began with some orienting questions that elicited some background about the interviewee, such as asking them about the amount of years they have been teaching, the grade levels they have taught, their experience with varying disabilities, and how long they have been implementing a community-based instruction program. Following the orienting questions, the protocol included questions that captured the gains that the

teachers have experienced as a result of implementing a community-based program. This helped to gain insight about teacher learning outcomes that the teachers acquired.

More specifically, the protocol honed in on questions that helped to elicit information about changes in beliefs, teaching practices, and knowledge as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. I followed up with additional questions that were not predetermined if I felt the need to gain a deeper understanding of responses that were provided during the interview process.

Table 1 below demonstrates how the research questions were addressed by the specific data collection techniques.

Table 1

Alignment of Research Questions to Data Collection Techniques

Research Question	Graphic Elicitation	Interview Question(s)
1. What professional learning outcomes do Mountainview Public Schools' community-based instruction teachers report acquiring as result of their program implementation?		1, 2, 3
2. How does the implementation of a community-based instruction program improve the quality of special education teachers' teaching practices?		2, 3, 5, 6, 7
3. In what way does the implementation of a community-based instruction program change your beliefs about teaching students with disabilities?	X	1, 4, 8
4. What changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high quality education for students with disabilities occurred as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs?	X	1, 7, 8

Graphic Elicitation

Following the semi-structured interview, all participants were asked to complete a graphic elicitation. The graphic elicitation was used to gain information about the participants' emotional experience related to implementing a community-based instruction program. More specifically, the purpose of the graphic elicitation was to have the teachers reflect on how they feel about their ability to teach after having implemented a community-based instruction program. The participants were given a piece of paper that had a circle in the center that read "How I feel about my ability to teach after having implemented a community-based instruction program" (see Appendix B). There were six circles surrounding the center circle, and the participants were instructed to write a response in each surrounding circle after reading the prompt in the center circle. The participants were encouraged to be reflective, honest, and descriptive in their responses. Furthermore, they were told to use as much time as needed, to add additional circles if warranted, and to draw connections between circles if they felt that any circles were connected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is an iterative and sequential process that helps to bring meaning to the data (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). More specifically, during the process of analysis, I immersed myself in the data by systematically organizing the data into meaningful chunks and then bringing meaning to the data to tell a coherent story (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The organized data were used to extract themes and conclusions about the professional learning outcomes for community-based instruction teachers, which are understood as naturalistic generalizations (Stake, 2006; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Data analysis began concurrently with data collection to cycle back and forth between thinking about existing data and generating strategies for collecting new and better data collection (Miles et al., 2014).

Raw data, including recordings and graphic elicitations, were processed prior to analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The first step in the analysis process was a word-for-word transcription of the interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Therefore, I transcribed each participant's interview and then captured my thoughts about the interviews in analytical memos (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). This is consistent with Rubin and Rubin (2012), who suggest using a separate memo file to capture tentative ideas about the meaning of the interviews as well as to capture comments and feelings about the interviews. Additionally, analytical memos were used to document and reflect on how the process of inquiry was taking shape and to start delineating the emergent patterns, categories, subcategories, themes, and concepts in the data (Saldaña, 2013). Analytical memos served as a basis for deeper analysis by writing reflective entries on various aspects of the data (Miles et al., 2014). Overall, I used the analytical memos to process my interviews and to find deeper underlying meanings that served as preliminary themes.

Coding

In the early part of analysis, concepts, themes, and events related to teacher learning outcomes were identified through coding, which is a markup on the transcript that represents what a given passage means (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Coding was used to analyze and attribute meaning to the qualitative data for the purposes of pattern detection, categorization, and other analytic processes (Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, I coded the transcripts to make meaning of the data and develop preliminary concepts. In essence, the

qualitative codes captured the essential elements of the research story and facilitated the development of categories and analysis of their connections (Saldaña, 2013).

The qualitative analytic process is a cyclical process where data gets coded and recoded (Saldaña, 2013). First cycle methods are those processes that happen during the initial coding of data (Saldaña, 2013). Therefore, during first cycle coding, I used descriptive coding, which was particularly appropriate for capturing what was seen and heard in the interviews and led to the development of a categorized inventory of the data's contents (Saldaña, 2013). The use of descriptive coding was in alignment with the purpose of this research study, as I sought to explore the teacher learning outcomes that are obtained as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. That is, descriptive coding helped me to extract what teachers think and feel about their learning outcomes associated with implementing a community-based instruction program.

During second cycle coding, I analyzed the data by classifying, prioritizing, integrating, and synthesizing the results into a metasynthesis (Saldaña, 2013). More specifically, I used pattern coding to integrate, synthesize, and abstract themes that emerged from the data. Pattern coding was used to reorganize and reanalyze the data that was coded in the first cycle (Saldaña, 2013). During this process I grouped the codes into a smaller number of sets, themes, or constructs and attributed meaning to the organized data (Saldaña, 2013). Furthermore, pattern coding was used to find relationships between professional learning outcomes and community-based instruction so that I could develop statements that describe the major themes, pattern of actions, network of interrelationships, or theoretical constructs from the data (Saldaña, 2013). Themes are recurring messages that are pervasive throughout the data and that function to categorize

recurring ideas by bringing meaning to those patterns (Saldaña, 2013; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

Naturalistic Generalizations

Naturalistic generalizations refer to conclusions that are arrived at by reflecting on your personal life experiences or through the vicarious experience of others (Stake, 1995). It is a private experience whereby the reader generalizes information to their own life experiences as a result of engaging detailed and specific case studies (Stake, 1995). Naturalistic generalizations are subjective experiences that build upon private knowledge of the reader. The reader will determine if and how these vicarious experiences can be used to understand other settings and circumstances, or transfer the knowledge they acquire from the case study (Hellström, 2008; Stake, 1995). Therefore, the data from this case study can be used to draw conclusions and interpretations relating to learning outcomes for teachers who implement community-based instruction programs.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of qualitative research can be measured by the confirmability, dependability, credibility, and potential transferability of the data (Miles et al., 2014; Toma, 2006). Findings of qualitative research are considered internally valid when meaningful inferences can be drawn and the instruments measure what they intend to (Toma, 2006). Triangulation can be used to ensure the trustworthiness of a study (Miles et al., 2014). The purpose of triangulation is to gain information about the various aspects of the phenomenon that is being studied (Maxwell, 2013). According to Miles et al. (2014), at least three independent measures should be used to support a finding. Triangulation is used to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation (Stake, 2014). This

involves using different methods to check on one another and to see if they support a single conclusion (Maxwell, 2013). Overall, the basic principle is that the data, both supporting and discrepant, needs to be rigorously examined (Maxwell, 2013).

Through triangulation, I collected information from multiple informants at multiple points in time over the course of two months and from a variety of methods such as through interviews, graphic elicitations, analytical memos, member checks, and peer debriefing, which were used to reduce the risk of systematic bias due to using one specific method (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The use of multiple methods assisted in triangulating the data. That is, using multiple methods such as interviews, graphic elicitations, and analytical memos helped to clarify the meaning of the data and verify its repeatability and interpretation (Stake, 2006).

Additionally, I needed to be conscientious of qualitative conclusions that reflect my existing preconceptions or goals for the study (Maxwell, 2013). Some strategies that assisted with this were member checks and triangulation (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). I solicited feedback about the data and conclusions I drew from the people in the study, which is considered one of the most important ways to minimize the misinterpretation of what was said in the interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These member checks afforded the participants an opportunity to elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about the conclusions that have been drawn (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Validity threats are alternate conceptualizations of the research and it was critical to deal with them as part of the research process (Maxwell, 2013). Reliability was ensured by explicitly identifying the purpose of the study and ensuring the interview

questions capture that purpose (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The interviews were conducted systematically to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). They were conducted in a random order, one following the next, and with a standardized set of questions. The data was collected over the period of two months, with rich detailed information relating to the experiences of teachers implementing community-based instruction programs to ensure that the data comprehensively captured the phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Furthermore, a peer debriefer was used to discuss design modification decisions and to develop possible analytic categories as a way to have an additional perspective on the decision making involved in the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The peer debriefer was a colleague of the researcher who had subject-matter expertise in the areas of teaching and learning as well as community-based instruction. Their role was primarily to serve as a partner that discussed the themes that emerged from study and engage the researcher in reciprocal feedback on the findings of the study.

Role of the Researcher

According to Lincoln and Guba (2013), constructivism embodies the notion that social realities are relative to individuals and their specific contexts. Essentially, at the core of constructivism is relativism, which posits that once the context and individuals change, the reality also changes (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). As someone who is a strong advocate for people with disabilities, I am sensitive to the fact that the idea of disability is socially constructed and helps to maintain the continuum of hierarchy in society (Davis, 2013). Beyond my role as a researcher, I am first and foremost a practitioner. My research emanates from the passion I have developed over the years as a school

psychologist and now as Director of Special Services. My day-to-day decisions are driven by my desire to influence the perceptions of people with disabilities along with providing them with opportunities that enhance their potential to be contributing members of society.

As a researcher, I engaged in learning through an active, constructive, and goal-oriented process (Shuell, 1986). It was important for me be reflective and honest with myself about the knowledge that I had and didn't have about the content being studied (Shuell, 1986). As the researcher, I was cognizant of the learning process that took place and played an active role in the learning. That is, through the interactions with teachers and analyzing of the data, I actively participated in and constructed my own learning. Consistent with a constructivist approach to learning, I was conscientious about my strengths and weaknesses and sought out activities that helped to facilitate my learning about teacher outcomes that occur as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program (Shuell, 1986).

Ethical Considerations

Institutional Review Board. A proposal of this study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Committee prior to the commencement of conducting research to ensure that no humans would be put at risk as a result of this study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The IRB committee assessed the potential risk to participants, such as physical, psychological, social, economic, or legal harm (Creswell, 2014). The IRB committee also ensured that risks were minimized, the risk/benefit ratio of the study was reasonable, subject selection was equitable, informed consent was obtained, data was

monitored and secured, and that the privacy and confidentiality of participants was respected (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Human subject protection. According to Guillemin and Gillam (2004), when conducting research that involves humans and asking people to partake in procedures they have not actively sought out, it is important to explore the ethical considerations if the researcher primarily benefits from their participation. It was crucial to gain informed consent of all participants prior to conducting research (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Informed consent forms contained key components, including the name of the researcher, the sponsoring institution, the purpose of the study, the benefits of participating in the study, the level and type of participation expected of the participant, limits of confidentiality, assurance of the ability to withdraw at any time, and the names of people they may contact should a question arise (Creswell, 2014).

During the recruitment of voluntary participants, I ensured that their participation was uncoerced and that they were fully informed of their rights throughout the study (Miles et al., 2014). Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study and the researcher ensured that participants understood what their agreement to participate in the study entailed (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Consent was obtained willingly and it was made clear that they could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Additionally, participants were informed that their words would be used in direct quotes in the written report (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Power dynamics. According to Creswell (2014), researchers should assume that a power imbalance exists between the researcher and the participants during interviews and observations. More importantly, this potential power imbalance must be respected

(Creswell, 2014). This was of particular importance in this study, as the participants were supervised by the researcher in their work setting. I was cognizant of how stressful the interview process might be for participants, how critically the interviewees were questioned, and whether the participants had a say in how the data was interpreted (Creswell, 2014). At no point were participants exploited in this study, as I made efforts to engage in a reciprocal process with participants and convey the findings to them following the study (Creswell, 2014).

Social stigma. In order to ensure that there wasn't any social stigma associated with participation in this study, I preserved the privacy of participants by using aliases and controlled the access to any information related to the study that would jeopardize confidentiality (Miles et al., 2014). My intention to protect the identifiability and privacy of participants was articulated during the informed consent process (Miles et al., 2014; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Chapter 4

Findings

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in a New Jersey school district. Ten teachers from Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey participated in a semi-structured interview that explored the learning outcomes they experienced as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. The participants also completed graphic elicitations to visually demonstrate their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities.

Initially, 10 teachers were invited to participate in the study, and nine out of 10 agreed to participate. While the initial sampling strategy used to select participants was a maximum variation (heterogeneity) strategy, a slight change to this strategy came about after the study commenced (Patton, 2002). More specifically, the study included an unplanned snowball selection, whereby participants of the study recommended additional key participants who could provide information-rich data appropriate to the study (Patton, 2002). One of the participants recommended another teacher from Mountainview Public Schools who had experience implementing community-based instruction. I did not initially include the recommended teacher because she teaches a group of children who typically don't receive community-based instruction, so I was unaware of the extent to which it was taking place in her classroom; as a result, she was invited and agreed to participate in the study. This brought the total number of participants up to 10.

This chapter includes the findings of the study as well as a description of all participants. More specifically, this chapter includes a description of the participants based on their interviews as well as an analysis of the interviews and graphic elicitations that were conducted.

Description of the Participants

Participants

Ten teachers from Mountainview Public Schools participated in a semi-structured interview and completed a graphic elicitation to explore the teachers' learning outcomes acquired as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. Mountainview Public Schools is located in Mountainview, New Jersey, a suburban community that has a population of approximately 38,300 residents. Mountainview Public Schools educates approximately 7,000 students, 1,500 of which are eligible for special education and/or related services. There are six elementary schools (Pre-K through fourth grade), one intermediate school (fifth and sixth grade), one middle school (seventh and eighth grade), and one high school (ninth through 12th grade). Community-based instruction programs exist across all grade levels from Pre-K to 12th grade.

The participants show a range in years of experience teaching students with disabilities. A review of the participants' gender and years of teaching experience can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Description of Participants

Participant Alias	Gender	School	Years of Teaching Experience
Dan	Male	Mountainview Middle School	6
Regina	Female	Mountainview Elementary School #1	15
Harper	Female	Mountainview Middle School	13
Kelly	Female	Mountainview Elementary School #2	28
Adriana	Female	Mountainview Intermediate School	41
Monica	Female	Mountainview High School	34
Martin	Male	Mountainview High School	15
Tara	Female	Mountainview Elementary School #3	18
Gabriel	Male	Mountainview High School	10
Amanda	Female	Mountainview Elementary School #3	30

Findings

Following the analysis and integration of data, the information was reduced and synthesized into five naturalistic generalizations, which will be represented as themes: Mirroring student outcomes, honing the art of introspection, advocacy through collaboration, an "eye-opener," and deconstructing the idea of disability. In this section, I

provide a detailed description of each theme, excerpts from the data to illustrate how participants depicted each theme, and how those depictions are demonstrative of each theme. The themes capture the learning outcomes that were researched and the participant data illustrates how the outcomes were experienced and described by the participants.

Mirroring Student Outcomes

The teachers who implemented community-based instruction asserted that the learning outcomes they experienced paralleled the learning outcomes of their students. The gains that were made as a result of implementing community-based instruction were strikingly consistent with that of their students. Students who participate in community-based instruction learn to problem solve real-world situations and expand their skillset (Baker & Freeman, 2014; Resnick, 2010; Sawyer, 2014). Similarly, according to participants, teachers acquired the same benefits by implementing community-based instruction. Community-based instruction teachers noted "flexibility," "creativity," thinking "out of the box," and "making decisions in the moment" as distinguishing characteristics of teaching students out in the community. Consequently, these elements lead to improved teaching skills by encouraging teachers to teach in non-traditional environments, which expanded their skill-set and built capacity for their teaching.

Mental flexibility. By teaching outside of the confines of their classroom, in the absence of sterile environments and planned supports, the teachers learned how to modify and adapt their teaching practices to meet their students' needs. The art of teaching takes on a new dimension when it's applied to a non-traditional setting, such as the community,

and consequently, teachers expanded their skill-set and built capacity by engaging in this experience.

One of the participants explained the impact that community-based instruction had on her as a teacher. She elaborated on the difference of teaching in a classroom versus a real-world setting:

> I think in the classroom, it's more scripted. It's more, you're in control as a teacher, I think. I think behind your four walls, between your four walls, as a teacher, you have a lot of control, and that's good. I don't think it's a bad thing, but it's like a laboratory. It's a little bit more pure. When you're in the community…you're not in control as much. It's real world on all levels…the control you lose is just what happens in the real world. (Adriana)

She went on to explain that:

> I have to make a decision in the moment…I have to make that on-the-spot sort of decision about how we're going to go with it… (Adriana)

Another participant similarly explained:

> You know, in my room, my womb that I call a classroom, I can control a lot of extreme variables for my guys. When we're out in the larger community, I can't always do that. So I have to be very quick in assessing exactly what supports I can provide, where we are, and what supports I can't provide, and how quickly I give them what they need. (Amanda)

Another participant explained:

> I think it makes me more…How do I want to say this? Maybe more flexible…I think it's taught me not to be so focused on the lesson at hand that I'm trying to

> teach. If I see something, completely different than what we're trying to focus on, it's helped me learn "You know what?" change gears. This is not important right now. We can practice the money skill or whatever skill we're working on, and let's go with this because this is what you need. (Harper)

Another participant explained:

> When you're in the community you have to be much more flexible…you have to be more flexible. You have to look at what's going on around you, look at the people who aren't teaching and see how they're reacting to everything that's happening…you have to let some things go when you're in the real world and things are happening. So, I had to adjust my goal at that moment, and then know that was something we were going to have to work on. (Kelly)

These descriptions support the notion that teachers' learning outcomes mirror that of their students and to some extent, teachers are indeed an extension of the population they serve. Just as students in community-based instruction programs learn to utilize their skills in a real-world setting, engage their natural environment, and think critically about their behavior, teachers learn to do the same. For teachers, by stepping outside of their comfort zone, the classroom, they are forced to think critically about their teaching practices and push themselves to find a way to impact their students' learning in the place that holds the most meaning and context for them, the real-world. That is, learning is most meaningful for students when it takes place in a natural setting, such as the community, so it is imperative for teachers to be able to teach in those settings as well. While students are pushing themselves to adapt, think, and exercise mental flexibility so that they can integrate themselves into the community, teachers are doing the same.

Creativity. Participants spoke about needing to be creative about their teaching strategies in order to accomplish their goal of helping their students learn. When placed in the real-world setting with limited resources, teachers had to be creative about how they accomplished their goal. A participant explained her own personal experience:

> You kind of have to think out of the box more… You have be creative, really, and you have to look at each student and how I might teach one thing to one student may be totally different from how I teach the same skill to another student because every student is different…You definitely have to be more creative. (Regina)

Similarly, another participant spoke about the need to be creative and went on to explain that the creative element of community-based instruction actually makes the task more challenging. More specifically, he explained that teachers are not all creative individuals, which makes the task of teaching in a real-world setting more challenging. The participant explained:

> I wouldn't say that all teachers are creative…I think it makes my particular setting a little more challenging in getting creative in what work will be done outside of the classroom…They just have to be creative about how to generalize skills throughout the building…So creativity is a challenge. (Gabriel)

Similarly, another participant spoke about the challenge of needing to be creative:

> I don't know that I'm the most creative person, but if you seek to be creative because you start to realize that with each student there are just keys that you have to find to unlock whatever their maximum capabilities are. So you might not see it yet and you have to keep looking and probing for those keys. A lot of times, that

takes some creativity to try and both find the opportunities that work for students, find hidden skills that they have, and really figure out how to maximize their talents. I think I probably work more to be creative than I ever would have in the beginning…But you can go far beyond if you really push yourself to think about it. (Martin)

The role that creativity plays in teaching community-based content for teachers mimics what students experience when they interface with the real-world. When teachers are implementing community-based instruction, it requires them to transfer their teaching skills from the classroom setting to the real world. There is a parallel; just as students are expected to transfer their learning to the real world, teachers are also required to do the same.

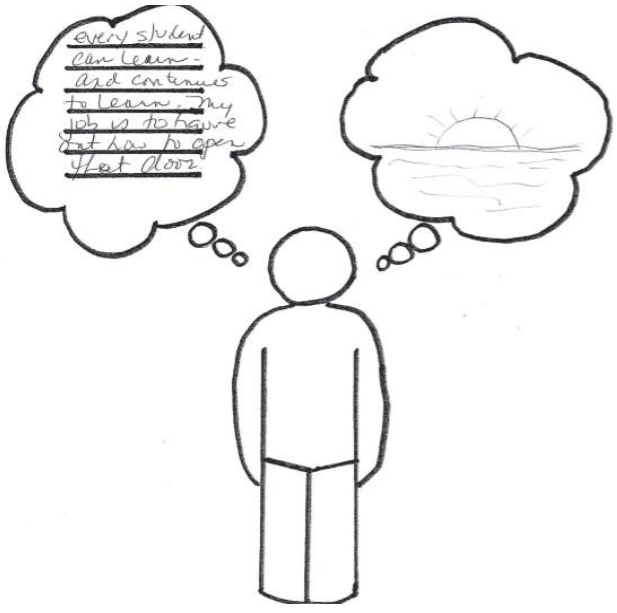

Figure 1. Graphic elicitation: Adriana. This figure illustrates the teacher's perception of "the expansiveness and openness of teaching and learning," as she compared it to a sunrise over an ocean.

During the interview, she went on to explain:

> Community-based instruction is the real world…It's the natural environment training. That's exactly what it is. The student doesn't own a skill until they could do it out there. I've always said that to teachers, "He doesn't own it until he can do it outside your four walls." You own it when you can teach in places such as the community. That to me, is where the tires really meet the road…That little piece, no matter what, is probably more important than people realize, because if you can't do it out there, then why have the skill? (Adriana)

The participant elaborated on this idea by explaining that community-based instruction "has given me more tricks in my bag…as a teacher, you learn so much because it's that child's real environment…you have to learn a lot of tricks" (Adriana)

When teachers are able to apply their teaching skills to real-world settings, they facilitate deeper, more meaningful learning for their students. When teachers transfer their lessons into the community, they are expanding their capacity to meet students' needs in the setting that is most meaningful to them. Overall, while students become more proficient at navigating the 'real world' when they are out in the community, teachers learn to do the same by engaging in mental flexibility and creativity, according to the study's participants. For teachers, they are afforded an opportunity to become better at teaching their students in the context that matters the most, the real world.

Honing the Art of Introspection

Participants in the study spoke about how implementing community-based instruction led them to reflect on their own teaching. More specifically, by implementing

community-based instruction they began to reflect on what they did well and what they needed to work on and gained a broader perspective about their teaching.

Gaining a wider perspective through reflection. Teachers reflected on the role they played in their students' successes and failures while out in the community. Following community-based instruction lessons, teachers reflected on their own actions and gained a broader perspective on how they can move toward improving their teaching. One participant explained:

> There should be a lot of reflection. I think with community-based instruction you should do much more reflection on what occurred versus the classroom. I think you need to do a lot of autopsies, good and bad. I always did this with the teachers. I said "What was great? "Tell me what was great," "Why was it great?" "What parts of it were great?" and "Oh my god, it was horrible," "Why?" "What will we do differently?" (Adriana)

Another participant also discussed the experience of reflecting on her teaching and gaining a wider perspective on teaching: "So, it just gives you that wider perspective…it's a little bigger, I'm a little scared, and we all have to adapt. And I did have to let a lot of things go." (Kelly)

When asked about how community-based instruction helped to improve the quality of her teaching, a participant responded by saying:

> I think it's helped me because I see more overall. It's very different just to be in a classroom and teaching math…versus going out to the community and actually watching them do what I've taught them in the classroom. It's very rewarding. It

helps me fine tune what I'm teaching because of the reality out in the real world. (Monica)

These teachers' stories of reflecting on their practice supports the notion that implementing a community-based instruction program facilitates reflection and fosters a broader perspective on teaching. It is through reflection that teachers can hone the art of introspection and begin to gain a broader perspective on what effective teaching can look like. Considering the disparity that exists in high-quality teaching for students with disabilities, reflecting on and understanding effective teaching practices can be critical for teachers.

Connecting the dots. By engaging in reflective practices, teachers gained a broader perspective on the work they did with students as well as gained a new appreciation for the relevance of it. While teachers go through the motions of teaching, they lose sight of the big picture. That is, they lose sight of the ultimate goal for students, which is to be productive members of society. By engaging in community-based instruction, teachers are afforded with an opportunity to reflect on their practice and gain a more global perspective on what their students' needs are. A participant explained:

> When you are in the classroom, you have tunnel vision. You're thinking about readiness skills, pre-academic skills, academic skills, and it's all in this tunnel…like you're encapsulated in the classroom and sometimes you lose focus as to why you're teaching the particular skill. But when you're doing community-based instruction, you're more mindful of the community-based instruction, it opens you up to "Oh, this one little skill is important in all of these different places for all these different reasons." (Kelly)

She went on to explain later in the interview:

> I think it makes your teaching more efficient and more effective and relevant…I had to learn about how I was teaching, and I had to teach other people about what I was teaching. (Kelly)

Similarly, another participant completed a graphic elicitation that highlights the connection that was made for students with disabilities as it relates to implementing community-based instruction:

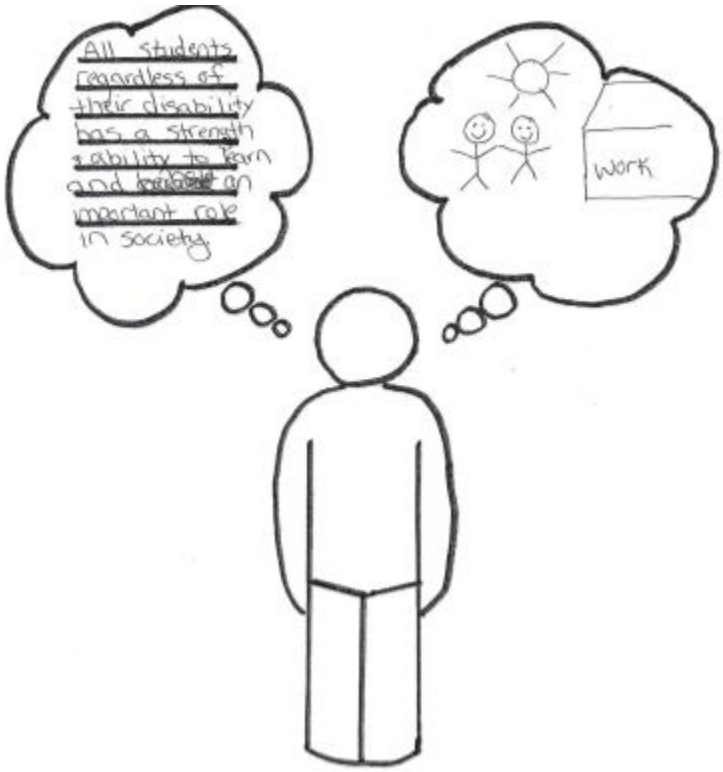

Figure 2. Graphic elicitation: Regina. This figure illustrates the teacher's belief that the ultimate goal for students is to "hold an important role in society."

Essentially, as teachers reflect on their practice, they begin to see their work through a new lens. As they think about the work they do and step back to engage in self-

examination, they understand the impact of their teaching practices in a larger context. They make the connection between the quality of the teaching they provide to their students and the likelihood of success and integration after they graduate. By better understanding the link between high-quality teaching and successful life outcomes for students, teachers can move toward improving the access to high-quality education they offer to students with disabilities.

Advocacy Through Collaboration

The idea of collaborating with others as a result of implementing community-based instruction was a theme that came up often when interviewing participants. Participants reported an increase in collaboration with other staff members as a result of implementing community-based instruction. More importantly, the collaboration with others led the participants to advocate for and help foster an inclusive school environment for students with disabilities. Through collaboration, a sense of belongingness, acceptance, and inclusiveness was fostered in the school community.

Integration into the school community. Participants reported that their collaboration with other teachers helped to facilitate integration into the school community for themselves as well as their students. One participant explained:

> One of the things that's been good is just developing the relationships with the teachers that they do interact with because we can all help each other. Help each other across our classes, with behavior management…and giving each other ideas of things that motivate students to do what we need them to do. (Martin)

Similarly, another teacher discussed her collaboration with other teachers:

> With my school community, the staff, we take a lot of time to work with the gen ed staff to help them to understand that there's time where our student might be having a behavior and we are helping them…We have a lot of dialogue, constant dialogue with our staff. We'll go into staff meetings sometimes and…they always want to know what they can do to help because they're not sure of the expectations…Within our school…we do a lot of education with the gen ed. (Tara)

Another participant described the experience of becoming integrated into the school community as a result of implementing community-based instruction:

> So, it was a lot of educating the community, the other teachers, about what kind of things my students needed and "If you wanted to help me, I appreciated that, but this is what it would require of you." Some teachers still thought I was crazy, but most of them embraced the thing and really took my class under their wing. We used to partner with a third grade class, and those kids would come in at recess. They would give up beautiful days outside to come and play with my students in the classroom, which said a lot a lot, I think, about the teachers selling it. People didn't look at me like I was crazy anymore, and they genuinely wanted to help, most of them. (Kelly)

In communities where students with disabilities are marginalized, their teachers become marginalized as well. So in a school setting, a dichotomy exists between general education and special education, which is a replica of the relationship that exists among the students. However, by implementing community-based instruction, teachers become integrated into the school community just as much as the students. While community-

based instruction affords students with disabilities an opportunity to exist in an inclusive environment, it is through the collaboration with other teachers that special education teachers, namely ones that implement community-based instruction, become integral parts of the school community as well. Consequently, the disparity between the two groups (general education and special education teachers) lessens, and the marginalization is ameliorated.

Advocating for inclusiveness. As teachers collaborate with others while implementing community-based instruction, they become advocates for inclusive environments. As they work with their students to help facilitate their integration into society, they become advocates for promoting inclusiveness. One teacher discussed their role in advocating for inclusiveness as a result of implementing community-based instruction:

> By implementing community-based instruction, you're actually seeing the gaps across the whole entire school community…the gaps in people's way of accepting and knowing how to interact with students with disabilities. So as a teacher, it just sort of improves the quality of your interactions with adults….and other staff members and community members. And it improves the quality of how you interact with them, and it helps you be more of an advocate, I think, for students with disabilities. (Harper)

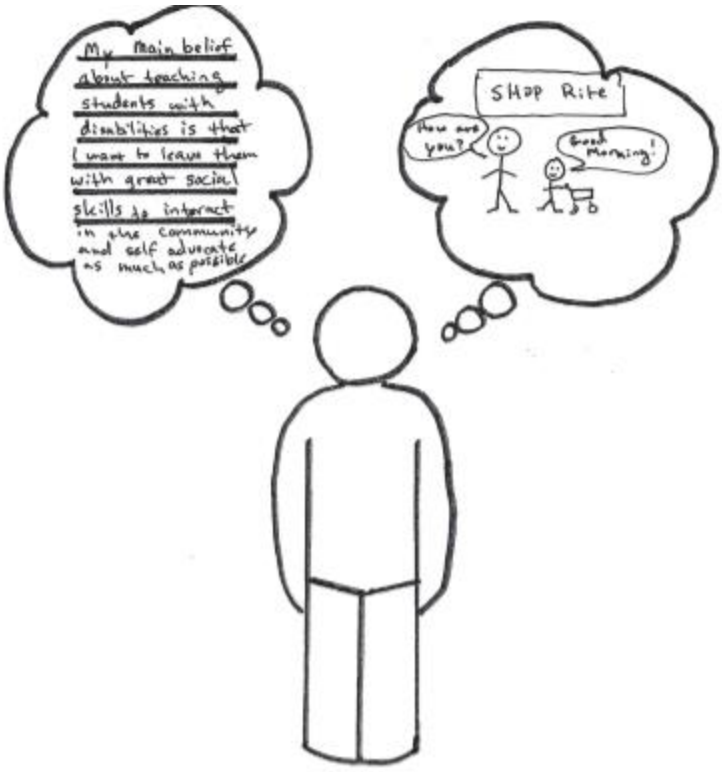

Figure 3. Graphic elicitation: Martin. This figure illustrates the teachers' beliefs that students with disabilities should be integral parts of the community. Moreover, not only is the teacher advocating for his students, but he is teaching his students to advocate for themselves.

> The participant elaborated on his graphic elicitation by explaining:
>
> That's my biggest fear, is that they become disconnected from interaction and from society. I want them to be as interactive and integrated into what's going on in the world, in their community, as they've always been, if not more so. They could have the opportunity to hold jobs, earn money, expand their network the same way that we would, that anyone would. (Martin)

The depiction and explanation of Martin's graphic elicitation lends further support to the idea that implementing community-based instruction elicits teacher-advocacy on behalf of the students.

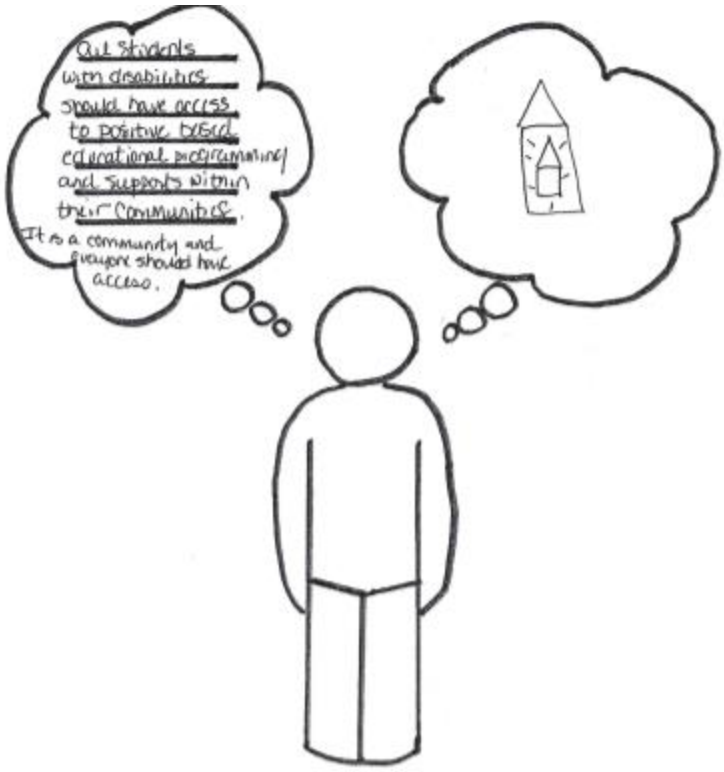

Figure 4. Graphic elicitation: Amanda. This figure illustrates the teacher's advocacy for students with disabilities as she depicts, "All students with disabilities should have access to positive based educational programming and supports within their communities. It is a community and everyone should access."

Amanda further elaborated on the concept of advocating for inclusiveness during her interview as she explained:

> I think for me, most importantly, you're on a larger stage. I immediately think about the individual I'm working with and people's perception of the interaction with myself and that individual…if they're having difficulty, "How can I maintain their dignity [and] move them through to the next thing?" Offer them support, move on, help them have a greater understanding while informing people around them of what may or may not be happening. (Amanda)

Teachers become invested and believe that inclusive communities are not only a possibility, but the expectation. Community-based instruction impacts teachers' fundamental belief about students with disabilities, and they become strong proponents of inclusive communities. Community-based instruction promotes an environment where teachers advocate for a "new norm."

An Eye Opener

A theme that many participants discussed during the interviews relates to the idea that implementing community-based instruction helped them to better understand their students and their students' needs. Consequently, they adjusted their teaching practices to better align what they taught in the classroom to what the student would need to be successful in society. More specifically, teachers felt that implementing community-based instruction helped them to gain a deeper and more accurate understanding of their students in the context of a real-world setting. Unfortunately, in most cases, teachers' realized that their perceptions of their students were inaccurate and their curricula were misaligned.

Better assessment of students. Teachers described community-based instruction as a means to assessing the strengths and weaknesses of their students. In many cases, teachers realized their perceptions of their students were inaccurate when they had the opportunity to see their students exercise their skills in a real-world setting. Therefore, community-based instruction was described as a means to gaining a deeper and more accurate assessment of the students' ability to function in society. One participant explained:

> I think it gives a clearer picture to me on what the student actually needs. When they're in the classroom and it's our class and it's our small group setting, students behave one way or they know their expectations in the classroom. It's interesting to see them out and how they interact when you're not in the room… (Harper)

Another participant also explained:

> In school, I would have never noticed that. I never would have picked up that he can't match ketchup to ketchup and mustard to mustard…because if you're going to stock a shelf, there's no shelf on the planet that only has one ketchup you know, or there's only one mustard….when I go out into the community, that provides me with information as to some deficits when there are different stimuli present other than the ones you're trying to simply control. (Dan)

He went on to explain that:

> Luke is the perfect example because I learned a lot from him in the community setting because he has issues with visual discrimination. (Dan)

Another participant described how seeing his students out in the community helped him better assess the needs of this students:

> It's almost the difference between a 360 degree view of something and just a two dimensional kind of thing…I get this great three-dimensional view of the student as a person and a learner, and that translates into what happens in the academic part…So having the understanding of them in the community, it's almost like how a parent knows their child…You kind of have a greater understanding of the student as a person, which helps you teach them the academic part better. (Martin)

The data supports the notion that community-based instruction affords teachers the opportunity to better understand the needs of their students. More specifically, when the students' areas of weakness can be identified and isolated, teachers can focus on honing the exact skills that will help to facilitate a successful transition into a real-world setting, In thinking about how students with disabilities are assessed, the data supports the idea of using the community setting to not only teach students but to assess their skills as well.

Realigning lessons. Teachers explained that they went back and realigned what they were teaching in the classroom based on what they learned about their students out in the community. They gained a more accurate understanding of the students' strengths and weaknesses in the real-world setting, then used this information to inform their instruction. Teachers often described misperceiving what they believed their students abilities to be. One participant explained:

> In turn, I come back and all of the sudden I say, "I thought we could wait, I thought that you have really good waiting behaviors, but clearly we need to tweak that." So I'll start making them or teaching them to wait for things that they love in different areas of the building while they are seeing some other distracting thing that they really like as well, so I can take it to the next level to try to fill in those holes within our building and then begin to generalize it again as we go out. (Tara)

Another participant explained:

> I'm not going to stop teaching him how to read, but I'm gonna teach him more things that he really needs to learn in the community to read as opposed to being

able to sit down and read a book, which he's probably not going to choose to do anyway. (Regina)

A participant described how teaching was realigned as a result of implementing community-based instruction and having a better assessment of his students' skills:

> But the other part of it is, I try to do things that I know are going to connect directly to what they're going to need to do in the real world…So definitely assessing their capabilities in the community-based instruction certainly impacts where I try to drive them in the post-grad reading and math program. (Martin)

Essentially, the data suggests that community-based instruction ultimately impacts what teachers do in their classroom. Community-based instruction helps teachers to better understand their students' needs, which in turn impacts their lessons. By seeing their students in the real-world setting, they can tailor their instruction to support their areas of weakness out in the community.

Deconstructing the Idea of Disability

A theme that emerged from the study was the notion that that teachers raised the expectation for students as a result of implementing community-based instruction. They described underestimating their students' potential out in the community. Consistent with the notion that disability is a socially constructed concept that is perpetuated through institutions such as school systems, the teachers consistently reported having inherently lower expectations for their students in community settings (Bayton, 2013; Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Hosking, 2008; Macleod, 1995; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Consequently, teachers began raising the expectations of their students and started to question their own practices. One participant explained:

> I've learned that it's ok to push my students. They are capable of so much more outside of the classroom. And they might not complete a task because they might fail nine times, but that 10th time when they actually get it, and you look in their eyes and they see that they get it…that's what does it for me. (Gabriel)

Another participant explained:

> I have to have realistic expectations for my learners. I have to tap into what they're most reinforced by and what they're interests are to motivate them to learn. That has to transcend in other places with them as well, even if that means not in my classroom, or out in the larger school community. I think it just constantly reminds me that they have great limitations, but they're only going to rise to the expectations that I set for them. (Amanda)

One participant completed the following graphic elicitation:

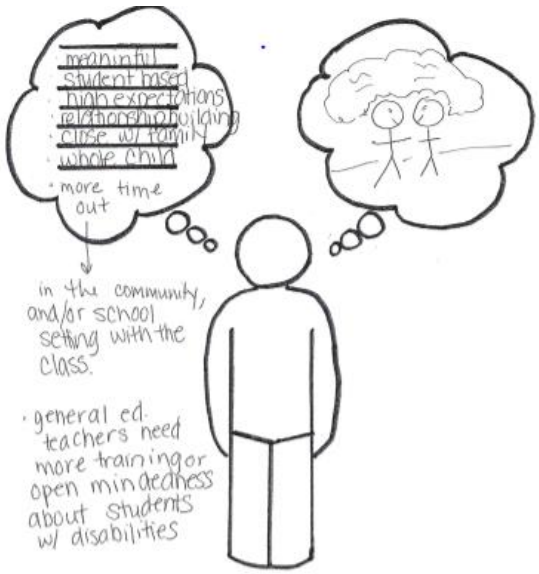

Figure 5. Graphic elicitation: Harper. This figure illustrates the teachers' belief that students with disabilities should have "high expectations" set for them. Additionally, the belief is that teachers need to be more open-minded to the capabilities of students with disabilities.

Harper went on to explain:

> I think it's helped me to realize that the students in my class can definitely do a lot more. Especially when I started teaching the moderate class…Like my expectations have changed, seeing them out, and giving them more opportunities, like "Oh, they can do that"….But I feel like it just helped me to raise my expectations…I think it helps me make it more rigorous.

These data suggest that as a result of implementing community-based instruction, teachers have come to the realization that they underestimate their students' abilities and have consequently adjusted their expectations. Moreover, teachers' consciousness is raised about their preconceived expectations of students with disabilities, which sets the stage for them to begin challenging the socially constructed concept. This notion directly impacts the quality of instruction, as teachers begin striving to provide a higher quality education to students with disabilities that better prepares them for the real world. By raising expectations, teachers better prepare students with disabilities to be competitive in the real world, post-graduation. Ultimately, by increasing the quality of education to students with disabilities, schools will have the potential to break the cycle of perpetuating inequality by rethinking the idea of disability (Davis, 2013; Giroux, 2003).

Summary

As a result of implementing community-based instruction, teachers acquired mental flexibility and exercised creativity. Furthermore, teachers engaged in reflective practices that led to a broader perspective on teaching and learning. Teachers also explained that implementing community-based instruction afforded them with an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers in their school communities, and

consequently, they became advocates for not only students with disabilities but for promoting inclusive environments. Additionally, teachers in the study were better able to assess the needs of their students in real-world settings, which translated into better aligning their classroom lessons to the students' individualized needs. Overall, community-based instruction helped teachers to see their students' true potential and adjust their expectations for their students. That is, teachers found themselves setting higher expectations for students as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program.

Chapter 5

Discussion & Implications

Providing students with disabilities unequal access to high-quality education leads to an achievement gap that has long term implications, and the exclusionary status of people with disabilities becomes perpetual as a result of institutions that contribute to the systematic, social, and environmental disadvantage of people with disabilities (Hosking, 2008; Taylor, 2006). Students with disabilities are perceived to function below the mean achievement level and have poorer postsecondary outcomes in life, including being less likely to enroll in postsecondary programs, less likely to be working and supporting themselves financially, and less likely to be living independently (National Longitudinal Transition Study, 2015; U. S Department of Education, 2006). Therefore, community-based instruction can be used to help to ameliorate the perpetual and systematic disadvantage of students with disabilities as well as close the achievement gap that exists for students with disabilities (Hoskings, 2008; Kosiewicz, 2008; Murphy, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in a New Jersey school district. The work in this chapter was guided by four research questions:

1. What professional learning outcomes do Mountainview Public Schools' community-based instruction teachers report acquiring as a result of their program implementation?
2. How does the implementation of a community-based instruction program improve the quality of special education teachers' teaching practices?

3. In what way does the implementation of a community-based instruction program change beliefs about teaching students with disabilities?
4. What changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities occurred as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs?

Ten teachers from Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey participated in a semi-structured interview that explored the learning outcomes they experienced as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. The participants also completed graphic elicitations to visually demonstrate their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. The goal of this study was to explore teacher learning outcomes as a result of implementing community-based instruction. The data from the interviews and graphic elicitations were transcribed, integrated, and analyzed. As a result, the information was reduced and synthesized into the following themes: Mirroring student outcomes, honing the art of introspection, advocacy through collaboration, an "eye-opener," and deconstructing the idea of disability. In this chapter, I provide a discussion of the findings in relation to the research questions and identified themes. The content in this chapter is discussed as it relates to the theoretical framework of this study. Additionally, this chapter concludes with presenting implications for policy, practice, and suggestions for future research.

Discussion of the Findings

Mirroring Student Outcomes

The first research question asked about the professional learning outcomes that teachers experience as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program.

It was found that the teachers in this study acquired outcomes that are similar to that of their students when they implement community-based instruction. Students who participate in community-based instruction learn to problem solve real-world situations and expand their skillset (Baker & Freeman, 2014; Resnick, 2010; Sawyer, 2014). Consistent with this literature, teachers also reported expanding their skill set and being able to teach in real-world situations such as out in the community.

Professional learning outcomes. Teachers explained that when they taught out in the community, outside of the classroom setting, they acquired skills such as becoming more flexible, creative, and engaged in more "out of the box" thinking. They clearly made the distinction that these outcomes were a result of teaching outside of the confines of their classroom, where they felt they were in their comfort zone and had all the supports they needed. The notion of teachers learning outside of their classroom in the community setting is in alignment with Kelly (2006) and Merriam and Bierema (2013), who explain that teacher learning occurs in complex settings and is bolstered by opportunities for teachers to learn alongside their students. The participants in the study confirmed that they acquired learning outcomes by not only interacting with their environment but also by doing so while teaching their students.

While the literature on teacher learning outcomes highlights the value of learning occurring in complex settings (Kelly, 2006; Merriam & Bierema, 2013), the teachers in this study expanded on that notion by operationalizing the specific learning outcomes they acquired as a result of implementing community-based instruction in the natural setting. The teachers consistently identified flexibility, creativity, and problem solving as specific learning outcomes they acquired. Confirming Beakley et al. (2003), who explain

that special education teachers engage in problem-solving skills while implementing community-based instruction programs, the teachers in this study similarly reported applying problem-solving skills out in the community since they were not able to anticipate all of the problems they may encounter ahead of time. However, outcomes such as flexibility and creativity are not explicitly mentioned in current literature. Therefore, this study contributes to the current body of literature by expanding on the professional learning outcomes that are acquired when implementing community-based instruction.

Deepening the learning: Constructivist learning. Teachers in this study reported feeling forced to think critically about their teaching practices and pushing themselves to find a way to impact their students' learning in the place that holds the most meaning and context for them, the real world. Furthermore, the teachers in this study expressed how teaching in the natural environment was pivotal to their learning outcomes. This finding is consistent with a constructivist approach to learning whereby the learner constructs meaning through interactions with their environment (Merriam & Bierema, 2013).

Moreover, this finding corroborates the literature on teacher learning. More specifically, a critical component to teacher learning is the construction of their own knowledge when placed in complex social learning environments, such as community-based instruction, which leads to improved teacher quality (Kwakman, 2003; Meirink et al., 2009; Opfer & Pedder, 2011). The collaborative experience that teachers reported in this study, afforded them with an opportunity to learn with their students and to "learn by doing" (Hoekstra, et al., 2009, p. 665; Kelly, 2006). The teachers consistently described

expanding their skills and being forced to go with the moment while out in the community. Consequently, this led to their teachers learning outcomes. This supports the idea that learning is not a passive experience, but one that requires the learner to actively engage their environment in order to obtain deep meaningful learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2013; Shuell, 1986; Vygotsky, 1980).

Honing the Art of Introspection

The second question asked how the implementation of community-based instruction improved the quality of instruction of the special education teachers. The special education teachers in the study spoke explicitly about how implementing community-based instruction led them to reflect on their own teaching practices. More specifically, teachers reflected on the role they played in their students' successes and failures while out in the community and gained a broader perspective on how they can move towards improving their teaching. This finding is consistent with Kamens et al. (2003), who explains that the experiential learning of community-based instruction programs that occurs for teachers has been shown to be extremely beneficial to their professional growth by contributing to their reflective thinking. Teachers in this study reported that they reflected on their teaching practices following community-based instruction as a means to alter their teaching practices.

Realigning teaching practices. The special education teachers in this study spoke about how implementing community-based instruction helped them to reflect on the alignment of their lessons with the needs of their students. The teachers reported having a better assessment of their students after seeing them out in the community and consequently realigning their lessons in the classroom to match the students' needs. The

notion of aligning teaching practices to students' needs is consistent with Cameto et al. (2004) and Noddings (2013), who explain that coursework and instruction should be specifically designed to help students transition from secondary education to adulthood by providing 21st-century teaching and learning that extends beyond the classroom and provides students with an opportunity to apply and integrate the skills they are taught in the classroom setting into real-world environments. In doing so, schools can focus on creating learning environments for people with disabilities that foster productive members of society and help to ameliorate the significant achievement gap that exists between disabled and nondisabled students (Kosiewicz, 2008). Therefore, this study contributes to the literature by asserting that the implementation of community-based instruction can actually be used as a way to achieve alignment between students' post-graduation needs and the coursework they are exposed to in the school setting to promote post-graduation success when students transition into adulthood.

Improved teaching practices. According to Eraut (2004, 2007) and Kwakman (2003), the ultimate goal of teacher learning is to improve teaching in the classroom setting. While the teachers in this study reported altering their teaching practices by better aligning the lessons to the students' needs, the participants did not explicitly report improving their teaching as an outcome associated with implementing community-based instruction. The teachers reported that they indeed were more reflective about their teaching practices, but the data from the interviews and graphic elicitations in this study did not support the idea that they were able to transfer those reflections into improved teaching practices.

Deconstructing the Idea of Disability

The third question asked how implementing community-based instruction programs changes beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. Teachers in this study consistently reported that they underestimated the potential of their students with disabilities. Teachers explained that they were setting low expectations for their students until they had an opportunity to see them in a real-world setting and realized their potential. Consequently, their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities changed to reflect setting higher expectations and regarding students with disabilities as having the potential to become productive members of society.

Beliefs about students with disabilities. The fact that teachers were compelled to set low expectations for their students is consistent with the notion that the culture of disability is defined by the recognition of differences rather than in spite of differences (Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000). Teachers in this study spoke about the realization that they judged their students' potential, in most cases inaccurately, based on their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. This finding lends support to the idea that disability is the product of judgement and social, political, economic, and cultural practice (Baglieri et al., 2011; Brookfield, 2005; Davis, 2013; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Taylor, 2006; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Furthermore, there was a discrepancy between how they visually depicted their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities and how they described their teaching in the interviews. Teachers consistently drew pictures of people with disabilities as capable and integral members of society. However, as they reflected on their beliefs during the interview, the teachers verbalized that they had low expectations for their students. This

supports the idea that disability is described as a disruption of normativity that leads to the notion of a defective class (Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Vehmas & Watson, 2014). Therefore, implementing community-based instruction can pave the way for teachers to begin thinking differently about people with disabilities by seeing them as having the potential to be capable members of society. This is in alignment with Davis (2013), who explains that employing alternate ways of thinking about people with disabilities is a product of developing consciousness around disability issues. Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that implementing community-based instruction programs forces us to "reverse the hegemony of the normal" as our beliefs about people with disabilities begin to shift (Davis, 2013, p. 12).

A new perspective. Teachers in this study talked about gaining a new perspective on the relevance of providing students with disabilities an education that prepares them to be productive members of society. Through the implementation of community-based instruction, it became more apparent to teachers in this study that the ultimate goal is to prepare students for post-graduation. The teachers reported that they perceived community-based instruction to be an integral part of preparing students for transition out of school, which confirms the notion that community-based instruction is an effective and valuable practice for transitioning students with disabilities into adulthood and is considered best practice for fostering the skills needed to live, work, and participate in an integrated community (Agran et al., 1999; Bates et al., 2001; Beakley et al., 2003; Cihak et al., 2003; Kamens et al., 2003; Kim & Dymond, 2010; Pickens & Dymond, 2015; Steere & DiPipi-Hoy, 2012).

As teachers reflect on the role they play in affording students with disabilities a high-quality education, they understand their work in the larger context for the students. Additionally, through an analysis of the data, it became evident that teachers began making the connection between the quality of the teaching they provided to their students and the likelihood of success and integration post-graduation. A renewed way of thinking about educating students with disabilities is in alignment with the current focus of the U.S. Department of Education (2014), which has made it a priority to focus on improving effective teaching and learning and ensuring equitable educational opportunities for U.S. students in relation to the rest of the world. Therefore, the findings of this study contribute to the larger body of literature in that the implementation of community-based instruction leads teachers to gain a greater perspective on the connection between the work they do with students and their preparedness for post-graduation.

Advocacy and Inclusiveness

The fourth question asked about changes in teachers' knowledge about equal access to high-quality education for students with disabilities. The teachers in this study explained that while implementing community-based instruction, they found themselves advocating for inclusive environments that afford students with disabilities an opportunity to equal access to high-quality education. The teachers described themselves as being instrumental in facilitating inclusiveness and access to the school community. While walking through school hallways or out in the community, their interaction with other adults led to conversations around inclusiveness and access. According to the New Jersey Administrative Code (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.2, 2004), educating students in the least restrictive environment is explicitly stated as a requirement for school districts so that

students with disabilities can be provided access to a high-quality education. Therefore, the implementation of community-based instruction led teachers to better understand their role in providing equal access to high-quality education.

Access to high quality education. The idea of increasing teachers' knowledge about providing equal access to high-quality education is relevant for people with disabilities because teachers need to be conscientious that they are not marginalizing students, as social institutions should be designed to protect and empower them (Baglieri et al., 2011; Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Taylor, 2006). Furthermore, teachers reported becoming advocates for students by looking for inclusive opportunities for their students. They reported that they became responsible for increasing the quality of education by taking lessons out of the classroom, infusing them into the real world, and helping to influence inclusiveness in the school community.

Access to high-quality instruction better prepares students to be competitive in the real world, post-graduation. Ultimately, by increasing the quality of education to students with disabilities, schools will have the potential to break the cycle of perpetuating inequality by rethinking the idea of disability (Davis, 2013; Giroux, 2003). Therefore, the changes in teachers' knowledge about providing access to high-quality education helps to combat the position of schools as social institutions that help to sustain the stratification of society and exploit class hierarchies through administrative and curricular practices, particularly for students with disabilities (Erevelles, 2000; Erevelles & Minear, 2010; Giroux, 2003; Hosking, 2008; Macleod, 1995; Taylor, 2006).

Overall, teachers reported having a heightened awareness of inclusive practices that lead to a high-quality education for students with disabilities and described

themselves as advocates for this practice. They were able to clearly articulate that through ameliorating segregated learning environments, they were affording their students equal access to high-quality teaching. As the teachers consistently reported having inherently lower expectations for their students in community settings, their perceptions of themselves as advocates for inclusive environments helps to combat the socially constructed concept of disability that is perpetuated through institutions such as school systems. (Bayton, 2013; Davis, 2013; Erevelles, 2000; Hosking, 2008; Macleod, 1995; Vehmas & Watson, 2014).

Implications

Policy

The findings of this study demonstrate that teachers acquire learning outcomes as a result of implementing community-based instruction that lead to better aligning classroom lessons to the needs of students. More specifically, teachers who implement community-based instruction reported altering their teaching practices to better prepare their students for the transition into adulthood. Currently, school districts have transition programs for students with disabilities, as guided by both federal (34 CFR 300.703[b][1]) and state regulations (N.J.A.C 6A:14, 2004). However, the implementation of community-based instruction programs for the purpose of transition is not explicitly stated as a requirement in federal and state regulations. Community-based instruction affords students with disabilities an opportunity to generalize the skills that are taught in a classroom setting to real-world situations in home, work, and community settings (Baker & Freeman, 2014). Furthermore, early transition planning leads to successful outcomes for students with disabilities, as it can have a positive impact on post-school outcomes,

such as obtaining employment, increased independent living, and greater life satisfaction (Shogren & Plotner, 2012; Walker et al., 2010).

Therefore, based on the results of this study, it is recommended that legislation explicitly include community-based instruction as a mandate in both federal and state regulations for the purpose of transition programming. Passing such legislation on community-based instruction would facilitate teacher learning outcomes that lead to the alignment of teaching practices that foster success for students with disabilities. Consequently, students with disabilities will have access to high-quality education and be afforded inclusive learning environments that lead to the bridging of the achievement gap.

Practice

Based on the results of this study, teachers acquired learning outcomes such as flexibility, creativity, and problem solving as a result of implementing community-based instruction. Teacher learning occurs when teachers are placed in situations that require them to think critically about teaching, such as in community-based instruction, which occurs in a student's natural environment (Sheull, 1990). Furthermore, teachers engaged in reflective thinking practices that led them to align their teaching practices to the needs of their students. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers implement community-based instruction as a means of altering their teaching practices to better meet the needs of students with disabilities and prepare them for transition into adulthood. When teachers extend learning outside of the classroom and into real-world settings, they are forced to be problem solvers and critical thinkers and to interact with their environment in a complex way (Nathan & Sawyer, 2014; Rogoff, 2003; Sheull, 1990). Consequently, this

leads to learning outcomes that alter their teaching practices as well as beliefs about how students with disabilities should be taught.

It is recommended that teachers engage in reflective practices regarding their own teaching. Based on the findings of this study, teachers gained new insights about the expectations they set for students and their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities when they reflected on their practices. More specifically, teachers were often underestimating the potential of their students and setting expectations low. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers engage in reflective practices that specifically focus on their expectations and beliefs about educating students with disabilities.

It is recommended that teachers extend their advocacy for students with disabilities to include promoting the use of community-based instruction. Using the results of this study, teachers can approach their educational leaders and request that community-based instruction be included and financially supported at their educational institutions. Furthermore, it is recommended that teachers use the findings of this study to collaborate with their professional learning communities about infusing community-based instruction into their teaching practices.

Research

According to the findings of this study, implementing a community-based instruction program fosters an opportunity to acquire professional learning outcomes for teachers. However, the extent to which educational leaders are fostering additional learning opportunities is unclear. It is recommended that future research explore the extent to which educational leaders are fostering opportunities for special education

teachers to engage in activities that lead to professional learning outcomes which alter their teaching practices and beliefs about students with disabilities.

Additionally, based on the findings of this study, teachers reported acquiring learning outcomes that altered their teaching practices and their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. However, the data from this study did not explicitly demonstrate how teachers transferred their learning outcomes into improved teaching practices. While they better aligned instruction to the needs of their students, teachers were not able to operationalize how their teaching improved as a result of implementing community-based instruction. Therefore, it is recommended that future research explore this idea.

Analysis of the data in this study revealed a discrepancy between how teachers depicted their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities and what they described their beliefs to be. More specifically, in the graphic elicitations, when asked to draw a picture of their belief about teaching students with disabilities, the teachers mostly drew pictures of students who were integral members of society. However, during the interviews, when asked about their beliefs, they often described learning environments that were segregated and marginalized. Therefore, it is recommended that future research explore teachers' espoused theories versus their theories in use as it relates to their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities (Argyris & Schon, 1974).

Considering the high-stakes testing for students that is emphasized in legislation such as the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (2016), future research should focus on the relationship between teacher learning outcomes and students' achievement on standardized assessments. Based on the results of this study, teacher learning outcomes

altered teaching practices and beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. Therefore, future research should explore the extent to which implementing community-based instruction has an impact on students' performance on standardized assessments.

Leadership

Considering the teacher learning outcomes identified in the findings of this study, educational leaders should foster opportunities for teachers to implement community-based instruction. It is recommended that educational leaders collaborate with teachers and all stakeholders to afford teachers an opportunity to infuse community-based instruction into their teaching practices. Furthermore, support and training should be provided to teachers so that they can experience success.

Additionally, the findings from this study can be used to engage all stakeholders in conversations during professional learning communities, staff trainings, and parent meetings that focus on their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. Using the findings from this study, educational leaders can initiate conversations about the connection between beliefs about teaching students with disabilities and access to high-quality education. Social justice leaders should make issues of marginalization central to their leadership as a way to increase inclusiveness in schools and help to ameliorate segregation, increase student achievement, improve school structures, bolster staff capacity, and strengthen the school culture (Theoharis, 2007).

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative instrumental case study was to explore the professional learning outcomes of teachers as they implement community-based instruction programs for students with disabilities in a New Jersey school district. Ten

teachers from Mountainview Public Schools in New Jersey participated in a semi-structured interview that explored the learning outcomes they experienced as a result of implementing a community-based instruction program. The participants also completed graphic elicitations to visually demonstrate their beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. It was found that teachers experienced teacher learning outcomes such as flexibility, creativity, and problem-solving skills as a result of implementing community-based instruction. Furthermore, teachers engaged in reflective thinking that led to altering their teaching practices. Teachers were better able to assess the needs of their students and consequently altered their teaching practices to promote the development of skills that are needed for transition into adulthood in society. While teachers altered their practices to better align their teaching with the students' post-graduation needs, the data did not support improved practices. That is, while the data supported a change in teaching practices, there was not sufficient data to support that these changes translated into better teaching.

Additionally, it was found that implementing community-based instruction led to inclusive teaching practices that afforded students with disabilities more access to a high-quality education. Consequently, teachers became advocates for inclusive school environments and began changing their beliefs about how students with disabilities should be taught. It was discovered that teachers realized the importance of setting high expectations for students with disabilities and began making the connection between the roles they play in providing students with access to high-quality education. Therefore, the study found that community-based instruction can be used as a vehicle to decrease the

marginalization of students with disabilities in addition to paving a new way of thinking about how people with disabilities can and should be integral members of our society.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Rapport Establishing (Warm up):

Interviewer: Restate the purpose of the study which is to investigate the teacher learning outcomes as a result of implementing community-based instruction programs.

How long have you been teaching students with disabilities?

What grade(s) do you currently teach and what grades have you taught in the past?

What knowledge and/or experience do you have with implementing community-based instruction programs?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol:

1. In what way(s) is the experience of teaching different when implementing community-based instruction?
2. What have you learned about teaching and instruction through the implementation of community-based instruction?
3. How has the implementation of community-based instruction altered your teaching practices, if at all?
4. How has your belief about your own teaching changed as a result of the implementation of a community-based instruction program?
5. What specific teaching skills do you use while implementing community-based instruction?
6. How do you the skills you acquire during community-based instruction get incorporated back into your teaching practices?
7. In what way(s) has the implementation of community-based instruction improved the quality of your teaching?
8. How has implementing community-based instruction altered your perception of how students with disabilities should be taught?

Appendix B

Graphic Elicitation

On the right side of the person, illustrate your beliefs about teaching students with disabilities. On the left side of the person, describe your beliefs about teaching students with disabilities.