A Dissertation

Entitled

Third Grade Teachers’ Views and Perceptions of the Participation of Students with Disabilities in Statewide Testing

by

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This qualitative study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. This phenomenological study was prompted by the testing and accountability mandates under No Child Left Behind. Three questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased student achievement? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing?

Research for this study was conducted with ten third grade general education teachers. Interviews were completed according to a semi-structured format. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. Several themes emerged from the analysis of data including testing experience, level of achievement, impact on curriculum, impact on instruction, number of identified students, and instructional setting.
The teachers in this study reported that the testing experience for students with disabilities was not always positive. Teachers shared that students with disabilities are often overwhelmed by the testing experience. For the most part, teachers felt that a single standardized test score was not an appropriate measure of a student’s level of achievement. Teachers did not feel as if the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities was closing. All teachers viewed their curriculum as better aligned to Ohio’s Content Standards as a result of mandated testing. They shared mixed results regarding whether the curriculum had expanded or narrowed. Teachers reported that their instructional strategies had changed and that teaching was not as fun for them or for their students as it had once been. More students with disabilities are receiving their instruction in the general education classroom. Most teachers predicted a decline in the number of students identified as having a disability, even though most reported that student needs have increased.

The data in this study indicated a need to examine current educational practices. Recommendations for further study include: (a) rethink the school game, (b) examine educational training, and (c) evaluate methods of assessing achievement.
Dedication

This work is dedicated to all students with disabilities.

I challenge you to reach your greatest potential.

To all teachers

I admire and respect your commitment and passion

for all students whose lives you touch each day.

You give of yourselves in ways that only teachers can understand.

Thank you.
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It is with heart-felt gratitude that I recognize the many people whose support and encouragement made the elusive dream of obtaining a doctorate a reality.

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Thank you to the principals and teachers who participated in this study. I will always be in awe of your commitment and dedication to all of the children in your
classrooms and buildings. Thank you for your unselfish willingness to share your thoughts.

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To mom and dad, thank you for the sacrifices you made to provide the opportunity for me to be a teacher. It all began with the classroom in the garage. Thank you for believing in me. Mike, Candra, and Thomas, I promise to make up for lost time. I’ll be your number one fan! To Amy and Phil, prepare the guest room. I’m coming to visit. To Jeff and Tracey, thank you for your support and understanding. And Madison, I can’t wait to be a real Nana! Lindsey, you have become a teacher during this project. I am in awe of your understanding and compassion for children with special needs. Thank you for being there for the kids who need you the most. Jennie, who would have thought we would share a graduation? You have shown incredible strength over this past year. I am very proud of who you are and what you stand for. And Doug, thanks for your continued support, encouragement, and willingness to share in this endeavor. You are the best. This time, when you ask, “Are you done yet?” the answer just might be, “Yes.”
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Chapter One

Introduction

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is an educational reform policy that requires school districts to reach high levels of academic achievement for all students and to report publicly the results of this achievement. All students, including students with disabilities, are required to meet specified levels of performance on statewide assessments. The teachers in our nation’s classrooms are faced with the challenge of meeting the educational needs of all students. School administrators are faced with the challenge of providing instructional leadership to these classroom teachers. Many educators are left with more questions than answers as they struggle to meet the mandates of NCLB.

Background

Standardized testing has been in existence for more than 100 years and these test results have assisted educators in making instructional decisions. These standardized tests were non-threatening to educators (McDonnell, 2004). The present educational reform, however, mandates statewide testing as a method of measuring the overall performance of schools. The use of these test results to measure a school’s performance, along with the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing, is
challenging for educators. In order to begin to address these challenges, this research study explored the views and perceptions of third grade general education teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.

There is a long history of educational reform in the United States, with each reform policy designed to improve student achievement. In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) required states to set standards for students with disabilities that were not only consistent to standards for students without disabilities, but appropriate for each specific student with a disability as well. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act also required states and districts to create testing and reporting systems that included students with disabilities in addition to students without disabilities (Ansell, 2004; Goertz, Duffy, & LeFloch, 2001; Kohl, McLaughlin, & Nagle, 2006; Marshall & Patterson, 2002; Pullin, 2005; Thurlow, Nelson, Teelucksingh, & Ysseldyke, 2000).

On January 8, 2002 the No Child Left Behind Act was signed into law. This policy increased the standards for states and districts to a greater degree than IDEA by holding them accountable for both the participation and “adequate yearly progress of students with disabilities on state tests” (Ansell, 2004, p. 75; Norlin, 2005). Shortly after, NCLB was followed by a reauthorization of IDEA in 2004, known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA). This reform policy continued the mandate of the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004; Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Harriman, 2005; Nagle, Yunker, & Malmgren, 2006). In 2007, discussion of the Reauthorization of NCLB began and will
most likely bring additional mandates regarding the participation and accountability of
students with disabilities in statewide testing as legislators are questioning whether states
have set the bar too low (Abdullah, 2007).

Why are the mandates of NCLB and IDEA causing such turmoil among
educators? The number of students with disabilities in our classrooms is significant. In
1976-77 in the United States alone, 3.7 million children were identified and receiving
services as students with disabilities. These students with disabilities comprised 8% of
the country’s school-age population. In 2003-04, our nation’s schools served 6.6 million
students with disabilities. This represented 14% of our school-age population (United
States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). This is
a significant upward trend in the percentage of students with disabilities in our nation’s
schools. Of these 6 million students with disabilities, 67% were identified as having
specific learning disabilities or language disabilities (Edwards & Chronister, 2004) and
nearly 96% of these students were served in regular school buildings (Olson, 2004a).
This increase in numbers of students with disabilities, combined with the participation
and accountability mandates of NCLB, presents a new and unique challenge for
educators.

Students with disabilities have made gains, but there are still large gaps between
the performance level for students with disabilities and students without disabilities
(Olson, 2004a). The participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment is
viewed as one step toward closing the achievement gap between students with disabilities
and students without disabilities. The educators in our public schools are held
accountable to make this gain in achievement a reality (Foote, 2007; Goertz et al., 2003;
Thurlow et al., 2000; Yell, Katsiyannas, & Shiner, 2006). Olson (2004a) quotes Mitch Chester, then Assistant Superintendent for Policy Development in the Ohio Department of Education, “Accountability for students with disabilities has become a ‘major lightning rod’ in the implementation of federal law” (p. 13).

Many educators are challenged by the mandates in NCLB. The challenge is not the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. The challenge is that students with disabilities are not only required participants in statewide testing, they are held to the same achievement standards as students without disabilities (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Harriman, 2005; Lehr & Thurlow, 2003; Nagle et al., 2006). The accountability mandate is relatively new as historically there was little to no accountability on the part of public schools to ensure that students with disabilities participated in all assessment or performed at a sufficient level (Thurlow & Wiley, 2006; Pullin, 2005). Olson (2004a) cites Heubert, “For a long time special education became a convenient place to put anybody who was going to bring your pass rates down” (p. 26). This shift to accountability for outcomes is new to educators and they are searching for ways to meet the learning needs of all of their students.

The No Child Left Behind Act has not only mandated an accountability level for the performance of all students on these tests, including those with disabilities, this accountability factor ultimately determines the success level of schools. As reported in Mazzeo (2001), “We now live, at least rhetorically, in an era of ‘no excuses,’ where teachers, principals, and school communities are expected to teach students, no matter what these students’ background or initial capacity” (p. 390). Educators across the country are scrambling to meet the mandates of NCLB and IDEA (Albrecht & Joles,
As Dr. Seuss et al. (1995) remind us, the stakes are high. Schools are being judged by the performance level of all students. This information is publicly reported and school districts are feeling the pressure to receive high performance ratings. General education teachers are held accountable for the achievement level of all of their students. While teachers may be positive about what the students with disabilities in their classrooms achieve, they are hesitant to agree that all students can meet state standards. According to Olson (2004a) “only 19% of teachers say all or most of their special education students would be able to score at the proficient level on state tests for students their age” (p. 13, 15). These are disturbing statistics considering that the consistent message of NCLB and IDEA is that states must test all students and the scores on these tests will be used to judge schools (Olson, 2004b).

Teachers must begin to feel more confident that all of their students can reach accountability standards. Understanding what teachers are thinking and what they need in order to fulfill the mandates of NCLB and IDEA is essential. No Child Left Behind represents high-stakes accountability that is new to teachers. For this reason, the focus of this research study will relate more specifically to NCLB than to IDEA. This is not an
indication of lesser importance of IDEA. It is an indication of the monumental significance of the accountability mandate of NCLB. This research study seeks to understand the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing as mandated by NCLB.

No Child Left Behind requires states to implement a single, statewide accountability system that measures the achievement level of all students and determines whether all students are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Norlin, 2005). In response to this mandate, Ohio established statewide achievement tests. These achievement tests were designed to meet both federal and state laws to measure student achievement. These tests are aligned with the content standards in the areas of math, reading, science and social studies.

In addition, NCLB required states to define adequate yearly progress. Guidelines were set for states to follow. These guidelines include: (a) holding all schools to the same high standards, (b) creating an accountability system that is statistically reliable and valid, (c) showing academic growth that is continuous and substantial, (d) measuring school progress based primarily on student performance, and (e) including separate objectives for the continuous improvement of subgroups of disadvantaged students. Students with disabilities comprise one such subgroup (Norlin, 2005).

Ohio established four measures through which to meet the federal mandates. These measures include (a) performance indicators, (b) performance index, (c) growth calculation, and (d) adequate yearly progress (AYP). Adequate yearly progress is met through a 95% participation rate and a 75% proficiency rate in math and reading for all
subgroups. Students with disabilities, one of the subgroups, are held to these accountability standards. Schools and school districts cannot reach AYP if all subgroups do not meet these standards. The other subgroups include ethnicity, limited English proficiency, and economically disadvantaged (Chester, 2005). The requirement for all subgroups to meet 75% proficiency rate is a challenge to educators. The ultimate goal of NCLB is that all students will meet or exceed the state’s proficient level of academic achievement by the 2013-14 school year (Norlin, 2005; O'Neill, 2004).

There were 219 districts in Ohio that did not make AYP in 2003-04. Seventy-five percent (165) of these districts missed the AYP target for students with disabilities solely (Chester, 2005). In 2003-04, the third grade Ohio Achievement Test results in the area of reading indicated that 78.2% of all students passed the test. However, in the subgroup of students with disabilities, 50.2% passed as compared to 82.6% of non-disabled students (Ohio Department of Education, 2004). A similar pattern existed for the third grade reading test in 2004-05, with 81% of non-disabled students passing compared to the passage rate of 54.1% of students with disabilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2005). The 2005-06 school year resulted in similar passage rates. Seventy-eight percent of non-disabled students passed third grade reading, compared to 52.6% of students with disabilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2006).

In order to fulfill the reporting requirements of NCLB, the state of Ohio also determined classifications for measuring the effectiveness of school districts. These include, from highest to lowest, excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch and academic emergency. The formula for determining the rating of each school and district is quite complicated (Chester, 2005). The formula includes the performance
indicators, performance index, growth calculations and adequate yearly progress for all subgroups.

Districts must meet AYP for all subgroups in order to reach a designation of effective or excellent. In addition, there are sanctions for school districts that do not meet acceptable levels (Chester, 2005). Educators are feeling a great amount of pressure to provide instructional programs that result in all students reaching and demonstrating high levels of achievement. Not all school districts are meeting these requirements. In 2003-04, there were 262 of 608 school districts in the state of Ohio who were rated continuous improvement and below. Of the districts in academic watch and academic emergency, 100% did not reach AYP (Chester). This is a serious concern and there is a need to study the impact of the participation of students with disabilities in this mandated statewide assessment.

Statement of the Problem

The high-stakes accountability mandate of NCLB regarding students with disabilities in statewide testing is a relatively new concept to general education teachers. Teachers must find ways to create structures and strategies in order to meet the educational needs of all students in their classrooms, including students with disabilities. Practical research data are needed to assist general education teachers in transforming the requirements of NCLB into effective practice in their classrooms. “Awareness is only the first step and familiarity with policy does not ensure changes in beliefs and practices” (Crawford & Tindal, 2006, p. 214).

It is reasonable to conclude that all teachers want all of their students to achieve to the maximum extent possible. This is consistent with the mandates of NCLB.
Nonetheless, these same teachers face classrooms of students with widely varying abilities each day. Teachers need guidance to meet the learning needs of all students. We must begin to unravel the realities of NCLB as it impacts teachers and students on a daily basis.

As stated in Marshall & Patterson (2002), “Policies, programs, reforms, political pressures, and legal mandates push in different directions and thus confuse and confound educators” (p. 351). The concerns surrounding current educational reform policies are numerous and have resulted in a great deal of research regarding the impact of these policies on the educational environment for general education students (Bejoian & Reid, 2005; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Elliott & Thurlow, 2000; Foote, 2007; Holbrook, 2002; Ysseldyke, Nelson, Christenson, Johnson, Dennison et al., 2004). There has been little research, however, involving general education teachers’ perspectives of the impact of these reform models regarding students with disabilities (Cimbricz, 2002; Crawford, Almond, Tindal, & Hollenbeck, 2002; Defur, 2002; Koretz & Barton, 2003; Schulte & Villwock, 2004; Schulte, Villwock, Whichard, & Stallings 2001; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006; Stecher, n.d; Thurlow, 2002; Thurlow, 2004). Further study in this area is needed.

It is essential to study the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of NCLB as the mandated outcome of increased achievement is dependent upon classroom teachers. Without such research, it is unclear how general education teachers will fulfill the requirements of these reform policies in a manner that will be effective for all students. The teachers in the classroom are the link between the policy as it is written and the policy as it is practiced. There is a need for more in-depth study of the impact of
the statewide testing mandated in educational reform and the actual practice of teaching in our nation’s classrooms (Cimbricz, 2002).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. This understanding will inform classroom teachers in their daily instructional practices and it will inform educational leaders in creating policy and practice that is built upon actual input of real teachers in real classrooms. The classroom teacher holds the responsibility to see that all students meet the mandated achievement levels as determined by NCLB and these teachers need a voice. These teachers are in the classroom on a daily basis and experience the effects of reform policy first-hand. Future policy and educational practice must consider the views and perceptions of these classroom teachers.

**Significance of the Study**

The Ohio Department of Education website (iLRC Power User Report, 2006-2007) provides data regarding the performance of Ohio’s school children on statewide tests. This data indicate that in the state of Ohio during the 2006-07 school year there were 250,781 students with disabilities in our schools. This figure represents 14.3% of the school-age population. Statewide testing begins with reading and math in the third grade. In the year 2006-07, there were 19,239 students with disabilities in the third grade. Of these students, 4,223 were identified as a student with a language disability and 7,699 were identified as a student with a learning disability. General education
teachers are responsible for all students with disabilities; however, those with learning and language disabilities are the focus of this study as these students are typically educated in general education classrooms.

According to the 2007-08 Report (iLRC Power User Report), 99% of Ohio’s third grade students with language disabilities participated in math and reading assessments and 98.65% of the students with learning disabilities participated in math and reading assessment. This is a substantial number of students who were required not only to participate, but to reach proficient levels on mandated statewide assessment. These third grade students with language disabilities met proficient standards at a rate of 69.6% for reading and 80.3% for math. These third grade students with learning disabilities met proficiency rates at 48.7% for reading and 63.1% for math.

A proficiency level of 75% in each tested areas is required for schools and districts to make adequate yearly progress. Gordon (2006) reminds us of the importance of research in this area in his statement, “As the push toward inclusion of students with disabilities into regular classrooms increases, there is an even greater need to develop more research and better practices for future endeavors” (p. 224). This research study provides data to inform educational leaders regarding the practices and policies established for teachers.

As the above data support, the research data generated from this study are important on many levels. It should be important to general education teachers implementing the policies of NCLB. It should also be valuable to educational leaders at the local, state, and perhaps, federal level. Specifically, the results of this study: (a) inform future policy development at the local, state and federal levels; (b) inform process
and practice decisions for state and local educational leaders; (c) provide teachers with data upon which to base future decisions regarding students with disabilities in their classrooms; and (d) provide teachers with an awareness of the views of other teachers who are fulfilling the requirements of the educational reform mandates for testing.

Research Questions

This research study addressed the gap in information surrounding the perceptions of general education teachers regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. “Although some research has explored teachers’ perceptions about large-scale assessments, there is a paucity of research related to teachers’ thoughts on the inclusion of students with disabilities in these assessments” (Crawford, Almond, Tindal, Hollenbeck, 2002, p. 98, 99). This gap in information is addressed through this study involving third grade general education teachers.

Three basic questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing?

Framework

The most appropriate framework for this phenomenological qualitative research study is the paradigmatic framework. Paradigms represent situations that are neither right nor wrong. According to Glesne (2006), a paradigm is “a framework that functions as maps or guides…determining important problems or issues…” (p. 6). Webster’s New
World Dictionary (1968) defines a paradigm as a “pattern, example, or model” (p. 1060). Just as there are conflicting views regarding nature-nurture; qualitative-quantitative; reductionism-constructivism (Paul & Ward, 1996), a new paradigm has resulted from the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment. This paradigm of intended and unintended outcomes does not represent a hypothesis to be accepted or rejected. It is a paradigm that merits further study and, thus, served as the conceptual framework for this study.

Overview of the Research Design

Qualitative Methodology

This phenomenological qualitative research study involved third grade general education teachers. General education teachers are responsible for the mandates of NCLB and therefore, it was important to involve teachers from the general education setting. Teachers from a rural, suburban, and urban school district were involved. Purposive sampling was utilized in order to access the teachers who had students with learning and language disabilities in their classrooms for interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather in-depth data of the views and perceptions of third grade general education teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The data collection methods that were incorporated in this qualitative study included interviews as the primary data source, with data triangulation accomplished through multiple interviews, multiple sites, and participant-observation.
Analytic Theory

The sociological analytic theory most appropriate to this qualitative study is the interpretive theory. The paradigm of intended and unintended outcomes is compatible with the interpretive theory as a method of analyzing the views and perceptions of real-life teachers in real-life classrooms as interpretive theorists study real-life situations in real-life settings (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Maxwell, 2005). The interpretive theory provides a structure for the discussion of the data in a manner that is appropriate to phenomenological qualitative studies. In this study, general education teachers are the most appropriate participants in order to provide first-hand information regarding students with disabilities and mandated testing. These teachers are in the classroom everyday and have a great deal to share.

Assumptions

Third grade general education teachers representing rural, suburban, and urban districts were interviewed for this study. The underlying assumptions regarding this study are (a) teachers possess a basic understanding of the reform policy of NCLB, and (b) teachers fully disclose their views and perceptions regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide testing.

Delimitations

Several delimitations to this study include: (a) participants were selected through purposive sampling that resulted in 10 third grade general education teachers from Ohio as participants; (b) participants are third grade teachers, even though grades three through
eight are tested; (c) participants are general education teachers as opposed to special education teachers; and (d) students with learning and language disabilities, as opposed to students from all disability categories, are the focus of the study.

Limitations

There are several possible limitations to this study. These include (a) participants are all female, (b) teachers’ level of understanding of the mandates of NCLB may impact their responses, (c) teachers may demonstrate bias against the top-down policies and mandates of NCLB, and (d) teacher attitude toward participation in the study.

Researcher’s Perspective

As is critical in all research, every attempt has been made to eliminate researcher bias. However, bias does exist and was considered in the analysis of this study. The intent of NCLB is that all students reach high levels of achievement through mandated participation in statewide assessment. The general education teacher is responsible for a wide range of needs and abilities within each classroom. Educational leaders and policy-makers need to understand the views and perceptions of classroom teachers regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment if all students are to be educated successfully. Interview recordings, verbatim transcription, and reporting of the participants’ actual words lessen the impact of researcher bias.

Definition of Terms

The field of education contains large numbers of definitions and acronyms. The following is a list of terms as they are defined for the purpose of this study. The reader
may encounter additional and various definitions as indicated in other sources or in educational practice.

1. **Accommodation**: a testing accommodation represents a change in presentation of the material or a change in response to test questions.

2. **Accountability**: goals and timeframes set by the federal government as part of NCLB; the concept of holding public educators accountable for students’ achievement levels.

3. **Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)**: federal mandate that allows states to determine the level of adequate yearly progress; states must demonstrate that all students are held to the same high standards; that all schools and districts are held to the same high standards; must measure progress for achievement tests; must determine subgroups of students who must also demonstrate progress.

4. **Alternate Assessment**: assessments designed for students with disabilities who are not able to participate in the regular assessments, even with accommodations; substituted for the large-scale assessment in which students without disabilities participate.

5. **Cognitive Disability**: a disability that affects a child’s learning and thinking processes.

6. **Content Standards**: the knowledge and skills specific to each subject that students are required to master.

7. **Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**: defined in IDEA as an appropriate education provided to a child with a disability at public expense;
includes special education as well as any related services or support that a child may need to access general education

8. General education: the instruction provided to students without disabilities; instruction regularly provided to students in a school

9. High-stakes assessment: tests that carry consequences for students and/or educators; consequences can be specific to each state

10. Inclusion: providing a student with a disability access to the general education curriculum; often indicates education provided in the general education classroom

11. Individualized Education Plan (IEP): a document developed by a team for a student with a disability; describes the student’s educational needs, goals, and objectives; based upon the individual’s strengths and needs

12. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): the federal law that provides the funding and regulations for the education of students with disabilities; prior to 1990 known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act

13. Language disability (speech or language): a communication disorder that adversely affects a child’s educational performance

14. Large-scale assessment: standardized assessment administered to large numbers of students

15. Learning Disability (Specific Learning Disability): a disorder in one or more of the psychological processes involved in understanding and using language
16. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): defined in IDEA as educating children with disabilities with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate; removal of students with disabilities to more restrictive settings only when an appropriate education cannot be provided with supplementary aids and services

17. No Child Left Behind (NCLB): a federal law regulating the achievement and accountability standards for public schools; regulates funding

18. Paradigm: a pattern, example, or model

19. Performance Index: a weighted average of all tested grades and subjects, with more weight given to higher performance levels; comparing the performance index scores over time shows trends in school and district achievement

20. Performance Indicators: specific items that define what students need to be able to do to demonstrate that they are proficient

21. Proficient Level: a level determined by each state department of education; in Ohio, 75% is needed for proficiency in achievement test areas

22. Pull-Out: educational setting provided to a student with a disability in a setting that is separate from the general education setting; typically does not include any students without disabilities; considered a restrictive setting for students with significant, or low incidence, disabilities

23. Standards-based Reform: reform that sets standards for performance in designated subjects; designed to strengthen the educational program for all students; designed to improve student achievement
24. Standardized Test: tests that are scored and administered in a standard fashion; provides uniformity to all students; provides for comparison of results

25. Sub-groups: as mandated in NCLB, subgroups include socio-economic status; race/ethnicity; language background (limited English proficiency); students with disabilities; minimum subgroup size for reporting purposes is 30 students

26. Title I (of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act): a federal program that provides funding to schools to improve learning for disadvantaged students (Lordi, Murphy, Tejada, & Smith, 2007; McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; Ohio Department of Education, 2002; O’Neill, 2004; Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1968)

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of this research study. Chapter two includes a comprehensive discussion of the current research regarding educational reform policies. The literature review supports the purpose of this study, to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. This review of the literature supported the need for further study in this area.

Three questions guide this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing?
Chapter 3 provides a description of the research methodology, with further detail regarding the phenomenological qualitative methodology. It is essential to the understanding of the views and perceptions of classroom teachers to gather rich qualitative data. In-depth data will result in meaningful changes for teachers and ultimately the students in their classrooms.

The reader is introduced to the sites and participants in Chapter 4. This description includes the actual words of the participants as they share their overall impression and understanding of NCLB. This description provides the foundation for the remainder of the discussion.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the study according to the themes and categories that emerged from the analysis of the data. The words of the participants are included in order to preserve the voices and stories of the participants.

The summary, limitations, recommendations for further study, and conclusions are presented in Chapter 6. It was the goal of this researcher to provide data that has practical application to current educators. The recommendations provide a guide for future research and policy in order to continue the study of the views and perceptions of general education teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.
Chapter Two  
Review of the Literature  

Evaluating student performance through testing has been a long-standing tradition of public schools. For decades, teacher designed tests have been supplemented with standardized tests designed to monitor the general effectiveness of our educational system. School districts have administered these standardized tests on a regular basis. These test scores provided a source of information for teachers and gave parents a general sense of the performance level of their children. As the trend of using standardized test scores to monitor student performance continued, testing companies began to create tests specific to the needs of each state.

On a national level, standardized testing continues to be the method of monitoring the educational system. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a large-scale assessment administered to a sampling of school districts across the United States. The NAEP, often referred to as the nation’s report card, provides a uniform comparison of student progress across the country (Stetcher, 2000; Zuckerbrod, 2007). The NAEP results from 2005-2007 indicated gains in math and modest improvement in reading (Zuckerbrod, 2007). This assessment is used to evaluate the state of education across the country, which is non-threatening to each individual school district. It is a
standardized assessment that provides a reliable and valid indication of achievement in which to measure student progress.

Current reform policies, however, are viewed differently by educators. Both the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and No Child Left Behind (NCLB) contain mandates for assessment that is ultimately used to rate school districts. This rating is based on the achievement of all students, including students with learning and language disabilities.

No Child Left Behind and IDEA are standards-based reform policies. Standards-based reform is defined by McDonnell, McLaughlin, and Morison (1997) as:

…content standards that specify what students should learn; performance standards that set the expectations for what students must know and do to demonstrate proficiency; and assessments that provide the accountability mechanism for monitoring whether these expectations have been met and by whom… (p. 3)

It is implicit in standards-based reform that schools be held publicly accountable for the performance level of all students.

The underlying premise of standards-based reform is that all students, including students with disabilities, will reach higher levels of achievement due to the public accountability for student performance. The National Research Council, as cited by Lehr and Thurlow, (2003) reports:

…if states set high standards for student performance, develop assessments that measure student performance against the standards, give schools the flexibility they need to change the curriculum, instruction, and school organization to enable
their students to meet the standards and hold schools strictly accountable for meeting performance standards, then student achievement will rise. (p. 15)

The mandates of IDEA and NCLB are intended to result in increased student achievement. However, with every change there are intended and unintended outcomes. Classroom teachers are best equipped to discuss these outcomes since they are the conduit of the change. It is essential to understand the views and perceptions of classroom teachers in order to provide data to inform educational decision-making.

This research study ultimately focused on the mandates of NCLB, commonly considered to be the most comprehensive educational reform policy to date. It is NCLB that has resulted in teachers examining their instructional practices and wondering if they will be able to meet all the mandates. As stated in the Aspen Report titled Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the Promise to Our Nation’s Children [Aspen Report], 2007, “One of the most significant effects of NCLB was to turn what many schools and districts had established as a goal – ‘that all children will learn’ - into national policy” (p. 15). While this concept is generally accepted by educators, being held to this standard through federal reform policy presents a unique challenge.

History of Educational Reform

School improvement is the foundation of educational reform. Federal reform policy has been passed with the intent of improving schools through increased student achievement. Every reform policy is a reflection of and response to the political and societal climate at the time. No Child Left Behind and IDEA represent a reflection of the times and are the result of the failures and successes of the reform policies that preceded them.
The first federal Department of Education was established in 1867. This department was created with the goal of helping states operate effective school systems. This was to be accomplished through the collection of information on schools and teaching. In 1980, Congress established the Department of Education as a cabinet level department. Today this department operates programs that impact every level of education, serving more than 14,000 school districts and 56 million students attending more than 94,000 public schools and 28,000 private schools. The mission of the department continues to address student achievement: to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access (United States Department of Education, n.d.).

The educational reform policies created by the federal government have often been in response to societal and historical events. In 1890, the Second Morrill Act was passed giving responsibility for administering federal support to land-grant colleges and universities. The Smith-Hughes Act, passed in 1917, provided federal funding to schools for vocational education. This trend continued with the 1946 George-Barden Act focusing on home economics, industrial, and agricultural training for high school students (The United States Department of Education, n.d.).

World War II brought several changes to education. One change was increased federal support for education. The Lanham Act in 1941 and the Impact Aid laws of 1950 were both designed to ease the financial burden of communities affected by the War. This relief came in the form of monetary payments to schools. This was termed the “GI Bill” and afforded nearly 8 million World War II veterans the opportunity to attend college (The United States Department of Education, n.d.).
In 1958, during the Cold War, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. Sputnik was the first man-made rocket to be launched into orbit. This event caused great turmoil in the United States in general, but was an especially pivotal point in education. The March 24, 1958 issue of *Life* magazine carried the words “Crisis in Education” in bold red letters on its cover (Bracey, 2007). The Federal government response to Sputnik was two-fold. The National Education Defense Act was passed. This Act was designed to ensure that the United States graduated highly trained individuals who would be educated and prepared to assist the United States in competing with the Soviet Union in the fields of science and technology. This Act provided financial support to students for college, and called for the improvement of science, math, and foreign language instruction in our nation’s schools (The United States Department of Education, n.d.).

A second response to the launching of Sputnik was increased funding to the National Science Foundation. This reinforced the federal government’s commitment to science and established science as not only an educational priority, but it established science as a national priority. Congress appropriated $134 million to the National Science Foundation. This support continued and by 1968 the budget reached $500 million (The National Science Foundation, n.d.).

The National Education Defense Act represented a substantial increase in federal level involvement in education that continued to grow with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; P.L. 107-110) passed in 1965. The ESEA represented federal government involvement that was unprecedented to this point. The foundation of ESEA was to eliminate poverty by focusing federal resources on the poor (Conley, 2003).
In their attempt to eliminate poverty, the federal government provided resources that were known as Title I funds. Title I funds were distributed to state departments of education who were charged with appropriately distributing the funds to school districts. While most school districts receive some Title I funding, schools with large concentrations of low-income students receive larger amounts of funding. Eventually, schools with large percentages of children from low-income families were determined to be Title I schools. If the numbers of children from low-income families were large enough, districts were determined to be Title I districts, with the funding shifting from the child to the school to the district (Conley, 2003).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was also designed to create equity in education by closing the achievement gap between students of low-income status and those students of affluent status. It was intended as a means of providing educational opportunities of equal value to all students (Aspen Report, 2007; Gordon, 2006; Nagle, Yunker, & Malmgren, 2006). In order to determine whether or not the achievement gap was closing, the ESEA required schools to evaluate student progress in reading and math. In addition, schools had to report these results to state governments (Conley, 2003; McDonnell, 2004). The goal of this law, equity for all students, set the stage for the requirement of mandated statewide testing and mandated reporting of the results as a method of monitoring student achievement (McDonnell, 2004).

Most people were satisfied with the level of education in the United States for many years. However, in the late 1970s the educational system was again under scrutiny. *A Nation at Risk*, a report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education was made public in 1983. This report included the accusations that the improvements made
to the educational system following Sputnik had been lost. In response, standards for entering the teaching profession were increased, curriculum requirements were established, minimum competency testing was required, and provisions were made for auditing school achievement (Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Wirt, 2004). It was soon acknowledged that the current educational system was inadequate and a series of educational reform policies was set into motion (Aspen Report, 2007).

In 1988, the ESEA was reauthorized, again with an emphasis on academic achievement for all students. The impact for schools receiving Title I funding included the requirement to examine the academic achievement of the specific group of students served with Title I funds. These students were considered economically disadvantaged and generally received assistance in reading or math. Even though ESEA targeted academic achievement for all groups of students, there was little actual change in student achievement. Achievement expectations remained low, few instructional changes were made, and groups of students remained isolated (Goertz et al., 2003).

Educational reform had become a political hot topic and as a result, in 1989, then President H. W. Bush held an education summit. The summit was attended by most of our state governors, including future President Bill Clinton. The summit resulted in an expectation that all students meet a designated level of performance in challenging subject matter. This goal was formalized in the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 during Clinton’s first term as President (Aspen Report, 2007).

Goals 2000 set broad standards for student performance, and also provided federal funding to assist schools in meeting these standards (Aspen Report, 2007). The legislation of Goals 2000 declared that all children can learn and achieve to high
standards and that it is essential to the prosperity of the United States as a country that this goal is achieved. Goals 2000 also declared that all students are entitled to a challenging curriculum and to sufficient resources to address all of their educational needs (McDonnell, et al., 1997). In addition, Goals 2000 encouraged life-long learning, parent participation, increased graduation rates for all students and required increased achievement in science and math (Aspen Report, 2007). The stage had once again been set for all students to reach high standards of performance.

In 1994, a second reauthorization of ESEA led to the Improve America’s Schools Act (IASA). The result was a federal mandate requiring all states to set standards for performance; to create assessments to measure student performance; and to develop statewide accountability systems. Not only did the IASA require mandated statewide testing, it required scores to be disaggregated for groups of students, specifically student groups by race and disability status (Aspen Report, 2007; Crawford et al., 2002). Thus the goal of equity among students through high achievement standards and accountability for all students was confirmed as a priority in our nation’s educational system.

Even though the educational reform policies included accountability standards to meet the mandates, concern remained regarding the achievement level of all students. Student achievement had increased, but not enough, especially for specific groups of students. One group that caused significant concern was students with disabilities (Aspen Report, 2007). As the numbers of students identified as having a disability grew, the concern over their lack of achievement grew as well.

Why was there such concern over students with disabilities? It is because the large number of students who were considered to have a disability was not making
achievement gains commensurate with students without disabilities. In the 1970s, most of the more than 8 million students with disabilities were excluded from our nation’s classrooms. Approximately 70% of these 8 million students were taught in separate classrooms or separate facilities (Gordon, 2006). There was no opportunity for these students to meet challenging standards.

During the next 3 decades the numbers of students with disabilities continued to increase. In 1998, the total number of students in the United States with disabilities was equal to the combined populations of North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, Nevada and Idaho (Thurlow, Elliott, & Ysseldyke, 1998). There are 32 states with a population that is less than the total number of students in the United States who are identified as having a disability (Thurlow, et al.). Once again, Congress responded with legislation to address the deficits in our educational system, this time with a focus on specific subgroups of students.

No Child Left Behind

The focus on achievement for all students eventually evolved into the most comprehensive educational reform policy to date. The ESEA was reauthorized and became known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), signed by President George W. Bush in the state of Ohio on January 8, 2002. This Act strengthened the intent of the original ESEA, to close the achievement gap between subgroups of students. No Child Left Behind requires a public reporting system of subgroups of students, thus making public the individual school accountability for the achievement of all students (Nagle et al., 2006).
The subgroups created in NCLB include children from families that are economically disadvantaged, students of racial/ethnic minorities, students for whom English is a second language, and students with disabilities. In Ohio, the required number of students within a school or across the district to be considered a subgroup is 30 (Chester, 2007; Lordi, Murphy, Tejada, & Smith, 2007). Students from these subgroups are required to participate in a challenging curriculum and to reach a proficient level on statewide tests in order to demonstrate their individual achievement, as well as the success level of the school (Crawford et al., 2002; Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Nagle et al., 2006; Thornton, 2006).

In order to determine whether all students are meeting the standards set by each state, NCLB includes an unprecedented accountability feature called adequate yearly progress (AYP). Students from all subgroups are held accountable for meeting AYP in the areas of math and reading in grades 3 through 8. Test results are publicly reported by subgroup, including the subgroup of students with disabilities. Schools that do not demonstrate AYP for each subgroup face a series of sanctions. These sanctions include required tutoring (either in the school or an independent tutor funded by the district), transferring students to high-achieving schools, and eventually replacing key personnel in low-performing schools (Aspen Report, 2007; Lordi et al., 2007; O’Neill, 2004).

No Child Left Behind required all states to create an accountability system as a measure of the AYP of all students, as well as each subgroup of students, in each school district in the state. An Assistant Superintendent from Kendallville, Indiana was quoted in the Aspen Report (2007), “No longer can schools hide their failing students behind
school averages that appear on the surface to convey a reasonable degree of acceptability" (p. 57).

The bar for student achievement has been set by NCLB and the standards are high. Each state’s accountability system must define a performance level that establishes incremental increases in achievement in order that 100% of students reach a state-defined proficiency level by the 2013-14 school year (Norlin, 2005; O’Neill, 2004). The accountability requirements also stipulate a minimum of 95% participation rate of each subgroup of students (Lordi et al., 2007; Norlin, 2005; O’Neill, 2004) This includes the subgroup of students with disabilities (Aspen Report, 2007; Lordi et al., 2007; Norlin, 2005; O’Neill, 2004).

Ohio’s Response to NCLB

The state of Ohio has created an accountability system to fulfill the requirements of NCLB. Ohio’s system includes four measures to rate school effectiveness. These measures include performance indicators, performance index, growth calculation, and AYP. Ohio’s accountability system results in ratings for schools within districts and districts overall. Schools receive ratings of excellent, effective, continuous improvement, academic watch, or academic emergency. A combination of performance indicators, performance index, growth calculation, and AYP determines school and district ratings (Chester, 2005). The 2006-07 state ratings indicated that 80% of Ohio’s districts were rated as effective or excellent and 63% of Ohio’s individual schools were rated as effective or excellent (Chester, 2007). Ohio’s accountability system is complex. The first component, the performance indicator, is determined by each grade and subject that is
assessed, graduation rate, and overall attendance for the building and district. The current standard of performance for each subject assessed requires 75% of the students to score proficient or above (Chester, 2005).

The second component of Ohio’s accountability plan is the performance index. The performance index is also a composite score “based on a weighted distribution of scores from all tested grades and subjects” (Chester, 2005, p. 42). The weighted score determines the performance index that results in school and district ratings. From the 2005-06 school year to the 2006-07 school year, schools in Ohio showed a 44% increase in their performance index, and districts showed a 26% increase in their performance index (Chester, 2007).

The third component is a value-added model. Value-added scores are intended to show individual student growth from one year to the next year. Value-added scores are based on two consecutive years of data and result in classification ratings for reading, math, grade composite, and district composite scores (Chester, 2007). The value-added calculation requires a complex mathematical equation as well. Numerous experts in the field of data collection and analysis continue to refine this process (Chester, 2007).

The fourth component of Ohio’s accountability system addresses the federal requirement of AYP. Chester (2005) describes four standards that determine AYP. Two of the standards are accomplished by meeting the established proficiency level on the math and reading tests. A safety net to these requirements, known as safe harbor, allows these standards to be met if a specified percentage of improvement over the prior year is reached. The other two standards include the requirement of 95% participation rate in both math and reading. These four standards are applied to each school and district, as
well as each subgroup within the school and district. In addition, a specified daily attendance rate and high school graduation rate are included in the calculation to determine whether or not a school or district has met AYP.

**Conclusion to NCLB**

As is evident from the description of Ohio’s accountability model, fulfilling the mandates of NCLB represents a complex process. Educators are making changes in order to reach the high standards set by NCLB and are faced with the challenges inherent in this task. “No Child Left Behind reinforces the message that individual schools are responsible for the achievement of all students, and if students fail to improve, NCLB holds schools accountable” (Nagle et al., 2006, p. 29). It remains to be seen whether the complex systems of accountability actually result in increased student achievement for all students, including students with disabilities.

**Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

A second educational reform policy that has significantly impacted our nation’s classrooms is IDEA. This current policy, like NCLB, results from a series of reform policies. In 1975, President Gerald Ford signed the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (EAHCA: PL 94-142). This reform significantly altered the way in which public schools educated students with disabilities. This law required that all students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). In addition, students with disabilities were afforded the right to nondiscriminatory testing practices for the purposes of identifying them as
students with disabilities. And lastly, procedural due process safeguards were put into place to protect students with disabilities and their families. Teams of educators were charged with creating an individualized education plan (IEP) for students with disabilities (Yell, 1997).

In 1990, amendments to PL 94-142 renamed the EAHCA, resulting in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The most significant change in this reform was the movement toward person-first language. It was no longer appropriate to refer to a child as a ‘handicapped student’. A child with learning needs was referred to as a student with a disability (Yell, 1997).

In 1997, President Clinton signed the Amendments to IDEA (Lombardi, 1999). This reauthorization confirmed the dedication of the federal government to the education of students with disabilities and represented a glimpse into the alignment with the assessment and accountability requirements for students in general education. General education teachers became part of the IEP teams, and thus began the general education teacher’s role in the education of students with disabilities (Gartner & Lipsky, 1999; Yell, 1997).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act contained four specific components considered important in the history of educational reform for all students. This policy required that all students be given access to the general education curriculum. This included students with disabilities. Second, students with disabilities became required participants in statewide assessment. The third component required a student’s IEP to address the preceding two mandates, participation in assessment and access to the general education curriculum. Finally, any performance results or scores reported for
students without disabilities must also include the performance results or scores for students with disabilities (Fuhrman & Elmore, 2004; Goertz et al., 2003; Kohl, McLaughlin, & Nagle, 2006; Marshall & Patterson, 2002; Norlin, 2005; Pullin, 2005; Thurlow, 2004; Thurlow, Nelson, Teelucksingh, & Ysseldyke, 2000). Over 40 states require the public reporting of assessment results for students with disabilities (Mazzeo, 2001) and all 50 states have implemented educational initiatives to increase achievement for all students (Goertz et al., 2003).

On December 3, 2004, IDEA was once again reauthorized as President George W. Bush signed the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) into law. The IDEA 2004 contained the provision for a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with disabilities. Often, the least restrictive environment is the general education classroom. In passing IDEA 2004, Congress incorporated many of the requirements for assessment and accountability that are contained in NCLB. When President Bush signed IDEA into law, it was with the intent to align IDEA with NCLB and to incorporate the assessment and accountability mandates of NCLB (Lordi, et al., 2007).

Then U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, as cited in Lordi, et al. (2007), described the relationship of IDEA 2004 and NCLB:

Every child in America deserves the highest-quality education, including our children with disabilities. Our goal is to align the IDEA with the principles of No Child Left Behind by ensuring accountability, more flexibility, more options for parents and an emphasis on doing what works to improve student achievement. (p. 1)
Thus the discussion began regarding the relationship of IDEA and NCLB and whether these major reform policies were indeed as compatible as originally intended (Gordon, 2006).

Requiring all students to achieve the academic goals and performance scores on mandated assessment presents a challenge for both students and teachers. The requirement that students with disabilities perform at a level commensurate with their non-disabled peers contributes to this challenge. Up to this point, including students with disabilities in assessment was relatively new to the educational system. Students with disabilities had historically not been held to the same standards as their peers without disabilities. No Child Left Behind requires all students to participate in assessment and all students to reach proficiency by the year 2014, thus increasing educational opportunities for all students and increasing educational challenges for schools (Allbritten et al., 2004; Crawford et al., 2002; Harriman, 2005; Nagle et al., 2006). “It is hoped that including these students in assessments – especially, the large-scale assessments tied to accountability in standards-based reforms – will make schools more accountable for, and thus more attentive to, the academic performance of students with disabilities (Koretz, 1997, p. 1).

When viewed individually, the reform policies of NCLB and IDEA have had a significant impact on education. When viewed together, the impact is even greater. These reform policies are “more robust than any other in the field of education over the last 40 years” (Elmore, 2004, p. 274). Educators continue to struggle to balance the mandates of both policies. The high accountability of NCLB coupled with the individual nature of IDEA presents a challenge to all.
Conclusion to IDEA

The link between policy and practice is critical to the success of all students in the classroom, but it is especially critical to the success of students with disabilities. In the past, the concern was that students with disabilities were excluded from assessment and accountability. Now, the concern is the extent of the impact of including students with disabilities in assessment and accountability reform, the very students for whom it was intended to benefit. Little is known about the consequences of including students with disabilities in mandated assessment (Koretz & Barton, 2003; McDonnell et al., 1997; Schulte & Villwock, 2004). Additionally, due to past exclusion of students with disabilities, scant data exist regarding their performance on assessment upon which to base future decisions or to compare the current impact of assessment (Schulte, Villwock, Whichard, & Stallings, 2001). As shared in Ysseldyke et al. (2004), “It is assumed that holding schools responsible for improved outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities, will lead to increased instructional effort, improved instruction and better outcomes. But, we do not yet know whether this is the case” (p. 90).

Relationship of NCLB and IDEA

There is no doubt that the reform policies of NCLB and IDEA were created with the intent of increasing educational opportunities for all students. Both NCLB and IDEA have strengthened the accountability requirements of schools. Educators must now make decisions with all students in mind. This accountability for all students has created challenges for educators.
On the one hand, NCLB requires that students with disabilities gain access to general education and that they are included in statewide assessment along with students without disabilities. On the other hand, IDEA requires that students with disabilities have access to this education in ways that accommodate for their disability in a non-discriminatory fashion (Albrecht & Joles, 2003). Miriam K. Freedman, a lawyer in Boston who represents school districts, shares, “The individualized nature of IDEA is totally inconsistent with the group nature of NCLB, even though they both talk about classes of kids who are disabled” (Olson, 2004, p. 13). Educators must balance the needs of the individual child with the demands to meet accountability standards for all children (Albrecht & Joles, 2003; Faircloth, 2004; Koretz, 1997; Nagle et al., 2006; Thompson, Lazarus, Clapper, & Thurlow, 2006).

It was not until the requirements of NCLB were implemented and public reports of achievement levels began to appear, that educators fully realized the impact of this reform policy. As Faircloth (2004) states, “Implication of the NCLB Act at the school level presents not only an administrative, but also an ethical dilemma; forcing school leaders to choose between two competing values, that of the individual child and that of the school at large” (p. 32). Building and district leaders face the ethical decision of meeting the individual needs of students with disabilities at the same time they meet the accountability standards of high achievement for all students.

Most educators accept the basic tenets of NCLB that assessment and accountability are catalysts for increased student achievement. If students with disabilities were not included in the assessment requirements of NCLB, they would obviously be unlikely to benefit from this reform. One of the realizations of educators is
that no student or group of students’ needs can be ignored when the accountability requirements for reporting achievement scores includes all students. Through the accountability for all students, schools are required to improve the educational services for all students, including students with disabilities (Albrecht & Joles, 2003). Educators are challenged to meet these standards.

Conclusion to the Relationship of IDEA and NCLB

It is too soon to know if the educational reform policies of NCLB and IDEA are compatible and how they will impact all students, and how they will eventually impact the entire educational system. As stated in Harriman, 2005, “It is hard to argue against accountability for student learning” (p. 68) although Allbritten et al. (2004) remind us that “Special education, as a non-normative child-centered system, was precisely created in response to the general educational normative system that sorted out students with disabilities who did not fit the general education curriculum. Let’s not re-invent the past” (p.74).

Will the reform policies of NCLB and IDEA result in an educational system that closes the achievement gap for all students or will these reform policies result in amplifying the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities (Faircloth, 2004). Educational leaders must carefully consider the implementation of NCLB and IDEA and how they will provide guidance to the teachers in our classrooms. “External political power can mandate compliance, but the challenge of learning still rests on the internal commitment of those who would educate and those who would be educated” (DeBard & Kubow, 2002, p. 389).
To this end, the remainder of this review focuses on NCLB and the views and perceptions of general education teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The following includes discussion of the numerous reports and studies that relate to mandated testing.

Studies and Reports

A great deal of research has been completed in relation to standards-based reform and student achievement. Much of this writing is in the form of Technical Reports generated through the Center for the Study of Evaluation (CSE), National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST). This center is housed at the University of California at Los Angeles and has been in existence for over 40 years. These reports represent large-scale analysis of evaluation and testing techniques.

Another source of comprehensive analysis of educational accountability and assessment systems is The National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO). This center was established in 1990 and provides leadership in educational assessment and accountability. This organization addresses assessment and accountability issues for students with disabilities as well as the general education population. NCEO is located at the University of Minnesota with Martha Thurlow currently serving as the director. This organization provides research from all 50 states and continues to provide tools for analyzing data specific to each state. The reports from CRESST and NCEO are numerous. A summary of a sampling of these large-scale technical reports reveals the depth of study (See Appendix A).
In addition to the large-scale technical reports, research is emerging that addresses the issues of standards-based reform on a somewhat smaller scale. This research appears to be directed toward specific aspects of NCLB. Most of this research addresses the issue of including students with disabilities in mandated assessment from the perspective of the method of participation (alternate assessment or assessment with accommodations) and resulting reliability and validity of the test scores (See Appendix B). Considering the large-scale assessment requirements in NCLB for students with disabilities and the impact on teachers, schools, and districts, very little research exists that specifically addresses the views and perceptions of general education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in mandated assessment.

The primary intent of NCLB is to increase student achievement for all students, including students with disabilities. This is no small task. While some increases in student achievement have been demonstrated, the progress has been slow (Aspen Report, 2007). No Child Left Behind has been under scrutiny since its inception and this scrutiny continues. The review of the literature exemplified this scrutiny. Educators are willing to acknowledge that there have been benefits from the mandates of NCLB. They also indicate that some of the mandates of NCLB have not been beneficial. These intended and unintended outcomes of NCLB constitute a paradigm worthy of further discussion. The remainder of this literature review is framed according to this paradigm.

Paradigmatic Framework

A paradigm is a framework that guides what is important, what should be studied, what questions should be asked, and how research should be interpreted (Glesne, 2006; Maxwell, 2005; Paul & Ward, 1996). Paradigms represent points of view that merit
discussion. Paradigms are not solved through scientific methods. There is no right or wrong answer. The paradigmatic framework does not solve the issue of which outcomes are better than others. It provides a foundation for in-depth discussion of the issues. Individuals must form their own thoughts surrounding these issues. “It is not really possible to prove that one paradigm is more accurate or better than another one using a ‘scientific’ approach. It is possible, even desirable, to reduce or refine theories, research, and practices within a paradigm” (Paul & Ward, 1996, p. 4).

While it could be viewed that this paradigmatic framework may oversimplify the educational outcomes of NCLB, the review of the literature indicated that much of the research fell into the broad categories of intended and unintended outcomes. It must be acknowledged that both intended and unintended outcomes do exist. Educators are challenged by these outcomes and must delve into this paradigm in order to begin to understand the impact in their classrooms. As Paul and Ward (1996) remind us, “A clear articulation and acknowledgment of a paradigm should lead to an improvement of theories, research, and practices…” (p. 10).

In summary, the goal of NCLB is to increase student achievement for all students, including students with disabilities. The premise of NCLB is that the accountability of publicly reporting the assessment results for all students will result in improved curriculum and instructional practices for all students. The accountability for schools and districts includes publicly reporting the assessment results for subgroups of students. All subgroups are required to reach AYP, a specified proficiency level. Students with disabilities comprise one such subgroup. This presents a challenge for educators as students with disabilities were not historically included in the assessment and
accountability mandates of previous reform policies. It was not even until IDEA 1997 that access to the general education curriculum was a consideration for students with disabilities. This represents a relatively short period of time for teachers to learn appropriate methods for meeting the needs of individual students with disabilities in their classrooms.

Participation in Statewide Testing

Intended Outcomes

No Child Left Behind mandates the participation of all students, including students with disabilities, in statewide assessment. Students with disabilities must either participate in statewide assessment with no accommodations (same standards as general education students), statewide assessment with accommodations (most students with learning and language disabilities), or they must participate in an alternate assessment (students with significant disabilities) (Elliott & Thurlow, 2000). One premise of NCLB is that the mandated participation of all students in assessment will result in greater access to a quality education (Lehr & Thurlow, 2003; Pullin, 2005; Thurlow, 2004). In addition, the increased accountability mandate for schools and districts is intended to result in increased attention to the performance of students with disabilities (Bowen & Rude, 2006; Koretz & Barton, 2003).

Thurlow (2002) listed several reasons for including students with disabilities in assessment and accountability of reform policies. She maintains that the participation of students with disabilities in assessment and accountability results in a more accurate picture of education; it allows students with disabilities to benefit from the reform policy;
it provides data for accurate comparisons with non-disabled peers; it fulfills the legal requirements of the policy; and promotes high expectations for all students (p. 196). In theory, the inclusion of students with disabilities in assessment programs should provide an opportunity for schools to document overall gains in achievement (Crawford & Tindal, 2006) considering that these students historically did not participate in assessment.

Some states have demonstrated increases in passage rates and increased student performance. As Ysseldyke et al. (2004) report, testing of all students with disabilities in the state of New York resulted in quadrupled passage rates for these students. The same was true of the states of Colorado and Maine, with state directors of special education reporting gains in the performance of students with disabilities. The Colorado Department of Education reported that their fourth grade population of students with disabilities improved 107% from 1998 to 2001.

A study completed by the Educational Policy Reform Research Institute (EPPRI) involving the states of California, Maryland, New York, and Texas generally reported that participants of state and local education agencies supported the requirements and believed that all students should be held to high standards. Participants believed that students with disabilities should be given the opportunity to demonstrate what they know and that participation in assessment provided learning opportunities that previously were not available to students with disabilities (Nagle et al., 2006). Bejoian and Reid (2005) remind us that students with disabilities deserve to be considered and valued as members of the school. They deserve to be taught in ways that are appropriate to them and that provide for continued progress.
Unintended Outcomes

Some research reported results that indicated a discrepancy between administrators and teachers regarding how the mandates of required assessment and accountability for students with disabilities were viewed. A study completed by Koretz, Mitchell, Barron, and Keith (1996) reported that 65% of elementary school principals and 85% of middle school principals reported encouraging their teachers to set high expectations for all students. In the same study, however, teachers reported that few expectations had really increased. More teachers reported that expectations had increased for high-performing students than for students with disabilities. Teachers viewed the emphasis on increased standards as much more beneficial to average and above average students. Some teachers reported a negative impact on low-achieving students and students with disabilities.

Research exposed the concern that some educators have about the possible negative impact of mandated assessment for students with disabilities. Some educators believed that increased accountability of the performance of all students will result in the subgroup of students with disabilities being blamed for failing ratings of school districts (Albrecht & Joles, 2003; Allbritten et al., 2004; Crawford et al., 2002; Kauffman, 2005; Nagle et al., 2006). In a study completed by Crawford et al. (2002) involving a focus group discussion with 57 general and special education teachers in the state of Oregon, results showed that teachers were apprehensive about including all students with disabilities in assessment even though, for the most part, teachers had positive attitudes about statewide assessment. These teachers were concerned about the impact of publicly reported results on students with disabilities.
DeBard and Kubow (2002) reported the results of a study they completed in 2001 indicating that 87% of teachers and 76% of administrators in a district in Ohio stated that mandated testing was overwhelming for students with disabilities. Both administrators and teachers displayed a concern for the impact of mandated assessment on students. *Education Week*’s national survey of 800 general and special education teachers in grades K-12 resulted in similar findings. Eighty-four percent of the teachers surveyed indicated that students with disabilities should not be expected to meet the same content standards as students with out disabilities (Olson, 2004). This same survey indicated that teachers feel similarly about the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment. Almost 8 in 10 teachers said that students with disabilities should be excused from taking the same statewide assessment that students without disabilities take and that it was unfair to evaluate students with disabilities on how well they mastered the content standards based on a test score (Olson, 2004).

Crawford et al. (2002) reported that a study involving teachers from a northwestern state indicated they were greatly concerned about the stress of mandated assessments on students with disabilities. Using the scores of one subgroup of students to describe an entire school as failing is a disservice to the child and to the school and can be debilitating regarding a student’s confidence in their learning ability (Sloan & Kelly, 2003). No one wants students with disabilities to be viewed as an obstacle to the success of entire schools; however, the current reform policy of NCLB may result in that very thought.

As Koretz and Barton (2003) reported, the current reform policy is based on the premise that one test is appropriate to measure the achievement of all students, those who
are high-achieving and those who have disabilities. This policy is based on faulty assumptions, as it is not possible to accurately assess the achievement level of all students with one test. Others shared the same concern for the validity, reliability, and fairness of using one test to assess the achievement level of all students.

In addition, as Kauffman (2005) reported:

A President, a secretary of education, or a legislative body may well declare that ‘no child will be left behind’ but that does not change the fact that testing will always produce a distribution, including a bottom…even an individual or a group that score lowest. It happens every single time. (p. 521)

Kauffman (2005) reminds us that students with disabilities have been identified as such through a comprehensive evaluation that resulted in the determination that they were in need of specialized instruction. “Students with disabilities are those who score low on tests because of their disabilities” (p. 520). Perhaps the gap in achievement is not closable and serves only to draw negative attention to students with disabilities, their teachers, and their families.

Students with disabilities are at a disadvantage when participating in mandated assessment because of their neurological disorders, impairments, and other disabilities. As a result, these students with disabilities have a difficult time demonstrating their abilities (Holbrook, 2002; O’Neill, 2004; Pullin, 2005).

These children have a disability. Their brains don’t work in the same way as yours and mine. More services will help and we should always expect a little more for each of them. But let us be realistic; the disability won’t go away, just as blindness, deafness, or cerebral palsy won’t vanish. (Holbrook, 2002, p. 784)
Reform policies operate under the theory that by measuring and reporting performance, instructional practices will improve. Administrators, teachers, and students will work harder to reach higher standards of performance (Elmore, 2004; Foote, 2007) when accountability is part of the reform. The impact of standards-based reform on curriculum and instruction has yet to be determined, but it is undeniable that statewide assessment has had an influence on curriculum and instruction (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Crawford, 2006; Ysseldyke et al., 2004).

Several studies have contributed to the body of research regarding the impact of NCLB on curriculum and instruction. A substantial number of studies reported a change in the emphasis of curriculum. Often this change occurred in the form of the alignment of the curriculum to state content standards (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Guskey, 2005; Jennings & Rentner, 2006; Nelson, McGhee, Meno & Slater, 2007; Stecher & Borko, 2002). This represents a positive change considering that statewide assessments are aligned with state content standards.

In addition to positive changes in curriculum, Stecher, Barron, Chun, and Ross (2000) found that teachers reported that they were making positive instructional changes in response to the mandated assessment as well. In a study completed by Crawford and Tindal (2006), teachers reported that mandated assessment had changed their instructional practices. Approximately 30% of the teachers surveyed reported that test content was useful in guiding instructional practices. Harriman (2005) indicated that
“Teachers consider more seriously what they are teaching, how they are teaching, and what’s most important to teach” (p. 67). In this same report, educators responded that the mandates of NCLB had resulted in more dialogue among teachers regarding both curriculum and instructional practices.

Similar results were reported in a study by Koretz et al. (1996) on the perceived effects of the Maryland School Performance Assessment Program (MSPAP). Teachers reported that instruction had changed as a result of the assessment program. A majority of the teachers, 61%, reported that their instructional techniques had improved as a result of assessment. In this study, 95% of principals reported that they had purchased instructional materials that were aligned with the MSPAP.

*Unintended Outcomes*

Even though studies exist indicating that the intended outcomes regarding curriculum and instructional practices have been positive, there are studies that indicate the unintended outcomes as well. One such unintended outcome is the narrowing of the curriculum to emphasize tested content. It has been argued by several researchers that emphasis on assessment and accountability has resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum (Abrams, et al., 2003; Cimbricz, 2002; Elliott & Thurlow, 2006; Taylor, Shepard, Kinner, & Rosenthal, 2003; Vogler, 2002).

This was shown to be the case in a study completed by Koretz (2005) where it was reported that instruction had shifted to focus on the material that would be tested. This report also indicated that a shift in instruction to match the test resulted only in an increase in performance on those particular areas and not an increase in overall mastery.
Educators who shifted instruction to match the test also reported that this shift in instruction often resulted in instructional strategies that they did not deem good educational practice (Abrams et al., 2003), which is certainly not an intended outcome of NCLB.

Stecher and Chun (2001) reported the state of Washington’s standards, known as the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EALRs) and the state’s testing program, the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). The results of this study indicated a change in allocation of time given to subject areas as well. Teachers reported that instructional time had increased for tested areas and decreased for non-tested areas. This study also showed that teachers had already begun to focus more on the tested items of the WASL than on curriculum alignment with the content standards. In the state of Colorado, where standards-based reform is especially controversial, Taylor et al. (2003) found that pressure to perform on tests had resulted in a narrowing of the curriculum. This study also revealed that instructional time was reduced for non-tested subjects.

**Implications for Educators**

No Child Left Behind is a federal education reform policy. It represents the culmination of reform policies that preceded it and reflects the views and opinions of the government who created it. Political pressure for increased academic performance continues to build and it is not likely that this reform policy will go away (Bejoian & Reid, 2005; Elmore, 2004). Educators, however, hold the key to the successful implementation of any reform policy. A critical aspect of any legislated reform policy is that policy alone does not result in improved practice (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Koretz et al., 1996; Stecher & Chun, 2001). It is essential that the views
and perceptions of the classroom teachers responsible for the implementation of NCLB be considered (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Crawford et al., 2002; DeBard & Kubow, 2002).

In order for the full intent of NCLB to be realized, more information must be gleaned from teachers in classrooms. Information must be reviewed in order to determine whether the goals for reform are being met. Cimbricz (2002) analyzed several studies and concluded that teacher beliefs and practices provide the essential relationship between practice and policy and the effective implementation of such. He concluded that further research is needed to understand and interpret teachers’ beliefs, knowledge, and experiences that they bring to the classroom.

This research must provide a rich, in-depth understanding of teacher views in actual classroom settings. Koretz and Barton (2003) concluded that there exists a need for further research that provides descriptive information that can be applied to practice in the classroom. This study indicated a need to further evaluate the specific effects of policy reform on both learning and instruction.

Researchers have studied the overall impact of large-scale assessment on the general education population, but there remains a scarcity of data available regarding the views and perceptions of general education teachers toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in statewide assessment (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Crawford et al., 2002; Defur, 2002; Koretz & Barton, 2003). This lack of data is surprising considering that schools and districts receive annual ratings, based primarily on the performance of subgroups on statewide testing. One such subgroup is students with disabilities. As stated by Mitchell Chester in Olson (2004), “The biggest challenge is going to be for
educators because, in many cases, the population that we will hold to grade level standards has not been in mainstream curriculum, and often, has not been in mainstream instructional programs” (p. 16). The population referred to is students with disabilities.

No Child Left Behind not only requires all students to perform at high levels, but also includes sanctions if schools fail. The success of a school district is reliant upon general education teachers, special education teachers, administrators, parents and students working together (Allbritten et al., 2004; Faircloth, 2004). This policy will continue to shape the future of education. We must begin to consider not only the results of statewide assessment, but also the views and perceptions of teachers, in order to determine the ultimate impact of NCLB.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. Three basic questions guide this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing?

This study is significant on several levels. Data obtained from interviews with teachers will inform future policy development at the federal, state, and local levels. District and building administrators will use the data to inform process and practice decisions within their districts and buildings. Administrators will have data upon which
to determine appropriate training for teachers, as no reform policy will increase achievement for all students unless teachers are effective in the classroom. This study will provide teachers with data upon which to base future decisions regarding students with disabilities in their classrooms. This study will also provide teachers with an awareness of the views and perceptions of other teachers who are faced with the requirements of NCLB.

A review of the literature indicated that research is beginning to emerge regarding teachers’ perceptions of assessment and accountability specific to general education students. However, little has been written regarding general education teacher perceptions of the participation of students with disabilities in the assessment and accountability systems (Crawford et al., 2002).

No Child Left Behind is a general education reform policy. This coupled with IDEA, which mandates that students with disabilities be educated in the general education setting as much as possible, results in general education teachers being responsible for the performance of all students. The mandates of NCLB are complex and could be difficult for educational leaders to fully understand. No one believes that ‘a child should be left behind’ but educators are not certain how to assure that ‘no child is left behind’. Therefore, it is essential that research begin to address the views and perceptions of classroom teachers. Future policy decisions should be informed by the data resulting from discussions with real teachers in real classrooms.

Summary

The issues that surround the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment mandates of NCLB are complex. There are no simple answers. There is no
argument that students with disabilities should be included in the content rich environment of the general education classroom. There are concerns, however, regarding the long-term consequences of the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessment (Koretz & Barton, 2003; McDonnell et al., 1997; Schulte & Villwock, 2004). Researchers also know very little about sustaining reform policies over time (Sindelar et al., 2006), and must begin a dialogue with the teachers in our classrooms who are responsible for implementing NCLB today and in the future.

For now, students with disabilities will continue to participate in the statewide assessment and accountability practices of NCLB and we must learn as much as we can about the impact of this policy. Classroom teachers are in the best position to provide specific information to researchers. Information from classroom teachers is essential if educators are to meet the mandates of NCLB and, more importantly, do so in a fashion that is appropriate to all of the students in our nation’s classrooms. As DeBard & Kubow (2002) state, “political power can dictate compliance, but commitment will emerge only when there is open dialogue in formulating and improving policy” (p. 387).

Educational leaders need research that can be applied to future policy and practice decision-making. District and building administrators need research that will inform decisions about the training needs of the teachers in our classrooms. Teachers are feeling pressured to perform (Abrams et al. 2003; DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Sindelar, Shearer, Yendol-Hoppey, & Liebert, 2006) and are seeking guidance. In order for educational leaders to effectively respond to these issues, this research will investigate third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires school districts to reach high levels of academic achievement and to publicly report this achievement. All students, including students with disabilities, are required to meet mandated levels of performance. Classroom teachers are faced with the challenge of meeting the educational needs of all students. Data are limited regarding the views and perceptions of the classroom teachers responsible for implementing the mandates of NCLB. Classroom teachers need data to guide their daily instructional practices and educational leaders need data in order to inform policies and practices at the local, state, and federal levels.

This chapter provides a description of the phenomenological qualitative design of this research study. A qualitative design was indicated in order to investigate third grade teachers’ views and perceptions of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. This study incorporated an investigation of the
paradigm of the intended outcomes and the unintended outcomes resulting from the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing.

Research Questions

Three basic questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing?

Overview

How does a researcher determine whether to complete a qualitative or a quantitative study? “The goal of both methodologies is the same: to identify clear and consistent patterns of phenomena by a systematic process” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 192). Quantitative researchers often view qualitative research as subjective and unreliable. Qualitative researchers often view quantitative research as narrow in focus and overly controlled (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). Quantitative research is indicated when the researcher would like to gather information that is broad in nature and, therefore, would gather information from a large sample. This process allows for deductive reasoning and statistical analysis. On the other hand, qualitative research is appropriate when the researcher would like to gather information that is more in-depth, and therefore would gather information from a much smaller sample (Mertler, 2006). Ultimately, the research questions must drive the methodology.
Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe qualitative research as research that delves into organizational processes and addresses real issues that may be complex in nature. Qualitative research is carried out in real-life settings allowing for interactive data collection methods. These authors conclude that qualitative research is suitable for the sociological theory of interpretive analysis. The analysis of this study is guided by the interpretive analytical framework.

A further investigation of the appropriateness of qualitative methodology, as delineated by Maxwell (2005), is that the research goals must serve as the driving force behind determination of methodology. The following excerpts from Maxwell’s list of considerations within a qualitative study include:

1. “Understanding the meaning for participants in the study…” (p. 22)
2. “Understanding the context within which the participants act…” (p. 22)
3. “Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences…” (p. 22)
4. “Generating results and theories that are understandable…” (p. 24)
5. “Conducting studies…intended to help improve existing practice.” (p. 24)
6. “Engaging in collaborative research with practitioners….”” (p. 24)

The research design of this study included components to address each of the considerations listed. A detailed discussion of the participants, interviews, and data is included in chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Phenomenological Study

Qualitative research can take many forms. In order to provide specificity to this research study, the various typologies of qualitative research were explored. The specific
The typology of qualitative research that was incorporated in this research study is phenomenological. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) conclude in their discussion of phenomenological studies that, “A researcher undertaking a phenomenological study investigates various reactions to, or perceptions of, a particular phenomenon” (p. 436).

The understanding of the views and perceptions of teachers regarding the phenomenon of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing falls solidly within the phenomenological typology. The views and perceptions of multiple teachers were analyzed and organized by commonalities in order to define the phenomenon (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006) of statewide testing. The phenomenological qualitative study provided the structure to address the paradigm of intended and unintended outcomes through an interpretive analysis of this paradigm.

In summary, perhaps Maxwell (2005) said it best, “There is no way to mechanically ‘convert’ research questions into methods; your methods are the means to answering your research questions, not a logical transformation of the latter” (p. 92). Maxwell further describes the strengths of qualitative research as deriving from “its inductive approach, its focus on specific situations or people, and its emphasis on words rather than numbers” (p. 22). The phenomenological qualitative design of this study resulted in words that provided a richness and depth to the study.

**Paradigmatic Framework**

Qualitative research must be well-grounded in a conceptual framework (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The most appropriate framework for this study is the paradigmatic framework. A paradigm is “a framework that functions as maps or guides…determining
important problems or issues…” (Glesne, 2006, p. 6). The research questions in this study represent a paradigm, one in which there is no right or wrong answer; no experimental design; no control group or hypothesis. The research questions merit further study to gain an in-depth understanding of the paradigm; not to prove or disprove a predetermined hypothesis. “It is not really possible to prove that one paradigm is more accurate or better than another using a ‘scientific’ approach. It is possible, even desirable, to reduce or refine theories, research, and practices within a paradigm” (Paul & Ward, 1996, p. 4). This study explored the paradigm of intended and unintended outcomes resulting from the mandated participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.

**Analytic Theory**

The sociological analytic theory that is most appropriate to this study is the interpretive theory. Glesne (2006) reminds us of the importance of an analytic framework to “serve as a theoretical lens to shape the kind of research questions asked and the methods used” (p. 9). The importance of an analytical framework is not a new concept. A framework serves as a map to guide research. Yin (1984) discusses the importance of the development of an analytical structure in the beginning stages of research design. He states that too often researchers start a study “without the foggiest notion about how the evidence is to be analyzed” (p. 99). The concepts of phenomenological qualitative research provide for research that elicits data suitable to the interpretive framework. The sociological interpretive theory provided the analytical framework for this study.
Researchers associated with the interpretive theory are phenomenologists who believe that “the best way to understand human behavior is to examine real-world situations using qualitative methods of inquiry” (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p. 21). This research involved the input of third grade teachers in order to obtain the rich data that resulted from the study of real-life situations. The paradigm of intended outcomes and unintended outcomes is consistent with the interpretive theory as a method of analyzing, not that which is right or wrong, but the inter-relatedness of the two outcomes (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999; Maxwell, 2005).

The school setting was selected as “interpretive theorists view schools as places where meaning is constructed through the social interaction of people within settings” (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999, p. 25). Interpretive theorists study real-life situations at the micro-level (individuals and small groups) and seek to understand what is happening from the view of the actual participants (Bennett deMarrais & LeCompte, 1999). The design of this study is consistent with the interpretive theory of analysis as classroom teachers provided first-hand information resulting from their interactions with students with learning and language disabilities in their classrooms.

According to Bennett deMarrais and LeCompte (1999), several assumptions are included in the interpretive theory. The following is representative of the assumptions of the interpretive theory that remained at the forefront of the analysis of data in this study: (a) construction of meaning through social interaction, (b) dictation of actions through role expectations and individual qualities, (c) changes in meaning as determined by perceptions of individuals, and (d) changes in reality as determined by interpretations of individuals.
Research Design

Qualitative research methodology is suitable when the researcher wishes to understand phenomena from the view of those involved and seeks to understand how those involved interpret and make sense of the phenomena (Glesne, 2006). This is best accomplished through an in-depth study of the participants, not to determine right or wrong, but to develop and understand patterns. In this research study, the phenomenon of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing was explored.

The following discussion includes specific information regarding the research design of this study; however, it remained important for the researcher to be responsive to the individuals in the study, thus reserving the right to modify research strategies as the study progressed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Three basic questions guided the design of this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing? The following discussion details the research design.

Sites

As Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe, when selecting a site for qualitative data, it is important to select one in which the probability is great that a rich mix of people and programs will be present and that a positive interaction is likely to exist. To this end, three public school districts from northwest Ohio were selected for this study.
These districts represent rural, suburban, and urban designations. The identities of the districts will remain confidential. Specific demographic information about these three districts is included in Chapter 4.

Districts were initially identified through informal discussions with building principals. Once the study was formalized, principals who had indicated an initial interest in the study were contacted. These principals were provided a detailed written description of the study (See Appendix C). After reviewing the written information, each principal then determined whether or not he or she would consent to approval of their building as a site. Consent for site approval was provided in written form.

**Participants**

In order to address the research questions in this study, it was necessary to select a population of teachers who were involved in third grade statewide testing. As stated in Marshall and Rossman (2006), “One cannot study the universe – everything, everyplace, at the same time. The researcher makes selections of sites and samples of times, places, people, and things to study” (p. 62). Therefore, purposive sampling was appropriate for participant selection. Purposive sampling allowed the researcher to interview individuals who had first-hand knowledge that provided valuable information (Patten, 2005). This study makes no claim to generalize to a larger population. The goal was to produce results that are trustworthy. The procedures used to establish trustworthiness are discussed later in this chapter.

In order to secure participants, the building principals who had provided written consent of their building as a site for research contacted the third grade teachers in their
buildings. The principals provided an initial description of the study. If teachers were interested, the names and contact information of the teachers were provided to the researcher. The researcher then contacted the teachers and arranged a time to meet. At this meeting, the study was further described. Teachers agreeing to participate signed a written consent form (See Appendix D). Once consent was obtained, the interview was conducted.

Data Collection

The researcher in a qualitative study must incorporate data collection methods that tap multiple sources in order to gain depth of understanding of the research question and to enhance the trustworthiness of the results of the study. Involving multiple sources and multiple sites results in different perspectives and contributes data that others will find credible (Glesne, 2006; Yin, 1984). In this research study, the primary data collection methods that were incorporated are multiple participant interviews from multiple sites with the inclusion of observation field-notes.

Interviews

Phenomenological interviewing is a type of interview that results in rich, in-depth data. The purpose of phenomenological interviewing is to study a phenomenon in its natural setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This type of interviewing was appropriate to study the phenomenon of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. As described by Marshall and Rossman (2006), “the interview will provide participant views (emic perspective) as opposed to the views of the
researcher or interviewer (etic perspective)” (p. 101). The emic perspective is vital to this research.

Numerous educators contributed to the content of the semi-structured interview protocol. Initially, the review of the current literature provided a broad outline for the protocol. Practicing educators then responded to this initial protocol and provided further feedback based on their practical experiences. Following this initial feedback, the interview protocol was further refined. This protocol was then field-tested with practicing teachers. The feedback from the field-testing provided specificity from the perspective of these third grade teachers. This input from practicing educators resulted in a reduction of researcher bias as the final interview protocol is reflective of the collective input of numerous educators (See Appendix E).

Ten third grade general education teachers participated in the interview process. These 10 teachers represented four elementary schools from three different school districts. The school districts represented a rural, suburban, and urban district. The final interview protocol included ten questions. All ten questions were asked of each participant; however, the researcher took the liberty to ask clarifying questions that were specific to each participant. The clarification of questions occurred throughout the interviews. This semi-structured format afforded the researcher and the participants the opportunity to ask questions and to add additional comments. This format also contributed to the relaxed atmosphere of each interview.

In order to capture the verbatim responses of each interview, the participants were asked for their consent to record the interviews. All of the participants agreed to have their interview recorded. Recording the interviews did not appear to have any inhibiting
impact on the responses. The recordings provided an accurate and precise account of the words of the participants and afforded the researcher the opportunity to review the audio tapes throughout the course of the study.

**Participant-Observation**

The primary source of research data was obtained from the interview responses. However, it was important to note the observations that were specific to each site, to each classroom, to each teacher. Each building from each district provided a variety of settings. All but one of the interviews took place in the teacher’s classroom, which provided the researcher the opportunity to record information specific to the classroom such as items posted on the walls or materials available to children. One interview took place in a computer lab adjacent to the teacher’s classroom because the classroom was being used by another teacher. Participant-observation also gave insight into the culture of the school, especially surrounding the inclusion of students with disabilities into the school culture. Marshall and Rossman (2006) state that “Observation is a fundamental and highly important method in all qualitative inquiry” (p. 99). While observation is valuable, one must remain cautious, however, that the observation does not interfere with the interview. Researcher bias of the phenomenon under study is a risk when using participant-observation since participant-observation demands active engagement of the researcher (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Yin, 1984). The researcher gave consideration to researcher bias throughout the interview process and when compiling observation notes. The observation notes provided a form of data triangulation; however, observation was not the primary data collection method.
Soundness of Design

Researcher’s Role

In order for the content of the interviews to result in rich, meaningful data, it was essential to create an atmosphere of trust and to build rapport between the researcher and the participants. The researcher’s nearly 30 years of experience as an educator added credibility to the interview process. The interviews were approached in an ethical manner with a willingness of reciprocity. House (1990) describes the importance of reciprocity in the interview setting to the participants. He concludes that reciprocity most likely occurs in the form of intent listening and an understanding of the roles of the participants. The participants in these interviews were given as much time as they needed and the researcher listened intently.

If one is to engage in a high level of rapport between the researcher and the participants, it is essential to understand that “in order to maintain access (to the site and to the interviewee), you need to act continually in culturally appropriate ways” (Glesne, 2006, p. 111). It was critical that the interviewees were not coerced or manipulated into this research process if mutual respect was to be achieved (House, 1990). It was through mutual respect that a comfortable environment was created that set the stage for the participants to participate openly and honestly. It was important to nurture relationships with the participants in order for a richness of data to result from the study. As stated by Maxwell (2005), “The relationships that you create with participants in your study who can facilitate or interfere with your study are an essential part of your methods, and how you initiate and negotiate these relationships is a key design decision” (p. 82). It was a
priority of this researcher to establish relationships and to create a comfortable atmosphere and high level of rapport for each interview.

Validity

A question that arises in any research study, and perhaps more readily in qualitative research, is the question of validity. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) define validity as “the appropriateness, correctness, meaningfulness and usefulness of the specific inferences researchers make based on the data they collect” (p. 150). Eliminating all threats to validity is most likely an elusive task. Threats to validity occur in all research and it is important to remain cognizant of the fact that threats to validity are ruled out by the evidence that is collected, and not by the research methodology (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Maxwell, 2005).

Perhaps one of the most viable responses to questions of validity is to be forthright in discussing the threats to the validity of the research. In this study, the primary threats to the validity of the research are the researcher’s role (bias) and the primary data collection methodology (interview). While it is understood that methods and procedures do not eliminate threats to validity, “they are nonetheless essential to the process of ruling out validity threats and increasing the credibility of conclusions” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 109).

In order to address the validity threats of researcher bias and the interview process, multiple data collection sources were utilized. Using multiple sources of data is a form of data triangulation (Mathison, 1988). In this study, data triangulation included bringing data from various sources together in order to increase validity through a
consolidation or convergence of data (Creswell, 2005; Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mathison, 1988; Maxwell, 2005; Mertler & Charles, 2006).

The multiple sources of data that were incorporated in this research study included interviewing multiple third grade teachers from multiple school districts. In addition, participant-observation was incorporated throughout the interview process. Observation notes were completed immediately following each interview in order to provide a high level of integrity to these field-notes. Multiple interviews, multiple sites, and participant observation are considered appropriate methods of data triangulation (Glesne, 2006). Data triangulation as a means of addressing threats to validity “lies in providing evidence…such that the researcher can construct good explanations of the social phenomena from which they arise” (Mathison, 1988, p. 15). Great care was taken to preserve all data throughout the study.

Trustworthiness

Quality researchers are phenomenologists who study multiple perceptions of a phenomenon and then make connections. They assume that some level of commonality exists when individuals experience similar phenomena. Fraenkel and Wallen (2006) remind the reader, “A limitation of qualitative research is that there is seldom methodological justification for generalizing the findings of a particular study” (p. 440). This study makes no attempt to generalize to a larger audience.

The goal of this study was to produce research and results that are trustworthy. Several structures were created with this in mind. First, the interview questions were developed with input from practicing educators. Practicing teachers field-tested the
interview, which was then revised to reflect their input. Second, the design of the study was created with on-going input from trusted outsiders, including colleagues and dissertation committee members. Glesne (2006) considers dissertation committee members as “logical auditors” of a research study (p. 167). Third, credibility of this research, triangulation, was accomplished through corroboration of multiple sites and multiple sources, including demographic information, interview responses, and observation field-notes. Interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and are available for review. Fourth, and perhaps most importantly, the data is presented in a descriptive format that relied upon the rich descriptions and experiences of the participants. To a great extent, the descriptions are in the form of the actual quotes of the participants. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) support this methodology of data reporting as one in which the participants, the setting, and the phenomena under study provide data that are credible and trustworthy as the data are the actual words of the participants.

Data Management

The management of data in any study is a critical component. In a qualitative study, this management is of paramount importance. The data in this study were managed with considerable care. From the conception of the study to the presentation of the data, precise measures were taken to preserve the integrity of the data.

Data management includes maintaining the data in a form that others can understand. All data in this study, from the initial stages to its completion, have been preserved and organized in a logical fashion. The input from practicing educators regarding the interview protocol has been maintained. All correspondence to establish
building sites and to secure participants has been maintained. Observation field-notes were written and filed. All drafts of thematic and categorization schemes have been organized and filed. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, all interview recordings have been transferred to digital files in order to maintain the availability of this primary data source. It is vital to any research study that the data be well organized and preserved in order to provide integrity to the study.

Interviews

The recording of each interview was played promptly following the interview. This initial playing of the tape provided an overview of the participant responses. The tape was listened to a second time, during which time a thorough tape index was completed. This was followed by a verbatim transcription of each interview. The transcripts were then read with the intent of capturing the overall essence of the responses. The recordings were listened to again with the goal of capturing major themes. This process of reviewing the transcripts and listening to recordings continued. Once the transcripts had been reviewed multiple times and categorized in multiple ways, the themes and categories that are presented in this study emerged. A matrix was created as a data management tool and served as a guide for ongoing data analysis. The data were copied from the initial transcripts according to themes and have been maintained in this thematic format as well as the verbatim transcripts.

The analysis of data is presented in Chapter 5 according to the emergent themes. This organization and management of data around themes and categories is an approach that is commonly used to analyze the abundance of data that results from a qualitative
study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006; Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Maxwell, 2005).

**Presentation of Data**

The following chapters present the data from this study using the words of the participants in the hope of creating a picture that will make the data more meaningful for the reader (Mertler, 2006). These words come from the actual transcripts of each interview. If, at times, words were omitted from a quote, a three-dot ellipsis indicates such. Words that were added for clarification are placed within brackets. The analysis of the data involved a persistent reference to the data and relied solidly upon the actual words of the participants in order to maintain the integrity of their words.

**Summary**

As stated in Davis (2007) in reference to educational research, “The most important issue for practitioners is not the broad relevance of research to the field, but the relevance of research findings to particular contexts and circumstances” (p. 577). The phenomenological qualitative design outlined in this chapter resulted in data that is significant and relevant to area educators. It was not the intent of this researcher to provide data that can be unequivocally generalized to all teachers across the country. The results of this study were intended to provide insight into the views and perceptions of third grade teachers from northwest Ohio regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.
Chapter Four

Description of the Participants

This study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions of the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. Therefore, the participants in this study are all third grade general education teachers. They teach in rural, suburban, and urban school districts in northwest Ohio and all are responsible for the education of students with disabilities as well as students without disabilities in their general education classrooms. All shared their views and perceptions regarding the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing with thoughtful response.

Glesne (2006) encourages researchers to provide a description of the participants of a study by “staying as close to data as originally recorded…drawing heavily on field notes and interview transcripts…allowing the data to speak for themselves” (p. 164). Through vivid description, the reader is introduced to the participants in this study in such a way as to create a foundation for the study. Both observation field-notes and interview transcriptions provided the data for the following description of the sites, interview settings and participants. The words of the participants comprise the rich data that fill the pages of this chapter and those chapters that follow.
School Districts and Buildings

Rural

Two elementary buildings, a middle school, and a high school make up this district. The typology of the district falls in Ohio Category 2. Districts in this category are small, rural districts. This district is classified as low poverty, with low-to-moderate median income. The average daily membership is 1446 students with 15.3% of this student population identified as a student with a disability. For the school year 2006-2007, the Ohio Department of Education Report Card rating for the district was effective and the district met adequate yearly progress (AYP) for subgroups of students. (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

The two elementary buildings are divided by grade level. One of the elementary buildings houses students in grades four through six. The other elementary houses students in kindergarten through third grade. The participants in this study were from this building. Visits to this building were quite enjoyable. On one occasion, even though snow was falling and it was quite cold, the children were outside for recess. They were engaged in numerous activities in the snow. None of the teachers seemed to mind the extra time it took to put the coats and boots on, or the snow that melted in the hallway from the boots neatly placed outside each classroom door. Student work adorned the hallways and the interactions between the students and teachers were friendly.

The enrollment of this elementary building is 420 students. Students with disabilities represent 12.5% of the student population. There are four third grade classrooms. In 2006-07, this elementary was rated by the Ohio Department of Education
Local Report Card as excellent. The building met adequate yearly progress (AYP) for subgroups of students. Students with disabilities did not meet the minimum subgroup size and therefore were not included in the AYP reporting. The report card indicated that 89.3% of the students without disabilities passed the statewide reading test, with 53.3% passage rate for students with disabilities. Similarly, 90.5% of the students without disabilities passed the statewide math test, with 53.3% passage rate for students with disabilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

Suburban

This district is comprised of three elementary schools, one junior high school and one high school. The configuration for the elementary buildings includes kindergarten through grade six. The typology of the district as classified by the Ohio Department of Education is Category 6, which includes both urban and suburban. This district most closely falls into the suburban category. The median income is in the high range. According to the Ohio Department of Education Local Report Card, the student enrollment of the district is 1,924. The population of students with disabilities comprises 13.6% of the district enrollment. In 2006-07, the district was rated as effective (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

There are two third grade classrooms in this building. The design of the classrooms is an open floor plan, with the rooms divided by book shelves or other furniture. There are no walls between the rooms. The classrooms were filled with books, educational materials, and student projects. The classrooms had the appearance of high levels of student activity. The interview was scheduled right after school allowing for an
observation of the hustle and bustle of the children leaving for the day. At one point, the busses were asked to wait in order to give a student time to gather her things and not miss the bus.

The enrollment of this elementary is 253 students, with 12.6\% of the student population identified as students with disabilities. The Ohio Department of Education Report Card rated the building as effective. The building made AYP for subgroups of students. The performance level of the subgroup of students with disabilities was not reported due to having fewer than the minimum subgroup size of students with disabilities. The percentage of students with disabilities who passed the statewide test in reading and math was not reported for the same reason. The percentage of students without disabilities who passed the reading test was 90.5\% and 95.2\% of the students without disabilities passed the math test (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

**Urban**

This urban district includes nine elementary buildings, two junior high schools, and two high schools. The district is categorized by the Ohio Department of Education as urban, with low median income and high poverty. The enrollment of the district is 6,681 students. Across the district, 14.9\% of the student population is identified as a student with a disability. In 2006-07, the district was rated by the Ohio Department of Education as effective. The district did not make AYP in the subgroup of students with disabilities (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

Third grade teachers in two of the elementary buildings participated in this study. Both buildings are similar in the design of the building. Both buildings were located in
residential neighborhoods. The settings for these schools appeared as if the neighborhoods had developed around them. The buildings are similar in size and student composition as well. Each will be described separately.

The first building visited has an enrollment of 476 students. There are 12.0% students with disabilities. While waiting to meet with a teacher, several students, teachers, and paraprofessionals were observed in the hallway. One student rode a 3-wheeled bike up and down the hallway as part of his physical therapy session. Another student with autism calmed himself in a swing that was hanging in a corner of the hallway. There was other adaptive equipment in the hallway as well that had the appearance of frequent use. This attention to individual students and their needs was impressive. A great deal of student work was displayed in the hallways. The atmosphere was calm, with the hum of student activity in the background.

The Ohio Department of Education Report Card rating for this elementary in 2006-07 was effective. The building did not make AYP for the subgroup of economically disadvantaged. The subgroup of students with disabilities did not meet the minimum subgroup size, and therefore was not part of the AYP calculation. Students without disabilities had a reading passage rate of 80.0% on the statewide testing. These students reached a passage rate of 92.7% for math. The passage rate of students with disabilities was not reported separately due to the small subgroup size (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

The second elementary visited in this urban district has an enrollment of 281 students with 20.1% of the students identified as having a disability. The halls in this building were filled with student work, as well as the mission, vision, and goals of the
building. These were visible throughout the building and served as a constant reminder of the mission of the building. The atmosphere of this building was one conducive to learning as well.

In 2006-07, this building received a rating of excellent according to the Ohio Department of Education Report Card. The passage rates of both students with disabilities and students without disabilities were reported. On the statewide test in reading, students without disabilities had a passage rate of 90.0% and students with disabilities had a passage rate of 91.7%. This same passage rate held true for math, where students with disabilities had a passage rate of 91.7% and students without disabilities had a passage rate of 95.0%. These are all impressive scores (Ohio Department of Education, 2006-2007).

**Comparison of Districts**

While this research study does not necessitate a comparison among districts, there are a few areas worthy of notation. The willingness to participate in the study was apparent in all teachers from all of the districts as was their genuine concern for all children. The atmosphere was warm and friendly in all of the buildings.

Due to the various categories of each district, there were some differences. In the rural setting, all of the third grade teachers in the district teach in one building. This is not the case in the suburban or urban districts, where there are multiple elementary buildings that house third grade classrooms. This resulted in varying structures for collaboration. The rural setting is conducive to on-going collaboration among the
teachers. The suburban and urban settings allow for on-going collaboration within the buildings, but collaboration across the district is not readily available.

Another area worthy of comparison is the involvement of support personnel. The suburban and urban school districts employ specialists such as school psychologists, special education directors, and curriculum directors. The rural district participates in a consortium and shares these specialists with other districts. This creates varying situations regarding training and professional development. The availability of specialists to the teachers within the district afforded on-going discussion of the mandates of NCLB.

Last, an interesting comparison is the district-level leadership. In two of the districts, there is a new superintendent. In one district, there is not only a new superintendent; there is a new assistant superintendent, a new curriculum director, and a new special education director. The new personnel were all viewed favorably by the teachers and all of the teachers expressed the hope that new leadership would bring new ideas into the district.

**Description of Participants**

All of the teachers who participated in this study are third grade teachers. They have varying levels of teaching experience, ranging from 3 years to nearly 37 years. Some have experience as a special education teacher, some do not. The teachers with training and experience in the area of special education had a working knowledge of the numerous acronyms and regulations associated with the field of special education. A summary of the educational experience of the participants revealed a wide range of years of experience in education and as a teacher in third grade (See Table 1).
Table 1

Description of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years at Grade Three</th>
<th>General Education Licensure</th>
<th>Special Education Licensure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sherry</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ellen</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sandi</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linda</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandy</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheila</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vicky</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In order for the reader to develop a sense of familiarity with each participant, a description of each participant follows. This description includes the teaching background, interview setting, and teacher’s overall impression of NCLB. This background discussion provided teachers the opportunity to share their perspective of NCLB. It also established a common ground between the researcher as interviewer and the teachers as participants. Teachers were also asked to rate their overall understanding of NCLB, using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating a very low level of understanding and
5 indicating a high level of understanding. In addition, each teacher was asked to provide 5 words that came to mind when they thought of NCLB. These descriptive words, which at times varied from 5 words, are included as well and provide additional insight into each teacher’s overall impression of NCLB. These are their stories.

Sherry

*Teaching background.*

Sherry has been a teacher for 10 years. She has taught third grade for 6 of those 10 years. She does not have licensure in the area of special education, but did recall some coursework in the area of special education that was required for her degree in elementary education. It is interesting to note that Sherry began her teaching career prior to the implementation of NCLB. She then took a leave of absence for several years. During her leave of absence, NCLB was signed into law, which presented a different teaching situation upon her return.

In the past, Sherry has had students with disabilities who receive their instruction in her classroom with the assistance of the special education teacher. This inclusive model of instruction has worked well for Sherry and for her students. Sherry has also had situations where students were removed from her classroom for instruction with the special education teacher in a pull-out setting. Sherry viewed this as an effective strategy as well. This year, the students with disabilities are placed in the inclusion setting of Sherry’s classroom for their instruction. They receive assistance from the special education teacher.
Interview setting.

This interview took place in Sherry’s classroom at a table near the front of the room. Sherry, a very soft-spoken person, appeared comfortable in the interview setting and responded in a thoughtful manner to the interview questions. The classroom was large, with a separate area for coats by the door. There was a great deal of student work displayed around the room. In addition, there were charts and graphs addressing the curricular areas of Ohio’s Content Standards. Sherry indicated that there was a cabinet in the hallway full of test preparation materials that all of the 3rd grade teachers shared. She shared that the teachers had used the materials for several years and had found them to be helpful.

Impression of NCLB.

In explaining her general impression of NCLB, Sherry said, “I think the idea is a good one. I don’t necessarily like how it’s put into practice and what people do with the results.” She elaborated by sharing her thoughts that it is difficult for one test to demonstrate what a child has learned during an entire year. She would prefer that more than one test be used to demonstrate student learning. Sherry gave examples of tests that she gives during a unit of instruction, as opposed to one test at the end of the unit. She rated her level of understanding of NCLB as “maybe a 3.” She elaborated by saying:

Because I’m sure there are parts of it that I’m not very clear about. I think for how it impacts me in the classroom, I have enough of an understanding of it without getting into all of the legal jargon and what all of that, the rest of it means.
Description of NCLB.

When asked to spontaneously provide descriptive words that came to mind when hearing the words, NCLB, Sherry very matter-of-factly stated, “standards, accountability, assessment, planning, and literacy.”

Ellen

Teaching background.

In comparison to the other participants in the study, Ellen has the least amount of teaching experience. She has taught for 3 years and all of these years have been at the third grade level. Ellen’s licensure is in the area of elementary education and she does not have any special education teaching experience. Ellen has always taught under the requirements of NCLB. This is in contrast to all of the other teachers in the study who have experience teaching prior to NCLB as well as following the implementation of NCLB.

Ellen has worked with students with disabilities and viewed this as part of her job as a general education teacher. This year, the students with disabilities are included in Ellen’s classroom for their math instruction and are pulled-out of the classroom for reading instruction. When the students are pulled-out of Ellen’s class, they receive their instruction with the special education teacher. Ellen has taught students with varying levels of learning and language disabilities and described some of the differences involved in teaching students with varying levels of cognitive ability. She views the level of disability as the determining factor of the type of instruction the children receive.
Interview setting.

The interview was scheduled to follow the dismissal of the students. As the students left the room, Ellen said good-bye to each of them. Her interactions with all of the students were quite friendly. Ellen invited me into the room and we sat at a table near the door. Ellen sat cross-legged on her chair in an apparently comfortable manner. She did not feel well and grabbed some tissues prior to the interview. It was obvious at the start of the interview that Ellen didn’t feel well; however, as she became engaged in the interview she appeared to feel better. She shared information openly and without regard to the time.

Ellen’s classroom was organized, with most items neatly placed around the room. There were number charts, graphs, and grammar and punctuation rules posted in the room. Ellen shared that these charts were quite helpful to her students in completing Ohio’s Third Grade Content Standards.

Impression of NCLB.

Ellen described her impression of NCLB, saying:

Honestly, I’m not sure that I know all the details of what it is. I know that it’s on education and they want to make sure that all the children are getting the help that they need. And I think that is great. But by doing that with the standardized test, you’re not giving them what they need. So, it’s a double-edged sword there, I guess. But that’s all I really know about it.

When asked to rate her overall level of understanding of the requirements of NCLB, Ellen said, “A one.” When asked if she would like to know more about NCLB,
she thought for a view moments. After consideration of her response, she replied cautiously:

When I want it. I’m one of those people that like to be on the need-to-know basis. If I need to know it then tell me, but if I don’t need to know it I’ll forget it. With all the other stuff going on I’ll completely forget it. So, if I had something that was an easy guide, like I love the state standards books and how they’re right there organized where I can open them up…So if there was something like that on NCLB in simple language that I could understand when I needed it, that would be great but I guess I’m okay with it until I need to know something.

Ellen provided the example of Ohio’s Content Standards as a format that would be helpful to teachers in order to enhance their understanding of the mandates of NCLB. She views the Content Standards as a summary of what she needs to teach. She had used the Content Standards books and shared that this may be a format that would be helpful for teachers in fulfilling the mandates of NCLB. Ellen viewed the requirements of NCLB as overwhelming for all teachers, especially beginning teachers. She thought that a summary format of the most important concepts would be beneficial to serve as a guide for discussion among teachers.

*Description of NCLB.*

Ellen shared the following words to describe NCLB, “government, standards, achievement tests, mandates, and law.” She then added, “It’s annoying – too many things teachers are responsible for…”
Sandi

Teaching background.

Sandi has been a teacher for 23 years, although she has only taught third grade for 3 years. She described herself as relatively new to the third grade level and shared that she relied on the other third grade teachers to assist with understanding the curriculum requirements. Sandi’s licensure is in elementary education and she does not have any special education teaching experience.

Sandi shared that the students with disabilities are removed from her classroom for reading and math instruction in the pull-out setting with instruction delivered by the special education teacher. The previous year, Sandi had students with disabilities in her classroom. The assignment of the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is rotated among the third grade teachers. Sandi anticipates that she will have students with disabilities in her classroom again the following year. Sandi felt that she has had enough experience teaching students with disabilities in previous years that she could continue as a participant in the study.

Interview setting.

The students in Sandi’s room were finishing a game when I entered the room. Within a few minutes they lined up to go to a special area class. The students were orderly and quiet when finishing the game and lining up. The interview took place at a table near Sandi’s desk. There were motivational posters encouraging students to treat each other with respect posted on the wall. There were also numerous educational
materials such as a word wall, punctuation and capitalization rules, word-of-the-day, and other items posted on the walls. Sandi also had a Smart Board in the room and indicated that she felt that her use of technology had increased over the years. Recently she had received hand-held student response devices that allow for immediate feedback of student understanding to the teacher. Sandi was not sure if her increased use of technology was related to NCLB, but she did see advantages in the immediate feedback of student knowledge.

*Impression of NCLB.*

In providing her general impression of NCLB, Sandi said:

I would say generally what it has done is, it has set a standard so that we are all supposed to be teaching the same thing at the same time so that we don’t re-teach the same thing year after year and miss things. And that, of course it involves the testing that nobody really likes, but that’s part of it to make sure that we’re teaching what we’re supposed to be teaching.

Sandi rated her overall understanding of NCLB as a 3 and indicated that she “probably could know more about it.” She indicated that she relies on the other third grade teachers and the building principal in order to provide the information that she needs to fulfill the mandates of NCLB.

*Description of NCLB.*

When asked to provide words to describe NCLB, Sandi replied, “President Bush, testing, money, and standards.”
Linda

Teaching background.

Linda is a veteran teacher with 32 years of teaching experience. She has taught third grade for 24 years. Linda also taught in the special education area for 2 years in a position she held in a different state, although she does not hold special education licensure in the state of Ohio.

Over the years, Linda has taught students with disabilities in her classroom that have been involved in both pull-out and inclusion programs. Currently, the students with disabilities in her class receive their math instruction in the general education classroom and they are pulled-out for reading instruction with the special education teacher.

Interview setting.

The interview with Linda was held in her classroom and took place following another interview. Initially, Linda indicated that she had limited time for the interview. We were seated at a table near the door for the interview. As the interview progressed, Linda did not appear concerned about the time and she spoke at length regarding her thoughts about NCLB. As a veteran teacher, she drew upon her many years of experience when responding. The interview was quite conversational in nature.

This classroom was full of educational materials and remnants of student projects. Linda shared two items in particular that she used to prepare students for statewide tests. These included the OAT, a test preparation book, and past statewide tests that she now used as practice tests. She also shared two reading tests and two math tests that facilitate
test preparation. Linda found these materials helpful to the students and also useful as a guide for instruction.

*Impression of NCLB.*

In considering her overall impression of NCLB, Linda pondered this question before responding:

I just know it was a time when everything, things really started changing a lot in the classroom, as far as, instructional techniques and strategies. And really, bottom line, my feeling is a lot of the fun when out of it. The fun went out of the teaching for me. A lot of it. Do I understand it that much? There are probably a lot of parts of that I don’t.

Linda continued to indicate that one of her greatest disappointments was that she no longer felt that teaching was as enjoyable as it once had been.

When asked how she would rate her overall understanding of NCLB. Linda replied:

Probably a 3. It seems when it first came about…you heard a lot about it then and maybe in the next couple of years. But it seems like lately, we don’t hear as much about it.

When asked if she was satisfied with her level of understanding, Linda thought for a moment and then said:

Probably not. I would say that there’s probably more to it that I need to… like I said in the last few years not hearing that much about it anymore, are they assuming that you know everything you need to know about it?
Description of NCLB.

Linda used phrases to provide a description of NCLB. She included the following in her spontaneous description, “getting each child to the point of being successful and passing the test; everybody is capable; everybody succeeds; and, as teachers, we do what we can to get students there.”

Mandy

Teaching background.

Mandy has taught for 12 years, with 5 years of experience at the third grade level. Mandy holds licensure in both elementary education and special education. She was a special education teacher for 3 years, which affords Mandy the perspective of both the general education teacher and the special education teacher.

The students with disabilities in Mandy’s classroom receive all of their instruction in her general education classroom, with as much support from the special education teacher as the schedule allows. Mandy views her experience as a special education teacher as quite valuable in her current position as a general education inclusion classroom.

Interview setting.

This interview took place in a computer lab so that we would not be interrupted by Mandy’s students returning to the classroom. Mandy was very friendly during the interview, and in spite of moments of frustration regarding NCLB, she laughed often and
provided candid responses. The interview was completed with ease as Mandy was quite willing to discuss the mandates of NCLB and quite comfortable sharing her thoughts.

Mandy shared that the computer lab we were in was used throughout the day by all students and included test preparation programs. In addition, materials had been purchased in order to assist in test preparation. Mandy also spoke about the extra time that many teachers had given in order to tutor students who needed more assistance than could be provided during the school day. For the most part, this tutoring took place after the school day had officially ended. The teachers at this particular school volunteered to provide this tutoring.

Impression of NCLB.

When asked about her general impression of the mandates of NCLB, Mandy expressed the following:

It’s a policy I guess that I would say was put in place before it was thought out. I really honestly don’t know all the specifics of it. I know that at first it was to be in place and they weren’t supposed to go past third grade unless they passed the reading test, which is the no child left behind part. But, then they realized that, hmm, we can’t have 16 year-olds in third grade, so they revised that.

In response to how Mandy would rate her overall understanding and level of satisfaction with her understanding, she considered the question for a couple of moments and then replied:

Probably a 3. I think it’s confusing. I still don’t know it all. I’m not sure where I’m required as far as what’s in that policy and how that’s going to
effect me because it’s always changing. It’s never, there’s never a status quo about what’s really happening. So it’s one of those other things that you’re always, you’re never sure exactly what you’re supposed to do for each specific thing.

Description of NCLB.

Mandy’s responded to the request to provide a description of NCLB with a phrase. She shared, “The race is on to pass!”

Karen

Teaching background.

Karen’s teaching background totals 19 years and includes 3 years as a third grade teacher and 15 years as a special education teacher. During Karen’s years as a special education teacher, she was a resource room teacher. She provided instruction in a pull-out setting and also assisted students with disabilities and their classroom teachers in the general education setting. Karen’s experience as a special education teacher for more years than a general education teacher was unique and provided a perspective that the other teachers did not have.

The students with disabilities in Karen’s general education classroom are included for both reading and math. Karen considers her experience as a special education teacher helpful in her current position as a general education teacher. Throughout the discussion, Karen’s past experience was apparent in the depth of response and her use of the vocabulary common to field of special education.
Interview setting.

The interview took place in Karen’s classroom. Her classroom was large and there was ample space for student desks as well as tables. We sat at a table at the far end of the room. The rows of student desks were between us and the door. Karen’s background as a special education teacher allowed her to share both the general education and special education teacher perspective of NCLB. She provided in-depth, thoughtful responses. We were interrupted one time during the interview by a teacher. Another time the phone rang several times, but Karen did not stop the interview in order to answer the phone. At the end of the interview, Karen smiled and said, “I hope I stayed on topic. I’m exhausted.”

Impression of NCLB.

Karen provided an in-depth response to the question regarding her overall impression of NCLB. She explained:

I think that with NCLB we have overlooked the social and emotional development of our children. I think our perspective is more on academics and pushing our children academically. And not letting them to socially and emotionally develop. I think every child comes in and leaves ahead, and you always have those children that are always going to be behind. I think it’s good because it targets the three-strikers, your low socio-economic, your multi-racial and your African American, and your special education population. And I think that’s great. But the NCLB, I believe it’s not for everyone.
Karen rated her level of understanding of NCLB saying, “It’s changed over the course with President Bush, so I’m going to have to say a 3.5. When asked if she was satisfied with that level of understanding, Karen said:

I think I have been less interested in knowing how it’s changed because I don’t believe in it. I think it needs to be looked at more closely. I think the monies can be funded into different avenues to support other areas.

Description of NCLB.

At the end of the interview, when Karen was asked to provide words to describe NCLB, she collapsed onto the table and said with a smile, “complex, impossible.” She had participated in the interview with a high level of enthusiasm and passion for her responsibilities as a teacher.

Sheila

Teaching background.

Sheila is an experienced teacher with 21 years of total teaching experience. She taught in a parochial setting for 4 years prior to entering public education. Sheila has taught third grade for 7 years. Sheila does not have licensure in the area of special education, but her experience with her own child with special needs has given her a unique perspective on the education of students with disabilities.

The students with disabilities in Sheila’s class are included for both math and reading. They receive support from the special education teacher as much as the schedule allows, although the special education teacher has several classrooms in which
to support students. Sheila indicated that the schedule does not always allow the special education teacher to assist the students in the classrooms at the times they most need it. She shared that this is a difficulty that other teachers in the building face as well.

*Interview setting.*

This interview took place in Sheila’s classroom. Sheila seemed to feel rushed to finish the interview, and offered to finish it after her students returned if necessary. We were able to conclude the interview with ample time prior to the return of her students to the classroom.

Sheila’s large classroom was full of student work and evidence of on-going projects. She shared information about the computer program that the district had purchased to assist with test preparation.

*Impression of NCLB.*

Sheila was forthcoming in her response about her general impression of NCLB. She said:

What I know about it, I think I need to be more informed. I think it was put into action back in 2001. And I know teachers have to be highly qualified. I think there are a lot of bugs that need to be work out of it, but I personally don’t know, I need more information on it.

Sheila smiled when asked to rate her overall understanding of NCLB. She indicated that she has a basic understanding, but that she would like to know more about it. She replied:
I would rate my understanding between a 2 and a 3. I understand that we’re accountable for our students in the area of reading and that every teacher is expected to get these children to pass, to make adequate yearly progress. So that’s what I would know. I would like to know more. And I think even our principals, they’re learning every time they go to new meetings. I think it’s something that changes pretty frequently. I just know a general background of it and what we’re accountable for.

Sheila pondered the request to spontaneously describe her feelings about NCLB.

*Description of NCLB.*

Her words represented the thoughts she shared in the interview. She concluded, “confusing, scary, limbo, changing, up and coming.”

*Lori*

*Teaching background.*

Lori has been teaching for 14 years. She has taught third grade for 7 years. Her licensure is in elementary education and she does not have licensure as a special education teacher.

The students with disabilities in Lori’s classroom were fully included for both math and reading at the start of the year. The special education teacher provided instructional support to the students with disabilities within the general education classroom. Due to the needs of the students, the special education teacher would often provide specific instruction to the students with disabilities concurrently with the
instruction Lori was providing to the students without disabilities. Once it was
determined that this was creating too much confusion for all of the students in the
classroom, the learning environment was changed. The students with disabilities now
receive their math and reading instruction in the pull-out setting of the special education
room with the special education teacher.

*Interview setting.*

The interview was held in the teacher’s classroom. We sat at a table at one end of
the room. This table was in the science section of the room. There were tubs of crawfish
on the table. While they made some noise at times, it was not distracting to the interview
process. Lori was eager to participate in the interview and responded with enthusiasm.

We discussed instructional materials in general, and Lori shared the names of
several of the test-preparation materials that the district has purchased. These included
the computer program Fast Forward that all the grade levels use. In addition, a series has
been purchased called Better Test Scores booklet, that provides practice in responding
appropriately to questions. The district has also invested in tutors to work in the district
on a temporary basis to assist students. She also indicated that many of the teachers in
the district had tutored students on their own time. Lori viewed all of these as related to
the mandated testing.

*Impression of NCLB.*

When Lori responded to the question regarding her general impression of NCLB,
she smiled and said:
I think as a teacher it’s given us more work in terms of documenting and more accountability in the positive aspect. We are accountable for every child. But to say that no child is left behind, I think there should be some exceptions to that.

Lori rated her level of understanding of NCLB as “Probably a one. Maybe going up to two possibly. But very little.”

When she was asked if she was satisfied with her level of understanding, she hesitated for several moments before speaking. She then replied:

That’s a good question. I would like to know more but just the whole politics. I just want to be here with the kids, for the kids. I would like to know more. But like I said I do what I need to do. Usually that comes down from administration. They’ll say you need to do this and I do it. Or they say this needs to be done because of this. And I do it. Usually it’s I’m following the chain of command.

*Description of NCLB.*

When asked to describe NCLB, Lori exclaimed, “paperwork, documentation.” She thought for a moment and then declared, “Really, No Child Left Behind.”

*Vicky*

*Teaching background.*

Vicky is a veteran teacher with 31.5 years of teaching experience, although she has taught third grade for a relatively few 4 years. All of Vicky’s experience is in general education, the area in which she holds licensure. She does not have licensure or experience as a special education teacher.
The students with disabilities in Vicky’s classroom are included for math and reading. Vicky shared that she has a great deal of assistance from the special education teacher, who comes into her classroom to assist the students with disabilities. She indicated that the presence of the special education teacher in the classroom was the key to the success of the students.

*Interview setting.*

The interview with Vicky took place in her classroom and she directed me to a table near a very large window. The view was spectacular, overlooking a beautiful wooded area. She shared that, at times, the students were distracted by the numerous birds that were attracted to the bird feeders placed near the windows.

Inside the classroom, the tables and desks were filled with student projects. Vicky apologized for the projects that were scattered about; however, it appeared that the students were involved in project-based learning and the projects looked quite interesting. Book shelves and large tables separated Vicky’s classroom from the classroom next door.

Vicky was engaged throughout the interview, but appeared more comfortable the longer we talked. The longer we talked, the more her personality and sense of humor was evident. At one point, the custodian entered the room to empty the trash. Vicky did not seem distracted by this and the interview continued. Vicky indicated that part of the reason the room was crowded was that numerous materials had been purchased to address the testing mandates of NCLB. Vicky shared some materials that had been purchased specifically for statewide test preparation. She particularly liked the Math Corners books that were part of the Bridges Program.
Impression of NCLB.

Vicky considered her response carefully before sharing her general impression of NCLB. She explained:

Well, what I’m thinking is that every child will be on the same, they will be on level at the end of the year. And we know…students are not all going to be on the same page at the same time. And it’s frustrating to think that the road is so narrow that we don’t allow for the differences in the children to all get to the end point. I always look at the goal. Don’t ask me how I get them there, but if they’re there at the end, then that’s where I need to be. And to keep doing all of these tests, and keep track of all these scores sometimes doesn’t work for, you know, it’s just…I mean I look at it and I kind of laugh. Do you think we purposely try to leave children behind? We don’t. So, I mean when they came up with it at first it was like, who thought of this?

When Vicky was asked to rate her level of understanding of NCLB, she declared, “Probably a 4.” In response to whether this level of understanding was satisfactory to her, she responded:

I think things change. You have to keep up on what comes down. Like I said I was listening to President Bush talk and it’s like we have to have more money. Well, yea, that’s good. But tell me how you’re going to use that money. What changes are you going to make? And, I think these changes are made so slightly but they effect everyone and it’s really hard to keep up on everything. Am I doing what I’m supposed to be doing? It’s really hard. So, I think, yes you do need to know. You always need to know more because you need to know if
you’re doing what you’re supposed to be doing or if you’re supposed to add something. And they’re pretty good at telling us that. So, am I satisfied with what I know? Yes. Am I satisfied with the whole thing? That would be lower.

*Description of NCLB.*

In response to the request to provide words that describe NCLB, Vicky thought for a moment and then exclaimed, “We don’t leave children behind!”

*Tina*

*Teaching background.*

Of all of the participants in this study, Tina has the most experience in education. She has been an educator for 36.8 years and has experience as an administrator and a teacher. Tina has taught third grade for 9 years. She is licensed as a general education teacher and does not hold licensure as a special education teacher. The interview took place in Tina’s classroom. She talked about the size of the room and that she felt the lack of space limited the number of projects and group work that could take place. There was evidence of several projects and when asked about these, Tina shared that she tried to make learning interesting for the students and felt that students enjoyed working on projects. Tina initially indicated that she had limited time for the interview, but as the interview progressed she did not seem concerned about the time. She joked about how long the interview had taken when it was over. We exited the building with another teacher and Tina shared that she had enjoyed our time together.
Interview setting.

The interview took place after school, and the custodian entered the room to gather trash. Tina did not hesitate to continue her responses when the custodian was in the room. Near the end of the interview, another teacher came into the room. Tina invited this teacher to comment on some of the questions, which she did. They talked openly about the challenges of teaching and the frustrations that teachers often feel.

The students with disabilities receive most of their instruction for both reading and math in Tina’s classroom. The special education teacher works with students within Tina’s classroom. Tina indicated that she is grateful for the assistance of the special education teacher and does view the impact on students as positive. Tina also indicated that this inclusion setting was challenging at times, especially when the disabilities are significant.

Impression of NCLB.

In response to her general impression of NCLB, Tina responded, “I don’t think there’s any meat to it. I think it’s verbiage.” When asked to elaborate, she shared her thoughts on the benefits of early intervention and preschool services as a method to ensure readiness. Tina provided further explanation:

Well, the thing is, since I’ve been in education for 38 years I’ve seen the cycles of everything. None of it is very different. We want every kid to be able to do their personal best. I don’t think anybody should be in a classroom that doesn’t feel that way. You don’t just give up on kids. You try and give them something that’s going to work.”
Tina rated her overall level of understanding of NCLB as between a 4 and 4.5. She thought for quite awhile before elaborating. Tina shared that she had been an educator for many years and had seen many trends in education. She was not certain that all of the changes in education over the years had actually resulted in substantial change. When responding, she said, “I understand it. It’s just not realistic in terms of a school district being able to do all of the things…”

Description of NCLB.

When asked to provide a spontaneous description of NCLB, Tina shared, “Unrealistic goals. What do mandates really mean for students; Insufficient time to meet the standards.”

Summary

The third grade general education teachers who participated in this study are real teachers in real classrooms carrying out the real-life mandates of NCLB. The experiences that these teachers so candidly shared resulted in rich data that addresses the real issues of NCLB. To the greatest extent possible, the words of these teachers are shared as they were spoken as these teachers’ words convey powerful messages. The interviews that were conducted for this study resulted in an abundance of data. Participants were forthcoming with their thoughts and their stories. They did not hesitate to share their views and perceptions. The words of the participants are presented in chapter 5 according to the themes and categories that emerged from the data. Glesne (2006) describes the analysis of data as the second stage of data transformation during which time key factors are identified and systematically organized. It is this researcher’s
mission to present this analysis in such a way as to allow the words of the participants to create the picture that tells their story (Glesne, 2006; Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Mertler, 2006).
Chapter Five

Findings

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing is the result of the federal reform policy, No Child Left Behind (NCLB). The participation of students with disabilities has had an impact on both students with disabilities and their teachers. Educators are challenged to meet all of the mandates and, at the same time, provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities.

Research Questions

Three basic questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing? The following provides a discussion of the data.
Overview of Study

The analysis of the data was approached with the intent to “identify clear and consistent patterns of phenomena by a systematic process” (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 192). As Glesne (2006) describes,

“Data transformation is of course an invariable aspect of types of research, qualitative or otherwise. It is the effort of researchers to manage and make sense of their data, to transform it from its acquired form – at which point it is perhaps more accurately called ‘information’- into a form that communicates the promise of a study’s findings.” (p. 165)

The presentation of data in this chapter is organized according to the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. Fraenkel and Wallen, (2006), state, “The researcher attempts to describe the fundamental features of the experience that have been described by most (hopefully all) of the participants in the study” (p. 437). The results of the data analysis are presented using the actual words of the teachers to the greatest extent possible. In this way, their voices, their words, their stories can fully inform this analysis.

To this end, the intent of the following discussion of data analysis is to share the views and perceptions of the third grade general education teachers who contributed to this study regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing.

Themes

The recordings of participant interviews were reviewed multiple times. The transcripts were reviewed and numerous preliminary thematic schemes were considered.
Eventually, the themes and categories that are presented here emerged. The themes that emerged are testing experience, levels of achievement, impact on curriculum, impact on instruction, number of identified students, and instructional setting (See Table 2).

Table 2

Data Analysis

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These themes and categories are presented through a detailed discussion on the following pages.

*Testing Experience*

One of the mandates of NCLB is the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. Not only must students with disabilities participate in testing, they must reach the same level of proficiency as students without disabilities. General education teachers are held accountable for the performance of students with disabilities on these statewide tests. When asked to describe their students’ experiences during statewide testing, three categories emerged. Teachers described the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing as “Positive participation”, “Negative participation”, and “Neutral participation.” At times, teachers shared experiences that fell into more than one of the categories.

*Positive participation.*

The data under “positive participation” regarding participation in statewide testing came from two teachers and appeared to be linked to the actual performance of the students with disabilities on the statewide test. These two teachers spoke openly about the performance of these two students on the test. Ellen shared, “All three of my boys took the test this fall and all three of them passed. Their actual reading ability is okay.” Similarly, Tina indicated that, “Most of ours [students with disabilities] pass. We coach them to think positively. Our special education people really do a good job of making them comfortable. So that, come on, we’re going to do our best.”
Negative participation.

Most of the experiences of students with disabilities in statewide testing described by participants fell into this category. Teachers described accounts of students who had made progress throughout the year; however, not enough progress to pass the statewide test.

Ellen was particularly passionate about the growth that the children in her classroom had made. She recounted the following:

I think of my kids, the kids I had last year. I made incredible leaps and bounds with one student. She was able to read sight words at the end of the year. And that was a huge success. But it was all dwindled because she couldn’t pass the test. And it still makes them feel that they’re dumb. And they would say that, “I can’t do it. I can’t, I can’t, I can’t.” Yeah you can, yeah you can. But they didn’t pass it and everyone else did, so that makes them feel that they can’t.

When asked if she thought the students in the classroom were aware of who passed and who didn’t pass, Ellen said:

Yeah, oh yeah. They definitely have an awareness of it. And so do the rest of the kids in the class. They know. They know who’s different and they know why they’re different. But they make leaps and bounds in other places that are appropriate for them, but they still can’t pass the test. When this child comes in they can’t even read the words ‘the’ and ‘was’. And at the end of the year, they’re reading multi-syllabic words. So it’s kind of frustrating on our part. I want them to come be in my classroom for a year. Come see how this actually works. Because you can’t expect the same out of all kids.
Another teacher related the improvement and progress that some of the students with disabilities in her classroom made, but not nearly enough to pass the statewide test. Sherry explained:

From October to spring, some of them would show a big jump, but they were still low. They’ve all just, I mean it’s kind of upsetting to them. I mean it’s so difficult. It’s so far beyond what they feel confident doing that it’s devastating to them.

Other negative experiences were related to the fact that the students identified as having a disability have been assessed and have met the identification criteria of a specific disability. These students are entitled to an individual education plan (IEP). The IEP provides for individualized instruction. This is incongruent with the requirement of students with disabilities to be held to the same standard of performance on statewide tests as students without disabilities. Mandy expressed:

I don’t think it’s necessarily fair because these students that you’re asking to take these tests do not have the cognitive ability in order to take those tests. And it doesn’t show what they know. It doesn’t show their achievement. It’s not a good thing.

Echoing these statements, Sherry elaborated on the testing situation when she shared:

The testing is unrealistic. They [students with disabilities] may be able to get to that level at some point, but in third grade what’s expected of them to do this year, and these children are identified and placed. I think the third grade expectation is unrealistic for them. And I just think it makes them feel like a failure. I guess I
wish they could come and see what these students are doing when they give them this test.”

This same sentiment was also shared by Lori, who described in detail her beliefs regarding the testing for students with disabilities:

I think for me that’s the most frustrating thing I see. Is that if they were functioning as a regular education ability student, they wouldn’t be on an IEP. They wouldn’t need an IEP. But that’s the whole purpose. To give them the individual education plan that works for them. Not what works for the state and for every other regular education student. The whole concept of having a disability is that they can’t sometimes function in a normal, regular point A to point B. If they could, they wouldn’t have an IEP… And, as a teacher, I do what’s best for every kid. I try to do what’s best for every kid, regardless of IEP, special ed., regular ed….And I do think, too, though that you want every student to achieve at a certain level for our society. But really as a teacher I think that’s kind of a given. We take every kid and move them as much as we can.

As part of an IEP, a student with a disability is afforded provisions to accommodate for learning difficulties. These accommodations generally include assistance with reading and writing, taking the test in a small group, and extended time to complete the test. General education teachers are required to provide these accommodations to students with disabilities as part of daily instruction.

These accommodations must be provided for students during statewide tests, with the stipulation that the accommodation does not change what the test is intended to
measure. For example, a teacher is allowed to read the test directions and questions to a student with a disability, but cannot read the actual reading passages. The reading passages cannot be read to the student because this would change the intent of the reading test to measure a student’s reading level.

This presents a unique situation for both teachers and students since the students are not required to read grade level passages during daily instruction that would be beyond the student’s reading level. This is recounted in Mandy’s words about accommodations:

It’s hard for them. Especially the reading part. You can’t read the story to them. You can read the questions to them as an accommodation. But they have to read that entire passage and for most of these kids, I mean mine are functioning at the first grade reading level. And for them to have to read that passage that’s higher than third grade reading level most times. They shut down. Some of them won’t attempt. They really have to be prodded along. And if it’s not taken one-on-one, even in a small group they won’t. Just because it’s so difficult for them. I’ve seen tears. I’ve seen very, lots of frustration just because they can’t do it, they can’t do it. And so then they beat themselves up because they can’t do it.

Not being able to read the actual reading passages of the statewide test for students with disabilities was a concern for Lori as well:

I think my biggest frustration is that we give them their IEP accommodations and then when it’s time for a classroom test, a lot of tests are read to them. And as a result, when their OAT (Ohio Achievement Test) comes up, it’s not read to them. And then they’re left struggling because they can’t figure it out.
When Lori was asked if she was referring to the reading test and the reading passages, she replied:

Yes, yes. This is a big struggle for some of the students. And most of the students who are on IEPs are on reading IEPs. And so they’re not reading at a third grade level but yet we practice in class with instructional level text. So they’re reading below grade level and then when this OAT test comes, it’s like, “Whoa. We have to read two pages of text,” when they’re used to reading only a paragraph and identifying the main idea and information and whatever they’re doing. In that aspect it’s a negative because those students aren’t tested fairly. That’s not what is on their IEPs. They’re on IEPs because they can’t read at a third grade reading level. If they could, they wouldn’t be on an IEP.

*Neutral participation.*

Two teachers described the testing experience of students with disabilities as neither positive nor negative. It was viewed as something that had to be done and was approached as such. Karen described the mandated participation in testing as:

I think that the support that we have here, with our special education teachers is we truly try to prepare our children with special needs to put their best foot forward. And to do the very best that they can. We really impose upon them that it’s “Do the best you can. It’s not whether you pass or not. It’s do the best you can.” Now, my students in the past, the one that took it in the fall, she passed the reading. I’m pleased and tickled to death. In previous years, I’ve had students
that make great gains, but you really, I think the key outcome is that these children feel good about who they are and that you feel good about how you’re preparing them for the test. And working with the general education teacher, the special ed teacher, just to prepare them. The students are treated as just one. The only time those children are truly removed is when we have the actual test where they go with a person to have their accommodations. And they get frustrated, they get fatigued, but we just continue to try to build them up and encourage them to do the best they can.

Vicky shared the ways in which she approached the testing situation with the students with disabilities in her classroom:

Well, probably my approach to it is different because I try to make it as stress free as I can. We’ll start with Brain Gym in the morning. I always precede it by saying, “You don’t know everything. No one does. You need to show me what you do know. But it’s nothing to worry about if you don’t answer.” I try to make it, ease into it as much as I can. And I’m usually very pleased with what they do. I mean during the test. Not how well they do, but their ability to take the test.

Summary of testing experience.

In summary, the discussion of the testing experience of students with disabilities evolved into a discussion of the required performance level as well as the actual participation in testing. Participants shared more experiences that fell into the negative category than the positive category. Most teachers viewed the required proficiency level
as unrealistic for students with disabilities. They reasoned that students with disabilities have been determined to have learning needs that would prevent them from performing at the same level as students without disabilities.

**Level of Achievement**

One of the goals of NCLB is to close the achievement gap between groups of students. One such gap is that between the level of achievement of students with disabilities and students without disabilities. Schools and districts must show that they are making adequate yearly progress (AYP) toward this goal. Adequate Yearly Progress is determined according to the performance of subgroups on statewide tests. Teachers’ views regarding levels of achievement are described under the categories of “Increased Achievement”, “No Increased Achievement,” and “Neutral Achievement.”

**Increased achievement.**

Some teachers indicated that the participation of students with disabilities in statewide tests had resulted in some level of increased achievement, at least according to test results. These teachers were not willing to make these claims for all of their students with disabilities, but did speak to individual students and situations.

The level of a student’s cognitive ability makes a difference, according to Karen. She indicated, “Your autistic, your other health impaired, they’re making gains and progress. Some of your higher functioning special needs children are making gains. I would say the lower functioning students are not achieving more because it’s just too difficult…”
Some teachers expressed gains, but were not certain whether the gains were sufficient. This sentiment was expressed by Ellen:

They’re achieving more in how they know how to take a test. And read and look back at the answers. I don’t know if they’re improving. I mean I guess it would help them in different strategies…comprehension wise to look back. But I don’t know if it necessarily helps them when I’m trying to get them to understand science curriculum or social studies curriculum, because they still have no idea what those words mean.

Linda shared that the increase in services from the special education teacher had resulted in gains in achievement, saying:

According to the test results, I would say they probably are. Because I can remember in years past…they just took the test in the regular classroom. I know they just did not do well at all. So, that part of it being with her, the special needs teacher. Are they really achieving more or are they just doing better?

Again, the situation of each individual child was described as making the difference in achievement gains. Mandy described gains in achievement, but also shared concerns about meeting the individual learning needs of the students:

I think that’s really on an individual basis. Because I believe that there are students that have made more achievement because…they are in the regular curriculum now and they are being pushed and being challenged more. But as an overall, is it getting them where they need to be? No, because you’re still not getting into those specific skills that they need because you’re now working on these test items.
Tina, an experienced educator, did not hesitate when she expressed her view that the students with disabilities in her classroom have made gains in achievement on a regular basis. She stated:

Again, my hands-on experience has been the years that I’ve been here. And they’re always achieving more than they were at the start of the year. We really make sure that we do everything we can to accommodate their needs and monitor their progress and that. I can’t think of a child who has failed in special education in the building in the years that I’ve been here.

No increased achievement.

The teachers recounted several reasons why students with disabilities were not achieving more as a result of the NCLB mandate of participation in statewide testing. They made connections to the curriculum and instructional strategies, but did not view the statewide test as having any impact on the achievement level of students with disabilities. Sherry described this situation saying:

I don’t think the test has anything to do with them achieving more. The only way I could see any kind of connection there would be that teachers are more particular about making sure that every single thing is taught carefully and repeatedly.

The use of interventions for specific students in addition to whole-class instruction made the difference in achievement gains according to Lori. Even though she admitted that providing interventions for specific students can be challenging for a
classroom teacher, she views them as valuable. She reflected on the use of interventions as a means of increasing achievement:

I wouldn’t say that they’re achieving more because of NCLB. I think that the students are making progress but it’s not because of NCLB. I just think it’s the intense interventions that they’re given. And I think that they would make those achievements or progress regardless of the NCLB. I think that’s one of the things that frustrates me is that we’re trying to see how much they’re improving or how much they’re getting, but yet they have intense interventions. I feel they can only do so much. Their brains only let them do so much.

Lori continued to reflect on the issue of increased achievement as a result of NCLB:

And I think that, yes, that’s our teachers’ goal. To get them as far as they can. Having laws and administration and the state looking down and saying you have to get them from point A to point B. Well, we get them from point A to as far as we can get them, regardless if there is the NCLB bill. I mean, my goal as a teacher is to get a child from point A as far as you can, to the best of their abilities. I think that’s my vision of NCLB. They’re setting a standard from A to B and …with special ed. kids you just want to get them as far as they can…

The concern of meeting the learning needs of each individual child while fulfilling the mandates of NCLB was discussed by Karen. Karen had been a special education teacher in past years. Even though her special education teaching experience was prior to NCLB, Karen viewed this experience as valuable. This past experience surfaced in her discussion:
Wow. I do not think that they’re achieving. I think with the fact that we’re putting them in the classroom, in the general education environment, and exposing them to the general education curriculum but we’re not meeting their needs. We’re not lessening that gap to where we can teach them some independency when they get to the junior high. We’re not providing them the opportunity to work on the skills that they need to be successful. We look at all of our children and we say that one-size fits all. And it doesn’t. It truly doesn’t. I don’t see them as achieving as much as they have in the past. When I used to be a resource room teacher I saw major gains. I saw students do tremendous on the standardized tests they used to have to take. Only because we were able to lessen the gaps in the area of reading and writing and math because we did concentrated small group.

*Summary of level of achievement.*

Even though some teachers reported increased levels in achievement, most were not convinced that the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing had made the difference. Teachers felt that there were too many factors that entered into the determination of increased student achievement and that they had no way of knowing which factor had impacted student achievement to the greatest degree. Most teachers indicated that students were gaining test-taking skills and possibly were gaining overall skills, but cited that the innate ability level of the student was the determining factor. One teacher felt that she did not have enough trend data to conclude that the participation in statewide testing had resulted in increased achievement for students.
Impact on Curriculum

In the previous discussion of levels of achievement for students with disabilities, several teachers alluded to changes in the curriculum. Three categories emerged regarding impact on curriculum. These categories include, “Expanded Curriculum”, “Narrowed Curriculum,” and “Neutral Curriculum”. Some teachers indicated that the curriculum requirements had expanded under NCLB. Other teachers indicated that the scope of the curriculum had narrowed under NCLB. The teachers, who did not consider the curriculum as having expanded or narrowed, did indicate an enhanced awareness of curriculum.

In order for students to gain exposure to the content of the statewide tests, the Ohio Department of Education developed content standards. Following the development of these standards, school districts worked to align their local curriculum to the content standards. Sandi described the benefit of this alignment, “I don’t think it’s all bad. I think it’s good that it makes it equal. So here in…we’re doing the same things as you’re doing in…So I think that’s good.”

Expanded curriculum.

The discussion of the alignment of the content standards with curriculum was evident throughout the interviews and in some cases resulted in the opinion that the curriculum had expanded. Sherry described the strategies that she and a colleague used to address this issue:

I think the curriculum has expanded. And part of the change…that the teacher next door and I took all of our social studies and science standards and we looked
through the reading standards and we made as many connections as we could. So that when we’re reading a particular story in our reading book, we cover whatever social studies and science standards fit with that story. There’s something like 10,000 hours worth of standards to cover.

Aligning the curriculum to content standards has resulted in more attention to the time of the year that content is covered. The tested content must be covered prior to the test as Mandy described:

We’ve been doing mapping and aligning the curriculum according to the standards and seeing where the gaps are between grade levels. And seeing, looking at what’s on that third grade test… We have to make sure that we cover the things that we know are going to be on that test before the test. Like in our math series, we don’t get to fractions and probability until the end of the book. So, we have to go back, we have to push that forward and teach it before it might be ready in that spiral that the math series does.

In addition to the alignment of the curriculum and the attention to the time of year that tested content is covered, some teachers viewed the content as more rigorous than in the past. As Karen emphasized:

Curriculum, it’s changed. There’s just so much, there are the standards. And aligning your standards and your teaching and making sure that your standards are met within the district and then you meet the standards in order for your children to pass the Ohio Achievement Test, both in math and reading. I think it has expanded. There are a lot of skills that we are, they’re in the content standards that we’re supposed to teach. I personally think that the children aren’t
ready for these skills that they’re asking. And I just find that exposure is pretty much all I can…I’m more of one that I like quality versus quantity. And I feel that it’s more quantity versus quality. Because we’ve got to meet AYP. We’ve got to get these kids to pass. You’ve got to get your standards in. You’ve got to make sure that you’re getting…it’s almost February you should be by state standards on unit six. So it’s a lot of pressure. So the curriculum has expanded. Tina discussed the rigor of the curriculum expressing the difficulty for students with disabilities and the possible benefit to students who are advanced. She described the curriculum as:

You’re really in a more rigorous program to cover more curriculum in the same amount of time. And that helps the advanced kids because you actually do finish all the math curriculum, but it doesn’t help the ones who aren’t really ready for that. If they really haven’t mastered addition and subtraction, you can’t stop. You have to go on to probability and some of the more complicated things.

The stress level that some of the teachers felt as a result of the expansion of the curriculum is reiterated by Sheila:

I would say it has absolutely expanded. I think there’s more goals we need to meet, there’s more strands that we need to teach now. So absolutely. What I did five years ago is much different than I do now. It’s not the fun and game learning. It’s getting down to the basics. What we teach now is, our goal is to make adequate yearly progress. We don’t want the state to take over…we’re scared. Every teacher wants their class to succeed, so we feel like we have this big weight on our shoulders.
Narrowed curriculum.

The discussion of the narrowing of the curriculum was not as prolific as the discussion regarding the expansion of the curriculum. However, the teachers linked the narrowing of the curriculum to the content standards in much the same fashion. Linda expressed, “The curriculum has narrowed. You’re focusing more on the standards that you have to teach.” Vicki agreed:

I think the curriculum has narrowed. I find myself now tied to those standards. I find myself tied to the books because if I don’t teach what’s in that book [content standards], then they don’t have what they need to do the test.

Neutral curriculum.

Three teachers described no impact on the scope of the curriculum. They indicated that the statewide tests had resulted in an alignment of curriculum to the content standards, but they did not feel that this had impacted the amount of content that was required to be covered.

Summary of impact on curriculum.

The discussion of the impact on curriculum included a discussion of whether or not participants viewed the impact of NCLB on curriculum as having expanded or narrowed the curriculum. All participants spoke of Ohio’s Content Standards when addressing this topic and all participants indicated that curriculum had been impacted. Data emerged regarding both an expanded and narrowed curriculum. The discussion of expanded curriculum included more content to cover than the time in the day. Teachers
speaking of narrowed curriculum indicated an emphasis on the tested content, in particular math and reading.

Five participants viewed the curriculum as having expanded as a result of the mandates of NCLB. They felt that there was a great deal to cover in one school year. These participants had aligned their curriculum to the content standards and all cited lack of time as an issue. They indicated that the curriculum has expanded and is more rigorous. They also shared the frustration of lack of time to cover all of the content, which has resulted in fewer fun activities for the students.

In relation to a curriculum that had narrowed in focus, two participants shared this view. These two teachers stated that the alignment of curriculum to content standards had resulted in a more defined curriculum. They felt that they had fewer choices about what they could teach. They did not deviate from the content standards and, therefore, viewed that as a narrowed curriculum.

Three participants defined the impact on curriculum as neither expanded nor narrowed. They described no real impact regarding the amount of material they taught. These participants, however, did state that the focus of the curriculum was the content standards and no longer did they have time for the fun activities that the students had really enjoyed.

Impact on Instruction

Closely related to the input from teachers regarding the impact on curriculum is the discussion of instructional strategies. For the most part, the teachers indicated that the mandates of NCLB had impacted their instructional strategies. The categories that
emerged under this theme are “No Change in Instruction” and “Changed Instruction”. The following provides details regarding instructional strategies.

*Change to instructional strategies.*

Changes in instructional strategies for teachers most often included a discussion of an emphasis on tested content. In the third grade, students are tested in the areas of reading and math. One teacher, Sherry, has created units in order to cover all of the content. She viewed this as a positive change:

I like the teaching in units and keeping things together. We try to do it this way instead of just teaching things in an order or going straight through a book and duplicating ourselves and doing things over and over. This way it’s in a chunk or a unit.

Most teachers determined that the changes in instruction were the result of the focus on tested content. Many shared similar thoughts, including an emphasis on teaching students how to take the test. Ellen elaborated on this topic:

I think you focus more on their test-taking skills. We now have workbooks that we go over with the kids on “Here are questions, this is how you answer this kind of question., this is what you need.” We focus more on that kind of thing instead of having them learn about the stuff that they really are interested in. And that’s a huge part in learning. I know with these guys, I work on them with “Go back and look in the story. Is that something that you just think that you knew from before or is that something that’s actually mentioned in there. Go back and look, go back and look, go back and look.”
This sentiment was shared by Mandy. She described the changes in her instructional strategies that have occurred as a result of the statewide testing mandated by NCLB:

Well, in general as a teacher I am now more geared toward teaching skills that are going to make it easier for them to take those tests. I feel very test-driven as far as everything that I do, the way I set up my classroom, how I run activities. You try to get them in longer activities so they can sit for the length of the test.

When asked for specific examples of how the instruction is geared toward the test, Mandy gave this response:

I try to mimic more of how the test is, or what the test is and the type of questions that are on the test. And we’ve gone back just recently and changed all, we don’t normally give a book test, like if it’s given by the book company. We usually make up our own test. Well, we’ve gone back because our scores were short.

We fell short in the short answer realm. We now have gone back and we now add short answer responses and extended response answers to all our tests because that’s where we have to improve on as a school. So, it’s changed a lot. It’s changed a lot.

This thought was echoed by Lori who shared a very similar situation where teachers were reviewing test results and making instructional adjustments. She concluded:

It’s sad but we’re at the point where, sorry, we’re working toward this Ohio Achievement Test and we’re reviewing past tests and looking at the data analysis. Well, why did 57% of the kids get this problem wrong? What’s wrong with
this question? Or is it worded right? Or did we not teach that concept? So, we’re doing a lot more data analysis, which is good. As a teacher I know in what areas I need to improve. But sometimes it’s just a bad test question and we have no control over that. I can’t sit here and say that I teach towards the test, but a lot of our activities are modeled after the Ohio Achievement Test formats.

In addition to the instructional strategies described, teachers reported that they do not view teaching to be as much fun as it was in the past. Sherry admitted that she has changed:

I think it has changed me where, you don’t get to have as much fun with your class. You don’t even get to, not even enjoy them as much, because you’re always so busy. You’re always so focused on making sure you cover everything.

Sandi agreed that there is less time for fun in the classroom:

I think I’m teaching less fun things, doing less fun, yet educational, activities. I don’t want to say fun, they’re not learning anything. But there are less of those and there are more, there’s a lot more of me standing up in front of the class teaching rather than hands-on.

To take this one step further, Linda relayed her thoughts about the changes in her instructional strategies when she said:

I still enjoy what I do, it just seems like a lot of the fun is gone out of it. A lot of the extra little fun things you used to be able to do, you just don’t have time for them. You feel like you’re under pressure all the time to, we met for lunch today and we were all talking about what we need to cover…We’re spending a lot more time on math, a lot more time on reading. Getting the science and social studies...
in as much as you can. Just not so much, whether it’s seasonal activities or those
funzy kinds of things that you like to do. You just don’t have time. So it’s a lot
of time on reading and math, I would say, would be the biggest instructional
change.

Perhaps, two teachers provide a summary of the instructional changes. Sheila
concluded:

We teach more and we teach everyday to the test now. We teach kids how to
take the test. And it absolutely has changed the way I teach. And I could
probably speak for every teacher in this building.

And, in speaking about the entire student population, Karen summarized the
instructional changes that she has made in saying:

I feel it’s changed me as a teacher. I feel that there’s more I have to teach and less
time to teach it. And then yet I have a diverse population of children that I have
to get it all to. And then meet all their needs. From gifted to the, my special ed
population. And then there’s that middle group that really needs you and you’re
pulled at both ends, they just flounder. So that’s one change.

*No change to instructional strategies.*

In contrast to the reports of changes in instruction, one teacher stated that her
instructional strategies had not changed as a result of NCLB. Vicky shared the
following:

I don’t think it has changed me as a teacher. I always expected, I always had high
expectations. I always worked for all of them. So as we make our changes in
our educational ways that we teach, you always try to do the intelligences. Like
this one’s auditory, this one’s visual. And I’ve always taught so that I’ve tried to
reach them all. In teaching a lesson I’ve done that for the auditory, visual,
kinesthetic, musical. I put all of that in. And so it really didn’t, there was no
stress for me. Because again, you do what you can do and hope for the best.

*Summary of impact on instruction.*

Nine participants cited changes to their instructional strategies as a result of
NCLB. As has been stated previously, all nine participants indicated that their teaching
was more focused and they could not include the fun activities that they had included in
the past. These teachers also indicated an increased focus on tested content. They also
stated that they spent time teaching test-taking skills, a change since the mandated
statewide testing. These teachers indicated that they had acquired materials for students
that target the tested content in addition to providing practice of test-taking skills.

One participant indicated that her instructional strategies had not changed. She
felt that she had always held high expectations and that NCLB had not impacted the way
she teaches on a day-to-day basis.

*Instructional Setting*

The mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing and
the requirement for these students to reach the same proficiency level as students without
disabilities has caused schools to examine the instructional setting for students with
disabilities. It is generally accepted that if students with disabilities are required to
participate in testing and to reach a required level of proficiency, they must be exposed to the content of the test. While the content of the test can be provided in any setting, most typically the general education teacher provides this instruction in the general education classroom.

Teachers described the instructional settings of “Inclusion” and “Pull-Out” with the inclusion setting most commonly implemented among these teachers. Inclusion refers to students with disabilities receiving their instruction in the general education classroom. The special education teacher often assists the students with disabilities in the general education classroom. The instruction in a pull-out program is provided by the special education teacher and the students in the classroom are all students with disabilities. Typically this is a small group of students who are working on skills below those of their grade-level peers.

*Inclusion.*

The teachers who were interviewed provided varying perspectives regarding inclusion. The teachers discussed the need to make decisions regarding instructional setting on an individual basis. Mandy described this situation:

I think there are some kids, yes, that can be included and fare very well and will get what they need from being included. There are students who their ability, their cognitive ability, just doesn’t allow for them to even participate in what the kids are doing [in the general education classroom]. I’ve seen the whole inclusion part of it, I’ve seen where they’re in the classroom being included but they’re not doing anything that everyone else is doing because of their cognitive ability. So,
is that truly inclusion? No, I mean as far as I’m concerned, that’s not. Are we serving them the way they need to be serviced? Maybe the exposure is enough. I don’t know. And every child’s individual when it comes to that, so it’s a very hard thing to answer across the board. I think inclusion is good. I do think it’s good. In order for it to work properly you need more adults. You need your ratio to be a little bit smaller in order to do that. It’s hard to find that happy medium to get the needs of everyone else in the classroom plus your special needs students and do it within the timeframe of the day.

Mandy described her feelings regarding inclusion in much the same fashion. She expressed:

I think some children, inclusion works well and I think sometimes it doesn’t. And I kind of think that depends on the degree of disability that they have. And I think there’s a lot of things that kind of need to come into play. And the attitudes of the teacher. Do they like having another person in the room working with them? Would they rather the students be pulled out? The needs of the kids, the teachers who are involved, and the schedule.

The perspective that the decision regarding inclusion must consider the individual students and their learning needs was reiterated by Lori. She raised the question about the students individual education plans (IEPs) when she remarked:

As far as inclusion, my view on inclusion is sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. You have to know that right balance. Like I said, we tried it earlier this year and earlier this semester and we were, it was working and then it just became distracting for the special ed. students and for the regular ed. students. When it
works, it’s the best thing for them. But the students I have this year, their IEP and their goals that they’re working on are much, they’re moving at a slower pace for one. They’re trying to do the same skills. But we may be working on writing letters and they’re still working on a paragraph. So their expectations for their IEP kind of guide their instruction more so than the state curriculum we’re doing.

Not all of the teachers had always held the same opinion regarding inclusion. Vicky talked about how her views had changed over time:

I guess I used to think special education had to be pulled out. And over the years that has changed. I know the best place for them to be if they’re capable again, is to be in the classroom…We’re very fortunate I think the way that we do it because our people are spread very thin, our special ed. people. But they do look at those IEPs and they do help, in many ways when they’re in the classroom. When they pull them for something, they’re trying to follow those IEPs as best they can.

Karen shared her views of inclusion and her belief that inclusion has changed over time. She reflected on these changes:

I call the new form of inclusion, hallucination. Because they just pull them in the hall and teach them. In an environment that is inappropriate. The view of special education with NCLB I think has moved further away from what you’re supposed to be looking at. If a child is on an individualized education plan, that’s an IEP. It’s specifically written to meet the needs of the children. When you swing and go into inclusion, you are looking at that child from the perspective of we
need that child to fit into the whole. Well, they can fit in the whole, but you’re missing out on meeting that child’s needs. Inclusion is great, but not for everybody. There has to be built in some quality time that you can address the IEP, meeting those goals and objectives. Because you’re not going to get progress. You’re not going to get the one year growth. Inclusion is from the NCLB, I think has really, to me, what’s the purpose of the IEP? Honestly? Why do we write IEPs for these children? And, in turn it’s more our responsibility as the general ed. teacher to meet the needs of their goals and objectives. And our inclusion teachers, there’s not enough of them in the building. They’re spread too thin.

Other teachers shared similar thoughts regarding the balance between inclusion and pull-out programming. These teachers expressed the need to consider a combination of inclusion and pull-out programming. Ellen shared specifics:

Sometimes they need help with words, because they couldn’t read sight words. I don’t understand how they were going to read science and social studies curriculum books and be okay. It didn’t make any sense to me at all. It still doesn’t after watching them do it. I had to read everything to them, tests, worksheets, experiments. Everything had to be done with me. So I just, if they need to be pulled out then they need to be pulled out. And if they can be in, they can be in with some assistance is fine.

Another teacher, Linda, spoke sincerely about the assistance of the special education teacher in the classroom that included pulling the students out as needed. She viewed this flexibility for instructional setting as important to the success of the students:
Well, I think, probably I’d have to say it’s helpful. And especially, like I said, when she [the special education teacher] in working with her in the past, she’s always been really willing to take those students and work with the certain skills and things that they were having trouble with in here.

Sheila summarized the discussion of the balance between inclusion and pull-out programming when she concluded:

Inclusion works I think. It can work for two reasons, if you have a great support team and you have a great teacher. But, I think you also have to have the pull-out time. I don’t think, and I’m all about teaching the special ed. kids with just accommodations. They’re learning the same things. My kids in here are learning the same things as any of the other kids. But they do need the pull-out time.

Pull-out.

Three of the teachers had students with disabilities who were placed, at least part of the day, in a pull-out setting. The remaining time during the day the students were placed in the inclusion setting. Only one teacher, Ellen, spoke specifically about having students placed in a pull-out setting for part of the day:

I rely a lot on the intervention specialist. So, when they’re pulled out I assume that they’re getting what they need to be getting, unless they come in and tell me what to work on this with them. And then I’ll be okay. I’ll do that. But I assume that when they’re being pulled out and being worked with out there that that works. Yea, and when they’re pulled out I don’t have the time to work with them,
so I guess there just needs to be a lot of communication and that doesn’t seem to happen always, a lot, around here.

Summary of instructional setting.

Most of the participants indicated that the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing had resulted in changes to the instructional setting for these students. Three participants indicated that both instructional settings are important to students with disabilities. These participants indicated that the determination of instructional setting must be based on individual student needs.

Seven of the participants spoke about the inclusion setting. Two of these participants do not believe that the inclusion setting is beneficial to students with disabilities. They cited the need for intense instruction at the student’s individual level and did not view the general education classroom as the optimal location for this instruction. The remaining participants spoke of the benefit of the inclusion setting; however, they indicated the need for qualified support personnel to be available to assist in the general education classroom.

The mandate for adequate yearly progress for students with disabilities is in the area of reading and math. As a result, most participants saw an increase in the placement of students with disabilities in the general education inclusion setting. Six of the participants had students with disabilities in their general education classroom for both reading and math instruction. The students with disabilities in two of the participant’s buildings received their math and reading instruction in a pull-out setting. Two participants indicated that the students with disabilities are in the inclusion setting of the
general education classroom for math and in the pull-out setting with the special education teacher for instruction in reading.

**Number of Identified Students**

The testing requirement of NCLB has prompted a discussion of the number of students identified as having disabilities. This is because schools that have a large enough population of students with disabilities are held to the standard of AYP. Adequate yearly progress requires schools to meet a predetermined level of proficiency and ultimately contributes to the overall performance rating of the school. Schools that do not have a large enough subgroup of students with disabilities are not held to the AYP standard. The subgroup size in Ohio has been lowered from 45 to 30 students. This has resulted in a great deal of discussion regarding the identification of students with disabilities. The two categories discussed include “Increase in Numbers” and “Decline in Numbers” of students with disabilities.

*Increase in numbers.*

One teacher related the increased sophistication in diagnosing students with disabilities as a reason that the numbers will increase. Vicky shared her thoughts:

I think you’re seeing the numbers go up but I think it’s because there’s more diagnoses of different types of disabilities. And I think it’s going to be because the diagnosis is there and people want a name on something. Is that going to help any? You can only do so much and it’s like okay, so we diagnosed them. What are we going to do about it?
Decline in numbers.

Common among teachers was the thought that the mandates of NCLB will result in a decline in numbers of students with disabilities. Most anticipated or have experienced a change in the eligibility process that has resulted in some students not meeting eligibility requirements. Ellen voiced this thought:

I think that the process will make a difference that less people will be identified. But I think having them not pass the test, I don’t know. That’s kind of the double edged sword, too, because if they’re not passing the test, if they’re not functioning at grade level, then they need extra assistance but we can’t give them extra assistance unless they go through this whole long process of all this other stuff. So, the more you’re supposed to give them help, there’s more red tape for them to go through. So, it’s kind of an annoyance. More work for us to just go through and say, I’ll take care of it. If they’re going to get special attention somewhere else then I’ll just take care of that too. So, we get burned out more.

When asked if she thought the number of students identified as having a disability would change, Mandy expressed the following:

Yes, I do. I do. Because we’re already looking at changing how that qualification has come down with the cognitive delay qualification and the IQ has changed. And that’s making it a lot, making students who were that shady eighty as we used to call them, they’re not qualifying anymore. So they’re getting zero help now. They don’t qualify for accommodations so they get no help on this test then. And they they’re supposed to try to pass this test on their own as well. And we’ve had a, just recently, I’ve had a student who came off of an IEP and
they have no help. They can’t do it. Yes, the number of special ed. students is going down. But they still need the help. That’s the part that’s hard.

Sheila commented that even though the qualifications have changed, students are still the same and still need help. She said:

It’s a different qualification than it was three years ago. So I think it’s going to be more difficult. The number of students with disabilities, I think the number is going to decrease, and it’s not because these, they just don’t qualify. They raise the standards for qualifications, so I think that is going to have a big impact. We’re going to have to meet the needs of more kids without the support.

The comments that Tina shared reiterated Sheila’s thoughts that students still need help. Tina said, “My guess is that the government will want to reduce them. But the fact is more kids are needing more help for a variety of variables.”

To conclude the discussion on the number of students with disabilities, Karen spoke in-depth about NCLB. Her response elaborated on the thoughts of others:

I see that there will be less children identified with NCLB. Because I really think the objective of NCLB is that we do early intervention. So that we’re addressing these children’s needs early on. So that when they become school-age they are less likely to be at-risk children that need intense services. Honestly, I believe that they will identify less but it’s not because the children are performing better or coming in with more knowledge. I think it’s because we’re changing the whole system, the way we’re meeting these children’s needs…And I understand that fully, but you cannot put a percentage on how many students
you are going to identify. Because if no child is left behind and you say we can only identify 8% of your population, you’ve just left some kids behind.

Summary of number of identified students.

The participants in this study spoke about the number of students with disabilities. Seven participants were of the opinion that the number of students with disabilities will decline as a result of NCLB. These participants shared that the criteria for eligibility as a student with a cognitive delay had been changed to a lower level of functioning. These students were now determined to be students without disabilities. These teachers spoke of a more intense identification process that would also lead to fewer students identified as students with a disability.

One participant indicated that, even though her belief was that the government wanted to reduce the number, she believed that the number of identified students would continue to increase. She reasoned that students have more needs now than in the past.

One participant shared that it is too soon to know what the overall impact on the number of students with disabilities will be. She shared that her hope is that students will receive the assistance that they need and that they will be placed in a setting that is appropriate to their individual needs.

Summary

Three basic questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcomes of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the
unintended outcomes of statewide testing? The following discussion is provided as a summary and is not intended to diminish the actual words of the participants in this study.

What are the views and perceptions of the participants regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing? The response to this question, in part, is left to the reader. Some participants reported that the actual participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing was simply a mandate that they were following. Most, however, shared the concern that students with disabilities were being asked to participate in a testing situation that was too difficult for them. In spite of the belief that the students with disabilities in their classrooms made tremendous progress throughout the year, the statewide test did not reflect this progress.

In response to the question of the teachers’ perceptions of the intended outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities, teachers were not convinced this outcome was not met. Even though some teachers reported that some of the students with disabilities in their classrooms had passed the reading or math portion of the statewide test, they did not believe that the students had achieved more. These teachers do not perceive the achievement gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities to be closing as a result of the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing.

What are the unintended outcomes of statewide testing? The participants in this study shared information regarding impact on curriculum. Both a narrowing and an expansion of the curriculum were reported. Participants shared that they had changed their instructional practices as a result of NCLB. In addition, participants shared information regarding the impact on the number of students identified as having a
disability. The participants in this study predict a decline in the number of students identified as having a disability. Participants also shared their views on inclusion. They viewed the increase in students with disabilities placed in inclusion settings as an outcome of NCLB.

This chapter presented the results of the qualitative analysis that was completed from the data collected from the ten teachers who took part in this study. The purpose of the analysis was to gain an in-depth understanding of third grade general education teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The discussion presented in this chapter reflected the themes that emerged through the analysis of the data. A summary of these results, as well as the limitations, recommendations, and conclusions, are discussed in Chapter 6.
Chapter Six
Summary, Recommendations, and Conclusion

This phenomenological qualitative study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. General education teachers participated in the study and contributed the data that are presented in this chapter.

All teachers participated in a semi-structured interview. The interview protocol consisted of 10 questions or prompts to guide the discussion. The first two prompts were intended to establish rapport and to set the tone of the interview. Instead, these prompts resulted in heart-felt discussion as the participants related their overall impression of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). All participants shared numerous accounts of the impact of mandated participation in statewide testing on the students with disabilities in their classrooms. The data resulting from these prompts were presented in Chapter 4 and provided insight into the perspective of each participant in this study.

The data in Chapter 5 were presented according to the themes that emerged from the analysis of data. Data were shared using the words of the participants to the greatest extent possible, thus preserving the integrity of the words of the participants and contributing to the trustworthiness of the study. Themes included testing experience,
levels of achievement, impact on curriculum, impact on instruction, number of identified
students, and instructional setting. This chapter presents a discussion of the data with
consideration of the tenets of the interpretive theory. These include construction of
meaning, role expectations, perceptions of individuals, and reality as determined by
individuals (Bennet de Marrais & LeCompte, 1999). Each participant in this study spoke
from their own construct of the meaning of the mandates of NCLB. Each participant
shared their thoughts according to their own perceptions and their interpretation of the
reality of their experiences and the experiences of the students in their classrooms.

This chapter concludes with limitations and recommendations for further study. It
is the intent of this researcher to present the following discussion with an emphasis on the
essence of the views of the participants in this study. Glesne (2006) states that the
interpretation of data occur when the researcher “transcends factual data and cautious
analysis and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (p. 164).

Research Questions

Three basic questions guided this study. First, what are the views and perceptions
of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language
disabilities in statewide testing? Second, what are teachers’ perceptions of the intended
outcome of increased achievement for students with disabilities? Third, what are the
unintended outcomes of statewide testing?

Review of Methods

Research for this study was conducted with 10 third grade general education
teachers. Interviews were completed according to a semi-structured format which
contributed to a relaxed atmosphere and resulted in the rich data presented in this study.
Each participant agreed to have the interview recorded. These recordings were reviewed
numerous times in order to capture the essence of each interview. In addition, verbatim
transcripts were completed for each interview. This print material was reviewed multiple
times using various coding schemes until the themes and categories that are presented in
this study emerged.

Summary of Themes

This study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and
perceptions of general education teachers regarding the participation of students with
learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. The mandated participation of
students with disabilities in statewide testing is the result of the federal reform policy,
NCLB. This reform policy, like others before it, is intended to increase student
achievement. An emphasis of NCLB is not only the intent to increase achievement for all
students, but to close the achievement gap between subgroups of students. The focus of
this discussion is the subgroup of students with disabilities.

In tandem with the intended outcomes of NCLB are the unintended outcomes.
This paradigm of intended and unintended outcomes provided a framework for this study.
Paradigms are neither right nor wrong. They represent points of view that merit
discussion. Following are the views of the participants in this study.

Testing Experience

In order for all students to benefit from reform policies, all students must be
included in the requirements. This view is supported by many educational reform
leaders. Thurlow (2002) supports increased achievement and high expectations for all students as an intended outcome of reform policies such as NCLB. Similarly, Bejoian and Reid (2005) remind us that students with disabilities deserve to be considered and valued as members of the school. Both Thurlow and Bejoian and Reid suggest that the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing should be viewed in a positive fashion. The participants in this study were not as convinced that the participation is always positive. Two participants viewed the participation as positive, three viewed the mandated participation as negative, and five had no opinion either way.

The concern that the tested content is not appropriate for students with disabilities is a common discussion. The review of current literature indicates that the mandated participation in statewide testing is often overwhelming for students with disabilities. DeBard & Kubow (2002) report the results of a survey of teachers in Ohio as 87% believing that students with disabilities would be overwhelmed by testing. Crawford et al. (2002) reported that teachers were greatly concerned about the stress of testing on students with disabilities. In addition, Kaufman (2005) states that the complex evaluation that identifies students with disabilities presents a diagnosis that the student would not be expected to perform as well as students without disabilities on statewide tests.

The participants in this study shared these concerns. They reported the challenges that students with disabilities faced during assessment. Eight participants shared concerns about the well-being of students with disabilities in testing. More than one participant indicated that students with disabilities had been identified as having learning disabilities and, as such, would not be able to compete at the same level as students without disabilities. Participants also shared their frustration that students with
disabilities showed great improvement during the year, but were still unable to pass the test.

Level of Achievement

The teachers in this study for the most part felt that a single standardized test was not an appropriate measure of achievement and progress. Participants shared that the test was a “double-edged sword” in that while they were required to include all students in testing, they did not view the test content as appropriate for all students. Teachers gave reasons such as, “it’s not fair” and “there’s lots of frustration”. These teachers indicated that each student shows growth that is acceptable for them as individuals, but not enough to pass the test. One teacher shared, “all children come in and leave ahead” regardless of what the test scores show.

In the discussion regarding the link between mandated participation and increased achievement for students with disabilities, the participants did not report achievement gains for all students. This represents an interesting dilemma for educators as the educators in our public schools are held accountable to make this gain in achievement a reality (Foote, 2007; Goertz et al., 2003; Thurlow et al., 2000; Yell, et al., 2006).

One participant reported gains for high functioning students with disabilities. Six participants reported that students with disabilities were not gaining achievement as a result of NCLB and three participants were not willing to commit to the link between participation in testing and increased achievement. Perhaps the hesitation for these teachers to link achievement level with the mandates of NCLB is not uncommon.
(2007) states, “Because schools have implemented multiple programs, policies, and reforms to raise student achievement since 2002, it is difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether improvements occurred directly as a result of NCLB” (p. 92). As one participant shared, “Are they achieving more? That’s on an individual basis.” Many participants shared stories of students who tried very hard to do well on the tests, but simply were not able to handle the grade level content. As one teacher summarized, “We’re not lessening the gap.”

This is an area that requires a great deal more discussion. Mitch Chester of the Ohio Department of Education as quoted in Olson (2004a) declares “accountability for students with disabilities has become a ‘major lightening rod’ in the implementation of federal law” (p. 13). Interestingly, even though these teachers did not view increased achievement for their students, the 2006-2007 Annual Report on Educational Progress in Ohio showed a -1.9 reduction in percentage point gap between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

Impact on Curriculum

Several studies concluded that measuring and reporting student performance, as is mandated through NCLB, results in enhanced attention to curriculum and an alignment to content standards (Crawford & Tindal, 2006; Guskey, 2005; Nelson et al, 2007). Participants in this study overwhelmingly reported the alignment of curriculum with content standards. They spoke favorably of this outcome of NCLB and appeared comfortable knowing what curriculum they were required to cover. One participant shared that, in the past, she would have covered the content that was in the textbook.
Now, she pulls content from several different sources and indicated that she is more comfortable knowing what content to teach as opposed to relying on a textbook.

Even though intended changes regarding curriculum were reported in the review of the literature as well as the participant responses, unintended outcomes were reported as well. The review of the literature included a discussion of a narrowed curriculum as a result of NCLB. This narrowed curriculum was the result of a focus on teaching tested content (Koretz, 2005). Two participants in this study agreed that the curriculum had narrowed to focus on content standards, and indicated that “you’re more focused on the standards that you have to teach.” This is consistent with the review of the literature as the content of the statewide tests is based on content standards.

In contrast, five of the participants reported that their content had expanded. They reported the alignment to the content standards as the reason that the curriculum had expanded. So, on one hand, teachers viewed the content standards as having a focused or narrowing effect on the curriculum, while other teachers viewed the alignment to content standards as having the effect of expanding the curriculum. Whether or not one views the expansion of the curriculum as negative or positive is not of significance. The significance is that teachers viewed the alignment of the curriculum to content standards as having altered the curriculum as they had known it prior to NCLB. One teacher concluded, “What I did 5 years ago is much different than what I do now.”

Impact on Instruction

The discussion of curriculum led to a discussion of instructional strategies. An underlying premise of reform policies is that by measuring and reporting student
performance, instructional practices will improve (Elmore, 2004; Foote, 2007).

Consistent with this premise, all but one participant shared that their instructional strategies had changed. When describing this change, the participants agreed that their instruction was more focused on teaching the content standards. Some shared that they taught specific test-taking strategies. All of the participants indicated that they had acquired materials specific to the test. These materials were in the form of workbooks, computer programs, and practice achievement tests. Nine participants agreed that teaching had become less enjoyable for them as well as their students. As one participant shared, “I still enjoy what I do, it just seems like the fun is gone out of it.” The changes to instructional strategies are not regarded as positive or negative; they are simply changes that have resulted as an outcome of NCLB.

Instructional Setting

An interesting discussion developed around the instructional setting specific to students with disabilities. Participants described the instructional setting for students with disabilities as inclusion or pull-out. Most of the participants indicated that the mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing had resulted in an increase in inclusion. These teachers reported varying levels of support from the special education teacher.

However, some teachers indicated a combination of inclusion and pull-out instruction. For the most part, students with disabilities who were pulled out of the general education classroom for instruction received their reading and math instruction in the pull-out setting with the special education teacher.
One teacher termed inclusion, ‘hallusion’ and reported that even though the instructional setting was considered to be the general education classroom, the students with disabilities often received their instruction in the hallway. A similar situation was shared by another teacher who indicated that it was too distracting for all students to try to provide instruction to meet the varying ability levels of all students in the general education classroom. Eventually the students with disabilities were placed back in the pull-out setting to receive their instruction from the special education teacher.

It is important to note the concern that these participants showed for the well-being of all of their students, in particular, the students with disabilities. These teachers were concerned about the educational needs of students and whether these individual needs were met. They shared the conflict they felt when trying to balance the requirements of NCLB with the individual education plans of the students. This concern over the individual versus the group mentality of NCLB is one that is consistent with the review of the literature when comparing NCLB and the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Educators must balance the needs of the individual child with the demands to meet accountability standards for all children (Albrecht & Joles, 2003; Faircloth, 2004; Koretz, 1997; Nagle et al., 2006; Thompson et al., 2006).

Number of Identified Students

Two additional outcomes discussed by participants that were not readily associated with the intended outcomes of NCLB as reviewed in the literature are number of identified students and instructional setting. The review of the literature reports a steady increase in the number of students identified as having a disability. In 2003-04,
6.6 million students with disabilities were educated in our nation’s schools. This represents 14% of the school-age population (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2006). While the participants of this study indicated increased student needs, they also reported that they foresee a decline in the number of students identified as having a disability. This was attributed to a change in Ohio’s identification process that lowered the cognitive level for eligibility under the disability category of cognitive delay. These teachers concluded that this change was a result of NCLB and the federal government’s goal to decrease the number of students with disabilities. The review of the literature as conducted by this researcher did not indicate such as an intended outcome of NCLB.

Limitations and Recommendations

Limitations

The limitations of this study surround the selection of participants. One of the most obvious limitations to this study is the homogeneity of the participants. All participants are female, all are general education teachers, all teach third grade. There is diversity in the age and experience of the participants, ranging from 3 years of teaching experience to nearly 38 years of experience. Two of the participants hold licensure in the area of special education and have experience as special education teachers.

Third-grade general education teachers were selected for this study to ensure that the students with disabilities in their classrooms had participated in statewide testing. Third-grade students participate in a fall administration of the statewide tests in addition
to a spring administration. The involvement of a single grade level could be considered a limitation to this study.

In the state of Ohio, individual schools and districts must meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) in order to be rated as excellent or effective. Adequate yearly progress is determined by the performance of subgroups on the statewide tests. Students with disabilities comprise one such subgroup. A minimum of 30 students is required for a subgroup. Adequate yearly progress is not reported for individual school buildings with fewer than 30 students with disabilities. Therefore, the performance of this subgroup would not impact the building rating. The stakes are higher for buildings with a subgroup of students with disabilities. In this study, the rural and suburban elementary buildings did not meet the minimum requirement for a subgroup. This may have impacted the views of the teachers in these buildings, and therefore, subgroup size could be considered a limitation to this study.

An additional limitation is the selection of participants from northwest Ohio as opposed to a study involving participants from across the country. NCLB is a federal reform policy and all states must fulfill the mandates, although there are implementation variances across states. This study focused on the mandates of NCLB as they are implemented in the state of Ohio.

Recommendations

It is difficult to take issue with a reform policy entitled No Child Left Behind. To do so implies that one would think it satisfactory to indeed, leave a child behind. The participants in this study, as teachers in general education classrooms, are living
examples of this dilemma. Each participant spoke with passion about all children. Each participant spoke of the progress of the students in their classrooms. Each participant also shared their thoughts and ideas about the changes in education under NCLB.

Several recurring issues surfaced that deserve further study. Issues such as (a) test scores of students with disabilities, (b) number of students identified as a student with a disability; and, (c) instructional setting could be investigated on a large-scale through quantitative research studies. This quantitative data would provide valuable trend data in order to track the impact of NCLB. A study of the relationship between any or all of these 3 areas would be informative. For example, is there a relationship between test scores and instructional setting of students with disabilities? Or, is there a relationship between the number of students identified as having a disability and the subgroup size requirements under NCLB? These issues would best be studied through quantitative methods. Other issues will require continued dialogue with the teachers in today’s classrooms. A discussion of those most pervasive in this study follows.

*Rethink the school game.*

The participants in this study provided input regarding what they need in order to fulfill the mandates of NCLB and to ultimately increase the achievement of all students, including students with disabilities. Much of their input surrounds a restructuring of education as we understand and practice it today. Sunderman and Orfield (2007) state that, “We believe NCLB can work to produce more equal and effective schooling only if it makes sense to educators and provides the necessary resources” (p. 137). The real teachers in real classrooms teaching real students have the first-hand experience to
contribute to an improved educational system. Nelson, McGhee, Meno, and Slater (2007) encourage the involvement of educators in setting educational policy. They conclude, “We must help lawmakers understand the connection between education and public policy” (p. 709).

The participants in this study supported this view as they shared that teachers need to be included in decision-making. Their input indicated a need for the school game to be restructured. Teachers and students are struggling to meet the mandates of NCLB under a system that is not designed to support these mandates. The players and the rules need to be revisited. Educators and policy-makers need to come together in a collaborative fashion to restructure the school game. To this end, the following deserve consideration and further study:

1. Restructure the school day to provide collaboration time among teachers.
2. Place specialists (special education teacher, reading specialist, speech therapist) in the classroom to co-teach with the general education teacher.
3. Place remedial materials in the classroom and not in the specialist’s room.
4. Eliminate the interruptions of pull-outs throughout the day.
5. Create educational teams for all levels (elementary, middle, high).

The time to restructure our nation’s school system is now. W. Edwards Deming, a leader in quality movement in the United States, as cited in Cawelti (2006) warned:

A heavy reliance on single goals or other narrowly defined evidence of success tends to encourage people to tweak the system rather than make the fundamental changes needed in schools and classrooms to ensure student mastery of standards.
Making the right numbers appear becomes more important than improving the system (p. 65).

*Educational training.*

The mandated participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing has resulted in a resurgence of students with disabilities receiving their academic instruction within the general education classrooms. The two participants in this study who have licensure in both special education and general education perceive that the training in special education has better prepared them to teach all students in the general education classroom. Currently, pre-service teachers in the state of Ohio must select a licensure area. Both general education licensure and special education licensure require 4-5 years of university coursework. Most undergraduate students do not attempt a dual major as it not only takes a great deal of time; it is a costly venture as well.

Further study in this area is needed. It is possible under the current practice of inclusion, where students with disabilities are educated in the general education classroom, for a teacher trained only in general education to have more contact time with students with disabilities than the teacher trained in special education. This creates an interesting dilemma.

All teachers would benefit from specific training in teaching students with disabilities. There is a great deal to know as far as each specific disability as well as the myriad of rules and regulations surrounding special education. We cannot expect that general education teachers will acquire the knowledge and skills that they need to effectively instruct all students without specific training. As long as general education
teachers continue to be held responsible for the performance of all children, they must be provided appropriate training. Research of the potential gap between current licensure and course requirement standards compared to the needs of the field is indicated.

Method of assessment.

No Child Left Behind, like the numerous educational reform policies before it, emphasizes increased achievement for all students. The requirement of NCLB that all subgroups of students meet proficiency level has presented a challenge for public schools. The subgroup of students with disabilities is of particular concern.

The participants in this study shared that all students make progress from the start of the year to the end of the year. They shared numerous accounts of students with disabilities and the progress that each had made during the year. However, this progress was not enough to reach proficiency on the statewide tests. Teachers are questioning whether the use of a single test to measure overall achievement is a defensible accountability system. Barton (2007/2008) states:

There is a basic flaw in our current sanctions-based accountability system: its reliance on an end-of-year test. End-of-year tests measure students’ knowledge, no matter when or where they acquired it – in preschool years, in the family, during the summer, in previous grades, or in previous schools (p. 70).

There is a myriad of information available on assessment. There are numerous types of assessment. Two types of assessment need to be considered in the overall determination of student gain in achievement.
Formative assessment provides on-going feedback and should be utilized to inform instruction and to measure student progress on an on-going basis. Formative assessment provides students with a tool for self-monitoring their own understanding. It also provides teachers with an on-going tool to check student understanding of each concept as presented (Fisher & Frey, 2007). In this way, the assessment informs the day-to-day instruction for individual students. Ultimately, a strong framework and implementation of school-wide formative assessment can lead to strong statewide test performance (Popham, 2008).

Summative assessment measures student competency. The tests administered in NCLB are summative assessments used as an end-of-year test. This type of assessment result provides information about grade-level goals and benchmarks (Fisher & Frey, 2007). It is an assessment of learning as opposed to an assessment for learning. This type of assessment is appropriate for many situations, but has been questioned under the mandates of NCLB as the sole method of measuring student achievement.

The high-stakes mandates of NCLB are such that the reliance on a single test needs to be revisited. As the discussion evolves around the Reauthorization of NCLB, it is critical that the assessment process be included. While quantitative studies can determine the percentage increase or decrease in achievement, this data should be coupled with qualitative studies in order to gain the valuable insight of teachers. It is important to find the right balance of accountability and flexibility. Perhaps it is time to consider both formative and summative assessment in order to accurately determine the level of achievement of each individual student, regardless of whether the student is a student with a disability.
Conclusion

The education reform policy of NCLB remains a highly debated topic in this country. It is a topic of discussion among educators and policymakers alike. The future of NCLB remains to be seen. However, for the real teachers in real classrooms teaching real students, the impact is felt every day.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the views and perceptions of third grade teachers regarding the participation of students with learning and language disabilities in statewide testing. Certainly within this framework, an increased understanding emerged. The experiences these teachers shared provided insight into the paradigm of the intended and unintended outcomes that have surfaced under NCLB.

As a result of this qualitative study, real teachers in real classrooms were given a voice and a forum through which to tell their story. They have spoken freely and with passion. They have provided rich data that should be considered to inform local, state, and federal policy. This is especially important at a time when educators and policy-makers must come together to reauthorize this reform policy. Perhaps most importantly, teachers who read this study may see themselves in these teachers. Perhaps the words of these teachers will encourage other teachers who are facing the mandates of NCLB in their own classrooms.

The future of NCLB and ultimately the future of the education for students with disabilities remain to be seen. Educational reform policies will continue to provide a foundation for the operation of public schools today. With continued research and input
from the teachers in our nation’s classrooms, we will continue to move toward an educational system designed to meet the needs of all students.
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Olson, L. (2004b, January 8). All means all. Education Week, 23(17), 44-60.


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Ysseldyke, J., Nelson, J. R., Christenson, S., Johnson, D. W., Dennison, A., Triezenberg,
H., et al., (2004). What we know and need to know about the consequences of high-stakes testing for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children, 71*(1), 75-94.

Appendix A:

Summary of Technical Reports
### Technical Reports and Studies Regarding Standards-based Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study or Report</th>
<th>Source and Content of Report</th>
</tr>
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</table>
Reviewed the Maryland School Performance Program (MSPP); School accountability program; performance-based assessment of student achievement and school performance; statewide review; included students with disabilities |
Reviewed the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS); described analyses of KIRIS results for students with disabilities; specific to accommodations; statewide review |
Reviewed Washington Assessment of student Learning (WASL); statewide assessment of student learning and accountability; not specific to students with disabilities |
| Goertz, Duffy & LeFloch (2001) | Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE); University of Pennsylvania  
Examined data from all 50 states; described state assessment and accountability; not specific to students with disabilities |
Technical Reports and Studies Regarding Standards-based Reform (continued).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors</th>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stecher &amp; Chun</td>
<td>National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) University of California, Los Angeles</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Presented a review of the Essential Academic Learning Requirements (EARLs) and Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL); focus on impact on curriculum and instruction; not specific to students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stecher &amp; Borko</td>
<td>National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) University of California, Los Angeles</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Presented a review of the reports from Kentucky and Washington; utilized case study and survey methodology; not specific to students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koretz &amp; Barton</td>
<td>National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) University of California, Los Angeles</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Reviewed status of research on assessment issues regarding students with disabilities; recommended directions for future research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koretz</td>
<td>National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) University of California, Los Angeles</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Technical report regarding the alignment of curriculum and test score inflation; investigated test preparation; not specific to students with disabilities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B:

Summary of Research Studies
### Studies Regarding Standards-based Reform

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Study</th>
<th>Impact regarding students with disabilities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schulte, Villwock, Whichard, &amp; Stallings (2001)</td>
<td>Reviewed the participation of students with disabilities in standards-based reform; five-year study of one district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford, Almond, Tindal &amp; Hollenbeck (2002)</td>
<td>Reviewed the comments of 57 general and special education teachers regarding their perceptions of the inclusion of students with disabilities in large-scale assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defur (2002)</td>
<td>Completed a survey of Virginia special education administrators regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ysseldyke, Nelson, Christensen, Johnson, Dennison, &amp; Triezenberg (2004)</td>
<td>Reviewed the positive and negative consequences of mandated assessment; presented anecdotal and empirical evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harriman (2005)</td>
<td>Interviewed staff members and students regarding NCLB from the perspective of a rural district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crawford &amp; Tindal (2006)</td>
<td>Reviewed responses from special education teachers and principals regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in the Oregon statewide assessment program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kohl, McLaughlin, &amp; Naugle (2006)</td>
<td>Studied 16 states to determine how states utilized alternate assessment for students with significant disabilities</td>
</tr>
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<td>Nagle, Yunker, &amp; Malmgren (2006)</td>
<td>Interviewed personnel from four states and eight school districts on the opportunities and challenges of students with disabilities meeting annual yearly progress.</td>
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Appendix C:

Request for Site Approval
Request for Site Approval

Dear Building Principal:

This is a request for general site approval for the University of Toledo study “Third Grade Teachers’ Views & Perceptions of the Participation of Students with Learning and Language Disabilities in Statewide Testing.” This research is designed to examine the views and perceptions of third-grade teachers regarding the participation of students with disabilities in the Ohio Achievement Test as mandated by NCLB. This will be accomplished through:

1) Interviews – a single one-hour interview is anticipated with your third-grade teacher(s); anticipated time-frame of January, February, or March, in accordance with the availability of the teachers
2) Compilation of Information – all research will be compiled into broad categories
3) Confidentiality – no teacher, building, or district will be identified by name

The goal of this study is to gather research from the teachers who have first-hand knowledge and understanding of this topic. As an educator who has been a general education teacher for 18 years and is now working in the area of special education, I realize the importance and value in gathering information from general education teachers. It is my desire that this study will provide data that will assist all educators in the future. This research is intended to provide a positive contribution to the field of education.

If you are willing to invite your 3rd grade teachers to participate in this research, please fax a letter of approval on your school letterhead to: Ann McVey (fax: **********). Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Respectfully,

Ann McVey
Doctoral Student, University of Toledo
Appendix D:

Informed Consent for Research
ADULT RESEARCH SUBJECT - INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Third Grade Teachers’ Views and Perceptions of the Participation of Students with Learning and Language Disabilities in Statewide Testing

Principal Investigator: Caroline Roettger, Ed.D., Associate Professor (419)530-2461
Ann F. McVey, University of Toledo, (419)823-3164

Purpose: You are invited to participate in the research project entitled, Third Grade Teachers’ Views and Perceptions of the Participation of Students with Learning and Language Disabilities in Statewide Testing, which is being conducted at the University of Toledo under the direction of Dr. Caroline Roettger and Ann McVey. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of teachers’ views and perceptions regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. This understanding will further inform classroom teachers in their daily instructional practices and it will assist educational leaders in creating policy and practice that is built upon the actual input of real teachers in real classrooms. The classroom teacher holds the responsibility to see that all students meet the mandated achievement levels as determined by No Child Left Behind and these teachers need a voice. Future policy and educational practice must consider the views of classroom teachers.

Description of Procedures: This research will take place in public schools in Ohio between the months of November (2007) and June (2008). Your participation will take approximately 1-4 hours and will involve sharing information related to statewide testing through an interview and collection of any documents you wish to share. The interview will consist of open-ended questions and will be conversational in nature. In order to accurately capture the essence of the responses, the interview will be tape recorded. You may stop the interview or choose not to respond to any part of the interview at any time. As a participant in this study, you are free to ask any questions that you may have about the research.

“Permission to record: Will you permit the researcher to audio record during this research procedure?”

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Potential Risks: There are minimal to no risks to participation in this study. The researcher will make every effort to create a comfortable situation. If at any time you feel uncomfortable, please let the researcher know. You may stop the process at any time. It is important for you to know that no identifying information will be shared with anyone. You will be identified only as ‘teacher’. The name of your school district will not
be used. Schools will be referred to only by their classification of urban, suburban, or rural.

**Potential Benefits:** The purpose of this research is to assist educational leaders and teachers in fulfilling the mandated testing requirements for students with disabilities through gathering information directly from teachers and principals. It is hoped that you will benefit through informed decision-making. An additional benefit is that your views and perceptions will be heard and valued as the person with first-hand information regarding the participation of students with disabilities in statewide testing. Other educational leaders and teachers may benefit by learning about the results of this research.

**Confidentiality:** The researchers will make every effort to prevent anyone who is not on the research team from knowing that you provided this information, or what that information is. The consent forms with signatures will be kept separate and in a secure location. Your interview responses will not include names and will be presented to others only when combined with other responses. Although we will make every effort to protect your confidentiality, there is a low risk that this might be breached.

**Voluntary Participation:** Your refusal to participate in this study will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled and will not affect your relationship with The University of Toledo or your school system. In addition, you may discontinue participation at any time without any penalty or loss of benefits.

**Contact Information:** Before you decide to accept this invitation to take part in this study, you may ask any questions that you might have. If you have any questions at any time before, during or after your participation, you should contact a member of the research team: Dr. Caroline Roettger, University of Toledo, (419)530-2461, or Ann McVey, University of Toledo, (419)823-3164. If you have questions beyond those answered by the research team or your rights as a research subject or research-related injuries, please feel free to contact the Chairperson of the SBE Institutional Review Board, Dr. Barbara Chesney, in the Office of Research on the main campus at (419) 530-2844.

Before you sign this form, please ask any questions on any aspect of this study that is unclear to you. You may take as much time as necessary to think it over.

**SIGNATURE SECTION – Please read carefully**

You are making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above, you have had all your questions answered, and you have decided to take part in this research. The date you sign this document to enroll in this study, that is, today’s date must fall between the dates indicated at the bottom of the page.

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<th>Name of Subject (please print)</th>
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<th>Name of Person Obtaining Consent</th>
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THE UNIVERSITY OF TOLEDO
SOCIAL, BEHAVIORAL & EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

The research project described in this consent form and the form itself have been reviewed and approved by the University of Toledo Social, Behavioral & Educational Review Board (SBE IRB) for the period of time specified below.

SBE IRB #: 105848    Approved Number of Subjects: 15
Project Start Date: 1/8/08    Project Expiration Date: 1/7/09
Appendix E:

Interview Protocol
Interview Protocol

1. NCLB is an educational reform policy that has impacted everyone in education. What is your general impression of NCLB?

2. On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being very little and 5 being a lot, how would you rate your overall understanding of NCLB? Are you satisfied with this level of understanding?

3. Think about the students with disabilities in your classroom who have taken the third grade achievement test. Tell me about some of the testing experiences of these students. Please do not use the name of the student.

4. You’ve shared an experience that was positive for a student with a disability. Tell me about an experience for a student with learning or language disabilities that was not so positive.

Or:

You’ve shared an experience that was negative for a student with a disability. Tell me about an experience for a student with learning or language disabilities that was more positive.

5. What do you think about requiring students with disabilities to reach a level of proficiency that is the same as students without disabilities? How has this requirement impacted the level of achievement of students with disabilities?

6. The testing and accountability requirements of NCLB have resulted in changes in education. How has NCLB changed you as a teacher?

7. When you think about students with disabilities and the high accountability and performance requirements of NCLB, how has this impacted your view of special education?

8. In order to carry out the mandates of NCLB, what do you need most from your principal?

9. You’ve talked about what you need from your principal. What do you need from these people? special needs teacher; special education director/ supervisor; curriculum director; superintendent

10. Is there anything you would like to add that we haven’t talked about?