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ATTITUDES ABOUT INCLUSIVITY AMONG PRESERVICE EDUCATORS:

A MIXED METHODS APPROACH

A Dissertation Submitted to Molloy University
The School of Education and Human Services
Education Doctorate

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

by

KATHLEEN M. QUINN
Dr. Mubina Schroeder, Dissertation Chairperson

DECEMBER 2023

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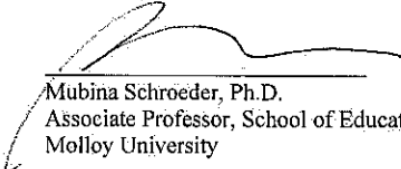
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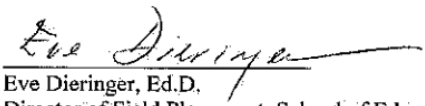


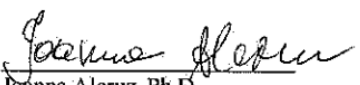
**MOLLOY
UNIVERSITY**


SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) became the first enacted policy that led the fight against ableism, providing students with disabilities the right to public education. In 2004, this policy became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), which included these major components supporting the policy of inclusion: *Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)*, *Individual Education Plans (IEP)*, and *Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)*. This study highlights how teacher preparation programs are pivotal in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. The data for this study was collected and analyzed based on quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews with preservice teachers at Preparatory University (pseudonym). The findings of this study confirmed that teacher preparation programs impact preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. However, there remains a significant gap in the components of the specific aspects of the curriculum that affected preservice teachers' attitudes. The broad understanding of inclusion captured by preservice teachers demonstrated barriers to inclusive attitudes, but there needs to be more understanding of inclusion from a social justice lens.

Further, preservice teachers in this study support inclusion and have inclusive attitudes. However, there were significant implications of concerns on implementation and feasibility of inclusion within the confines of the educational system. These findings indicate the need for more inclusive educational resources within our teacher preparation programs, redesigning the pedagogical core, and restructuring the educational system to support inclusion and the fight against ableism.

Dedicated in memory of my sister Mary.

Your strength, sass, and unconditional love
continue to make an inclusive “mark” on the lives of so many.

I love and miss you endlessly.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“INCLUSION IS NOT SIMPLY ABOUT PHYSICAL PROXIMITY. IT IS ABOUT INTENTIONALLY PLANNING FOR THE SUCCESS OF ALL STUDENTS.”

-NATIONAL INCLUSION PROJECT

According to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics' annual 2020-2021 report, approximately 7.2 million students with disabilities received special education services between the ages of 3 and 21 under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The number of students with disabilities has grown from 6.4 million, or 13% of all students in 2010-11, to almost 7.2 million, or 14.5% in 2020-21. With the growing number of students with disabilities in the educational system, many teachers report they do not feel prepared to teach this population. Silva and Morgado (2004) emphasized that teacher preparation and training impact on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Inclusion is “an educational practice based on a notion of social justice that advocates access to equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of the presence of a disability. Inclusion involves students with disabilities learning with their peers in regular schools that adapt and change how they work to meet the needs of all students” (Hamid et al., 2015, p.140). The growing number of students with disabilities suggests an increased awareness of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion is necessary. How we can meet these students' needs depends on the degree to which teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are fostered (O'Toole & Burke, 2013).

Research has emphasized that general education teachers usually have less favorable attitudes toward inclusion than their special education teacher colleagues. If teachers continue to criticize inadequate training on inclusive education (Ashman, 2009), it is essential to consider the mission statement, learning outcomes, and the structure of inclusive education in preservice teacher preparation programs (Ashman, 2009). Since teachers' attitudes can influence the climate of classrooms, it is vital

to investigate the effect preservice teachers' preparation programs have on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Woodcock et al., 2012). Kelly et al. (2014) believe that implementing inclusive teaching has to overcome many obstacles, but of one the most critical components remains to be the lack of teacher training for inclusion. Further, Sze (2009) found preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were a significant predictor of the future implementation of inclusive practices.

Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that the best time to increase positive attitudes toward inclusion is during preservice teacher training. Furthermore, they demonstrated that preservice teachers who completed modules on effective inclusion pedagogy and practices had significantly more positive attitudes toward inclusion than those who did not. According to Murdaca et al. (2018), successful inclusion requires planful adaptations to the curriculum, increased focus on authentic assessment techniques, and expanded opportunities to practice effective pedagogy. Boyle et al. (2011) stated, "It must be remembered that the commitment to inclusion begins with each educator"; therefore, preservice teacher preparation programs must provide opportunities to learn and practice curriculum adaptations, authentic assessment, and effective pedagogy (p. 77).

Problem Statement

Many studies indicate the advantages of inclusive education on students' cognitive and social development. Magyar et al. (2020) emphasized that all learners increased social, emotional, and behavioral development in an inclusive environment. Inclusion requires successful implementation, and teachers' attitudes play a significant role in fostering inclusive education (De Boer et al., 2011). The recent focus on the importance of preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion has been due to the impact of teachers' attitudes on the successful implementation of inclusion (Odongo & Davidson, 2016; Secer, 2010). While IDEA (2004) does not use the word inclusion, it does, however, state that "to the maximum extent appropriate, school districts must educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports" along with their typical peers. It does not consider how

preservice teachers' attitudes affect inclusion. Currently, IDEA does not use the term "inclusion," but the law contains one of the most critical components, including determining the child's least restrictive environment (LRE). Inclusive education is a reform that supports diversity among all children and as a principle that defines *education* as a fundamental human right, thus creating a foundation for a more just and equal society (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). For inclusion to be successful, it must first be accepted and understood by the educators who will put it into practice within the educational system.

The drive towards inclusion requires critical restructuring of educational policies and practices to allow students to integrate into mainstream settings through reorganization and innovation (Ware, 1995). Past surveys of teachers and students who had the opportunity to participate in inclusive practices, such as co-teaching, reported favorable attitudes toward inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Preservice teachers exposed to modules on inclusive education practices have more positive attitudes toward inclusion, specifically special education training and modules (Varoce & Boyle, 2014). To begin changing teachers' attitudes toward ability and disability, inclusion should be taught, modeled and practiced by preservice teachers.

The studies cited above demonstrate the importance of teachers' attitudes toward the successful implementation of inclusive education. The study is critical as it could reveal potential gaps in preservice teacher education programs and preservice teachers' understanding and attitudes toward inclusive education prior to employment. Since performance mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act of 2004 have demanded ever-greater access to the general education curriculum and environment for all students, the topic of inclusive education continues to grow across preservice teacher programs including at Preparatory University (pseudonym). However, it needs to receive adequate attention on the effects of teacher preparation programs on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This study adds to the growth of knowledge for further development and education on inclusive education.

Theoretical Framework

Critical disability theory (CDT) and sociocultural learning theory served as this study's anchor. The focus of this study was to identify and examine policies and practices related to how teacher preparation programs frame disability and segregation versus ability and inclusion to our preservice teachers through promoting inclusive assumptions, therefore challenging ableist assumptions. Critical disability theory offers a framework to challenge normative discourses on inclusive practices in preservice teacher education programs. To understand inclusive education, CDT affords preservice teachers opportunities to explore and analyze the marginalization and exclusion of students with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2016). Considering how CDT "detects, understands and dismantles exclusion as it presents itself in education" (Slee, 2013, p. 905), this theoretical framework supported my research to more deeply understand how teacher preparation programs affect preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This research critically examined how preservice teachers can view inclusive practices through a CDT lens. I used the critical disability study framework to identify preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion by employing Goodley's (2013) analysis, "through which to think through, act, resist, relate, communicate, engage with one another against the hybridized forms of oppression and discrimination that so often do not speak singularly of disability" (p. 641).

To reinforce the concepts and to understand the impact of preservice teachers' attitudes and the effects of inclusion on individuals learning development, this study used the importance of the zone of proximity based on Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory (Gindis, 1995). This study examined preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion using the sociocultural learning theory, which argues that "knowledge and interactions are constructed through social interactions with family, friends, teachers, and peers" (Bates, 2019, p. 19). This framework considered and emphasized the importance of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion by "focusing on the causal relationship between social interaction and individual cognitive development" (Leonard, 2022, p. 178).

Purpose of the Study

This study's purpose was to examine preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion based on their progression through a teacher preparation program. For inclusion to be successful, there must be an understanding by teacher preparation programs of preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs. This study aimed to identify the impact of teacher preparation programs on preservice teachers' inclusive attitudes, thus supporting proactive change to better support inclusive education through reorganization and innovation. Examining if there is a difference in preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion from novice year to graduating year may help clarify how preservice teachers' attitudes are affected by teacher preparation programs. Kantavong et al. (2012) reviewed teacher preparation programs across 16 institutions and found inconsistencies in the programs and topics of inclusion. This study expanded on previous research identifying how preservice teachers attitudes are affected by their preparation program. I specifically honed in on Preparatory University with the expectation that surveying both novice and graduating preservice teachers provides valuable data to the University on how teacher preparation programs impacts preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions through a mixed methods explanatory sequential design.

Overarching RQ: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion?

Quantitative:

RQ1: Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on:

- a. Participants' level of coursework

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

b. Extent of participants interactions working with a person with a disability

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants interactions working with a person with a disability.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants interactions working with a person with a disability.

c. Participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

RQ2: Do first-year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes toward inclusive education?

H₀: There is no difference in teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

H₁: There is a significant difference in teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

Qualitative:

- How do preservice teachers understand and define inclusion?
- How do preservice teachers perceive their teacher program preparation for working with special education students?

Integrative Question:

- To what extent and in what ways do qualitative interviews with novice and graduating preservice teachers contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the differences in their attitudes toward inclusion?

Research Design and Methods

A mixed method design was used, including a quantitative component, to make a statistical inference between new and graduating preservice teacher participants' attitudes toward inclusion, using the TATIS-A. A cross-sectional survey design allowed me to investigate novice and graduate preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through quantitative components. A cross-sectional survey design allowed me to collect data from many different participants at a single point in time, observing the variables without influencing them. A qualitative component of interviews enriched the data through four participants' experiences. A mixed method explanatory sequential design was an advantage for the straightforwardness of the TATIS-A and opportunities for exploring the quantitative results in more detail through interviews. This study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the differences among the participants in their attitudes toward inclusive education based on (a) their level of schooling, (b) the extent of their interactions with a person with a disability, and (c) teaching experience of children with disabilities.

This study occurred at a small, suburban private university in Nassau County, New York. I used the pseudonym Preparatory University for confidentiality purposes. Preparatory University offered undergraduate, dual-degree, and graduate programs in education. Preservice teachers receive a liberal arts foundation as well as national, state, and institutional learning and teaching standards. All programs were pursuant to §52.21 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, continuously accredited to meet the New York State requirements. Teaching certifications offered to preservice teachers in the

undergraduate program included Childhood Education, Childhood/Early Childhood Education, Childhood/Special Education, Adolescence Education, Adolescence/Special Education, Music Education (Pre-K-12), and Visual Arts Education. Dual-degree programs were offered in childhood/special education or adolescence/special education, allowing preservice teachers to earn a bachelor's and master's degree in an accelerated five years. Teaching certifications offered in the graduate program, including early childhood/childhood education, special education, TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and adolescence education. Preservice teachers have access to small class settings and a variety of field experiences, being placed according to the degree(s) they are pursuing. Further, the following dispositions excerpted from "The Guidelines for Student Teaching Seminars" at Preparatory University also reflect an inclusive mindset:

- Believes all children can learn.
- Embodies a mindset that embraces diversity of identity, thought, and experience.
- Advocates and supports implementation of social justice practices that ensure equitable education experiences for all students.
- Engages in reflective practice that incorporates research, assessment, and a comprehensive understanding that is able to meet the needs of diverse learners.

The goal of the Division of Education is to "develop your competency in content knowledge, preparation, instructional delivery, classroom management, student development and assessment, collaboration, and reflective and responsive practice" (Preparatory University, n.d.).

I used purposeful sampling was used to survey all eligible participants. All students enrolled in the education major related-courses were invited to participate in the study. There were 93 novice preservice teachers and 67 graduating preservice teachers currently enrolled in Preparatory Universities program. Based on the population size, my sample size of novice preservice teachers was 76 and

graduating preservice teachers 58. To minimize bias, all surveys were anonymous. I used Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool to construct and distribute the Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted (TATIS-A; Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Participants responded to 21 questions assessing their attitudes toward inclusion. A six-point Likert scale was used as the measure of response, “Strongly Agree,” scored as six, to “Strongly Disagree,” which is scored as one. Data were inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for analysis of the survey data. Using SPSS, I analyzed descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and ranks. Upon completion of the survey students were able to opt to be interviewed for 15-30 minutes interviews via Zoom. During the interview students were asked the meaning of “inclusion,” to describe their background and interest in education, and how they feel the program has prepared them to teach a diverse range of students. For qualitative and integrative questions, data from audiotaped and transcribed discussions were analyzed to explore patterns and themes among preservice teachers' experiences. The transcriptions were checked for significant errors or omissions. Once transcriptions were checked for accuracy, I used Dedoose software to organize and code the transcriptions based on common categories and themes identified throughout the interview phase.

Limitations

Several limitations were identified that may affect the generalizability of this study. The first limitation is that using different participants based on the year of schooling does not allow for comparing the same individual's attitudes pre/post-program. Next, the sample size is specific to one university on Long Island, which can limit the geographical contexts. The third limitation, using a self-reporting scale, relied on the honesty and accuracy of the respondents. Another limitation is that this study does not go in-depth to identify what specific courses or years of schooling effects preservice attitudes toward inclusion. The qualitative component only looks at a small group of participants'

experience in the program in which there is a limitation of the generalizability of components of the course that affect preservice teachers' attitudes.

Summary

Throughout the literature, it is apparent that teachers' attitudes are prerequisites to successfully implementing inclusive practices (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). While research has shown how inclusive education impacts the learning environment, it is essential to consider how teachers' attitudes toward inclusion support the success of inclusive education. Therefore, we must analyze the effectiveness of teacher preparation programs to foster positive attitudes toward inclusion. Murdaca et al. (2018), emphasized inclusion involves a number of changes in the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment techniques. Investigating if there is a difference in attitudes toward inclusion based on the year of study will help Preparatory University determine if more emphasis on inclusive education should be embedded in the curriculum. Haim Ginnot stated,

I've come to a frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my personal approach that creates the climate. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or dehumanized (1972, p. 15).

Preparatory University preservice teachers can create inclusive climates, but first, we must determine if they are being given the tools to understand inclusion.

Definitions of Key Terms

Ableism or disability oppression is a term used to describe the all-encompassing system of discrimination and exclusion of people living with disabilities." (Castañeda et al., 2013, p. 466)

Critical disability theory is built upon the argument that "disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a

question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to” (Devlin & Pothier, 2006.)

Disability is defined as a “functional delay: a significant delay or disorder in one or more functional areas related to cognitive, language and communicative, adaptive, socio-emotional or motor development which adversely affects the student’s ability to learn; or a specific disability classification of autism, deafness, deaf/blindness, hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, other health-impaired, traumatic brain injury or visual impairment including blindness” (Regulations of the Commissioner of Education, 2021).

Inclusion is defined as “an educational practice based on a notion of social justice that advocates access to equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of the presence of a disability. Inclusion involves students with disabilities learning with their peers in regular schools that adapt and change the way they work in order to meet the needs of all students” (Hamid et al., 2015, p.140).

Inclusive Learning Communities is defined as educational settings in which students with disabilities have opportunities to participate and receive support in all aspects of school life alongside neurotypical peers.

Preservice teacher is defined as an individual who is enrolled as an education major and is completing college coursework to graduate and become a teacher.

Preservice teacher's attitudes is defined as the personal assumptions, feelings, truths, and biases, preservice teachers have about inclusive practices and pedagogy for students with disabilities.

Sociocultural Learning Theory is built upon the *belief that children learn from their classroom culture and that teachers’ and peers’ attitudes influence and promote inclusive education.*

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Congress passed The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, PL 94.142 (EHA) in 1975. When Congress reauthorized this act in 1990, its name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and remained IDEA through additional reauthorizations in 1997 and 2004. Two critical mandates that evolved from the above legislative acts were that all students classified with an educational disability were entitled to a *Free and Appropriate Public Education* (FAPE) in the *Least Restrictive Environment* (LRE). FAPE and LRE gradually moved instruction for individuals with disabilities from special schools (where all students had disabilities) to local public schools and eventually from self-contained classes (where all students have a special education classification) in the local schools to integrated classrooms (where classified students share a learning environment with their non-classified peers). The colloquial term used for these integrated classes is *Inclusion*.

Inclusive classes change schools by increasing all students' participation in the culture and curricula of schools, thereby minimizing exclusion (Booth, 1996; Varcoe & Boyle, 2014). Ainscow (1999) indicated that inclusion depends on continuous organizational and pedagogic development within mainstream settings. Haq and Mundia's (2012) analysis of teachers' training and instructional skill development further supported this concept. Increased legislative mandates for inclusive education continue to place demands on the restrictions and barriers in our education systems. Although some positive changes have occurred over the past 30 years, including increased awareness and advocacy for inclusive education, our education systems still have restrictions and barriers (UNICEF, 2007). According to the New York State Department of Education as of October 2022, there are 484,147 thousand students receiving special education services in New York State. Further the National Council on Disability (NCD) conducted a report in 2018 outlining *The Segregation of Students with Disabilities*. New York was considered one of the top four states to have the highest rates of placing students in

separate classes. It is clear that segregation still exists, through the most current report conducted by the NCD in 2018, in New York State only 57.98% of all students are inside the regular class 80% or more of the day, concluding that 42.02% of students still experience segregation in some capacity throughout the day from typical peers. Bunar and Sernhede (2013) referred to segregation as a teacher's tendency to view the objectives of education as 'private goods' rather than public goods'. There is an abundance of research on the academic and social benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities (Baker et al., 1995; Falvey et al., 1995; Mavropoulou & Sideridis, 2014) Within this research, many believe the primary purpose of education should be to foster a more equitable and inclusive society and culture through equity and equality in education for all students (Florian & Kershner, 2009; Naraian, 2011) Although the research on the benefits of inclusive education is evident there is little empirical research on preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusive education and how they may serve as barriers or facilitators to inclusion.

For inclusion to be successful, it must first be accepted and understood by the educators who will put it into practice within our educational system. The National Department of Education's (2002) concept of the implementation details, "Inclusive education is about the whole education system from the national, provincial and district offices of the Department of Education, to individual schools and their communities, and to individual teachers and learners" (p. 4). Therefore, it is crucial to consider preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education and the impact classroom teachers have on implementing effective inclusive education practices.

According to McRuer (2006), disability is an ideological notion that positions people with disabilities as inferior to able-bodied people. Such ableism influences how teachers think about including students with disabilities in schools and classrooms. Inclusion should be taught, modeled, and practiced daily to begin changing teachers' attitudes toward ability and disability. Using the critical disability theorists work to analyze teacher preparation programs and gain an understanding of

preservice teacher attitudes on inclusion and how different models of teacher education may influence teacher attitudes, policymakers and teacher educators can begin to implement proactive changes to better support inclusive education through reorganization and innovation of teacher preparation programs. This literature review explores various models of teacher education for inclusion and how they impact preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Critical disability theory and sociocultural learning theory informed my analysis of the literature. In the following sections, I discuss theoretical frameworks that I identified to limit the scope of the literature review. Next, I discuss how data were collected and categorized into themes. Finally, the themes were analyzed and synthesized to discuss the literature on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and where limitations and future research will lead. This study was necessary to bridge such gaps and understand the effects of inclusive curricula on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion to prepare educators better to be responsive to the increase in diversity in schools and classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

Critical Disability Theory

I used CDT in this as the lens to examine and challenge ableist assumptions that shape the structural inequities within society and teacher preparation programs on inclusion. The CDT offers a framework “through which to think through, act, resist, relate, communicate, engage with one another against the hybridized forms of oppression and discrimination that often do not speak singularly of disability” (Goodley, 2013, p. 641). Preservice teachers need to be prepared to understand and evaluate what disabilities are and how teachers foster the inclusion of individuals within their classrooms (Watson, 2017). Teacher education programs might employ the work of critical disability theorists to positively influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion by expanding their awareness of effective, innovative, and inclusive pedagogy. Further, we must highlight and analyze the philosophy and practices of inclusion in teacher preparation programs to discuss and educate preservice teachers on

the history, politics, and economics of education and disability (Sapon-Shevin, 1989). Teacher preparation programs must emphasize the CDT lens to analyze preservice teachers' attitudes by discussing ableism and the politics and power that influence creating an inclusive environment (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). The notion of preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion in CDT goes beyond pedagogy. As Sapon-Shevin (2003) wrote, "Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice. Inclusion demands that we ask, 'What kind of world do we want to create and how should we educate students for that world'" (p. 26). This research used the lens of CDT to focus on analyzing the influences on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, ensuring we are challenging ableist assumptions in our preservice teachers' preparation programs.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

Inclusive education is a reform that supports diversity among all children. As a principle, inclusion defines education as a fundamental human right, thus creating a foundation for a more just and equitable society (Ainscow & Sandill, 2010). According to Vygotsky, social interactions among people in the social context leads to enhanced levels of knowledge and a complete transformation of their thoughts and behaviors (Mahn, 1999). Vygotsky looks at inclusion, highlighting that segregation and exclusion are social justice issues. Considering Vygotsky's philosophy that the path of development diverges from normal social development, the exclusion of students because of disability can lead to socially depriving children with disabilities. This can lead to the emergence of delays and deficiencies, known as secondary handicapping conditions and inadequate compensatory ways of coping (Gindis, 1999). For preservice teachers to understand inclusion, they must understand how exclusion is detrimental to all learners. This study explored how preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are affected by working with a person with a disability or having a family member with a disability. Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory suggests the importance of identifying preservice teachers' zone of proximal development as pivotal in their learning on inclusion and, therefore, their attitudes

toward inclusion. Using the sociocultural learning theory, this study explored preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, ensuring the understanding that segregation and mindless inclusion are social justice issues. This study focused on how the proximal development of preservice teachers' experience with individuals with disabilities affects teacher attitudes through their interactions with students with developmental disabilities.

Literature Review Methodology

I conducted a literature review to summarize and synthesize findings across the literature. Given the complexity of inclusive education and preservice teacher preparation programs, I used the following keywords to identify applicable studies: *preservice education training and/or experience, preservice special education preparation programs, preservice teacher preparation programs, Critical disability theory, Inclusive education, preservice teacher attitudes and inclusion, inclusion and preservice teacher beliefs, preservice educator and inclusion, Sociocultural learning theory and inclusion, and Sociocultural learning theory and special education*. I conducted a keyword-focused search using the following databases: EBSCO, SAGE, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. I used a rigorous selection and review of articles and books to analyze quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies. A universally used definition of inclusion and inclusive education was missing across the literature.

I developed criteria for inclusion and exclusion of studies to narrow the scope of my analysis. I limited the scope of the review to literature pertaining to inclusive education related to students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The inclusion of studies specifically pertaining to preservice teachers' attitudes and the type of preparation programs allowed me to narrow the scope and exclude studies on teacher attitudes not related to preparation programs. A literature map was developed to identify related themes across texts. Themes in the literature were further synthesized and organized into the following categories: Inclusive Education, Preservice Teacher Curricula, Preservice Teacher

Attitudes towards Inclusion, and Effects of Teacher Preparation Programs on Teacher Attitudes toward Inclusion.

Organization of Literature Review

According to Pugach et al. (2014), many institutions have started a dialogue to restructure professional programs to prepare educators for special education. Federal policy has also played a significant role in influencing and initiating the reconceptualization of teacher education for inclusion (Kleinhammer-Tramill, 2003). However, a lack of action remains in creating new, innovative programs to prepare preservice teachers for inclusion. According to Blad (2017), “That’s because many teacher preparation programs don’t provide enough training on how to identify the skills students need to be successful, and how to teach those skills, they say” (p. 10). Further, McLeskey et al. (1998) found, “critical need for appropriate training in inclusive teaching is underscored by the increasing frequency with which students with disabilities have been included, or placed in general education classrooms, in recent years” (p. 9). Additional courses and course components in special education can improve the instructional skills of preservice teachers and, therefore, can improve preservice teachers’ attitudes. Requiring coursework in inclusive pedagogy and practices can positively impact their attitudes on inclusion (Hodge, 1998). At Preparatory University, inclusive pedagogy is emphasized through a multi-dimensional curriculum that trains preservice teachers to meet the needs of every child through cutting-edge strategies designed for learners in diverse, inclusive classrooms. Darling-Hammond and Bransford (2005) shared that “[r]esearch suggests that several elements make a difference in the design of a teacher education program, including: the content, the learning process, and the learning context” (p. 394).

Cook (2002) highlighted that with increased awareness of inclusion, general education teachers would benefit from an infused curriculum on inclusion. Further, Cook (2002) illustrated that preservice teachers’ attitudes include greater strengths and fewer weaknesses regarding inclusive instruction as

more knowledge acquisition on inclusion exists in their programs. In the following sections of this chapter, I reviewed selected literature related to my study, including research on how preservice teacher education programs affect preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. My examination of the literature begins with a discussion about inclusion and what inclusive education is. Next, I described how different types of preservice teacher education programs address inclusion. Finally, I examined the literature about how such programs impact preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to understand how preservice teachers view inclusive education based on their preservice teacher education program and curriculum.

This study aims to answer the following questions through a mixed methods explanatory sequential design.

Overarching RQ: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion?

Quantitative:

RQ1: Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on:

- a. Participants level of coursework

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

- b. The extent of participants interactions working with a person with a disability

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions while working with a person with a disability.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions while working with a person with a disability.

c. Participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member

H_0 : There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of the participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

RQ2: Do first-year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes toward inclusive education?

H_0 : There is no difference in teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

H_1 : There is a significant difference in teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

Qualitative:

- How do preservice teachers understand and define inclusion?
- How do preservice teachers perceive their teacher program preparation for working with special education students?

Integrative Question:

- To what extent and in what ways do qualitative interviews with novice and graduating preservice teachers contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the differences in their attitudes toward inclusion?

Inclusive Learning Communities

The review of the literature identified the range of perceptions and attitudes on how to define inclusive education. It has been 48 years since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA)

stated all students with disabilities are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. It has also been 48 years since this requirement was within the LRE, highlighting the increase in research on the best practices to educate individuals with disabilities. From segregated settings in the 1970s to current times, there is an increased emphasis on the philosophy of inclusion. The focus of this study was to determine the impact of preservice teachers' education programs on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education.

To have a historical context, Schwartz (2005) stated, "Inclusion is not serving students with disabilities in separate schools or exclusively in self-contained classes, based solely upon their categorical label" (p. 11). Many misconceptions surround inclusive practices. Schwartz (2005) discussed the key identifying aspects of what inclusion is and is not. She highlighted the critical historical treatment of individuals with disabilities, including using *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)* as the basis for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in schools by concluding separate education as unlawful. According to Castaneda et al. (2013), the oppression of individuals with disabilities by discrimination and exclusion is known as ableism. Furthermore, the authors discussed the critical societal components that discount individuals who do not meet specific standards, thus furthering the gap by creating stigmas and exclusion. Based on Schwartz's work, educators must continue to define inclusion and strengthen the parameters of what inclusion is.

Segregation of students with disabilities exists in many contexts, despite IDEA and research showing that special education students educated in general education classes had higher performance rates than their peers educated in segregated settings (Baker et al., 1995). In fact, several studies have shown that students without disabilities make more significant greater progress when taught in an inclusive setting with students with disabilities, thereby promoting the benefits of inclusion for all pupils (Cole et al., 2004; Cosier et al., 2013). To build on the benefits of inclusion, Falvey et al. (1995) stated:

Inclusive education is about embracing all, making a commitment to do whatever it takes to provide each student in the community- and each citizen in a democracy- an inalienable right to belong, not to be excluded. Inclusion assumes that living and learning together is a better way that benefits everyone, not just children who are labeled as having a difference. (p. 8)

In education, there should be a commitment to respect the rights of all students by ensuring the inclusion of each student. Cosier et al. (2013) noted that there are beneficial aspects for all students in inclusive models. The authors emphasized that neurotypical students benefit from social and academic engagement with neuro-diverse learners. Furthermore, it is the responsibility of the educators to ensure the inclusion of every student in the practice enriches the learning environment. Mavropoulou and Sideridis (2014) discussed that inclusive environments promote more interaction opportunities for students with and without a disability. Thus, these environments have increased social benefits specific to a neurotypical peer. Falvey et al.'s (2004) work urged researchers and educators to consider the benefits of inclusive settings for not only individuals with disabilities but also for neurotypical peers.

Inclusion is more than a program and modifications; it is a way of living together in which everyone benefits and is a valued member in their own community. Hegarty (2003) reflected,

Inclusion should not be equated with integration, nor should it be understood as a mere supplement to the existing school structure; instead, it should be seen as a process of changing society, the environment and institutions, which need to consider and value diversity more (p.35).

The literature on inclusive education varies as inclusive education requires a fundamental paradigm shift in education. Slee (2005) found that it is a “social justice movement against structural, cultural and educational exclusion of students who are marginalized and ‘different’” (p.27). To shift the paradigm, we must begin to think of inclusive education as more than access to a general education setting. Considering what exclusion is for students with disabilities, this is much greater than unequal

access (Slee, 2011). We need preservice teachers to enter their chosen profession with the attitude that,

In some countries, inclusive education is thought of as an approach to serving children with disabilities within general education settings. Internationally, however, it is increasingly seen more broadly as a reform that supports and welcomes diversity amongst all learners (Ainscow & Cesar, 2006, p. 231).

McLeskey and Waldron (2001) emphasized the components and barriers in creating an inclusive educational system. In this section, I discuss how we can support preservice teachers' attitudes to foster inclusive education. To create inclusive classrooms, we must begin to look at the curriculum development within our schools. The overall goal of inclusion is planning instruction to meet each student's individual needs within the general education environment (Hallahan et al., 2009). Inclusive education considers the accommodations within the LRE to support the student, including adapting expectations of the curriculum to support every learner individually (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). By shifting an inclusive paradigm's focus onto the educational system's structural context, we can encourage inclusive environments and joint endeavors to end discrimination (CSIE, 2002). The role of educators in the educational system should be modeled and reinforced to practice inclusion through their instructions and practices. For educators to successfully practice inclusion, they must learn about inclusive education in their teacher preparation programs. According to Nishimura and Busse (2016), preservice teachers often have a negative view of inclusion as they lack the awareness and training needed to teach students with disabilities. It is vital that we look at how we prepare our preservice teachers because for an inclusive education program to be effective, teachers must have a positive attitude of inclusion (Stites et al., 2018).

Odom and Diamond (1998) stated, "The single commonality across definitions of inclusion is that children with and without disabilities are placed in the same setting" (p. 6). Inclusion is placing

children with disabilities in the same setting as their typical peers. Odom and Diamond (1998) described different definitions of inclusion and rationales for inclusive classrooms. With the growing research on inclusion, including definitions, philosophy, practice, and pedagogy, preservice teachers have exposure to inclusive curricula throughout their preparation program.

Promoting inclusion first requires looking at inclusive education as a social justice issue. Further, “There is surprisingly minimal literature suggesting a connection between leadership for social justice and inclusive schooling” (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008, p. 231). The lack of literature on inclusive education and social justice leadership creates the question of whether there is a connection. Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) discussed critical aspects surrounding the minimal theoretical and practical literature on leadership preparation for inclusive educational systems. The authors analyzed critical dispositions for inclusive leadership within the education system. Sapon-Shevin (2003) highlighted the challenge in separating social justice and inclusive schooling. Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) provided concrete examples and scenarios to encourage critical thinking surrounding teaching and leadership for all students. Although there is some literature on social justice and inclusive education, according to Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008), the lack of literature prompts the basis that researchers should continue to explore the connection of these pertinent topics related to inclusive education. Inclusive education is a social justice issue that requires attention at the preservice level. To create equitable schools, we need a baseline of preservice teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education.

Further, strengthening and expanding inclusive education requires effective collaboration between educators, but it largely depends on teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion. Exploring preservice teachers’ attitudes through how we prepare preservice teachers on inclusion is crucial to expanding inclusive education (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Understanding and analyzing inclusive education includes identifying the effects of preservice teachers’ preparation programs on teacher attitudes toward inclusion and how they may serve as barriers or facilitators to effective inclusion classrooms.

Preservice Teacher Curricula

In fostering inclusive education, we must consider the role that teachers play in fostering an inclusive environment for all learners. First, we must consider the critical role that educational programs play in preparing teachers to foster inclusive education. Rouse (2010) stated that “there have to be changes in the ways inclusion is conceptualized and a realization that it can only be achieved if all teachers are supported in the development of all aspects of knowing, doing, and believing” (p. 51). For the purpose of this study, it was necessary that I looked at how universities support teacher in their programs in terms of inclusive education. Teacher preparation programs need to begin to adapt to the rise in inclusive education. “Effective teacher preparation programs are based on a careful analysis of the performance competencies needed for new teachers to improve student performance” (Blanton et al., 2003).

Inherently, teacher preparation programs are the pathway to providing teachers with the skills and knowledge to promote and foster inclusive educational practices. To further understand teacher preparation programs, Allday et al. (2013) examined 109 elementary education bachelor’s degree programs to analyze the number of courses devoted to inclusion. The results of the study demonstrated that teacher preparation programs focus on disability characteristics with a brief emphasis on classroom management. Very few programs emphasize teaching and collaboration on inclusive practices, specifically the differentiation of curriculum (Allday et al., 2013). However, there is a shift toward including and emphasizing differentiation of instruction which is evident in Preparatory University’s lesson plan. Across the literature, scholars suggest that traditional teacher preparation programs consist of coursework and teaching practice. However, there is limited research on where in preservice teacher preparation programs inclusive policies are introduced and how the program inclusive practices are reinforced (Blanton et al., 2003; Allday et al., 2013). For inclusion to be successful, the curricula must employ all students’ participation. Forlin (2001) argued that learning and participating in inclusive

practices is inadequate in teacher preparation programs, specifically the lack of programs embedding working with students with special needs in inclusive environments in their curricula through field placement. Curricula embodies the content of the curriculum taught in the classroom as well as practiced through field placements. Although all students at Preparatory University access clear dispositions that reflect the preservice teachers understanding of inclusion, not all students experience working in an inclusive environment.

Some literature suggests that teachers who receive training on inclusion still receive an education that “is informal and unplanned, as teachers learn through experience with and from colleagues, students, and others, in settings that may be both literally and metaphorically far removed from lecture rooms or classrooms” (Booth et al., 2003, p. 3). However, across the literature, there is a range of models to prepare preservice teachers for inclusive education. Hardman (2009) observed that teacher education programs in the United States are ambiguous regarding inclusion. Across researched literature, preservice teacher education programs in the United States emphasize teacher preparation separated into different instructional levels and content area and learners are grounded by diversity. Preparing teachers based on the above further focuses on knowledge and skills specific to each category without any collaborative approach to teaching skills or tools for effective differentiation based on the learner’s need (Hardman, 2009). Special education is not a place; it is a service in which the sector of inclusion which requires exposure to inclusive education across all preservice teachers in teacher preparation programs.

Scholars’ criticism of teacher education programs states that a body of literature provides preservice teachers with the skills needed to work with children in special education and the initial training in teacher preparation programs does not adequately cover the curricula (Hodkinson, 2005). Furthermore, scholars discussed the benefits of improving preservice teacher education programs so that

programs prepare teachers to teach all students because inclusion is not only for students with special needs (Slee, 2001).

Preservice Teacher Attitudes towards Inclusion

A growing body of literature states preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion directly impact teachers' ability to be effective teachers to all students regardless of the student's ability. Many studies support the idea that teachers' attitudes are the primary prerequisite for successful implementation of inclusive practices (Ahmmed et al., 2012). Many researchers have studied teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through questionnaires. Several studies that used questionnaires found that teachers' levels of efficacy influence their attitudes toward inclusion (Forlin, 1998; Soodak et al., 1998). Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) also identified many factors that influence teacher attitudes toward inclusion. These factors included teachers' confidence in effectively delivering inclusive practices and concerns about the available support needed to foster an inclusive classroom effectively (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). This continues to be apparent as Bailey et al.(2015) found that even though teachers held a generally positive attitude towards inclusion, their self-efficacy to implement inclusive practices successfully was deficient which negatively affected their self-reporting of their attitudes toward inclusion.

Further, in 1996, Scruggs and Mastopieri (1996) conducted a meta-analysis of 28 studies investigating teachers' perceptions of inclusion. They reported that 65% of more than 10,000 teachers supported inclusion, but only 30% stated they had adequate training and sufficient resources to implement inclusive practices. A review of the literature shows that both general education and special education teachers are supportive of inclusion (Hsien, 2009). Boyle et al. (2013) determined teachers had positive attitudes towards inclusion, but the barriers that affected their implementation of their inclusive attitudes centered on concerns regarding adapting and modifying classroom arrangements, which stemmed from a lack of relevant training in their teacher preparation program. However, special

education teachers reported having more positive views on inclusion than general education teachers (Cochran, 1998). Although teachers have reported positive views toward inclusion, the literature expressed concerns of both special education and general education teachers surrounding the time it takes to plan and collaborate, availability of materials, and personnel, and the level and amount of training provided (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Forlin et al. (2014) reported that preservice teachers' positive attitude directly impacts their ability to feel comfortable with inclusion.

Effects of Teacher Preparation Programs on Teacher Attitudes on Inclusion

Differences in preservice teacher training for general education and special education teachers explain differences in teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. General and special education teacher training have been traditionally separate from each other. For this study, based on the belief that inclusion benefits all students, it is now critical to continue designing preservice teacher preparation programs for both general and special education teachers.

When teacher preparation programs focus on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through inclusive coursework, graduates demonstrated a skill base and support for teaching students with special needs (Carroll et al., 2003). Although Gigante and Gilmore (2018) found that preservice teachers exposed to a module on disability and special education did not improve their attitude toward teaching in an inclusive classroom. For this study, I examined preservice teacher programs with inclusion curriculums across multiple studies to explore teachers' attitudes. In both Kearns and Shevlin (2006) and Winter's (2006) research, preservice teachers reported that the most valuable program for preparing for inclusion requires multiple components. First, preservice teachers' attitudes are affected by taking a dedicated unit of study on diversity. Next, teacher preparation programs should focus on the education of preservice teachers with special education across all curricular areas.

Kraska and Boyle (2014) demonstrated preservice teachers' attitudes were affected by taking a year of study on inclusion and special education. The study showed preservice teacher attitudes by

calculating a Total Inclusion Score, which determined that participants who studied modules on inclusion had more positive attitudes towards inclusive education (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Social significance of inclusive education was an crucial factor in preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion. Another study by Richards and Clough (2004) examined the views of 120 preservice teachers on inclusion prior to training and following interaction in an inclusive learning environment. Preservice teachers reported positive attitudes on inclusion prior to training as well as after inclusive teaching experiences. However, while the study determined that the preservice teachers had positive attitudes, there was still a vast need for training on strategies to promote and foster inclusion (Richards & Clough, 2004).

While there is ample literature about inclusive education programs for preservice teachers, there is limited literature about how these programs impact teacher attitudes. Carroll et al. (2003) analyzed 220 preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusive education before and after receiving training on special education. Before the training, preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education included fear, uncertainty, vulnerability, coping, sympathy, and discomfort. After preservice teachers received training, their levels of uncertainty and coping decreased, and preservice educators felt they were less ignorant and had more skills and tools for inclusive education (Carroll et al., 2003). In contrast, Costello and Boyle (2013) reported more positive attitudes towards inclusion from students in their first year than in the following year through analyzing a downward trend in preservice teachers attitudes across years of study,

Swain et al. (2012) examined changes in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education after completing a special education course and practicum. Preservice teachers' attitudes changed drastically concerning the feasibility of educating all students in a general education classroom. Preservice teachers felt more confident in inclusive practices at the end of the semester, but some noted the need for more and continued training on inclusive practices. Swain et al. (2012) added to the

research that paired special education courses and practicum can promote positive attitudes of preservice teachers towards inclusion. Hoskin et al. (2015) also determined that preservice teachers' inclusive attitudes also diminished during the duration of their teacher preparation program based on their concerns in their capability and efficiency to implement inclusive practices effectively. More information is necessary on compare the types of teacher preparation programs and the implications on preservice teachers' attitudes compared to other university programs.

Discussion

A review of the existing literature on inclusive education and the effects of preservice teacher preparation programs on inclusive education offers insight into the inconsistencies while discussing inclusive education. Although there is an increased awareness of inclusive education, the review of the literature identifies a vast range of perceptions and attitudes on how to improve inclusive education. Further examination and collaboration is necessary to identify the components of inclusive education. Across the literature, scholars discussed the benefits of improving preservice teacher education programs to prepare teachers to teach all students (Carroll et al., 2003; Swain et al., 2012). However, it is unclear what type of preparation program is most beneficial for creating significant changes in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. With the rise of awareness on inclusive education, researchers should further identify preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion by comparing year of study of preservice teachers, to determine the impacts of course level of teacher preparation programs and experience on inclusion. Considering if inclusive attitudes are influenced based on year of study of preservice teachers can add to the literature on how teacher preparation programs affect preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Conclusions

Overall, this literature review has emphasized the importance of examining further how teacher preparation programs prepare preservice teachers on inclusive educational practices and the effects of

teacher preparation programs on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. My study bridges the gap in identifying if there is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes based on year of schooling. Throughout this literature review, it is clear there is a vast need for further empirical research on the effect of teacher preparation programs on the attitudes of preservice teachers toward inclusion. The study is significant in how to identify how we prepare preservice teachers to teach in inclusive learning communities. Teaching inclusive education is not a one-and-done topic. This study adds to the gap in research and the need for more research on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on the participants' exposure to inclusive instructional pedagogy and practices, extent of their interactions with a person of disability, and their experiences teaching children with disabilities. The need for more research on inclusion is critical, and this research adds knowledge about the effects training has on preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusive education before a teacher is licensed and practicing. Sharma et al. (2008) emphasized the importance of altering preservice teachers' attitudes towards diversity and inclusion as the most effective way to alter society's attitudes and support the fight against ableism. Ensuring preservice teachers are competent in inclusion is vital for fostering inclusive education.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

To create educational equity, we require social justice leaders to promote transformative change to the social structures of our educational systems. These changes include creating equitable schooling and education by examining issues of race, diversity, marginalization, gender, spirituality, age, ability, sexual orientation, and identity (Dantley & Tillman, 2006). Teachers' attitudes towards inclusion are essential in affecting professional competence among learners in inclusive education (Baumert & Kunter, 2006). According to Avramidis and Norwich (2022), teachers' role in implementing inclusive practices is significantly affected by positive attitudes. How teacher preparation programs prepare teachers can be the foundation of positive and inclusive attitudes toward educating students with disabilities (Killora et al., 2014). Critical disability theory's origins stem from the argument that "disability is not fundamentally a question of medicine or health, nor is it just an issue of sensitivity and compassion; rather, it is a question of politics and power(lessness), power over, and power to" (Devlin & Pothier, 2006, p.2). The current study used the lens of CDT to examine the ableist assumptions that shape the structural inequities within our educational system and teacher preparation programs. Through analyzing preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, I gained more information on how teacher preparation programs influenced ableist assumptions through education and exposure to inclusive education. To understand inclusive education, critical disability affords teachers to understand the marginalization and exclusion of students with disabilities (Annamma et al., 2016).

Furthermore, this study looked to identify the effects of preservice teacher education programs on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, including designing and implementing inclusive classrooms. For inclusion to be successful, it must first be accepted and understood by the educators who will put it into practice within the educational system (Woodcock et al., 2012). The increase in the number of students with disabilities requires looking at the restructuring of teacher preparation

programs. Ultimately, how we can meet these students' needs depends on the degree to which teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education are fostered (O'Toole & Burke, 2013).

The National Department of Education's (2002) concept of the implementation of inclusive education entailments: "Inclusive education is about the whole education system from the national, provincial and district offices of the Department of Education, to individual schools and their communities, and individual teachers and learners" (p. 4). To expand on this idea, this study explored how teacher preparation programs influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion based on the year of schooling. The analysis focused on the year of schooling of new and graduating preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion to provide data on whether differences exist in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This study analyzed differences that may exist based on new and graduating teachers' attitudes to determine if there is a shift in attitudes on inclusion based on the year of curriculum in their teacher preparation program. For this study, I used the pseudonym "Preparatory University" to keep all University information confidential.

Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following questions through a mixed methods explanatory sequential design.

Overarching RQ: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion?

Quantitative:

RQ1: Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on:

- a. Participants level of coursework

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of coursework.

b. Extent of participants' interactions working with a person of disability

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions working with a person of disability.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions working with a person of disability.

c. Participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

H₀: There is no difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

H₁: There is a significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on the extent of participants' interactions with a person with a disability as a family member.

RQ2: Do first-year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes towards inclusive education?

H₀: There is no difference in teacher candidates attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

H₁: There is a significant difference in teacher candidates attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling.

Qualitative:

- How do preservice teachers understand and define inclusion?
- How do preservice teachers perceive their teacher program preparation for working with special education students?

Integrative Question:

- To what extent and in what ways do qualitative interviews with novice and graduating preservice teachers contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding differences in their attitudes toward inclusion?

Based on my research questions, I used a mixed methods design. I used an explanatory-sequential approach because the sequential approach allowed me to follow up the quantitative results with qualitative data. Using specific demographic questions in the survey of preservice teachers, I solicited the data necessary to assess if there was a difference between novice and graduating preservice teachers. This study explored how preservice teachers understood access to education as a fundamental human right for all individuals and how a zone of proximal development plays a pivotal role in the individual's learning development based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory. Comparing the two groups of students demonstrated if the concepts and principles of inclusion taught to preservice teachers.

In this next section, I discuss my critical analysis of my role as a researcher and why I chose to study preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Next, I describe my rationale for using a mixed method explanatory sequential. I describe the population and sample, justifying my sampling protocol. I describe my questionnaire data collection procedure and how I analyzed the data. I will describe my qualitative approach and how I interviewed participants, and how I cleaned and coded the data. Ensuring validity and reliability will be described by justifying the different steps. As a researcher, I will discuss my ethical concerns and how I addressed them if they arose. In conclusion, I will discuss the relevance and importance of exploring how teacher preparation programs influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion.

Role of the Researcher

Data is the evidence and rationale we can use to make effective changes. As a researcher, I sought to understand the hypotheses through my research questions and design. I made hypothetical claims to test my theory that there is no difference in teacher candidates' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling. In testing my theory, I do not prove my hypothesis; instead, I indicate a failure to reject the hypothesis (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). This study used quantitative analysis to provide concrete, knowledgeable data on how their coursework influenced preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Using a mixed method explanatory sequential design, I provided data for the University to analyze and determine if there should be more restructuring of their teacher preparation program, explicitly emphasizing the importance of inclusive components.

I continued to view my research objectively; as I know I have a bias; it was essential to look at the validity and reliability of my research and quantitative tools. As a researcher, I have had many personal and professional experiences that have profoundly impacted my worldview. These experiences have influenced my desire to research teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. Early childhood shaped my view of teachers' roles in inclusive education. Having a sibling with a disability and being involved in her education exposed me to teachers' naïve attitudes toward disability and education due to a perceived lack of knowledge. I began to acknowledge that teachers facilitate learning and are responsible for the learning environment's climate. As a Board Certified Behavior Analyst working in schools, I witness the importance of teacher education in inclusive practices. The vast gaps and differences in teachers' knowledge of inclusion based on schooling began to shape my hypothesis and research questions. As the interviewer I did not have any direct connections or relationships with any of the participants. Working at Preparatory University allowed me to understand the programs structure as well as the culture of the school, specifically the students and dispositions in the education department. Working as a clinician and an advocate, I am aware of my biases surrounding inclusion as a social justice

movement. In order to minimize and manage such biases I approached all potential participants in a neutral manner and used and relied on interview protocols and questions to keep me on topic. I also used neutral tone in my voice throughout interviews to diminish any form of leading. Debriefing through journaling allowed me to monitor my own thoughts, feelings, and personal biases throughout the process. Further, I used the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP, 2017) qualitative checklist to specifically evaluate potential biases throughout. My postpositive worldview allowed me to see if preparation programs influence teachers' attitudes toward inclusion by objectively measuring what exists in teacher preparation programs.

Methods

Based on my research questions, I chose to use a mixed methods explanatory sequential design. Following the steps outlined by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), I used an explanatory-sequential approach because the sequential approach allowed me, as the researcher to follow up the quantitative results with qualitative data. As a mixed method study, I iteratively analyzed the quantitative survey data followed by the qualitative interview data to address the research questions. The first two research questions were answered quantitatively using survey data. In the qualitative phase, I then conducted and analyzed interviews. The final integrative question was analyzed by triangulating the quantitative and qualitative data. My rationale for choosing a mixed methods explanatory sequential design is supported by Greene et al. (1989), which argued that this design was appropriate based on the relationship between the qualitative and quantitative data and based on how the phenomenon has been studied in extant research. Furthermore, I chose the mixed methods explanatory sequential design because it allowed me to gather both qualitative and quantitative data, which provided me with a more complete understanding of my guiding research problem (Creswell, 2012).

This study sought to understand differences in preservice teachers at Preparatory University attitudes toward inclusion based on novice and graduating students. The popular method within the

domain of descriptive research is the cross-sectional survey study which involves data collection over only one period of time (Parasuraman et al., 2006). I designed and employed an online self-administered survey to solicit data on participant background working with individuals with special needs, their academic year of study, their gender and age, and their TATIS-A. Multivariate techniques were then used to determine the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables. A cross-sectional survey design is observational and can be an effective research design as it can be done effectively and quickly. This study allowed me to look at novice and graduate preservice teachers at one point in time.

This study aimed to identify preservice teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion in their preparation program to determine if there is a difference between groups. Using a cross-sectional survey design, preservice teachers were broken into novice and graduating groups to make statistical inferences on whether their teacher preparation programs influence their attitudes. The study's design was a mixed method explanatory sequential. For the purpose of this study, I chose to use an explanatory-sequential approach because the *sequential* approach allowed me to follow up the quantitative results with qualitative data. Using qualitative data as a subsequent interpretation and clarification of the results from the quantitative data analysis allowed participants' interviews to enrich the data collected from the TATIS-A. Using this two-phase approach was useful because I explained the findings from the first phase of the study with the qualitative data collected during Phase 2 through my exploratory and integrative research questions. A mixed method design was used, including a quantitative component, to make a statistical inference between new and graduating preservice teacher participants' attitudes toward inclusion using the TATIS-A. A cross-sectional survey design allowed me to investigate novice and graduate preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through quantitative components. A qualitative component of interviews enriched the data through four participants' experiences.

A mixed method explanatory sequential design is an advantage for the straightforwardness of the TATIS-A and opportunities for exploring the quantitative results in more detail through interviews. Further, it allowed me to derive causal relationships from the data. I was able to uncover and interpret the facts based on the data, allowing me to identify the characteristics of the population to provide a descriptive and inferential analysis and prompt a need for further analysis of the preparation program. This research design helped determine if there are possible connections between the following variables (a) their level of schooling, 1st year or graduating, (b) the extent of their interactions working with a person with a disability, (c) teaching experience of children with disabilities and (d) participants attitudes on inclusion. I explored the effect of the dependent and independent variables. The dependent variables were the preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. The independent variables included the participants' level of course curriculum, interactions with a person with a disability, and the extent of their experience working with children with disabilities.

Population, Sample, Setting, and Sampling

The population included all preservice teachers drawn from a suburban university in New York. For this study, a preservice teacher is defined as an individual enrolled in an education major and completing college coursework to graduate and become a teacher. There was no exclusion of preservice teachers based on demographics.

The study was designed to collect responses from novice preservice teachers in their first year and graduating preservice teachers in their final year. Participants were pursuing an undergraduate Bachelor's degree or graduate Master's degree in Education. Data were first collected through a quantitative, non-random survey research study. For this study, I used the pseudonym "Preparatory University" to keep all University information confidential. I used purposeful sampling by identifying preservice teachers in their first year (novice) and final year of schooling (graduating) at Preparatory University. Based on the sample collected, I used stratified random sampling into strata: novice and

graduating preservice teachers. Stratified random sampling involves dividing the entire population into homogeneous groups called strata. This type of sampling was most appropriate for the current study because each strata was based on its proportionality to the total population. Further, this demonstrated a total representation of the entire population, both novice and graduating preservice teachers, while reducing sampling error. I emailed students on their institutional email and ensured to provide consent forms containing incentives for participation in the study. At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would like to opt-in to a follow-up qualitative interview.

The sample consisted of novice and graduating preservice teachers. All 93 novice preservice teacher and 67 graduating preservice teacher students enrolled in these education major related-courses were invited to participate in the study. Based on the population size, I used Cochran's formula, which allowed me to calculate an ideal sample size given a desired level of precision, confidence level, and the estimated proportion of my preservice teacher population. My sample size of novice preservice teachers was 76 and graduating preservice teachers 58 based on a precision level of 5%, a confidence level of 95%, and an estimated proportion of 0.5.

Table 1 provides descriptive statistics of the survey respondents. Thirty-five individuals participated in the survey; 15 first year students and 20 students in their final year. This indicates a response rate of 16.1% for first year students and a response rate of 29.9% for last year students. The average participant was female (88.2%), had a family member with additional needs (67.6%), participated in an inclusive module (91.4%), and had experience working with individuals with a disability (94.3%). Fifteen participants (42.9%) were in their first year of study, with the remainder in their final year of study.

Table 1*Participant Demographics and Background*

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Female	30	88.2
Male	4	11.8
Family with Additional Needs		
No	11	32.4
Yes	23	67.6
Current Year of Study		
First year in graduate program	5	14.3
First year in undergraduate 4yr program	5	14.3
First year in undergraduate 5yr program	5	14.3
Last year in graduate program	4	11.4
Last year in undergraduate 4yr program	4	11.4
Last year in undergraduate 5yr program	12	34.3
Inclusive Module		
No	3	8.6
Yes	32	91.4
Experience working with Individuals with Disabilities		
No	2	5.7
Yes	33	94.3

Additionally, respondents ranged in age between 17 and 52 ($M=23.12$, $Mo=23$, $SD=5.66$).

Average age by program and year is provided in Table 2. The data indicate that respondents in the graduate program are older than respondents in the four-year and five-year program and that there is an outlier in the first year graduate program sample. Because of this, the average first year student in the sample ($M=23.57$, $SD=8.55$) is older than the average last year student in the sample ($M=22.80$, $SD=2.35$).

Table 2

Age by Program

Program	First Year			Last year		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
4yr	4	21.50	3.12	5	22.40	2.30
5yr	5	20.80	1.79	12	22.67	2.27
Grad	4	29.00	15.64	4	24.00	2.71
All	14	23.57	8.55	20	23.12	5.67

Respondents were also asked about courses that influenced them and their specialism. The most frequently listed course of influence was Strategies for Diverse Learners ($n=5$), followed by Diverse Abilities and Needs of Students in Inclusive Classrooms ($n=3$), Meeting the Needs of Culturally Diverse Students in Inclusive Classrooms ($n=3$), and Characteristics of Students with Disabilities, Including Developmental Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder ($n=2$). The following courses were each listed once: Curriculum and Methodology in Early Childhood Education, Critical Examination of Issues in Education, Critical Examination of Issues in Education, Theoretical Foundations and Teaching Practices of Regular and Special Education, Interdisciplinary Birth-Grade 2, Childhood 1-6 and Middle Childhood Teaching Methods for Diverse Learners, Assistive and Adaptive Technology for Students with Special Needs. Additionally, four non-specific responses were recorded: “preservice teaching,” “friends in high school and classes taken in university,” “A grad level course by Dr. [redacted],” and

“all my education courses; how we can include different types of disabilities.” Regarding major (in alphabetical order), majors listed included: biology ($n=2$), childhood education ($n=5$), educational technology ($n=2$), elementary education/ TESOL ($n=1$), English ($n=5$), English/ TESOL ($n=1$), English/ special education ($n=2$), physical education/ math ($n=1$), secondary English/ special education ($n=1$), social studies ($n=3$), special education ($n=3$), TESOL ($n=1$), and visual arts ($n=1$).

Instruments

The Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted (TATIS-A) (Kraska & Boyle, 2014) (See Appendix A). Ewing et al. (2018) found the TATIS-A to be a psychometrically sound scale to address cognitive and behavioral components. This survey was adjusted by Kraska & Boyle from the original 27-item Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale (Boyle et al.; TATIS, 2013). In the adjusted scale, I replaced, altered, or deleted items to be relevant to preservice teachers' attitudes rather than in-service teachers' attitudes (See Appendix A).

The demographic survey included background information on participants' prior experience and knowledge, including exposure to inclusive practices and individuals with disabilities. The TATIS-A instrument contains an inventory questionnaire including 21 items answered with Likert-type response scales. The survey was modified on one demographic question to specify participants' experience teaching children with disabilities. The Likert-type response scale ranges from Strongly Agree (6) to Strongly Disagree (1). The phrasing of the questions were positive and negative to prevent acquiescence bias (Watson, 1992). According to Qualtrics (202), acquiescence bias is "the tendency for survey respondents to agree with research statements, without the action being a true reflection of their own position or the question itself (para. 6)." The questionnaire was checked for internal consistency using Cronbach's α assessment method. The Cronbach's α was greater than 0.7, a value used as a benchmark to confirm a questionnaire's internal consistency; the questionnaire was considered reliable (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

In the qualitative phase, I conducted semi-structured interviews with four participants who opted in at the end of the survey. The interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom. Following the mixed methods explanatory sequential design, the interview instrument was designed to collect additional insight into the quantitative survey data. I asked students to discuss their role in education to get a better understanding of why they went into the field of education and discuss their interest in special education. Students were probed to explain aspects of their preparation programs and their attitudes surrounding different aspects of curriculum including differentiation, strategies to teach all learners. The interview questions were determined to allow participants to describe their experience and attitudes in their preparation program. One of the main focuses on the interview was to allow participants to anecdotally discuss inclusion as a philosophy (See Appendix D).

Data Collection Procedures

I used Qualtrics, a web-based survey tool, to construct and distribute the TATIS-A (Kraska & Boyle, 2014). Participants in their first year received the survey in the Spring semester of the program's first year. The introduction of the survey presented participants with a disclaimer. Participants who chose to have a follow-up interview received a consent form prior to the interview. I informed all participants that they could refuse to participate in the study or opt-out at any time (see Appendix C). Upon completion of the survey, students could opt to be interviewed for 15-30 minutes via Zoom. All interviews were completed by June 1, 2023. I asked students about the meaning of inclusion, their background and interest in education, and how they felt the program had prepared them to teach a diverse range of students.

Dependent variables: The dependent variables were the preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, as measured by TATIS-A.

Independent variables: The independent variables included participants' level of curriculum, interactions with a person with a disability, and the extent of their experience teaching children with disabilities.

Data Analysis Procedures

I inputted data from Qualtrics into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyze the data collected from the survey. I cleaned the data in preparation for analysis by examining the outliers and running necessary analyses to determine the assumptions for inferential statistical analysis. I reverse coded TATIS-A statements 2, 7, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, and 21 (Corresponding statements to the numbered TATIS-A statements are provided in Appendix A). Before I reverse coded selected statements, strongly disagree was coded as “1” and strongly agree was coded as “6.” Using SPSS, I analyzed descriptive and inferential statistics, including frequencies, percentages, mean, standard deviation, and ranks. I examined the demographics' standard deviation, mean, median, and mode. Due to the small sample size, I used non-parametric tests to assess differences between respondents. Specifically, I employed the independent samples Mann-Whitney U test in place of the t-test to assess that statistical significance of differences in the survey data.

For qualitative and integrative questions, data were analyzed from audiotaped and transcribed discussions with participants to explore patterns and themes among preservice teachers' experiences. The transcriptions were checked for significant errors or omissions. Once transcriptions were checked for accuracy, the researcher used Dedoose software to organize and code the transcriptions based on common categories and themes identified throughout the interview phase. . It is important to note that my qualitative analysis was a recursive process, in which I used a thematic analysis, which is a method that allowed me to analyze and report themes within my data through the multiple steps (Braun & Clarke, 2008). I used Braun and Clarke's thematic six phases of analysis as a way to organize my process (2008). I first transcribed my data which allowed me to read and note down my initial ideas,

familiarizing myself with the data. I then generated my initial codes across the entire data set. This led me into searching for themes across and categorizing all the data to each potential theme. Reviewing themes and creating my thematic map was done by making sure my original initial ideas and codes were related. After reviewing the themes I defined and named the themes, refining each theme and generating clear definitions and names for my themes. Lastly, I produced my report by using specific examples extracted from the data, and related my final analysis back to my research question and literature.

I interpreted the quantitative and qualitative data through the process of triangulating my findings. I produced a convergence coding matrix where I analyzed where there was agreement, partial agreement, silence or disagreement across findings. I used data triangulation between the TATIS-A scale and qualitative interviews to determine meta-themes across all data (O’Cathain et al., 2010).

Validity and Reliability

I informed participants that their participation was confidential to ensure validity. The data collected was anonymous, with no identifiable information about the participants or the university. Participants filled out the demographic survey and the TATIS-A privately so they could select specific choices among the answer sets. Considering the study's characteristics, the researcher developed the demographic survey to obtain information detailed to this study in conjunction with TATIS-A. I determined the current Cronbach's Alpha to measure the validity of the adjusted scale. I found that the TATIS-A had acceptable reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.74 (Boyle, 2014).

Bollen (1989) defined content validity as a qualitative form of validity that evaluates whether the expressions in the measuring instrument represent the phenomenon intended to be measured. In my data, the Cronbach’s alpha for TATIS-A statements was 0.68 for all respondents, 0.74 for respondents in their first year of school, and 0.60 for respondents in their last year of school. In Chapter 5, I further discuss these values as a limitation of the study.

Table 3

Coefficient Alphas for TATIS-A by Program

Scales	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall	.68
First year respondents	.74
Last year respondents	.60

Voluntary response sampling was used in which all voluntary response samples collected were analyzed (Vehovar et al., 2016). All preservice teachers in the undergraduate and graduate programs received information on the study through their university email. Flyers were distributed around Preparatory University and handed out in classes. Using SPSS, I described how I coded the demographic replies to ensure I validly analyzed the results.

Ethical Concerns

For the purposes of this study, I used the terminology "students with disabilities", which is currently used in current legislation and policies that are specifically derived and responsible for coordinating special education services. Recently, the term neurodiversity has become a term used to describe the variety of human neurocognitive abilities. Federally the Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA, 2004) uses the term *disability* as the gateway to special education services. In New York the Office of Special Education provides assistance related to services and programs for *students with disabilities*. The primary focus of the study is recognizing that everyone has different learning and function abilities. When considering the study procedures and the tools using this terminology, I considered the emotional risk for the participant. Individuals who have neurodiverse family members may be upset by the terminology throughout the research, in which I was sensitive and reflective throughout the research and my analysis to deliver the primary focus for using this terminology was based on individuals' classification and eligibility for special education services

Through the research process, I ensured the participants understood how I designed this research to promote inclusion and neurodiversity. As preservice teachers enter their first year of curriculum and graduate, I am aware of the pressure and expectations that programs and society may have on them. With this in mind, I ensured that participants understood the consent process, including confidentiality and their rights as participants to leave the study at any point. By conducting research with IRB approval, I ensured that I followed the responsibilities of being an investigator in human subject research, in which I preserved the safety and welfare of all participants, including confidentiality of data and aggregation of data. I ensured the use of data ethics by encompassing my moral obligation to the participants, including gathering, protecting, and analyzing the data.

Limitations

The main limitation of the study was that population and sample were small. The small population size undermined the generalizability of my study to a broader population. As this research focuses on one college in the northeast, the findings may also be restricted in their generalizability to similar small suburban colleges. Another limitation is that I used a cross-sectional survey rather than a longitudinal study, which did not allow me to use the same participants in their first year and final year of schooling. For the purpose of time, I used different groups that did not allow me to see the individual effect on the participants over four years.

Conclusions

Past studies have surveyed teachers' attitudes, identifying factors on perceptions of inclusion education (Berry, 2006). This study explored how teacher preparation programs influence preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This quantitative study adds to the research on teacher preparation programs in preparing preservice educators for inclusion. The purpose is to better understand teacher preparation programs, including different aspects. This includes preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on years of schooling, the extent of their interactions with a person of

disability, and their experiences teaching children with disabilities. This study increases knowledge of preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion and provides insight into means for improving curriculum on inclusion in teacher preparation programs.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Introduction

Teachers' attitudes can influence the climate of an inclusive classroom, and it is vital to investigate the effect preservice teachers' preparation programs have on teachers' attitudes toward inclusion (Woodcock et al., 2012). This mixed methods study explored preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion based on the progression through their teacher preparation program. This study analyzed preservice teachers' responses on the TATIS-A scale in addition to examining their definition of inclusive education.

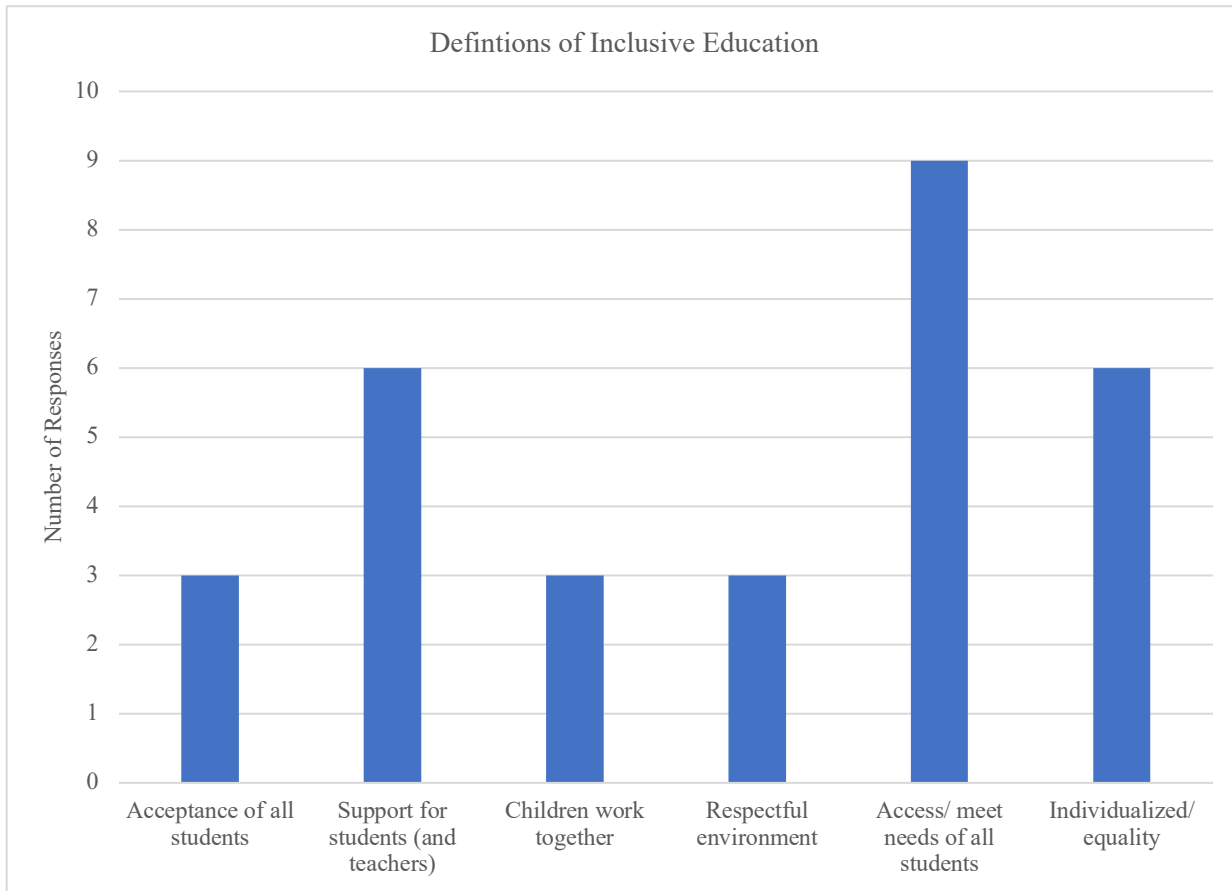
This chapter provides answers to research quantitative research questions using data from the TATIS-A survey. Further qualitative research questions was analyzed based on interviews conducted. I examined integrative research questions based off both TATIS-A surveys and interviews conducted, allowing for further analysis of preservice teachers' attitudes. This chapter first analyzes participants who complete the TATIS-A, followed by a qualitative analysis of interviews and then an integrative analysis. This allows the progression of the mixed-method study through multicomponent analysis.

Definitions of Inclusive Education

I directed survey respondents, "Please provide your definition of inclusive education." Twenty-one respondents answered this question. However, I coded some responses into more than one emphasis area. As presented in Figure 1, I identified six emphasis areas across the 21 responses: acceptance of all students, support for students (and in one case, support for teachers), a classroom in which children work together, a respectful environment, access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children, and an individualized education that promotes equality for students. Figure 1 presents the frequency distribution across the six codes.

Figure 1

Definitions of Inclusive Education



TATIS-A Descriptive Data

I used the TATIS-A scale to assess the respondents’ attitudes regarding inclusion of children with disabilities in general classrooms. Table 4 provides descriptive data for the TATIS-A statements with reverse scoring as described in Chapter 3 (Corresponding statements to the numbered TATIS-A statements are provided in Appendix A). The table provides the number of responses, the mean response, and the standard deviation of the responses for each statement for the total sample, for first year respondents, and for last year respondents. In the final row, all 21 statements have been summed. The total scores for all respondents ($n=27$) ranged from 70 to 95 ($M=86.63$, $SD=5.26$).

Table 4*TATIS-A Descriptive Data*

	All Respondents			First Year			Last Year		
	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Students with additional support needs should be educated in a mainstream school.	32	5.03	.93	14	5.21	1.12	18	4.89	.76
Educating children with additional support needs in mainstream classes has a detrimental effect on the other children in the class.	32	4.28	1.70	14	3.50	2.06	18	4.89	1.02
I feel that my teacher-training program is preparing me adequately for working with all children irrespective of disability.	32	5.03	.97	14	5.21	.89	18	4.89	1.02
I feel competent to work with students who have varying levels of difficulties.	32	5.09	.93	14	5.36	.93	18	4.89	.90
Students with additional support needs have the social skills required to behave appropriately in the classroom.	32	4.34	.87	14	4.50	1.02	18	4.22	.73
The presence of students with additional support needs in my	32	3.87	1.24	14	3.86	1.56	18	3.89	.96

mainstream class will have only a minimal effect on my implementation of the standard curriculum.

Including children with additional support needs in the classroom can adversely affect the learning environment of the class.	32	3.50	1.57	14	3.36	1.74	18	3.61	1.46
A lot of the learning strategies employed in the classroom are applicable to all students, not just those with additional support needs.	28	5.46	.69	11	5.55	.82	17	5.41	.62
Some children have difficulties that mean that they should not be educated in mainstream schools.	28	3.29	1.49	11	2.55	1.37	17	3.76	1.39
I will be able to make a positive educational difference to students with additional support needs in my classroom.	28	5.61	.63	11	5.45	.82	17	5.71	.47
Student peers will reject students with additional support.	28	4.29	1.44	11	3.73	1.80	17	4.65	1.06
Students performing at a level more than 3 years below their	28	3.61	1.40	11	4.18	1.66	17	3.24	1.09

chronological age should still be educated in mainstream classes.

Children with Social and Emotional Behavioral Difficulties should be educated in the mainstream class only if there is sufficient support in place for the class teacher.

It is not beneficial for children with additional support needs to be educated in mainstream schools.

It is my job, as a teacher, to provide alternative materials for students who have additional support needs (e.g., printed sheets of work from the whiteboard).

The daily or weekly formative assignments that are given to students to assess the class should be adapted for children with additional support needs.

The teacher should usually attempt to ensure that all the children in the class, irrespective of levels of difficulty or ability,

28	1.86	.85	11	1.73	.79	17	1.94	.90
28	4.57	1.40	11	4.09	2.02	17	4.88	.70
27	5.85	.46	10	5.70	.68	17	5.94	.24
27	5.59	.75	10	5.70	.68	17	5.53	.80
27	5.74	.66	10	5.70	.95	17	5.76	.44

are able to participate in the class as much as is possible.									
With appropriate support, I could teach all students (including additional support needs) in the same class.	27	5.63	.57	10	5.60	.70	17	5.65	.49
A teacher, if given what are regarded to be appropriate resources, could teach the vast majority of children with additional support needs.	27	5.30	.82	10	5.20	.92	17	5.35	.79
Children with additional support needs learn best when grouped with others with similar needs.	27	2.89	.89	10	2.50	1.35	17	3.12	.33
I do not support the policy of inclusion, no matter how much extra support the teacher is given in the class.	27	5.26	1.53	10	4.80	2.10	17	5.53	1.07
TATIS Total	27	86.3	5.26	10	88.00	7.10	17	85.82	3.84

Research Question Results

RQ1a: Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on participants level of coursework?

When TATIS-A scores are compared by level of coursework, I first noted that the TATIS-A score decreased between first and last year for 4-year program students, 5-year program students, and graduate students (see Figure 2). Next, I used the independent samples Mann-Whitney U test to assess if there is a statistical difference in the total TATIS-A score across three groups: first and last year four-year undergraduate students [$p=.271$], first and last year five-year undergraduate students [$p=0.030$], and first and last year graduate students [$p=.714$]. The independent samples Mann-Whitney results in Table 5 indicate that there is not a significance difference for TATIS-A total scores for respondents from the four-year program and from the graduate program at the $p<.05$ level; however, the difference in TATIS-A scores between first and last year respondents from the five-year program is statistically significant, $U=4.00$, $p=.030$. The independent samples Mann-Whitney U test was used as the nonparametric alternative to the independent samples t-test because of the small sample size.

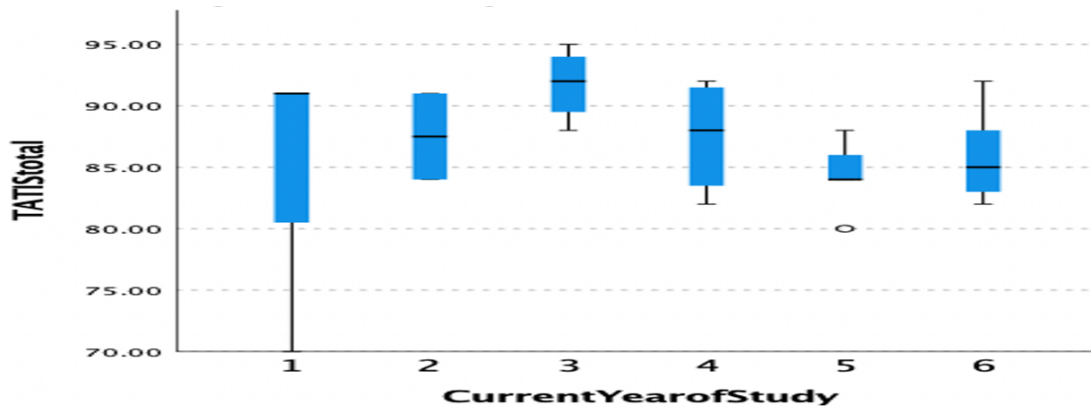
Table 5

Mann-Whitney U Test Results Comparing TATIS-A Scores by Program

Program	First Year			Last year			U	p
	N	M	SD	N	M	SD		
4yr	2	87.50	4.95	5	84.40	2.97	3.00	.271
5yr	4	91.33	3.51	9	85.89	3.72	4.00	.030*
Grad	3	84.00	12.12	4	87.50	4.80	5.00	.714
All	10	88.00	7.10	17	85.82	3.84	51.00	.085

Figure 2

Box and Whisker Plot of TATIS-A Scores by Level of Study



Note. Current Year of Study 1= First year graduate program, 2= First year four-year program, 3= First year five-year program, 4=Last year graduate program, 5= Last year four-year program, 6= Last year five-year program

RQ1b: Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on extent of participants interactions working with a person with a disability?

Of the 27 respondents who answered the question about experience working with individuals with disabilities and all 21 TATIS-A statements, only one respondent ($M=85.00$) reported having no experience in this area (see Table 6). The remaining 26 respondents had a mean TATIS-A score of 86.69 ($SD=5.35$). Therefore, I noted a higher TATIS-A score for the respondents with experience with disabilities than for the respondent with no experience with disabilities.

Although I reported in Table 1 that there were two participants who did not have experience working with a person with a disability, one of these respondents did not answer all TATIS-A statements and as such, they were excluded from further analysis. Because only one respondent did not have experience, no further inferential statistics were meaningful. This is

noted as a limitation of the study, but was also further explored in the qualitative data collection and analysis.

Table 6

Results of Averages and Standard Deviations in TATIS-A Total Scores between Respondents with and without Experience Working with Disabilities

	Experience with Disabilities		No Experience with Disabilities	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
TATIS Scores	86.69	5.35	85.00	-

RQ1c: Are there differences in preservice teachers’ attitudes toward inclusive education based on extent of participants interactions with a person with a disability as a family member?

The nine participants who had no experience working with individual needs as a family member ($M=86.89$, $SD=3.76$) compared to the 17 participants who had experience working with individual needs as a family member ($M=86.65$, $SD=6.12$) did not have a statistically significant difference in total TATIS-A score, $U=83.00$, $p=.724$ in a Mann-Whitney U test. Based on these results, I failed to reject the null hypothesis and found that there was not a difference in attitudes towards inclusive education between respondents who do and do not have a family member with a disability.

RQ2: Do first year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes towards inclusive education?

I recoded the six levels of coursework into first ($n=15$) and last ($n=20$) years; however, after I used pairwise deletion to assess means for each group, I had all TATIS-A data for 10 respondents in their first year and 17 respondents in their last year. I did not find a statistically significant difference between the first and last year respondents in total TATIS-A scores.

Next, I conducted independent samples Mann-Whitney U tests to compare responses for each of the 21 TATIS-A statements by participants in their first and last year of study. The results indicate a difference between first year (n=4) and last year (n=4) graduate students for statement two ($U=1.00$; $p=.032$), statements eleven ($U=0.50$; $p=.048$), and statement fourteen ($U=0.00$; $p=.026$). For five-year program students, there was a difference in first year (n=5) and last year (n=7) responses for statement four ($U=9.00$; $p=.032$) For the sample overall, there was a difference between first year (n=11) and last year (n=17) students in statement nine ($U=52.00$; $p=.047$). I did not observe significant differences for students in the four-year program.

Qualitative Analysis

I addressed qualitative and integrative questions by analyzing interview data and the responses to an open-ended question of the survey. I, as the researcher, conducted, recorded, and transcribed four interviews to explore patterns and themes among preservice teachers' experiences. I began all interviews with an overview of the informed consent document, an introduction of myself and the research, and with obtaining consent to conduct and record the interview. I transcribed the audio recordings and then checked for significant errors or omissions. Once I checked transcriptions for accuracy, I organized and coded the transcriptions using thematic analysis based on common categories and themes identified throughout the interview phase. Below, I provide interview summaries for each of the four participants.

Interview Summaries

Participant 1: Kelly. Kelly (pseudonym) was on a five-year track in elementary education with a concentration in English. Her mom was a fifth grade teacher, so she felt she always had a connection to education. As a triplet born three months early, she and her brothers had learning disabilities growing up. Although she was able to get out of the special education

system in kindergarten, her brothers was in special education until third grade. She reported that this experience gave her a connection to and interest in special education.

Kelly defined inclusion as:

I'd like to think of inclusion as just leveling the playing field and offering every person just their own voice and having their own form of representation, whether that be any means necessary, whether it be verbal, nonverbal, physical. Anyone.

She thinks of inclusion “in terms of accommodations and differentiations.” She uses the example of her brothers, explaining they had one-to-one aids, a separate location for testing, and extended time, but they were still in a mainstream classroom setting. For Kelly, inclusion means allowing students to be “as mainstreamed as possible, given the supports they need to perform to their best potential.” In this definition, she defines mainstream as the general education classroom “where it’s a standard one teacher and however many students.”

Kelly, who is pursuing teaching in an information and communication technology classroom, sees the difference between a general education and a special education teacher as the special education teacher providing “extra modified differentiated” support. The general education teacher may give specific instruction, but the special education teacher provides the differentiated notes and support. The general education teacher still works to foster inclusion with appropriate training.

To prepare her for work with students of a diverse range of abilities, PI’s program requires numerous classes on diverse students. Kelly added that these courses do not go into specifics on how to provide accurate supports for students with special needs. She added, “But the reason why I know how to help students of different abilities is because of my mom, and my personal experience I don't think always helps with that at all.” However, she did have a graduate

course that focused on “legalities of being a special education teacher and how you are legally required to provide these certain accommodations” where preservice teachers wrote a mock IEP. She further discussed that the program focuses on taking a multicultural lens, but does not focus on different cognitive abilities.

She expressed concern that the program did not better prepare her to:

Help students with like ADHD or having emotional disturbances or any form of cognitive mental ability, except for meet them where they are or the basic color coding or visual cues, but not if a student is acting out or what to do in this situation or that situation.

She attributes this to the staff who are teaching the program possible not having enough experience actually working in the field of education. She explained that one staff member had worked in the field as a special education professional and described the situation as “upsetting.” She further explained that this is why she has been so influenced by the example of her mother as a teacher and through her brother having learning disabilities, as well as her own experience working as a swim instructor for children with different capabilities and abilities. Overall, the participant expressed that if she could transfer out of the program, she would, stating: “I've gone in this program knowing a lot about inclusion, and I was hoping for it to be expanded, and it kind of wasn't. I'm not really happy with the education I've received here.”

Participant 2: Leslie. Leslie (pseudonym) has two siblings with autism and has helped them all her life, which has inspired her to go into special education. Leslie is in her senior year (of a four year program) in which she is not enrolled in a special education program but will continue on to her masters in special education. She has completed her student observation hours in a preschool inclusion room, which she reported gave her a different perspective on an inclusion room compared to the school where she currently works. From this exposure, she

concluded that her school program needs different programs, such “a Board Certified Behavior Analysis program, like a behavioral analysis program because that's what [she] would go into after doing [her] master's in special education.”

Leslie defines inclusion as “including everybody, but also finding the ways and the methods in order to include all different types of learners, people from different cultures, people from that have different abilities.” She further adds that inclusion also entails that we “really need to dive deeper into how we include all different types of learners, no matter what ability they are across the spectrum.”

Leslie’s feels that her experience has prepared her to work in an inclusive classroom and that it was also touched on in one of her courses. She reported that her professor in this course “did do a decent job touching on the subject of inclusion and different learners,” but that it should also be included in general education courses “on a little bit more as we get into our teaching career.” Leslie explained that she will be teaching next year and if she did not have prior knowledge through personal experience, then she would be lost in the areas of inclusion and special education. She feels that the program has prepared her to teach diverse learners through pre-student teaching and observation hours, which gives preservice teachers a different perspective through experiencing inclusion, stating that it gives “them a different idea because they're not just looking at it on pen and paper, they're looking at what it would be like with these diverse learners in an inclusion classroom.” However, Leslie noted that she specifically requested to be in an inclusion room for her observation hours, which implies that this experience might not allow all preservice teachers to have the same exposure to inclusion.

Leslie recommended that all education students should go into some type of inclusion observation setting. She stated,

I think I would say go in inclusion room if you would like to, but maybe I would say do half an inclusion room and half gen ed, or even half special ed and half gen ed in a sense. Just watch, just obtain, look, observe, just watch how they strategize, watch how they go about learn, doing things with kids. And I feel like that would give the future educator a different type of background and different type of experience with different learners in a sense, and with students that have a disability, in a sense.

Furthermore, she recommended that preservice teachers meet with the cooperating teacher to see different types of lesson plans and to discuss what the teacher is doing in different classes and with different students. Students are supposed to meet regularly with their cooperating teachers and may ask for plans and inquire about other classes, in which this should be reinforced. She added that the program could “add a class added into our progression grid inclusion class, an inclusion class, just dedicated to those kids that have such a broad understanding of what and how they can learn.” This addition, Leslie adds, would better prepare teachers for working with students with disabilities and to develop strategies for diverse learners.

Participant 3: Tanya. Tanya (pseudonym) is a special education major who currently works with a 22 year old man with autism. She recalls that in high school, she was the president of a club called “Pairs.” She described it as follows: “we all came together, and during lunch we had lunch with these kids with special needs. And we played board games and them when they were done with their lunch. It made me want to go into special ed.” She is now a senior in her program

To Tanya, inclusion is about accepting everyone and coming together to understand and accept the needs of others. She defines an inclusion classroom as “a small classroom with kids

with goals that can be met.” In a general classroom Tanya explained that “a gen ed teacher just teaches more the course, when an inclusion teacher comes around and helps the kids that have those IEPs or 504s, and they really hone in on their goals and accommodations.”

Tanya discussed a professor that she feels has prepared her to work in special education by giving out real IEPs and preparing education students to read and write IEPs. Tanya expressed that inclusion and IEPs are correlated and that she felt prepared by the program to work in an inclusion classroom because of her exposure to IEPs. However, she thinks the program could be improved by more exposure to “inclusion and special needs” because it is not really addressed in the curriculum for general education majors. She explained that this was concerning given that all teachers will work with children with IEPs or 504s. She stated,

For gen ed teachers, I would have a special education class for all general eds that's required that they have to take. They're going to have kids with special needs in their class, so I think that would be really beneficial to them.

Currently, she felt that the program does not prepare general education teachers to work with special education teachers or in an inclusive classroom.

Participant 4: Elizabeth. Elizabeth (pseudonym) expressed that she always wanted to be a special education teacher. She recalled, “I remember seeing the self-contained classes at my elementary school, not liking how alienated they were from us, and always wanting to be with them more.” This has led her to a passion for special education. She has witnessed people not being given the right chances and that this has limited them, so this makes her feel very passionate about providing “equitable education that’s actually enriching for them.” However, Elizabeth feels that many schools, especially public schools, do not have the appropriate

resources for special education students, which limits their social and curricular opportunities.

For Elizabeth, inclusion:

means making sure that everybody has the same opportunity. It doesn't necessarily mean that they're all getting the chance to do the same exact thing, but they're all getting the chance to do something that's enriching for them and that's pushing them.

Her experience at her current university, however, is that inclusion is not adequately introduced. She does not feel that they teach why inclusion is good. Elizabeth stated, "I feel like it was kind of an unspoken thing, but I don't think that it should have been an unspoken thing, because people still do believe that those kids should maybe be separate completely, and stuff like that." Elizabeth went on to add that she had one teacher who well-rounded when it came to special education, and she feels like she learned a lot from her regarding inclusion, but overall, the program does not have a heavy focus in this area. Furthermore, she does not feel that the program has prepared her prepare or read IEPs; however, she does feel that she is prepared to differentiate and modify assignments. Elizabeth would like to see more classes on behavioral analytical strategies because this is another area where she said she has not received instruction. Although she has taken a class on laws, she would like to see a class on how to read a behavioral plan or do a behavioral assessment.

The biggest change Elizabeth would like to see is more emphasis on the importance of inclusion. She stated, "I feel like in those classes, in those early education courses to talk about the importance of inclusion would be beneficial, because then that gets people thinking about that from the beginning." Elizabeth added that she has observed teachers at her school who do not like inclusion or do not feel prepared to be in an inclusive setting, but the curriculum could normalize this and prepare teachers.

Preservice Teachers' Understanding and Definitions of Inclusion

Although all four interviewees supported inclusion and had personal experiences working with individuals with special needs. However, there are nuanced differences in how the interviewees understand and define inclusion. Kelly defined inclusion as:

I'd like to think of inclusion as just leveling the playing field and offering every person just their own voice and having their own form of representation, whether that be any means necessary, whether it be verbal, nonverbal, physical. Anyone.

The underlined emphasis in this definition implies a sense of equity in the definition. According to Kelly, inclusion takes place through accommodations and differentiations. Further aligning with the emphasis on equity, Kelly stated that inclusion includes providing opportunities that are “as mainstreamed as possible, given the supports they need to perform to their best potential.”

Similarly, Leslie defines inclusion as “including everybody, but also finding the ways and the methods in order to include all different types of learners, people from different cultures, people from that have different abilities.” Leslie further adds that inclusion also entails that we “really need to dive deeper into how we include all different types of learners, no matter what ability they are across the spectrum.” In comparison to Kelly, Leslie placed more emphasis on including different types of learners in her language.

Tanya also placed emphasis on accepting everyone in an inclusive classroom, but also with reference to equity in acknowledging the different needs and having to give different efforts to meet them. To Tanya, inclusion is about accepting all students and coming together to understand and accept the needs of others. She defines an inclusion classroom as “a small classroom with kids with goals that can be met.” This aligns with the definition of inclusion provided by Elizabeth. For Elizabeth, inclusion:

means making sure that everybody has the same opportunity. It doesn't necessarily mean that they're all getting the chance to do the same exact thing, but they're all getting the chance to do something that's enriching for them and that's pushing them.

Overall, the interviewees agreed that inclusion is about recognizing that students have different needs and working to understand and meet these needs.

Perceptions of Teacher Program Preparation for Working with Special Education Students

Overall, the preservice teachers interviewed **did not feel that their** teacher program has adequately prepared them to work with special education students. However, participants did report that their program has a positive impact on their understanding of inclusivity. Kelly expressed that although her program requires numerous classes on diverse students, these courses do not go into specifics on how to provide accurate supports for students with special needs.

The participants stressed that their **own personal experiences** are important in their preparation since they feel like they are missing important exposures through the program. For example, Kelly stated that although there are areas where she has not been prepared by her program, she knows “how to help students of different abilities is because of [her] mom, and [her] personal experience.” All four participants shared similar experiences of drawing on their exposure to family members or other individuals that they knew prior to their higher education experience.

I asked the participants to **provide recommendations for improving** the program. Many of these recommendations focused on, even correlated IEPs and inclusion. However, there were mixed responses on the focus on IEPs within the program. Kelly stated that she did have a graduate course that focused on “legalities of being a special education teacher and how you are

legally required to provide these certain accommodations” where students wrote a mock IEP. Similarly, Tanya discussed a professor that she feels has prepared her to work in special education by giving out real IEPs and preparing education students to read and write IEPs. Tanya expressed that inclusion and IEPs are correlated and that she felt prepared by the program to work in an inclusion classroom because of her exposure to IEPs. Elizabeth does not feel that the program has prepared her prepare or read IEPs; however, she does feel that she is prepared to differentiate and modify assignments.

Participants recommended courses to better prepare them for working with students with diverse needs. Kelly expressed concern that the program did not better prepare her to “help students with like ADHD or having emotional disturbances or any form of cognitive mental ability” or respond to these behaviors. Similarly, Leslie discussed the need for “a BCBA program, like a behavioral analysis program because that's what [she] would go into after doing [her] master's in special education.” Tanya also discussed that general education preservice teachers could also benefit from additional courses on special education. Currently, she felt that the program does not prepare general education teachers to work with special education teachers or in an inclusive classroom. Elizabeth would like to see more classes on behavioral analytical strategies because this is another area where she said she has not received instruction. Although she has taken a class on laws, she would like to see a class on how to read a behavioral plan or do a behavioral assessment.

A final recommendation was that students, as well as staff working in the program need more exposure to inclusion and special needs students. Kelly expressed concern that the staff teaching the program do not have enough experience actually working in the field of education. Leslie suggested that preservice teachers could get this exposure from participating in an

inclusion observation setting, as well as meeting with the cooperating teacher to see different types of lesson plans and to discuss what the teacher is doing in different classes and with different students. She added that the program could “add a class added into our progression grid inclusion class, an inclusion class, just dedicated to those kids that have such a broad understanding of what and how they can learn.” Elizabeth also suggested a greater emphasis on inclusion. She stated, “I feel like in those classes, in those early education courses, to talk about the importance of inclusion would be beneficial because then that gets people thinking about that from the beginning.” Elizabeth added that she has observed teachers at her school who are not comfortable working in an inclusion classroom, but the curriculum could normalize this and prepare teachers.

Integrative Analysis

A summary of the findings I presented in the chapter is provided in Table 7, which services as the basis of my triangulation efforts. Regarding the first research question, I found that there is a statistically significant difference between first and last year students in the five year program specifically, but did not find a significance difference for respondents from the four-year program and from the graduate program. Furthermore, I did not find a difference in TATIS-A scores based on experience working with individual needs as a family member. Of the 27 respondents who answered the question about experience working with individuals with disabilities and all 21 TATIS-A statements, only one respondent reported having no experience in this area. Because only one respondent did not have experience, no further inferential statistics were meaningful, but I did not note a higher TATIS-A score for the respondents with experience with disabilities than for the respondent with no experience with disabilities. The nine participants who had no experience working with individual needs as a family member compared

to the 17 participants who had experience working with individual needs as a family member did not have a statistically significant difference in total TATIS-A score. The first research question was addressed through the variations in attitudes noted in discussions on how they referred to and defined inclusion. Interviewees expressed how having a family member with individual needs prepared them for their work, the survey results revealed that there was not a difference in TATIS-A scores between individuals who do and do not have a family with individual needs. It can be inferred from these statements and the quotes provided in this chapter that personal experiences and the preservice education program influenced attitudes towards inclusion. However, I did not record level of coursework for interviewees.

Regarding the second research question, I did not find a statistically significant difference between first and last year students in overall TATIS-A score, but I did note statistically significant differences in select TATIS statements. For graduate students, there was a statistically significant difference between first and last year students for three statements: “Educating children with additional support needs in mainstream classes has a detrimental effect on the other children in the class;” “Student peers will reject students with additional support;” and “It is not beneficial for children with additional support needs to be educated in mainstream schools.” For five-year program students, there was a statistically significant difference in first and last-year respondents for one statement: “I feel competent to work with students who have varying levels of difficulties.” When comparing the responses of students in their first and last year collectively, I found a statistically significant difference in one statement: “Some children have difficulties that mean that they should not be educated in mainstream schools.” I did not find any statistically significant differences between first and last year students in the four-year program. I also noted a decline in total TATIS-A scores between the first and last year for all three programs. Because

I did not collect data on the year of study for interviewees, this question was not addressed with qualitative data.

Regarding the third question, survey respondents and interviewees defined inclusion similarly, commonly focusing on acceptance, support, respect, access, and equality. I asked survey respondents to define inclusion in an open-ended format. In analysis of their responses, I identified six emphasis areas across the 21 responses: acceptance of all students, support for students (and in one case, support for teachers), a classroom in which children work together, a respectful environment, access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children, and an individualized education that promotes equality for students. Similarly, interviewees defined inclusion, with definitions commonly focusing on acceptance, including everyone, and equal opportunity. My comparison of the survey and interview data on definitions of inclusion revealed extensive overlap between survey and interview definitions of inclusion with a focus on acceptance, support, respect, access, and equality

Finally, regarding question four, the preservice teachers interviewed did not feel that their teacher program has adequately prepared them to work with special education students. The participants stressed that their own personal experiences are important in their preparation since they feel like they are missing important exposures through the program. All four participants shared similar experiences of drawing on their exposure to family members or other individuals that they knew prior to their higher education experience. The survey did not address the extent to which preservice teachers perceive their teacher program prepared them to work with special education students.

Overall, I found that participants felt that their program had a positive impact of their understanding of inclusivity. However, some students interpreted the definition of inclusion

differently, showing that they have not yet fully embraced this approach. They have knowledge of inclusivity, but are not ready to implement it in their professional approaches. By triangulating these quantitative and qualitative data, I am able to address the overarching research questions: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion? This question is addressed through the discussion provided in Chapter 5. I will discuss these findings and how they align with the extant literature. I will discuss them in the context of CDT and sociocultural learning theory, and introduce the implications and findings. The chapter will conclude with the limitations and recommendations for future research.

Table 7*Quantitative and Qualitative Integrative Analyses*

Research Questions	Quantitative (Phase 1)	Qualitative (Phase 2)	Integrated Mixed Methods Findings
Overarching RQ: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion?			
RQ1- Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on (a) participants' level of coursework, (b) extent of participants' interactions working with a person with a disability, and (c) participants interact with a person with a disability as a family member?	<p>(a) There is not a significance difference for respondents from the four-year program and from the graduate program at the $p < .05$ level; however, the difference in TATIS-A scores between first and last year respondents from the five-year program is statistically significant, $p = .030$.</p> <p>(b) Of the 27 respondents who answered the question about experience working with individuals with disabilities and all 21 TATIS-A statements, only one respondent ($M = 85.00$) reported having no experience in this area. Because only one respondent did not have experience, no further inferential statistics were meaningful.</p>	[Not assessed in qualitative phase]	-

(c) I failed to reject the null hypothesis; The nine participants who had no experience working with individual needs as a family member ($M=86.89$, $SD=3.76$) compared to the 17 participants who had experience working with individual needs as a family member ($M=86.65$, $SD=6.12$) did not have a statistically significant difference in total TATIS-A score, $U=83.00$, $p=.724$ in a Mann-Whitney U test.

RQ2 - Do first-year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes toward inclusive education?

There is not a statistically significant differences between the collective first and last year TATIS-A scores, but there is a difference between first and last graduate students for statement two ($p=.032$), statements eleven ($p=.048$), and statement fourteen ($p=.026$). For five-year program students, there was a difference in first and last year responses for statement four ($p=.032$) For the sample overall, there was a difference between first and last year students in statement nine ($p=.047$). No significant differences were observed for students in the four-year program.

[Not assessed in qualitative phase]

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RQ3 - How do preservice teachers understand and define inclusion?

I identified six emphasis areas across the 21 responses: acceptance of all students, support for students (and in one case, support for teachers), a classroom in which children work together, a respectful environment, access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children, and an individualized education that promotes equality for students.

Interviewees defined inclusion, with definitions commonly focusing on acceptance, including everyone, and equal opportunity.

There was extensive overlap between survey and interview definitions of inclusion with a focus on acceptance, support, respect, access, and equality.

RQ4 - How do preservice teachers perceive their teacher program preparation for working with special education students?

[Not directly assessed in quantitative phase]

Overall, the preservice teachers interviewed did not feel that their teacher program has adequately prepared them to work with special education students. The participants stressed that their own personal experiences are important in their preparation since they feel like they are missing important exposures through the program. All four participants shared similar experiences of drawing on their exposure to family members or other individuals that they knew prior to their higher education experience.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I present the summary of the study, a discussion of the findings related to the literature, implications of the findings, limitations of the study, and any implications and recommendations. This study examined preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion based on the progression through their teacher preparation program. Since classroom teachers have commonly critiqued and criticized a lack of training or inclusive education (Ashman, 2010), it is vital that there is a greater focus on preservice teachers training through their educational institutions. Considering how preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion are shaped, understood, and influenced is one of the most effective ways we can ensure the creation of inclusive learning environments through our facilitators of learning, teachers. If a child is having difficulty with traditional methods of teaching, educators must facilitate learning in a manner that the student is able to learn. In order to facilitate learning all of students, we must expose preservice teachers to inclusive educational strategies and practices, ensuring we are breaking down ableist structures and promoting learning for all students, regardless of disability.

Summary of Findings

Research Question 1

I examined all quantitative and qualitative data from the TATIS-A and all interviews in this study to address the overarching research question in this study: What are the participants' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion? I developed various conclusions after analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data and further analyzing the integrated results of both data sets to ensure all research questions results were satisfied.

The first research question guiding this study was, "Are there differences in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education based on participants' level of coursework?" The data shows no significant difference in attitudes toward inclusion between the six levels of coursework. The first year of education major students' courses in the undergraduate 5-year program had the highest mean of

attitudes, but there is no significant difference between each level. When individual groups are compared, I noted that the TATIS-A score decreased between first and last year for 4-year program students, 5-year program students, and graduate students. However, before conducting the study, I hypothesized that perceptions of inclusion, measured here by TATIS-A scores, would increase as preservice teachers advanced through their coursework. As my hypothesis was supported by the majority of extant literature, the findings of my study should be further explored as they do not align with the literature supporting preservice teachers' exposure to inclusion as a predictor of favorable attitudes towards inclusion (Ware, 1995; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Varoce & Boyle, 2014).

I also note, however, that Costello et al. (2013) is an exception here; this study used the TATIS scale to study preservice teachers and found a significant decline in attitudes towards inclusion across the years of study. Costello et al. (2013), like me, hypothesized that preservice teachers attitudes towards inclusion would be increasingly positive as they moved through their program. However, the authors attribute the downtrend to the effectiveness of the program and note that "one explanation for this decline may be as preservice secondary teachers gain experience and a greater understanding of their future role as teachers, any deficiencies in their training may become more evident" (Costello et al., 2013, p. 139). Similarly, Hoskins et al. (2015) found that preservice teachers' inclusive attitudes also diminished during the duration of their teacher preparation program based on their concerns in their capability and efficiency to implement inclusive practices effectively, which could also explain the decline observed in my study.

This contradiction between my findings that the literature could be the result of a strong majority of respondents already having exposure outside to inclusive practices for their education, which could possibly limit the positive impact of their education. In other words, although studies find that preservice teacher preparation programs are necessary for providing opportunities to learn about

inclusion (Boyle et al., 2011), there are perhaps circumstances outside of the preservice teacher preparation programs that are impacting perceptions of inclusion.

While more data would be necessary to draw meaningful conclusions, further analysis of RQ1 demonstrates significance in the following statements that lead to some critical findings. TATIS-A statements such as “Educating children with additional support needs in mainstream classes has a detrimental effect on the other children in the class” showed preservice teachers in their first year of education major course in graduate program *disagreed* compared to the preservice teachers in their last year of education major courses in their graduate program who *agreed* with this statement. I interpret this as a preservice teachers having a decrease in viewing inclusion as a right of students with disabilities and trending towards an ableist view. Promoting inclusion, however, requires looking at inclusive education as a social justice issue that should be discussed in leadership preparation for inclusive educational systems. This finding aligns with the fact that there is minimal supporting literature on social justice leadership and inclusive schooling (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2008). Preservice teachers came into a program disagreeing with an ableist view that inclusive education is detrimental to other learners, compared to graduates agreeing with such a statement, requires more social justice lens' in the teacher preparation curricula.

The findings on decrease in positive attitudes towards inclusion between first and last year preservice teachers also indicates that perhaps more focus should be placed on the curriculum. Overall, the preservice teachers interviewed did not feel that their teacher program has adequately prepared them to work with special education students. The participants stressed that their own personal experiences are important in their preparation since they feel like they are missing important exposures through the program. All four participants shared similar experiences of drawing on their exposure to family members or other individuals that they knew prior to their higher education experience. Although Pugach et al. (2014) reported nearly a decade ago that many institutions are working to restructure

professional programs to prepare teachers for special education, my results indicate that there is still work to be done in this area. Like Allday et al.'s (2013) finding that very few programs emphasize inclusive practices, my interview data indicates that the program I examined could also do more to prioritize inclusion.

Although it has been noted that instructors can influence the attitudes of preservice teachers attitudes toward inclusive education (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), further research would be needed to understand if this was a factor in the changes noted in this study. As there is evidence in the findings of this study that the method of the curriculum delivery shaped preservice teachers' attitudes, this will be further discussed in the recommendations for future studies section. Although obtaining information from the instructors would help to draw more valid conclusions on whether it is the instructor or curriculum that influenced the shift toward a more ableist lens, this becomes a requisite for programs to consider the importance of planning and curriculum, including a hidden curriculum, on shifting toward inclusive attitudes. The idea that perhaps social interactions through education programs also influenced the per-service teachers' perceptions of inclusion aligns with sociocultural learning theory. In viewing this learning process through the lens of sociocultural learning theory, it is a matter of social justice that the curricula and the instructors of this curricula promote a zone of proximal development regarding attitudes toward inclusion (Leonard, 2022).

Kraska and Boyle (2014) determined that the social significance of inclusive education was a pivotal factor in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. To further support this finding of a lack of social justice in the views of last year's students, I note the following TATIS-A statement: "Including children with additional support needs in the classroom can adversely affect the learning environment of the class." In this study, all coursework levels agreed strongly with this statement except for the first year of education major in an undergraduate four-year program, which *somewhat disagreed*. Leading to the conclusion, first-year students not enrolled in a graduate plan have more favorable attitudes toward

inclusion. They believe educating students with disabilities in a more inclusive setting does not disrupt the learning environment. Although age has not been thoroughly assessed in the extant literature as a predictor of perceptions of inclusion, experience is a commonly studied predictor (Wray et al., 2022). These findings lead to a significant finding that preservice teachers' exposure to the curriculum may shift their inclusive views not necessarily to an ableist view but to the notion that inclusion can disrupt the learning environment. In particular, in a systematic review of factors affecting teacher perceptions of inclusive education, Wray et al. (2022) found that teacher knowledge of related policies was the best predictor of their inclusion practices, which leads me to conclude that policies and legal expectations should also be part of this curriculum.

The literature emphasized teachers' concerns in effectively delivering inclusive practices and the support needed to foster inclusion correctly and effectively (Hoskin et al., 2015; Richards & Clough, 2004). Ultimately, preservice teachers may now be more aware that a shift in inclusive attitudes requires more analysis of why teachers believe there is a disruption of the learning environment. Savolainen et al. (2020) aptly noted that while rhetoric has shifted towards more inclusive education, the arguments against inclusion remain: there is the opposition perception that inclusion increases teacher workload and that it negatively impacts the education of the classroom as a whole. There is a need to embed social justice for the primary reason that a student with a disability belongs in the classroom and should not be labeled by educators as a disruption to the classroom. For inclusion to be translated into practice, educators must have a commitment to social justice foundations behind it, which lie in equity and ethical appeal (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2020). The research of Flores and Bagwell (2021) further adds that social justice as inclusion has to have the support of leadership to effectively address social inequities in education. Additionally, the conclusions from those analyses demonstrate that the primary reason a student with a disability belongs in the classroom needs to be embedded as a social justice right to prevent labeling the student as disruptive, with exclusion being the common effect.

I also found evidence in the data that preservice teachers in their final year of schooling were inclusive in their overall social inclusion of students with disabilities aside from curriculum and placement. In the following statement, “Student peers will reject students with additional support,” all respondents in their final year *somewhat disagree*, demonstrating a positive shift toward inclusive attitudes based on the progression of the year of study in promoting additional support and positive social peer relationships. The literature supports the sentiment of this statement—that there are benefits to all students in inclusive classrooms— as well (Cosier et al., 2013; Mavropoulou & Sideridis, 2014; Falvey et al., 2004) Molina Roldán et al. (2021), for instance, found that students without special needs benefit from interactions with students with special educational needs in multiple ways. More specifically, Molina Roldán et al. (2021) found that rather than rejecting students with additional needs, peers without special needs learn to respect other, learn to help others, learn about their own abilities, and benefit from the cognitive effort of these interactions. However, there is also literature that supports that this not always perceived to be the case (Savolainen et al., 2020). It is therefore crucial that teachers understand the benefits of inclusion for all students and that this is emphasized in preservice education and opportunities. Ultimately, the altering preservice teachers’ attitudes towards diversity and inclusion is considered to be the most effective way to alter society’s attitudes and support the fight against ableism (Sharma et al., 2012).

My conclusion that preservice teachers in their final year of schooling viewing inclusion positively was based on the preservice teachers in their first year of the graduate program *somewhat disagreeing* with both “It is not beneficial for children with additional support needs to be educated in mainstream schools” and “I do not support the policy of inclusion, no matter how much extra support the teacher is given in the class.” Ultimately, all last year's students *strongly disagreed*. I found that all preservice teachers in their last year supported the policy of inclusion if the teacher receives appropriate support. This further supports the literature that teachers with special education training were more

inclined to support educating individuals with special needs in the mainstream environment (Sharma et al., 2012). Overall, there is an extensive continuum across these significant questions, making it difficult to draw conclusions on the year of study and preservice teachers' overall inclusive attitudes. However, it demonstrated that through exposure to curriculum, teachers' attitudes shifted to a more segregated mindset due to the lack of support within the classroom to promote inclusion. I concluded that there were inclusive attitudes at all levels of students. However, the attitude of the implementation of inclusion being realistic and feasible within the confines of a general education classroom appears to decrease the more curriculum students are exposed to.

Teachers' personal experiences are well documented in literature to impact their perceptions of inclusion (Subban & Sharma, 2006; Majoko, 2016). Based on this body of literature, I hypothesized that having experience working with individuals with disabilities or having a family member with a disability would be positively related to attitudes towards inclusion. I looked at personal experiences of the preservice teachers. Regarding working with a person with a disability, all but one respondent had experience in this area, so I was not able to run inferential statistics to assess the impact of this experience. Regarding having a family member with a disability, I did not find a statistically significant difference in TATIS-A scores based on this experience. The data related to preservice teachers' attitude towards inclusion being different when having a family member or a work experience with a person with a disability produced no findings. The literature in this area is also inconclusive. Subban and Sharma (2006) found that teachers with family or friends with disabilities exhibited greater self-efficacy in implementing inclusive education. Kraska and Boyle (2014), however, did not find a statistically significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion based on their interactions with family or friends with disabilities.

Research Question 2

To address Research Question 2, I grouped all first-year and last-year preservice teachers to examine differences in inclusive attitudes as larger groups. The conclusions of those analyses provided more extensive insight into the following research question: Do first-year teacher candidates and teacher candidates in their final year of schooling have different attitudes towards inclusive education?

Although I did not find a statistically significant difference in TATIS-A total scores, I did find difference in some statements. There was only one TATIS-A statement that has a statistically significant difference between all first and last year respondents: "Some children have difficulties that mean that they should not be educated in mainstream schools." First-year preservice teachers agreed with the statement, while preservice teachers in their final year somewhat disagreed. The literature supports that "Inclusion is not serving students with disabilities in separate schools or exclusively in self-contained classes, based solely upon their categorical label" (Schwartz, 2005, p. 11). Therefore, first year students, at least in regards to this statement, do not understand or support inclusion. Respondents in their final year, however, somewhat disagreed with the statement indicating they have more positive views towards inclusion. What is fascinating is that preservice teachers exposed to the curriculum understand and disagree with segregation when it refers to the physical proximity of the school, but this is not generalized to physical segregation within the inclusive school environment. As support of this observation, I offer that preservice teachers in their final year understand what is wrong with this statement regarding physical proximity or educating students with disabilities in a separate space, but still not always agree on other statements of inclusion. These differences emphasize the notion that inclusion is a spectrum and evolving in concept and practice (Boyle et al., 2022).

Qualitative Analysis

My analysis of interviews with preservice teacher participants allowed me to look at the following questions: How do preservice teachers understand and define inclusion? How do preservice teachers perceive their teacher program preparation for working with special education students?

All four participants supported inclusion, but similar to the literature, there are discrepancies in how the participants understand and define inclusion. This is of note because how teachers conceptualize inclusion will impact their enactment of conclusion. Just like in the quantitative results where I found differences in support for inclusion based on how the TATIS-A statements presented inclusion, there were differences in how the interviewees defined inclusion in their own words. The participants clearly understood that inclusion requires awareness of different levels of need and working on how to meet those needs. The major conclusion is that all the preservice teachers understood inclusion differently in education. Although notions of inclusion have shifted over time (Savolainen et al., 2020), it is possible that distinctions in definitions of inclusion could lead to differences in how it is ultimately perceived and implemented in the classroom. While not all inclusive classrooms will look the same, in fact they are adaptable and will not look the same, inclusive classrooms do share common elements. Moreover, preservice teachers attitudes towards inclusive education has a considerable degree of influence on what they are prepared to implement and the success of their inclusive classroom (Khasawneh, 2023).

The following participants' quotes demonstrate a need to educate preservice teachers more sufficiently on an understanding of inclusive education: "Level the playing field," "as mainstreamed as possible," and "getting the chance to do something that's enriching for them and that's pushing them." These quotes, in particular, lack a basic understanding of equity as a foundation of inclusion. Equity is not about "leveling the playing field." Equity is about providing all students what they need to succeed. Although nuances in discussion of perceptions of inclusion might seem trivial, teachers' inclusive

practices are directly related to their knowledge and attitude regarding inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2022). It is also important to note here that the New York State and the accrediting bodies now require all teacher preparatory program to focus on equity and diverse needs of students in the classroom. These are outlined in the New York State Education Department (NYSED) and The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) general pedagogical core requirements in all teacher preparation programs. Teacher preparation programs in NYS are required to focus on equity and the diverse needs of the students in the classroom by requiring “at least three semester hours of study for teachers to develop the skills necessary to provide instruction that will promote the participation and progress of students with disabilities in the general education curriculum” (NYSED, 2023).

This study adds to the research that there are many misconceptions surrounding inclusive practices. For example, for the inclusion of students to occur, oppression and exclusion must exist. Castaneda et al.’s (2013) view of oppression of individuals with disabilities by discrimination and exclusion is known as *ableism*. To decrease stigma and exclusion, we have to shift to preservice teachers understanding that all students, regardless of disability, have a right to belong. All students have a right to an education. Including students in their school facilitates the future transition and lessens exclusion in adulthood.

One of the study's most critical findings was that preservice teachers found that their teacher program did not adequately prepare them to work with special education students. The qualitative component of this study provided insight into the following commonalities preservice teachers want to: understand IEPs more, have a broader, more comprehensive understanding of the IEP, understand supporting inclusion from a behavioral standpoint, and want more exposure to inclusion and special education for all education students. Although NYS requirements include ensuring curriculum development, instructional planning, designing and offering differentiated instruction, and multiple research-validated instructional strategies for teaching students within the full range of abilities more in

depth exposure to these topics and experience in these areas will prove crucial to moving inclusion forward. There is a mounting body of literature that links preservice teacher education and their ability to effectively identify and curate an inclusion classroom (Khasawneh, 2023).

Integrative Analysis

I developed various conclusions from detailed analyses of the quantitative and qualitative data, especially from subsequent analyses of the integrated results, to ensure all research questions were satisfied. Using the triangulation of the quantitative and qualitative findings, I addressed the following research question: To what extent and in what ways do qualitative interviews with novice and graduating preservice teachers contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding the differences in their attitudes toward inclusion?

My analyses of the integrated data results identified six attitudes toward inclusion: (a) acceptance of all students, (b) support for students, (c) a classroom in which children work collaboratively, (d) a respectful environment, (e) access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children, and (d) an individualized education that promotes equality for students. As discussed through this chapter, these attitudes add to the literature on what preservice teachers define inclusive education into key themes. The major theme identified was “access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children,” which supports the findings in this study that to be able to foster inclusive attitudes, the learning environment has to be supported and conducive to the needs of all children. As Richards and Clough (2004) demonstrated, preservice teachers reported positive attitudes toward inclusion before training and after inclusive teaching experiences. However, there is still a vast need for the strategies and support provided in the learning environment. Perhaps the consistent continuum across past literature and the study's major findings reveal the need for restructuring educational systems and aligning and preparing preservice teachers to continue to foster their positive attitude toward inclusion while aiding them to have a realistic vision of inclusive placements. Further creating the pathway to making

inclusive placements a reality to align with how we can prepare preservice teachers to not only have inclusive attitudes but also the main factor at making inclusive environments.

In all, my findings likely support the literature that hypothesizes that preservice teachers have fewer positive perceptions of inclusion in their final year than in their first year (Costello et al., 2013; Hoskins et al., 2015); one possible explanation for this change is that there are factors of the educational programs that do not sufficiently address the importance of and the strategies for inclusion classrooms. Another possible explanation is that teachers enter the program with a more naïve view of inclusion and conclude the program with a more realistic approach after immersion in the program. Through Vygotsky's sociocultural learning theory, collaborative interactions with inclusive in-service teachers within inclusive communities preservice teachers can be supported to scaffold their understanding of inclusive education.

The quantitative results revealed a decline in positive perceptions of inclusion between first and year preservice teachers and the qualitative findings provided discussion of the need for better exposure and education regarding inclusion. Therefore, is a social justice that the program take efforts to better prepare teachers to work in an inclusive environment (Leonard, 2022). With interview respondents expressing an insufficient understanding of inclusion and training in the area and survey respondents expressing some inconducive views regarding inclusion, there is a need for preservice teachers to receive additional training on inclusion. In particular, given that teacher knowledge of inclusion policies was found by Wray et al. (2022) to be the best predictor of inclusion practices, this addition may address some of the concerns that arose from triangulation of the data.

It is evident that preservice teachers in Preparatory University are aware of the concept of inclusion and are able to actively participate in the learning process. According to Bloom's Taxonomy preservice teachers are able to receive and respond to inclusion, but they have not yet fully internalized and valued inclusion (Armstrong, 2010). For preservice teachers to embrace and implement inclusion,

students must reach the 'valuing' stage, where they not only see the importance of inclusion but are also motivated to implement it in their practices. I also note, however, that viewing inclusion as a social justice issue is not only the responsibility of the program. The teachers must also value inclusion. To fully embrace and implement inclusion, teachers must reach the valuing stage, where they see the importance of inclusion and are motivated to implement it in their practices. While programs can instill and promote these values, my research also presents that the personal experiences of teachers are a factor in these values. Through their education and personal experiences, valuing inclusion leads to a deeper emotional connection to and engagement with the concept beyond an understanding of what it is or how it is defined. In the context of Freire's development and critical consciousness preservice teachers can recognize that exclusion and oppression of students with disabilities requires educators recognize and analyze oppressive educational, political, and social contexts shaping society and take action against these Ableist forces (Freire,1970). Preparatory University preservice teachers can also benefit from Mezirow's Transformative Social Justice Learning, in which an emphasis on reflecting critically on their own experiences, assumptions, beliefs, feelings, and mental perspectives can provide new interpretations on their course and field placement experiences (Mezirow, 1991).

Contributions to Theory

In this section, I present the findings of this dissertation study pertaining to the current literature on the topic of preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion and the theoretical framework of CDT and sociocultural learning theory.

Critical Disability Theory

To explore this study comprehensively, CDT provided the information portal to determine preservice teachers' sentiments, attitudes, and concerns toward inclusion. The theory enabled me, as the researcher, to explore and analyze preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion, allowing an analysis under

the frame of CDT, which can challenge normative discourses on inclusive practices. Considering how Slee (2013) demonstrated that CDT is used to understand and dismantle exclusion in education, the current study relied on quantitative and qualitative data analysis to seek knowledge about what preservice teachers' attitudes are about inclusion and how preservice teacher programs can shift the paradigm to more inclusive attitudes or ableist attitudes. Based on the CDT, this study provided initial findings on preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion at Preparatory University to begin discussing how we can challenge ableist assumptions through the structural inequities that exist in preparing preservice teachers to educate all students equally. This study's data revealed a need for more emphasis on curriculum through a CDT lens. There needs to be more discussions on ableism, and some insight into the politics and power that influence creating an inclusive environment needs to be introduced or presented (Devlin & Pothier, 2006). This aligns explicitly with the overall finding that preservice teachers must understand that they are one of the main stakeholders and gatekeepers to create inclusive environments. They need to be educated about their integral role of inclusive education socially, educationally, and as a basic right.

Sociocultural Learning Theory

The sociocultural learning theory emphasizes that social interactions form and construct knowledge and interactions (Bates, 2019). According to the data, although there was no significant difference in preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through comparison of groups, 85% of participants had experience working with individuals with disabilities. Further analysis through the sociocultural learning theory would lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the causal relationship between social interaction and cognitive development of preservice attitudes teachers toward inclusion (Leonard, 2022). My analyses of the integrated data results demonstrate that "a classroom in which children work together" is one of the main traits the current study determined could promote inclusive attitudes through proximal distance. This serves as a building block to understand

how a zone of proximity can foster inclusive attitudes in preservice teachers and our learners. I presented this data as a hypothesis with the intention to leave room for future studies to improve the sociocultural learning theory in regard to inclusive attitudes.

Limitations

Nonetheless, the current study has limitations that suggest caution when interpreting the results. First, the current study assessed one university, which limits the generalizability of the study. Related to the single setting, I also found a lack of variability of diverse characteristics as respondents were predominately White and female. Another limitation was the sample size; a larger sample size would give me greater confidence in my findings, provide more in-depth analysis, and allow for the generalizability of the results to a larger population. In addition to not being able to use parametric tests, I was not able to run all inferential statistics due to sample size limitations. For instance, within the sample size, only one participant did not have experience working with an individual with a disability. The data collection process became increasingly more complex with time constraints and the overall small population pool starting point. Further, since I used statistical tests, this would normally require a larger sample size to ensure that my data was a representative distribution of the population. Since my sample size was small it may not be considered representative of preservice teachers limiting the results being generalized or transferred. This limited the interpretation of differences of preservice attitudes based on the extent of working with a disability minimal. This limitation is also likely the cause of the Cronbach alpha values reported in Chapter 3 for the collective sample (.68), first year respondents (.74), and last year respondents (.60). These Cronbach alpha results are under performing in comparison to the tool's reliability of .76. I attribute this discrepancy to the small sample size, but also note that the alpha values in my study are considered acceptable or marginally acceptable given the small sample size. These values are a limitation in that they limit the reliability of the results and the generalizations that I can make about the application of my findings to the larger population.

Another possible limitation would be the use of the TATIS-A survey. In addition to the scale being self-reported and therefore unable to be verified, the measure is also possibly out of date and may not reflect the current changes in the field, including how inclusivity is discussed. For example, neurodiversity is not mentioned. Additionally, the current study compared different groups of preservice teachers, which did not allow for the benefit of a longitudinal design that would allow for analyzing the same participants over the course of their preparation program. However, by using a mixed methods study, I was able to verify some of the survey responses and allow students to elaborate and explain their thinking about inclusivity. Although limitations restrict the generalizability of my results, I do believe that the study contributes to current knowledge on the impact of preservice education on perceptions of inclusion and adds a more nuanced perspective to the literature about understanding of inclusivity.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study confirmed that teacher preparation programs impact preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. More importantly, I found that teacher preparation programs must ensure preservice teachers are exposed to and supported in inclusive concepts from an environmental, social, behavioral, and educational standpoint. Through analysis of the TATIS-A, although there were some differences between year of curriculum and preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, there remains a significant gap in the components of the curriculum that affected preservice teachers' attitudes. An additional longitudinal study that followed preservice teachers throughout their preparation program may provide pivotal information on specific courses, instructors, and fieldwork that may influence preservice teachers' attitudes.

Further, preservice teachers' definitions of inclusion paired with integrative analysis of interviews lead to the following conclusion: preservice teachers capture the broad understanding of inclusion, but understanding inclusion from a social justice lens remains unseen. In order to understand

inclusion, preservice teachers need to understand that exclusion and oppression of individuals with disabilities continues to be one of the main barriers to inclusion. Preservice teachers graduating from a program still agree that educating students with additional needs within a mainstream setting can disrupt the learning environment and add to the ableist infrastructure that students with disabilities do not belong. The current study demonstrated that these preservice teachers support inclusion and do have inclusive attitudes, but the implementation and feasibility of this require more education. Exposure to a successful inclusive environment can assist the preservice teacher in envisioning the implementation of an inclusive classroom environment. To advance this research, I recommend that teacher preparation programs consider the following. Faculty and curriculum need to develop with the understanding that inclusion is an inalienable right of every individual. It is imperative in this effort to study the perceptions and abilities of instructors in preservice programs as the individuals delivering the content will impact the perceptions of preservice teachers. Given evidence that instructors can influence the attitudes of preservice teachers attitudes toward inclusive education (Sleeter & Carmona, 2017), I recommend further research on the role of the perceptions of instructors, as well as the attitudes of instructors towards inclusion. This should lead to discussions and curriculum on inclusion as a social justice movement and provide a framework for the differentiation of curriculum modifications and the role of a teacher. Discussions should include further restructuring the current educational system view structurally, politically, and socially to meet inclusive attitudes. It is important that teacher preparation programs focus not only on the cognitive understanding of inclusion, but also on developing positive attitudes and values towards inclusion that can be enhanced through discussions, reflective exercises, and more fieldwork opportunities. Improvements in these areas can help challenge students to consider their own beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion.

Furthermore, I find a greater need to not only view disability justice within the larger social justice movement, but also to align curricula to this view. Fraser's theory of social justice (1995) parity

in participation, has been used as a framework by researchers such as Danermark and Gellerstedt (2004) to analyze and understand disability in society. This term is interchangeably used as disability inclusion, to challenge and fully address ableism. Without educating preservice teachers on disability justice, inclusion efforts and policies may fall short of their intentions.

Based on the Cronbach alpha scores for the survey data, I have identified the need for future research to develop a more robust measure of attitudes for inclusiveness. A recommendation stemming from this study is that a more robust, reliable survey instrument be developed and evaluated that is more current to the language and perspectives of 2023. Although the TATIS-A was adopted as the best available instrument for this study, it was published in 2014 and research in the area of inclusive education has dramatically evolved since it was developed nearly a decade ago.

Finally, reforming teacher preparation programs is not enough. Continuous support, assistance, training, and evaluation must be embedded into our educational systems to ensure preservice teachers can implement inclusion successfully. Simply preparing preservice teachers does not allow for successful inclusion; this study supports the notion that as preservice teachers progress throughout their preparation program, they begin to see the real-world barriers teachers face when implementing inclusion from a micro and macro level.

Conclusion

Since the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was signed into law, the fight against ableism and the inception of inclusion for all students continues to be a crucial and prevalent discussion within the educational system. Despite federal mandates to educate all students in the LRE and promote inclusion, teachers continue to be the main stakeholders and change agents in fostering inclusion. A widespread acceptance exists that teacher preparation programs must ensure they expose preservice teachers to how to effectively promote inclusion to address this issue. How teachers think about their students impacts how they plan curriculum, provide instruction and assessment, and

interact with students (Jung, 2007). Researchers have identified many factors as potential predictors of preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion. This chapter presented my findings as they relate to the literature and theories, implications, recommendations, and limitations. Through participant's experiences, this study provided insight into preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion through the progression of coursework, experience, and overall exposure to the curriculum.

This study found that while preservice teachers have exposure to inclusion, it is in an isolated and often concrete context. Inclusion requires acceptance of all students, support for students (and in one case, support for teachers), a classroom in which children work together, a respectful environment, access or a classroom that meets the needs of all children, and an individualized education that promotes equality for students. This study's findings add to the surface layer of what preservice teachers view as inclusion, leaving room for interpretation of what inclusion is but, more importantly, little direction on how to implement and promote inclusive practices, schools, and structures. My hope is that the findings will open discussions on reshaping teacher preparation programs in conjunction with igniting the social justice movement toward more equitable schools. In 2023, there is still a vast and apparent amount of oppression of individuals with disabilities, ableist policies, attitudes, and structures that need reforming and restricting. For educators to embed inclusive education in our school culture, preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion must become obsolete.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: TEACHERS ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION SCALE ADJUSTED

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted

PsycTESTS Citation:

Boyle, C. (2014). Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted [Database record]. Retrieved from

PsycTESTS. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t36360-000>

Instrument Type:

Inventory/Questionnaire

Test Format:

The 21 items of the measure are answered with Likert-type response scales.

Source:

Kraska, Jake, & Boyle, Christopher. (2014). Attitudes of preschool and primary school preservice teachers towards inclusive education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol 42(3), 228-246. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1359866X.2014.926307>, © 2014 by Taylor & Francis. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis.

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Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted

**TAISA
ITEMS**

Please circle the appropriate item

(I) **Please indicate your gender:** Male Female

(II) **Does a member of your family or a friend with whom you have regular contact with have additional support needs?**

YES NO

(III) **Please select the course that you are studying:**

(IV) **What is your current year of study?**

2 3 4 POST GRAD

(V) **What is your specialism/proposed specialism (e.g., physical education, psychology)**

(VI) **Please indicate your age:** _____

(VII) **Have you studied a module or unit on inclusive education?**

Yes No

(VIII) **Have you experience of working in a school in some form of teaching**

YES NO

FOR ALL THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS PLEASE INDICATE WHETHER YOU DISAGREE OR AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT BY SELECTING A SCORE TO REPRESENT YOUR VIEW

Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted

TATISA

ITEMS

(Strongly Agree) 6 5 4 3 2 1 *(Strongly Disagree)*

- *(1) Students with additional support needs should be educated in a mainstream school.
- *(2) Educating children with additional support needs in mainstream classes has a detrimental effect on the other children in the class.
- *(3) I feel that my teacher-training program is preparing me adequately for working with all children irrespective of disability.
- *(4) I feel competent to work with students who have varying levels of difficulties.

- *(5) Students with additional support needs have the social skills required to behave appropriately in the classroom.
- *(6) The presence of students with additional support needs in my mainstream class will have only a minimal effect on my implementation of the standard curriculum.
- *(7) Including children with additional support needs in the classroom can adversely affect the learning environment of the class.
- *(8) A lot of the learning strategies employed in the classroom are applicable to all students, not just those with additional support needs.
- *(9) Some children have difficulties that mean that they should not be educated in mainstream
- *(10) schools. I will be able to make a positive educational difference to students with additional support needs in my classroom.
- *(11) Student peers will reject students with additional support.
- *(12) Students performing at a level more than 3 years below their chronological age should still be educated in mainstream classes.
- *(13) Children with Social and Emotional Behavioral Difficulties should be educated in the mainstream class only if there is sufficient support in place for the class teacher.
- *(14) It is not beneficial for children with additional support needs to be educated in mainstream
- *(15) schools. It is my job, as a teacher, to provide alternative materials for students who have additional support needs (e.g., printed sheets of work from the whiteboard).
- *(16) The daily or weekly formative assignments that are given to students to assess the class should be adapted for children with additional support needs.
- *(17) The teacher should usually attempt to ensure that all the children in the class, irrespective of
- *(18) levels of difficulty or ability, are able to participate in the class as much as is possible.

- *(19) With appropriate support, I could teach all students (including additional support needs) in the same class.
- *(20)

*(21) A teacher, if given what are regarded to be appropriate resources, could teach the vast majority of children with additional support needs.

Children with additional support needs learn best when grouped with others with similar needs.

I do not support the policy of inclusion, no matter how much extra support the teacher is given in the class.

PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR DEFINITION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION:

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION TO USE TATIS-A SURVEY

Dr. Boyle,

Hello. I am writing to seek permission to utilize the below-cited test. As a doctoral candidate, this test would be utilized for my dissertation in Educational Leadership for Diverse Learning Communities at Molloy College. The survey would be administered to preservice teachers in their first and final year to gather self-report data on their perceptions of inclusion education in their teacher preparation program. Would you grant permission to utilize the Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted for my study, of course with appropriately cited permissions and citation of the publication?

Your approval would be greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Quinn

PsycTESTS

Citation: Boyle, C. (2014). Teachers' Attitudes Towards Inclusion Scale Adjusted [Database record]. Retrieved from PsycTESTS. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/t36360-000> Instrument Type: Inventory/Questionnaire Test Format: The 21 items of the measure are answered with Likert-type response scales. Source: Supplied by Author. Original Publication: Kraska, Jake, & Boyle, Christopher. (2014). Attitudes of preschool and primary school preservice teachers towards inclusive education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol 42(3), 228-246. DOI:

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AND PROTOCOL

Dear Participating Preservice Teachers:

I am conducting this study as a part of my doctoral dissertation research to better understand how teacher preparation programs influence preservice teachers' attitudes on inclusion. I plan to explore the differences in preservice teachers' attitudes towards inclusive education based on year of schooling, based on extent of participants interactions with a person of disability, and participants experience teaching children with disabilities. It would be most appreciated and helpful to my research if you would participate.

The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. You will receive a copy of the survey through Qualtrics. Your personal information and responses will be kept completely confidential, and any information you share will be used strictly for the purpose of this dissertation. There are no known risks in participating in this study. The results of this research will benefit the field of education, students and classrooms at large in fostering inclusion.

If you volunteer for the study, you may withdraw at any time and stop participating. You will not be penalized in any way if you do not wish to remain as a participant. If you complete the survey, it means that you have read the information contained in this letter and would like to be a volunteer in this research study. Furthermore, you are granting me permission to use your anonymous responses in my doctoral dissertation, and therefore names and other identifying information will not be associated with my study.

Although your IP address will not be stored in the survey results, there is always the possibility of tampering from an outside source when using the interview for collecting information. While the confidentiality of your responses will be protected once the data is downloaded from the interview, there is always the possibility of hacking or other security breaches that could threaten the confidentiality of your responses.

Thank you in advance for your time. If you have any questions or would like to speak with me about this survey or the study in general, you may contact me at kquinn2@lions.molloy.edu. If you have questions concerning your rights as a subject, you may contact the Institutional Review Board Administrator:

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APPENDIX D: QUALITATIVE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol Questions:

- Can you tell me a little bit about your background and why you went into education? (Probe: general ed or special ed)
- What does inclusion in education mean to you?
- What is your understanding of the differentiation of the role of a general education and special education teacher?
- How has your program prepared you to teach students with a diverse range of abilities?
- Describe your program's focus on curriculum on disabilities and special education?