Chapter 4

Findings

During my second interview in a third grade classroom with 20-year veteran teacher Lynn Kelso, she told a story referencing her first experience teaching in an inclusive classroom. The event she recalled was her first day of her teaching career.

> It was my first day of teaching. I was a 3rd- grade teacher with full responsibility. When I walked in the door, I was getting things ready and then about ten minutes before the kids came into the room, there was an adult that came to my room and she introduced herself and she said that she was going to be my assistant. And I was like, 'Why would I have an assistant?' and she said, 'Well, I am here for the blind child' and I didn't even know that I was getting a blind child and I even wonder sometimes if they [the administration] even knew, I mean, I think that it was an oversight. And so ten minutes later, Jo Ellen came in the room with the kids and she was completely blind. She carried a cane and it was white with red on the tip and I can remember meeting her and thinking, 'Oh my God, I have no clue how to help you, no clue'. And so my first day of actual teaching with twenty eight kids, I had Jo Ellen who was completely blind and I felt panic at first, because I had no clue about what to do with her… I was extremely nervous because I didn't know how to meet her needs. You know, I thought, Oh my God, What am I going to do? Where would she be academically? How would I have to make special adaptations for her as far as curriculum goes, and as far as getting around the room goes? I mean, I had nothing…. We had nothing for this child as

> far as materials go… I knew nothing (Lynn Kelso, Silvermann Elementary School).

Mrs. Kelso's experience offers insight into the concern that she had with her first experience teaching in an inclusive classroom. Mrs. Kelso mentioned that she "…knew nothing" and had "no clue" about how to teach her student who was blind. Phrases such as "I didn't know" and "I knew nothing" about teaching students with disabilities prior to working in inclusive classrooms were prevalent in each of the participant's stories. For example, third grade teacher Molly Chapman stated, "I was very nervous to teach in an inclusive classroom only because, I kept saying, I haven't had any training, I don't know anything". Other teachers described their experiences similarly with assertions including, "I didn't know anything because I didn't have a special ed. background" (Michelle McGlaughlin, grade four) and "I knew nothing, had zero information" (Cameron Hamad, grade four). In each of these situations, general education teachers believed that they did not have enough information pertaining to specific disabilities of the students they were assigned to teach. Furthermore, general educators believed that lacking this information put them in a position where they would not be able to effectively teach students with disabilities in their classrooms. Regardless of their beliefs, teachers were appointed to teaching assignments in inclusive classrooms.

Teachers who stated that they "didn't know" information they deemed necessary for teaching in inclusive classrooms offered additional details that helped to better understand their circumstances. A few factors seemed to contribute significantly to their conjectured lack of knowledge in this area. Fourth grade teacher, Cameron Hamad explained,

> When I was growing up, I didn't have any students with disabilities in my own class. I remember being in middle school when I first saw people around with disabilities; I just saw them in the halls. They were never included. That was it. I have not had a lot of exposure to students with disabilities at all…. When I was interviewed for the position [fourth grade teacher], I didn't get a choice about the classroom that I was going to get and I personally don't think that they should have put me as a first year teacher in here [inclusive classroom]. I didn't really have a say in the matter. I had a lot of fear of working in an inclusive classroom (Cameron Hamad, Silvermann Elementary School).

Likewise, all teachers who participated in this study stated that they didn't have any experience learning or interacting with children who had disabilities in school settings. Instead, the background information that was attained from their prior experiences provided knowledge on separate educational systems and socialization patterns. That is, students with disabilities were separated from the general elementary education classrooms where all of the interviewed teachers had been educated. Teachers mentioned that they were lacking information because they had no exposure to or interaction with children with disabilities. Moreover, formalized education on teaching students with disabilities was not part of their teacher preparation programs. One teacher explained her predicament in teaching with no prior knowledge,

> I didn't have kids with disabilities in my own classroom when I was a kid myself. Their room was down the hall; it was separate, more off on the end of the school. I don't recall seeing or knowing any kids with disabilities when I was in Kindergarten through sixth grade. I saw them in high school and unfortunately,

> we didn't socialize with them at all. I don't really recall them even having lunch with us…. So I had no understanding about disabilities or anything like that at all. My first year teaching I had a little girl in fifth grade with autism and she was non-verbal and I really didn't know much about it. I didn't know much about autism or any disabilities at the time. I didn't really know how I could include her into the class and I don't know if I really gave her the best year that I could have because I didn't know. She certainly enjoyed being in our classroom… I don't know if we really did her a complete service because we just didn't know a lot about inclusion. If I was her mother, I don't know, I just don't know if I had a child like that, I don't know where I would want that child to be. It's a tough situation to be in…. Part of her disability was that she was also legally blind and I was really nervous about getting her in the first place because I didn't know anything about teaching someone with such severe disabilities. All that I knew was that I remembered the year before when I would walk in the hall and hear her screaming and yelling and crying. She would do that every day. So, I am thinking, oh, my gosh, what am I going to do? What am I going to do? I was really nervous about how it was going to work (Kathy Tallman, Malden Park Elementary School).

Statements that included phrases suggesting that teachers "didn't know" how to teach in inclusive classrooms were coupled with feelings of nervousness and fear; this coupling of the cognitive belief of "not knowing" with the associated emotion of fear was common throughout all participants' experiences.

Understanding that the teachers' background knowledge and prior experiences did not provide information on or interaction with people with disabilities provides some insight into the cognitive confusion and emotional distress that they experienced when they began to teaching in inclusive classrooms. "Not knowing" what to expect or how to teach students with disabilities, tangled with feelings of fear and nervousness, became an influential impetus for teachers to seek means of learning information that they felt they needed to know.

Through analyzing the stories that teachers shared during interview sessions, four main findings emerged offering insight into how teachers have lessened their ideas of "not knowing" while dissipating their fear that they had with respect to teaching in inclusive classrooms. Each finding provided insight into answering the research question: How did general elementary education teachers who are teaching in inclusive settings learn to teach the wide heterogeneity of students in their classrooms? The findings that emerged were (a) initiating independent reading and research; (b) knowing all students; (c) reflecting on teaching practices; and (d) learning from special educators. The following information provides a description of each finding with subsequent evidence from teachers' narratives.

Initiating Independent Reading and Research

All but one of the teachers interviewed stated that they initiated their own independent research to locate and read information on inclusion, special education, and teaching students with disabilities. Teachers initiated independent reading and research when they were faced with "not knowing" pertinent information on disabilities specific to the needs of students in their classes and with the circumstances that they were involved.

That is, all teachers who located information to read on disabilities read specifically about disabilities that students in their classes had (Table 4 provides an overview of some teachers' phrases that were representative of this finding). Additionally, some teachers also located and read information on special and inclusive education. For instance, Molly Chapman, a third grade teacher who had five years experience teaching was in her second semester of her first year teaching in an inclusive classroom. With no background on disabilities, she was assigned to teach two students with autism and one student diagnosed with a central auditory processing delay (CAPD). She mentioned that she had not heard of autism or CAPD prior to being assigned as their teacher. Specifically, she explained that she needed information on autism. "I got the articles myself… and read them to learn what I wanted to know and what I needed to know…. I read a lot of articles on autism. It helped me to learn what that was, some of the behaviors to expect and it gave me a basic understanding of it. From the articles, I learned not to deviate from my schedule too much and to keep things consistent. That helped a lot. I also learned a lot about what autism is" (Molly Chapman, Malden Park Elementary School). Similarly, Cameron Hamad was in her fourth year teaching elementary education but was in her first year teaching in an inclusive classroom when she was interviewed. In her inclusive classroom were nineteen students with four students identified as having disabilities and working with individualized education plans. Ms. Hamad had no information on the disabilities that her students had including Amanda who had Down syndrome, Phillip who had Central Auditory Processing Delay and twins Joshawn and Darnell who were physically and cognitively disabled due to their mother's drug use while pregnant. Cameron stated, "I've done some research on the Internet on their specific disorders, for

example, my child with central auditory processing disorder. I had no idea what that all entailed so I did some research on the Internet about it. I also had to read about Down syndrome. I didn't know anything about that". Lynn Kelso, a twenty-year teacher also researched information on Down syndrome. Lynn had two students with Down syndrome in her inclusive classroom and explained "Since I had children with disabilities in front of me, I had the desire to learn how to help them. I did a lot of reading, research. I did a lot of reading. I really did; I really did." Through their reading, both teachers explained that they learned about Down syndrome while also learning about certain characteristics that students with Down syndrome often have. In such instances, teachers believed that they needed to learn information as soon as they could because they "were responsible for teaching all of their students." Lynn Kelso also explained about a time earlier in her career that she used independent reading and research to help her learn about a specific disability that a student had in her class. She explained, "They asked me to take an autistic child and I knew nothing about autism so I went and got books and articles and talked with people. I think, really, you learn on your own. You learn to dig, you learn to dig to see what you can find out that will help this child." In this example, Lynn provided some insight into one of the ways that teachers facilitate their own learning.

Michelle McGlaughlin, a 4th-grade teacher at Malden Park Elementary School, was in her second year teaching in an inclusive classroom. Of the 20 students in her classroom, three were working with individualized education plans. One of her students, Sam, was diagnosed with autism and was legally blind. William had learning disabilities in reading, written expression and math, and Nina was an English Language Learner. Michelle explained that she found resources to read on autism and on learning disabilities

by commenting, "I don't have any special ed. background. When I went to school, there wasn't any special ed. course that I took or anything like that so I had to figure out how I was going to learn what I needed to know. I got information to read and to learn different techniques that … the experts say to use. I got that information before the school year actually started. I haven't had any formal training at all." Hollie Peterson, 1st-grade teacher, recalled a time eight years earlier during her first year teaching in an inclusive classroom when she had a student with Down syndrome in her classroom. She mentioned that she did not know anything about teaching in an inclusive classroom. Hollie explained, "I had to do a lot of research. When I first started teaching in inclusive classrooms, I read a lot of journal articles on it [inclusion]." Hollie clarified that she was nervous because she didn't know what to expect when teaching in an inclusive classroom but that her reading helped to "break the ice a little".

Pat Micklus, a 3rd-grade teacher with 13 years teaching in general education classrooms, was in her second semester of her first year teaching in an inclusive setting. Of her classroom of 20 students, three students were diagnosed as having disabilities. Robert and Adam were both diagnosed with autism and Claire was diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome. Pat explained, "I have two kids with autism, different degrees and different forms. I wish I had known about that before teaching them. I didn't know that there were different degrees of autism. I bought a book over the summer at a teacher's store that is on how to teach in inclusive classrooms on how things go in this type of classroom and about autism and I read up on that… it helped me in the beginning."

Teachers mentioned that they often looked for what they need to know about specific disabilities that students had in their classrooms and often made adaptations to

that knowledge when considering what they believe that their students needed. For example, Pat Micklus said, "When I read that book, it helped me a little but, but you do your own thing after thinking about what you read." And Lynn Kelso explained, "I think that even when you read, you might find something that you think is perfect, but then it might not work and you have to adapt it to what you need and then you go from there." When teachers mentioned that they had to make adaptations to information gained through reading, they referred often to the structure and routine of their educational day, management strategies and educational strategies they used to work with all students in inclusive classrooms. While teachers modified some information found in their reading about inclusion and disabilities, teachers believed that the specific knowledge that they gained helped them to better meet their students' needs in their educational settings.

Kathy Tallman was in her fourth year teaching elementary school. All four years of her experience had been at the same school and she had taught in inclusive classrooms throughout all years of her experience. During the time that she was interviewed, Kathy mentioned that although she had students with learning disabilities in her classroom, the students' disabilities weren't as severe as students she had taught in the past. However, Kathy's fifth grade class was actively engaged with cooperative learning practices with another teacher's fifth grade class. In that class was one student, Bobby, who had cerebral palsy and was very limited with his verbal expression. Kathy mentioned that she thought often about Bobby, her limited understanding of cerebral palsy, and how the world occured for him. Kathy told how she initiated her own independent reading and research to learn about Bobby's specific disability; however, the way and rationale for using the information that she found differed considerably from previously mentioned teachers.

Kathy located a book that told a story about a child with disabilities so she could help her students to better understand life from a perspective different than their own. After reading the book herself, she decided to read the book to her fifth grade students. Kathy explained:

> I read a great book, Petey by Ben Michaelson and it is about a little boy who…had cerebral palsy and I just finished reading it to my class and one of my students said, 'Wow. You mean Bobby can learn?' and he was referring to Bobby who is a little boy in another classroom [in our school] with cerebral palsy… He sometimes comes into our room for cooperative work…. Well, after reading this book, they [students] realized that this boy Petey, even though he couldn't talk, he had the brain capacity to learn. But he couldn't move. He couldn't move his arms, just flail them. So the kids thought that because he was in a wheelchair and that he couldn't talk, that he was dumb. And they learned from this book. It was a terrific book. It was a very powerful book. It sent a great message to the kids…. Now, I notice that they talk to Bobby a little differently. Now they ask him questions and even though he doesn't answer verbally back to them, he will do something to let them know that they are communicating with him. I think that they understand that, they sympathize and empathize, and they communicate more with him now…. The kids realize now that kids with cerebral palsy are physically handicapped and that they have something to say, and they just can't get it out. I really think that the book helped the students to understand cerebral palsy and what it is.

In this situation, Kathy's reading was a method that she used to become self-educated about some characteristics of cerebral palsy. Her self-education provided the opportunity for her students to gain knowledge about cerebral palsy as well. Kathy explained that since her students knew about cerebral palsy, they were more willing to interact with Bobby, which lead them to better understand and accept him.

During interview sessions, teachers frequently mentioned that they learned to teach in inclusive classrooms "on the job". Deconstructing this phrase took some probing to determine what teachers meant by this statement. Moreover, it often took much redirection during interview sessions for teachers to provide detailed descriptions of what the phrase meant to each of them because teachers often suggested, "Well, I just learn it [how to teach in inclusive classrooms] on the job; you just learn to teach on the job." Subsequent questions such as "Can you tell me what you meant when you said 'learning on the job'?" were frequently answered with statements such as "You know, you learn it as you go." Through this initial questioning, I discovered that teachers' learning was so deep-rooted and intertwined throughout many circumstances and interactions that they had during their teaching days that teachers had not contemplated how they were learning what they believed they needed to know to teach in inclusive classrooms. Analyzing information that teachers provided during interview sessions provided some insight into what was meant when they referred to their learning to teach in inclusive classrooms "on the job".

When deconstructed, learning "on the job" referred to three means of learning how to teach in inclusive classrooms. General elementary educators mentioned that they were learning to teach by knowing and learning from their students, reflecting on and

changing their own teaching practices, and learning from special education teachers. These three different modes of learning were the three final findings that emerged through analyzing general educators' perspectives and experiences that they shared.

Knowing All Students

Knowing and learning from students was the second finding that emerged through examining teachers' narratives. This finding indicated that while general educators believed that they didn't know specific information regarding disabilities that students in their class had, their learning was often acquired through working with their own students. Teachers often mentioned that they found time in their teaching day to work one on one with their students with disabilities and that this practice assisted them in getting to know the student, to better understand the disability which increased their overall knowledge on the disability while subsequently decreasing their fears (Table 5 provides an overview of some teachers' phrases that were representative of this finding).

Betty Kay, with 29 years teaching experience, was in her first year teaching in an inclusive second grade classroom. In her classroom of 19 students, four had disabilities and had their own Individualized Education Plans (IEP). Sandy had Down syndrome, Gordon had autism, Christina was diagnosed with Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD) and Jamal had an emotional disorder. Ms. Kay participated in the following dialogue, illustrating how she believed that she was learning to teach "on the job":

R: What has helped you to learn how to teach in inclusive classrooms?

BK: Well, you know, on the job training.

R: Can you tell me what you mean by that?

BK: From experience.

R: Well, what experiences have helped you to learn it?

BK: You know, you can sit there and read inclusion books because I have done that in the past and that gave me a start which was a good thing, but it's not the same as getting in touch with a child and really seeing how this child behaves, so I think that being on the job and being familiar with the child, feeling comfortable with the kid you are going to be working with and talking with is important. You can't be afraid and if you think that you know everything, you don't… I think that some people are a little timid of kids with disabilities and it's probably the old stand-by thing.

R: What do you mean when you say 'the old stand-by thing'?

BK: Well, if you're not around somebody, you don't know what that person is like. Every kid is an individual and… you have to like kids. They're not the same from moment to moment…. Maybe teachers have never had an experience of working with somebody who is very disabled and at first they might want nothing to do with a kid like that because they aren't really comfortable. I think it's the fear of the unknown. You really have to be there with the kids. Be open to the kids. They [kids with disabilities] are just like any other kid, really. All kids have their own little quirks, it's true.

Another 2nd-grade teacher mentioned learning in a way similar to Betty Kay. Lucielle Slagle had taught for seven years, three of the years in inclusive classrooms. Lucielle's classroom of 17 students contained five that were working with Individualized Education Plans (IEP) and were diagnosed with disabilities that included Asperger's syndrome, learning disabilities and speech and language delays. Lucielle explained

> I think that it is a matter of giving it [inclusion] a try and working with the kids. If you haven't had any experience working with disabilities you have to interact with the kids get to know the kids. After I did that, I quickly realized that I absolutely loved it. And at first, it is hard. My first year, I had such a group that year. We had three kids with Down syndrome in the room and, oh, my gosh. They really gave us a run for our money…. Since working with those kids, I've learned that each student is different and I have to figure out what each student needs, what they need to learn, how they need to learn. I had to get an understanding that kids are kids and they are more the same than they are different and I think that almost all educators will find it surprising how much a child with a special need is just like any other kid. Inclusion kind of has to be compared to anything you're learning, or any new experience that looks scary because of the unknown. Once you start doing something new, I mean there are probably lots of people who have done something new and at first said, Oh, I could never to that, but I think that once people try something new, think it's pretty good… and with inclusion, it's the same idea, I think that you learn best by doing it. I do.
>
> (Lucielle Slagle, Malden Park Elementary School)

While this information provided some initial insight into how teachers were learning to teach in inclusive classrooms, deeper understanding came when teachers were asked to explain one particular interaction with a student that they believe facilitated their own learning. With that request, teachers provided more specific and detailed information, revealing precisely what and how they believed that they learned "on the job". For example, Molly Chapman, a 3rd-grade teacher mentioned,

> I sit down and read with Frankie my high needs autistic student every day for about ten minutes, and I have learned what he will respond to and what he will not so I have learned to work with him. Like simple stuff. The louder my voice gets, the louder his voice gets. So, when I lower my voice, he lowers his voice. That's how he responds. My other little boy with autism, Sean, he has a great personality, he just, I learned, he is just so different than the other boy. Sean loves to get up and talk in front of people. So, I have learned that's how he is. So, I mean, I guess each of the children are different…. When you are a teacher and have an inclusive classroom for the first time, you are just running wild. It wasn't that long ago so I remember. You are always trying to stay ahead of everything and you don't feel like you even have that extra five minutes to spend time with a kid very often. I learned to take time, even any time that kids are in the class and interact with them one on one. I think that it gives me a better picture about the kids. I think that if we can connect with students and have them feel that they want to do the work, and getting to know them personally, then I think that the students get more out of it (Molly Chapman, Malden Park Elementary School).

Another teacher, Kathy Tallman told about an experience that she had teaching a few years prior to this year. She had Josie in her class who was non-verbal and used a wheelchair. Kathy recalled,

> I worked with her as much as I could one-on-one and I learned so much and found out what she could do and that she could spell words on her Dynabox [electronic communication device] and I learned, I think that the best lesson that I learned from her is to try to take the time to work with students individually, as opposed

to always spending time with the whole class. And you can do it. Because really, if you do that, you can really get a better feel for what they can do and then you can include them more…. I think that was the best lesson that I have ever learned from students realizing that you just have to spend individual time with them. She loved it, you know. She needed to be toileted too and I helped her with that and I think that that showed her that I cared about all aspects of her life.

Another teacher, Cameron Hamad was in her first year of teaching fourth grade and had participated in the following dialogue with me:

R: How are you learning to teach in inclusive classrooms?

CH: I don't know. I really don't know. I just think that it's from watching the kids in the classroom, from watching them.

R: That's interesting. What do you think that you are learning from watching the kids?

CH: From watching them, from their questioning, I think watching them on the whole. But if I have to think about how I learned that, that's tough. Sometimes, it's kind of innate, I guess (laughs).

R: Can you think about a specific situation that you have watched and tell me about it?

CH: Yeah. My Down syndrome girl Amanda, she is very, she's a fun loving little girl but is very stubborn and that's part of her disability which I learned which I am learning and from working with her one on one I have learned ways to coax her to do her work.

R: How have you coaxed her?

CH: Using comedy, that kind of thing, helps a lot with her…. I learn by teaching every day. It is a learning process. Every day I learn. I am trying to be specific here. I think of Phillip who has central auditory processing delay and what he is and isn't capable of doing and how to get him to do work and do it effectively and like I said, I have to use humor with Amanda and I have to be a little intimidating with Phillip to do something and it's funny because I never thought that that would be something that I would have to worry about or have to do. I would have loved to have had the background knowledge on the specific disabilities. I don't know a lot. There's a lot that I don't know and I am embarrassed to say that because I am teaching these kids but I don't know… So, while I say that it definitely would have helped to have more knowledge, I still think that in the end, that it wouldn't really have prepared me for coming in and teaching in an inclusive classroom. I just have to do it. I have to work with the kids.

One teacher, Lynn Kelso referred to her learning by working with students as "trial and error". She provided information that helped to understand that she had tried different strategies and methods of teaching students with disabilities one at a time to find out what worked best for each student. Lynn reflected on a situation that she had years prior to her interview in the following conversation:

LK: It's just trial and error. I don't really feel that there is a lot of other ways to learn to teach students. Each child with special needs is so different that you have to get to know the child first, and then you can go from there…. The first year that I was here I had a little girl in first grade that was deaf. She had an interpreter for the first time in school and the interpreter's role was just to sign for the child. And

I was responsible for everything else…. She was a little spitfire, really powerful personality… I think that the biggest challenge that I had with her was to try to get her to understand that she was one of the gang…. I had to really teach her to socially wait her turn and how she could be part of the group. I think that she saw herself separate. So, that was the challenge. Academically, it wasn't so hard because I had materials available for her but it was hard that I couldn't communicate with her in the same way.

R: What do you mean?

LK: Everything went through the interpreter and I think that she probably communicated less with me because it was such an effort, you know. But I decided to keep a journal with her which was really helpful so that it was just between her and I and we didn't have to include an interpreter for that. That was great.

R: How did you know to do that?

LK: I don't know. It just seemed that it would make an extra connection. I had to keep trying things until one worked. And I got to learn more about her through her journal entries than through a lot of other things that we did…. So, writing worked well with us. That was a nice connection and I think that it helped us bridge the gap of really getting to know each other and meeting her needs a little bit better.

Throughout teachers' narratives, there were instances where teachers explained that they learned how to teach students with disabilities by getting to know them as individuals and working with them one-on-one. Thus, the students influenced teachers'

learning of particular disabilities; teachers' knowledge gain was specific to the nature of their classroom population of students and the particular disabilities of students that they taught.

Reflecting on Teaching Practices

Reflecting on teaching practices was another finding that emerged when teachers explained that they learned to teach in inclusive classrooms while "on the job". Reflecting on specific moments that teachers experienced when teaching was seen as a critical component to planning for and teaching lessons (Table 6 provides an overview of some of the teachers' phrases that were representative of this finding). Teachers revealed that after their teaching day ended, they often thought back to distinct moments of instruction time and considered ways that they could change their teaching practice to better assist all learners.

Second grade teacher Lucielle Slagle stated, "I reflect a lot during and right after school but a lot of that happens when I am on my own in the car or in the shower or when I'm trying to fall asleep at night. I think, 'I could have done that differently. Next time, I'll do it that way'". Lucielle mentioned that she always thought about her teaching practices and believed her reflection contributed to her being able to teach students more effectively while making her a more competent teacher.

Another teacher Kathy Tallman told about an experience that she had with a student who showed a lot of frustration with reading and writing. Kathy commented,

> A few weeks ago, I wrote something on a paper for one of my students, Anthony, who has a learning disability. I wrote down a comment like, 'Wow. This is really nice. I've learned from you by what you had to write about a personal experience

> of yours for your autobiography'. And then he said to me, 'Thanks for giving me a chance to write that'. Afterward, I thought, you know, little things like that make me realize that I should tailor things for all of the students in my class so they have an opportunity to learn and that they are in charge of their own learning, just like that comment from Anthony.

A fourth grade teacher, Michelle McGlaughlin, also commented on reflecting on her own teaching. She spoke about her reflection during and after teaching Sam, a student who had autism and was legally blind:

> 'Okay', I thought, 'I better change my way of teaching, Shel, because he can't see anything that you're doing!' And so I had to change everything. Now when I use the overhead, I have to make sure that someone is sitting next to him with a dry erase board explaining to him what I am doing. After the first week of school, I thought about what I was doing and it made me change everything that I did. Because it had to be. He couldn't do anything that I was doing because I used to just hold up things that I wanted students to do and I had to rethink all of that. So, I learned to make accommodations… sometimes I think about it right while I'm teaching and I'm like… Oh, Okay. Let's change this right now. And I change it right away. And then those changes lead me to think about my teaching next time, too. It's in my thought process… and I try to log it in the back of my brain for next time and keep it in my mind. It's usually afterwards that I go, "Oh, Okay, I should change that."

Another teacher, Lynn Kelso also described ways that she has used reflection to learn more about teaching in inclusive classrooms. Lynn mentioned:

> I think back to what I did. If I think that cutting back on an assignment is going to help a child get through an assignment and it doesn't, then I can say, 'Well, obviously they don't understand the content that I am teaching, I need to back up.' And as you become a more experienced teacher, you know that really in your classroom, you have all sorts of learners that fit along a continuum, but your children with disabilities seem to have much more of a gap, and so you have to go back further. I really had to think about how I taught it [content] and search because I was ultimately responsible for a child's learning.

Teachers revealed that they learned to teach by reflecting on how they taught and interacted with students and considered what might better assist students next time they were in situations similar to ones that they had. To illustrate, Kathy Tallman mentioned:

> Every year I learn because every year I get a new group of kids so every year I get something new to learn and like this year, I really bonded with a little girl in my class and trying to understand how she thinks, you know, and I can remember her. Then the next year, I'll have another student, and I'll remember, "well this worked with Felicia, so I can try that with this student." I try to do that and I think it helps a lot when you're able to reflect on what you've done and concentrate on it to help other individuals that you teach.

Since each general educator worked with and learned from different students, their overall knowledge gain was very specific to their individual circumstances and events that happened in their own inclusive classrooms. Therefore, although it was understood that while general education teachers believed that they learned to teach in inclusive classrooms through their interactions with students, it was impractical to

categorize specific data on what knowledge teachers gained because their learning was situational to each particular experience. It became apparent that, inherent to teachers' notions of reflection, was the understanding that their reflection was positioned within their background knowledge, the context of their classroom demographics as well as past and present teaching situations.

Learning from Special Educators

The fourth finding that emerged included information revealing that general educators learned to teach in inclusive classrooms by teaching with special educators. This finding was the strongest that emerged because teachers themselves held their special education colleagues as the most influential contributors in assisting their learning process while working in inclusive settings (Table 7 provides an overview of some of the teachers' phrases that were representative of this finding). In each of the participants' inclusive classrooms, specific service delivery models were used to teach all students. As such, at least one special educator and one teaching assistant were assigned to teach in each inclusive classroom alongside the general education teachers. Teaching with other adults in the same classroom was a new experience for teachers who did not have prior experience working in inclusive classrooms. In addition, general education teachers revealed that they had not had any prior experience teaching with adults who assisted students with disabilities. Since teachers lacked experience, they often asserted that they did not know how to work with other adults in their own classrooms. This sense of not knowing elicited many feelings of nervousness, fear and frustration prior to and while working alongside other teaching staff in their classrooms. Teachers referred to their thoughts and feelings in many similar ways. Hollie Peterson was a fifteen-year veteran

teacher who was in her eighth year teaching in inclusive classrooms. She commented on her initial thoughts regarding working with other adults in her first grade classroom:

> I want you to understand that I think that teachers are afraid of other adults in the room with them while they are teaching. That's the way that I think it is. They are afraid that they might not live up to the expectation of the other people. It is very hard to have someone else in the room with you when you teach. Especially every day. It's like being on my toes every day…. I was afraid of it to be honest with you. I was afraid my first year of inclusion. I didn't know; I was so upset. I didn't know anything about it.

Pat Micklus, a fourth grade teacher who was in her first year teaching in inclusive classrooms had one special education teacher assigned to work in her classroom half of the day along with one teaching assistant who stayed in her classroom throughout the entire day. Pat expressed that she felt uneasy about teaching with other adults in the room:

> The thing that made me nervous was knowing that I was going to have extra adults in the classroom. I think that there are days when you don't feel totally prepared or you don't feel like this is my forte teaching a science lesson on motion, or whatever, someone is going to be able to sit here and listen to me and they'll say, Oh, my gosh… I don't think that I have all of the background knowledge and tricks and strategies that are needed to teach in an inclusive class…. I probably wouldn't be doing a decent job just because I don't know different ways of teaching.

Betty Kay, a first grade teacher in her first year of teaching in an inclusive classroom, used a service delivery model that included a one teaching assistant and a special educator in the mornings replaced by a teaching assistant in the afternoons. In addition, Betty mentioned that a speech and language teacher often came into her room to assist students in her class throughout the day. Although Betty Kay was in her twenty-ninth year teaching elementary school, she had never worked alongside so many other adults in her classroom. Betty explained her circumstances:

> I don't think that people are well prepared or knowledgeable about what is involved with inclusion and what inclusion actually means. I think that they [administration] just say, 'Will you take it?' and you say, 'Sure, I'll take it' but you don't know what you're getting yourself in for. I think you need to have some background of information on the subject, how to deal with the kids, how to work with people, extra people, because usually they come along with quite a few additional adults in your room… They [students with disabilities] have a whole entourage that they come with. For me, I didn't have the knowledge base for how to suddenly approach working with so many different people all at one time…. First of all, you have to figure out what to do with everybody's purses (laughing). You come in and there's five purses in the room now and you don't have room for that so you really have to be accommodating and you have to go with the flow of things.

Cameron Hamad was a 4th-grade teacher who was also in her first year teaching in an inclusive classroom. The service delivery model that was used included a half-day special education teacher, a full-day teaching assistant and two half-day teaching

assistants (one during her mornings replaced by another in the afternoons). In that way, Cameron's teaching situation included at least two other adults in her classroom with her. She explained:

> I think that teachers have a fear of working with other adults. That's what I had. I felt nervous because I didn't know what people were looking for and what my role was. You see, I didn't expect, I didn't think that I would be the type of person that would really want, I don't know if I would go as far as to say like autonomy but that I'd want my own classroom. You know, I never thought that I would have a problem with some other adult in my room. Sometimes, it's such a challenge for me to have the adults in the room with me though. It's really hard to try to mesh it all together. I've got to do something so that I don't burst. That's the part that's been a real challenge where I didn't really think that it would be. I mean, you just go in and do your thing and you're working with other people constantly and I think that I'm a people person but not to that degree.

While working with special educators in their inclusive classrooms, general elementary educators soon realized that special education teachers knew specific information that they themselves were lacking. To learn from special educators, general education teachers revealed that they had to become flexible with their teaching practices while being open to all forms of communication with special educators. This element in their teaching practice was seen as new and often cumbersome for veteran as well as inexperienced teachers. General educator-to-special educator communication was seen as new because prior to working in inclusive classrooms, general educators worked alone with students they were assigned to teach; communication between other adults in the

school happened only during predetermined events such as meetings or passing in hallways. Communication often seemed cumbersome for teachers because they found it challenging to find time in their teaching day to communicate with the support staff with whom they worked. Since many teachers revealed that they worked with more than two other staff members throughout their day, finding time to meet with each of them was often difficult. Although they saw the adults in their own classrooms, it was often in the presence of students; therefore, non-verbal communication was often sought particularly within the classroom environment. Outside of the classroom, general educators asked special education teachers direct and specific questions pertaining to specific circumstances and students that they shared. Teacher Betty Kay explained such a circumstance:

> Since I work so much with the special educator, we have to do a lot of give and take. Give and take. There is a lot of that. The special ed. teacher guides me through a lot of it. We have to communicate a lot. Things go hand in hand…. You really need to know the other teacher. You need to know what you're working with. You have to be willing to give up what you might control. You have to be able to give up some power. You have to be flexible. I just have to be. It's so true… I have to communicate. It is important. I just had to be willing to give up a little bit of myself, make sure that I am talking and I couldn't get too overwhelmed.

Another teacher, Marie Mahar, worked next door to Betty Kay and was teaching in a first grade classroom. Marie had 12 years teaching in elementary classrooms and was in her first year teaching in an inclusive classroom. Marie had three students with IEPs

and had a service delivery model that included a half-day special education teacher, a half-day teaching assistant and a full-day one-on-one teaching assistant to work with six year old Kelly, a student who was diagnosed with Down syndrome. Marie commented:

> I've realized that I have to be very flexible in my teaching and I think that I have to have a personality that can deal with a lot of people in my room, a lot of interruptions and I have to let things roll off of my back a little bit. That was hard because you never know what is going to happen and you have to like adults enough because there is going to be a number of adults, not just the kids, just the whole aspect of liking kids and you know, being willingly patient with them, that's a given, but the other aspect is being patient with the adults in your room. You sometimes have five or six people running around, you know, that sort of thing…. You've got to have good communication.

Lucielle Slagle, a second grade teacher, used a service delivery model including a half-day special education teacher, a full day teaching assistant, a full day one-on-one teaching assistant, and a half-day early literacy teaching assistant. At times in Lucielle's classroom, there were five adults in her room. In addition, Lucielle mentioned that "Last semester I had a student teacher too, so that made 6 adults in the room." Through this experience, Lucielle mentioned:

> What I have learned more than anything is that you really need a group of adults that are passionate about teaching and are invested in the kids and have people skills because teaching together is the most important thing…. I have found that you have to have someone who you work with that has a sense that everyone in the classroom's opinions and feelings are valued. It works great when you bounce

ideas off of one another… and if you like to have someone else in the room and feel comfortable in the room with them. That has taken me some getting used to but once you have it, then you love it…. We all take ownership for everyone in the class and we get a feeling of we're in this together. I think that I thought that I could do everything at first. I couldn't. I thought that I could at first, but by the end of my first year in an inclusive classroom, I learned that I couldn't do it all… I think that I had to be brave enough to say to the special ed. teacher, 'Would you mind doing this?' and I think that's something that made it work. You really need to communicate.

Kathy Tallman had one special education teacher with whom she worked in the mornings replaced by a half-day teaching assistant in the afternoons. Kathy also mentioned circumstances of working with other adults in her classroom:

I realized that I have to work cooperatively with the special educator. I think that's the biggest thing in inclusion. If you don't work well with your special education teacher, I think that it's difficult. It makes it stressful. The days won't run smooth. You need a person that is going to share the duties with you. That's what makes a difference for me. I think that's the number one thing that I needed to know… because I think that communication is the hardest thing about working in an inclusive classroom, and something that is so important between the special education teacher and the regular education teacher.

Hollie Peterson had taught elementary education for seven years prior to working with other adults in her classroom. Now in her eighth year teaching in an inclusive classroom, she stated:

> I had to be a flexible person working in an inclusive classroom. If I had to think back to before teaching in an inclusive classroom, I've had to learn that it's not just my classroom. I'm more of a team teacher… I became more of a team player. First, I was with my own classroom, with myself, the 'I'm going to do this myself' idea, but now it's more of a group effort.

A service delivery model including one half-day special education teacher, one full day teaching assistant and two half-day teaching assistants was used in Cameron Hamad's fourth grade inclusive classroom. She commented on her realization that she had to be flexible with her teaching practices in her inclusive environment:

> I have learned that I really have to be a people person because there are so many adults running everywhere in this classroom…. You have to have a fairly easy going personality to allow all of that. I think that teachers need to get used to working with other adults. To work in an inclusion classroom, you have to be flexible, you have to be easy going and you have to be patient. That's what I had to learn to be.

Pat Micklus had 13 years teaching experience prior to teaching in an inclusive classroom. She worked with a half-day special education teacher and a full day teaching assistant. Pat explained about her need to be flexible and the special educator's need to be flexible with her as well:

> There have been times when I have been kind of loosey-goosey about things and I wasn't sure how we were going to do something but my special ed. teacher was easy going about it. She is available for me to talk to… and we communicate together which I think is real important. The lines of communication are good

> which are real important. Feeding off of each other helps. What do you think about this? I ask. Or how do you want to handle the next situation….
>
> Communication is the big thing with a special ed. teacher. I have found that it is important for me to have a good rapport with the special ed. teacher and communication and to be flexible I have learned about flexibility and being patient because I never know what to expect.

When asked to tell more about specific conversations that general educators had with special education teachers, details revealed information disclosing specific knowledge that special educators taught general educators. With this information, it became apparent that general elementary educators were learning how to teach in inclusive classrooms by gaining specific knowledge relative to the disabilities of students that they taught students while learning how to best meet their students' educational needs. First grade teacher Betty Kay explained such a learning experience:

> I have had to use the special ed. teacher as a resource because every child is a little different and there are some things that I don't quite understand why they behave that way. You think, 'Okay, they look normal. They should be doing this but they don't. Now, why aren't they doing it? Why are they behaving like this?' And you need to have somebody who understands so that you can go to them and ask them because if you don't then you're going to be butting your head against the wall and you're going to be having a lot of upset kids and you don't want to do that so you really have to have someone you can go to.

Second grade teacher Lucielle Slagle indicated that she believed that she became a better teacher because of the knowledge that she gained from the special educator who worked with her. Lucielle stated:

> I feel like, for me personally, that for me as a teacher, I feel like I've become a better teacher because of the opportunity to work with other professionals, and I get to see, especially the last couple of years, the special ed. teacher in the room and she had a ton of expertise and having her in the room, I have learned so much from her and her knowledge and her background and her experiences. So, I feel that watching and getting to interact with other teachers which you really don't have a chance to do that as much unless you have an inclusive class. I feel like it is a gift in fact that I get to work with other teachers and get to learn about other teaching techniques, management techniques, just different ideas as to how she would approach a topic…. The special ed. teacher helped me to understand my students with special needs and what they need and how I can help them best. And I don't think that I would have ever understood that. You can pass a teacher in the hallway, and say, 'Oh, what are you doing?' But until you work with them on a daily basis, I saw the things that she was doing and how she just plain talked to the students and I learned so much from her…. I think that she has taught me that they need to have a very individual program and goals and it really can't be what the other kids are doing with their program and goals. I was trying to kind of parallel what the other kids were doing instead. And that didn't work. She helped me with that.

Third grade teacher Molly Chapman explained that she found that some of her students were not responding well to the directions that she gave when she introduced assignments. Molly illustrated that she learned to teach differently by watching and listening to the special educator help a student in her class. After observing the special educator, Molly reflected back to that incident and has changed her own teaching practice because she believed that changing the way that she gave directions better met the needs of her students. Molly explained:

> I talk to the special ed. teacher and I ask, 'Why is he doing this?' And she tells me. That's beneficial because… I don't have a lot of information on special ed. issues…. I watched the special ed. teacher when she was working with Frankie and some of the other kids. She used very soft-spoken language. I listened closely because she knows how to reword what I've said. It gives me other options. If I say the directions one way, I wonder why the students don't understand what I've said. Then I hear how she says them and then I think, I hear her be very quiet and she says, 'Let's think about that' and then she breaks directions down into parts. She takes it slower and uses different vocabulary. That has helped me to think that I could try to say it that way. … I just don't have all of the knowledge that she has about inclusion and the special needs kids.

In this instance, Molly's teaching practice changed as a result of communicating with and observing the special education teacher with whom she worked. Since Molly changed her own teaching practice, she became better able to help other students by offering more detailed and complete directions when teaching in her inclusive classroom.

Fourth grade teacher Michelle McGlaughlin revealed that she was not certain how to provide interventions for a student who needed fine motor skill improvement. She explained that a student became frustrated because of not being able to form letters legibly when writing. Michelle explained ways that she learned from special educators with whom she worked:

> With each class that I have, the special ed. teachers were wonderful in giving me the information that I needed to know about disabilities for the students in my classroom…. I have been very fortunate to work with some wonderful staff that have such great qualities to them and they have been teaching for so long. I go to them and say, "OK. Here is the problem. The handwriting is horrible. What can I do as an intervention to help them?" Get a larger pencil. Work on hand eye coordination; work with larger lines of paper, used black lined paper and all of that…that kind of communication helps so much.

Prior to Cameron Hamad's teaching in an inclusive classroom, special educators who were on her teaching staff offered information on inclusion and the service delivery model that they used. Cameron thought this information to be particularly helpful and used their expertise throughout the academic year to learn how to modify assignments and how to better meet the needs of students with disabilities who were taught in her inclusive classroom. Cameron explained:

> The two special ed. teachers made a workshop. Yes, they had a workshop where they talked about our role, what the assistants would do and they laid out that we would all work together and this is going to be the role of the general ed. teacher, this is going to be the role of the special ed. teacher and this is going to be the

assistant's role. And we went through and discussed exactly what is to be expected of each of us. So that was extremely helpful…. The special ed. teacher sat down with me, and she took me right through and showed me an IEP. Because I had never seen an IEP form before and that was challenging but it was wonderful for her to sit down with me and go through it. She was wonderful with me…. We have a great working relationship, and I'm really thankful for her because she has really taught me a lot. Especially not having any background in special ed. We meet once a week and she looks at my lessons and modifies everything for the special needs students. She comes into the room and she teaches with me a lot which has been wonderful. If I've got some problems, she helps me out… we meet and say 'Okay this is working well, this is not working well, we still need to work on these kinds of things' and that has been a wonderful resource to have…. It has been really important for me to learn new information and to ask questions about the children that I am working with because often times the special ed. teacher was the insight to these children that I needed.

When 3rd-grade teacher Lynn Kelso was new to inclusion, a special education teacher helped her to learn information that was needed. Although Lynn had eight years experience with inclusion, she still relied on the assistance of special educators to learn information that she believed she needed to know to teach in an inclusive classroom:

There was a special ed. person who I worked with and she was really pretty well versed in special ed. and she gave me a lot of really good ideas… and that was good because I needed help after I began working in an inclusive classroom. I really didn't know what to expect and she acted like a mentor in some sense to

> give me some guidance… In fact, I think that the support that you get from your special ed. teacher is key. It is still key for me. They know what is needed to know. They have the time built into their schedule to make the adaptations and they have more children that are doing similar things and they have more materials that might be more hands on, and they are a resource because they know more about special ed. information than I do.

Lynn's comment revealed that regardless of the years of experience that she had in inclusive classrooms, she still relied on special educators to provide her with needed information. With additional information on students' disabilities, Lynn believed that she was better able to teach students in her inclusive classroom.

The fourth finding, learning from special educators, revealed that general educators have learned to teach in inclusive classrooms by communicating with and learning from special educators. In each instance, general educators solicited knowledge on specific disabilities that students had in their classes to learn how to best teach their students. Throughout teachers' narratives and explanations detailing their interactions with special educators, it was evident that they gained specific knowledge that they believed they needed to teach in inclusive classrooms. Data revealed this knowledge gain had teachers experience a change in their understandings of working in inclusive classrooms.

Data from this study was analyzed to identify the aforementioned findings that participants revealed when describing how they learned to teach in inclusive classrooms. Further analysis was done to connect prior scholarly work on teaching and learning to this study's findings. Chapter 5 provides such information.