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Managing Editor

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Appropriate Processing Time: Valuing Process over Product

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Abstract

This article views appropriate processing time through various lenses considering diverse needs of students/children. After noting significant differences between school cultures of Italian (Reggio Emilia and Montessori) and U.S. schools, the researchers conducted a qualitative case study where they collected data from a heterogenous group of participants. The participants logged "hurry up" commands given to students/children over the course of two weeks. While the number of "hurry up" commands dramatically decreased from week one to week two, and the participants realized that using imperatives to hurry students/children along were ineffective, merely illustrating these points to the participants was not enough to create lasting change. The researchers propose for U.S. classrooms to truly increase depth of learning and collaboration, the competitive nature found in these classrooms must be eliminated, and students/children must have increased processing time to consider learning from a meaningful and relevant stance.

Keywords: Processing time, wait time, collaboration, process, product, locus of control.

Introduction

Does faster always mean better? After observing schools in Italy and comparing them to experiences in American public schools, the researchers questioned whether the frantic pace in U.S. schools is producing the desired outcomes. In an article in the *New York Pos*t, psychologist and author, Dr. Stephanie Brown (2014) reports:

Researchers note that this push for speed is changing the way people think. The need for efficiency and instant response leads to the dumbing down of information intake so that people become scanners and "decoders" of information, cruising horizontally across the screen to pick up bytes, rather than delving towards a deeper understanding (para. 13).

The fast-paced American society pushes to achieve more and more, often times sacrificing depth for breadth. As professional educators, students, and parents, the participants of this study all realized the benefits of wait time and increased time to process information and learning; however, societal norms necessitate pushing students/children to complete tasks faster, without pausing to think, process, or consider outcomes critically. This investigation juxtaposes observations of Italian educational programs with American public schools. The research study provides evidence that allowing increased processing time may facilitate the development of a stronger internal locus of control and help children establish more ownership of their learning. This study was purposefully designed to examine these issues by looking at processing time, locus of control, and collaboration through various lenses.

The researchers acknowledge that processing time will vary according to different situations and various outcomes; however, when reviewing the literature on this subject, they found that appropriate processing time is critical for some specified groups of learners.

Literature Review

Wait Time in ESL Methodology

Wait time is an integral part of any lesson; it is a simplistic component that when added pays dividends by providing incredible impact. Wait time is the difference between full engagement and participation versus students reaching a level of frustration and checking out (Gonzalez, 2018).

Wait time is a key component found in Sheltered Instruction (SI), and similar to all Sheltered Instruction techniques and strategies, it is simply good pedagogy across the board for all students. SI supports multiple learning styles; it is a method of integrating both content and language learning through instructions by using a variety of non-linguistic supports such as visuals, multi-media, gestures, realia, and a host of other supports that do not solely rely on language to make content comprehensible. Krashen (1985), is credited for the theories behind these concepts. Besides second language learners, these techniques are especially effective for students in special education, students who are more visual or tactile kinesthetic learners, students who struggle academically, students with dyslexia, and students with a myriad of other specialized learning needs (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017).

Students learning new content or a new language benefit from time to listen to the question and then to process what they have heard (Gonzalez, 2018). Many Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students need additional time to either translate or process the words they have heard in order to comprehend the message being presented in the learning process. Once the student understands the question being asked, then they have to formulate a response (Gonzalez, 2018).

After formulating a response, the CLD student must gather the courage to relay the response in front of the class. In an effort to help lower the affective filter (Krashen, 1987), educators should allow responses that may not be grammatically perfect; then recast (Gonzalez, 2018) the responses to illustrate the response in standardized English as needed.

Example:

Student: "I eated dinner last night."

Teacher: "You ate dinner? What did you have?"

Kathleen Mohr and Eric Mohr (2007) suggested that for English Language Learners to be successful in the classroom, the teacher should "Allow sufficient wait time, including patient pauses that support students' possible need for code switching (i.e., thinking or speaking in one language and switching to another). Repeating the question or prompt allows more time for processing while engaging more students" (p. 1). Knowing that sufficient wait time is necessary is the first step in providing it to students. However, the next consideration is how much wait time is currently being provided versus how much wait time is actually needed?

Rowe (1974), Garigliano, (1973), and Gambrell (1983) found that the average length of time between a teacher posing a question and requiring a student response was between 1-1.5 seconds. Rowe (1974) describes this as Wait Time 1. However, one second does not provide sufficient processing time to consider and then process a response. Rowe (1974) suggested that teachers increase the length of time between the proposed question and the student response to 3-5 seconds at least. The positive effects of doubling the amount of time provided to students to process the information provides several positive benefits:

- Length of responses increased
- Correctness of responses increased
- More students volunteered answers
- Responses consisting of "I don't know" decreased
- Student confidence increased

Additionally, increased wait time benefitted classroom teachers as well. The quality of teachers' questions increased while the sheer quantity of questions asked decreased. Gonzalez (2018) suggested this benefit illustrated the concept of quality over quantity.

When there is not a sufficient amount of wait time given, CLD students do not have enough time to translate, process, and then understand what is being asked before moving on to other concepts or questions. This can cause CLD students to become frustrated and shut down (Gonzalez, 2018). Additionally, if they are not provided enough time to participate, they will begin to assume that the questions are not for them and that they are not being

included in the discussion. "Wait Time is a clear message to all of our students that the lesson and the learning are for them. They are important, and we will not give up on them" (Gonzalez, 2018, p. 1).

Wait Time 2. Rowe (1974) introduced the concept of Wait Time 2. This is the time after the student responds to the proposed question to the teacher's reply back. Rowe (1974) also proposed waiting an additional few seconds to encourage students to extend responses and continue processing the information.

Wait Time in Literacy

Donald Graves (2002), considered to be the father of the process approach to writing, points out that "slow thinking" allows for critical thinking and creativity to blossom. Some of the great self-avowed slow, but very effective thinkers, such as Charles Darwin, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein displayed their ability to stay focused for long periods of time in order to find and solve problems. Long, slow thinkers exhibit some common positive characteristics, such as: being "problem finders," enjoying their own company, exhibiting a sense of play, remaining highly focused for extended amounts of time, and having the ability to sustain thought. Many of these individuals were mentored by other long thinkers (Graves, 2002, pgs. 54-55).

Likewise, Kahneman and Egan (2011) describe two systems of cognition known as the "dual processing theory" (p. 10). System 1, the subconscious and intuitive system, relies on fast thinking and instinct, which is important in many dangerous or critical situations, but may result in faulty thinking. While System 2 thinking refers to slow and deliberate thinking. This type of cognition requires time for deep, rational and logical thought; however, individuals may tire easily of this deeper thinking and default back to System 1 cognition (Kahneman & Egan, 2011). Could this phenomenon be what is occurring in the current educational system? Are teachers and students able to devote the time and energy necessary to extend System 2 thinking throughout the day? For example, Graves (2002) used the term *"kairos"* (meaning "the fullness of time") to describe how teachers enter into the teachable moment when conferring with students on their writing. Graves (2002) further explains this interaction by saying, "Power is much more fully exchanged in the "kairos moment," when both persons are fully present and sense there is no hurry and know their hearts beat together" (p. 13).

Wait Time in Early Childhood Education

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) (2009) recommends extended blocks of time for young children to engage in sustained play, investigation, exploration, and interaction (pg. 18). Renowned early childhood programs, such as the Reggio Emilia

approach and the Montessori method recommend large blocks of time for student exploration to develop the pleasure of learning. The Reggio Emilia Approach incorporates time for both individual and corporate expression through many "languages" (Reggio Children). Rathunde (2001) describes the "flow experience" as a time "when a person is fully concentrated on a task at hand, relatively oblivious to the passage of time, and feeling clear about what needs to be done from one moment to the next" (pg. 14). Maria Montessori, well-known Italian educator, physician, and scientist, also believed that periods of deep concentration motivate children to further spontaneous learning activities (Montessori, 1917). Thus, her ideas on the prepared environment included liberal amounts of processing time to help young children develop a stronger internal locus of control (Montessori, 2013).

Locus of Control

This spectrum of internal regulation involves individual's belief that they have control over the outcome of events in their lives (Rotter, 1954). The development of this discipline takes significant time and positive interactions with parents, caregivers, and teachers. Joelson (2017) explains that "children with a more internal locus of control behave healthier as adults because they have greater confidence in their ability to influence outcomes through their own actions" (para. 5). This confidence is important, not only for young students, but adolescents as well. Hunter and Csikszentmihalyi (2003) found that involvement, interest, and curiosity in daily life positively impacted adolescents' global self-esteem, their internal locus of control, and emotional well-being. On a recent study abroad trip to Italy, the researchers and university student participants experienced a poignant example of young students who exhibited internal locus of control and demonstrated their ability to control their behavior. The researchers watched as a teacher in the Italian Montessori school rang the "silence bell." All the children stopped what they were doing, stood still, and waited an extended amount of time until the teacher released them by ringing the bell again. In the study abroad debriefing sessions, the researchers were left wondering if students in the United States would have been capable of similar control.

Background of the Study

In the aforementioned study abroad, the researchers observed at both Reggio Emilia and Montessori schools. At Reggio Emilia, the researchers observed children's created art projects in the form of statues—an individual task. However, the students then took these individual art projects and combined them to create a collaborative community work of art. This illustrated a collaborative environment instead of a competitive one as noted in the classrooms observed in the U.S. The researchers also observed children

working on tasks independently and diligently on tasks that they chose. Quality was promoted over quantity in this environment as well. The culture of U.S. classrooms is in direct opposition to what ESL research suggests is needed for CLD learners as suggested by the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2017). The authors illustrate necessary sheltered instruction components such as increased wait time, comprehensible input, and adapted speech. Another element that greatly impressed us was the students' locus of control. The researchers witnessed evidence of this in several ways at the Montessori schools.

Methodology

Statement of the Problem

The researchers observed that as Americans, that students are being rushed through life. "Children age 8 to 17 say they worry about doing well in school, getting into good colleges and their family's finances. They also report suffering headaches, sleeplessness and upset stomachs" (Munsey, 2010, p. 22). This is in direct contrast to the Italian culture and educational system where the researchers observed a slower pace where children could sit and critically think and process without being rushed to the next task. Through the development of self–efficacy, the Italian students seemed to value completion of work and intrinsically valued learning. The researchers wanted to see if that was their own perception, or are educators asking students/children to hurry through tasks without having enough time to process or critically think.

Hypothesis: A collaborative learning environment allowing plenty of processing time is more effective than a fast-paced competitive learning environment.

Design of the Study

This research study was conducted as a qualitative case study. Throughout the fall semester of 2018, the researchers collected data from the participants. In addition to considering the issue of processing time through a variety of lenses, the researchers considered the amount and types of processing time different audiences may require. For example, how much time do parents give to their children in comparison to what an English Language Learner (ELL) might need as they are learning a new language and trying to process language and content simultaneously? What type of processing time does an Early Childhood student need as s/he is beginning to develop internal locus of control versus adolescents who may frequently engage in multitasking?

The researchers conducted a study where they had participants track how many times, they told a student/child to "hurry up" in a variety of contexts for one week. The participants were required to keep a journal of these phrases

that equated to a command that meant to accomplish something faster. Then in week two, the researchers instructed the participants to consciously try to limit the number of "hurry up" prompts they gave and to provide students/children as much time as they needed to complete required tasks. The researchers then had all participants reflect on the changes in the student/child behavior from week one to week two and if the modification in processing time made any noticeable differences.

Research Questions:

1. How many times in the span of a week do participants prompt their children/students to "hurry up" during a learning task?
2. How does conscious effort in providing ample processing time affect learning outcomes?
3. What are participants' reflections concerning processing time and learning outcomes based on their responses in reflective journals?

Participants

The participant pool included a convenient, targeted, representative sample of five. This was a unique group not typically represented in conjunction with one another. The researchers believed that considering the phenomenon from various perspectives, such as different educational programs with varying experiences, would enrich the findings. The different subgroups represented include one participant from each of the following:

- Classroom Teacher
- Pre-Service Clinical Teacher
- Special Education Teacher
- ESL/Bilingual Teacher
- Parent

Data Sources

- Participant Journals
- Lesson Plans/Weekly schedule
- Tally Charts
- Interviews

Participants tallied the total number of times in weeks one and two that they requested the students/children to "hurry up" and noted the context and result of this imperative. Completing a Task—pick up toys, complete a meal, brush teeth, get out or put away materials, etc. Physical Movement—walk to another room, get into the car, move from point A to point B, etc. Academic Learning Task—finish a homework paper, read a passage, write a paragraph,

or other type of task. Other Task—any other task that they requested the child/student to complete faster.

Participant Journals

Week One: Each day of the first week the participants took notes in the journal provided by the researchers how many times they asked a student/child to "hurry up" on a task. This included any form of coaxing a student/child to complete a task more quickly. Participants made tally marks in the journal for each date. They also noted the types of tasks they asked the student/child to complete more quickly (i.e. getting dressed, getting into a vehicle, lining up for lunch, getting materials out, etc.).

Week Two: In this week, the participants consciously tried to limit their prompts for students/children to "hurry up." The participants were instructed to provide them as much processing time as needed. Then the participants journaled about what the task was, how they felt providing as much time as needed, and what the outcome was after providing additional processing time. The participants were asked: Is this more effective? Why or why not? How did the student/child respond to the additional processing time? What was the learning outcome of each task? The participants then answered these questions and provided any additional thoughts concerning this week.

Findings

Week One

The findings of Week One indicated that participants asked students/children to "hurry up" many times in a variety of contexts. Over the course of the week, the five participants gave 135 commands to complete a task more quickly. Most of these commands occurred in the areas of completing tasks and physical movements while fewer "hurry up" commands were given in conjunction with academic tasks.

Table 1: Week 1 Compilation of Participant Tallies Requesting a Child to Hurry

Participant	Complete A Task	Physical Movement	Academic Learning Task	Other Tasks	Total
1-Classroom Teacher	20	24	6	1	51
2-Student Teacher	2	2	1	0	5
3-ESL/Bilingual	16	7	9	0	32
4-SPED Teacher	12	3	1	0	16
5-Parent	22	9	0	0	31
Totals:	72	45	17	1	135

The comments in Table 2 illustrated that the participants realized that giving "hurry up" commands were ineffective; however, they continued to do so even when desired results were not actualized. Participants stated that they did this out of habit and even threatened punishment if students/children did not complete tasks more quickly.

Table 2: Week 1 Context and Results of Requesting Children to Hurry on Tasks

Context	Result
Put away or pass out class supplies Students moving from one area Bathroom breaks	Students comply to teacher command to hurry and complete task—multiple instances of request to accomplish.
Students were asked quickly to write grammar examples from mentor sentences and notes	Some gave up and waited for examples to be shared; others completed the task.
Asked a student to stop getting off task and to hurry up and finish his writing sample before it was time to end class.	Teacher initialed where he was when she checked on him and told him she was excited to see how much more he could get by the next check.
Asked a student to quickly work to complete his paragraph that he started on.	Teacher helped the student walk through what he wanted to say. As she walked away the student gave up.
Most of the time the students were told to do something because of our rushed schedule. With 23, I feel like that is all I am doing every day is rushing these students to ensure that we meet our minutes and follow the schedule.	"Most of the time when I ask students to hurry up nothing really happens".
This day was a little different; we had tons of people coming in and pulling students out for assessment, so that did throw our day off a bit.	"Students quickened their speed a little bit. I think they are just used to me saying hurry, and students are immune to it".
I asked students to hurry and finish their multiplication monster.	"I threatened to take away Friday store, and students fixed behavior".
I typically tell my child to "hurry up" a lot on a lot of different tasks…	"It's like a default mode".

Week Two

When the participants were instructed in Week Two to limit the number of "hurry up" responses given to students/children, the number of

these imperatives decreased dramatically. When explicitly attempting to limit these commands, participants were able to reduce the number of "hurry up" commands by 37%. Most of the commands still occurred in the columns of completing a task and physical movement while most participants ceased or decreased the "hurry up" requests for academic learning tasks most significantly.

Table 3: Week 2 Compilation of Participant Tallies Requesting a Child to Hurry

Participant	Complete A Task	Physical Movement	Academic Learning Task	Other Tasks	Total
1-Classroom Teacher	8	3	3	0	14
2-Student Teacher	3	3	0	0	6
3-ESL/ Bilingual	5	8	0	0	13
4-SPED Teacher	2	3	2	0	7
5-Parent	5	5	0	0	10
Totals	23	22	5	0	50

The comments in Table 4 illustrate the participants' realizations that many times requesting students/children to "hurry up" is ineffective. The participants also noted that they were surprised by how many times they gave "hurry up" commands once they started keeping track of this. Participants recognized that continuously rushing students/children created more anxiety in the learning environment. While others realized that providing students/children more processing time can be highly effective; however, most still believed that the students/children needed redirection at certain times. Finally, this exercise reminded participants to slow down and provide additional processing time for the students/children; they even began to notice when others were requiring the students/children to hurry on tasks and realized the potential negative impact.

Table 4: Week 2 Context and Results of Requesting Children to Hurry on Tasks

Context	Results
"I do notice that I tend to hurry students when I am giving support in the general education classroom, and they are unfocused on the task at hand."	"When I am able to give more processing time, I would say 80% of the time it is successful where the other 20% of the time the student needs redirection."
Teacher tells students to hurry during transition.	Causes more anxiety in the students.
Teachers/parent kept tally logs and documented the number of times they requested the child/student to complete tasks faster.	"This tally log has reminded me to take a breath before saying something to the student and allow them a little more time to transition."
The child has no concept of time, "so the only way she knows we need to complete something or leave is by me telling her."	"I have to prompt her to complete a task. I am not sure I honored the assignment as I replaced hurry up with, 'we are leaving in 5 minutes.'"
"I gave the child all the time she wanted to complete a task."	"She just sat there."
"I jotted down the times I asked students to hurry up; I thought this would be easy."	"I was surprised by the number of times I asked students to hurry up."
Teacher had students writing in class and conferred with them on their writing.	The day was stressful; the new assistant kept telling the students to hurry up or "let's go." The participant noted, "I was saddened. I don't like rushing my students when it comes to writing because I know that can shut down the creative flow; not to mention breaking their concentration.
Teacher did not rush tasks and allowed students as much time as they needed.	"I'm not sure if it was more effective when I didn't hurry them. For example, most students are responsible enough that they know what they should do. However, some still need structured reminders."

While there is a positive correlation between allowing more processing time and collaboration, accomplishing tasks in a specified time frame doesn't appear to garner the desired long-term results. Participants cited issues of control, consistency, lack of understanding of the "end goal," and thus not being able to get past accomplishing the "task" as reasons that they were not always successful in eliminating "hurry up" commands. Some participants cited directing the students/children to complete tasks quickly without using

the words "hurry up." These actions illustrated societal norms: changing words didn't change actions, which led them to realized that shedding light on the issue of processing time does not necessarily mean that societal changes will occur even when the participants realized the benefits from making these changes. Several of the participants noted that students/children do not have the same concept of time as an adult. "When I intentionally started thinking before I asked them to hurry, I began asking myself if they were really moving at a slow pace or just not my self-imposed time frame."

Conclusion

Having students all frantically working in a classroom does not equate to successful learning; in fact, commanding students to constantly hurry causes continuous and undue stress. For example, while on the study abroad in Italy, the researchers asked the guide from the Montessori Foundation about bullying and school violence in Italian schools; he reported that it is a non-issue in Italy. The researchers' hypothesis concerning this difference stems from the varying environments. The Italian schools observed were more collaborative versus competitive.

As the researchers drew conclusions from the findings, three dichotomies emerged: quality over quantity, process over product, and collaboration versus competition.

While considering the first dichotomy, quality over quantity, the researchers recognized that there may be numerous minutes of instruction, one must truly consider what is occurring during that time? As the literature and research have both indicated, there is a need for more processing time to achieve deeper understanding. Therefore, the researchers assert that when educators talk of "engagement," what they are referring to is involvement in System 2 thinking.

In the second dichotomy, process over product, the findings also illustrated that there could be punitive consequences given for not completing a task within the teacher/parent specified timeframe with no thought to the process or quality of the product. When considering process over product, the researchers were able to conclude that simply requiring a product of some sort to merely check off a box of completion did not lead to engagement or quality in the process of learning.

In the final dichotomy, collaboration versus competition, the researchers witnessed a more collaborative environment in both Reggio Emilia and Montessori schools observed. This was evident in the example of students creating a work of art or statue and then bringing all the individual pieces together to create a communal composition. While the participants in this study did not specifically mention collaboration, the researchers noticed more that even though collaboration is stressed in U.S. classrooms, and

research indicates this is considered to be best practices (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), there is an obvious disconnect between theory and practice as evidenced by none of the participants including or discussing additional collaboration in their logs and observations even when attempting to provide more processing time and fewer "hurry up" commands. Whereas collaboration was observed in the Italian educational settings.

In summation, the researchers found that the culture of U.S. classrooms is in direct opposition to what research indicates is needed for CLD students, children with special needs, early learners, and children in general. For true and lasting change there needs to be a systemic transformation where educators move away from checking off the boxes in a certain time frame to valuing process, quality, and depth of learning.

Limitations of the Study and Considerations for Future Research

The findings of this research study should be viewed in light of some limitations in the data collection. The researchers acknowledge that the participants were given only a brief window for collecting the data and some of the information may be biased since the participants were self-reporting their own responses. Additionally, due to common human error, some of the "hurry-up" requests may have gone unreported in the hustle and bustle of everyday life at home or in the classroom.

The identified limitations and conclusions drawn from this study unearthed some possible areas for future research on this topic. Since the data collection window was so short, additional data could be gathered for longer periods of time to strengthen the conclusions about the value of appropriate processing time for various groups of individuals. Additionally, the study highlighted the topic of developing the locus of control in students. The researchers are interested in discovering more about early childhood classroom strategies that may support student's internal regulation of behavior. The researchers also believe more research is needed to document effective strategies that promote slow critical thinking that lead to true engagement and love of learning.

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Developing Student Growth Through Effective Inclusion Skill Sets in the Rural Black Belt Region of Alabama and Mississippi

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Abstract

Skill sets have been identified as the abilities needed by an individual to perform a job or task. In this mixed methods study, an online survey was developed to collect data identifying those skill sets and the barriers to effective inclusion in rural schools in the Black Belt region of Alabama and Mississippi. For rural administrators, this becomes a challenging task to provide the supports needed for students with disabilities to be successful and prepared to be college and/or career ready when they graduate. Rural school principals must be cognizant of teacher skill sets needed for both general and special education teachers to be competent team members in the inclusion classroom.

Although 242 randomly selected rural school administrators employed in the Black Belt Region of the twin states area were sent an email requesting participation, there was only a 16% response rate for the survey. Results of the study indicated that principals felt supports that were needed for successful inclusion were related to professional development, common scheduling and planning, and collaboration. Barriers to inclusion were territorial and shared responsibilities, personality conflicts, and insufficient number of staff and co-teaching training. One of the conclusions of this study indicated the need of administrators to be aware of the use of a variety of inclusion strategies that support more than just one inclusion model. The second conclusion indicated a need for the College of Education to revise and include additional training in effective inclusion skill sets both within their educator and instructional leadership preparation programs.

Keywords: Inclusion, rural principals, teacher skill sets, disabilities, co-teaching.

Introduction

Research indicates the two primary reasons for student growth and success are based on the ability of the teacher to present content knowledge and develop relationships. School administrators have a critical responsibility in molding the learning environment in their schools (Roberts, Ruppar, & Olson, 2018). Because of this, the instructional leadership of the school is charged with providing supports to their teachers to help them increase student academic growth and enhance their future success.

Part of student success can be tied to the concept of inclusion. The roots of inclusion began with Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and has continued to improve the quality of this educational standard through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1990, 1997, and 2004. The implementation of these statutes and the court's interpretation through case law have indicated an ever changing need to review and prepare teachers, administrators, and support personnel to adequately implement inclusion in their schools.

Originally, inclusion put students with disabilities in non-academic environments through the use of mainstreaming. These lesser restrictive environments with their peers without disabilities transformed into what we currently know as inclusion, a shift to include academic placements with their age or grade level peers. Even though schools tout the use of inclusive practices in their general education classrooms, insignificant data has been collected to review the productiveness of this mandate in student growth and success in rural schools (Goulas, Henry, & Griffith, 2004).

Educators need to acquire specific skills and abilities to successfully perform their job in the classroom. Skill sets are a list of those abilities needed to perform the job or task. Effective inclusion is based on the use of a variety of those predetermined skills, comprehension of the components of the process, and the implementation of research-based instructional strategies (Hoppey, 2016). Teachers need to be able to apply skill sets that bring a variety of scientifically-based instructional strategies to support all students' learning needs and provide accommodations to increase academic and social skill success (Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori, Algozzine, 2012).

In general, it is the how and what that both general and special education teachers bring to the inclusion classroom that provides the effective skill sets for a successful classroom (Scruggs and Mastropieri, 2017). Although Scruggs and Mastropieri, 2017, identified two promising practices of effective inclusion, Practice 1: Effective Collaboration and Practice 2: Explicit Instruction, the findings of this study found parallels between rural

Black Belt school principals' perceptions and the components of the first practice, Effective Collaboration.

Challenges of Rural School Administrators

The task of adequately preparing students for success in the classroom and to be college and career ready through inclusion, becomes a greater challenge in rural districts where financial, personnel, and community resources are limited. It is critical that administrators are cognizant of inclusion skill sets needed by both general and special education teachers to support student success. For inclusion to be effective, principals need to know what kinds of internal supports are needed and how to provide them to their teachers (Monsen, Ewing, and Kwoka, 2014).

Soio-Economics and Demographics of the Black Belt Region

The Black Belt region which runs through many of the southern states, stretches across nineteen counties in Alabama and seventeen in Mississippi. This area known for its dark fertile soil, which played a role in the agricultural history of cotton in both states, is one of extreme poverty and small rural communities with a lower economic tax-base, limited or poorly trained workforce and regional resources, and greater numbers of minority students served by educators with limited knowledge of diversity and the literacy of poverty. Because of these circumstances, school leaders struggle to meet the academic needs and provide an adequate success rate for college and career readiness skills of its student population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify school administrators' perceptions of the skills needed for effective inclusion classrooms in the Black Belt area of Alabama and Mississippi. Although there is research on attitudes toward inclusion by teachers and principals, limited focus has been on the perceptions of inclusion in rural schools.

A mixed-methods online research survey consisting of qualitative and quantitative questons was developed by a research team that consisted of a former superintendent/instructional leader and three educator preparation faculty, two of them former special educators and one from the area of early childhood/elementary education. The purpose for selecting an online survey as the data collection method was due to easy access by participants who would only have to make a few clicks on their computers to open the survey, answer the questions and then submit their responses. This also provided immediate collection of the data. The team identified the need for addressing training and effectively preparing individuals to deal with the academic needs of children with disabilities in their classrooms and schools. This critical need

was one that had surfaced through Internship surveys, information gathered from former College of Education graduates and Black Belt administrator focus groups that work collaboratively with this university to prepare educators. The instrument consisted of two parts. The first section included demographic and Likert scale multiple choice questions which were used to collect qunatitative data. The second section involved open ended questions used to identify patterns and needs through a qualitative data collection method.

Method

The thirty-five question online survey designed for school administrators was developed using the Qualtrics survey program. The questions included demographics, training and experience related to working with individuals with disabilities, principals' perceptions of inclusion and inclusive practices, knowledge of the six inclusive classroom environments, and special and general education inclusion skill sets.

A total of 257 principals were identified in the Black Belt region of Alabama and Mississippi as potential survey participants. After receiving IRB approval, a request for participation in the study was emailed to those principals. Fifteen of those emails were returned as insufficient addresses leaving a total of 242 email recipients. Two additional reminder emails were sent within a two-week period requesting participation in the survey and a reminder that the study would close at the end of that time period.

Results

The survey, *School Administrators of the Black Belt Region of Alabama and Mississippi Perceptions of Educators' Skills needed for Effective Inclusion Classrooms,* was conducted winter of 2017. Of the 242 invited participants, 41 individuals clicked on the link and opened the survey. Thirty-nine of those 41 individuals completed the survey questions. The response rate for participation was 16%. A 10 – 15% survey rate for an external survey is considered a good response rate since interviewees have no real ties to the organization conducting the study. Internal surveys involving employees working within the organization would be expected to have a higher response rate.

The greatest number of interviewees that participated in the *School Administrators of the Black Belt Region of Alabama and Mississippi Perceptions of Educators' Skills Needed for Effective Inclusion Classrooms*, 56.41%, were from Alabama. Only 43.59% of instructional leaders from Mississippi selected to participate in the study. Even though this rural Alabama university sits close to the Mississippi and Alabama state line and is

committed to preparing educators for school districts in both states, more principals from Alabama participated in the research study.

This research report reviews several areas related to demographics that include the number of inclusion classrooms in the school, state location, and formal training in areas related to special education. Quantitative question #12 related to the six types of inclusion/co-teaching classrooms. Qualitative questions #30 and #31 identified inclusion classroom supports and barriers.

Quantitative Data

Inclusion Classrooms

Data presented in Table 1: Percentage of Inclusion Classes in My School, indicates that the majority of principals that participated in the survey, 25.64% and 20.51%, only had 0% - 1% or 2% - 5% of inclusion classrooms in their school. The lowest percentages reported were 5.13% and 2.56% with 31% - 40% and 41% - 50% inclusive type environments indicating small numbers of inclusion classrooms being part of the school's instructional environment.

Table 1: Percentage of Inclusion Classes in My School

#	Answer	%	Count
1	0% - 1%	25.64%	10
2	2% - 5%	20.51%	8
3	5% - 10%	10.26%	4
4	11% - 20%	10.26%	4
5	21% - 30%	12.82%	5
6	31% - 40%	5.13%	2
7	41% - 50%	2.56%	1
8	51%+	12.82%	39

Special Education and Individuals with Disabilities Training

Question #11, data reported in Table 2: Types of Formal Training Related to Special Education and Individuals with Disabilities, asked participants to report which types of training they had previously had related to special education and individuals with disabilities. The largest percentages disclosed were in the areas of inclusion, 76.92% and special education law, 79.49%. The lowest percentage involved training in team building, 48.72% and 56.41% in the supervision of teachers working in one of the six inclusion type classrooms.

Table 2: Types of Formal Training Related to Special Education and Individuals with Disabilities			
#	**Answer**	**%**	**Count**
1	Inclusion	76.92%	30
2	Team Building	48.72%	19
3	Special Education Law	79.49%	31
4	Supporting Inclusion in the General Education Classroom	58.97%	23
5	Co-Planning/ Collaborative Planning	58.97%	23
6	Supervision of Teachers Working in One of the Inclusion Models Listed	56.41%	22

Types of Inclusion/Co-Teaching Models

Question #12 asked participants the types of inclusion/co-teaching models most frequently used in their schools. Answers ranged from 7.69%, N/A-No co-teaching in my school, to the largest percentage of 33.33%, one teach – one assist. This data is reported in Table #3: Models of Inclusion Most Frequently Used in My School.

Table #3: Models of Inclusion Most Frequently Used in My School			
#	**Answer**	**%**	**Count**
1	N/A - No co-teaching in my school	7.69%	3
2	One Teach - One Assist	33.33%	13
3	One Teach - One Observe	7.69%	3
4	Station Teaching	10.26%	4
5	Parallel Teaching	5.13%	2
6	Alternative Teaching	17.95%	7
7	Team Teaching	17.95%	7

Qualitative Data

Inclusion Supports – Question #30

Question #30 included qualitative information where principals provided short answers on the types of supports given to both general and special education teachers to be successful in the inclusion classroom. Three themes appeared when reviewing the data. Professional development and workshops, common planning and scheduling, and collaboration were mentioned by almost all of those completing the survey.

Professional Development

Professional learning communities, professional development opportunities and workshops were combined to indicate additional training needed by and provided to many of the teachers. One principal noted that both general and special education teachers were provided the same support and exposure to professional development needs, however, teachers are afforded different individual opportunities based on their personal choice for training. Another commented that consultants from content-specific areas provided distinct strategies to support students in the inclusion classroom. General and special education teachers had the opportunity to attend these trainings together. Some respondents noted the importance of training on co-teaching skills and the participation in all professional development activities together.

Common Planning and Scheduling

Numerous individuals reported daily common planning time and flexible schedules in several of their comments. To provide for effective services for students with disabilities, planning times are the same for the inclusion and homeroom teacher. Several administrators identified that that these times should be used to coordinate support of special needs students. Two individuals mentioned this common planning time should also be used to plan for peer observations.

Collaboration

Significant comments on collaboration were also noted as part of this question. Scheduling time for collaboration and identifying its significance, contributed to the classroom climate. One principal encouraged the special education teacher to be part of the classroom and participate in all grade level meetings. Another mentioned that this provided an understanding of what they are going through.

Additional Perspectives Provided in the Survey

One principal added several thoughts that encompassed many of the elements of the role of the special education teacher. This respondent felt that

a principal should have a fundamental knowledge of the scope of the special educator's role. This role includes teaching, curriculum and lesson planning as well as aligning those plans with college and career-ready standards, specially-designed instruction, content knowledge for the areas where they provide academic support and instruction, facilitating meetings, progress monitoring, managing communications, knowledge of the law and requirements of paperwork, and the constant changes required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With all of this, special education teachers need to have constant contact with general education teachers.

Others included walk through observations and the use of district level specialists to support academic and behavioral needs of challenging students. Three of the individuals surveyed also commented on the use of assistant teachers and paraprofessionals to assist with those students with more significant educational, behavioral and social needs in the inclusion classroom.

Inclusion Barriers – Question #31

Data from qualitative question, #31, "What do you consider to be barriers to inclusion in your school?" is the last question presented in this research report. Being territorial and sharing responsibility, personality conflicts, scheduling problems, insufficient numbers of special education teachers, and inadequate skills and training in co-teaching were common threads seen in the responses of the administrators.

Territorial and Shared Responsibility

A comment was made that the general education mindset is one of the top barriers to inclusion in their school. Many general education teachers already felt overwhelmed without adding students with unique needs to their general education classroom. Several administrators wrote that general education teachers are territorial people. Many feel that this is their classroom and leave special education teachers out of planning. Another wrote their barrier was getting the regular and special educators to share the responsibility of teaching all students and effectively planning student centered activities that are sensitive to student needs. General education teachers also do not understand the law regarding disciplining students with disabilities, and the development and successful implementation of a behavior management plan.

Personality Conflicts

It was noted that many times there are personality conflicts between the individuals that are to work together to help students with special learning needs. One principal stated that there needs to be ownership by both teachers

and the ability of these two people to work as a team for the benefit of all the students in the classroom. Disagreements on classroom management and teacher expectations for students also contributed as barriers to effective inclusion.

Scheduling Problems

Time and scheduling were main barriers for teachers to collaborate. There is a need to incorporate more instructional aides to provide the one to one support. A respondent included that collaboratively we must depend on each other's strengths, knowledge and abilities. Time must be used to build trust between these educators.

Insufficient Inclusion Staff

There was a consensus among several of the principals that there are not enough inclusion teachers in the schools. It was mentioned how difficult it was for the special education teacher to manage multiple subjects and grade levels of their assigned students they worked with. Many of the inclusion teachers ultimately work with only one of the grade levels, ignoring the needs of the other students.

Training Needs for Co-Teaching

Several comments were made on the need for training. Teachers need guidance and coaching to become effective collaborators in co-teaching. Several principals indicated the need for instruction for both general and special educators for effective communication between the teachers, parents and other school-related staff. Prior professional development before the first year of teaching and the need for colleges to use a blended approach in their educator preparation programs will give general education teachers more practical special education knowledge. The lack of co-teaching skills and the fear of the unknown regarding inclusion were additional concerns.

Conclusion:

In the United States, over one-third of schools are located in rural communities (Preston and Barnes, 2017). That is a significant number of educational institutions with unique responsibilities for school administrators to support the academic, social and behavioral growth of its students. One of those areas of critical need in the successful management of student growth is the implementation of effective teacher skill sets for the rural inclusion classroom.

Data collected from an online survey sent to rural school principals in the Black Belt region of Alabama and Mississippi, indicated similar requirements and identified specific skill sets needed by teachers for inclusion

classrooms. Those needs found in two of the qualitative questions of this study were parallel to the components of Practice I: Effective Inclusion. Research conducted by Scruggs and Mastropieri, 2017, indicated common challenges for successful inclusion were communication, planning time, content mastery, control and turf issues, differences in teaching philosophy, and disagreements in discipline and behavior management. Fowler, Coleman, and Bogdan, 2019, also indicated that there was a problem with planning together with other faculty in their research with 79% of their participants lacking this value collaborative tool which also correlated with the results of this study.

It was interesting to see how the various responses from these rural school principals compared with those areas already identified as challenges and best practices needed to make inclusion work for all students. Although rural administrators have unique challenges to supporting student success in their schools in Alabama and Mississippi, they have similar perceptions of the supports and barriers that must be overcome to prepare students for their state's college and career-readiness skills and successful future citizens of their communities.

Additional information from the survey provided insight into the needs of administrators to be aware of the use of a variety of inclusion strategies that support more than just the one teach - one assist model. Replication of different approaches involving both educators as co-teachers could be explored and implemented in the same instructional environment.

Data from this study is being used to determine the level of training and support needed to prepare future and current educators in effective skill sets critical for successful inclusion classrooms. The College of Education is using information to redevelop its degree programs to more effectively prepare general and special education teachers to work collaboratively to support student growth in application-based classrooms in partner schools within the Black Belt region. This data is also a future catalyst in the development of training to be used to guide school administrators to improve the achievement of students with disabilities.

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