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of  
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## Note from the Editor

I am glad to introduce you to the first topical issue of the Journal of the International Association of Special Education (JIASE). In addition to the regular annual edition, a topical issue will be published biennially during the year that follows the biennial conference of the International Association of Special Education (IASE). Each topical issue will be based on the theme of the conference held during the preceding year. The topic of this inaugural edition is “Inclusion from around the World” and is based on the theme of the 13<sup>th</sup> biennial conference of the IASE held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada in July 2013. Through the manuscripts in this edition, the authors share their views, experiences, research and/or practice about inclusion. I hope that this edition will give you a good glimpse of different issues related to inclusion from different countries and perspectives.

The next topical edition will be published in 2016. A call for manuscripts will be announced in 2015. For more and current information about this please visit the IASE website at [www.iase.org](http://www.iase.org).

As usual, I would like to thank everyone who contributed to this publication including the authors, members of the editorial team, and the Department of Counseling, Psychology and Special Education at Duquesne University. I would also like to recognize the following individuals who served as guest reviewers for this edition:

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Thank you all for your contribution.

Sincerely,

Morgan Chitiyo, Editor

# Culturally Responsive Professional Development for Inclusive Education in Rural Malawi

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## Abstract

*Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 2014). Yet, our experiences working with rural schools suggest that the Malawi education system may be far ahead of many developed nations, including the United States, in terms of their practical and philosophical commitment to inclusive education for all children, including children with disabilities. Universal free primary school education is a poverty reduction strategy for Malawi that began in the early 1990s. Many of the teacher trainees are experienced, but untrained (Coults & Lewin, 2002). Teacher preparation in special education is relatively new and not yet widely available in Malawi. This paper describes the author's experiences of her initial explorations of professional development to support inclusive education in rural Malawi in collaboration with a local nongovernmental organization, The Landirani Trust.*

Malawi is one of the poorest countries in the world (World Bank, 2014). Yet, our experiences working with rural schools suggest that rural Malawian teachers are committed to inclusive education for all children, including children with disabilities. In this paper, we describe our reflections on an initial exploration of potential barriers to inclusive classrooms in rural primary schools outside of the capital city, Lilongwe. Overall, this informal and co-constructed exploration of teachers' needs and beliefs related to inclusive education described herein suggest much cause for optimism and hope for the future of inclusive classrooms in our partnership schools. Unlike the challenges associated with an overall lack of will for inclusive classrooms in many classrooms and schools in the United States, many of the challenges to inclusive education in Malawi appear to be based on a lack of knowledge and skills, and thus, are problems amenable to professional development. This paper describes our initial exploratory work to collaborate with rural primary school leaders, rural primary school teachers, the Special Needs Department at the Malawian Ministry of Education, and a local nongovernmental organization, The Landirani Trust (Landirani), to co-construct a program of culturally responsive professional development for inclusive education in the Malawian context.

We traveled to Malawi in June, 2012 to work with The Landirani Trust to survey the disability and inclusive education landscape. The Landirani Trust is a small NGO registered in both the UK and in Malawi. The charity founded in 2005, focuses on support for orphans and vulnerable people in a rural area of approximately 250 square miles located around the capital city, Lilongwe. It is a young and progressive charity organization. Their aim is to work with and through communities to develop long-term and sustainable solutions in five key areas: education,

healthcare, orphan care, self-sufficiency, and water and sanitation. By supporting the communities, Landirani enables support for orphans and vulnerable people in their area. Landirani has only 11 paid employees; approximately 100 Malawian volunteers from the communities carry out much of the work.

Inclusive education is a new area of focus for Landirani. As part of their work with vulnerable children they have been compiling a comprehensive list of orphans on their beneficiary list. They quickly recognized that they serve a large number of children with disabilities and that most of these children do not attend school. Furthermore, they believe that the number of children they have been able to identify with physical, cognitive, or emotional disabilities that negatively impact educational performance is only a small number of the overall population who should be living in the local communities and attending village schools (Cox, 2011).

In June, 2012, we worked for several weeks with the Landirani Education Director to visit village local schools in the rural districts that are partnered with Landirani. We visited school headmasters, teachers, and zone directors to attempt to determine how children with disabilities are identified, how many children with disabilities had been identified in local schools, and how students were being served. These conversations indicated a fundamental lack of capacity to identify and serve children with disabilities. Across the 20 rural schools we visited with Landirani serving approximately 17,000 children, roughly 300 students (roughly two percent of enrolled students) with disabilities had been identified. Official data on the incidence of students with disabilities in Malawi is difficult to find, however, Mcheka's (n.d.) report on the challenges faced by special needs education teachers indicates that a 2004 national disability survey revealed that students with disabilities accounted for approximately five percent of the all

learners and Cox (2012) reports that at the Department of Special Needs –Malawi Ministry of Education estimates that as many as 70% of children with disabilities may not actually be enrolled in schools. The figures we gathered from the 20 rural schools are far below what we expect to find in developed countries. For example, in the U.S. children with disabilities comprise about 13% of enrolled students (United States Department of Education, 2013). We suspect that given the more challenging physical context of rural villages in a developing country, many more children with disabilities may exist and are either not identified and/or are not attending the rural schools with whom we are working. These initial, informal explorations of the potential for inclusive education in these rural zones outside of Lilongwe leave us eager to develop more rigorous and structured research projects in the near future. In particular, based on our explorations, we believe that a dearth of professional development for teachers is a significant challenge to effective identification of children with disabilities, beyond the extraordinary demands of huge class sizes, inadequate teacher education, and limited resources described next.

### **Identifying Disability in Rural Malawi Public Schools**

It is difficult to find statistics on the numbers of children with disabilities in Malawi. Information gathered by the Southern African Federation of the Disabled indicated that there are over 69,000 school-aged children with learning impairments, including visual impairments and blindness, hearing impairments, physical impairments and learning difficulties (Lang, 2008). However, Lang cautions that these statistics “do not capture all learners enrolled in mainstream classes with impairments or learning difficulties such as intellectual disabilities, emotional and behavioral difficulties, specific learning disabilities, health impairments and language and communication difficulties” (p. 71). This observation concurs with our experiences working with rural schools in Malawi. At the beginning of this project in 2012, we visited 20 schools in two rural zones and simply asked the headmasters at each school to share with us the numbers of learners with disabilities that were enrolled. One zone reported 84 learners with special needs (the Malawian terminology for students with disabilities) out of 7000 children. The other zone reported 231 learners with special needs out of nearly 10,000 children. These data are suspect for two reasons. First, we spent weeks observing classrooms in the 20 schools and had anecdotal field notes about numbers of children who appeared (based solely on observable physical characteristics but not using any diagnostic tool) to have

physical disabilities, low vision, low hearing, and what may have been various forms of cognitive impairment and intellectual disabilities in the classrooms. Clearly, we were not assessing using any formal or informal assessments and thus our obtained counts cannot be used officially. In a developed country, such as the United States, it is estimated that 10 percent of all students in schools will have various forms of disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Yet, in Malawi, a country with far greater health care needs, significantly less maternal and prenatal care, inadequate nutrition, and all of the other factors associated with poverty, the schools we worked with were identifying children at a rate of less than two percent of the student population according to their self-reports to us during informal interviews. Numbers from our anecdotal field notes suggested that at least seven to eight percent of the learners we observed in classrooms should be assessed for physical, sensory, and/or cognitive disabilities. We met with Landirani staff and the Department of Special Needs at the Ministry of Education and decided that one of at least two possible explanations could account for such a low incidence of students with disabilities officially identified in these classrooms; either large numbers of students with disabilities were attending school and were not being identified as having a disability that negatively impacted educational performance, or large numbers of students with disabilities were simply not attending school. In talking with teachers, community leaders, and Landirani staff and volunteers, the team ultimately decided that both possibilities were likely. Based on available resources and the fact that this was our first attempt to explore professional development on assessment for inclusive education in these 20 rural Malawi schools, the team made the decision to delay efforts to find children with disabilities who were not attending school until a comprehensive child find plan that involved community leaders, Landirani, and school personnel could be developed. Our team is committed to building a sustainable model of professional development for the rural schools. This requires using locally available and culturally relevant resources for professional development.

Two years prior, the Ministry had created a booklet called a Disability Toolkit with the intention that teachers would use it to understand, assess, and identify students with disabilities in their classrooms. One copy of the booklet was distributed to every primary school in Malawi but the ministry was unable to provide professional development, coaching, or follow-up assessment. It is well documented in the literature that teachers need job-embedded professional development and coaching in order to work effectively with new pedagogical tools (Darling-Hammond & Richardson,

2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009) And thus, after weeks of observation in rural schools, interviews with teachers and administrators, consultations with Landirani staff and Ministry personnel, we developed a one-day workshop to train three teachers from each rural school on using the Disability Toolkit to identify students with disabilities in their classrooms.

### **Ongoing Educational Challenges in Rural Malawi**

Before describing our professional development efforts to build teachers' capacity for identifying children with disabilities in their classrooms, it will be helpful to provide some background about the overall state of education in Malawi, teacher training, and professional development for teachers in Malawi.

#### *Free Primary Education*

Universal free primary school education is a poverty reduction strategy for Malawi that began in the early 1990s. Following Malawi's independence, a national goal was to train personnel to fill positions vacated by former colonial administrators (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). Initially, this led to an increased attention to secondary and tertiary education for those who could afford it in Malawi. In 1994, school fees were abolished for primary school students. This made it possible for children to receive free, although not compulsory, primary school education in Malawi (World Bank, 2009). As a result, school enrollments skyrocketed, increasing from approximately 1.9 million enrolled students in the early 90's to nearly three million in the year 2000. This dramatic increase in enrollment required a commitment on the part of the Malawi government to provide sufficient learning materials and teachers (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). In the mid-1990's, approximately 18,000 untrained teachers were hired to fill primary school classrooms throughout the country, creating a 120:1 pupil to trained-teacher ratio (Al-Samarrai & Zaman, 2007).

Malawi continues its educational reform, yet challenges abound. While many more students now attend school, many leave school before they have attained basic literacy and numeracy skills (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). The extent to which chronic, wide-spread academic underachievement is due to malleable systemic factors such as teacher knowledge and class-size or if there are wide-spread intellectual and learning disabilities that require highly specialized instruction for large numbers of students is unknown. What is known, is that the large enrollment numbers in Standards 1-4 tend to fall as students enter the upper levels of primary

grade education, with substantial drop-out rates for students in Standards 5-8 (Al-Samarrai & Zaman, 2007) as fewer and fewer children are able to pass the state examinations that allow them to progress upwards through the standards. In fact, approximately half of the students who enter Standard 1 will reach Standard 3 (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). Such statistics indicate that there continue to be challenges within the public education system that must be addressed from multiple perspectives. Indirect costs of schooling, family obligations, and lack of interest in school are among the top reasons reported for learners leaving school (Kadzamira & Chibwana, 2000).

Within the school setting, students have been taught in the vernacular language in Standards 1-4 and in English in Standards 5-8. Textbooks tend to be in Chichewa, regardless of the regional language (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). The curriculum is progressive with an emphasis on child-centered pedagogy including group work, debates, and problem-solving activities. However, it is reported most teachers are not well-trained in these instructional techniques and resort to traditional teaching methods in efforts to handle the large class sizes (Kadzamira & Rose, 2003). We observed similar instructional challenges during our school visits and informal observations of classrooms.

#### *Teacher Training*

The significant increase in primary school enrollment resulting from free primary public education in the mid-90's sharply increased the teacher-pupil ratio significantly in Malawian classrooms. Efforts were made to train teachers quickly. The Malawian government addressed this pressing issue by hiring teachers who were educated, but untrained, with plans to train them later. Minimum requirements included a Junior Certificate of Education, taken two years after secondary education (Edwards, 2005). Training efforts included the Malawi In-Service Integrated Teacher Education Program (MIITEP), instituted in 1997. The MIITEP is comprised of three months residence in a Teacher Training College, 20 months teaching in a primary school, and six weeks of intensive revision and assessment back at the Teacher Training College (Edwards, 2005). There are six colleges that support the program in Malawi (Coultras & Lewin, 2002). The MIITEP has been deemed only partially successful (Kunje, 2002). Estimates are that approximately half of the teachers in Malawi are untrained (Edwards, 2005). Without well-trained teachers, educational reform, including effective inclusive educational practices, cannot be effective and will not last.

Many of the teacher trainees are experienced, but untrained (Coults & Lewin, 2002). Approximately 42% of teacher trainees are female, averaging 26 years of age. About 62% of trainees are Junior College Certificate holders. MIITEP courses, according to syllabi and materials used, are consistent with the goals of revised primary education, advocating constructivist approaches focused on learner-centered approaches, though more traditional, authoritative stances toward teaching are still evident in the curricula (Kunje, 2002). Some research on teacher trainee attitudes and perceptions about teaching and learning indicate that Malawian teacher trainees believe in differentiation through small groups in the classroom (ability grouping) and disagree with the statement that slow learners cannot be helped by teachers (Coults & Lewin, 2002). According to Kunje (2002):

there is a need for a more consistent approach [to teacher training] to ensure that teachers would have a good understanding of their subjects and how to teach them. A systematic focus on upgrading the students' knowledge across all key subjects should instill confidence to teach all levels of the primary school. (p. 311)

And thus, for all of the challenges facing Malawian teachers, students, and schools, there is a foundation of inclusive practice and philosophy in even the most basic training that Malawian teachers receive which offers a very positive place from which to build teacher capacity for inclusive classrooms.

#### *Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education*

Teacher preparation in special education is relatively new and not yet widely available in Malawi (Itimu & Kopetz, 2008). However, an ongoing commitment exists in policy and practice to educate children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (Itimu & Kopetz; 2008). As previously mentioned, significant challenges to providing special education services in general education classrooms exist. These include: (a) large class sizes; (b) beliefs about disabilities; and (c) general educators' beliefs about their abilities to work with disabilities (M. Cox, personal communication, June 12, 2012). A limited number of disability education specialists and long distances between schools mean that students with disabilities often have limited access to services (Mcheka, n.d.). Efforts to address these issues and improve access to appropriate education for all students are ongoing (Chavuta, 2008). One strategy to promote inclusive classrooms that is largely missing is the provision of professional development to general

educators in differentiated instruction and practical strategies for including students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. Little research exists on issues related to professional development for building capacity for inclusive education in Malawi.

#### **Importance of Professional Development for Inclusive Practice**

Professional development means "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (Hirsch, 2009, p. 12). To meet the demands of working in dynamic, complex, highly stressful environments, teachers, like all professionals, must have access to high quality professional learning opportunities throughout their careers (Fullan, 2010; Taylor & Labarre, 2006). High quality professional development is also a key indicator of organizational transformation and practical changes that promote inclusive classrooms (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). Three major reviews of the literature on professional development (Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009) agree on the following essential characteristics of effective professional development: (a) deepens teachers content knowledge; (b) helps teachers connect content knowledge to their students' needs; (c) facilitates active learning in authentic contexts; (d) has coherence with school, district, state, and national goals; (e) is collaborative and collegial; and (f) provides sustained support for teachers' ongoing learning over time. Collaborative professional development is particularly effective (Joyce & Showers, 2002).

Waldron and McLeskey (2010) synthesized the literature on collaborative professional development and identified characteristics that are similar to findings in the three previously described reviews. Collaborative professional development: (a) is coherent and focused; (b) addresses instructional practices and content knowledge that improve student outcomes; (c) is built upon the practices and beliefs of teachers, ensuring high levels of teacher buy-in; (d) is school-based, job-embedded, and long-term; (e) provides extensive follow-up (e.g., coaching) in teachers' classrooms; and (f) is actively supported by the school administration (Waldron & McLeskey, 2010). These characteristics are only possible in a culturally relevant, co-constructed, job-embedded model of professional development. Effective professional development should ultimately lead to increased student achievement, a goal desperately warranted in Malawi, considering the high dropout rates in primary schools. While there are no studies exploring

the essential elements of professional development for teachers in Malawi, extensive research describes professional development in Western context. Using best-practices from the literature on adult learning and professional development for Western teachers, we designed a 4-hour professional development workshop in which teachers would be given explicit instruction in using the Disability Toolkit, have opportunities for guided practice using it, and would learn how to write measurable goals for using the Disability Toolkit in their schools. When designing the workshop, however, the team was careful to focus on practices that were culturally relevant and sustainable without requiring schools or teachers to rely on assessments, materials, or personnel that were not already available in their schools. The guiding framework for developing the workshop was the Malawian pedagogical model, Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR).

#### *Teaching and Learning Using Locally Available Resources (TALULAR)*

In most Malawian primary schools, students have to share textbooks due to large class sizes. Teaching guides are often insufficient and teaching aids are largely absent (Kadamira & Rose, 2003). Due to the lack of adequate learning and teaching materials, TALULAR is an approach to teaching and learning that has been embraced by Malawian teachers through a longstanding partnership between the TALULAR founder Andy Byers and the Malawi Institute of Education (Gwayi, 2009). TALULAR is also a part of teacher training in Malawi (Gwayi, 2009), with the majority of teachers stating they feel comfortable with the TALULAR ideology (Phiri, 2008). “For a poor country like Malawi the choice to use TALULAR as a means of provision of resources, is an answer to low financial support of educational activities” (Phiri, 2008, p. 121).

TALULAR encourages teachers to improve the quality of education by using the resources around them, such as bottle caps, seeds, even what may appear to be ‘trash’ to some and to assertively create learning experiences around these items. For example, teachers may use bottle caps to help students learn to count, add or subtract using manipulatives. Leafy branches from trees might be used to teach multiplication. Teachers may set up ‘stores’ to practice math problems centered around purchasing goods at a local store. Teachers, schools (community and teacher training colleges), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and the government are key stakeholders to the success of TALULAR, promoting the rich resources locally available to teachers in their natural surroundings

(Gwayi, 2009). Thus, with TALULAR as a guiding framework, the team implemented two four-hour workshops for 60 Malawian general education teachers from 20 rural schools.

### **Professional Development**

Our ongoing collaborative interests include the co-construction of a culturally relevant model of professional development to support inclusive classrooms in rural Malawi primary schools. To accomplish this goal, the environmental constraints of Malawian schools must be considered. Teachers in our 20 schools instruct hundreds of students every day in small, dark classrooms, most of which have no desks, dirt floors, and rely on natural light. Blackboards are painted onto plaster walls and roofs are made of tin. Children sit crammed side by side on floors and oral direct instruction is delivered from the front of the classroom. The challenges for students with sensory impairments are immediate and obvious.

An ongoing challenge for Western organizations working in Malawi is resisting the temptation to simply provide instructional resources to teachers and schools. We witnessed first-hand, however, the problems with using such a traditional, charitable model for professional development. Based on our observations and experiences in classrooms and talking with teachers, our opinion is that the bits of plastic and paper in the form of Western manipulatives and other instructional tools quickly become clutter in this environment. Teachers and Landiran staff report that little or no training in how to use Western tools occurs, so teachers often ignore the tools altogether. That is, if they have access to them at all. It is often the case that because resources are scarce, any materials, particularly expensive items like books, paper, manipulatives, models, markers, pens, etc., tend to be locked away for safe keeping and are generally unavailable for teachers’ or students’ use. Therefore, when designing our professional development for teachers, we had to focus on what was possible for teachers to implement now with the resources they had access to in their classrooms. Frankly, it was often challenging for the team to keep in mind that the changes in teacher behavior and student outcomes might be paltry by Western standards, these were important and significant changes in the Malawian context and were more sustainable than a foreign interventionist approach because the main product was teacher knowledge, something that is completely independent of an ongoing relationship with any Western entity. We believe our ongoing commitment to TALULAR for instructing primary school students and professional development for their teachers is essential.

Thus, we trained the teachers to use the only disability assessment tool available to them, the Disability Toolkit provided by the Department of Special Needs at the Ministry of Education.

The Disability Toolkit is a booklet created by the Department of Special Needs that focuses on 8 areas of disability that teachers might encounter in their classrooms. For each area, the toolkit provides information about the overall area of disability, key indicators that teachers might see in their classrooms, and instructional strategies for mediating needs associated with the disability. In planning the workshop, we decided to focus on providing training on three common areas of disability that teachers could easily identify and address instructionally: low vision, low hearing, and epilepsy. The first half of the workshop addressed overall high access instructional strategies (Feldman & Denti, 2004) that all teachers could use with all students. As we taught and practiced the strategies, teachers had opportunities to ask questions, practice independently and in small groups, and to share with each other how they could use the strategies in their own classrooms. In the second half of the workshop we worked with teachers to help them understand how to use the toolkit to identify students and how the high-access instructional strategies they had just learned met the instructional needs described by the toolkit. At the end of the workshop, teachers were asked to set a measurable goal for using the toolkit to identify students with disabilities in their classrooms and their schools. The Director of Education for Landirani followed their progress over the 2012-2013 school year. In the year following the Disability Toolkit workshops, identification rates doubled across the 20 schools. We conducted informal interviews with two district administrators and 10 building level administrators. When asked about the increase in identification rates all of these administrators attributed the increase to the workshops. While certainly not scientific, these data suggest that future research should systematically and rigorously explore professional development as an important malleable factor for building capacity for inclusive education in rural Malawi schools.

It is important to note during informal interviews teachers and administrators reported ongoing challenges recommended identification procedures in the Disability Toolkit provided by the Special Needs Department at the Malawian Ministry of Education (the only available assessment tool). Although these data were gathered during casual and spontaneous, 'how have things been going'-type conversations with teachers and administrators, we believe that these are important barriers that are worthy of further, more structured investigation. The teachers indicated that many of the

recommended procedures were impossible to implement due to the responsibilities associated with large class sizes. The identification strategies provided in the Toolkit require teachers to be able to focus sustained attention on individual students, which may not be realistic given the numbers of students in the early primary grades. Also, the recommendations in the toolkit that are most doable are those related to physical and sensory disabilities. The cognitive/academic/learning disabilities information is not granular enough to yield meaningful results and is too involved for the teachers to be able to process for large numbers of children.

## Conclusion

During our June, 2012 visit, the Malawian government passed the Inclusion of People with Disabilities Act which guaranteed civil rights and equal opportunities for people with disabilities, including inclusive education for children with disabilities. However, many obstacles must be overcome. In talking with teachers and community members, it was clear that culturally relevant sensitization activities are needed. A common view is that people with disabilities are possessed with evil spirits and bring bad luck to their families. Thus, it is ill advised to touch or help these children in case the evil spirits afflict other families. In Malawi, people with disabilities are among the poorest and most marginalized in a country of extremely poor and marginalized people. Changing these traditional views is a challenge. We know that some people purposely put a limb of a person having a seizure into a fire to 'wake them from a trance'. Children with cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities are often kept at home to avoid shaming the family. Children with blindness, deafness, and intellectual or learning disabilities are held back in the early primary grades because they are unable to pass standard level exams to progress with their same age peers. Yet, we repeatedly met teachers, parents, and community members who want to help but explain that they do not know what to do for children with disabilities or how to explain to others that these traditional beliefs are inaccurate and harmful. An important outcome of this exploratory work is the discovery of the many attitudinal and academic strengths among Malawian teachers and community members related to including children with disabilities in the general education classroom. Barriers to inclusive education in Malawi are issues of knowledge and resources, both of which can be mediated through effective professional development that is sustainable and culturally responsive.

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# The US and South Korean Pre-K through 6 Teachers' Beliefs about Inclusion Practices in their Countries: Cross Cultural Perspectives

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## Abstract

*South Korea and the United States of America (US) both have procedures in place for identifying and serving individuals with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. This current study examined the differences in identification practices for students with disabilities in the US and South Korea. In South Korea, fewer students were identified as having disabilities and the students who were identified tended to have more significant disabilities. The beliefs towards inclusion of educators teaching pre-K through 6th grade in both countries were documented and contrasted. Differences concerning teacher beliefs about students with disabilities in inclusive settings were examined across the two countries. In addition, teachers' beliefs concerning isolation were explored. Recommendations were made for additional exploration for teacher training. Future exploration of the impact that current identification and inclusion practices hold for student outcomes in both countries was recommended.*

The movement toward inclusion experienced in various countries is a reflection of the cultural values of equal opportunity and diversity which spring from a political system and a value system that supports diverse cultures (Hick & Thomas, 2009). In South Korea and the US, services for individuals with disabilities have been influenced by societal concerns that are reflective of each culture (Deng, 2010). The inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in the general education classroom is a legal requirement in the US as well as in South Korea that reinforces both governments' value for diversity. In the US, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA, 1990) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA, 2004) provide support for inclusion (Loreman, Deppeler, & Harvey, 2005; Mungai & Kogan, 2005; Odom & Diamond, 1998). In 2001, the US passed the No Child Left Behind Legislation which set academic standards for all children (Hewitt, 2011). Similarly, in South Korea, there are laws such as 장애인복지법, which is the Welfare Act for People with Disabilities and 장애인 등에 대한 특수교육법, which is the Special Education Law for Students with Disabilities (South Korea Ministry of Health & Welfare, 2012).

## Definition of Inclusion

Many define inclusion as a movement designed to bring children with special needs into the general classroom to educate them together with their typically developing peers (Forlin, Earle, Loreman, & Sharma, 2011). However, the term inclusion has many definitions. As one reviews the literature it becomes apparent that although inclusion has been consistently explored over the years, there are still issues with defining the practice of inclusion. King (2003) explained that "inclusive education means that all students within a school regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, or disabilities in any area become part of the school community" (p. 152). In this context, students with disabilities attend the same schools as their neighbors and peers without disabilities where they are provided all support needed to achieve full access to the same curriculum. Obiakor, Harris, Mutua, Rotatori and Algozzine (2012) indicate that inclusion is an entitlement guaranteed by US law. Inclusion is therefore, built on the principle that all students should be valued for their exceptional abilities and included as important members of the school community. Friend and Bursuck (2009) indicate that inclusion is defined by the situation. The development of effective inclusion

Table 1

*Percentage of Children with Disabilities Over Total Enrollments of School-aged Children*

	US (2009-2010)	South Korea <sup>c</sup> (2010) (2011)
Total Enrollment (EC-12)	54,862,000 <sup>a</sup>	7,745,551 7,646,178
Children in Special Education	6,481,000 <sup>b</sup>	79,711 82,665
% of Children in Special Education for Total Enrollment	13.1%	1.03% 1.1%

*Note.* <sup>a</sup> Total enrollment in educational institutions, preK through 12th grade as adapted from US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012, Table 2). <sup>b</sup> Adapted from US Department of Education, National Center For Education Statistics (2012, Table 46). <sup>c</sup> All data of South Korea were adapted from South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2011), p. 101.

Table 2

*Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Each School Type Across the Two Countries*

	US (2009-2010)	South Korea (2010) (2012)
In regular schools	94.7% <sup>a</sup>	70% <sup>d</sup> 70.7%
In separated schools or residential facilities	3.3% <sup>b</sup>	30% <sup>e</sup> 29.3%
In others <sup>g</sup>	2.0% <sup>c</sup>	# <sup>f</sup> #

*Note.* # = Rounds to zero. <sup>a,b,c</sup> Adapted from Table A-9-2 by US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012). <sup>d,e, and f</sup> Adapted from South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2012, p. 4).

<sup>g</sup> Homebound, homeschool, or hospital.

practices at the school and classroom level is impacted by several factors such as the country, state and district policies, availability of resources, the leadership of the school principal, and the degree of collaboration among the staff. However, teachers' attitudes and willingness to include students with diverse abilities and the teachers' perceived confidence or sense of efficacy in being able to work with students with special needs impact the success of inclusion. There are some very broad definitions of inclusion. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) defines inclusion as, "The active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity — in people, in the curriculum, in the co-curriculum, and in communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) with which individuals might connect — in ways that increase one's awareness, content knowledge, cognitive sophistication, and empathic understanding of the complex ways individuals interact within systems and institutions" (AAC&U, 2013). However, for purposes of the current study inclusion will be defined as a policy where students with

disabilities are supported in chronologically age-appropriate general education classes in their neighborhood schools and receive the specialized instruction within the context of the core-curriculum and general class activities (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001).

*Statement of the Problem*

In recent years, the educational paradigm supporting inclusion in South Korea has followed a similar pattern to inclusion practices in the US (Kwon, 2002). Inclusive education is also a surging educational movement in South Korea (South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011). As we attempt to determine the best policies for supporting individuals with disabilities to maximize their potential, it is important to explore how inclusion is implemented across cultures and countries. Exploring existing policies will provide insight into issues which might impact the acceptance and status of individuals with disabilities in both countries. Table 1 indicates that the

percentage of children with special needs enrolled in pre-K through twelfth grade in the US (13.1%) is more than 10 times higher than the percentage in South Korea (1.1%). This information denotes there are differences in special education placements between the two countries. Possible reasons for the differences include: a) children in the US may be more widely placed into special education categories compared to children in South Korea; b) there may be differences in the identification policies and procedures between the two countries.

Table 2 indicates the percentages of students with disabilities served in various types of educational settings in the US and South Korea. Table 2 indicates that students labeled as having a disability in South Korea are more likely to be served in separate or residential schools. Also, fewer students in South Korea who are labeled as having a disability are served in inclusive settings. However, considering that the percentage of children with special needs in the US is approximately 10 times higher than that in South Korea, the differences could indicate that students with mild disabilities are not served in special education. In South Korea, students with mild disabilities could be served in the general education classroom but without special education identification. In other words, students with mild disabilities may not be recognized as having a disability in South Korea. These students remain in the general education environment without identification or a disability label. This difference in identification results in students with more severe disabilities making up the population of students with special needs in South Korea. However, students with more severe disabilities are more likely served in more restrictive environments.

The differences across countries in the implementation of inclusion as a method for serving students with disabilities are important. As we seek equitable treatment for all individuals with disabilities across countries and cultures, it is important to assess differences in practices and procedures. Schools with successful inclusive programs have reported that all children as well as teachers benefit from such programs (Hollingworth, Boone, & Crais, 2009; McGregor & Forlin, 2005). However, in spite of the reported positive outcomes, many educators are still hesitant to adopt inclusion (Dunn, 2000; Küçüker, Acarlar, & Kapci, 2005; McDonnell et al., 2003). Difficulties related to serving children with and without disabilities in the same school environment have been expressed by teachers working in inclusive settings (Anderson, 2006; Pivik, McComas, & Laflamme, 2002). Difficulties teachers commonly cite with implementing inclusion include lack of training and resources necessary to accommodate students with special needs in an inclusive environment (Burstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello, & Spanga, 2004).

There are also additional factors that may make implementing inclusion differ across countries (Moberg & Savolainen, 2003). For instance, it is possible that students with more severe disabilities make-up the population of individuals served by special education in some countries. This different distribution of students served in special education may be one of the factors influencing inclusive practices in various nations. There is a difference in the identification policies concerning students with special needs between the US and South Korean education systems. In South Korea, the government classifies children with special needs into 11 categories: (a) visual impairments, (b) hearing impairments, (c) intellectual disability, (d) orthopedic impairments, (e) emotional and behavioral disturbance, (f) autism spectrum disorder, (g) speech or language impairment, (h) learning disabilities, (i) other health impairment, (j) developmental delay, and (k) other disabilities (South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011). The US has similar categories (see Table 3) identified by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA). Under the 2004 legislation of IDEIA, the US lists 13 federal educational categories of disability (Bolt & Roach, 2009; US Department of Education, 2006). Under these categories, the overall percentage of students served in special education (both public and private schools) demonstrates a difference between the two nations: incidence rates of children with disabilities are 13% (2009-2010) in the US (US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012) while only 1.03% in 2010 and 1.1% in 2011 were identified with disabilities in South Korea (South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2011). Although the disability categories in the US and South Korea seem somewhat similar, the percentages of children in each category are extremely different. Table 3 indicates that there are huge differences between the US and South Korea in the number of students in the categories of learning disabilities, speech/language impairments, and intellectual disability. The number of students identified with intellectual disability differs across the two countries. The numbers from 2010 revealed a much higher rate for students served with intellectual disability in South Korea (53.6%) when compared to the US (7.1%). However, the number of children with learning disabilities and speech/language impairment is much higher in US (37.5% and 21.8%, respectively) than in South Korea (7.9% and 2.0%, respectively). Jung (2007) indicates that schools in South Korea define learning disabilities as “disabilities in learning, reading, writing, and calculating” and people with learning disabilities can be considered as “those who have lower than 75 for an IQ score” (p. 183). This

Table 3

*Percentage of Students with Disabilities in the US and South Korea who Received Special Education*

Categories of Disability	US <sup>a</sup>	South Korea	
	(2009-2010)	(2010) <sup>b</sup>	(2012) <sup>c</sup>
Specific Learning Disabilities	37.5%	7.9%	5.6%
Speech or Language Impairments	21.8%	2.0%	2.1%
Intellectual Disability	7.1%	53.6%	54.4%
Emotional Disturbance	6.3%	4.5%	3.2%
Hearing Impairments	1.2%	4.7%	4.4%
Orthopedic Impairments	1.0%	13.0%	13.3%
Other Health Impairments	10.6%	2.7%	2.6%
Visual Impairments	0.4%	3.0%	2.7%
Multiple Disabilities	2.0%	---	---
Autism	5.8%	6.9%	9.3%
Traumatic Brain Injury	0.4%	---	---
Developmental Delay	5.7%	1.7%	2.4%
Deaf-Blindness	#	---	---
Others	---	#	#

*Note.* # = Rounds to zero; --- = Not applicable. <sup>a</sup>The data for the US were adapted from Table A-9-1 by the National Center for Education Statistics (2012, p. 158). <sup>b and c</sup>The data for South Korea were adapted from South Korea Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (2012, p. 4).

definition differs significantly from the definition given in the US where in some states, to be labeled as having a learning disability students must have an IQ score in the “average or above range (approximately 85 or above)” and merely demonstrate difficulties in the academic areas. The operational definitions of intellectual disabilities and learning disabilities are different between the two countries. Most students who are served in the category of learning disabilities in the US would not be served in that category in South Korea. South Korea has a broader definition of intellectual disabilities.

Smith (2010) indicates that it may be more difficult to include students with intellectual disabilities in general classroom settings. When considering all students who are identified as having disabilities in both South Korea and the US, South Korea identifies a higher proportion of students in the category of intellectual disability. If, as Smith (2010) postulates, it is more difficult to educate students with intellectual disabilities in the general classroom, the higher proportion of students labeled as having an intellectual disability in South Korea could impact the number of students who are included in general classroom.

Another possibility is that students with milder disabilities may not be identified as having a disability in South Korea. So, students identified as having a learning disability in the US may not receive a label at all in South Korea. Students who might be classified as having a learning disability in the US are served in inclusive settings in South Korea. However, these students who would be classified as having a learning disability in the US would not be identified as having a disability in South Korea.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) synthesized results from 29 research studies in the US that were conducted from 1958 to 1995. The results indicated that low percentages of teachers (i.e., 11.9%, 22.8%, and 31.2% from three different studies) agreed with including children with severe disabilities such as serious behavioral, intellectual, or physical disabilities in general education settings, although they supported (71.9%, 74.9%, and 86% from each of the three studies) inclusion for children with mild disabilities (i.e., mild physical or sensory disabilities, learning disabilities). Scruggs and Mastropieri determined that the decision of whether to include children with special needs in the general classroom seem to be related to the severity of

students' disabilities. In the same manner, Palmer, Fuller, Arora, and Nelson (2001) concluded that high functioning students receive education in inclusive settings and most students with more significant disabilities have remained segregated in separate classrooms. If students with milder disabilities are not identified and served in South Korea, the population of students served by special education in South Korea would include students with more significant disabilities. According to Palmer and colleagues it would be more difficult to implement inclusion with a population of students with more significant disabilities.

To understand practices of inclusion in both countries, it is critical to discover the difficulties that educators in the US and South Korea are facing with inclusive education and if those difficulties are similar across the two countries. In addition, to determine if inclusion is a feasible practice, it is important to examine if teachers in the two nations are prepared and supported to implement inclusion. Elementary school teachers are more likely to incorporate inclusive practices if they embrace positive thoughts and embrace the belief that all children can learn (Florian & Rouse, 2010). Florian and Rouse (2010) indicated that teachers' beliefs that all children can learn are reinforced when teachers understand the essential constructive skills necessary to manage effective inclusive practices. More than half of the children with disabilities in South Korea are classified as having intellectual impairments, compared to the large percentage of children classified as having either specific learning disabilities or speech or language impairments in the US. The current study focused on elementary (pre-K through sixth grade) school teachers' beliefs in the US and South Korea. The purpose of this current study was to evaluate the perceptions of teachers concerning inclusive education in the US and in South Korea and assess teachers' confidence for using the teaching strategies related to inclusion. The study also explored practices that might facilitate the implementation of successful inclusion in the two nations to reveal which factors are barriers for effective inclusive classroom settings. Ysseldyke and Algozzine (2006) indicate that inclusion is built on the principle that all students should be valued for their exceptional abilities and included as important members of the school community. This study seeks to explore the state of inclusion in the US and South Korea. Once current practices are understood, the opportunities for increasing the effectiveness of inclusive classrooms will be enhanced.

## Method and Procedure

### *Participants*

The participants were a convenience sample of elementary school teachers in the US and South Korea. The elementary school teachers taught grades pre-K through sixth. Teachers in the US and South Korea were contacted by email. For the email addresses of teachers in each of the 50 states of the US, the researcher visited websites of public elementary schools, which were found from the resource website for elementary schools (<http://elementaryschools.org/>) and randomly selected 10 teachers from each of 78 schools from around the country. This database is not comprehensive but does represent a large number of teachers who have email addresses throughout the US. For collecting data from the South Korean participants, the same procedure was used. A database in South Korea (<http://www.schoolinfo.go.kr>) provided email addresses for a substantial number of teachers from South Korea. An email was sent to 780 teachers in the US and 490 teachers in South Korea asking them to complete a survey related to inclusion. A link to the survey webpage was included (<http://www.surveymonkey.com/>). A total of 94 teachers (12% of potential respondents) from the US and 69 teachers (14.1% of potential respondents) from South Korea responded to the survey. However, only 74 respondents (9.5%) from the US and 54 respondents (11%) from South Korea completed the total survey and were subsequently selected for the current study. Before beginning the survey, participants were advised that (a) the participants' names were not required, (b) demographic information would be confidential, and (c) that participation was voluntary.

### *Instrumentation*

Stoiber, Gettinger, and Goetz (1998) developed the instrument, My Thinking About Inclusion (MTAI) Scale, which is designed to measure the beliefs of practitioners about the inclusion of children with exceptionalities in general education settings. Reliability for the MTAI Scale using Cronbach's alpha was 0.91. The MTAI Scale included a practitioners' demographics section which was used to gather data on teacher education level, training (special education, regular education), grades taught (preschool, kindergarten, elementary and middle school), and years of experience. Years of experience was divided into five categories: 1-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and more than 20 years, instead of a blank space that required teachers to fill in their years of experience.

Table 4

*Demographics of Participants*

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>US<sup>a</sup></i>		<i>S. Korea<sup>b</sup></i>	
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	66	(89%)	41	(76%)
Male	8	(21%)	13	(24%)
<b>Training</b>				
Spe.Edu.	26	(35%)	19	(35%)
Gen.Edu.	48	(65%)	35	(65%)
<b>Highest Level of Education</b>				
Bachelor	19	(26%)	35	(65%)
MA or higher	55	(74%)	19	(35%)
<b>Who Working With</b>				
Preschooler	7	(9%)	6	(11%)
Kindergartener	13	(18%)	5	(9%)
Elementary Students	53	(72%)	43	(80%)
Middle School Students	1	(1%)	0	(0%)
<b>Experience</b>				
1~5 years	15	(20%)	19	(35%)
6~10 years	15	(20%)	2	(4%)
11~15 years	8	(11%)	12	(22%)
16~20 years	15	(20%)	13	(24%)
More than 20 years	21	(29%)	8	(15%)

*Note.* <sup>a</sup>*n* of US= 74. <sup>b</sup>*n* of S. Korea= 54.

The MTAI Scale used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = undecided/neutral, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree). Some of the questions (i.e., 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 14, 15, 19, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, and 28) utilized inverted scoring so the 5-point scale needed to be reversed (1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree). The MTAI Scale questionnaire has three subscales: (a) Core Perspectives, (b) Expected Outcomes, and (c) Classroom Practices. The Core Perspective Subscale measures the belief that students with disabilities have the right to be educated with the typically growing peers in the same classroom. The

Expected Outcomes Subscale measures teachers' beliefs about what will result from a specific situation or event and the Classroom Practices Subscale reflects beliefs about how inclusion impacts instructional practices (Stoiber et al., 1998). The MTAI Scale was selected because the instrument contained relevant questions to analyze teacher's thoughts and beliefs about inclusion. The survey questions were translated into Korean and reviewed by two professors holding doctoral degrees and currently teaching in a college of education in South Korea. A pilot study was conducted to verify the translation of the instrument. For the pilot study, the

reliability for the MTAI Scale using Cronbach's alpha was 0.85. Both the English and Korean version of the survey were loaded into SurveyMonkey. Participants were recruited through email. The consent notice at the beginning of the survey explained to the participants the purpose of the study and advised that the completion of the online survey was voluntary.

### *Data Analysis*

The beliefs of teachers from the US and South Korea, regarding inclusion were analyzed using summary scores of the MTAI Scale. The mean scores for respondents' survey questions were calculated. Also, individual participants' 28 MTAI Scale scores were computed and transformed to three subscale scores (i.e., Core Perspectives, Expected Outcomes, and Classroom Practices) to analyze the relationship with other independent variables (i.e., training area, education, and experience) using an Analysis of Variance. A cross tabulation procedure was performed to sort and compare special and general educators' beliefs toward inclusive education. The mean scores for special and general education respondents' survey questions were calculated separately. An independent samples *t*-test was completed to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the general and special educators in the US and South Korea.

### **Results**

The present study examined pre-K through 6 school teachers' beliefs about inclusion, their beliefs about the degree of accommodation and their level of preparation, the level of each barrier to inclusion, and what improved inclusive practices. For all survey responses gathered through the SurveyMonkey website, Cronbach's alpha was tested to measure internal consistency. The internal consistency test (Cronbach's alpha) for the instrument MTAI Scale was 0.94 (excellent) for teachers in the US and 0.83 (good) for teachers in the South Korea. Also, the reliabilities of the three subscales were: 0.81 (US) and 0.76 (South Korea) for Core Perspectives, 0.89 (US) and 0.70 (South Korea) for Expected Outcomes, and 0.82 (US) and 0.65 (South Korea) for Classroom Practices.

### *Demographic Information*

Participants in the study totaled 74 from the US and 54 from South Korea. Table 4 represents the demographic information. Characteristics of the respondents from the US revealed that 89% were female

and 11% were male teachers while 76% of respondents from South Korea were female and 24% were male.

### *To What Extent, If Any, Do Pre-K through 6 Teachers Agree with Inclusive Education?*

The overall attitude toward inclusion was analyzed comparing the means of the US and South Korea teachers' ratings. In addition, data between countries was compared for each question on the MTAI scale. An independent samples *t*-test was completed to compare overall means for the full scale between US and South Korea teachers (see Table 5). A statistically significant difference was found between the two nations on the full survey scales. Teachers' mean scores on a Likert scale indicated slightly positive ratings towards inclusion in both countries with the US having significantly more positive overall ratings towards inclusion

The MTAI scale divides 28 questions among three categories: core perspectives, expected outcomes, and classroom practices (see Table 6). *T*-tests compared teacher results between countries on each category (see Table 6.)

Table 6 indicates the mean scores, *p* values and effect sizes for each question on the MTAI scale. The mean scores between the US and South Korea teachers were comparable across all three subscales (see Table 6). However, the US and South Korean participants showed significant differences on the Likert scale on some individual questions. On the Core Perspectives category questions, teachers between the US and South Korea displayed bigger gaps on questions 3, 7, 8, 9 (see Table 6). Teachers in South Korea indicated stronger agreement on: (a) It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains a mix of children with exceptional education needs and children with average abilities (item 3); (b) Most special education teachers lack an appropriate knowledge base to educate typically developing students effectively (item 7); (c) The individual needs of children with disabilities can't be addressed adequately by a regular education teacher (item 8); and (d) Educators must learn more about the effects of inclusive classrooms before inclusive classrooms take place on a large scale basis (item 9). Educators in South Korea also reflected significantly more positive experiences with inclusion which are (a) Parents of students with disabilities want to place their child in an inclusive classroom (item 6); and (b) Just educating students in integrated settings is the best way to begin inclusive education (item 10) (see Table 6)

In Expected Outcomes, teachers in the US more highly disagreed than teachers in South Korea on points (i.e., items 14, 15, 23): (a) Students with disabilities will more rapidly improve academic skills in a separate

Table 5

*US and South Korean Teachers' Mean Scores on the Full Survey Scale*

Country	<i>n</i>	Mean	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i> <sup>c</sup>
US	74	73.9 <sup>a</sup>	-2.484	.014*	-.45
S. Korea	54	80.5 <sup>b</sup>			

Note. <sup>a</sup>73.9/28= 2.64, <sup>b</sup> 80.5/28=2.88 (1=*strongly agree*, 5= *strongly disagree* toward inclusion). <sup>c</sup>Small if *d*=.20; Medium if *d*=.50; Large if *d*= .80. \**P* < .05. According to Cohen (1992), the effect size calculated is between small and medium.

Table 6a

*Summary of Agreement of Participants for Each Question Indicated by Likert Mean Scores*

	MTAI Questions	US <sup>a</sup>	S. Korea <sup>b</sup>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i> <sup>c</sup>
Core Perspectives	1	4.12	4.24	.437	.14
	2	3.84	3.47	.166	-.25
	3	3.09	2.35	.000*	-.64
	4	4.12	4.11	.870	-.04
	5	3.97	3.82	.105	-.29
	6	3.49	4.04	.000*	.63
	7	3.70	3.02	.001*	-.61
	8	3.07	2.59	.010*	-.44
	9	2.43	1.80	.000*	-.61
	10	2.81	3.39	.001*	.54
	11	2.86	2.98	.465	.13
	12	3.81	3.59	.061	-.34
	Mean	3.45	3.28	.079	-.33
Expected Outcomes	13	4.14	4.09	.765	-.06
	14	3.12	2.65	.013*	-.44
	15	3.78	2.26	.000*	-1.18
	16	4.14	3.85	.057	-.35
	17	3.80	3.57	.162	-.26
	18	3.65	3.20	.005	-.51
	19	2.96	3.13	.331	.17
	20	3.51	3.41	.490	-.11
	21	3.57	3.43	.365	-.16
	22	3.30	3.37	.686	.07
	23	3.73	3.09	.000*	-.65
	Mean	3.60	3.28	.003*	-.58
Classroom Practices	24	2.64	2.59	.817	-.05
	25	2.24	1.83	.012*	-.42
	26	2.46	1.96	.003*	-.50
	27	2.73	2.94	.291	.19
	28	3.03	2.72	.124	-.27
		Mean	2.62	2.41	.129

Note. The mean scores of SOME questions were reversed during analysis so that higher numbers represented higher ratings. Scale 5= *strongly agree* and 1= *strongly disagree*. <sup>a</sup>US teachers, *n*=74. <sup>b</sup>South Korean Teachers, *n*=54. <sup>c</sup>Small if *d*=.20; Medium if *d*=.50; Large if *d*= .80. \* *p* < .05.

Table 6b

*My Thinking about Inclusion Scale (MTAI)*

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Core Perspectives

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1. Students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students.
  2. (R) Inclusion is NOT a desirable practice for educating most typically developing students.
  3. (R) It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains a mix of children with exceptional education needs and children with average abilities.
  4. Children with exceptional education needs should be given every opportunity to function in an integrated classroom.
  5. Inclusion can be beneficial for parents of children with exceptional education needs.
  6. Parents of children with exceptional needs prefer to have their child placed in an inclusive classroom setting.
  7. (R) Most special education teachers lack an appropriate knowledge base to educate typically developing students effectively.
  8. (R) The individual needs of children with disabilities CANNOT be addressed adequately by a regular education teacher.
  9. (R) We must learn more about the effects of inclusive classrooms before inclusive classrooms take place on a large scale basis.
  10. The best way to begin educating children in inclusive setting is just to do it.
  11. Most children with exceptional needs are well behaved in integrated education classrooms.
  12. It is feasible to teach children with average abilities and exceptional needs in the same classroom.
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Expected Outcomes

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13. Inclusion is socially advantageous for children with special needs.
14. (R) Children with special needs will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a special, separate classroom than in an integrated classroom.
15. (R) Children with exceptional needs are likely to be isolated by typically developing students in inclusive classrooms.
16. The presence of children with exceptional education needs promotes acceptance of individual difference on the part of typically developing students.
17. Inclusion promotes social independence among children with special needs.
18. Inclusion promotes self-esteem among children with special needs.
19. (R) Children with exceptional needs are likely to exhibit more challenging behaviors in an integrated classroom setting.
20. Children with special needs in inclusive classrooms develop a better self-concept than in a self-contained classroom.
21. The challenge of a regular education classroom promotes academic growth among children with exceptional education needs.
22. (R) Isolation in a special class does NOT have a negative effect on the social and emotional development of students prior to middle school.
23. (R) Typically developing students in inclusive classrooms are more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors learned from children with special needs.

(Continued)

Table 6b (Continued)

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Classroom Practices

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24. (R) Children with exceptional needs monopolize teachers' time.
25. (R) The behaviors of students with special needs require significantly more teacher-directed attention than those of typically developing children.
26. (R) Parents of children with exceptional education needs require more supportive services from teachers than parents of typically developing children.
27. Parents of children with exceptional needs present no greater challenge for a classroom teacher than do parents of a regular education student.
28. (R) A good approach to managing inclusive classrooms is to have a special education teacher be responsible for instructing the children with special needs.
- 

R=reverse scored item

special classroom than in an integrated classroom; (b) Students with disabilities are more likely to be isolated by peers in inclusive classrooms; and (c) General students in inclusive classrooms are more likely to display challenging behaviors learned from students with disabilities. Noticeably, the US and South Korean teachers displayed the biggest mean difference ( 1.4 difference on 5- point Likert scale) on item 15 (see Table 6) which relates to children with exceptional needs being isolated by typically developing students in inclusive classrooms. The effect size of this difference is -1.18 and is considered very strong. In the Classroom Practices category of the MTAI scale, teachers in the US also highly disagreed on item 25 and item 26, compared to teachers in South Korea: (a) The behaviors of students with special needs require significantly more teacher-directed attention than general education peers (item 25), and (b) Parents of students with disabilities need more supports from teachers than parents of typically developing students (item 26).

### Discussion

Since the 1970s, the education systems of both the US and South Korea have implemented laws for including students with disabilities in general education. The movement toward inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings has created many additional roles and responsibilities for teachers in providing an appropriate education for all students in public schools. It is important to understand the differences in identification practices between the two countries. Understanding inclusion policies across cultures can provide a step towards globally accepted inclusive education. Global understanding of the

advantages of inclusion can facilitate society with providing students with disabilities the educational opportunities needed to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century across various cultures and perspectives.

This study applied a cross sectional method to examine the differences in teachers' beliefs toward inclusive education. Pre-K through 6 teachers' beliefs about inclusive practices in the US and South Korea were surveyed to determine if there was a difference between the two groups' beliefs about inclusion. The findings suggested that teachers' beliefs and concerns about inclusive practices in the US and South Korea were different. In addition, there was most likely some disparity concerning the types of students served by special education in the two countries. For example, proportionally, more students with intellectual disabilities were identified in South Korea as opposed to the US. It could be that there is a difference in the types of students who are classified as students with disabilities between the two countries. Smith (2010) indicated that it is more difficult to serve students with disabilities in inclusive classroom. A difference in the classification of the children served across countries could impact beliefs concerning inclusion.

#### *Pre-K through 6 Teachers' Beliefs toward Inclusion in the US and South Korea*

The analyses conducted revealed that inclusion is actively advocated among teachers in South Korea as well as in the US. Teachers in the US and in South Korea were supportive of inclusion as shown by the mean scores on the MTAI scale. The most noticeable difference on beliefs between US and South Korean teachers was that teachers in South Korea thought

students with disabilities were more isolated by their peers in general education classrooms while teachers in the US did not (for question 15, a 1.4 point difference in the mean exists on the 5-point Likert scale, which is statistically significant. The effect size of this difference is -1.18 and is considered very strong. It is important to understand the differences in identification practices between the two countries. South Korea identifies fewer students as having disabilities (See Table 1) but the students that are identified have more significant disabilities such as intellectual disabilities (see Table 2). The differences in the population of students identified for special education may play a major role in the differences displayed in how teachers from each country view inclusion. According to Table 3, fewer students with mild disabilities, such as learning disabilities, were served in South Korea as opposed to the US. South Korea served fewer students (see Table 1) but the students that are served had more significant disabilities (See Table 3). Smith (2010) indicates that students with more severe disabilities are more difficult to serve in inclusive classrooms. Because students with more severe disabilities make up the population of students served by special education in South Korea, teachers in South Korea may view the success of the inclusive classroom differently when compared to teachers in the US. In addition, further examination of other variables such as teacher training, class size, and administrative support might provide more insight into the differences noted in teacher beliefs towards inclusion.

The study has some limitations. The study used a convenience sample of teachers who had voluntarily provided their email addresses to a website for educators. The lack of random selection limits the generalizability of the study. In addition, the percent of teachers who actually responded to the survey is small when one considers the number of teachers who were asked for a response only 9.5% from South Korea and 11% from the US responded. Because of the low response rate, the data presented should be interpreted with caution. However, the researchers conducting the study believe that the current study provides an initial understanding of the differences and similarities in special education identification policies and inclusion practices across the two countries.

### *Recommendations*

The most distinctive difference of belief between US and South Korean teachers was that a high number of teachers in South Korea thought that students with disabilities were isolated by their peers in general education classrooms while teachers in the US did not show a similar belief. This significant difference

between the teachers' views may reflect the current understanding of teachers within each country concerning individuals with disabilities including students with special needs.

It is important to explore the impact that the identification practices for special education placement in both countries hold for individuals with disabilities. In South Korea, few students with mild disabilities are identified. Does this difference in identification practices result in differences in future integration into society for the individual with a disability? Also, more research could help determine if the differences in the types of students served in special education impacts beliefs about inclusion.

Clearly, training in effective inclusive practices is needed; but effective training strategies that facilitate inclusion need to be determined first before being implemented. Mulvihill, Shearer, and Horn (2002) investigated the relationships between disability-specific training and childcare providers' and teachers' experiences in serving children with disabilities. One identified outcome was that caregivers with more training observed fewer needs and obstacles among children with disabilities. Mulvihill and colleagues highlighted the importance of training and support for ensuring that teachers and childcare providers build the skills necessary to manage and overcome students' learning disabilities in an inclusive classroom. To best serve the needs of individuals with disabilities, collaboration and sharing of the research associated with effective practices is critical. Only through sharing knowledge about effective identification and inclusive practices can we prepare individuals with disabilities to assume their rightful role in an ever-increasing global economy.

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# Characteristics of Inclusive Classrooms in Turkey

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## Abstract

*In this paper, inclusive classrooms in Turkey are described in terms of the characteristics of both classroom teachers and students with special needs. Participants of this study consisted of 54 teachers working in inclusive classrooms and 54 students with mild intellectual disabilities in those classrooms in Turkey. Data for this study were collected using direct observation and survey techniques. According to the results, of a total of 1,448 students in 54 inclusive classrooms, 65 were diagnosed with a disability defined by Guidance and Research Centers, while 87 students had no diagnosis but showed continuous challenges compared to their peers. Of the participating teachers, 81.5% expressed that those students needed to be educated in separate special education settings. Observation results showed that, although Individualized Education Plans (IEP) were prepared for 98.1% of participating students with mild intellectual disabilities, 85.2% of them were not educated according to their individual differences.*

Inclusion is defined as the education of students with special needs in the same educational environment with their peers with no special needs with the necessary support services provided in that environment (Sucuoğlu, 2006). In Turkey, the philosophy of educating students with special needs in inclusive environments is embraced by the Ministry of National Education and supported by related laws – the Special Education Law and the Special Education Services Regulation (Melekoglu, Cakiroglu, & Malmgren, 2009). Although inclusive education is designed to promote the educational success of students with special needs (Sharma, Loreman, & Forlin, 2012), the desired benefits of inclusion can be achieved when certain conditions such as instructional accommodations and qualified personnel and support services are provided for the students (Batu & Kircaali-Iftar, 2005; Devecchia, Dettorib, Dovestona, Sedgwicka, & Jamenta, 2012).

## Special Education in Turkey

In Turkey, the education system is both formal and informal. Formal education is the typical education that individuals receive in school settings based on specific ages. Schools provide formal education in the form of early childhood, primary, secondary or higher education. However, there are informal education settings, which may consist of academic and non-academic education and vocational training workshops and centers available for individuals who have never been exposed to formal education, dropped out of school at any level, or graduated from an informal educational institution. Furthermore, all educational activities are governed by two institutions in Turkey: the Ministry of National Education and the Higher Education Council. All public

and private institutions that provide education, including special education, from early childhood to secondary level operate under the responsibility and control of the Ministry of National Education, while all higher education institutions are controlled by the Higher Education Council (Melekoglu et al., 2009).

In the 2012-2013 school-year, there were 220,649 students with disabilities in the country (Ministry of National Education, 2013). Almost three quarters of those students were educated in inclusive classrooms, and the rest were placed in segregated schools or classrooms. Also in the same school year, 25,477 students with disabilities were educated in self-contained classrooms in general primary and middle schools. Most of the self-contained classrooms are cross-categorical with only a few non-categorical classrooms available in the country. Furthermore, there are residential schools for children with visual impairments, hearing impairments, and orthopedic impairments at both the elementary and secondary levels. Private special education and rehabilitation centers are widespread in Turkey. Therefore, students with disabilities can receive education one-on-one or in small groups and, rehabilitation or therapy services in those centers. In addition, gifted students can receive special education in Science and Arts Centers after their regular education hours. As of the 2012-2013 school year, there were 66 Science and Arts Centers serving 11,268 gifted and talented children around the country (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

## Special Education Teacher Preparation

Currently, one has to complete a four-year undergraduate degree to become a special education teacher in Turkey, and teacher candidates are centrally

placed in those undergraduate programs based on the results of nationwide higher education exams. Special education teachers are prepared in four specific areas which are education of individuals with intellectual disabilities, education of individuals with hearing impairments, education of individuals with visual impairments, and education of gifted individuals. The government allows teacher certification in education of individuals with intellectual disabilities for teachers from some divisions of other departments such as primary education and early childhood education to be able to work only in private institutions. The undergraduate programs in special education use preset curricula that are approved by the Higher Education Council of Turkey. All teacher candidates who successfully complete undergraduate programs in special education can work as special education teachers, and there is no national certification procedure. However, in order to be able to work in public schools, teacher candidates need to take a nationwide teacher placement exam, and based on their scores and the quota in appointment periods, the Ministry of National Education places teachers in schools.

Only regular education teachers (e.g., primary education teacher, math teacher, science teachers etc.) teach in inclusive classrooms and special education teachers cannot teach in inclusive classrooms in Turkey. Regular education teachers take at least one special education course (i.e., Introduction to Special Education) as part of their teacher training. Primary education teachers and early childhood education teachers can take more courses about special education and inclusion during their undergraduate education.

### **Inclusion**

Inclusion was first widely adopted in western countries, such as in the USA and UK, and was followed by many other countries (Sharma, Forlin, Deppeler, & Guang-xue, 2013). It took a relatively long time before inclusion was adopted in Turkey. The term inclusion is first mentioned in the Children in Need of Special Education Law No. 2916 that was enacted in 1983. Inclusion has been carried out in Turkey for approximately 30 years, and a growing number of students with special needs are placed in general education classes each year. According to the Ministry of National Education statistics, more than 147,000 students with special needs were placed in inclusive classrooms in elementary schools in the 2012-2013 school year (Ministry of National Education, 2013).

Even though inclusion has become widespread, both in Turkey and in many countries across the world, studies have reported various problems regarding the

implementation of inclusion. For example, some studies report negative attitudes of teachers working in inclusive classrooms towards children with disabilities (Hines, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Teachers complain about problem behaviors of students with special needs in inclusive classrooms and indicate that it is difficult to manage the problem behaviors of the students (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009; McClean, 2007). Additionally, teachers report that students with special needs manifest more problem behaviors compared to their peers without special needs and those behaviors interrupt classroom order (Jordan et al., 2009; McClean, 2007). Also, students with special needs require special attention to motivate them to participate in classroom activities (Niesyn, 2009). Teachers think that the time spent dealing with the problem behaviors of students with special needs reduces teaching time for instruction, and state that students with special needs must be educated in separate classrooms (Jordan et al., 2009; McClean, 2007).

Inclusion requires teachers to be aware of the individual needs of students both with and without special needs, and to make instructional accommodations to meet those needs (Sharma et al., 2012; Sucuoğlu, 2006). Teachers working in inclusive classrooms indicate that they are not trained to teach students with special needs; therefore, they do not believe they are sufficiently informed and equipped to work with students with special needs (Hines, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Several studies have examined teachers' behaviors towards students with special needs (McIntosh, Vaughn, Schumm, Haager, & Lee, 1993; Skrtic, 1980) and have reported various results. For example, Skrtic pointed out that teachers manifested more criticizing behaviors towards students with special needs and approved of those students less. In McIntosh and colleagues' study, results indicated that students with special needs had very low interaction with teachers, compared to students with no special needs, but teachers' behaviors did not change towards students with or without special needs. Two other studies show similar results, that although behaviors of students with special needs in general education are quite similar to their peers without special needs, teachers give more attention to students with special needs (Brown, Odom, Li, & Zercher, 1999; Wallace, Anderson, Bartholomay, & Hupp, 2002).

Teacher and student behaviors in inclusive classrooms have been investigated in a few studies in Turkey (Akalin, 2007; Güner-Yıldız & Sazak-Pınar, 2012; Sucuoğlu, Akalin, Sazak-Pınar, & Güner, 2008; Sucuoğlu, Demirtaşlı, & Güner, 2009) and the findings are generally similar. For example, the findings of Sucuoğlu and colleagues (2008) indicated that teachers

directed their attention solely to students without special needs during 61% of the observation period, and to students with and without special needs together in 26% of the observation period, while teachers focused merely on students with special needs in 5% of the observation period. Akalın's study also revealed similar findings; teachers focused on students with special needs in 4% of the observation intervals.

Sucuoğlu and colleagues (2009) conducted observations in inclusive classrooms of 201 teachers and identified the instructional strategies that the teachers used in those inclusive classrooms. According to the results, 38.31% of the teachers worked with students with special needs individually (although sometimes for a short-time period), 11.99% allowed students with special needs to get help from their peers, and only 7.46% made adaptations in content of instruction based on the needs of students with special needs. Furthermore, 41.79% of the teachers easily reached students with special needs during instruction, and 43.78% provided modelling for difficult assignments. Lastly, 38.31% of the teachers provided learning opportunities for students with special needs, while only 27.36% rewarded at least one or two academic or social behaviors of students with special needs in the classroom (Sucuoğlu et al., 2009).

In Güner-Yıldız and Sazak-Pınar's (2012) study involving 45 general education teachers, the results indicated that 20% of the teachers rewarded/approved special needs students in class, and 9% provided learning opportunities for those students. Moreover, 7% made adaptations in content of instruction based on the needs of those pupils, 24% placed their students with special needs in front rows to reach them easily, and 40% provided help when students with special needs could not fulfil a given task. All of these results indicated the lack of teachers' competence in having students with special needs follow and successfully complete instructions.

Effective implementation of inclusion is critically important for the achievement of both students with special needs and other students in the classroom. Therefore, solutions need to be generated to overcome the practical problems. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of inclusive classrooms in Turkey and to identify strategies that can be used to increase the quality of inclusive practices in the country.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants of this study were 54 general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms of

public elementary schools in Eskişehir province, Turkey, and 54 students with special needs attending those classes. Those teachers are selected from a list of inclusive classrooms in central municipalities of Eskişehir, and all participating teachers of this study volunteered to participate in this study. There were 11 second-grade, 10 third-grade, 15 fourth-grade and 18 fifth-grade classrooms from the Odunpazarı and Tepebaşı municipalities of Eskişehir. To be included in this study, the classrooms had to have a student with special needs who was diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, and the teachers and parents of the students with special needs had to give their consent.

The participating teachers consisted of 35 (64.8%) female and 19 (35.2%) male general education teachers; their ages ranged between 28 and 57 years ( $M=39.7$  years). In addition, 38 (70.4%) teachers were graduates from primary education departments of education faculties, four (7.4%) were graduates from other departments of education faculties, and 12 (22.2%) of the participating teachers were graduates from other faculties. Students with special needs attending inclusive classrooms consisted of 20 (37.0%) female and 34 (63.0%) male students, and their ages ranged between eight and 13 years ( $M=10.2$  years).

### *Instruments*

*Demographic Information Form and Survey.* A demographic information form was used to collect information about the age and gender of teachers and the students with special needs, and the undergraduate programs from which the teachers had graduated.

*Observation Form and Survey.* An observation form was used to record where students with special needs were seated in the classrooms and whether or not adequate adaptations were made in the instructional curriculum based on individual characteristics of those students. In order to be able to easily reach to the children with special needs, front desks (the first two rows) are considered adequate places for seating children in classrooms because teachers in Turkey usually stay close to the front desks during instruction. During in-class observations, when students with special needs were seated in two front desks this was coded as an adequate place on the form. However, when students were seated in back rows the observers noted these places as inadequate. In addition, it was observed whether teachers had made adaptations in instructional programs based on the characteristics or the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), of students with special needs. Observers marked 'adaptations exist' or 'no adaptation' on the form, accordingly.

Furthermore, the survey had questions about whether or not teachers prepared IEPs for students with special needs and the number of students with special needs diagnosed by Guidance and Research Centers. Additionally, observers asked the number of students who were not diagnosed by Guidance and Research Centers but experienced difficulties in following instructions or fulfilling requirements of the class. The survey also included questions about the education and income levels of the parents of the participating students and the total number of students in the classrooms. Questions were directed to the teachers regarding whether or not the teachers needed additional information about students diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, and teachers' opinions about the educational environments where students with special needs should be placed.

### *Procedure*

Observations were conducted in the spring semester (February – June) of the 2011-2012 school year in second, third, fourth and fifth grade classrooms of 54 elementary schools, where students with special needs, who were diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, were educated in the city centre of Eskişehir, Turkey. In each classroom, data were collected in four different lessons with at least a three-day interval between each collection. In addition, 18 observers conducted observations in 54 classrooms during Turkish, Life Sciences and Social Sciences classes for a total of 216 lessons.

The observers were selected from among volunteer freshman students from the Department of Special Education in Education Faculty of Eskişehir Osmangazi University. Eighteen students were designated as observers after successful completion of observer training. During the observer training, which lasted about six hours, the procedures to complete the observation form and the observation rules were explained.

### **Results**

The first question that teachers responded to was regarding their educational background. Results indicated that 77.8% ( $n=42$ ) of general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms were graduates from education faculties, while the remaining teachers (22.2%;  $n=12$ ) were graduates of other faculties. According to the responses of teachers to the second question on the survey, there were a total of 1,448 students in 54 inclusive classrooms. The average number of students in each class was 26.8. Sixty-five students

were officially diagnosed by Guidance and Research Centers in those classrooms. However, the teachers indicated there were an additional 87 students who were not diagnosed by Guidance and Research Centers but experienced difficulties in accomplishing the requirements of the classroom and continuously lagged behind their peers. Thus, whether or not they were diagnosed by Guidance and Research Centers, the proportion of students in the participating classrooms who needed special adaptations to be able to participate in educational activities was 10.5% ( $n=141$ ).

The third survey question was about the family characteristics of students with special needs, and teachers provided those information based on student records. According to the responses, 72.2% ( $n=39$ ) of mothers and 81.5% ( $n=44$ ) of fathers of students, diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, had only graduated from elementary school. Income levels of 68.6% ( $n=37$ ) of families were at, or below, the minimum wage.

According to the responses to the other survey questions, 84.7% ( $n=44$ ) of participating teachers needed information about students who were diagnosed with mild intellectual disabilities, and 81.5% ( $n=44$ ) of the teachers indicated that students with special needs should be educated in separate special education classrooms or special education schools. Furthermore, observation results indicated that in 57.9% ( $n=125$ ) of the 216 observed lessons, students with special needs were seated in the back rows of the classroom. In addition, even though an IEP was prepared for 98.1% ( $n=53$ ) of participating students, 85.2% ( $n=46$ ) of those students did not receive adequate education according to their individual characteristics.

### **Discussion**

This study aimed to establish a profile of teacher and student characteristics in inclusive classrooms in Turkey. Although inclusion in Turkey was legislated in 1983, systematic implementation was delayed due to scarcity of resources and low awareness among educators. Adoption of inclusion practices was accelerated after improvements in the law in 1997 (Batu, Çolak, & Odluyurt, 2012). Despite the rapid increase in the number of students in inclusive classrooms after 1997, endeavours to improve the quality of inclusion did not gain the same momentum. For example, there are currently almost no support services regarding inclusive education for teachers in Turkish schools (Eripek, 2009). Teachers generally reach out to guidance counsellors in schools as resources for inclusive education; however, those counsellors only take a three credit hour special education course and a three credit hour learning

disabilities course during their entire undergraduate education. Taking these courses does not appear sufficient in forming a knowledge base to provide support to teachers about students with special needs.

In a study about the qualifications of guidance counsellors about special education (Özengi & Ergenekon, 2010), findings revealed that guidance counsellors made unsystematic/haphazard practices about inclusion, but those practices are insufficient to solve the problems of general education teachers, families and students, and guidance counsellors consider themselves not competent regarding inclusion. In addition to the inadequate preparation of guidance counsellors on inclusion, other support personnel, such as teacher aides and special education specialist consultant are not available to general education teachers working in inclusive classrooms. One of the findings of this current study indicated that 84.7% of general education teachers needed educational as well as diagnoses-related information about students with intellectual disabilities, and showed that support services need to be urgently provided to general education teachers of inclusive classrooms.

When teachers do not receive support services for students with special needs in inclusive classrooms they usually exhibit negative attitudes towards those students (Ünal & İflazoğlu-Saban, 2010; Üstün & Yılan, 2003). For example, in Ünal and İflazoğlu-Saban's study, teachers reported lack of knowledge and experience about inclusion, and did not allocate enough time for the education of students with special needs in the classroom. In Üstün and Yılan's study, an attitude scale was administered to early childhood teachers about children with intellectual disabilities. The results indicated that teachers had negative attitudes towards inclusive education. In this current study, teachers were asked in which environments students with mild intellectual disabilities should be educated, and 81.5% of the teachers indicated separate special education classrooms and special education schools as the desired educational environments of those students. This finding corresponds with the results of other studies that revealed negative attitudes of teachers towards students with special needs in inclusion (Diken & Sucuoğlu, 1999; Kaner, 2010; Orel, Zerey, & Töret, 2004). Many general education teachers argue that general education classrooms are not appropriate for students with special needs and classroom order deteriorates in classes where students with disabilities are included (Cook, 2002; Jordan et al., 2009; McClean, 2007).

Teachers' attitudes are important because attitudes shape classroom practices. Observations in this study showed that in 57.9% of the 216 observed lessons, students with special needs were seated in back rows in

inclusive classrooms. Placing students with special needs, who require teacher support and control, away from the teacher may indicate that teachers may not be aware of the needs of those students or they may not care about those needs (Kircaali-İftar, 2008). Additionally, the results of this study revealed that IEPs were prepared for 98.1% of students with special needs, but only 14.8% of students received individualized education. This finding implies that teachers prepared IEPs to comply with official regulations, but did not use those IEPs in practice. This situation may be interpreted to mean that general education teachers see students with special needs being outside of their areas of responsibility, and do not sufficiently strive to meet the educational needs of those students.

The lack of ability or motivation of general education teachers to provide adequate education to students with special needs can bring a question to mind; to what extent are they trained to work in classes with children who exhibit different characteristics during their undergraduate education? Challenges of teachers in implementing inclusive education may be first associated with being graduates from disciplines other than education. However, when the education status of participating teachers is analysed, findings indicate that approximately four out of five teachers (77.8%) were graduates of education programs. Therefore, it is thought that education programs may not be training teachers sufficiently about educational accommodations based on individual differences. Since attitudes towards individuals with disabilities take shape during undergraduate education, and those attitudes are resistant to change afterwards (Jordan et al., 2009), education faculties have an increasing responsibility to improve trainee teachers' attitudes towards students with special needs in inclusive education.

Another finding of this study is that students with special needs in inclusive classrooms usually come from low socio-economic levels. The majority of mothers (72.2%) and fathers (81.5%) of students with special needs only held an elementary school diploma, and 68.6% of families of students with special needs had an income level at, or below, the minimum wage. Although further investigation is needed for a clear picture, this situation brings to mind that a family's socio-economic status may be critically important in preventing factors that cause disabilities. In addition, socio-economic status may be critical for early recognition of disabilities to obtain necessary health and education support services. Increasing the access of children at risk, and their families, to health and education services, and the monitoring of children by certain specialists (e.g., social workers), may help prevent risk factors for children developing disabilities.

Lastly, the results of this study indicated that in addition to the 65 students with disabilities, there were 87 students who needed special adaptations to be able to participate in educational activities in general education classrooms. However, those 87 students did not have any official diagnosis from Guidance and Research Centers. This finding indicates that the number of students with special needs in classrooms could be greater than the officially known number of students. Therefore, urgent and greater endeavours, such as designing better evaluation and diagnosis system, creating a comprehensive special education support system for teachers as well as students in inclusive classrooms, revising teacher training programs, and increasing awareness in the society are needed to find solutions to the problems of these classrooms.

### Conclusion

In summary, even though special education is developing on a daily basis in Turkey, there is still a long way to go to improve the quality of education in inclusive classrooms in general education schools. Support services need to be provided for teachers of inclusive classrooms in schools, and the competency of teachers needs to be improved in order to work effectively in inclusive classrooms. For this purpose, Turkey's teacher training process needs to be restructured so teacher candidates become proficient in inclusive education. All teacher preparation programs may need to include various courses that provide detailed information about children with special needs and implementation of inclusion. Those courses should be designed to meet the needs of teacher candidates, especially about designing adaptations for different educational needs of their prospective students. Moreover, all teacher candidates should be equipped with instructional methods that can be effective with students with special needs in inclusive classrooms. Finally, teacher candidates should be exposed to research-based practices that have been demonstrated to be effective in inclusive environments and should also have practicums in inclusive classrooms to practice those techniques learned in related courses.

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## Zambian Pre-service Teachers' Voices about Successful Inclusive Education

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### Abstract

*While inclusion has been studied in many parts of the world, there is a dearth of research on this topic in Zambia. This study investigated the perceptions of pre-service teachers about the benefits of inclusion and the resources needed to successfully include students with disabilities in general education settings in Zambia. Participants responded to four open-ended questions included in the Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion Questionnaire. Questionnaires that included responses to the open-ended questions (n = 484) were included in the analysis. Content analysis procedures described by Bogdan and Bilken (2003) were used to analyze responses. Participants described social and academic benefits of inclusion. Materials and equipment, teachers and support personnel, government support, and facilities were identified as resources needed for successful inclusion. Findings are illustrated with descriptions of the participants' responses along the dominant themes. Implications for special education practice and policy in Zambia are discussed.*

The inclusion of students with disabilities has become an increasingly visible objective in the Zambian education system. Simui, Waliuya, Namitwe, and Munsanje (2009) described inclusion in Zambia as a process of continually increasing access, participation, and achievement for all learners in general education settings, particularly for learners who are at risk for marginalization and exclusion (e.g., homeless children). According to Simui and colleagues, a well-conceptualized and implemented inclusive education program should meet the diverse educational needs of all children.

Research has suggested that although inclusion can be affected by several factors, one of the most important variables is the support teachers receive as they include children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Researchers (e.g., Forlin 2013; Nonis & Jernice, 2011) have identified the following supports needed for successful inclusion: national and state policies that encourage inclusion, strong leadership, qualified personnel, funding, and the availability of resources within schools. Additionally, researchers have identified the benefits of inclusion for students with and without disabilities (McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001), including improved educational and social outcomes for all students. However, Forlin (2013) noted that implementation of inclusive education may be impacted by the challenges that developing countries face in providing some form of basic education for all children.

Chitiyo and Chitiyo (2007) noted that the lack of legislative support has affected the development of education in most Southern African countries, including Zambia. The limited fiscal resources allocated to the education sector may indicate the value placed on education by Southern African governments (Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2007). An examination of public expenditures for the Southern African region reveals that six out of seven countries reduced their expenditures on education (as a percentage of national income) between 1990 and 2002 (United Nations Development Program, 2006). For the most part, special education in most Southern African countries has relied on charity from churches and Non-Governmental Organizations (Kabzems & Chimedza, 2002).

Singal (2008) noted that most inclusive education initiatives in developing nations are spearheaded by policy makers instead of educators and schools. Hence, as educators and schools attempt to engage in the process of inclusive education, implementation presents challenges (Gronlund, Lim, & Larsson, 2010). For example, teachers in Asian countries questioned the feasibility of implementing inclusive education, citing issues such as an exam oriented curriculum, extensive homework expectations, and didactic teaching practices as impediments (Forlin, 2013).

Like other developing nations, Zambia is experiencing challenges as it attempts to address the country's educational needs. The quest for a high quality educational system remains a challenge. While Zambian pre-service teachers may have positive attitudes toward

inclusive education (Muwana & Ostrosky, 2013) similar issues may impede the successful implementation of inclusive education. Specific challenges that have been identified as major obstacles in the provision of educational services include a lack of government support, a shortage of teachers, limited resources, oversized classes, an inflexible and didactic national curricula, and poverty (Chitiyo & Chitiyo, 2007; Sharma, Forlin, Guang-xue, & Deppeler, 2013).

The Salamanca Statement and Framework (1994) influenced the Zambian Government and the Ministry of Education's stance on inclusion. The Zambian government has adopted policies that endorse the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education environments. These policies stipulate equal opportunities, nondiscrimination, social justice, protection of basic human rights, and participation of students with disabilities in the mainstream activities of school and society. In response to worldwide trends and Zambia's policy on inclusion, some Special Education faculty undertook a critical review of their teacher preparation program in order to respond meaningfully to the challenges of inclusive education (University of Zambia Special Education Departmental Handbook, 2008-2009). Students' programs of study now include Educational Psychology courses that were added to strengthen student teachers' knowledge and skills so that they are able to address the psycho-social challenges faced by students with disabilities. To support teachers as they include students with disabilities, a resource center was established by the Ministry of Education to disseminate information about intellectual, behavioral, and educational challenges.

Walker (2010) indicated that "one of the major issues associated with implementing inclusion within developing nations is the lack of local research that identifies not only the challenges, but more especially provides potential local solutions for how to overcome them" (cited in Forlin, 2013, p. 23). Despite the implementation of inclusive education in Zambia, very few empirical studies have been conducted that focus on inclusion. The purpose of this study was to examine Zambian pre-service teachers' perceptions of the benefits of inclusive education and the resources needed to successfully include students with disabilities in general education settings. Research questions addressed were: What do Zambian pre-service teachers report as perceived benefits of inclusive education for students with and without disabilities? and what resources do Zambian pre-service teachers believe are necessary for inclusive education to be successful?

Table 1

*Demographic Information of Participants*

Characteristic	Demographic Information: n (%)
Gender	Male: 215 (44.4%) Female: 269 (56.6%)
Age	Less than 20 years: 50 (10.3%) 21-30 years: 247 (51.1%) 31-40 years: 122 (25.2%) More than 40 years: 65 (13.4%)
Year in school	1st year: 95 (19.7%) 2nd year: 127 (26.3%) 3rd year: 167 (34.6%) 4th year: 94 (19.4%) Missing: 1 (0%)
Major	Primary: 15 (3.1%) Secondary: 219 (45.3%) Special Education: 249 (51.6%) Missing: 1 (0%)
Teacher status*	In-service: 207 (43.9%) Pre-service: 276 (56.1%) Missing: 1 (0%)
Number of years teaching experience	Less than 2: 8 (2.1%) 2-5: 20 (4.3%) 6-10: 68 (14.1%) More than 10: 109 (22.2%) Missing: 279 (57.3%)
Training in special education	Yes: 270 (56.0%) No: 212 (44.0%) Missing: 2 (0%)
Contact with persons with disabilities	Yes: 434 (89.9%) No: 49 (10.1%) Missing: 1 (0%)
Years of contact	Less than 1: 86 (18.2%) 1-5: 166 (34.4%) 6-10: 82 (17.2%) More than 10: 98 (19.1%) Missing: 52 (11.1%)

\*Note: Even though the title of the modified instrument was *Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion Questionnaire*, participants included certified teachers (i.e., "in-service participants") and pre-service teachers.

**Method**

*Participants*

Researchers used a convenience sampling of participants who were enrolled fulltime during the 2010-2011 academic year at one university in Zambia. The students were members of four departments in the School of Education (i.e., Educational Psychology,

Sociology, and Special Education; Language and Social Sciences; Math and Science Education; Primary Education). These departments were targeted because they prepare primary, secondary, and special education teachers. The first author travelled to Zambia to gather all survey data. Questionnaires were distributed to 497 undergraduate students enrolled in a 4-year teacher preparation program. Four hundred ninety-five students (99%) who attended the classes in which data were collected over a 3-week period in Spring 2011 completed the questionnaires. While participants were given the option of omitting any question that they did not feel comfortable answering, all completed questionnaires were analyzed (i.e., those for which students provided comments to at least one open-ended question). Data from 484 questionnaires were included in the analysis, yielding a 98% response rate (i.e., 484 out of 495 students answered at least one open-ended question). Participants' demographic characteristics are summarized in Table 1.

### *Instrument*

Participants completed a modified version of the *Pre-service Teachers' Attitudes toward Inclusion Questionnaire* (El-Ashry, 2009). To develop the instrument and ensure that the content was valid for our intended purpose, the empirical literature and questionnaires addressing pre-service and in-service teachers' attitudes toward inclusion were reviewed to determine the major issues of concern regarding inclusive programs (i.e., Antonak & Larrivee, 1995; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Kavale & Forness, 2000; McHatton & McCray, 2007; McLeskey et al., 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Experts in special education reviewed the revised items to ensure clarity and coverage of relevant content. Some items were added, deleted, or rephrased based on recommendations from these experts. The resulting instrument consisted of four sections, including a section with four open-ended questions about perceived benefits of inclusion and the resources needed to successfully include students with disabilities in general education settings (for quantitative results see Muwana & Ostrosky, 2013). This article focuses on responses from the four open-ended questions.

### *Procedures*

The paper and pencil questionnaire was administered to students in large groups during eight class sessions. The first author solicited the students' participation by introducing herself and explaining the purpose of the study. Additional information about the study was

described to the students in a one-page consent letter that included the students' rights for participating in the study. Students were offered the option of signing the consent letter and completing the questionnaire, or leaving the classroom; two students left the room. The researcher distributed a questionnaire and a pen to each participant for completion. Completion of the questionnaire lasted approximately 30 minutes, after which participants placed the completed questionnaires in a box that was located in front of the classroom. As the students completed the questionnaires, the researcher sat off to the side in the front of the room reading a book. The researcher collected completed questionnaires. As an incentive, the participants were allowed to keep the pens.

### *Data Analysis*

To analyze responses to the open-ended questions, the authors and a graduate student familiar with qualitative methodology followed content analysis procedures described by Bogdan and Bilken (2003). All three members of the research team independently read all typed questionnaire responses to become familiar with the overall nature of the responses. As the research team read the responses, they highlighted phrases that captured the essence of the participants' answers and generated labels to represent key concepts. Then, the team members independently grouped all repeated responses to gain a sense of the relative importance of the issues. The team members independently defined tentative themes by combining thoughts that seemed to address the same issue and then writing definitions that described the focus of the theme.

Next, the research team met to discuss the initial wave of analysis. They conducted a page-by-page comparison of their highlighting and agreed on broad themes that were used to independently code all open-ended responses. In subsequent reviews of their independent analyses, they compared notes, negotiated discrepancies, and reached consensus on a streamlined set of themes. Finally, theme integrity was established by having a graduate student who was not familiar with the data, code 30% of the responses. Integrity for the themes was reached when the graduate student coded identical themes for the same data unit at 80% or higher for each open-ended question. Inter-rater reliability for each question was as follows: benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities (92%), benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities (81%), resources needed for successful inclusion (97%), and other issues that need to be addressed for inclusion to be successful (96%).

## Results

On the questionnaires, participants described their beliefs in regard to: (a) benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities, (b) benefits of inclusion for students without disabilities, (c) resources needed for successful inclusion, and (d) other issues that need to be addressed for inclusion to be successful. Themes are defined and data are presented in the following sections (see Tables 2 and 3).

### *Benefits for Students with Disabilities*

Three hundred seventy-six comments were gathered in response to the question “Do you think students with disabilities benefit from inclusion?” Five themes emerged to describe participants’ beliefs about the advantages of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms: social, academic, self-worth/sense of belonging, preparation for life/transition into society, and policy issues. Nineteen (5%) responses did not fit in any of the five themes.

*Social Benefits.* A considerable number of responses (n = 127, 34%) were categorized as social benefits. Respondents noted that students engage in interactions with students without disabilities when they are educated together. Through peer interactions, students with disabilities develop interpersonal, leadership, and communication skills. Several respondents indicated that peer relationships promote collaboration among all students. One participant summarized the social benefits of inclusion for students with disabilities as follows: “Students with special needs benefit because it [inclusion] offers them social interaction and integration, because inclusion is part of the normalization process which enables disabled learners to experience normal life of integration into society rather than segregation.”

*Academic Benefits.* Ninety-five (25%) responses to the question, “Do you think that students with special needs benefit from inclusion?” were categorized as academic benefits. Participants commented on students’ opportunities to participate in the same academic activities as their peers without disabilities when they are placed in general education settings. Respondents noted that learning alongside their peers without disabilities encourages students with disabilities to strive for better outcomes. For example, one participant observed, “Students with special needs are likely to be motivated by the academic skills of students without special needs. This will ensure progress in their academic work and success in inclusion.” Many participants noted that inclusion encourages “competition” among students. Zambian education is highly competitive because of the limited number of school settings. Participants believed

that by competing with students without disabilities, students with special needs would be “forced” to work hard and would “end up getting the same grades or even better grades than the students without disabilities.”

*Self-Worth/Sense of Belonging.* Complementing the theme of “social benefits” was a group of responses that were categorized as “feelings of self-worth and a sense of belonging.” Eighty-five (23%) responses focused on the self-worth of students with disabilities who are included in general education settings. One respondent noted that when students with special needs “...have established social relationships with peers without disabilities, they develop a sense of acceptance, which is a good thing for their esteem...they gain self-esteem by identifying that they, as other students, have the right to life and education.” Another participant wrote, “Inclusion will help them [students with special needs] motivate [increase] their self-esteem as they will not feel rejected by other students in class.” Another respondent noted, “children with special needs start feeling like any other [child] and in the process they become motivated and they develop [an] extra interest in education.”

*Preparation for Life/Transition Into Society.* Thirty-five (9%) responses were categorized as preparation for life/transition into society. Respondents viewed inclusion as a starting point for preparing students for future life endeavors. One participant wrote, “They [students with disabilities] learn to interact with people who are different from them and this helps them fit in the world of work, later in life, which [the world of work] does not only involve people of their own kind [people with disabilities].” A number of participants viewed these interactions with diverse students as preparation for transitioning into society when students leave school. One participant wrote, “They mix with other people. So mixing with ALL people is better starting at an early age than being in isolation while schooling. NO MAN IS AN ISLAND.” Another respondent described inclusive education as follows:

They [students with special needs] are trained to be in an environment that they will be in after they leave school. Hence, the outside world ‘after school’ will not be a strange place and this will help them fit in, adapt, and face challenges of society just like any other person.

Several participants believed that because of their experiences in inclusive settings, students with disabilities will “adapt to life in society as they already experienced it in their school experience.”

*Policy Issues.* Fifteen (4%) comments about perceived benefits were categorized as policy issues. Participants noted that within inclusive settings, all

Table 2

*Themes and Codes Related to the Benefits and Lack of Benefits of Successful Inclusion*

Theme	Codes	
	Students With Disabilities	Students Without Disabilities
Social Benefits	Peer relationships Interaction with peers Creating friendships Getting assistance/help from peers Learning behavioral/social skills from peers Social communication	Peer relationships Interaction with peers Creating friendships Getting assistance/help from peers Learning behavioral/social skills from peers Social communication
Academic Benefits	Classroom/school learning Academic activities Acquiring knowledge Competing academically Working hard in class activities Excelling/achieving	Classroom/school learning Academic activities Acquiring knowledge Competing academically Working hard in class activities Excelling/achieving
Self-worth/Sense of Belonging	Feeling of equality Acceptance Self-esteem Self-confidence Emotional support Loss of stigma Feeling a part of the group	
Preparation for Life/Transition into Society	Life lessons Being responsible citizens Independent living Societal change in attitudes Preparing students for post school life	
Policy Issues	Funding Classroom resources Physical accessibility of school/classroom buildings	
Learning about Individual Differences		Learning about each other's disabilities Understanding existence of differences Tolerance of disability Celebrating differences Appreciating differences/disability Perception of disability Acceptance of individual differences Social equality Dispelling myths about disability
Lack of Benefits	Lack of trained teachers Lack of policies Negative peer attitudes Negative teacher attitudes	Pace of instruction Level of instruction

Table 3

*Themes and Codes Related to Resources and Other Issues about Inclusion*

Theme	Codes
Resource Needs	
Materials and equipment	Equipment Materials Resources Assistive technology Teaching/learning aids Books Visual aids
Teachers and support personnel	Special education teachers Support personnel Trained/skilled teachers
Government support	Funding for schools/teachers Salaries Incentives/motivation Administrative support Curriculum issues Class size
Facilities	Conducive/adapted Classrooms/schools Infrastructure (buildings)
Other issues about inclusion	
Policy	Funding for schools/teachers Salaries Incentives/motivation Administrative support Class size
Training and professional development Family/community support Research	Research Finding out information
Support for inclusion/student benefits	

students are granted the right to a public education. Notably, participants indicated that students with special needs are given the same opportunities as their peers without disabilities in terms of education. One participant wrote, "Students with special needs can have equal opportunities where education is connected with the non-disabled."

*Benefits for Students without Disabilities*

Four hundred thirty-six comments were gathered in

response to the question "Do you think that students without special needs benefit from inclusion?" These benefits fell into three themes: learning about individual differences, social, and academic. These data are described next.

*Learning about Individual Differences.* Two hundred twenty-eight (52%) responses were categorized as learning about individual differences. Participants believed that as students interact and "socialize" with their peers with disabilities, they learn about individual differences and gain knowledge about disabilities. One

participant noted, “They learn that children with special needs are like any other child. This, therefore, makes them accept such individuals as people with potential differences. They learn to understand what causes those differing needs among those who are disabled...”

Interactions between students with and without disabilities may lead to increased understanding of family members and other people with disabilities, as one participant noted, “If one interacts with a student with special needs at school and if some day, a relative or sibling has the special need that the friend at school has, it will be easy for one to handle the disability.”

Some participants noted that learning about individual differences leads to acceptance, tolerance, understanding, and appreciation of individuals with special needs. For instance, one respondent noted that students without disabilities benefit from inclusion “by realizing that there isn’t much difference between disabled and non-disabled – so that we can no longer fear them. Myths about disability are cleared, like they [individuals with disabilities] have a short temper, which is false.” Another respondent stated, “They learn to appreciate God’s creation and also learn what disabled persons can do. This makes them change their perceptions on disabilities.” Finally, another participant wrote, “They learn to tolerate and respect other people that are not like them. Discrimination is reduced.” Students benefit from inclusion “as they better understand the SEN [Special Education Needs] children and also how they can help them appropriately. It also brings about a reduction of negative perceptions toward SEN children.” Ultimately, students without disabilities “will help change societal beliefs and attitudes toward students with disabilities.”

*Social Benefits.* One hundred forty-six (34%) responses were categorized as social benefits, as participants indicated that students without disabilities benefit from the relationships they establish with peers with disabilities. For example, one respondent stated the following about students without disabilities, “They know how to mingle with students with special needs. They accept that being physically disabled does not mean being mentally disabled. They understand that they can play with students with special needs without getting the disability—not contagious.” Also noted was that in the process of interacting with students with disabilities, students without disabilities forge relationships and learn other skills. One participant wrote:

By learning together with these children [students with disabilities], they [students without disabilities] would develop skills on how to handle and interact with other children with SEN. For example, if there are students with hearing impairments, some non-disabled

children may learn sign language, which may be beneficial later in their lives.

Participants described a variety of social benefits for students without disabilities including learning how to communicate with, socialize with, care for, and accept students with disabilities. Thus, “students without special needs will benefit from the philosophy [of inclusion] by being accorded the chance to mingle with the less abled and by so doing, they get to know them better and remove the stigma around impaired children.” One respondent wrote, students without disabilities “learn the language and culture of those pupils with disabilities.”

*Academic Benefits.* Sixty-two (14%) responses were categorized as academic benefits. Many participants believed that all students benefit from the academic support that is given to students with disabilities by virtue of being in the same classroom. For example, one participant wrote, “The support that will be given to students with special needs will automatically be extended to them. If they [students with disabilities] are given extra study materials to use, they will both [students with and without disabilities] benefit.” Other participants described benefits for students without disabilities in terms of clarity and the pace of instruction. For instance, respondents stated that students without disabilities benefit “when the teacher is repeating what he or she said for those with learning disabilities to understand,” and “students [without disabilities] may hear the same information repeatedly and this will help them ‘retain’ or ‘internalize’ the information better.”

A number of participants described the benefits for students without disabilities in regard to learning materials. One respondent stated, “They [students without disabilities] tend to benefit from the materials which are used for students with SEN. They both use the same learning materials to grasp the concepts.” Some participants noted that inclusion motivates students without disabilities to work harder. One respondent wrote that they will “learn to be responsible. It is a challenge to see someone with special needs doing well academically, this will motivate them to work hard.”

### *Lack of Benefits for Students*

*Lack of Benefits for Students with Disabilities.* One hundred-eight responses met the criteria for this theme. Participants noted that students with disabilities encounter academic challenges in general education classrooms due to a lack of trained teachers, a lack of policies, and negative teacher and peer attitudes and perceptions. Commenting on the academic challenges of students with special needs, one respondent wrote, “Mostly children with special needs grasp concepts at a

slower pace. This makes them lag behind in academics hence painting a picture that adversely affects their emotional well-being - the lagging may wrongfully be regarded as being dull." Another respondent noted that students with disabilities experience academic difficulties "because they cannot conceptualize things at the same pace as those who are not disabled, particularly the mentally retarded."

The challenges for students with disabilities may be amplified by the lack of professional development for teachers and limited policies to support inclusion. One participant stated that students with disabilities would not benefit from inclusion "because the environment is not usually supportive to meet their needs; for instance, a lecturer will be using PowerPoint [with] a visually impaired student...the buildings themselves make it difficult for them to find their way to certain places." Another participant wrote, "Most schools do not have specialized staff... it requires preparation to be considered when teaching special needs children. Hence the children do not gain from the inclusion." Some participants also commented on the teacher-student ratio, "Zambian classrooms have a very large number of pupils, for example, 50-60 pupils. It is very difficult to attend to the needs of children especially when there are a number of other problems that (even) the able-bodied children present."

*Lack of Benefits for Students Without Disabilities.* A small number of responses (n = 69) focused on academics as a reason for believing that students without disabilities do not benefit from inclusion. These respondents noted that the presence of students with disabilities slows down the pace of instruction to the detriment of students without disabilities. For instance, one participant wrote:

If a teacher explains to the class and half of it has special needs, say mental problems, they do not understand quickly. The teacher will be forced to go back to the same point over and over, delaying those without special needs who are ready to move on to the next thing. In most cases they are forced to learn at the pace of those with learning disabilities.

Some participants reported that students with disabilities would monopolize the teacher's time, resulting in the teacher neglecting students without disabilities. For instance, one participant wrote, "Students without disabilities don't benefit from inclusion because the teacher may be spending much of his time and attention on special needs students. Hence their [students without disabilities] needs as learners could not be achieved." Another participant noted, "The rate at which lessons are

conducted bores students without disabilities. This may lead to these students losing concentration during lessons."

### *Resource Needs for Successful Inclusion*

Two hundred-five comments addressed the question "What resources are necessary to make inclusive education successful?" Participants highlighted the lack of (a) appropriate teaching/learning materials and equipment, (b) trained or specialized teachers and support personnel, (c) government support and funding, and (d) facilities, buildings, and classrooms. Each of these themes is described below with representative quotes.

*Materials and Equipment.* One hundred twenty-one (59%) responses were categorized under materials and equipment, representing the most frequently noted resource necessary for successful inclusive education. In this theme, participants discussed equipment for teachers (e.g., audio/visual teaching aids, amplifiers), and materials for students (e.g., Braille machines, assistive technology). One participant summarized the need for materials and equipment as, "all professional materials and other educational specialized equipment which can meet the educational needs of an individual with special needs." Another participant shared, "The classroom should be adaptive such that the child [with special needs] should be finding it easy to learn."

*Teachers and Support Personnel.* The second most frequently cited resource (n = 62, 30%) was the need for highly trained or specialized teachers and support personnel. One participant described a need to have special education teachers in every classroom because they understand the needs of children with disabilities and they are able to implement the right interventions. Participants also noted the need for professional development. They observed that emphasis should be placed on instructional strategies for working with students with disabilities. For example, one participant stated, "All teachers should undergo training in special education to enable them to handle both children with special needs and able bodied learners in the same class."

*Government Support.* Fifty-one (25%) responses were categorized as government support, with participants noting the need for funding for schools, teacher salaries and incentives, and administrative support. For instance, one participant wrote, "They [teachers] need finances to help them buy the necessary equipment to teach children with special needs. For example, they need to buy hearing aids and equipment needed to teach the children, like Braille for the visually impaired." Another participant noted the need for,

“Resources from the MOE [Ministry of Education] that facilitate all teaching/learning materials as it [MOE] does for those who do not have special needs, such as finance, materials, and human resources - teacher aides.”

*Facilities.* Forty-nine (24%) responses focused on facilities. Participants observed that for inclusion to be successful there is a need for “modified infrastructure to make schools and classrooms accessible.” Some participants noted that the physical structure of classrooms must be modified to accommodate “both types of learners” (i.e., students with and without disabilities).

#### *Other Issues about Inclusion*

Finally, participants were given an opportunity to share their thoughts about other issues that were not included in the open-ended questions. One hundred sixty comments were provided in response to this question with participants’ responses falling into five themes described below: (a) policy/government support, (b) training/professional development, (c) family/community support and involvement, (d) research, and (e) support for inclusion/student benefits.

*Policy.* Ninety-four responses were categorized as policy, highlighting policies that do not support inclusive education. One participant wrote, “For inclusion to be successful, the government needs to come up with policies that would support inclusion and make sure that teachers are given knowledge on students with special needs.” The majority of responses focused on the need for the Zambian government to modify schools so that the infrastructure suits all children. For example one participant noted, “If inclusion is to be successful, there is a need for school and classroom environments to be changed to suit or accommodate the needs of students with special needs.” Another participant noted, “Inclusion can only work if there is proper funding so that all the resources should be available unlike the way it is in most schools now.” And, one participant concluded:

What puzzles me in the Zambian situation, it [Zambia] does not realize that inclusion is a process and at the moment we haven’t reached there so we need to move step by step. But in Zambia, it’s like we are developed, when in actual sense there is still so much on ground [to be done].

*Training/Professional Development.* Some responses (n = 24) focused on the importance of training and professional development. One participant noted that inclusion could be better achieved if all teachers were

well informed about various disabilities that they are likely to encounter in their classrooms. Another participant wrote, “Success of inclusive education widely depends on teachers’ skills and ability to handle such a class and cooperation of the pupils and administration of the school.”

*Family/Community Support.* Some participants noted the importance of family and community involvement (n = 20 responses). For example, one participant wrote, “For inclusion to be successfully attained, it requires commitment from teachers and the general public.” Other respondents stated that there is a need to “sensitize the community and churches” because “these students need the support of all stakeholders so as to ensure that they are integrated as much as possible.”

*Research.* Several comments (n = 15) focused on the importance of conducting research on inclusion. For example, one participant suggested, “I think before considering inclusion, you must do research on how many schools have equipment to help children with special needs and how many parents are ready to let go of their children with special needs. That is, to go to school.” Another participant commented, “A lot of research needs to be done here [Zambia] to find out the impact of inclusion on the learning of the students with special needs because from face value, it has disadvantaged learners with special needs.”

*Support for Inclusion/Student Benefits.* A few participants (n = 10 responses) reiterated their support for inclusion, citing student benefits. For example, one participant wrote, “I emphasize that inclusion is a good policy in all walks of life because by so doing, we will motivate the disabled to go higher in the educational ladder.” Another respondent stated:

Feeling part of the normal world gives students with special needs a boost of self-esteem in class as well as after school. People with special needs can have a feeling of belonging to the world and not feel isolated due to their special needs.

#### **Discussion**

Through this study, we have deepened our understanding of Zambian pre-service teachers’ perceptions about the benefits of inclusion and the resources needed to successfully include students with disabilities. We have affirmed previous research that inclusion promotes social justice and provides equal educational opportunities for all students (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). Participants in the current study believed that students with disabilities have a right to be educated in general education settings alongside their peers. Many respondents supported

inclusion because of the social and academic benefits for *all* students. Participants believed that by interacting with one another, students learn about individual differences, and students with disabilities develop a sense of self-worth and belonging. Previously, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) also found that inclusion enables students with disabilities to be part of their school community and identify with peers without disabilities from whom they would otherwise be segregated.

When discussing negative aspects of inclusion, McLeskey and Waldron (2002) indicated that teachers worry that inclusion may diminish the overall academic performance within their classrooms. In the current study, academic concerns were cited by participants who did not believe that inclusion benefits all students. Participants noted that in addition to students with disabilities experiencing difficulties in inclusive classrooms, the pace of instruction would be slowed down. The Zambian education system remains highly competitive and examination-oriented, and the ranking of schools is highly regarded. Teachers' success is measured by the number of students who pass their yearly examination at the end of the school year. Perhaps respondents who did not favor inclusion felt that having students with disabilities in their classrooms would lower the overall class performance and reflect poorly on them as teachers.

The lack of trained teachers, particularly with expertise in sign language and Braille, was a necessary resource noted by participants. Forlin (2013) pointed out that "without effectual and proficient teachers, appropriate pedagogy and instruction that can accommodate the needs of all learners is unlikely to be provided" (p. 26). Without doubt, the need to prepare highly effective teachers for inclusive education is paramount. Teacher preparation programs in Zambia should consider offering courses that focus on strategies to successfully implement inclusive education to all pre-service teachers. Furthermore, inclusive education requires the expertise and services of various professionals to help in the provision of services. According to the World Bank (2004), most developing countries need adequately trained professionals to provide meaningful educational services to children with special needs in inclusive classrooms. It is essential that the Zambian government invests in preparing personnel in order to effectively implement inclusion.

Participants in this study also expressed concern about the lack of government and administrative support, absence of appropriately designed buildings, and dearth of materials and equipment to support inclusion. Additionally, participants noted that Zambian schools are overcrowded making it difficult to attend to individual student needs. Chorost (1988) noted that the

willingness of teachers to have students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms is influenced by the size of the class and the teacher's workload. Teachers are more willing to include students with disabilities if they have a small class size. In Zambia, the average teacher-student ratio is about 1 to 50 (A. S. Chanda, personal communication, March 7, 2011). University students may perceive including students with disabilities in an already overcrowded classroom as overwhelming.

Furthermore, participants noted that funding for teacher salaries and teacher incentives is needed if successful inclusion is to be achieved. Respondents indicated that Zambian teachers are poorly paid and this may lower their motivation to teach in inclusive settings. Larrivee and Cook (1979) found that successful inclusion depends on teachers' motivation. Better working conditions may improve teachers' motivation to work with students with disabilities. In Zambia, working conditions for teachers are typically difficult. Including students with disabilities may, therefore, be considered an extra burden. The perceived lack of assistance from the government may have led to respondents' negative responses about including students with disabilities in general education settings.

## Conclusion

Successful implementation of inclusive education requires policies that are resolutely entrenched and informed by "local research that addresses the specific needs of a region by considering city and rural situations, fiscal constraints, support structures, and the capabilities of those who are to implement it" (Forlin, 2013, p. 27). Researchers, as well as participants in the current study, have identified the lack of local research that identifies the challenges and provides local solutions to inclusive education as a barrier to implementing inclusive education in developing countries, including Zambia. Consequently, it is imperative that research on issues specific to inclusive education in Zambia is conducted. By better understanding pre-service and practicing teachers' skills, knowledge, and attitudes toward inclusion, evidence-based inclusive practices that benefit all students can be implemented.

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# **Inclusive Post-Secondary Education in Canada: Transition to Somewhere for Students with Intellectual Disabilities**

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## **Abstract**

*Inclusive Education is not a new concept in Canada, however in contrast to the dominant approach to post-secondary disability access that narrowly focuses on the legal obligation to accommodate student learning, we consider Inclusive Post-secondary Education (IPSE) for students with intellectual disabilities within a broader framework of inclusive citizenry. IPSE programs in Canada originated in the province of Alberta and have enjoyed significant leadership from within the Canadian post-secondary and not-for-profit sectors. An overview of the principles and practices of IPSE programs is provided as well as details about the multiple program options available across Canada.*

For the past 30 years in Canada, many educators, families and community members with and without disabilities have been working positively towards the development of inclusive educational policy and practice. Following the Charter of Rights and Freedoms of 1982, it is understood by Canadians that education is a right not a privilege and that no child shall be discriminated against as a result of his or her mental or physical disability. Globally, in 1994, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization organized the Salamanca Conference where 94 countries participated in the development of the Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action. This declaration states that inclusion and participation are essential to human dignity and to the enjoyment and exercise of human rights. However, as Macartney (2012) recently reminded us “the existence and dissemination of laws, official documents, policies and pedagogies that support inclusive and human rights responses to disability and education do not guarantee the radical transformation of practices and settings that are called for and, in many cases, required.” (p. 180). Children and youth with disabilities remain among the most stigmatized and oppressed group in the world (UNICEF, 2005).

Inclusive education programs offer hope for equitable access and participation in education for all. As an academic discipline, Inclusive Education usually encompasses the foundations of all social difference; not only issues of disability but also race, ethnocultural identities, socio-economic class and gender diversity (Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, & Lupart, 2008; Mackay, 2006). Inclusive education can be described by its advances in public education but may also be traced through the academic work of scholars from sociology,

philosophy, disability studies, as well as the contributions of community activists. Most relevant to the consideration of Inclusive Post-secondary education programs is the conceptualization of inclusion as being in unity with societal diversity, benefitting all students, and fundamentally about equity, student rights and social justice (Slee, 2008). Inclusive post-secondary education programs take up social inclusion whereby all planning and action start from “the experiences of the individual and challenge society to provide a meaningful place for everyone.” (Hanvey, 2003, p. 3). Hanvey drawing on the literature of Indian economist Amartya Sen, reminds us that inclusion is an “active process – it goes beyond remediation of deficits and reduction of risk. It promotes human development and ensures that opportunities are not missed – not just for some, but for all” (p. 3).

In terms of human development, the need for increased opportunities for people with disabilities to acquire life and work skills that will facilitate full citizenship in society has been clearly documented in Canadian jurisdictions (Aylward, Farmer & MacDonald, 2007; Mosoff, Greenholtz, & Hurtado, 2009). For many youth with disabilities, the inclusive schooling experience of the primary and secondary public school system does not translate into a successful transition to continued post-secondary learning. Essentially, if transition planning is taking place in secondary schools without sufficient post-secondary and/or community involvement options to meet all student’s needs, then some schools, parents, and students are planning for a transition to nowhere.

The abrupt end to inclusion for some students with disabilities occurs at the age of eighteen with the graduation or completion of high school. As researchers

and parents have documented, some students with disabilities are therefore destined for a life of “clienthood” that necessitates a dependency on government and consumer-based services rather than moving more naturally through the various stages of adulthood (Ferguson & Ferguson, 2000). As Ferguson and Ferguson succinctly note, “a full understanding of the meaning of adulthood must look at the structure of symbols and imagery that surround this culturally defined role” (p.650) and they suggest that any efforts of establishing pathways towards the “promise of adulthood” take into account the dimensions of autonomy (self-sufficiency, self-determination, and completeness) and membership (citizenship and affiliation). Certainly one part of a pathway to adulthood that holds prominent status and high regard is enrolment in post-secondary educational study.

It is clear from surveying the available options that there is an insufficient number of post-secondary opportunities for students graduating from Canadian high schools with diverse learning needs (Bruce, 2011). Within a North American post-secondary landscape that is increasingly conscious of the legal obligation to ensure access for students with disabilities, the number of students enrolling in post-secondary education has significantly increased (Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). However, students with intellectual disability labels remain systemically marginalized with respect to post-secondary opportunities (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza & Levine, 2005) and have not enjoyed the same increase in access as their peers without such labels (Stodden & Whelley, 2004). University and community college admission policies are heavily influenced by an explicit commitment to the protection of academic integrity (Aylward, 2006; Hibbs & Pothier, 2006). This concentration on the establishment and preservation of historical academic standards can perpetuate low expectations and poor adult outcomes overall while reinforcing institutional and systemic barriers that continue to exclude students with intellectual disabilities from many post-secondary environments (Grigal, Hart & Paiewonsky, 2010)

With admission and access policies and practices that are firmly founded in discourses of academic integrity, students with intellectual disability labels are firstly denied admission to university programs through the use of standardized entrance criteria focused on previous academic achievement. Then, because individualized learning supports are not usually available within post-secondary settings, another barrier is erected. Finally, there is an assumption among educators that universities and colleges are for educating the “best and the brightest” which constructs an intellectual divide that is difficult if not impossible to traverse (Hafner, 2008).

Consequently, secondary educators and related professionals do not generally present going to college or university as a viable option for continued learning beyond high school for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (Hart, Grigal, Sax, Martinez, & Will, 2006; Hughson, Moodie, & Uditsky, 2006).

In reality, students with intellectual disabilities can benefit from post-secondary education and experiences as much as any other student (Casale-Giannola & Wilson Kamens, 2006; Hafner, 2008; Hart et al, 2006; Weinkauf, 2002). Benefits to students have consistently been observed in the areas of improved academic and personal skills, employment outcomes, self-confidence, self-advocacy, transition to community, and independence (Migliore, Butterworth, & Hart, 2009; Stodden & Whelley, 2004). In addition to these student benefits, studies have demonstrated that Inclusive Post-secondary Education (IPSE) programs within a Canadian university setting can have a positive influence on institutional structures and on faculty, staff, and students (Thompson, 2010).

### **Overview of Inclusive Post-Secondary Education Programs Principles and Practices**

Inclusive post-secondary education has its origins in the province of Alberta, and programs in Canada (as well as in the U.S.A.) strive to serve students with intellectual and developmental disabilities who wish to pursue further education with their peers in typical college and university settings (Greenholtz et al, 2007; Mosoff et al, 2009; Thompson, 2010). Students who enter IPSE programs are those who would not usually gain admission to college and university courses because they do not meet the standardized entrance criteria of the institutions. Viewed as adult learners, students are not assessed for admission to IPSE programs based on previous academic performance, diagnostic criteria, or psychometric or medical documentation of an intellectual disability.

IPSE represents a progressive model of adult education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. While specific IPSE program models will vary, researchers and program staff generally define IPSE, as a set of practices that enables students with diverse learning needs to engage in general college and university experiences rather than specialized targeted programs (Hughson, Moodie, & Uditsky, 2006). Motivation to learn is the principal criterion for admission, and individualized supports are provided to students in ways that facilitate a post-secondary experience that is comparable to that of their peers. It is important to note that IPSE is not an end in itself. It is a pathway to adulthood that facilitates the

achievement of socially valued roles where adults with diverse learning needs are viewed as achieving full membership status in society (Bowman & Weinkauff, 2004; Greenholtz et al, 2007; Mosoff et al, 2009). Eventually, with the comprehensive implementation of IPSE programs across Canada, it is hoped that the presence of students with intellectual disabilities will be an unremarkable aspect of all diverse college or university communities (Mosoff et al, 2009).

Hart and colleagues (2006) and Kleinhart, Jones, Sheppard-Jones, Harp and Harrison (2012) have identified salient models of IPSE programs. In the *Substantially Separate or Stand Alone* model students participate only in classes with other students with disabilities. These are frequently referred to as life skills classes or transition programs. Students may or may not be offered the opportunity to participate in regular campus activities. Employment experience in this model tends to be provided in a way that rotates students through a set of predetermined jobs either on or off campus. In the *Mixed* or *Hybrid* model students participate in social activities or academic classes (for audit or credit) with their same-aged peers without disabilities. Additionally, they participate in classes with other students with disabilities – classes that provide life skills training and transition options. Within this model, students gain experience in either on or off campus employment. The *Integrated* or *Inclusive Individual Support Model* offers students individualized support to take college courses, certificate programs, or degree programs either as audit or credit students. Supports might include educational coaching, tutoring, assistive technology, or naturalized assistance. The individual supports are determined by the student's vision and career goals. There is no program base on campus because the attention is given to establishing student-driven goals that will direct the course of study and employment experience.

More recently, the *Dual Enrolment* option has been extended to students with intellectual disabilities. This option is typically one in which high school students in their final two years are simultaneously enrolled in secondary and college/university programs. Through a collaborative agreement between public high schools and post-secondary institutions, students have the opportunity to earn college or university credit for some of their high school courses (Martinez & Queener, 2010).

Researchers have found that successful IPSE program initiatives tend to be small, individualized, and personalized with student numbers in natural proportions to the general population (Hafner, 2008; Hughson et al, 2006). Equally important is the necessity to protect IPSE students from being seen by faculty and students as

subjects of either research or practica (Hughson et al, 2006). While IPSE offers excellent reciprocal learning opportunities, in a North American society where post-secondary participation and indicators of achievement are predominantly linked to realizing status as a valued member of one's community, staying away from power structures such as researcher and researched or pre-service professional and practicum subject is favourable (Bowman & Weinkauff, 2004).

Bowman and Weinkauff (2004) have also emphasized the importance of examining the way in which IPSE programs are administered. IPSE programs, to the greatest extent possible, are best embedded within post-secondary institutions. While parent involvement and inter-agency cooperation are important elements, organizational alignment with post-secondary institutions allows IPSE students and services to be an integrated part of the campus community.

Weinkauff (2002), through involvement in IPSE in the province of Alberta has articulated several principles that have guided much of the IPSE program development in Canada. These principles help to ensure that IPSE programs are available to any adult with an intellectual disability and that no academic or physical criteria will prevent enrolment in programs. Some principles speak to providing individual student supports in a manner that will facilitate a learning experience that is coherent with that of other students as well as ensuring that there is adequate faculty and staff development. A vital principle of IPSE is the recognition of the students as adult learners who are involved in all program decisions in order to lead increasingly self-determined lives.

### **Inclusive Postsecondary Programs across Canada**

*Alberta.* Inclusive Post-Secondary Education programs began in the province of Alberta twenty-seven years ago (Trish Bowman, Executive Director, Alberta Association of Community living, personal communication December 3, 2013). IPSE programs in Alberta are consistent with the inclusive individual support model identified by Hart et al (2006). Students in Alberta have a wide variety of post-secondary options in numerous college and university settings. While the governance structures vary across programs, adherence to full inclusion principles is guided and supported by an Alberta Association for Community Living provincial network (Hughson et al, 2006). Students have access to a coherent post-secondary experience through academic classes, recreational experiences, and campus activities. Inclusion facilitators provide support in course adaptation as well as to faculty and to peer mentors. A primary goal of the IPSE initiatives in Alberta is for

students to gain relevant employment experience and preparation.

*British Columbia.* In British Columbia the initiative on Inclusive Post-Secondary Education is led by a not-for-profit agency (i.e., Steps Forward) that supports students with intellectual disabilities on four Campuses in the province. The initiative began in 2001 by parents who wanted to create campuses where students with developmental disabilities would be ordinary members of a diverse campus community, regardless of the nature of the disability. The program is a process of participatory auditing in which students access course material adapted by Steps Forward staff to meet individual learning needs. While IPSE students do not receive traditional grades or degrees, they do receive a certificate of completion from the university or college.

*Saskatchewan.* Campus for All at the University of Regina in Saskatchewan is a partnership among The University of Regina, the Regina and District Association for Community Living, and People First of Regina. It provides a post-secondary option to adults with developmental disabilities aged twenty-two or older. Campus for All students can audit classes, improve literacy, and develop connections with other students. At the University of Regina, students have access to campus facilities and services, can participate in student campus activities, can design individualized literacy plans with Campus for All staff, and can receive literacy tutoring from non-disabled classmates. The Campus for All program is most closely aligned with the inclusive individual support model.

*Manitoba.* Since 2004, the University of Manitoba, Faculty of Education, has been offering an inclusive post-secondary program called "Campus Life". Faculty, staff, and student volunteers have been supporting students with intellectual disabilities to take regular courses, to engage in social activities, and to be a part of the life of the University of Manitoba campus. Students are supported to audit courses in multiple faculties and departments, and the typical student will take one to three courses per term over a four to five year period. Campus Life students have the opportunity to complete a 30 hour non-credit certificate; and in the spring 2011, the first Campus Life students graduated in convocation ceremonies with their peers.

*Ontario.* The Ontario college system has created a post-secondary option for students with developmental or intellectual disabilities. Community Integration through Co-Operative Education (CICE) is a two-year full-time program in which students take a combination of regular college courses and core life skills courses with other CICE students. Depending on the college campus, students complete the program and receive either an Ontario College diploma or certificate. Regular

college courses are adapted to meet individual learning styles, and academic support is provided in the classroom and through tutorials. Students in this program are required to have a certain level of independence, and supports are not provided outside the academic arena. Course work includes a variety of field placements to allow students to gain valuable work-related skills. These programs appear to be most consistent with the mixed or hybrid model of IPSE.

*Quebec.* In Quebec Inclusive post-secondary programs exist in four English CEGEP (general and vocational pre-university programs) in Montreal. One program, the Post-secondary Alternative Community-based Education (P.A.C.E.) is a partnership between Champlain College and the Riverside School Board in St. Lambert Quebec. Intended for students with intellectual disabilities and/or pervasive developmental disabilities, this program is an opportunity to gain post-secondary experience through multiple learning opportunities. Program components include community-based instruction, parent involvement, job training, regular college classes and activities, transition planning, and inter-agency collaboration. In order to be admitted, students must be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one with a coded pervasive developmental disability and/or developmental disability. They must also be able to use public transit, be able to function with minimal supervision in college and work environments, and be willing to learn from a variety of experiences.

*New Brunswick.* Since 2001, the New Brunswick Association for Community Living and the New Brunswick Community College have worked in partnership to increase the participation of students with intellectual disabilities in post-secondary education. A four-year pilot project that ended in 2005 led to the development of a special admissions process for students with intellectual disabilities to access a limited number of seats in New Brunswick Community College programs across the province. Students work with college staff to develop an individualized learning plan that will include adaptation of the course work in the program. They are required to attend class on their own with the provision of appropriate accommodations. Instructors are trained in teaching alternative learning strategies, and tutorial services are also offered. Upon completion, students receive a certificate of participation along with a profile that outlines the skills they have acquired as a result of their participation in the program.

*Prince Edward Island.* In the province of Prince Edward Island the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) offers a program called Adult Connections in Education (ACE). In the ACE program, students with intellectual disabilities engage in university classes, extra-curricular activities, time with peers, and work

experience opportunities that are intended to provide academic enhancement and personal growth. Admission is based on compatibility between the goals of the student and the goals of the ACE program.

*Nova Scotia.* In 2012, after research and planning conducted by the authors, the first IPSE program in Nova Scotia was started on a university campus at Acadia University. Access Acadia is based on the University of Manitoba Campus Life model whereby the primary admission criterion to the program is students' motivation to continue learning. The Access Acadia program adheres to the inclusive individual support model with the goal of providing a post-secondary experience that is coherent with that of campus peers. Access Acadia students engage in a personalized student advising process that supports course selection, determination of required supports, and facilitation and implementation of those supports by interacting with faculty, staff, peer mentors, and student volunteers. It is also the goal of the program to assist students to find part-time and summer employment in order to explore possible work interests.

### Conclusion

Many primary, secondary and post-secondary schools in Canada root their espoused policies and practices in the belief that all students are valued members of the educational community. One often encounters within inclusive education policy, statements that affirm how all students share the following desires: to be challenged, to participate, to contribute, and to be respected for who they are. In recent years, Canadian disability advocacy groups have worked diligently to move the discussion of disability issues into the realm of human rights and citizenship. In particular, advocates for persons with intellectual disabilities have emphasized the realization of full citizenship for this systemically marginalized group. Engagement in higher education and employment are two key components of achieving full participation as citizens (Greenholtz et al, 2007).

Inclusive citizenry requires the development and enrichment of post-secondary educational settings where a diversity of learners can belong, an environment where belonging is not only defined by prior academic achievement and the standardized assessment of learning potential. There must also be a commitment to post-secondary teaching that recognizes the value in teaching all who can learn, not just in teaching those who can reach pre-determined academic goals. Inclusive post-secondary education programs encourage us to re-imagine university and college campus communities where it is possible to generate equitable spaces of

belonging and a transition to somewhere where all students get to be somebody.

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# Removing the Hurdles: A Brief Highlight of Inclusion Challenges in Guyana

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## Abstract

*Global policy towards special and inclusive education has seen a shift in the overall approaches used. The Dakar and Salamanca frameworks have necessitated renewed energy and commitment in the fulfilment of equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The Salamanca Framework for Action is a commitment made by governments, international organizations, and non-governmental agencies on the implementation of policies and practices in special needs education. This framework was adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education in June 1994. The Dakar Framework for Action reaffirmed the commitment to education for all and was adopted by the World Education Forum in April 2000. Removing the hurdles to inclusive education in Guyana has been and continues to be a gigantic task. The effects of these hurdles have not only created barriers in educational settings but have also stymied expressions and authentic voices in the local subsectors of the country. This paper, among other things, examines some positive benefits and factors that promote inclusion. It also highlights the challenges to inclusion in Guyana and examines how individual attitudes and beliefs in the Guyanese society prevent key developments in special and inclusive education.*

Inclusive practices and policies are pivotal to the development of any society and the concept of inclusion hinges on the full participation of individuals, organizations, civil society groups and other stakeholders with a vested interest in nation building. This concept has been given much thought by proponents such as Clark, Dyson and Millward (1995), Booth and Ainscrow (1998), and Clough and Corbett (2000), among others. Inclusion and the issue of equal access to education has always been a concern for policymakers, parents, community-minded citizens and even students as recipients. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of 1994 and the Jomtien Conference on Inclusive Education of 1990 have been instrumental in reducing exclusion of children who are vulnerable and marginalized. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action was the result of collective efforts of more than three hundred participants and twenty-five international organizations who met in Salamanca, Spain, in June 1994 to propel the objectives of education for all (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 1994). At the core of this document is the guiding principle of the right to inclusive education and education for every individual regardless of race, color or creed. It also affirms the right to education for children with special needs so that they can receive support necessary for efficient education (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Declaration also highlights the need for inclusive schools and affirms that inclusive quality education is pivotal to the achievement of human, social, and economic development (UNESCO, 1994). Similarly, the Dakar Framework for Action highlighted the need for

greater commitment to education for all children (UNESCO, 2000).

The Jomtien Declaration, which was adopted by the World Conference on Education for All in Thailand in March 1990, affirms the right to education for every individual as well as equal access for all categories of persons with disabilities (UNESCO, 1990). While the main thrust of the declaration is the right to education, it also mandates the removal of barriers that would inhibit equal learning opportunities for vulnerable and marginalized groups (UNESCO, 1990).

This paper examines some key aspects of inclusion and the challenges in Guyana. The first part of the paper will address general issues on inclusion, some key benefits, and factors that foster inclusionary practices. The second part of this paper will highlight the challenges of inclusion in Guyana. In this section, specific issues such as the education system, special education in Guyana, legislation for children with special needs and persons with disabilities will be highlighted. In addition, this section will also focus on special education teacher-training, inclusive education in Guyana, and the social and cultural factors that inhibit meaningful inclusive practices.

## A General Overview

Access to education has long been a commitment and goal for governments and international organizations and this has now attracted more attention in Guyana, a society where equal access to education is a growing concern. Studies conducted by Lloyd (2008), Miles and Ahuja (2006), Carrington and Robinson (2004), and

Pather (2007) have all highlighted the need for better inclusive practices and equitable educational experiences for students with special needs. Pather (2007) notes that central to the issue of inclusion is the access to the general education curriculum and the services in the general education classroom that would ensure student success. This theme is also addressed by Lloyd (2008) who points to the need for widening participation and social inclusion, which would prevent alienation in the society. What is significant is the fact that schools and organizations have developed a collective approach in embracing shared values, beliefs, and the diverse needs of learners with disabilities. These factors act as a catalyst for social cohesion and inclusion (Carrington & Robinson 2004; Pather 2007).

Inclusive education refers to the practice of including all students in the learning process to improve their academic and social competence (Begeny & Martens, 2007; Kavale & Forness, 2000). Proponents of educational inclusion have argued in favor of its benefits specifically on philosophical and social grounds. They contend that inclusion can result in better preparation for community life (Begeny & Martens, 2007). The positive aspects of inclusion are as follows: First and most important is the development of positive attitudes in typical students with disabilities, which in turn helps to create social interaction and principles on equality (Begeny & Martens, 2007). Secondly, inclusion provides the catalyst for academic and social achievement for students with disabilities (Begeny & Martens, 2007). The third positive aspect of inclusion is the development and improvement of teachers' skills and competence from working with students with disabilities in the classroom (Begeny & Martens, 2007). For instance, teachers working with students who are not native English speakers and have reading problems may need to develop effective strategies to ensure that their students succeed. The success or failure of the strategies employed will not only be a learning experience for teachers, but one that will also generate improvement in teaching skills. Begeny and Martens (2007) as well as Burnstein, Sears, Wilcoxon, Cabello and Spagna (2004) hold the view that inclusion not only creates positive change in classroom teachers, but also improvements in self-esteem and expectations among students. This suggests that attitudes and beliefs play a critical role in inclusive school practices. Therefore, it appears that where positive attitudes and beliefs are present among students and teachers, there is the likelihood of greater inclusivity in the classroom.

Besides, typically developing children are models for peers with disabilities and offer them the opportunity to learn, play, socialize and develop new skills and information (Bricker, 2000; Guralnick, 2001; Odom,

2002). The opportunities to learn, play, socialize and develop new skills can have positive implications for long-term inclusive practices in the classroom. For example, students from migrant communities are major beneficiaries of this opportunity. In this regard, Bricker (2000) Guralnick (2001), and Odom (2002) suggest that the development of inclusive practices depends to a large extent on the willingness of students and teachers to accommodate those with disabilities. Further, they report that once this task is accomplished, aversive events can be avoided and inclusion in the classroom becomes more attainable. On the other hand, they all affirm that in order to achieve inclusivity, specific learning opportunities must be created.

Bricker (2000), Guralnick (2001), Odom (2002) and Burnstein and colleagues (2004) believe that inclusion depends to a large extent on the availability of teachers who are willing and ready to work. Such readiness may also involve a collaborative approach by special education teachers and general classroom teachers in teaching students with special needs (Brice & Miller, 2000). For example, the general classroom teacher meeting frequently with the Learning Support and English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher to discuss progress of students and their inclusion in general education classroom. Therefore, teachers' roles, responsibilities and attitudes can significantly affect the outcomes of educational inclusion in schools (Bricker 2000; Burnstein et al., 2004; Guralnick 2001; Odom 2002). However, Burnstein and colleagues note that teachers' attitudes, beliefs and values about inclusion will continue to be a challenge for inclusive educational practices. They further argue that strategies and activities to move schools toward inclusive practices will depend largely on leadership, teacher commitment, staff development, planning time, and classroom support. In addition, strategies and activities to move schools toward inclusive practices will also involve the creation, adaptation and modification of learning environments and curriculum to meet the needs of all learners (Harris, Pretti-Frontczak & Brown, 2009). Harris and colleagues posit that inclusion involves participation and belonging in a diverse society. They hold the view that adapting and modifying learning environments and curriculum to foster learning and a true sense of belonging is the heart of early childhood education and inclusive practices.

### **Inclusion- A pre-requisite for quality education**

The issue of quality education and inclusive practices has been given considerable attention by governments and other agencies involved in education. There are several factors that contribute to inclusive practices for students with special needs. The first factor is the

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availability of resources and its equitable distribution in the provision of quality education (Miles & Ahuja, 2006). Secondly, culture and diversity also promote inclusion. Ashman and Elkins (2009) opine that cultural influences have broadened in Western countries such as the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada. This expansion of cultural influences is due in part to an increasing immigrant population, which has resulted in inclusive practices in the school system. However, they argue that there may be limitations to inclusive practices in culturally disadvantaged environments. A third factor that promotes inclusion of learners with disabilities is cooperative learning (Ashman & Elkins, 2004). Ashman and Elkins state that cooperative learning promotes academic achievement, self-concept and greater appreciation for learners with disabilities. A critical analysis of empirical evidence would reveal that emphasis has been placed on cooperative learning, as an effective strategy in promoting inclusion among students with disabilities. This is of great importance in creating change among students with disabilities who often experience difficulties and lack the interaction and discussion skills necessary to fully benefit from evidence-based interventions (O'Brien & Wood, 2011). In supporting this claim, Chandler and Dahlquist, (2010) note that the employment of self-management strategies in the classroom is a useful tool in teaching students to monitor their behavior.

### **General Highlights on the Situation in Guyana**

Guyana is a low income, developing country and the only English speaking country in South America. National expenditure on education highlights the growing importance of this sector to the country. This view is supported by statistics, which show that 32.3 billion Guyana dollars from a 2014 national budget of 220 billion Guyana dollars was allocated to the education sector (Narine, 2014). According to the Ministry of Education (2010-2011) there are four special schools in Georgetown, the capital city, and one in Region four. There are also two small units for children with disabilities in two rural towns (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). Statistics indicate that the capital, with 28% of the population, has 92% of the places in special education (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). The schools in Georgetown cater to students who have sensory and visual impairments, while those in the rural towns cater to students with physical disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011).

The Ministry of Education is the central agency that regulates the provision of education for all children in mainstream schools and special schools in Guyana. It is the largest ministry in Guyana in terms of scope of operations (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). The formal education system in Guyana comprises institutions of various levels and types (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). The levels and types of institutions include: pre-school or nursery level, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). There is also technical and vocational education, teacher training and university education (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). Continuing education is provided through the Adult Education Association (AEA) and the Institute of Distance and Continuing Education (IDCE), an arm of the main university, the University of Guyana (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013).

### *Funding*

There are several special schools and resource centers which receive funding from the government and cater to the needs of students with disabilities (Lockwood, 2010). Statistics indicate that in 2010 four special schools that cater to students at the primary level and two at the secondary level were funded by the government (Lockwood, 2010). In addition, there were three special schools which received funding by the government for students of all ages (Lockwood, 2010). However, there is only one school which caters to students with disabilities above 16 years (Lockwood, 2010). This school also receives funding from the government for its academic and vocational programs (Lockwood, 2010). Besides this, there is also one school that is privately managed but receives limited funding from the Ministry of Education (Lockwood, 2010).

### **Special Education in Guyana**

From the early 1990s there have been considerable changes in the education system in Guyana. The changes in the education system were a direct response to the political, economic, social and cultural needs of the society (Ministry of Education, 2008- 2013). The main focus was expanding access to education throughout the country which was done through compulsory primary education for all children in Guyana (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). One reason for the expanded focus, particularly at the beginning of the 21st century, was a commitment to fulfil the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary

education in Guyana. This goal has great relevance to inclusion in Guyana because one of the major challenges is the provision of equal opportunities to indigenous and hinterland children and particularly those with disabilities (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). This is so because a vast majority of children with disabilities in coastal and hinterland regions are still kept at home (Paul, 2013). One possible explanation for this situation is the general belief in the Guyanese society that children with disabilities are unable to cope with academic work. Social factors such as stigma and discrimination also contribute to children with disabilities remaining at home.

#### *Legislation for Children with Special Education Needs and Persons with Disabilities in Guyana*

The Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) makes several important stipulations regarding special education in Guyana. Some of these stipulations include:

- The provision of special education programs for students in need of special education
- The development of individual education plan which would be modified to cater to the specific needs of students.
- The sharing of cost between parents and the Ministry of Education in developing, providing and maintaining the individual education plan.
- The establishment of a council on special education which will serve as an advisory body on rules and guidelines in implementing special education programs (Lockwood, 2010).

In addition, while the Persons with Disabilities Act of 2010 provides equal opportunities for individuals with disabilities in Guyana, it also stipulates the promotion and protection of rights and its enforcement to prevent discrimination on the basis of disability (Persons with Disability Act, 2010). Further, this Act outlines provisions for education of persons with disabilities, employment, health, housing and water, sports and recreation, communication, accessibility and voting rights (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010). It also states that disabilities should not prevent children from being included in compulsory primary and secondary education (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010). The Act also outlines stipulations regarding integration of persons with disabilities in the school system and assistance for students with disabilities. This assistance may take several forms, for example, scholarships, grants, loans and other incentives for qualified students with disabilities.

In many ways, the Persons with Disabilities Act promotes inclusion since it outlines specific issues that

should not prevent people and children with disabilities from accessing and participating in educational, recreational, social economic and cultural activities. This inclusionary mechanism is illustrated in the provisions for training in sports, games and culture for persons with disabilities (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010). In addition, the inclusionary mechanism is also illustrated in the provisions for education and special training activities to improve the communication skills of persons with disabilities (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010). While this is a step in the right direction in promoting inclusion in Guyana, one of the major challenges is the full implementation of regulations in the Persons with Disabilities Act.

Currently, there are no major training programs and facilities in sports and culture for persons with disabilities in Guyana. Further, many students with disabilities are still unable to access the basic services necessary for meaningful integration and participation in activities that will enable them to realize their full potential. In addition, several provisions of the Persons with Disabilities Act, which deal with training of teachers, remain unimplemented. One such provision is the development and implementation of training programs for teachers specializing in disabilities.

#### *Special Education Teacher Training*

The Persons with Disabilities Act (2010) mandates the training of teachers in special education and the development of training programs for personnel in special schools. The Act also states that special education should be a compulsory component of the curriculum for the institution established to train teachers (Persons with Disabilities Act, 2010). The Ministry of Education has taken several initiatives to train teachers and increase the number of teachers in the school system (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). This increase in training is due in part to the number of teachers who have migrated or otherwise left the system. One notable inclusion strategy in teacher-training is the in-service distance mode program, which is being offered to teachers in several hinterland locations and in coastal regions (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013).

The Cyril Potter College of Education (CPCE) is the only teacher-training institution in Guyana. Initially, the college offered certificate programs in nursery, primary and secondary teacher training (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). A distance mode for secondary teachers with specialization in English, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies was developed (Ministry of Education, 2008-2013). Currently, the college offers a two-year associate degree program in education. However, there is no formal teacher training program with majors in

special education, but there are compulsory courses in special education for nursery and primary teachers.

### **Inclusive Education in Guyana**

In Guyana, the Ministry of Education Inclusion policy has several aims. Some of the main aims include: the appropriate placements for all children, appropriate quality education for all children in special schools and mainstream schools, improvement of school attendance for all children, improving teachers' knowledge and skills as well as the quality of teaching and the recognition and celebration of students' achievement both academically and socially (Lockwood, 2010). Within the inclusive policy framework, there are several outcomes aimed at ensuring every child has the opportunity to develop their full potential. Some of the main outcomes include: appropriate placements after assessment of children with special needs, the provision of a curriculum that meets the needs of students' academic level, differentiation in curriculum, and ensuring that students who do not attend school are identified and given appropriate placements (Lockwood, 2010). Other outcomes include: monitoring and evaluation of students with special needs and training of Regional Education Officers, head-teachers, deputy head-teachers, classroom teachers, special education needs coordinators and teachers in special schools in the area of special education (Lockwood, 2010).

Inclusion in Guyana is constrained by many factors, some of which are lack of a career structure within special education, and the scarcity of population in some regions of Guyana (Lockwood, 2010). As a result, full inclusion is not easily attainable in many sectors of the country. One such example is the service sector. Given the existing status of inclusion in Guyana, one of the major challenges involves full access to educational opportunities particularly for children in remote and hinterland regions. This is so because geographical factors make it difficult for efficient transportation services in many hinterland areas (Lockwood, 2010). In some instances, the long distances that children with special needs have to travel to school act as a barrier to consistent attendance and therefore inhibit inclusion of children with disabilities in the classrooms (Lockwood, 2010).

In developing countries such as Guyana, where the focus is on the provision of basic education, the challenges for special and inclusive education are many. These include:

- Organization and governance of the education system.
- The centralized nature of administration, management and decision-making.

- Negative attitudes towards special and inclusive education in many sectors of the society.
- Financial provision and budgetary allocation towards special education.
- Human resource availability, development and retention.
- Follow-up mechanisms, support programs and structured programs for integration, differentiation and adaptation.
- Enhancing the environment for learning through the promotion of an inclusive education policy.
- Developing partnerships and community support programs.
- Limited post primary and secondary opportunity for students with disabilities.

Other challenges to inclusion in Guyana are the absence of a complete national database on children with special education needs and lack of adequate supportive and quality teaching and learning environment. There is also need for an effective program for mainstreaming children with special needs, access to relevant work and life skills, training of special education needs specialist teachers, and the efficient management and administration of special needs education service (Paul, 2013).

Analyses of the challenges present grave realities of the situation. Evidently, organization and governance of the education system is stymied by the centralized nature of administration, management, planning and decision-making (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). So too is the case of policies that do not reflect an orientation towards equity and efficiency. Therefore, one of the major challenges for special and inclusive education is the negative attitude towards this issue. This attitude is sometimes evident at the highest level of the education sector. Negative attitude towards the poor and the most disadvantaged learners also create barriers for inclusion. Seemingly, this culture facilitates exclusive tendencies due in part to perceptions about learning.

In many contexts, financial provision and budgetary allocations towards special education present another challenge. While available financial resources may not be able to meet the demands, there seems to be little or no priority in this field. As such, budgetary provisions reflect low levels of interest towards special and inclusive education (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). Additionally, human resource availability, development and retention are also major challenges to any meaningful special education program in Guyana (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). Thus, a major challenge to inclusion in Guyana is the shortage of skilled teachers and health professional in special needs education and disability. This shortage of skilled

professionals makes it difficult for meaningful progress and development in special needs education in Guyana.

Statistics have indicated that there are no more than 50 teachers who are qualified in the area of special education within the special schools both in Georgetown and the rural towns (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). In addition, for the 2010-2011 academic year, there were a total of 327 males and 222 females attending special schools in Georgetown, Grove, and the two rural towns (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). From the statistics, it is also evident that the shortages of resources, both physical and human, together with inadequate facilities and learning materials highlight the nature of the situation. Thus, given the paucity of information, the existing services are meeting no more than 10% of those in need (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011).

However, while there is need for training it should also focus on the methods of facilitating consultation, developing management skills and sensitivity towards learners with special needs. In this regard, there is need for trained teachers and special education officers who can play a critical role in the learning/teaching process of those with special needs. Interestingly, an encouraging development is the employment of some persons with disabilities in the teaching system. For example, several members of the Guyana Deaf Mission are teachers and these persons are involved in teaching students with disabilities. In addition, the Guyana Society for the Blind employ teachers to conduct classes in sign language for students with disabilities, while the Resource Unit for the Visually Impaired has volunteer teachers to conduct classes at that unit. Though the number is small, this is certainly a positive step towards the enrichment of the education system through their personal and social knowledge and above all the promotion of inclusion.

Further, an interesting development in the promotion of inclusion in Guyana is the fact that a number of students from the Guyana Society for the Blind will be sitting the Caribbean Examinations Council May/June 2014 examinations. This is the first time in fifty-nine years that students from the society will participate in the regional examinations with persons without any visual impairment (Ramsay, 2014). The Caribbean Examinations Council Secondary Education Certificate Examinations (CSEC) is a regional examination written by students throughout the Caribbean at the fifth year of secondary school (Ramsay, 2014).

As stated earlier, the vast majority of the centers are located in the city and these become physically inaccessible to many learners with physical disabilities from rural and outlying areas. Hence, in areas where programs for students with disabilities exist, they often suffer from lack of support, follow-up programs, and effective monitoring and evaluation. These are all

necessary for the survival of the relevant special education programs (Ministry of Education, 2010-2011). Observation has revealed that there are also cases where programs are executed without any precise structure, thereby affecting the overall objectives.

In Guyana, the absence of an official inclusive education policy makes inclusive education a challenge not only for the transformation of the education system, but in responding to the diversity of learners. Further, while it is true that inclusive education is a human right, one of the major challenges is overcoming discrimination on the grounds of disability and capabilities. Given the complex nature of the society and low priority towards special needs education, inclusive education is still seen as a marginal theme on integration of learners in mainstream education. This is due in part to an educational policy that is yet to meet the challenges of this plural society as well as the attitudes and perceptions towards persons with disabilities, which is almost one of marginalization and exclusion. Further, many of the problems of learners with disabilities are not because of the disability, but the attitudes of others around them, which often reflect inertia and resistance. The attitude of resistance often reflects exclusive tendencies because of limited moral and political will. Moreover, even the curriculum in our schools does not have an inclusive framework and has been unable to meet the needs of learners from different cultures and backgrounds. However, amidst this situation, there is still visible evidence of grading of schools.

There are five national senior secondary schools and several junior secondary schools in Guyana. Unlike the junior secondary schools, which can be found throughout the country, the majority of the senior schools are located in the capital city. Junior secondary schools are placed into categories from list A to D (Stanley, 2013a). This categorization is based on the schools performance at the Caribbean Examinations Council Secondary Education Certificate Examinations (CSEC). In the grading system, 'List A' schools are those whose performance is high at the Caribbean Examinations Council Secondary Education Certificate examinations, while 'list D' schools are the lowest performers at the Secondary Education Certificate examinations (Stanley, 2013a). One of the main criteria for entrance into the 'list A' schools is performance (Stanley, 2013a).

What is striking is the fact that top performers are placed under 'list A' schools, while low achievers are placed among list B, C and D schools. While this is a norm, it is also a divisive tendency and certainly does not promote inclusiveness for all learners in the education system in Guyana. This divisive tendency can best be explained in the categorization of schools. For

example, 'list A' schools are different from 'Grade A' schools. The reason being that 'list A' schools are categorized based on quality and not quantity, while 'Grade A' schools are categorized on the number of students on roll (Stanley, 2013c). Further, this categorization of schools based on quality also includes quality of teachers, facilities and teaching, which are aimed at producing excellent students (Stanley, 2013c). Seemingly, this does not provide the opportunities for inclusive education and is also a challenge to inclusion in Guyana.

The evidence shows that millions of dollars are spent to upgrade selected schools to 'list A' schools, which also benefit from greater resources and laboratory and information technology facilities (Stanley, 2013b). This situation promotes inequity and creates a disadvantage for learners in grades A, B, C and D schools. This lack of inclusiveness can best be explained by two principal reasons. First, students who have the ability to learn and are placed at grade B, C and D schools do not have the same resources and facilities as their counterparts in the 'list A' schools. Secondly, the performance and success rate of students at 'list A' schools are greater than those at grade A, B, C and D schools. This system of grading schools does not promote inclusiveness for all learners in Guyana and is definitely a challenge to inclusion. One reason for this is the notion of individual educational achievement, which is measured against a set of norm-related standards and linked closely to effective schools.

Full participation in the decision making process by people with disabilities is another challenge. In this case, persons with disabilities should have a greater say in decisions involving their welfare. However, in the local context, participation cannot be brought about by political decree, since people will only become involved if they feel genuinely consulted concerning their needs. There is also need for greater support from all sectors towards inclusive education in Guyana, for example, the health and business sectors. The health sector can play a leading role through the implementation of disability awareness campaigns, with the aim of sensitizing members of the society to create change in attitudes towards persons with disabilities. On the other hand, the business sector can foster greater inclusion by embarking on equal opportunity programs in employment for persons with disabilities. Education administrators also have key roles to play in initiating measures towards the development of inclusive education. More importantly, parental involvement is a realistic proposition in the rural context of Guyana. The active involvement of parents in the inclusion process may only be possible through the development of a parent education program with special focus on disability.

In many ways the issues discussed in this paper, reflect the overall trend in developing countries particularly Guyana where there is a high degree of similarities with other developing countries. Evidently, special and inclusive education in Guyana is an issue that is still evolving and engaging the attention of policy makers in the education system. However, a high point is the UNESCO's Education for All initiative, which has already been adopted by the Ministry of Education through donor agencies support. The Education for All Fast Track Initiative EFA/FTI is a project that focuses on primary education with special emphasis on the indigenous population who are unable to access basic education.

Presently, there is no transition stage towards inclusion. However, this may be a future course upon which the relevant authorities may chart particularly with the drafting of the New Education Act. The New Education Act will regulate education at all levels in Guyana. It will also regulate the quality of education provided by government and private educational institutions. This Act has at its helm provisions for inclusion, mainstream education and broader societal participation in the delivery and enhancement of the education system.

In sum, the implications for best practice may be constrained by issues such as lack of differentiation, inadequate access to resources, lack of funding, teachers' attitudes and beliefs, assessments, culture, socio-economic status and ethnicities. However, factors such as the development of positive attitudes and values, legislation and policies and effective teacher training can help to mitigate exclusion and create the stimulus for inclusive practices in the school system. In large measure, events in school system can either promote inclusion or exclude students from the learning process.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be argued that inclusive educational practice is a continuous process that involves attitude change, training, resources and key support from stakeholders and policymakers in ensuring that best practice relating to inclusive education can be adopted by teachers. What is striking, however, is the implication for such practices given that there are always concerns about full inclusion in the classroom. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, issues such as lack of differentiation, resources, funding, teachers' attitudes and beliefs, an unmodified curriculum and negative peer attitudes are factors that can foster exclusion of students with disabilities from meaningful learning. In contrast, effective teacher training, positive attitudes and values, community support, a structured curriculum, adequate

resources and funding are key factors that can promote and foster inclusive practices in the classroom. To this end, there is need for greater political will in ensuring that more is done for children with special needs and people with disabilities in general. This will ultimately lead to greater recognition of rights and promotion of inclusion.

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# Culturally Responsive Teaching in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Inclusive Classroom

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## Abstract

*As the U.S. population grows more varied, public schools face the challenge of meeting the needs of an increasing population of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students with exceptionalities in inclusive classrooms. This is especially evident in the urban inclusive classrooms. There is a strong connection between culture and learning. The teacher has a significant role in enhancing all learners' sense of competence and preparing them for the global life of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Teachers can support maximum learning through use of culturally responsive pedagogy for CLD students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Teachers can transform their pedagogy with high expectations, contextual learning, culturally mediated instruction and productive family/community engagement. This article will discuss the incorporation of a culturally responsive paradigm and educational delivery practices to increase engagement and positive outcomes for diverse students with disabilities in inclusive settings.*

Within the United States, the legislative emphasis on academic preparedness and rigor for all students including those receiving special education services has undergone a paradigm shift. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004) does not specifically use the term 'inclusion', it indicates that to the maximum extent appropriate, the least restrictive environment for most students with disabilities is the general education setting unless the severity of the disability makes this impossible. Educational services delivered in this general education setting, not only optimize access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities but also provide the opportunity for them to interact with their peers.

Despite legal mandates under The Individuals with Disabilities Act (2004) to enhance the academic curriculum for all learners, the law in practice is often fraught with challenges. These challenges create additional stress for individuals with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds (Ford, 2012; Waitoller, Artiles & Cheney, 2010). While the number of students from CLD backgrounds is increasing, their educational performance remains below their potential, which places them at risk of being excluded from the classroom (Hoover, 2012). Multi-faceted racial, cultural, socioeconomic, and political

factors exacerbate the problems of CLD students, especially since there is little resemblance between teachers who are primarily European American and an increasingly diverse student population (Gay, 2000). While the shortage of multicultural educators is a problem to all students, it will be more intensely felt by multicultural students. Historically, multicultural school personnel served in various critical capacities (e.g., as leaders, role models, mediators, and mentors). Additionally, the majority of teachers and administrators do not reside in the communities of the multicultural students they serve. Disconnectedness between schools and multicultural students and their communities is further heightened. This dissonance often results in the disproportionate representation of minorities in special education resulting in academic failure and lower expectations (Sorrells, Rieth, & Sindelar, 2004). Disproportionate representation is either the higher or lower presence of students from a specific group in an educational program when compared to what would be expected from their representation in the general student body. This disproportionate representation especially affects CLD students in educational programs. Ethnic minority and English Language Learner (ELL) students are over-represented in stigmatized exceptionality categories (Hoover, 2012, Orfield & Lee, 2004;

Waitoller et al., 2010). African-American and Hispanic students are more likely to be overrepresented in special education programs such as mental retardation (MR) and emotionally disturbed (ED), while underrepresented in gifted programs (Salend, Duhaney, & Montgomery, 2002). ELLs (e.g., limited English proficient) and American Indian (e.g., Native American) students are overrepresented in Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) programs. Clearly, there is need for teachers and schools to understand who our students are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and to employ evidence-based practice to meet diverse needs in an inclusive classroom, including establishing authentic networks with family and significant community organizations.

Educational outcome issues are critical indicating the need for more culturally referenced educational services, evident in the continued lag in graduation rate of specific ethnic minority youth and the persistent dropout rate. While high school graduation rates in the United States generally increased during the 1970s and beyond, Black and Hispanic students continue to graduate at a rate below other students. During the 2009–2010 academic year, the high school graduation rate was 83% for White students, 71.4 % for Hispanic students, 69.1 % for American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 66.1 % for Black students (Aud et al., 2013). The 2011 dropout rate for Whites was 5%, for Blacks 7% and Hispanics 14% (Aud et al., 2013). These persistent graduation and dropout rates must be addressed.

### **The Need for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Culturally responsive teaching offers ways to best support diverse learners in an inclusive classroom as it approaches education by looking at the whole child where students are empowered intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) enhances the learning experiences of CLD students by focusing on their cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference and performance styles. Teachers must move beyond holidays celebrating cultures to infusing culturally relevant practices in the classroom. They must learn the cultures represented in their classrooms and translate this knowledge into deliberate, planned instructional practice (Gay, 2010). Unfortunately, many teachers do not recognize the impact of diversity and the need for culturally responsive practices in their interactions with CLD students. While diversity itself is not a problem, the potential cultural mismatch between teachers and CLD students is an issue (Dray & Wisneski, 2011).

Culturally responsive pedagogy for children with special needs is perhaps more critical due to the dissonance between their CLD background and the culture of the school they attend. These incompatibilities can impact the assessment results of students from CLD backgrounds. In the United States, there continues to be an emphasis on norm-referenced standardized tests which may be culturally and socially biased and often do not accurately assess the abilities of CLD students. Narrow definitions of socially constructed disability categories that fail to take into account the cultural differences, often result in CLD students being placed in special education for behaviors misunderstood by teachers from the dominant cultures (Salend et al., 2000; Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009). Teachers should be cognizant of the differences between disabilities and cultural/linguistic differences to make informed instructional decisions (Hoover, 2012). Many behaviors displayed by the student from a CLD background who is struggling in the classroom are misinterpreted as behavior problems rather than cultural differences in responses, especially among African American males. Irrespective of whether they are in special education or general education, CLD students consistently face academic failures, suspensions, high rates of dropout and disproportionate representation in special education (Sorrells et al., 2004). Understanding and implementing culturally responsive pedagogy in classrooms, and establishing productive networks with families and significant community resources offers teachers tools to support learning for all students in the inclusive classroom.

### **Teacher Efficacy for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy**

Teacher efficacy is the perception of the teacher's capability to bring about desired outcomes of student achievement through engagement, learning and motivation. Those teachers with a higher sense of efficacy have a greater belief in their ability to influence student learning, even the learning of those students who may be more challenging (Tschannen-Morana & Hoy, 2001). This simple concept has a powerful impact on teachers in relation to their behavior in the classroom, the effort they invest in teaching and expectations set for students (Tschannen-Morana & Hoy, 2001). As teaching and learning are cultural processes occurring in social contexts, it is imperative that discussions on teacher efficacy be framed within a paradigm that includes CLD students. In the United States, there is a strong resistance to cultural and linguistic diversity and, rather than acknowledge a pluralistic student population, teachers often prefer to assume the color-blind concept where everyone is taught in the same way. This failure

to acknowledge students from diverse backgrounds has often resulted in a deficit model of thinking where students from CLD backgrounds are held to lower expectations and negative perceptions not related to their cognitive abilities but rather to their differences in the learning process (Chu, 2011).

The disproportionate increase in referrals of CLD students to special education often reflects a misunderstanding between cultural differences/diversity and disability. Many teachers, who are largely middle-class European American, often enter the teaching profession with racial, ethnic and class prejudices of which they are unaware (Chu, 2011; Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002). Prevalent among them are the stereotypical beliefs of CLD students, cultural dissonance and negative perceptions of home environments, which influence their decision-making (Diaz-Rico & Weed, 2002). The differences in the cultural attitudes, values and behaviors of CLD students typically result in them being misidentified as having learning disabilities or emotionally disabilities (Gay, 2002; Hoover, 2012). Chu (2011) indicates that teachers are more likely to refer CLD students to special education because they attribute underachieving performance to lack of home support and student characteristics rather than their own performance.

Teacher efficacy is enhanced when they are critically conscious of their own cultural socialization and its impact on their attitudes and behaviors in shaping the classroom. As teachers study and reflect on their own attitudes and biases, they recognize the impact of their assumptions in the inequitable treatment of CLD students in inclusive classrooms (Weinstein, Tomlinson-Clarke, & Curran, 2004). When teachers critically analyze and evaluate how their own cultural values and beliefs, which shape their performance in the classroom, they are more likely to seek ways to minimize negative perceptions and be more inclusive in their practices. Teacher efficacy begins with a willingness to understand and accept CLD students in the classroom. While the first step requires teachers to be aware of their own culture and expectations and how they differ from those of CLD students in their inclusive classrooms, it is imperative that they also have knowledge of the background of their students and integrate it into their instruction.

### **Creating Inclusive Learning Environments**

Critical to effective inclusion of CLD students is an understanding of CLD students' unique needs, taking into account both their disability and cultural and linguistic differences (Gay, 2002, 2010). Effective teachers need to recognize the influence of culture on

learning in students and enhance their opportunities for success by understanding their differences and incorporating practices that consider student preferences toward learning. Recognizing the importance of culture in learning, culturally responsive teachers relate with learners not only by connecting with their students as individuals, but also understanding the cultural contexts influencing their interactions. Integrating academic content using student experiences to scaffold instruction, allows for discussion to promote understanding of key concepts regarding positive inclusive learning environments for CLD students (Klinger & Gonzalez, 2009; Worrell, 2007). The challenge for teachers is not the content itself, which is often factual, rather, it is the ability of teachers to teach content through the cultural lens (vignettes, scenarios, examples) which enhances understanding of principles, concepts, values, ideals and generalizations (Gay, 2002).

Culturally responsive learning environments begin with teachers infusing a rich multicultural education that reflects the diversity in the classroom. The challenge for both regular and special education teachers is to affirm the diversity in their classrooms by using books, designing bulletin boards, and implementing activities that support inclusive practices. This includes purposefully reading fiction and nonfiction books by authors representing the CLD students in the classroom, creating visual displays and multimedia materials that reflect diversity and promoting conversations with individual students about their culture, as well as obstacles they face when interacting with the mainstream culture. Teachers must carefully design, culturally responsive learning environments and recognize the uniqueness of all students in the classroom (Cartledge, Gardner, & Ford, 2009; Gay 2002).

Inclusive education requires that teachers provide instruction to students that optimize academic achievement. This implies that the learning environment created by teachers meet the students at their point of need rather than grade level (Worrell, 2007). Teaching approaches need to include scaffolding and differentiating instruction, giving students opportunities to succeed depending on their unique needs. Scaffolding, based on Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development, provides the appropriate mediational or cultural tools to students who are unable to accomplish a task independently (Cartledge et al., 2009). Scaffolds include (1) verbal such as paraphrasing, thinking-aloud, contextualizing definitions, slowing speech and pausing, (2) procedural such as demonstrating/modeling, giving multiple opportunities for guided and independent practice, and (3) instructional such as graphic organizers and models of completed assignments. A gradual release of responsibility from teacher to student as

mastery increases (Pearson & Gallagher, 1993) is particularly important to CLD students in inclusive settings (Echevarria, Vogt, & Short, 2013) with techniques such as I do, you watch and respond; we do together, I help and respond; you do together, I watch and respond; you do independently, I watch and respond.

Successful inclusion necessitates that all learners including CLD students be given opportunities to enhance learning by being engaged in activities that respond to their learning needs, strengths, and preferences. Differentiated instruction responds to student progress by providing on a learning continuum where pace, level, or kind of instruction is adjusted to capitalize on learner strengths and interests. The core instructional concepts that optimize learning for all including CLD students is through (1) content—the knowledge and skills students need to master (2) process—the activities used to engage students in the content and (3) product—the method used to demonstrate student learning (Heacox, 2002). Teachers who differentiate instruction recognize student diversity in its many forms, including prior knowledge and experiences, readiness, language, culture, learning preferences, and interests which CLD students bring to the classroom. They are cognizant of the ways in which they need to change their instruction to reach all students (Worrell, 2007).

Inclusive environments require CLD students with disabilities and all students to participate meaningfully in the curriculum. Teachers are now required to teach content to students with a range of abilities, and teaching one way to the dominant culture often creates a mismatch between CLD students and the curriculum. Differentiated instruction allows students to get to the same place, but with different paths depending on their unique needs (Thousand, Villa, & Nevin, 2007). Changes in how teachers perceive different communication as well as home background have direct implications to learning in inclusive environments. Equally important is how CLD students in inclusive classrooms are engaged in the learning process and can share their knowledge.

### **Implementing Culturally Responsive Strategies in the Inclusive Classroom**

While culturally responsive environments that include a multicultural curriculum and instruction are important to the success of all CLD students in inclusive settings and the unique needs of CLD students with disabilities must not be ignored. It is imperative that goals and objectives on their individual education programs are met through culturally appropriate materials and culturally relevant instruction. Culturally

responsive pedagogy necessitates using multiple and varied culturally informed techniques compatible to their unique needs. This often includes a storytelling approach, cooperative learning, visual supports and movement (Gay, 2002).

Culturally responsive pedagogy is best practice that engages students in multiple ways that benefit all learners, while meeting individual needs, modifying and accommodating for cultural, linguistic, learning, and behavioral differences. Careful construction of knowledge built on past experiences, as well as a meaningful curriculum taught explicitly reminds us that learning emerges from the student and not the teacher. The way teachers plan and deliver instruction, as well as their interactions with students communicates to students the value they bring to the learning relationship. Teachers who recognize the impact of culture on children's learning bring respect and dignity to their teaching (Torres-Velasquez & Lobo, 2005).

It is important that teachers use varied teaching styles to address the unique needs CLD students bring to the classroom. Assessment through instruction and progress monitoring inform curricular decision-making about primary and supplementary materials used that are not only culturally relevant but multi-leveled in a variety of forms: print, visual, auditory, and hands-on. Decisions about instruction are fluid, with multiple grouping arrangements and student choice (Tomlinson, 2001). Importantly, instruction builds on students' prior knowledge to motivate and generate purposes for learning as well as affirm what students know to connect new concepts for understanding. Anticipation guides, preview of vocabulary, questioning, and predicting support activates and develops prior knowledge (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2011).

Throughout instruction, effective teaching and learning strategies are employed that can make a difference in academic and language development of students. New instruction is supported through various delivery modes including modeling, demonstration, and visual representation rather than lecture. Students are engaged in frequent interaction with academic language through listening, speaking, reading, writing, and visualizing concepts individually, in pairs (think-pair-share), in small groups (collaborative learning) and as a whole class (grand conversations). These joint productive activities allow students' use of functional and home language and experiences across the curriculum, to comprehend at multiple levels (literal, interpretive and applied) as they progress in academic competence and cognitive complexity through dialogue and discussion, particularly instructional conversation (Tharp, Estrada, Dalton, & Yamauchi, 2000).

Engaging activities adapted to all levels of student proficiency, purposefully tie content objectives to language objectives and assessment. Graphic organizers, leveled study guides and outlines, taped text and jigsaw readings purposefully support diverse learners and integrate language practice opportunities. A variety of multisensory approaches can be used to support access to academic vocabulary including explicitly highlighting word patterns and meanings, creating word walls that include words and images, making personal dictionaries and concept definition maps, and rehearsal through word games. Clearly, a powerful tool for planning and implement culturally responsive pedagogy is for schools and teachers to maximize the use of funds of knowledge (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 2005) of their students, along with the rich resources of home and community.

### **Building Productive Home-School-Community Relations**

The need for effective communication between schools and families for CLD children with and without disabilities cannot be overstated and is particularly crucial for students in inclusive settings. Together, they should plan a consistent process to share information. When parents and teachers engage and collaborate they learn from each other and enhance student performance (Cartledge et al, 2009).

Essential to engagement between teachers, families, and significant community resources is effective communication founded on respect, clarity, integrity, and most important, a value for cultural and linguistic differences. Teachers are challenged to establish authentic bonds with culturally and/or linguistically (CLD) students and obtain in-depth knowledge about them by networking within their communities and incorporating relevant experiences and resources into classroom practices. Using this paradigm, a culturally responsive home-school-community structure would (a) provide meaningful services that improve educational outcomes for CLD students, (b) utilize significant cultural resources that possess knowledge about multicultural students' experiential backgrounds, and (c) support the resiliency and empowerment of CLD learners and their families. Unfortunately, public schools (like society in general) have traditionally viewed CLD communities or economically disadvantaged/disenfranchised communities from a deficit perspective (Ford, 2004).

Racially and ethnically diverse youth are still not afforded quality schooling (Orfield & Lee, 2004). Many multicultural youth experience not only low graduation

rates and disproportionate representation in special education classes but are also faced with catastrophic conditions in schools. Presently, 23 of the 25 largest school systems in the country are heavily composed of students from multicultural groups (Orfield & Lee, 2004). African American and Hispanic students attend schools where two-thirds of the students are African American and Hispanic, with most students being from their own group (Orfield & Lee, 2004). Many of the schools have limited funding and resources, inexperienced or unqualified teachers, lower educational expectations and career options, non-motivating instructional techniques and curriculum content, high teacher turnover rate, and unsafe physical facilities. Most schools with black majority enrollments do not have libraries, an adequate supply of textbooks and computers, art and music programs or science labs (Aud et al, 2013).

Schools and communities can work together to build an environment of supportive education. Many multicultural parents have a history of negative experiences with and mistrust of the school. Differences in income, language, dialects, value and belief systems or insensitivity to religious beliefs, impact involvement of multicultural parents and communities with the school. Consequentially, parents are reluctant and/or intimidated to take advantage of their legal rights (Banks, 1997; Cummins, 1986; Harry, 1995). For those parents, a "neutral" mechanism is needed to empower them with information and skills to advocate for their children. Significant Multicultural Community Resources (SMCR) may be used as a strategy to promote increase parental involvement (Ford, 2004).

Productive school-community linkages with multicultural communities require (a) the support and commitment of all major stakeholders (e.g., school administrators, certified/licensed school personnel, non-licensed staff, and the SMCR) and (b) the adequate preparation of school personnel. The need to establish on-going productive school-community partnerships encompasses two interrelated premises. First, schools alone cannot adequately address the multifaceted problems confronted by today's youth. This reality is more pronounced for districts in urban, low socioeconomic locales where the prevalent problems include poverty; poor health; hunger; physical, mental or substance abuse; unemployment; and teen pregnancy. These out-of-school, non-educational predicaments serve as barriers to students' academic achievement. Second, the educational benefits of involving significant others (i.e., parents and community leaders) who have a *direct stake* in what happens to youth.

Effective school-community partnerships are beneficial to all students, this linkage is especially

critical in maximizing educational opportunities for students from multicultural and/or bilingual backgrounds (Banks, 1997; Epperson, 1991; Ford, 2004, 2012). Epperson (1991) drew attention to the need for collaboration among public schools, multicultural communities, and parents for the enhancement and development of youth. Given the persistent negative assumptions afforded multicultural populations and their communities by public organizations (including the school system), precautions should be taken to help ensure that the delivery of needed services is done within a positive and culturally responsive framework (Ford, 2004). SMCR includes not-for-profit service or social organizations, sororities, fraternities, clubs or agencies, religious group/churches, and individuals that local community residents perceive as providing valuable *significant* services (Ford, 2004). These services may include: educational, advocacy, financial, legal and/or empowerment assistance. SMCR generally offer numerous types of services/programs that may potentially impact the overall well-being of the school as well as the various developmental needs of youth. For example, within many segments of the African American community, the African American church remains an important leadership institution (Billinsley & Caldwell, 1991). It extends a host of outreach programs to support educational initiatives (e.g., early childhood and literacy programs).

Specifically, SMCR have the potential of affording numerous benefits to multicultural learners (Banks, 1997; Billinsley & Caldwell, 1991; Epperson, 1991; Ford, 2004; Rueda, 1997). These include:

- Resilience-enhancing resources through accessible adult role models, mentors, and advocates.
- Reinforcement of school-related skills through academic motivation, tutoring, and test-taking skills.
- Exposure to self-enhancing/affirming activities (e.g., development of values and cultural group identity; decision-making skills; goal setting; rites of passage)
- Avenues for sensitivity toward culturally responsive programming through face-to-face encounters between administrators, teachers, and multicultural families and community resource persons.
- Forum for dissemination and collection of information. The need for information is a consistent theme regarding multicultural parents. This need has become increasing urgent today. Communication remains the key!

## Conclusion

In 21<sup>st</sup> century schools, it is crucial that teachers are prepared to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population of students in their inclusive classrooms. Given the disproportionate representation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education and the dissonance of teacher and student background, more culturally responsive pedagogy must be implemented to support success for all students. Additionally, teachers need to understand the role of their own cultural background and how it intersects with that of their students. They can create a student-centered inclusive environment with culturally relevant materials, strategies, and curriculum that support learning as they meet students where they are, monitor and build scaffolds to mastery while differentiating instruction. And importantly, they can build cultural bridges as they strengthen the home-school-community connection.

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# Mapping the Gaps: Redesigning a Teacher Education Program to Prepare Teachers for Inclusive, Urban U.S. Schools

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## Abstract

*As part of the process of redesigning an integrated general and special teacher education program to prepare candidates to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, researchers engaged a series of focus groups with current candidates, recent graduates, and partner school personnel. Data presented in this paper identified the gaps uncovered through the research process in the understanding of participants along a framework of necessary skills for teachers working in urban and diverse communities: socio cultural, affirmative attitudes, collaboration skills, and diversity pedagogy. Initial analysis indicated three emerging themes in responses: a deficit based understanding, an ability to identify gaps in knowledge and skills, and an emerging awareness of issues. Results of this analysis were used to guide the redesign of the integrated teacher education program.*

## The Call for Teacher Education Reform

In response to dramatic demographic changes and a pattern of under-achievement and disengagement of large numbers of students, international movements are underway to support teachers to critically examine, reflect on, and respond to practices for learners with diverse academic and social/emotional needs and from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Blanton, Pugach, & Florian, 2011). With growing success using inclusive practices, 96% of students with disabilities in U.S. schools spend at least part of their day in general education classrooms (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education [AACTE], 2011). However, reports continually indicated that while new teachers are teaching more diverse groups of students than ever before, most of the teachers do not feel adequately prepared for the job nor being held accountable for those students' achievement (MetLife, 2010; Villa & Thousand, 2005; Yates & Ortiz, 2004). In spite of general improvements in inclusive practices in U.S. schools, students of color are less likely to spend substantial portions of their day in general education classrooms. A number of scholars point to this problem as rooted in teachers' lack of preparation working with diverse students and in understanding the complexity of cultural norms, values, and behaviors, resulting in inappropriate and disproportionate referrals, identification, and placement in special education classrooms (Blanchett, 2006; Klingner et al., 2005; Kozleski & Smith, 2009; Skiba, 2001; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013; Zion & Blanchett, 2011). These results indicate that teacher preparation reform must be a

paramount priority for improving the learning outcomes of students with disabilities (Blanchett & Wynne, 2007; Sorrells, Webb-Johnson, & Townsend, 2004; Zion, Blanchett & Sobel, in review).

Preparing current and future teachers to teach students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse academic needs is one of the most compelling challenges facing teacher educators today (Futrell, Gomez, & Bedden, 2003; Gutierrez & Sobel, 2011; Hollins & Guzman, 2005; Klingner et al., 2005; Milner, 2010; Sobel & Gutierrez, 2009; Taylor & Sobel, 2011). The realities of the U.S. trend of over 86% of the current teaching force being Caucasian, primarily of the middle-class and 75% female (Darling-Hammond, French, & Garcia-Lopez, 2002; National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2010) combined with lingering teacher shortages in urban and high poverty districts (Clewell, & Villegas, 2001) and in special education fields (Frey, 2009) must be addressed. It is crucial that unique and responsible approaches to revising teacher education programs be developed – especially since many are haphazardly making changes to include social justice and culturally responsive pedagogy as very foundational principles.

There are multiple indicators of successful culturally responsive practices supported in the research. The work on culturally responsive pedagogy includes the two broad categories of beliefs and values of teachers and characteristics of culturally responsive teaching practices (Garcia, Arias, Harris-Murri, & Serna, 2010). Many researchers acknowledge that teacher preparation programs have not adequately prepared teachers to work with diverse students (e.g., Blanchett, 2006; Ford, 2004;

Table 1

*Focus Group Participants*

Focus Groups (n = 8)	Participants (n = 40)
Teachers 3 years post-graduation: 5 from our program, 4 from other licensure programs	9
Partner school personnel	16
Teacher candidates, currently in the final course of our program	15

Gay, 2010a; Gay, 2010b; Irvine & York, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 2002; Sleeter, 2001). Teachers, policymakers, and the public rely on professional organizations for direction and resources. Leading professional organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children (2014) call for the development of programs that promote educational practices that appropriately identify students who are culturally and linguistically diverse for special education services; assessment practices that accurately reflect cultural influences; education services that provide effective interventions for students from diverse cultures; and professional development to improve the cultural responsiveness of all educators.

As we began our process of redesigning an integrated general and special teacher education program to prepare candidates to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students, we engaged a series of focus groups with current candidates, recent graduates, and partner school personnel. Just as we teach our teacher candidates the value of gathering data about key components and using those analyses to inform classroom change, we sought to assess stakeholder perceptions to guide our program redesign efforts. In this article, we describe the results of an investigation that examined participants' understandings in an effort to inform needed redesign initiatives. Data presented lay out the gaps in the understanding of participants along a framework of necessary skills for teachers working in urban and diverse communities: socio-cultural, affirmative attitudes, collaboration skills, and diversity pedagogy. Finally, we share changes made to our teacher education program design as a result of the findings.

## Method

### *Setting the Context*

The mission of our School of Education (an Urban serving University in the Western United States) is "Leadership for equity through learning, research, and

professional practice in urban and diverse communities." The integrated general and special education teacher preparation program embraces that commitment to equity in urban and diverse communities as well as a commitment to strong collaborative partnerships with K-12 schools and districts in the preparation of our candidates and ongoing work of school renewal (Goodlad, 1998). These commitments have resulted in the establishment of a thriving network of 30 professional development schools (PDSs) across six diverse metropolitan school districts (Sobel, Gutierrez, Zion & Blanchett, 2011). Currently the 383 students in our program have elected a teaching licensure option at the undergraduate, post baccalaureate, or graduate levels in elementary, secondary, and/or special education.

Attempting to address the gaps in teacher preparation described above prompted the authors to write a grant, funded by the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education, to revise and improve the integrated general and special education teacher preparation programs, and to integrate content and learning experiences that support the needs of students who are culturally and/or linguistically diverse.

### *Data Collection*

The team undertook a comprehensive series of research and evaluation activities across the entire general and special education licensure programs, including a series of seventeen focus groups (n=102), with (a) current teacher candidates, (b) recent graduates, (c) school personnel (clinical teachers/principals), (d) culturally and/or linguistically diverse students with disabilities, and (e) families of culturally and/or linguistically diverse students with disabilities.

The focus groups were structured to help us understand the perceptions of participants related to the skill sets needed by teachers to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse students with disabilities. The focus of analysis in this paper included transcriptions from eight focus group participants (see Table 1).

Focus group questions were guided by a conceptual framework with four core areas of expectation about what culturally responsive teachers would know and be able to do- the same conceptual framework guided the work of all project activities (Voltz, Collins, Patterson, & Sims, 2007). The framework focuses on the following four areas as critical skills for teachers working in urban and diverse communities:

- Socio-Cultural—teachers have an awareness of and understanding of the impact of social, cultural, and historical influences on learning and behavior, and ideas of social justice.
- Affirmative Attitude—teachers understand the impact of teacher expectation, developing caring relationships, ongoing reflection, respect for student/family/community cultures, and articulate a commitment to issues of equity on teaching, learning, and behavior.
- Collaborative Skills—teachers have the skills to collaborate and problem solve with students, families, communities, and other professionals, and to understand their own areas of influence within the larger educational and social systems.
- Pedagogy Diversity—teachers have specific knowledge and skills around culturally responsive instruction, accommodation/modification, management, assessment, and curricular strategies and resources.

Focus group participants were asked the following open-ended questions (modified for students and families):

- What unique strengths, needs, and challenges do you see in students receiving special education support who are culturally/linguistically diverse?
- How well prepared were you upon graduation to meet the needs of this population? Identify specific examples that illustrate your view of your preparation including both course work and internship experiences.
- How do the socio-cultural, historical, and linguistic backgrounds of students and families impact teaching, learning, and student behavior?
- How does teacher expectation, respect for students, developing relationships, and engaging in reflection on practice impact student outcomes?
- How do general education and special education teachers collaborate with students, families, communities, and other professionals to meet the needs of diverse populations in your setting?
- What supports are in place to assist your students with identified special education needs or those who are culturally/linguistically diverse?

- What strategies do you know and/or use that are culturally responsive in terms of instruction, management, assessment, and curriculum? What strategies do you know and/or use that are culturally responsive in terms of accommodation/modification, differentiation, grouping, and tiered interventions?
- What recommendations do you have for enhancing the training of teachers in culturally responsive practices?

### *Data Analysis*

Data were reviewed by five members of the project and then categorized into themes that aligned with the conceptual framework (Socio-Cultural, Affirmative Attitude, Collaborative Skills, and Pedagogy Diversity) and focus group questions. Data in each theme were further coded into “rank” categories, as evidenced by a deficit perspective, identification of absence or gaps, an emerging awareness of the issues, and a critical understanding. Using NVIVO software, we coded all focus groups. Constant comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was used to generate the initial set of codes into which the data was sorted by grouping answers to the questions and determining what differences in perspective might exist.

Three members of the project team met, reviewed transcripts, and identified the framework for coding indicated above. The researchers first reviewed each transcription. Lengthy time was spent discussing first what constituted a scoring passage and then negotiating the coding across both the four conceptual framework categories, as well as the depth of awareness, defined as follows:

- a) Deficit Perspective: comments in this category reinforced stereotypes, assumptions of deficits located within children, families, or cultural groups, and a general lack of awareness of difference and privilege. Respondents in this category do not see that they need to learn or change their behavior- the focus is on blaming or changing “those” students or families.
- b) Identification of Gaps: comments in this category indicated that participants knew that they didn’t know something important- often, statements like “I wish I knew more about....” were made. Respondents were able to identify gaps in their own knowledge or skills, or gaps in the opportunities provided by their preparation program or current school setting.
- c) Emerging Awareness: comments in this category indicate that the participants do have an awareness of the knowledge, skills, and

Table 2

*Number and Percentage of Participant Responses*

	Deficit Approach		Identification of gaps		Emerging Awareness		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	Socio Cultural	36	26%	71	52%	27	20%	134
Affirmative Attitude	0		16	13%	102	84%	121	18%
Collaborative Skills	19	9%	98	44%	106	48%	223	33%
Pedagogy Diversity	19	9%	58	28%	128	62%	205	30%
							683	

dispositions necessary to work with students with special needs and from diverse backgrounds in urban environments but are still developing a deep understanding of both evidence-based and practical skills.

- d) Critical Understandings: at this level, we wanted to see deep and critical awareness of the complexity of working with students with special needs and from diverse backgrounds, and especially how social, political, and historical structures constrain the opportunities of marginalized students and families. We also wanted to see a clear framework for connecting with, and challenging the status quo. We did not find any statements that we could code in this category.

Researchers widely acknowledge that interrater reliability is a critical component of content analysis. For example, Neuendorf (2002) argues that in addition to being a necessary step in validating a coding scheme, establishing a high level of reliability also has the practical benefit of allowing the researcher to divide the coding work among many different coders. Rust and Cooil (1994) clarify that interrater reliability is important to marketing researchers in part because "high reliability makes it less likely that bad managerial decisions will result from using the data" (p. 11). Results of our interrater reliability trials (e.g., 1<sup>st</sup> 20 items was at 70%; 2<sup>nd</sup> 19 items was at 88.7%; 3<sup>rd</sup> set of comments at 94%) signified our laborious efforts as we strove to achieve high agreement. Uncovering a rationale for the reasons behind coding decisions that did not match revealed that researcher backgrounds had significant impact on interpretations. In our situation, two of the researches

had strong theoretical backgrounds in socio-cultural foundations, while the third was grounded in pedagogy. With strong expertise in teaching pedagogy, that researcher was inclined to code participant comments within the Pedagogy Diversity category yet given the trust and respect among researchers lengthy and sometimes difficult conversations around issues of participant resistance, fear, and bias were had contributing ultimately to our ability to reach high interrater reliability.

## Findings

Results of the initial coding activity, grouped by the number of responses coded in each category of our coding matrix, with the percentage of the responses that corresponds with the number of total responses for the category is displayed in Table 2. A total of 683 statements were coded into each of the 12 possible coding categories. Following this initial coding, researchers then began to look within each category for explanatory themes. In the following section, data from each of the four conceptual framework categories will be presented, with key themes across the rankings, and excerpts from the transcripts that provide an example of the type of comment coded in that category and ranking.

### *Socio-Cultural*

A total of 134 responses were coded in the socio-cultural category, with a majority (71, or 52%) falling in the identification of gaps category. Twenty-six percent (n=36) of responses in this category constituted a deficit approach to the topic, and 20% (n=27) indicated an

emerging awareness. The socio-cultural category had the highest level of deficit-centered responses of the four competency areas.

Responses ranked as deficit based in this category consisted of comments that indicated a limited understanding of the complexity of difference, and relied instead on stereotyping, such as:

Hispanic males are extremely macho, they are macho men.

The fact that the parents in the community of the students didn't value college, they valued the students you know getting out of high school or leaving high school whenever they did and getting real jobs in the community and helping make money for the family so you know they're teaching and they are really pushing you know what college do you want to go to and doing all of these higher level projects and their kids aren't interested in it because it is not what's important to them and to their parents.

The highest frequency of responses was in the "identification of gaps" category. Participants identified a need to know more about the influence of sociocultural factors, and an awareness of the lack of knowledge and experience they have:

I don't really have anything except my subjective kind of view of well he didn't do it this way and that was weird but I can't really talk about it in a very educated or informative manner, so I would say giving us the tools as teachers to understand...

Responses in the "emerging awareness" category indicated that, at least in some classes or internship experiences, socio-cultural concerns were being identified, and addressed:

And we make a lot of assumptions as teachers from our background knowledge, that these kids are misbehaving when they are acting completely appropriately for their culture, we need to identify that more and stop trying to throw this hammer, I don't want to say oppression down but you know fit into this group, this mold because it's just going to be like beating their heads up against a wall, you know figure it out and move on, find different ways.

#### *Affirmative Attitude*

In this category, a total of 121 responses were logged,

with the majority ( $n=102$ , or 84%) indicating an emerging awareness of both the value of and the skills to exhibit an affirmative attitude. None of the participants exhibited a deficit orientation to affirmative attitude, but 13% ( $n=16$ ) indicated an awareness of gaps. A further look at the statements identified as awareness of gaps showed that 14 of the 16 comments were pointing out gaps that they observed others in their schools exhibiting. Participants could identify the importance of attitude/expectation on relationships with students, families and colleagues:

Well, I think it's very important to be interested... and genuinely so. To be interested in who they are as people and... and... their background and their family's stories and... listen to them, and talk with them, and share... you know, if you have a connection, share your connections and let them share their connections... it's huge in relationship building.

Comments in the "identification of gaps" category focused on other teachers who had negative attitudes, or the toxic climate of the teacher lounge:

You know you go into the staff lounge at lunch time and all they're doing is complaining about the kids and its horrible things that you don't even want to hear that you don't even want to be around especially as a new teacher when you're so optimistic and you come in with all these big ideas.

Responses in the "emerging awareness" category indicated that participants were aware of the importance of this competency, but were worried about how to successfully implement and maintain a positive, reflective, relationship building attitude and expectations:

It kind of builds those relationships at a lot more personal level, when you have a class of 32 kids it is very difficult to develop a relationship with a kid.

#### *Collaborative Skills*

In this category, 223 statements were coded- participants were very eager to discuss collaboration, and had more tangible examples of both good practices and gaps. Forty-eight percent ( $n=106$ ) were in the emerging awareness category, 44% ( $n=98$ ) were in the identification of gaps, and 9% ( $n=19$ ) were in the deficit range. This category also required a further round of

coding, as it emerged that about two-thirds of the comments focused on collaboration with other adults in the school, but a third focused on collaboration with families.

Comments in the deficit section related to parents tended to place the burden of collaboration on parents, while those related to collaborating with other professionals tended to dismiss the need for collaboration:

There isn't much collaboration with parents of children in my class. I mean like with one or two parents maybe they are really involved but the majority of them it's kind of like all too willing to let the school take care of it.

We have ESL and bilingual resource teachers but they are not special ed oriented and that's my area so I don't necessarily need to collaborate with them for that purpose anyway.

Comments that identified gaps tended to focus on structural and resource issues within schools that make collaboration with colleagues and families difficult:

I found that the members on the special ed team are just like any other teacher, you know they are concerned and they are caring and they are willing to do whatever they can to facilitate success for that child but I wouldn't say that our system is as strong as what you are describing where we have frequent opportunities to come to participate in learning about special needs.

Responses in the "emerging awareness" category indicated that participants did see value in collaboration with both families and colleagues, understood the importance of building relationships, and wanted to find ways to make it happen:

I found that you can accomplish a lot more if you are sensitive to cultural background, in terms of how you work with families .....if I can present that in a way that is comfortable for them given their cultural background and therefore their educational background, how they were used to doing things in school when they were that age or what they feel is appropriate or what they feel is successful then I think that's a powerful way of being culturally responsive when I ask parents to work with kids at home, your student is struggling in math could you please you know here's some examples of ways you can work with them and thinking about what would be comfortable for the

parents to do.

### *Pedagogy Diversity*

Within this category 205 comments were tallied, with a majority of 62% ( $n=128$ ) in the emerging awareness category, 28% ( $n=58$ ) in the identification of gaps, and 19 (9%) in the deficit category. Items in the deficit category here focused on strategies to help "those kids" assimilate into dominant culture:

They need to come out of that [ELA class] after a year or so especially in high school, you have only got four years, you don't want to be four years in an ELL environment. You know you have got to kind of get nurtured and get going and then get in the mainstream.

Identification of gaps comments focused on a lack of resources or structural issues such as large class size that impede the ability of teachers to use strategies that they identify as supportive of diverse students, or on a lack of knowledge of strategies they can use:

I see in my own building is that we don't necessarily have the staff or the resources to adequately assess students and that very often we either assume a language issue without sufficient data to support the claim and so students end up year after year in the same situation where they are low achieving and no one is really ever identifying the reason why, there might not be a bilingual person who is qualified to administer special ed assessments and even if they are identified it might be very difficult to get even para professional support or whatever that IEP requires to actually requires to meet those needs.

Responses in the "emerging awareness" category indicated that participants had a clear set of strategies and skills that they could, or did, implement and found to be valuable:

I think differentiation itself is a strategy that's useful for kids who are linguistically or culturally diverse because chances are they're going to have different learning styles or different ways of accessing information or different ways of demonstrating their knowledge and so by providing a spectrum of possibilities we can really reach those kids.

Table 3

*Correlational Relationship between Conceptual Framework, Results and Actions*

Conceptual Framework	Results	Actions Taken
Socio Cultural	High number of deficit and gap oriented comments	Creation of the course, <i>Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in Urban Education</i>
Affirmative Attitude	High emerging awareness, external focus	Creation of the course, <i>Co-developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Communities</i>
Collaborative Skills	High emerging awareness, identification of gaps	Creation of the course, <i>Data Informed Decision Making for Diverse Learners Across Learning Environments</i>
Pedagogy Diversity	High emerging awareness	Creation of the <i>Collaborative Learning Communities</i> structure in partner schools

### Discussion

Demographic imperatives and socially-just values underscore the need for teacher preparation programs to concertedly address needed change. Garcia and colleagues (2010) advocate for teacher preparation communities working together in developing responsive teachers as, “Effective teachers are key to meeting the needs of diverse learners and critical in preparing these learners for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (p. 135). Our effort at listening to our stakeholders and analyzing areas of the framework in which our teacher candidates, graduates, and district partners see themselves as prepared to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs, and also by identifying those areas in which our candidates are not being prepared to meet the needs of these students began with the complex task of making sense of participant comments.

The process of conducting focus groups, coding data, and analyzing data created a space in which we had difficult conversations about the degree to which our coursework and internship experiences were preparing graduates to meet the goals of our mission and vision. This process, in concert with other redesign activities

such as visits from external reviewers and the curriculum review helped to illuminate the need for professional development for faculty and partner school personnel. We knew that to implement curricula and internship experiences that are committed to inclusive and responsive practices, a process for our professional development work would set us on the right track for continued work (Sobel et al., 2011).

It became obvious across all of the project activities that the area we most needed to do work in was the socio-cultural element, as it is the area in which most of the deficit based statement originate. Comments about the challenges inherent in the collaboration and diversity pedagogy portions of the framework indicated a need to work more closely with our partner schools to address those challenges in terms of resources and structures, but also to better equip our teacher candidates to understand the complexity of doing this work in school systems that are constrained by policy, limited resources, and old ways of doing business. Finally, it is clear that we needed to attend to ways of assessing our ongoing progress in these areas.

Information from this analysis has been used to inform the revision of our curriculum and implement

changes in our partner schools. Coding participant responses across a hierarchical ranking (deficit perspective, identification of gaps, emerging awareness, and critical understanding) provided insight into gaps in four critical component areas (socio-cultural, affirmative attitude, collaborative skills, and pedagogy diversity) and has resulted in an array of programmatic changes. Our redesign efforts began with the commitment to a conceptual framework that reflects a deep commitment to inclusive, urban education and social justice. We then utilized the conceptual framework to “backwards map” clear proficiency descriptors in the new teaching roles utilizing our internship rubric, a framework for urban proficiency descriptors, and additional professional accreditation standards and requirements. Next, we collaborated on the redesign of a sequence of core courses and internship experiences that provides for deep, developmental experiences for all teacher candidates throughout their program that closely aligned to the conceptual framework and mapped proficiency descriptors. This included collaborating on the selection of a core set of readings/texts that would be used across the course sequence, as well as the development of syllabi “shells” that include course objectives/proficiency descriptors and readings that allow “lead instructors” to further develop course materials, activities, and content outlines. Explicit attention to course redesign related to our four foundational skill sets has resulted in both course and internship changes as illustrated in Table 3, and by the following examples.

### *Socio-Cultural*

To better support our teacher candidates in deepening their awareness of and understanding of the impact of social, cultural, and historical influences on learning and behavior, and ideas of social justice a new core course required by all general and special education students has been developed. A new course, *Social Foundations and Cultural Diversity in Urban Education*, focuses on the role of cultural diversity in the United States school system and what this means for educators oriented toward social justice. The intention of this course is to have teacher candidates engage in exploring the most salient issues surrounding education in the United States, developing an understanding of the complex relationships between schools and the larger society of which they are a part. This course closely examines important contemporary and historical societal issues such as disability, race, social class, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, politics, and dynamics of power and privilege – examining the ways in which they affect education.

### *Affirmative Attitude*

The purpose of another new course, *Co-developing Culturally Responsive Classroom Communities*, is to increase knowledge about learners whose academic, cognitive, communicative, physical, social, and behavioral needs present unique opportunities to teaching and learning across school environments. We examine the various ways ability gets constructed in schools, as well as how students have been marginalized and misunderstood. Particular attention will be paid to learning differences with regard to teaching and individualizing instruction across learning environments.

### *Collaborative skills*

The course *Data Informed Decision Making for Diverse Learners Across Learning Environments*, addresses a strong knowledge base about learners whose academic, social, and behavioral needs present unique opportunities related to teaching and learning. We believe that understanding the individual needs of each child in our care involves learning and thinking deeply about the influences of national policies, local school issues, and individual student differences that impact our responsibilities as educators. This course investigates data-driven environments of teaching and learning and considerations for utilizing data that impact student growth. Through this course, teacher candidates better understand the various ways ability and disability gets constructed in schools as well as the consequences for students who have been marginalized.

### *Pedagogy Diversity*

In addition to revised on-campus courses, the results from this study have contributed to the emergence of a new school-university partnership model: deepened impact and involvement at district, and school levels with attention to blended PDS clinical and community-based teacher preparation. As a cohort, teacher candidates across our entire partner school network now engage in collaborative learning communities allowing for a space to suspend judgment and to interrogate learning and teaching, examine contradictions, and continually reflect on how their own personal identity interfaces with the development of their identity as an urban educator in working with youth and families from diverse and urban communities.

To further support the development of courses and collaborative learning communities, we have also instituted a program level assessment of intercultural competence that students take at admission and graduation (Hammer, 1999), and made refinements to

our teacher observation protocols to ensure that we are observing and assessing for the elements of the conceptual framework. Those elements are discussed in greater depth in other papers (Sobel, et al., 2011).

### *Remaining Challenges*

Strategically focused redesign efforts aimed at a deepened understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy across our teacher preparation programs have come with both opportunities and pitfalls that point to work ahead. While the integrated general and special education programs have long represented more than appending a second licensure program to an existing one, charging ahead with our new course offerings as we did resulted in aspects of inclusive practices content being only minimally covered. Clearly, while taking advantage of some new design opportunities, we neglected others. Blanton and Pugach (2011) warn that the trend toward dual certification presents significant opportunities for redesigning teacher education programs, but it also presents several pitfalls that might undermine its potential for more than surface level program redesign. After the first offering of courses, it became apparent that our focus on the larger diversity agenda caused special education faculty to experience a sense of disconnect with the delivery of content unique to the special education field. We have now engaged a broader constituency of teacher education faculty in a series of planning sessions to critically examine issues of coherence and meaningful alignment of inclusive practices content across the entire curriculum.

Time and resources must continue to be carefully planned for. In our situation, the process of engaging in this redesign work was supported by grant funds that allowed for retreat days to do the work, and for external experts to provide professional development for our faculty and site based personnel. We appreciate that we had to maximize those supports but view them only as foundational to what we believe has been a truly transformational redesign such that our efforts are sustained far beyond the boundaries of any one funding stream. Committing to collaborate with district and school partners will continue to call upon all of us to be attentive to ensuring that all partners support this vision, and have the tools and resources they need to make it happen.

Revising courses with attention to inclusive, culturally responsive practices is one thing but implementing recommended practices across 30 PDSs takes things to entirely different levels. With a strong professional development school model as an anchor, we knew that addressing the process of program redesign needed to go far beyond syllabi enhancements. Current

efforts have focused on the design and implementation of comprehensive assessment tools comprising a “Body of Evidence” intended to indicate levels of candidate proficiencies across internships. Assessing teacher candidate performance (general and special education) over the course of their licensure program(s) is a highly complex endeavor. In designing the elements of course and internship assessment for the program, we have tried to consider all of these complexities to create a holistic approach that is aligned with our conceptual framework and course work, comes from multiple perspectives, and is authentic and relevant. The next steps in moving forward with our multifaceted assessment process calls for careful attention to all elements of evaluation, as we know we must have confidence in determining the degree to which we are effectively preparing teachers for inclusive, urban schools.

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# Exploring the Landscape of Inclusion: Profiles of Inclusive versus Segregated School Districts in the United States

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## Abstract

*Although inclusive education has been increasing in frequency for students with disabilities in the United States, for many students, the opportunity to be educated with their peers without disabilities continues to be out of reach despite decades of efforts by those promoting the vision of inclusion. This exploratory case study used interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents representing inclusive and segregated school districts in one state to explore potential reasons for differences in districts that had high percentages of students with disabilities in inclusive versus segregated educational settings. The importance of administrative leadership and parent selective mobility were found to influence the extent to which a district implemented inclusive versus segregated placements for students with disabilities.*

Inclusive education in the United States is becoming more common, with states reporting that more students with disabilities are being educated in general education settings each year (Handler, 2003; The Right IDEA, 2011). Furthermore, research over several decades has documented that inclusive education is associated with beneficial outcomes such as comparable or improved cognitive and academic outcomes (Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2012), positive social skills and peer acceptance (Bellini, Peters, Benner, & Hopf, 2007), increased adaptive behavior skills (Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012), and improved self-determination skills (Hughes, Agran, Cosgriff, & Washington, 2013). Internationally, inclusive education has also gained increasing support as a civil rights issue for promoting equitable educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Armstrong, 1999; Cardona, 2009; Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). The United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) Article 24 (<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>) is a further reflection of an increased international focus on the importance of inclusive education for ensuring equal access and opportunities.

Despite growing evidence and international support for inclusive education, researchers have documented a number of factors that often impact the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities. One

key factor that has been identified is the interplay between how school personnel view inclusion and subsequent implementation of inclusive practices (Avraddmidis & Norwich, 2002; Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). For example, Avraddmidis and Norwich noted that teachers' attitudes towards inclusion were found to be strongly influenced by (a) child variables such as the severity and nature of the child's disability, (b) educational variables such as the availability of both physical and personnel support, and (c) teacher variables such as gender, grade level taught, experience, training, beliefs and teaching style, and socio-political views. These attitudes, as well as those of district leadership and school culture, often influence the inclusion of students with disabilities (Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999).

Another body of research has documented the influence of parent and community perceptions of inclusion (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Tissot's (2011) survey of parents in the United Kingdom found that parents' decision to place their child in an inclusive or specialized setting is often fraught with tensions around competing goals and complicated considerations for determining what is best for their child. Elkins, van Kraayenoord, and Jobling (2003) investigated the attitudes of 354 Australian parents of children with disabilities and found that parents were supportive of inclusion if their children were well supported and proper resources were in place

within the educational placement. Similarly, Moreno, Aguilera, and Saldana (2008) found that parent perception of teacher training was an important predictor of parent placement preferences. Lastly, Ajuwon and Oylinade (2008) found two variables with greatest predictive value for parents placing their children with visual impairments in either public schools or residential settings: preferred classroom size and attending school with a sibling. These studies indicate that how parents perceive the ways in which inclusion is implemented influences whether they will support a district's efforts to implement inclusion for students with disabilities.

In the United States, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) has promoted the view of inclusive education by requiring schools to provide educational services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) and to report their progress based on percentages of students receiving educational services in general education classrooms. The LRE concept has continued to create strong debate among educators and researchers, resulting in a lack of consensus on how the LRE should be defined (Hyatt & Filler, 2011). In our experience, translating the policies envisioned in initiatives such as the CRPD and the IDEA can be elusive, even though they can often be passionately articulated in principle. We believe that exploring school and district stories can help to highlight some of the ongoing challenges as we attempt to gain greater understanding of how schools create inclusive schools.

### *Research Questions*

In order to understand how views of the least restrictive environment influenced the provision of inclusive education for students with disabilities, the current study focused on the following research questions:

1. How do respondents in segregated and inclusive districts define the least restrictive environment (LRE) and what it means for inclusion of students with disabilities?
2. How was the LRE implemented in these districts and what factors influenced greater inclusive placements or greater segregated placements?

### **Method**

This exploratory study involved use of the case study method (Yin, 2009) in order to explore participant views of inclusion that distinguished inclusive versus segregated districts. Yin (2009) recommends that examination of a phenomenon using a case study method be based on a theoretical framework that can serve to explain the phenomenon through pattern matching

across cases. The overall design of this investigation was to examine how the phenomenon of inclusive education, or the LRE, is implemented in select school districts. Because there is wide variation in LRE data among states, it can be helpful to examine variability of LRE placements within a single state. Districts within a state would be operating under the same policies, which would eliminate some potential conflicting variables. Consequently, the primary focus of this study was one state: Arizona. This article is based on data that was collected during the 2007-2008 school year. This time period marked the mid-point when districts in the state were attempting to meet the state's 2010 target for LRE placements as defined in the Arizona FFY 2005-2010 State Performance Plan for Special Education (Arizona Department of Education, 2005). Such performance plans were mandated by the U.S. Department of Education as part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

### *Sample Selection*

Our experience working with districts led us to note that an important district feature influencing placement in inclusive versus segregated settings is often district size. Larger districts appear to have lower percentages of students with disabilities spending most of their day in general education settings. For this reason, sample selection involved purposive sampling for maximum variation (Patton, 2002), first based on district size, and secondly, on pattern of LRE placements.

District-level placement data for 2007 were collected from the Arizona Department of Education. Districts were grouped according to large (at least 2,000 students with Individualized Education Plans, (IEPs)), mid-sized (between 900-1,999 students with IEPs), small (between 300-899 students with IEPs), and tiny (less than 300 students with IEPs). Within each of these groupings, one district was selected from each group according to high percentages of students receiving special education services in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day and low percentages of students receiving special education services in general education settings for less than 40% of the school day (these districts were coded as "inclusive"). One district was selected from each group according to low percentages of students receiving special education services in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day and high percentages of students receiving special education services in general education settings for less than 40% of the school day (these districts were coded as "segregated"). The purpose was to include districts that were similar in size, but different in LRE patterns so that differences could be explored. The final sample included

three district dyads: one for large, one for mid-sized, and one for small districts.

### *Data Sources*

Data collection involved collecting information from a variety of data sources. Data from diverse sources allowed for triangulation of data in order to construct district profiles from a variety of perspectives (Jupp, 2006). When examining concepts such as inclusion, such triangulation can be important for making sense of how different individuals interpret its meaning.

*Focused Interviews.* The first author conducted initial interviews with each district's special education director either in person or by phone. School personnel and parents were interviewed based on recommendations of the district special education director. The interview questions followed a focused interview format (Seidman, 1991) and are included in Appendix A and B. If the district special education director mentioned any consultants and university faculty with whom they collaborated regarding implementation of the LRE, those consultants and university faculty were also interviewed. Interviews with school personnel and parents were either completed by phone or during the school site visit. Personnel included special and general education teachers and paraprofessionals.

As the interviews were conducted, notes were taken for each of the interview questions. As much as possible, verbatim quotes were documented. Data from each interview were inserted into an excel file to create a data display for each interview question for each district. These data were then used to construct narrative district profiles.

*Site Visits.* The purpose of the site visits was to provide additional information to elaborate upon the information gathered during the interviews with school principals and special education directors. School site visits were arranged with the special education directors and completed by the first author. For the larger districts the site visits spanned two days; for the smaller districts the site visits were completed within one day. The site visits were an opportunity to observe how each site implemented the LRE and to talk informally with school personnel and parents. Some of these participants were also asked to complete a semi-structured interview. Following each site visit, a summary of main points related to the LRE was noted in jotted field notes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Data Analysis*

A district profile was constructed for each district that included interviews and site visit field notes. Data

analysis involved the following steps as outlined by Patton (2002): 1) Assemble raw case data (e.g., interviews, field notes); 2) Construct a case record through condensation of raw data (e.g., organizing, classifying, and editing); and 3) Develop the case study narrative through "a holistic portrayal" (p. 388). These steps resulted in the construction of individual "profiles" (Seidman, 1991) for each participating district. These profiles were examined for common themes and comparisons for each district dyad.

## **Results**

In this section, we present findings for each district dyad for the purpose of contrasting inclusive and segregated districts. Themes for each dyad are presented as a way to organize the primary distinctions between the inclusive and the segregated districts.

### *Large District Dyad: New Directions versus Traditional Views of Special Education Services*

At the time of this study, the large inclusive district had 57.5% of its special education students in inclusive placement and 10.6% in segregated placements. The large segregated district had 35.1% in inclusive placements and 28.9% in segregated placements. Although these two districts were located right next to each other, implementation of special education services were very different. The inclusive district could be characterized as undergoing a dramatic change, while the segregated district could be characterized as maintaining its long-standing traditional model.

The large inclusive district was in its third year of change to their special education service delivery, with a primary goal being to return students to their neighborhood schools in an effort to implement a district-wide inclusive model. This change was initiated by a new special education director who had proposed a five-year plan that would involve a greater number of students with disabilities attending general education classes. In contrast, the large segregated district appeared to be maintaining its traditional model of special education service delivery.

There were significant differences in how the two special education directors described the LRE and how it influenced their view of inclusion for students with disabilities. For the special education director of the inclusive district, the LRE was defined as when students start in the general education classroom, "no ifs, ands, or buts," and are then pulled out as needed. In other words, students would "earn their way up the continuum" towards more intensive services as needed. The special education director of the segregated district noted that

the IDEA does not mandate inclusion, and if it did, “we would be required to provide an individualized inclusion program (IIP), not an IEP [Individualized Education Program].” Furthermore, if the federal government really wanted inclusion, they would be more explicit in this mandate. Instead, the law requires a “continuum of placements.” A principal from this same district stressed the importance of focusing on the needs of the individual student: “we’re going to make a program to fit the student.” Consequently, according to this principal, the LRE may not be best for a student because the student may need more support and the general education setting may not be beneficial.

School personnel also tended to share the view of the special education directors. For example, one of the inclusive district’s “intervention specialists” defined the LRE as meaning “students would be placed in the environment as close to the general education population as if they did not have a disability.” This would mean that the student would start in the general education setting, and then be pulled back depending on the student’s needs. School personnel mentioned that the definition of LRE came from the special education director who was described as speaking passionately about this move towards an inclusive district model.

In the large inclusive district, moving students to their neighborhood schools resulted in a movement away from center-based (or “cluster”) programs where students would be bused to different schools depending on a disability-specific program. Instead, schools were now expected to provide services to a wide range of students. One special education department chair noted, “We used to have tons of parents coming to see a ‘program.’” However, “we don’t have programs anymore.” Instead, special education services were to be determined through a process whereby necessary supports and services for each student would be identified. Special education services were to be viewed as a “broad spectrum of services.” The new model included use of “learning centers” where students would receive small group instruction as needed as opposed to spending most of the day in a self-contained special education classroom.

In contrast, the large segregated district was organized around a variety of center-based or “cluster” programs. For example, students with moderate intellectual disabilities, autism, or emotional/behavioral disorders typically go to a school where a program designed for this student population is located. However, the special education director also noted that two-thirds of the students with IEPs attend their home schools. One teacher indicated that her program focuses on “functional skills” which uses a combination of general education materials and specialized materials. These

programs were described as involving some degree of mainstreaming, where students with disabilities might go to a general education class for an activity or class period, or students without disabilities might go to the special education classroom (referred to as “reverse mainstreaming”). Students with more high incidence (or mild) disabilities such as learning disabilities typically attend their neighborhood school where there are either self-contained or resource programs depending on the social and academic skills of the student. For example, whether the “student can handle the academics.”

One of the schools in the segregated district has a “side-by-side” program, where two special education classes per grade level are connected to two general education classrooms of the same grade level. Students in the two special education classes for each grade level are assigned based on their “cognitive functioning level.” The goal of the side-by-side programs was to facilitate mainstreaming, and the principal stated that all students in the “higher cognitive level” classroom go to science and social studies in general education, and students in the “lower cognitive level” will go to physical education (PE) in general education. However, observations revealed that mainstreaming is rarely done except in the kindergarten and first grades. Instead, the special education teacher stated that her students visit the general education counterpart for approximately ninety minutes a week, for special activities. The principal also noted several advantages of this type of center-based program: benefits for teachers to do professional development and opportunities for staff to meet and talk with other professionals. She noted that as a result, there was very low teacher turnover.

Each of these large districts faced unique challenges. The inclusive district faced teacher turnover issues and families leaving the district, while the segregated district faced an increasing demand for special segregated programs. As one principal in the segregated district noted, their district tends to have more self-contained, or segregated programs, and that it is a “real Catch-22,” or dilemma, because the district “is so well-known for services so people move into the district for the program, so this could result in a disproportionate” number of students with IEPs. One administrator stated that because of their reputation for having specialized programs, parents are attracted to their district. She summarized this with the phrase, “build it and they will come.” In fact, the parents who were interviewed stated that they appreciated the specialized programs. The special education director further noted that there are challenges to providing center-based programs, such as increased transportation costs and issues with schools not meeting adequate yearly progress testing targets (AYP) as required by the state. Nevertheless, the director

stated parents appear to be satisfied because overall, complaints by parents are fairly low compared to the size of the district.

Both special education directors noted that the shift in service delivery in the inclusive district resulted in some special education teachers leaving to work in the segregated district. And, some special educators in the inclusive district were uncomfortable with being told that they no longer had a special education classroom (the special education director stated that during the first year of the district changes, close to 49% of the special education teachers left). Special educators were also expected to co-teach with general education teachers, which was a “huge shift.” A high school special educator who is a proponent of inclusion and had specifically applied to this district because of the focus on inclusion, spoke about how implementing an inclusive program has been challenging and that not all personnel were on the same page regarding what it would look like despite everyone talking about it in a similar way. Principals mentioned that the most significant challenge continues to be changing the mindset of teachers along with the need for training and resources to support the changes the district is undergoing. In the third year of the district changes, the special education director noted that they now have a waiting list for hiring special education teachers.

Both special education directors mentioned how the changes in the inclusive district also influenced parents. As one school special education department chair from the inclusive district noted, some parents were opposed to the changes because of “possible negative experiences, such as students being teased, being left in the back of the classroom, and losing their special connection with the special education teacher.” The special education director of the inclusive district also noted that they have the most complaints from parents in the state. There are still some parents wanting a self-contained program, especially parents of students with autism and emotional/behavioral disorders. He also expressed that there has been no leadership from the state level and most special education directors do not want to take on the degree of change that he has initiated.

#### *Mid-sized District Dyad: Culture of Inclusion versus Incremental Inclusion*

At the time of this study, the mid-sized inclusive district had 77.4% of its special education students in inclusive placements and 5.2% in segregated placements. The mid-sized segregated district had 41.3% in inclusive placements and 16.9% segregated placements. The inclusive district could be characterized

as maintaining a traditional practice of inclusion, while the segregated district could be characterized as beginning an effort towards increasing inclusive placements.

The inclusive district has a long-standing reputation for being one of the most inclusive districts in the state. The special education director has been with the district since 1989 when she was hired as a teacher. She has been the special education director for the past five years. The special education director of the segregated district had been in her current position for 29 years and expressed that she had always wanted “to do inclusion.”

As with the previous district dyad, these special education directors spoke about the meaning of the LRE and how it related to inclusion in different ways. The special education director for the inclusive district stated that “inclusion is a verb, not a noun.” She further noted that her district has “always been an inclusive district.” A principal at one of the schools stated that the LRE is “placing kids where they can maximize their ability to learn.” He also noted that this can be difficult in the mainstream, and it is important to look at every individual student. Similar to the director of special education, this principal noted that inclusion is “always the way we have done things,” and “there are no self-contained classrooms at this school.” When asked about the meaning of the LRE, the special education director for the segregated district mentioned the importance of students who take the alternate assessment meeting the standards and that this would mean they “need instruction in a special education classroom.” However, she also believed that these same students could participate for social purposes in extracurricular and lunch activities. Similar to the large segregated district, the mid-sized segregated district maintained specialized programs: one school had a program for students with autism, and one school had a self-contained class for students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities and a self-contained class for students with emotional/behavioral disorders.

The segregated district appeared to be on the verge of implementing some changes in order to increase LRE placement percentages. The special education director conveyed that at a recent statewide conference, their district data was reviewed and they were below state benchmarks for inclusive placements. They have since taken action on this, especially for students with high incidence disabilities who were too often being pulled out of general education. The special education director noted that research indicates that students with learning disabilities in general education classes perform better than those in resource rooms. She stressed that special education is a “support, not a place.” Through a response to intervention (RTI) program, the goal of the district is

to have every student remain in the core general curriculum. To facilitate this process, she had met with district personnel from a nearby district and the district had implemented the use of instructional coaches to facilitate monthly meetings and speakers. However, for students with significant disabilities, she felt there would continue to be a need for special self-contained programs.

The inclusive district appeared to have developed a culture of inclusion over time. For example, one of the principals stated that they have maintained their inclusive philosophy through their hiring process: “our philosophy is that we believe we don’t hire teachers/instructors; we hire people. We can’t train character. We have lengthy, lengthy interviews. And, we hire subs if necessary.” He stressed that the person who is eventually hired must share their philosophy. Many of the graduates from a nearby university come to work for this district because the university program also has an emphasis on inclusive practices. The university faculty member, as well as the faculty member who began working with this district when it began its inclusion model back in the 1990’s, noted that this district has come a long way and now has a cadre of teachers who have been trained on and understand how to implement inclusion for students with disabilities.

The special education director for the inclusive district noted that parent support for their inclusion model has been very strong. This view was echoed by a parent who noted that she had moved to the district because she specifically sought a school that provided an inclusion program for her daughter because she feared that her child would pick up on the behaviors of other students if she was placed in a self-contained setting with other students who had behavioral issues.

#### *Small District Dyad: Dismantling versus Maintaining Special Separate Programs*

At the time of this study, the small inclusive district had 88.6% of its special education students in inclusive placements and 3.1% in segregated placements. The small segregated district had 45.6% in inclusive placements and 18.7% in segregated placements. The inclusive district could be characterized as undergoing dramatic changes, while the segregated district could be characterized as maintaining its traditional model.

As with the previous district dyads, there were differences in how the special education administrators spoke about the meaning of the LRE and inclusion. When asked about the meaning of the LRE, the former superintendent of the inclusive district noted that their district is progressive. They pushed for “full inclusion, whereas, other districts do this in degrees.” She noted

that it was important to push this first, and then look at individuals, resources and other options that are needed to make it work. This view of the LRE was similar to the view of a special education teacher who stated that her view of the LRE means “the provision of a fully inclusive program for all students.” The current special education director was in her first year at this inclusive district and mentioned that the state department program monitor had told her that the LRE is not always the general education setting. She had been told to look at the continuum of services, such as resource rooms, indicating that the LRE is a resource room first followed by slowly integrating students, which was in conflict with how things were being done in this district. This view of the LRE was similar to views shared by personnel from the segregated district. One teacher described the LRE as being “the place where it’s closest to the regular ed[ucation] placement that provides the support needed by the student...[t]he environment in which they [students] can function.” She went on to elaborate that in some situations, the LRE could be a self-contained setting, depending on the needs of the student. Another teacher noted that the LRE needs to be defined as the “appropriate” setting to meet the student’s needs. A principal stated this same belief regarding the LRE: “that the students have the opportunity to work with the general education population as much as possible.”

The small inclusive district was in “transition” with a new administrative group. The former superintendent had retired the previous year and the former special education director had been on a consulting contract for two years. At the time of this study, there was a new superintendent and a new special education director. Moreover, this district had experienced a significant change to their special education program over the past several years. Two years before this study, a segregated school was closed in order to have students attend the school for their grade level. This self-contained school had been the placement for students with moderate to severe disabilities, and most students attended this school from elementary school through age twenty-two. As the previous superintendent and special education director noted, the school was a “big babysitting center” and “there was not a lot of academics, children were sitting in front of videos.” Furthermore, there were questions about whether these students had been diagnosed properly.

Through the initiation of the superintendent and interim special education director, one of the special education teachers was recruited to facilitate the closing of the segregated campus. This special education teacher was a graduate student at a nearby university that supported inclusive practices and had been teaching in

this district for six years. As the special education teacher noted, “[name of special education director] cleared the way as I drove the truck.” The segregated school had been a part of the community for twenty years and the process of “dismantling” it was challenging.

When the segregated school was closed, all of those students were “folded into existing caseloads . . . meaning all student are now more than 80% of the time in general education settings.” As the previous special education director noted, the philosophy of the LRE has changed since the closing of the segregated school to one in which “slowly, but surely, children belong at their home school with services brought to their school.” The only self-contained classroom in the district was at the high school.

Similar to the large and mid-sized segregated districts, the small segregated district provided special programs at specific campuses. For example, the special education director noted that there is a program for students with autism at one school. The new teacher who teaches in a resource program described that most of her students receive services under the disability categories of Learning Disability and Other Health Impairments (mostly Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder). She said that she usually works with her students for reading, writing, and math. None of her students remain in the resource room for the whole day, and most of the students receive instruction in the resource room for two hours per day. Students requiring a full-time resource room setting go to a different school.

## Discussion

Findings from these Arizona school districts reflect that there remains no unified view of LRE as related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings. However, one striking similarity across interviewees was the way in which they talked about the LRE. They all emphasized the importance of the LRE being “individualized” and “appropriate.” Yet, individuals in segregated districts tended to focus more on the ability of the students for determining placement options while those in inclusive districts tended to focus more on determining how to provide supports in the general education setting. For example, school personnel in inclusive districts tended to emphasize that students would “move up the continuum” towards more restrictive settings if the general education setting was unable to meet the student’s needs; whereas school personnel in segregated districts tended to emphasize that students would “move down the continuum” towards more inclusive settings as the student acquired more skills. Yet, the LRE provision in the IDEA states a

clear preference for students with disabilities being educated in general education settings with removal from that setting only when the needs of that student cannot be satisfactorily met in the general education setting. This provision actually reflects more closely the view of the LRE shared by the interviewees from the inclusive districts.

According to the most recent placement data, all the districts in this study had increased their inclusive placements since 2008, except for the large segregated district, which went from 35.1% to 34.5% in inclusive placements. The small and mid-sized segregated districts increased their inclusive placements by 8.9% and 13.7%, respectively. However, their overall inclusive placements remained substantially lower than their counterpart inclusive districts by approximately 30-40%. This would indicate that over time, districts tended to remain either inclusive or segregated despite the state’s plans to increase inclusive placements.

*The Role of District Leadership.* Most interviewees noted the importance of district leadership in determining the meaning of the LRE and how it is implemented in schools. This is consistent with others who have noted the important impact district and school leaders play in improving outcomes for students receiving special education services (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). In particular, how the special education director interpreted the policy and the philosophy of the district was of significance. These interpretations and philosophies were informed by the special education director’s past experiences. For example, the special education directors from segregated school districts mentioned their past experiences with creating special programs, such as an “autism program.” These efforts were mentioned as successes and as favorable indicators of support for special education. On the other hand, special education directors from the inclusive districts had either had previous experiences with inclusion or assumed leadership in a district that had already been implementing inclusion for some time. These special education directors shared a strong preference for inclusion and were willing to address opposition in order to make inclusion a reality rather than retreating from resistance from parents and teachers. These views and experiences are important because directors of special education have been found instrumental in “providing and selling a vision” of inclusion while responding to resistance (Mayrowetz, & Weinstein, 1999, p. 431).

District leadership to support inclusion was also depicted in their hiring practices. For example, administrators with an inclusive orientation tended to hire teachers who shared this philosophy. Conversely, administrators with preferences for and pride in creating

special programs tended to hire teachers who had the skills needed to build these special programs. Interestingly, teachers also tended to relocate to districts that shared their preferences for either an inclusive or more segregated program in which to work.

*Presence of Specialized Programs.* A notable difference between the inclusive and segregated districts was the presence of specialized programs. The segregated districts tended to describe “center-based” programs: programs that are located throughout the district to serve specific populations of students. For example, one principal mentioned that students with more severe disabilities would attend a different school and that one of the schools had a program for students with autism. There was also a different school that had a program for children with emotional/behavioral disorders. Parents and personnel from districts with these types of segregated programs appeared to associate them as indicators of a strong special education program. Perhaps this notion that separate settings are more specialized is not surprising, given the historical presumption that separate settings provide highly specialized instruction and care (Winzer, 2007). While these assumptions persist, they have failed to find support in empirical research. For example, Causton-Theoharis and colleagues (2011) found that separate special education programs failed to deliver on their promises of delivering specialized instruction, behavioral supports, and distraction-free learning environments.

*The Influence of Parents.* School personnel in the large districts identified the role of parents in determining whether a student would be placed in a more inclusive or a more segregated program. They noted that parents who are educated about the law, who are actively involved, and who will advocate for a specific type of placement can come from “both ends” of the LRE spectrum. For example, there has been an increased demand for self-contained programs from parents of students with autism. Additionally, parents who had the means tended to move into districts that provided the type of program placement that matched their preferences. However, in both the mid-sized and small district dyads, parental views were not mentioned. It is possible that in smaller districts that the views of district leadership have a stronger influence than parent preferences for inclusive versus segregated placements.

### *Implications*

As highlighted in the results, issues such as parent selective mobility, district’s historical reputation, district leadership, and lack of pressure from the state may play a role in whether a district chooses to implement

inclusion. Other issues may include a broader tension between establishing a program versus creating a set of services. In other words, districts that invest in special segregated programs may be less able to provide services in the LRE, making programs overall less flexible in meeting the needs of a broader range of student placements. Further, once programs are built, there is likely a pressure from parents and teachers to continue those programs, making it difficult to dismantle these programs should a district attempt to move towards greater inclusion of students with disabilities. On the other hand, if a district does not provide segregated programs and parents desire one, they might relocate to a district that has these types of programs. It would appear that parent perceptions in combination with district leadership play a central role in whether a district implements greater inclusion or greater segregation. Understanding how perceptions of district leadership and parents interact is an important area for future investigation. Furthermore, we believe that policymakers pushing for more inclusion of students with disabilities into general education settings will need to have greater understanding of the views and experiences of special education directors and district leadership in order to determine what types of challenges they are willing to undertake.

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## *Appendix A*

### *District Personnel Interview Questions*

1. Please describe your connection to this school and district (your role, how long have you been connected with this school and/or district).
  - a. Have you had any experiences with other schools within this district? If so, please describe.
  - b. Have you had any experiences with other districts in Arizona? If so, please describe.
  - c. Have you had any experiences with schools/districts in other states? If so, please describe.
2. Federal and state policies related to the educational placement of students who receive special education services have used the term “least restrictive environment.” In your view, what does this term mean? In what ways does your school implement this policy? Is this the same or different from other schools in your district? Is this the same or different from other districts in the state?
3. In your opinion, what would you say are your district’s and/or school’s policies related to educational placement of students who have moderate to severe disabilities? What seems to be working well? What would you like to see done differently?
4. Please describe your experiences related to students with moderate to severe disabilities receiving their education in general education settings? (If no experiences, please describe your views on having students with moderate to severe disabilities receiving their education in general education settings.)
5. If federal and/or state policies were to require that all students with disabilities receive their educational services in general education settings for at least 80% of the school day, what do you believe would be the greatest challenges for your district? What about your district would make this less difficult?
6. As you may know, educational placement varies from district to district. For example, some districts have very high numbers of students who spend most of their day in general education classrooms, while others have very low numbers of students. In your opinion, what do you believe accounts for these differences?
7. In your opinion, would you like to see greater numbers of students with disabilities in general education settings, or would you like to see fewer numbers of students with disabilities in general education settings?

## *Appendix B*

### *Parent Interview Questions*

1. Please describe your connection to this school (role, how long have you been connected with this school).
2. Have you had any experiences with other schools within this district? If so, please describe.
3. Have you had any experiences with other districts in Arizona? If so, please describe.
4. How would you describe the IDEA policy regarding the least restrictive environment? What does it mean to you?
5. In what ways does your school implement this policy? Is this the same or different from other schools in your district? Is this the same or different from other schools in the state?
6. How do you feel about the provision of the LRE for children who have more significant disabilities? How about for those who have more mild disabilities?
7. Are you satisfied with how things are regarding placements in your school? In your district?
8. As you know, schools and districts vary as far as how they provide the LRE for students with disabilities. For example, some districts have very high numbers of students who spend most of their day in general education classrooms, while others have very low numbers of students. Why do you think this is the case?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share about special education services within your school or your district?

# Field Experiences and Perceptions of Inclusion: Varying Contexts, Structures, and Interpretations

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## Abstract

*During the final semester of a student teaching program, 87 pre-service teachers in a dual certification (special education and elementary education) program completed a research based 22-item Perceptions of Inclusion Survey. In addition, five Special Education Directors for the six districts in which students were placed participated in individual interviews. Teacher candidates experienced a range of contexts both within and across districts. Descriptive categories of Excelling, Promising, and Developing Inclusion Practices emerged for the districts given teacher candidates' responses and administrator interviews. Results indicated the need for teacher educators to build fidelity into teacher education programs as they prepare individuals for a variety of contemporary school contexts. Findings also revealed the probable dissonance between philosophical perspectives on inclusion and inclusion as operationalized in schools, both from the perspectives of teacher candidates as well as at school district levels.*

Current United States legislative mandates related to the education of individuals with disabilities have resulted in more inclusive and diverse classrooms that must be staffed by special and general educators who are able to demonstrate competency and expertise immediately upon completion of their initial teacher education program (Berry, 2010; Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009; Griffin, Kilgore, Winn & Otis-Wilborn, 2009; Washburn-Moses, 2009). Preparing teachers for these changing contexts, known more specifically as inclusion, appears to be a concern not only in the United States, but also in schools, classrooms, and teacher preparation programs internationally (Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Winter, 2006). A significant complicating factor related to the study of this aspect of teacher preparation is the varying definitions and interpretations of the often elusive concept of inclusion (Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, & Vallecorsa, 2008; Donnelly & Watkins, 2011; Florian, 2008; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Kilanowski-Press, Foote, & Rinaldo, 2010; Snyder, Garriot, & Aylor, 2001). Indeed, many argue that a lack of clearly articulated policies, pre-service teachers' inadequate knowledge of inclusion, and inconsistencies across teacher preparation programs may pose barriers to the successful creation of inclusive settings in which the academic needs of all students are

met (Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, & Vallecorsa, 2008; Kearney, 2011; Mueller & Hindin, 2011; Titone, 2005).

Idol (2006) noted inclusion could entail "a student with special learning and/or behavioral needs...educated full time in the general education classroom" (p. 77). In addition, United States federal legislation describes inclusion as conditions under which all children are educated in the school or classroom they would otherwise attend if not identified as an individual with a disability (Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004). Prior research has focused on general and special educators' dispositions and attitudes towards the general concept of inclusion; this link between teacher dispositions and willingness to embrace inclusion is certainly acknowledged based on scholarly work conducted on this aspect of teacher development (Berry, 2010; Carbona, 2009; McHatton & McCray, 2007; Shade & Stewart, 2001; Spandagou, Evans, & Little, 2008). However, the need for schools to staff classrooms with teachers who are immediately and effectively able to meet the needs of diverse learners moves our research focus to pre-service teachers' acquired knowledge of inclusion and their subsequent ability to transfer that knowledge to their concurrent teacher preparation experiences in elementary and secondary classrooms. In addition, the alignment of teacher education with current practices in the field is

certainly a necessary aspect of ongoing initial teacher education program evaluation (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Idol, 2006; Winters, 2006).

A theoretical framework related to the constructivist concept of Transformative Learning guided the research design in the current study (Mezirow, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Transformative Learning describes an adult learner's growth as the ability to apply and adapt acquired knowledge within new contexts. In Transformative Learning interaction and new knowledge are constructed via experience and reflection. The field of teacher education seeks to prepare new teachers who are able to recognize, reflect upon, and effectively put into practice their university classroom learning within a variety of contexts. Graduating new teachers that demonstrate this ability has resulted in an emerging focus on stronger clinical or field experiences that are more intimately linked with university coursework expectations thus diminishing the disconnect between university campus-based coursework and local school-based components of teacher education programs (Zeichner, 2010). The research reported in this article focuses on pre-service teachers' ability to recognize inclusion in practice.

In reviewing recent published scholarly research, a few studies provide a background related to pre-service teachers' knowledge of inclusion and their lived experiences regarding inclusion in practice. Hodkinson (2005; 2006) found when surveying 70 general education teachers in their final year of training, that participants were able to define inclusion but had a 'shallow' understanding of how inclusion was actually operationalized and applied in educational settings. Follow-up data collected a year later from a small percentage of the same individuals confirmed that their concepts of inclusion had indeed narrowed and become more clearly defined in terms of actual practice. They were able to acknowledge that school systems provided negligible to extensive levels of support and continuing professional development in assisting teachers in educating students with special education needs (Hodkinson, 2006).

Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, and Rouse (2007) sought empirical evidence that would enhance teacher preparation programs for inclusive classrooms. They did so by assessing the knowledge and practice of 53 pre-service general and special education teachers participating in a value-added section of a required course in their teacher education program. Results indicated significant growth differences in the assessment of these participants' content knowledge pre and post-test as well as in comparison to groups completing the same course minus the addition of a six hour clinical experience aimed at application of course

content. Interestingly, no differences between the experimental and control groups were detected in attitudinal measures. However, skills related to the application of knowledge, for instance the ability to identify instructional accommodations, appeared stronger in the 53 participants completing the additional hours in classroom settings (Van Laarhoven et al., 2007).

Although the survey by Conderman and Johnston-Rodriguez (2009) collected a broad spectrum of information from 46 recent special and general education graduates, findings from one particular open-ended item provided insights on the effectiveness of strong, well-structured field experiences in teacher preparation programs. When asked to note the most 'useful aspect from their teacher preparation program regarding students with disabilities', a majority of responses from both special and general educators noted that having hands-on practical knowledge and experience was most useful. Also important to note, however, is that additional common themes emerged including the students' ability to use information from coursework in the field, and their recognition of methods, strategies, and student characteristics relevant to unique learners (Conderman & Johnston-Rodriguez, 2009).

The most recent work of Gehrke and Cocchiarella (2013) supports findings of this current study. Gehrke and Cocchiarella attempted to assess and align teacher preparation in terms of inclusion knowledge. One hundred twenty-five pre-service general and special education teachers completed a survey targeting when and how they had acquired their knowledge of inclusion. Findings indicated that coursework provided adequate definitions of inclusion but a majority of respondents were not able to identify or had not experienced inclusion in practice. This was consistent across all groups, even special education majors, and raised concerns about students' ability to transfer their university learning to elementary and secondary classrooms along with concerns about the settings in which they completed field experience hours (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013). Consequently, the research design, data collection and analysis described in this article are the result of a more extensive examination of: (1) how inclusion is presented in university coursework, (2) how students experience inclusion in general and special education classrooms during student teaching, and (3) how cooperating school districts interpret and implement inclusion. This current study sought to answer the following research question: How do local school districts' goals and supports for inclusion align with pre-service teachers' lived experience of preparation for and practice of inclusion in the field?

## Method

Participants were 85 pre-service teachers enrolled in the student teaching phase of the inaugural year of a dual certification (special education and elementary education) teacher preparation program. Relevant literature reviewed included pre-service teachers with singular rather than dual majors (Conderman & Johnson-Rodriguez, 2009; Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2012; Van Laarhoven et al., 2007), the emphasis for this study remained on the connection between university course content and local district practices with respect to inclusion. In this teacher preparation model, pre-service teachers entered student teaching during the third semester of their four semesters of professional teacher preparation and continued for 32 weeks through their fourth semester; 16 consecutive weeks of student teaching were supervised by a special education teacher and 16 weeks by an elementary education teacher. Cohorts of students were placed in six different public school districts all within a large urban/suburban area of the Southwestern United States. All students remained in the same district, but not necessarily the same school building, across both semesters of this model labelled Senior Year Residency. Districts referred to as Districts 2, 3, 4, and 6 were large PK-12 districts in suburban communities adjacent to the urban area (enrollment ranging from 26,000 to 39,000 students) and Districts 1 and 5 were PK-8 districts in the urban area (enrollment of 7,000-10,000 students). Coursework for this degree was completed both prior to and concurrently during the two semesters of student teaching. Participants were presented with the written survey two months prior to the completion of their student teaching experiences and district special education directors were interviewed in the same time frame. In each public school district, roles and responsibilities of a special education director include oversight of finances, program development, implementation of services, and personnel supervision of all special education teachers and students in the district.

Data collection in this mixed method study consisted of individual surveys presented to and completed by pre-service teachers in five of six cohorts as well as individual interviews with five of six special education directors affiliated with the model. Surveys were distributed to participants in face-to-face settings via site coordinators at each host district. A site coordinator is a university employee who is assigned to be within a school district to oversee teacher candidate's student teaching evaluations. Additionally, site coordinators consult and coordinate with course instructors for university courses so that content aligns with student teachers' experiences in elementary and secondary classrooms. Teacher candidates were given 15 – 20

minutes of class time to complete the survey. Surveys were collected by the site coordinator and placed in a manila envelope that had the district number on it. Special education director interviews were conducted by the research team and recorded in 30 – 40 minute structured interviews. Interviews were transcribed word for word for use in data analysis.

One cohort's surveys were not returned to the research team and one district's special education director did not consent to an interview. The survey, *Preservice Teachers Perceptions of Inclusion Survey*, is a 22-item survey that included eleven Likert-type scale items, seven items relating to participant demographics, and four open ended questions. The 11 Likert scale items were a composite of three comprehensive teacher surveys (Idol, 2006; McPeck, 2009; Spandagou, Evans, & Little, 2008). Items reflected research-based indicators of inclusion, that is, the support students with disabilities receive in general education classrooms as well as their interactions with peers and teachers (Idol, 2006; Voltz, Brazil, & Ford, 2001). Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis of the Likert scale items provided information related to significant differences both across districts as well as across individual survey items. Qualitative data analysis followed the process outlined by Miles and Huberman (1994) in that the content was categorized and coded, reoccurring themes were identified with research team consensus, and comparisons were made within and across cases. Data analysis also included comparison of interview and open-ended item findings with Likert scale results across districts and within program sites as a form of triangulation (Onwuegbuzie & Teddlie, 2003).

## Results

Findings from previous research exposed differences in how pre-service teachers acquired knowledge of inclusion as well as how they experienced inclusion within and across teacher preparation programs and data collection and analysis in this study sought to do the same (Gehrke & Cocchiarella, 2013; Kearney, 2011; Mamlin, 2012). To provide additional context for the reporting of our findings, the team systematically analyzed texts relevant to our program's course of study. From that analysis, we were able to document the following variety of definitions of inclusion: students with disabilities participating alongside peers without disabilities, students with disabilities being valued members of a classroom/school, students with disabilities fully integrated into classrooms/schools, students with disabilities in the same school as students without disabilities, and meaningful participation of students with disabilities. That finding reinforced our

Table 1

*Percentage of Respondents who “Strongly Agreed” or “Agreed” with each statement by District*

Survey Item	D#1 N=14	D#2 N=19	D#4 N=22	D# 5 N=10	D#6 N=22	Total N=85
1. At this point in my coursework, I can define the characteristics of an inclusion structure.	100%	74%	82%	80%	100%	89%
2. At this point in my student teaching, I have observed the characteristics of an effective inclusion structure.	86%	58%	64%	70%	95%	76%
3. At this point in my coursework, I have received instruction on how to identify an effective inclusion structure in a general education classroom.	50%	53%	64%	90%	73%	66%
4. At this point in my student teaching, I have received instruction on how to identify an effective inclusion structure in a general education classroom.	93%	89%	77%	90%	100%	92%
5. At this point in my coursework, I have received instruction on how to implement an effective inclusion structure.	93%	68%	77%	60%	91%	81%
6. At this point in my student teaching, I have received training on how to implement an effective inclusion structure.	93%	42%	64%	100%	95%	78%
7. In my student teaching setting, I have seen inclusion practiced as adapting and/or modifying materials for students with special needs.	86%	79%	84%	80%	91%	84%
8. In my student teaching setting, inclusion is defined in terms of services that students with disabilities receive; it is not primarily the location where student are receiving services.	93%	58%	77%	50%	91%	78%
9. In my current student teaching setting, inclusion is defined as student w/ disabilities interacting with students w/o disabilities.	100%	68%	68%	100%	100%	87%
10. In my student teaching setting, I can identify positive outcomes of an effective inclusion structure.	100%	53%	84%	100%	100%	85%
11. In my student teaching setting, I can identify negative outcomes of an effective inclusion structure.	100%	63%	64%	90%	95%	82%

Table 2

*Pearson Chi-Square Test Results*

Survey Item	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2 sided)
In my student teaching setting:			
6. I have received training on how to implement an inclusion structure.	24.233	4	0.000
8. Inclusion is defined in terms of services students receive.	12.146	4	0.016
9. Inclusion is defined as students with disabilities interacting with those without.	16.471	4	0.002
10. I can identify positive outcomes of inclusion.	18.198	4	0.001
11. I can identify negative outcomes of inclusion.	13.066	4	0.011

focus on examining pre-service teachers' knowledge acquired from university coursework along with their field experiences across a variety of contexts.

### *Quantitative Data Findings*

Tables 1 and 2 present findings related to the 11 Likert scale items on the survey. Interpretations of the findings reported in Table 1 exposed recognizable trends in this data. First, for the three items related to coursework that exposed respondents to the concept of inclusion (i.e., Items 1, 3, and 5), inconsistencies existed across districts in the degree to which respondents reported that university coursework contributed to their ability to identify and implement inclusion in general education classrooms. As a background, all participants had completed the same required sequence of courses related to their major. Therefore, more uniformity across district responses was anticipated. For instance, a large percentage (90%) of District 5 respondents reported that coursework provided instruction on identifying inclusion in practice while a mere half of the respondents in Districts 1 and 2 reported the same. District 5 along with Districts 2 and 4 respondents reported to a lesser extent that university coursework aided in their ability to implement inclusion in practice than did District 1 and 6. As a whole, more than 80% of respondents were able to credit coursework with contributing to their ability to define and implement inclusion, but only 66% agreed that their coursework helped them recognize inclusion in practice.

Second, differences across the districts were evident in terms of opportunities to observe inclusion and the manner in which inclusion was practiced in each setting. For items 2 and 7, a larger percentage of pre-service teachers in Districts 1 and 6 agreed that they had observed inclusion in the field. These two districts also had stronger indications that they presented inclusion as the services students receive, the adaptations of materials, and student interactions (Items 8 & 9). In contrast, pre-service teachers in District 2 agreed to a much lesser degree than the average to several survey items associated with their perceptions of inclusion during this aspect of their teacher education program. They appeared to have observed inclusion less frequently and they did not observe inclusion as services received, rather they observed inclusion as the placement of students (Items 2 & 8). Fewer of this group also appeared to have received training on implementing inclusion during their student teaching experiences when compared to those in other districts (Item 6). In addition, only half of the respondents in District 2 were able to identify positive outcomes of inclusion (Item 10). Results from inferential statistical analysis supported that meaningful differences across the groups existed

(Table 2). First, District 2 respondents differed significantly from their peers in both Districts 1 and 6 on the survey item related to inclusion consisting of services students received (Item 8). Secondly, their responses also differed significantly when asked to describe their own abilities to identify the positive and negative aspects of inclusion in their student teaching settings (Items 10 and 11). Both Districts 2 and 4 had significantly different responses from the other groups in terms of recognizing students with and without disabilities interacting with one another in their schools (Item 9). However, the strongest indication of a meaningful difference occurred with District 2 respondents' comments on training received to implement inclusion (Item 6, Table 2).

Lastly, Table 1 also presents total percentages of students agreeing or strongly agreeing with several survey items that suggest a majority of these pre-service teachers were exposed to aspects of effective inclusion in their student teaching settings. On Items 10 and 11 of the survey, more than 80% of the 85 student teachers noted that they were able to identify both the positive and negative aspects of inclusion, an indication of a level of critical thinking on their part. They were able to observe inclusion as not only adapting materials but also as students with disabilities interacting with typical peers (Items 7 & 9). In addition, an overall 92% of survey respondents agreed that they had acquired instruction on how to identify inclusion while student teaching (Item 4), whereas such instruction had not occurred to that extent during their university coursework (Item 3).

### *Qualitative Data Findings*

Not all participants provided written responses to the final two open-ended items on the survey. Although respondents were encouraged to supply specific information here, completion of the survey was voluntary. However, forty-eight of the 87 individuals completing the Likert scale items provided brief written responses to the following two open-ended items: (1) In your student teaching experience thus far, give examples or evidence of teachers practicing inclusion, and (2) In your student teaching experience thus far, what have you done to support and/or implement inclusion? These items served as an attempt to elicit more definitive evidence of pre-service teachers' ability to recognize indicators of inclusive teaching practices, for example, co-teaching, small group instruction, and implementing accommodations (Kilanowski-Press, 2010). The 48 respondents represented one-half to three-quarters of each district's cohort, with the exception of District 2 where only five of the 19 individuals who completed the Likert scale gave additional information. Those 48 individuals who did furnish answers, though, offered 88

separate comments across both questions. As comments were coded and categorized, descriptions of behaviors indicative of inclusion emerged. Respondents listed co-teaching, co-planning, differentiating instruction, making accommodations, providing small group instruction, students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) receiving instruction in general education classrooms, and special education teachers spending time in general education classrooms as behaviors they had observed and/or participated in. The number of each district's comments related to inclusion indicators was compared to the number of total comments provided. Overall, 85% of responses to these two survey items referred to inclusion indicators, with Districts 1 and 6 having the highest percentage of relevant examples (89% and 96% respectively).

Individual interviews were conducted with special education administrators in five of the six participating districts; District 4 administrator declined requests for an individual interview for reasons unknown to the research team even though a detailed description of the project was provided to that individual. Nevertheless, several themes emerged in the analysis of data collected from the five interviews. First, definitions, descriptions, and professional development opportunities related to inclusion varied, allowing researchers to focus on the degree to which districts appeared to address inclusion. For instance, interviewees in Districts 3 and 6, large PK-12 unified districts, relayed that their districts purposefully avoided the use of the words 'inclusion' or 'students with or without disabilities' in their mission statements. These districts, instead, preferred the use of 'every' or 'all' students in their statements. In contrast, Districts 1 and 2 administrators shared statements that addressed the inclusion of students with disabilities in settings and activities for students without disabilities. The District 5 interviewee had no knowledge of a district statement related to inclusion.

As interviewees described the implementation of inclusion in their districts, three of the five respondents (Districts 2, 3, and 6) focused first on the individual needs of each student with 'pull-out' instruction resulting from failure to succeed in general education settings. Interventions in general education settings included co-teaching (noted in Districts 1, 2, and 6), a Professional Learning Community structure for collaboration (described in Districts 2 and 3), and use of a Response to Intervention (RTI) or similar model that provided small group instruction for any student performing below expectations (noted in Districts 2 and 5). All districts, with the exception of District 6, maintained self-contained as well as pull-out programs. District 6 ensured that each building in the district housed special educators with expertise relevant to that

setting. The District 6 administrator was the sole interviewee who described a structure for documenting the academic achievement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, including the use of 'open-grade books.' Preliminary findings for this district revealed that, according to the interviewee, "We're not doing a good job with students with mild disabilities."

Regarding professional development opportunities related to inclusion, data collected from the interviews supported findings from prior studies that noted the need to differentiate professional development opportunities for special education teachers (Gehrke & McCoy, 2012). For instance, District 3 was able to provide summer institutes for all teachers in schools targeted for inclusion in the fall; Districts 1 and 5 provided additional training for those teachers involved in co-teaching settings, and District 6 used a 'needs based' approach to individual teacher professional development needs, for example, addressing behavior interventions or IEP writing. During data analysis, the research team members noted that districts appeared to be in various stages of developing inclusion practices. Subsequently, consensus was achieved on categorizing districts as 'Excelling, Promising, or Developing' based on information gathered at the district level. For example, Districts 3 and 6 appeared philosophically to have a broader concept of inclusion and had in place the widest array of teacher and student structures designed to support inclusion, earning them an 'Excelling' label. The research team noted that the District 2 administrator discussed a variety of structures that supported skill-based instruction prior to special education identification and professional development opportunities supporting teacher collaboration. However, the lack of that broader philosophical approach resulted in their label of 'Promising.' The resources and flexibility available to larger school districts was clearly evident during this aspect of the data analysis. Conversely, inclusion supports provided in the smaller PK-8 districts, District 1 and District 5, were less comprehensive or far-reaching, leading us to refer to these two districts as 'Developing.' In fact, the District 5 special education director admitted, "...we don't do it (inclusion) well and we don't do much" when asked to describe what inclusion looked like in that district.

Because student survey data was missing for District 3 and an administrator interview did not occur for District 4, direct comparative analysis of findings from the student's perspective and administrator's perspective existed only for Districts 1, 2, 5, and 6. Two findings were of note. First, despite districts emerging as 'Excelling, Promising, or Developing' based on our analysis of philosophical and operational approaches to inclusion, findings related to student perceptions of

inclusion practices in each context remained consistent across the teacher candidate surveys. The exception was District 2. Here the percentage of teacher candidates who agreed that, in their student teaching settings, they had received instruction in implementing inclusion, could identify the positive aspects of inclusion, and perceived inclusion as support services or peer interactions was consistently lower than all other districts. Indeed, the differences were statistically significant as noted in Table 2. Secondly, the three larger districts participating in the administrator interview aspect of the study appeared to provide more structures and supports related to inclusion. However, no meaningful differences in student teaching experiences were detected for teacher candidates in the smaller, urban districts (District 1 and 5). Survey responses for teacher candidates in these two districts closely mirrored those of respondents in District 6, a large unified district in a more suburban area.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Several aspects of this study's findings merit further discussion. First, we found that inclusion is an elusive concept and that its implementation across settings remains inconsistent despite more than a decade of attention focused on the teaching and learning of students with disabilities in general education curriculum and classrooms. This finding is similar to Kearney's (2011) findings. In the course of that study, findings indicated that a lack of knowledge on the part of those professionals tasked with structuring inclusion posed barriers to the effective implementation of inclusion in schools (Kearney, 2011). Similar inconsistencies became apparent in the administrator level interviews conducted in the current study as well as in teacher candidates' responses related to their experiences in carefully selected student teaching settings. Aligning teacher education at the pre-service level with current practices in the field becomes a challenge given the varying opportunities for special education majors to observe and participate in settings where the academic and social needs of students with disabilities are addressed within the context of general education classrooms. In current practice related to the preparation of effective special educators, Mamlin (2012) reiterates the need for teacher education programs (1) to seek out quality field experience placement settings, and (2) to nurture working partnerships with local school districts, while (3) ensuring that teacher candidates receive frequent and valuable supervision and feedback. From this current study, one particular university was able to identify specific program areas in need of improvement and would move towards creating a systematic evaluation of inclusion structures and teacher education professional

development in partnering public school districts (Idol, 2006).

Secondly, even though university coursework may have exposed these teacher candidates to varying definitions of inclusion, the candidates felt strongly about their ability to define an effective inclusion structure based on that instruction. Despite such confidence in their knowledge acquired in their university coursework, the students completing the survey felt less strongly that they had received sufficient coursework instruction on how to identify those elements of effective inclusion in general education classrooms. However, teacher candidates responded more positively about receiving such instruction in their student teaching settings, leading us to draw tentative conclusions about experiences in the field that foster the ability to bridge the theory to practice gap (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009). Teacher candidates in this current study were in their final several weeks of a two-semester student teaching experience and indications were that they had gained new knowledge related to inclusion from those field experiences as they observed inclusion in a variety of contexts. In relation to designing effective teacher education programs, our findings support recommendations by experts, such as Darling-Hammond (2006) and Zeichner (2010), who purport that stronger, extended field experiences have the potential to reduce the dissonance between university coursework and experiences in the field.

Next, findings of this current study also extend the work of others who have noted that special education teacher preparation must prepare teacher candidates for the wide range of contexts in which they may teach, for example, self-contained schools or classrooms, resource room or pullout models of service delivery, and co-teaching or consultation structures (Griffin et al., 2009; Washburn-Moses, 2009, 2013). Yet, most of the existing body of research focused on preparing special educators for the continuum of placements in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Results of this current study bring attention to the pedagogical knowledge and skills needed by special educators in inclusive general education classrooms. The findings exposed gaps, such as the ability to recognize specific characteristics of inclusion in practice, in a teacher education program seeking to produce quality special education teachers who are dually certified as elementary education teachers. Possibilities for enhancing special education teacher education now include additional university coursework assignments that require teacher candidates to observe, evaluate, and reflect upon the education of students with disabilities in general education settings. A limitation of the study remains that we were unable to discern why respondents may not have agreed with statements related

to observing the implementations of inclusion in their settings (Items 7, 8, & 9 on Table 1). Did evidence of adapting materials and/or peer interactions truly not exist in their settings or were teacher candidates unable to recognize such practices?

A last point for discussion addresses apparent exceptions to trends found in the data. The survey responses of teacher candidates in District 2, a large district with several inclusion structures in place, differed significantly from those of their peers placed in other districts. This cohort of 19 students also provided virtually no information related to specific aspects of inclusion evidenced or practiced in their student teaching settings. In somewhat of a contrast, the 14 teacher candidates in District 1, a small district with seemingly fewer resources supporting inclusion, agreed overwhelming that their student teaching experiences in this district provided them with evidence of inclusion as well as their ability to recognize both the positive and negative outcomes of inclusion. In fact, teacher candidates in District 2 had the highest percentage of respondents (93%) agreeing that inclusion appeared as more than just the placement of students. Factors not explored in this study (university instructor expertise, supervisor or mentor teacher attitudes or experiences related to inclusion, teacher candidates opportunities for feedback and reflection, as well as their own teacher dispositions) may have influenced the results. Examining the experiences of future cohorts of teacher candidates within this model of student teaching will provide larger numbers from which to make comparisons and draw conclusions. In addition, a need exists for more in-depth exploration of the knowledge and attitudes necessary for university faculty and practicing teachers to support inclusion more effectively (Kearney, 2011).

Establishing a clear, consistent definition of inclusion and enhancing teacher candidates' ability to recognize and implement inclusion in field experience settings has the potential to better prepare future special educators to successfully support the education of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. This current study found inconsistencies in the manner in which districts defined inclusion and, indeed, the manner in which schools and individuals within districts interpreted and supported inclusion. Therefore, future research for all teacher education programs must include the systematic examination of the extensive range of context variables related to the preparation of quality special educators. Such examination remains decidedly critical with regard to the experiences of teacher candidates as we prepare teachers for the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in general education settings.

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# Effects of Training on Pre-Service Special Educators' Abilities to Co-Teach Math Vocabulary in Preparation for Inclusion Settings

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## Abstract

*New special education teachers often struggle to teach children the mathematics vocabulary necessary to understand and effectively solve math word problems. The authors designed and implemented a pilot program to prepare pre-service teachers majoring in special education to implement the Camelot Learning Math Intervention Program (CLMIP). We met with participants an hour a day, twice a week, for five weeks over the summer to study the impact of learning to implement CLMIP on participants' comfort levels with teaching mathematics vocabulary. The pre-service teachers taught the CLMIP program in co-teaching pairs to prepare them for later co-teaching in inclusive settings. Over the course of three summers, 30 participants completed the program. A one-group pretest-posttest design was implemented using a Wilcoxon Signed-rank test and follow-up interviews to measure change in participants' vocabulary teaching comfort levels. Findings indicated that the program resulted in significant improvement of comfort levels,  $z = 6.357$ ,  $p < 0.0005$ , with a large effect size,  $r = 0.82$ . The results suggest that teacher education programs and school districts desiring to improve the skills of their teachers practicing in regular and inclusion classroom settings may benefit from implementing a similar program.*

Elementary and middle school students are required to both understand and apply the meanings of essential vocabulary in order to solve math word problems. Students begin with add (plus) or subtract (take away) in the very early grades. In the later elementary and middle grades, vocabulary necessary for solving story problems include words with technical terms in mathematics such as *addend*, *difference*, *divisor*, *minuend*, *product*, and *subtrahend*. These and many more vocabulary words must be taught and understood in order for students to be able to advance to higher-level skills such as solving math word problems using pre-algebra skills (Kaiser & Willander, 2005). Gritter (2010) notes that when solving math word problems each word in the problem must be defined precisely. The curriculum for later elementary and middle grades students becomes much more abstract, and many students fall behind due to a lack of understanding of what operation to use to solve problems and confusion with signs (National Research Council, 2001). For example, a student may confuse a "+" (add) for "x" (multiply). These common problems may lead to more difficulties as higher-level skills are introduced. Vocabulary is vital for math success and

must be introduced and reinforced in multiple ways, including showing the use of math vocabulary in word problems represented visually. Picture files, picture dictionaries, graphic organizers, and concrete objects/math manipulatives may be used to enhance conceptual learning and understanding by helping students to visually demonstrate and clarify the meanings of vocabulary for mathematics (Willis, 2007; Browder, Jimenez, Spooner, Saunders, Hudson, & Bethune, 2012).

There are specific techniques to incorporate when instructing struggling students in the meanings of mathematical vocabulary. Such techniques include using selected games to help with acquisition through practice, both guided and independent. Games widely used for math vocabulary development include flashcards for concentration, and crossword puzzles/word searches (Powell & Fuchs, 2012; Ramani & Siegler, 2008). Kaiser and Willander (2005) and Meaney (2007) suggest that teachers should encourage their students consistently to verbally explain their reasoning process as they attempt to solve math problems even when using games. Additionally, the use of age-appropriate math

manipulatives and peer tutors fill the gap where games leave off. Pairing math vocabulary words with associated signs or symbols may be useful as an enhancement strategy when new vocabulary is presented. Abstract concepts including words without symbols/signs must be taught and reinforced through manipulatives and games as well. Teachers can also choose to post math terms with their symbols and meanings on their walls (e.g., math word walls) and make bilingual math dictionaries for second language learners with concrete examples of math symbols represented (Salend, 2008).

### *Description of Pilot Project*

In order to improve upon the ability of pre-service teachers majoring in special education to practice how to help children recognize and recall definitions of math terms, a pilot program was developed and implemented at the Georgia Regents University Literacy Center in the summers of 2010, 2011 and 2012. The first focus of the pilot study was to provide real life experiences for 30 undergraduate special education majors to teach math concepts in co-teaching pairs to 59 elementary and middle school students, many of whom were enrolled during the school year in inclusion classrooms. Their classroom teachers recommended the students for the summer program based on need. Co-teaching pairs were used to teach the summer program. Co-teaching pairing was incorporated in order to prepare pre-service students for later co-teaching experiences in inclusive settings. A second focus was to expand undergraduate majors' understanding of how to best teach the definitions of math vocabulary as they worked with the elementary and middle grade students during the summer program. The Camelot Learning Math Intervention Program (CLMIP) was selected and used for the summer programs because it is designed to be an individualized program with activities chosen based on individual student level of ability, providing age appropriate math manipulatives to reinforce each student's learning activities in regular and inclusion classroom settings.

### **Literature Review**

Students' knowledge of words and their meanings play a vital role in understanding the language of math word problems (Cain, Oakhill, Barnes, & Bryant, 2001). For example, if a student does not understand what the word 'multiple' means, that same student is unlikely to identify or implement the appropriate mathematical operation from a given word problem containing the word 'multiple.' It has been noted that a rich vocabulary is one of the greatest predictors of students being able to

read with comprehension during the study of math word problems (Farkas & Beron, 2004).

The understanding of math vocabulary is basic to solving all kinds of math word problems (Beck, McKeown, & Kucan, 2002). As an illustration, it is important for the teacher or pre-service teacher to determine the student's awareness that the math vocabulary words for 'sign' and for 'operation' have specific definitions particular to the field of mathematics (Stahl & Nagy, 2006). When students cannot fully understand or define such essential math vocabulary, they are less likely to arrive at the correct answer to a mathematical word problem.

It is fundamental that pre-service majors know how to provide clear definitions for math vocabulary and to do so in a consistent manner (Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2005). Harmon and colleagues (2005) state "in content area reading, including in math word problems, middle grade math students need a thorough understanding of vocabulary because the words are labels for important concepts"(p. 265). In addition, pre-service teachers must be able to identify many terms used in mathematics that have multiple meanings in everyday usage; mathematics is truly a language unto itself. For example, the word 'square root' may be confusing to a student who is thinking of the definitions of 'square' and 'root.' The students may understand the words independently, but not when they are combined in a mathematical concept. "Many terms have meanings in the realm of mathematics that differ from their meanings in everyday usage" (Monroe & Orme, 2002, p. 140). Yet, the multiple meanings of math terms must be taught in a variety of ways to students with special needs. As Adams (2003) noted, "it is important to know which meaning of a word students are using when trying to make sense of mathematics because words used in everyday language may confuse their understanding of mathematics" (p. 788). As Raiker (2002) indicated, the comprehension of mathematical words is essential to the development of conceptual understandings in mathematics and mathematical thinking.

Math manipulatives have been shown as one way to reinforce the learning of multiple meanings of math vocabulary (Cathcart, 2011). For example, math manipulatives such as geo-boards are very helpful when introducing students of all ages to a variety of geometric concepts; indeed, students have been known to choose geo-boards and other manipulatives as their preferred mathematical tools when studying math concepts and solving math problems of all kinds (Moyer & Jones, 2004). Marshe and Cooke (1996) found significant improvements when concrete manipulatives were used to teach mathematical problem solving ( $d > 3$ ).

Table 1

Demographics of Pre-Service Special Educators

Category	Number
Gender	
Males	4
Females	26
Age	
Younger than 30	14
Older than 30	16
Race	
Caucasian	12
African American	18

It is imperative that pre-service special education students working in co-teaching pairs similar to how they will teach in an inclusion setting are provided guided experiences in teaching math to students—especially those with special needs. Schmidt and McKnight (2012) point out that when teachers in their study reported their own feelings towards adequate preparation in mathematics they demonstrated wide variations in knowing how to teach math-content specific knowledge. For example, the National Research Council (2001) reported that in order to teach students how to solve math word problems, teachers must realize the necessity of encouraging reluctant students to be persistent in working and re-working math word problems. The teachers must be sure that math students read, write, think, and speak in the language of math in a ‘precise’ manner and should require their students to verify solutions to math problems orally through techniques such as think-alouds followed by written verification (Pugalee, 2004). According to Posamentier (2003), teachers often seem as if they are too proud to admit they need much guidance in how to prepare for and teach children with weaknesses in the vocabulary of mathematics. Yet, in today’s era of rapidly progressing technological advances, competence in understanding the vocabulary of mathematics is more, not less, essential than ever. “Mathematics presents challenging reading because this content area has more concepts per word, per sentence and per paragraph than any other area” (Harmon, Hedrick, & Wood, 2005, p. 266).

It is essential that teachers must understand the links between mathematical vocabulary, conceptual understandings, reasoning, and problem solving. They must go beyond simply helping students conduct mathematical computation and must motivate their students to appreciate mathematics in everyday life.

Bennett (2010) indicated that it is important for teachers (and pre-service teachers) to practice how to ask their students probing questions in mathematics. Probing for vocabulary understanding in mathematics has been shown to be essential to comprehending both simple and more complex word problems.

Finally, the opportunity to work in co-teaching pairs adds another dimension to building teaching skills of pre-service special education teachers. Getting to know the co-teaching partner is essential to overall lesson success and prepares pre-service studies to co-teach in inclusive settings at future times. A successful co-teaching relationship is similar to a marriage in that there is a working relationship to promote effective communication and flexibility. By having a positive working relationship the teaching pair’s efforts will be focused on the student’s academic success and overall social development (Sileo, 2011). In addition, working in a successful co-teaching pair as pre-service teachers provides needed practice for teaching later in all kinds of inclusive environments. Rothman (2011) noted the importance of practice teaching math through co-teacher collaboration especially in today’s stress on teaching in an inclusion setting.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this current study was to examine the value of having pre-service special education majors use age appropriate manipulative materials as they co-teach math vocabulary to students who were struggling to understand math terms and their meanings. The students involved represented both elementary and middle grades and were selected to participate based on their teachers’ recommendations. The Camelot Learning Math Intervention Program was selected and incorporated into the lessons as the program is especially designed with math manipulatives to help all children master essential math skills and increase their confidence in their ability to learn.

#### **Method**

##### *Participants*

Thirty special education majors enrolled in coursework at Georgia Regents University during the summers of 2010-2012 were selected to receive special training in order to teach math vocabulary from consultants of the Camelot Learning Math Intervention Program. The 30 special education majors were selected based on convenience sampling since they comprised all of the special education majors at Georgia Regents University enrolled during those summer sessions.

Demographic data on the 30 pre-service special educators are indicated in Table 1.

### *Procedure*

Initial training consisted of three hours of intensive instruction at the beginning of each summer on how to use the Camelot Learning math materials and age-appropriate manipulatives to reinforce the vocabulary of mathematics for elementary and middle grades students. Students selected for the pilot study were chosen from public elementary and middle grades schools in Richmond County, located in Augusta Georgia. Their teachers referred the students to the University's Literacy Center staff. According to their teachers' reports, the students recommended were individuals needing introduction and reinforcement activities for building math vocabulary during the summer since they were unfamiliar with a myriad of terms used in mathematical contexts.

Camelot Learning math materials were selected for use in the pilot study by two of the authors who developed the summer camp. The Camelot Learning Math Intervention Program is based on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory of learning. The program uses kinesthetic, intra-and interpersonal, rhythmic, and assorted special learning modules to teach and reinforce a variety of math concepts. The program is designed to help students connect with math concepts using math manipulatives to reinforce students' own identified preferred learning style (Camelot Learning, n.d.)

General education students and students with special needs from elementary and middle schools came to the Georgia Regents University Literacy Center twice per week for an hour each time over a five week summer session. The 30 pre-service special education majors working in co-teaching pairs provided small group tutoring. In all, 59 elementary and middle grade students participated. Figure 1 illustrates what actions college majors were instructed to accomplish during their small group tutoring time.

### *Fidelity of Implementation*

Throughout the pilot study, the authors examined the fidelity of implementation of CLMIP using a Camelot-scripted lesson plan as the guide. Camelot Learning collaborated with these researchers on this project. As a partner in the project, Camelot Learning sent two Camelot Learning corporate trainers to train all teachers and staff who delivered the Math curriculum to students. This training included the rationale for Math Intervention using manipulatives that addressed Howard

Actions	Reminders
Be sure the student can perform computations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Before introducing math computation in word problems, student must be able to perform the desired computation.</li> </ul>
Teach reading skills through math.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach the student to read through word problems.</li> <li>• Have student read the word problem out loud and explain the gist of the word problem.</li> </ul>
Help the student identify key information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the student re-read the word problem and describe the key question without the extraneous information.</li> </ul>
Expand related vocabulary with the student.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the student color-code the signs representing the vocabulary in the math word problem to call attention to required operations.</li> </ul>

*Figure 1.* Strategies for improving mathematical word problem comprehension.

Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Model of Learning as well as the system for lesson delivery.

Three graduate students who taught math at the middle grades level observed all lessons and critiqued the presence or absence of five features of the lesson plan: (1) set induction, (2) concepts/word meanings taught through word problems, (3) appropriate use of math manipulatives, (4) review, and (5) closure. For example, the three graduate students observed what was taught and how the CLMIP recommended strategies were incorporated in the five component/features of the lesson plan. Fifteen pairs of undergraduate students majoring in special education served as co-teachers for this study. Co-teaching pairs received points for planning and implementing the five lesson plan components based on graduate student observations. Weekly meetings were held with camp leaders to discuss concerns and progress with the strategies (Figure 1) and the five features of each lesson plan.

The camp lasted for three summers, one month per summer, consisting of five weeks of twice-weekly one-hour sessions. Thirty special education undergraduate majors tutored the 59 elementary and middle grades students using the CLMIP. The vocabulary inherent in selected math word problems was reinforced through manipulatives. Specifically designed math vocabulary activities, including manipulatives, became the major thrust of each lesson.

## Results

The 30 undergraduate students who participated in this pilot study completed a pre-and post-assessment. The assessment measured their familiarity with math terms such as 'angle,' 'circumference,' 'divisor,' 'exponent,' 'quadrilateral,' and 'simplify.' The results indicate that after participating in this pilot study and teaching math for five weeks, the pre-service teachers did feel more confident that they would be able to define the terms in such a way that students would understand them. A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test was performed to determine if there were differences in self-reported ability to explain 69 mathematics terms after participants completed the professional development program. There was a statistically significant increase in ability to explain from pretest (Mdn=21.00) to posttest (Mdn=26.00),  $z=6.357$ ,  $p<.0005$ , with a large effect size,  $r = .82$ . Follow-up interviews by the three graduate students with teachers who referred students to the math camp indicated that the reinforcement of math vocabulary using the Camelot system was beneficial to the pre-service teachers. In addition, evidence from structured interviews with all pre-service teachers indicated moderate improvement of the pre-service teachers' 'comfort levels' to teach math vocabulary after using the Camelot Intervention Program to teach mathematical concepts. An examination of pre-service teachers' comfort levels was determined simply by counting the positive remarks included in the eight-question interviews. Moderate was defined by more than 50%. Sample structured interview questions asked of all participants included questions such as: "How do you feel after our initial training in terms of your preparation for conducting your lessons this summer?" Answers to the interview questions were grouped according to theme. The predominant theme related training to preparation for teaching. Results from the interviews supported the quantitative conclusion reached that the program benefitted the pre-service special education majors as they taught the math lessons.

Results also indicated that the pre-service teachers' math word knowledge increased over the five-week, twice-weekly math camp. These results suggest that a longer program specifically designed to increase pre-service teachers' use of math manipulative to teach math word knowledge through the use of manipulative resources may be effective for developing even more math vocabulary and related conceptual understandings in such a manner that students would understand the vocabulary more easily. Such instruction would likely be useful to pre-service teachers as they guide their students as they build math word problem understanding through accompanying demonstrations using math manipulative

resources. Gresalfi, Martin, Hand, and Greeno (2009) point out the need for teachers to assure that students continue to persevere until word problems are fully solved.

## Discussion

Based on this pilot study, the 30 undergraduate co-teaching tutors increased their understanding of the significance that the vocabulary of mathematics plays in students' grasping of mathematical concepts. Findings indicated that consistent incorporation of math vocabulary integrated into the regular math curriculum using authentic problems and manipulative resources during instruction in a five week summer math camp is instrumental to learning math vocabulary and is helpful in subsequently solving word problems, which is consistent with prior research (Willis, 2007; Browder et al., 2012). This practice of using authentic problems allows teachers and pre-service co-teaching pairs to connect students' existing knowledge to new knowledge acquisition (Gewertz, 2012).

Consistent with research on manipulatives and games (Moyer & Jones, 2004; Powell & Fuchs, 2012; Ramani & Siegler, 2008), the integration of Camelot Learning math manipulative resources stressing vocabulary instruction aided the understanding of math terminology. Using consistent math vocabulary was paramount to understanding how to solve math word problems, which is consistent with earlier studies (Adams, 2003; Bravo & Cervetti, 2008). A five-week math camp could be extended and expanded to reach even more students in need of assistance in how to use math manipulatives to build math vocabulary understandings. Training of their pre-service co-teaching pairs, too, was an instrumental part of this instruction in preparation for teaching in inclusion settings.

### *Limitations and Future Research*

Notable limitations of this pilot study are time frame, small sample size, lack of long-term follow up, and a pre-experimental design. A longer study with a more detailed follow-up assessment may be beneficial to assess the degree of long-term benefits of the vocabulary development through the use of math manipulative resources. Additionally, the one-group pretest-posttest design has many threats to its validity, and a future study using a more robust quasi-experimental design is planned to determine more thoroughly if consistent instruction using math manipulatives to reinforce definitions of math vocabulary will result in pre-service teachers who speak more fluently the language of

mathematics and are better prepared to guide their students to do so.

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# **An Island Outside the Mainstream? The Special Needs Unit during A Period of Inclusive Change in an Aotearoa/New Zealand High School**

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## **Abstract**

*This research article reports on the experience of a special needs unit within an Aotearoa/New Zealand high school during a period of inclusive change. The study of the special needs unit represented a case study within a larger year-long qualitative study of the school experience. Utilizing the Index for Inclusion: Developing learning and participation in schools (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) as a framework for reflection and planning, the school community explored core school values and assumptions and how those values and assumptions manifested in school practices. During this process a wide consensus was formed regarding the interpretation of inclusion which left the special needs unit and staff out of sync with the majority of the staff team. To resolve this tension the school re-modelled their delivery of special education provision which incorporated the special needs unit within the 'mainstream' of the school.*

There is a cartoon by the educator and artist Michael Giangreco titled, *Island in the Mainstream*. It depicts a traditional classroom of children—rows of desks, teacher in the front sitting at her desk with a black board, etc. In the rear of the class is another desk, set off on its own. It is actually on a small pile of sand and is occupied by one student (obviously with 'special needs' as he is sitting in a wheel chair) and a teacher's aide. All the students are facing the front except the student on his island who is facing the teacher's aide. It is clear they are doing different work from the rest of the class. The caption below the picture reads: "Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Cooper are still trying to figure out why Fred doesn't feel like part of the class" (Giangreco, 1998, p. 27).

While the scenario depicted in the cartoon is all the more powerful due to its replication in so many classrooms or schools, it does not quite capture the original position of the special needs unit in many high schools. There, the student with special needs would not be in the back of the class, they would be outside somewhere. The unit often forms an island outside the mainstream. This paper will explore the experience of an Aotearoa/New Zealand high school during a process of inclusive change and the role of the special needs unit within the school. Through the framework of the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) the school staff underwent a year long period of assessing the practice and policy of inclusion in their school. The special needs unit at this school was traditionally set apart from the mainstream of the school. Following a collective re-evaluation of how school values are expressed in practice, the school redesigned its model of service provision for students with special needs and incorporated the unit into a larger school department. The unit went from being 'an island outside the

mainstream' to becoming a more integral part of the school.

This paper demonstrates the inter-relation between inclusion and school culture (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; Slee, 2011; Zollers, Ramanathan, & Yu, 1999). However, culture is not a fixed entity. When action is grounded in reflection, and reflection leads to action, there is *praxis*. Change becomes possible in a directed manner when underlying values and assumptions are examined. Carrington, Deppeler and Moss (2010) argue that schools need to reflect on their values and beliefs in order to develop inclusive cultures. Culture, Carrington (1999) points out, is constructed by the beliefs and attitudes of people in a community. "Reflection on current beliefs and practices is necessary," Carrington concludes, to develop inclusive education (1999, p. 262).

## *Inclusive Education in the New Zealand Context*

In 1996 the Ministry of Education launched a package of reforms known as Special Education 2000 (SE2000) (Ministry of Education, 1996a). These reforms reshaped the provision of special educational services and were an endeavour to structure an equitable and efficient special education system on two levels. The practicalities of resource allocation made up the largest part of SE2000. However, another level of the reforms regarded aims and values. In an oft quoted and rather bold statement, the policy said: "The Government's aim is to achieve, over the next decade, a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities for all children" (Ministry of Education, 1996b, p. 5). The new system re-iterated parental right to enrol their child at the school of their choice (some special schools were retained as a part of this right). The

Ministry of Education established Group Special Education to advise school staff on the inclusion of students with special needs. Also created was the Ongoing Resource Scheme which attached funding to students according to need. This assistance included teacher aid support, building modification, transportation, and specialist services such as physical or occupational therapy. The majority of children with special educational needs (more than 98%) attend school in a regular educational setting (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Inclusion in New Zealand has been identified as an issue of social justice (Ballard, 1999) and more than mere placement in an educational setting, embracing larger social issues including the quality of participation. The Ministry of Education defines inclusion as:

about valuing all students and staff. It involves supporting all children and young people to participate in the cultures, curricula and communities of their local school. Barriers to learning and participation for all children, irrespective of their ethnicity, culture, disability or any other factor, are actively reduced, so that children feel a sense of belonging and community in their educational context. (Ministry of Education, 2008, paragraph 1)

Certain values underlie this definition of inclusion, such as respect, diversity, community, and equal rights.

### *Special Needs Units in Regular Education*

The special needs unit are usually specifically designed, staffed, and resourced locations within a mainstream school providing services to students with high and complex special educational needs. Such areas are typically staffed by specially trained teachers who provide individualized or group instruction (Mitchell, 2010). The term 'special needs unit' in this paper refers to a facility established by a mainstream school to cater for the special needs of students on its role (Ministry of Education, 2013). While a small percentage of special needs units are managed by special schools located nearby and are considered 'satellite units' of that school, the majority of units in New Zealand are staffed and managed by the mainstream school itself.

Research for this paper is based on a one year qualitative ethnographic study concerning how an inclusive educational system is understood, enacted, and negotiated. Data relating to the special needs unit within the subject school was gathered as a case study (Yin, 2009) within that larger study. The following questions were addressed in this study:

- What are the experiences of a school community developing inclusive values and practices?
- How does the process of reflection and change alter the place and practice of a special needs unit within the school?
- How is the process of reflection and change perceived by the members of the community?

### **Method**

The data for this paper is based on a qualitative research project carried out during one full academic year. The research looked into how a 'world class educational system' (Ministry of Education, 1996a) is understood, enacted, and negotiated within the parameters and paradigms within which the educational system is situated. A critical ethnographic methodology (Denzin, 2003; Jordan & Yeomans, 1995; Madison, 2005; O'Reilly, 2008; Thomas, 1993) also permitted scope for me to act as an advocate and advisor in the process of change. Whereas the objective of traditional ethnography is to describe a culture, the aim of critical ethnography is to participate in changing it. The critical ethnographer feels it her or his obligation to use knowledge from research to challenge the existing structures, values, and practices that oppress or *exclude* members of the community. As research was conducted for such an extended time I endeavored, as researcher, to become as much a part of the life of the school community as possible. My presence was well received by staff and I maintained a variety of roles, such as reliever teacher, soccer coach, and literacy tutor. To become a part of the school involved developing and fostering reciprocal relationships (Harrison, MacGibbon, & Morton, 2001) which also enabled observations to be 'thick descriptions' (Geertz, 1973; Mills & Morton, 2013) of the school experience.

Data collection methods for this paper involved participant observation, semi-formal interviews, and informal interviews. Semi-formal interviews took the form of guided conversation, where I encouraged the participants to talk in the area of interest, a method supported by Rubin and Rubin (2012). Informal interviews consisted of discussions and explorations of the change process (Kvale, 2008). These interviews also took the form of what Paliokosta and Blandford (2010) term 'opportunistic' discussions. 'Opportunistic' discussions with participants occurred in a variety of contexts. These discussions were later transcribed as field notes. The majority (70 percent) of interviews were conducted in this manner. Interviews were followed up with a review or 'member checking' (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007), of transcripts or summarized field notes, during which time participants were invited to add or clarify

information. Transcripts and notes were analyzed in a continuous iterative process throughout the year of study in the form of analytical memos (Biklen & Bogdan, 2007) to allow important organizational themes to emerge.

### *Utilizing the Index for Inclusion*

During the year in which research took place, the school utilized the framework for change known as the Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). The Index for Inclusion was originally created for use in the United Kingdom but has, since its first edition in 2001, been translated into 37 languages and used in 35 countries. Now in its third edition (and most accessible and flexible form) the Index for Inclusion is designed to be used by individual schools. The Index encourages a cyclical review process of review, planning, and implementation that introduces sustainability to teacher professional development and encourages wide participation. The Index process is designed to be a planning cycle of five phases: “getting started” (initiating the process in the school); “finding out together” (reviewing school culture and practice); “producing a plan” (creating action plans around prioritized areas); “taking action” (implementing the plan(s)); and “reviewing developments” (which also feed into further reflection and planning). The indicators and questions found in the Index for Inclusion assist the school community in examining how their values are reflected in their practice and encourages the development of a common language, or understanding, of what inclusion means in their school’s culture. During the research year I acted as ‘critical friend’ (Carrington, Bourke, & Dharan, 2012) to the school in regards to the Index process. Initial activities included introducing the Index for Inclusion to the staff team and building a planning group to organize Index related activities within the school. Facilitation of these groups was handled by the school principal and I assisted him with the planning of the content of each meeting.

### *The ‘Subject’ School*

The subject school upon which this research is based is a co-educational high school of over 600 students established in 1961. The school role reflects the actual demographics of the area which is predominantly bi-cultural. Over 60% of the student population and 40% of the staff were of Maori (indigenous New Zealand) descent. Maori staff included the principal, a deputy principal and several Heads of Department. Throughout the school’s 50 year history, core values have been embedded in the culture, including indigenous values

such as *manaakitanga* and *whanaungatanga*. *Manaakitanga* embraces the concept of reciprocity of kindness, respect, and humility. *Whanaungatanga* represents a sense of kinship, of relationship through working together and shared experience. These values have been re-iterated and re-interpreted by new generations of teachers. The school values itself in being “a caring school.” It is a place where staff are encouraged to “do the very best you can for the kids you have”. The “school has a class for everybody” (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). Collegiality is celebrated among staff. The students reflect an openness and acceptance. “[Our] kids are like that,” a teacher noted. “They aren’t like that at every school” (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*).

Along with a traditional departmental structure the school has a learning support area catering for students who might experience difficulty socially or academically with the demands of ‘mainstream’ subjects. This area comprises four classrooms and is made up of a team of four teachers and three teacher aides. While three classes are based on year groupings/grade level, the fourth class is a ‘composite class’ (a multilevel year groups/grade class) consisting of students with moderate to high needs. Set apart as a separate department, the learning support area provided subject specific assistance; however, students of the learning support area were largely integrated into mainstream option classes. This close knit department collaborates and plans together, as well as holds their own small assemblies on a weekly basis to celebrate student efforts and accomplishments.

### *The Special Needs Unit*

Also within the school is a special needs unit catering for students considered ‘high needs’. During the period of this research there were eight fulltime students attending the unit, seven of whom were male. This unit has traditionally been isolated and marginalized from the ‘mainstream’ of school life. Staff from the special needs unit, consisting of one fulltime female teacher who was not trained in special education and four female teacher’s aides (TA), were not expected to participate in daily staff briefings, nor were the students expected to participate in whole school activities such as sports days or assemblies. The practice that developed within the school was that the students from the unit would begin each day in that classroom, a standalone building by the school field. Certain activities, such as swimming, a weekly visit to the town library, or horse riding (Riding for the Disabled) would see the students leave the school grounds as a cohort. Twice weekly the students would go for a walk with their teacher aides, once again leaving the school grounds. Students had ‘options’ classes with

five other teachers and they would attend these classes as a cohort. Subjects included one period of physical education, art and music, and two periods with two other teachers for a variety of activities. While not with those 'options' teachers, the students remained with the unit teacher in the special needs unit.

While priding themselves on creating a place for every learner (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*) the school inadvertently created a place that was isolated and segregated from the 'mainstream' of the school. Students of the 'unit' had no opportunities, as outlined in their schedule above, for meaningful participation with their peers. Similarly, the unit teacher and unit staff had no opportunities to interact collaboratively with the staff of the 'mainstream' school or the learning support area. As the unit was set aside as a 'mini' department of its own, the unit teacher had no systemized way to discuss her work with a colleague. She acted as her own head of department and as such there was no senior administrative oversight of the educational programs instituted in that area. The unit teacher also acted in the role as Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) and received a stipend for this responsibility. This was a position awarded to her by the previous principal; however, the school at that time did not possess a job description for that role.

## Results

The Index in the school acted in some way like a 'Trojan Horse' (Carrington, et al., 2012) for the impetus of other aspects of systems change. Once in the school it becomes a prompt and reminder of the concept of inclusion and encourages dialogue and internal reflection around the expression of core values in school practice. The culture of a school is not a fixed entity; it is an arena of renegotiation of the interpretation of core values. During the change process, expectations alter as school community members become more aware of the relationship between values and practices. Where the consensus is expressed among community members, the places where staff interacted with each other becomes an arena of change while newer interpretations of values are explored. What also becomes contestable is how those values are expressed--what jokes are acceptable, what words are used, even what can and cannot be discussed. These boundaries shift with the shifting consensus (Hall, 1989).

### *Renegotiating the Consensus*

The core values expressed by the staff at the subject school, those values upon which they based an identity, was that the school was a caring place that met the needs

of all of the school's students (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). What staff began to review was *how* the school met those needs, what was meant by the word 'all', as well as how the word 'caring' was defined. During the sixth week of the school and immediately after the Index for Inclusion process began, the school held a sports day. The participation of the students from the unit was facilitated by myself. I took the students, and the teacher aids assigned to them, from station to station, advocating where necessary to ensure participation was possible. This sports day was the first in which students from the unit participated and staff (as well as students) were able to not only share the experience with them, but normalize their presence in the mainstream. Previously, the marginalization of the students within the unit was accepted as the norm; it was not noticed as marginalization. The focus on inclusion encouraged by the Index process, and the role of the researcher as advocate, encouraged staff to notice who was participating and who was not. Whole school assemblies could be held, for example, and the issue of the attendance of the students from the unit was considered. Daily morning staff briefings were held and the absence of the unit teacher was noticed, as staff were becoming aware of not just who was present, but who was not.

The process of change encouraged teachers, individually and collectively, to re-asses school practices and the place of the unit within it. By highlighting inclusion, teachers were encouraged to become more aware of the presence and participation of students with special needs. Examples were evidenced throughout the research year. During a training day on employing the South Pacific Education Curriculum (SPEC, a program adapted from ASDAN to reflect South Pacific culture and context) for students in the learning support area, the absence of the unit teacher was noticed. "Where is [teacher]? Her students would get so much out of this!" was one participant's remark (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). Absence was also noted during whole school assemblies. "Where are the students from the unit?" I asked a nearby teacher while a guest speaker addressed the students on the topic of healthy life choices. "How can they be a part of the school if they are kept separate in their classroom?" This type of interaction between staff fostered a reflection of not only school systems and practices, but what values meant and how they were expressed.

The development of a student council illustrates this process on an individual level. An experienced deputy principle (DP) interested in initiating a student council initially considered a council that did not include unit students. The feeling of the DP was that each class would send a representative. When I pointed out that not

giving the unit teacher and unit students an opportunity to participate could be perceived by staff as unfair (as the participation of other teachers was required) her response was that, “They are not a form class, they are a special unit” (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). The DP was at that time not seeing the students in the unit as a complete part of the school. She suggested speaking to the unit teacher about her students participating and together we facilitated the representation of the unit in the new council. Whereas the initial response of the DP reflected an assumed attitude of ‘difference’ and separateness, through reflecting on those attitudes the DP became an advocate for unit participation. During the council meetings a student representative from the unit attended and accommodations were arranged (a note taker) so that he could bring information back to his classmates.

### *Experience and Reflection Leading to Change*

These changing expectations evolved into changing practice. While initiating and sustaining a dialogue around inclusion in the school community, staff members and students became more aware of individuals and areas of the school that have traditionally been neglected or overlooked. The term ‘inclusion’ was able to move from ‘jargon’ to common discourse. The discourse, in this way, shines a spot light on areas that have been in the dark, into the ‘blind spots’. The level of patience for practice that is less than inclusive becomes less. There is a heightened desire and even an impatience for change. “It’s simple, just do it,” remarked one teacher during a staff meeting about the inclusion of students with special needs (*Fieldnotes: Participant observation*). With inclusive values in mind, the planning for both improved practice and systemic reforms becomes more conscious, and the reasoning behind why action is being planned or taken becomes more focused.

Part of simply ‘doing it’ involved the increased inclusion of unit students into the ‘mainstream’. As considerations about inclusion went from thinking about the students as a special class rotating as a group to various option courses or teachers, to thinking about the students as individuals, more teachers were willing to invite the students into their classes. This developed slowly in term three as schedules that were identical (all unit students following the same program) to more individualized schedules. In one situation a specific program was linked to a specific student, who left the unit for two periods on a Wednesday and attended composite class in the learning support area to work with a teacher aid and the software program Clicker 6. Another example was matching one student interested in

photography with the photography teacher. The principal of the school acted as broker and advocate to make this happen. The ongoing dialogue around inclusion made such brokerage easier as each teacher had a growing understanding of inclusion and were involved in improving the practice of the school.

On an individual level, the experience of ‘doing it’ led to teacher growth, the diminishing of teacher reluctance to embrace inclusionary practices, and a willingness to continue to develop their practice and experiment with teaching strategies. Physical Education (PE) teachers were handed the opportunity to ‘do it’ when a colleague was away for an extended period time at the beginning of term 3. This teacher’s replacement looked forward to the opportunity.

*Fieldnotes:* Asked [teacher] at briefing if she was going to continue to teach PE to the unit. She said “Oh, yeah!” and got excited about what she is learning about teaching. She said that “you have to have three activities, not just one” and she shared this with her colleagues. She said she took them for a walk but that was just one activity-- they then went to the gym and she used the buckets that are used to store gear and put numbers next them and the students threw balls to try to get them inside. She used different types of balls. “What a great way to assess their ability and needs as well,” I said, and she agreed.

Another colleague in the physical education department had a similar opportunity to take the PE classes of the composite class from the learning support area. In her first session with the class she informed them that they would need be ready and have their PE kit on. “If you are going to be included you need to follow the same rules,” she told them. The following day she expressed how previous dialogue and examples of inclusion encouraged her to find creative strategies in making her lessons more effective.

*Fieldnotes:* [teacher] was sitting next to me in the staff room and she told me about how she has been dealing with [a student’s] energy--having him run like the others but carrying punching bag. He really likes that, being able to use his strength. She was proud of herself for thinking of a creative solution to include him in the PE lesson.

Through experiencing success these teachers increased their confidence in their teaching abilities, and the change they experienced was more sustainable (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar, & Fung, 2007).

### *School Values Re-Evaluated*

As discussed above, there was a growing consensus about the participation of all students in whole school events. The school first experienced this in the beginning of the year with the sports day. On that occasion students from the unit participated for the first time. That day presented a shared experience where teachers and students alike could participate in an inclusive manner. As a result, staff became increasingly aware of who participated and who did not. At the end of the second term teachers would collect the unit students and staff, if they failed to attend school assemblies. The other teachers were no longer willing to let colleagues opt out. By the very end of term each of the three whole school assemblies were attended by unit students. The unit teacher's absence at the end of term assembly, where all staff performed the school *haka* (a Maori ceremonial war dance) for the students, was not only noticed but followed up after the school break with a meeting with the principal. This meeting was not only a chance to reinforce the expectation of full participation in school events (as well as teacher involvement in daily staff briefings) but to lay further ground work for changes in practice. Non-participation by a staff member or a group of students, which was previously considered a norm, was increasing seen as unacceptable.

With the change in attitudes also came reflections on practices of how Individual Education plans were used. Staff were able to comment that they had or had not seen an IEP, express confusion about the purpose of such a document and offer suggestions about accessing them to inform practice. The allocation of resources became a focus in linking students with option classes, individual goals, and the support needed to make change happen. The role of teacher aids and teacher management and responsibility for teacher's aids became the subject of professional development as the school took advantage of training modules being offered by the Ministry of Education. For an eight week period the school trialled the modules and offered feed back to researchers on their efficacy. Here attitudes and practices influenced how systems were organised in the school, not just the management of IEPs but also the management, allocation, and expectations of teacher aid use.

Resource allocation and organization similarly came under discussion as school staff began to reflect on their current model. The question posed was, "what is the best way to serve all of our students?" An increased notion of who 'all' was meant that separate departments, such as the learning support area, the special needs unit, the English as a Second Language (ESOL), and reading department needed to improve coordination and resource use. The planned demolition of the building housing the

learning support department as part of a Ministry rationalisation project gave extra impetus for change and the Head of Department actively sought alternative models in which her and other departments could be integrated into the 'mainstream' of the school. What was meant by 'mainstream' was similarly questioned. The HOD got to experience students from the 'mainstream' coming to learning support for specific needs and shared that the students were 'buzzing' about the progress they made. I pointed out that she was buzzing as well (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). She learned, by doing, what it meant to be a part of the whole school community and the experience contributed to her attitudes as well as informed her practice.

### *Conflicting Interpretations*

For the teacher and teacher aids of the special needs unit, the definition of 'caring' increasingly faced a conflict with the wider interpretation of that core value. The unit was originally set apart from the mainstream school, and this reflected the urge on the part of the school at that time to 'protect' students with disabilities from the mainstream. This conception of 'caring' was strong among unit staff, and very intertwined with a discourse that did not view 'difference' as an asset. When the idea of more individualized scheduling was brought up with one TA and the willingness of a teacher to take one of the unit students, her response was, "What, so he could be isolated and embarrassed?" Her view of segregating the unit students (though she did not refer to their placement as 'segregation') was that the unit *protected* the students from teasing and shame. The participation during sports day that I facilitated early in the year similarly caused upset to another aid. She saw my encouraging of an older student to 'give it a go' in the social sports as stigmatizing to the student, as publically embarrassing him, as highlighting his differences not only to his peers but to himself. Later in the year the principal expressed how the school's interpretation had moved on. "We segregated students thinking we were protecting them, it was done with good intentions but produced wrong results," (*Fieldnotes: Interviews*). The consensus about how the school interpreted 'caring' was being renegotiated, no longer meaning what the staff in the unit held it to mean. The underlying beliefs of the unit staff were increasingly out of sync with those of the wider school community.

Several changes to the practice of the unit were instituted throughout the year, as outlined above. These included expectations of attendance at staff briefings; expectations of participation by unit staff and students at shared experiences; attendance in options classes as individuals rather than a 'cohort'; membership in student

council; conscious and deliberate planning of shared events; increased expectations of key roles, such as SENCO; and an impatience for change/ an increased desire for change on the part of staff. However, the interpretation of the unit teacher regarding her responsibilities towards the students of the special needs unit meant that change was not carried out as desired, causing frustration among her colleagues as well school administrators. As the year drew to a close the school underwent a process of aligning staff levels to student numbers which resulted in several teaching positions being lost. The unit teacher's position was one of those posts rationalized and she took the opportunity to take retirement from teaching.

### Discussion

At the deepest layer of culture are found the assumptions on which a culture is based. These assumptions are often not clearly expressed or articulated. It is the 'hidden dimension' on which a culture is grounded (Hall, 1990). The organizational psychologist Schein (2010) observes that these basic assumptions "are so taken for granted that someone who does not hold them is taken as a 'foreigner' or as crazy" (p. 25). During the process of change at the subject school staff undertook, through the utilization of the Index for Inclusion, an examination of the assumptions and beliefs shaping the school identity. Chief among these was the interpretation of 'caring' and 'a place for all'. Although assumptions and beliefs are very individual by nature, the coming together of many individuals that constitute a shared culture is a dynamic zone of negotiation and re-negotiation. Tension is created as values evolve and as members begin to question and examine the underlying assumptions that shape the community.

In regards to the staff of the special needs unit, their interpretation of school values meant that they were increasingly out of sync with the evolving interpretation of core school values. This new interpretation ultimately found the expression of school values as evidenced through the practice of the special needs unit incompatible with what was now "the [school] way." It was decided by administration that beginning in the next academic year the students of the special needs unit would be members of the learning support area and the special needs unit itself would only be used as an educational resource. Furthermore, the Head of Department for learning support would design a department that provided service to any students in the school requiring assistance. Her vision was as the students from the special needs unit would become more integrated in to the 'mainstream', so too would the

learning support department. Indeed, following a sustained period of reflection and experience in the school the meaning of the word 'mainstream' was undergoing continued exploration, and the nature of what constituted the 'mainstream' in practice was similarly evolving.

The special needs unit at the subject school, as do units elsewhere, enables a student to attend their local school no matter what their physical or intellectual need. Units can provide a practical learning environment that incorporates life skills as well as meet the many physical needs that students may present. Ministry of Education funding has equipped units with ramps, wheel chair accessible entrances, hoists, and other vital equipment. Indeed, the presence of a special needs unit means that no impairment can prevent attendance at a mainstream school. There is great potential in the special needs unit in facilitating inclusion. This research illustrates how a school community can tap that potential through reflection and planning. In viewing inclusion as an issue of values and attitudes, the primary focus becomes how the individual student is valued in his or her local school, how teachers and peers reflect their appreciation and respect for that individual through their relationships with them, and the quality of their participation in the life of the school. An early perception of several teachers in the subject school was that inclusion involved removing special settings and 'including' all students in 'mainstream' classes. However, this is confusing inclusion with service provision—how additional needs are met. How the special needs unit is utilized is where inclusion *or* segregation can happen. Through re-evaluating their interpretation of inclusion and redesigning their service provision, this school has aspired to improve their practice and create a 'world class inclusive education system.'

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# Teachers' Perspectives and Experiences of the Contexts of Social Inclusion within Elementary School Classrooms in Canada and China

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## Abstract

*This study examined the contexts of social inclusion within elementary school classrooms in Canada and China. Based on interviews, classroom teachers in two metropolitan cities in Canada and China reported their perspectives and experiences with regard to: (a) the state of social inclusion in general; (b) places where social inclusion took place the most; (c) activities which generated the most social inclusion; and (d) places where social inclusion was most challenged. The results showed that: Social inclusion was only half fulfilled in both countries; the classroom was the main place for social inclusion; physical education and group work generated the most inclusion while academic areas proved the challenging aspect of social inclusion. There were, however, cross-national differences along these perspectives. Implications for educational practice and research aimed at improving social inclusion are discussed.*

Inclusion denotes a condition in which students of varied abilities and strengths are included in all classrooms (Winzer, 2005). An inclusive school implies “a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her education needs met” (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p. 3). Inclusion thus involves the social acceptance of children with disabilities and their participation with their nondisabled peers. Such a state is also referred to as “social integration” (Jenkins, Odom, & Spetz, 1989), now more commonly termed as “social inclusion”. An important goal of social integration, hereafter referred to as social inclusion, therefore, is the social acceptance and physical inclusion of students with disabilities (McCay & Keyes, 2001).

However, the goal of social inclusion has not been met. Studies have reported that it is common for elementary school students with learning or other disabilities to experience social isolation (Tur-Kaspa, 2002). For example, students with disabilities were reported to obtain a lower socio-metric status than their peers without disabilities (Farmer & Farmer, 1996). Other reviews found that children with intellectual disabilities enrolled in general education classes were not only not-as-socially-accepted as their peers without disabilities (Freeman & Alkin, 2000) but also were subject to negative attitudes and behaviors on the part of their peers and teachers (Siperstein, Norins, & Mohler, 2007). Moreover, teachers rated third and fifth grade students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms lower on social inclusion than their peers without disabilities (DiGennaro Reed, McIntyre, Dusek, & Quintero, 2011).

There are also contrasting findings regarding the social inclusion of students with disabilities. One U.S.

study reported that students with autism were not regarded by their peers as being different from students without disabilities in social preference or social network affiliation (Boutot & Bryant, 2005). Similarly, a study conducted in Cyprus found that the majority of secondary school students who were deaf or hard-of-hearing were socially included (Hadjidakou, Petridou, & Stylianou, 2008). Despite these few reports highlighting the success of social inclusion, the predominance of negative reports raises the concern over the state of social inclusion for students with disabilities. Siperstein and Parker (2008) concluded that: “Today, children with disabilities are more likely to be physically included and have access to [the] general education curriculum than they have ever been; however, little ground has been gained with regard to social integration” (p. 121).

To better understand the lack of social inclusion for students with disabilities, researchers have suggested that we examine the processes involved in social inclusion (Siperstein & Parker, 2008). At the same time, the discrepant finding from Cyprus suggests that the practice of social inclusion may differ according to its socio-cultural context. Concurrent international comparisons of social inclusion, carried out within a single study have, however, been lacking. In order to gain a broader understanding of social inclusion, there is a need to examine the socio-cultural contexts of social inclusion from a cross-national perspective.

Eccles and Rosser (1999) proposed that social and instructional contexts in the classroom affect students' learning. Classroom contexts would likewise set the stage for the social inclusion of students with disabilities. Major physical and social settings for social inclusion would include the place where social inclusion takes place as well as the activities which facilitate or

impede social inclusion. For example, research has found that settings affected the friendship or social inclusion of young children with disabilities (Buysse, Goldman, & Skinner, 2002).

The classroom contexts surrounding social inclusion may vary across cultures. The ecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) proposes that a set of ecological sub-systems affects human development. Among the sub-systems is the macro-system, as represented by culture. Culture may affect the contexts of social inclusion. Cultural belief systems have been broadly dichotomized into individualism and collectivism. Individualism embraces the individual as the source of value, self-reliance, personal achievement, independence, autonomy, and competition (Deal, 2002). Individualism thus emphasizes separation from the group (Deal, 2002). The predominant values of collectivist culture, on the other hand, include the group bond, mutual obligation, interdependence, belonging, cooperation, conformity, and group harmony (Deal, 2002). An aspect of collectivism thus symbolizes social support. Individualism has been found to be associated with the Western culture, and collectivism, the Chinese culture (Deal, 2002; Triandis et al., 1986). Emphasizing collectivism, China would have the classroom contexts, which would be more supportive of social inclusion than those in Canada. Moreover, because of likely cultural differences, there would be differences between Canada and China along the classroom contexts.

Teachers' perceptions or attitudes regarding inclusion are thought to either help or hinder the success of inclusion (Janney, & Snell, 1996). It has also been reported that social interaction with students with disabilities improved when teachers examined their own attitudes and beliefs about inclusion (Murray, 2002). Teachers' perspectives and experiences of the process of social inclusion would be invaluable when it comes to designing strategies to improve social inclusion. Based on teachers' views and experiences, this study presented a cross-national comparison of the classroom contexts underlying social inclusion in the elementary schools in Canada and China. The study sought to answer the following questions, within a cross nation context: (a) What is the general state of social inclusion; (b) where does social inclusion take place the most; (c) what activities generate the most social inclusion; and (e) what places present the most difficulty for social inclusion? The results would increase our understanding of the processes in which social inclusion takes place, thereby enabling us to identify where social inclusion succeeds and where it fails. As a result, more effective interventions can be designed.

## Method

### *Participants*

The study was based on purposive sampling which samples according to the needs of the study (Lonnner & Berry, 1986). Therefore, for a cross-national study, the sample was drawn from two countries with teachers as the participants. The teachers were from Canada ( $n = 64$ ) and China ( $n = 65$ ) who were teaching in general education schools. The former resided in a metropolitan city with a population of 350,000 in the Pacific-West region of Canada and the latter, in two major northern metropolitan cities, each with a population of over 3,000,000, in China. At the time of the study, the Chinese teachers were teaching grades one through six and the Canadian teachers were teaching kindergarten through grade seven. Eleven of the Chinese teachers were teaching special classes in general education schools. The Chinese schools had an enrollment ranging from 300 to 2,300 students. The Canadian schools had a student population ranging from 200 to 650. The teachers had varying degrees of teaching experience from two to over 30 years. Privacy prevented the collection of information on the teachers' age. There were 15 males and 49 females in the Canadian group and 15 males and 37 females in the Chinese group.

### *Procedure*

In Canada, the teachers were recruited, after the initial approval by the school principal, through a written description of the project and a presentation to the teachers as a group or individually by the researcher. A similar recruitment procedure was carried out in China, except for the personal presentation to the teachers by the principal investigator, which was instead made by the Chinese research assistants. The same recruitment letter in two languages, English and Chinese, was distributed respectively in Canada and China. Teachers' participation was voluntary in both countries.

After consenting to participate, the teachers were interviewed individually. The researcher interviewed the Canadian teachers, whereas three Chinese graduate research assistants who spoke the same dialect as the teachers and came from the same city interviewed the Chinese teachers. Before interviewing the teachers, the assistants practiced and met with the Canadian researcher (who also spoke Chinese). The teachers were asked to answer the questions according to their views and experiences. Interviews were tape-recorded and later transcribed. A Chinese doctoral student studying in Canada who was fluent in English further translated the Chinese interviews into English.

### *Instrument*

The instrument was a sub-questionnaire drawn from a more extensive questionnaire that had been developed for a comprehensive study of social integration and inclusion. The longer questionnaire examined various aspects of social inclusion, including classroom strategies for promoting social integration (Dyson, 2012). Using the back-translation method (Tafarodi & Swann, 1995), the English questionnaire was translated into Chinese and then translated back into English; this was done to ensure correspondence in meaning between the Chinese and English versions. Drawing from Eccles and Rosser's (1999) model of school contexts and for the purpose of collecting data that were useful for intervention, the sub-questionnaire included critical classroom contexts focusing on the places and activities that were generative of social inclusion or that presented difficulty for social inclusion. The questionnaire thus consisted of the following questions: (a) in your view, what is the current state of social integration or inclusion in general; (b) where does social integration or inclusion take place the most; (c) what types of activities generate the most social integration or inclusion; and (d) what places present the most difficulty for social integration or inclusion?

### *Data Analysis*

Responses to the interview questionnaire were analyzed question by question, using the content analysis method (Berg, 2007). Here, each word, phrase or sentence related to the topic of inquiry constituted a unit of analysis. From each unit, themes were identified through the constant comparison of similarities and differences in their meaning. Similar themes were subsequently grouped into larger categories and distinct themes were generated. The process was repeated until major and exclusive themes were derived for each question. When themes for all the questions were developed, they were combined and, through further comparison, major and exclusive themes were identified and finalized. To examine the reliability of the coding process, both a regular coder and a secondary coder independently coded the responses of 10 randomly selected teachers, five from each of the countries. Comparisons were made as a way to assess the degree of agreement between the two coders. The reliabilities ranged from 78% to 90% with an average of 81%.

### **Results**

Themes that emerged from the teachers' responses are reported in the following sections, with the main

themes being summarized in the tables. In each table, examples of the teachers' responses are provided for themes.

### *State of Social Inclusion*

Teachers were asked: "How socially included or integrated are the children with disabilities in your class?" As shown in Table 1, teachers identified different degrees of social inclusion, from the fully included or integrated to the marginally included.

Full inclusion was described in that children with disabilities took part in all school activities: social and academic. However, this was reported more by Chinese teachers than by the Canadians (52% vs. 47%). The greatest differences between the Chinese and the Canadian teachers arose on the issue of marginal inclusion. A substantial proportion of the Canadian teachers (30%) reported borderline inclusion; here children with disabilities were largely isolated on the playgrounds, playing only with others with similar disabilities (e.g., hearing impairment). In contrast, only one Chinese teacher reported such kind of borderline inclusion. Next to borderline inclusion, more Canadian teachers than Chinese teachers (14% vs. 4.6%) reported that inclusion depended on the children themselves, with some being more included than others. However, more Chinese teachers than Canadian teachers reported partial inclusion. Partial inclusion occurred in cases where inclusion took place more in certain activities (such as physical education or art) than in others or when inclusion was achieved with the help of the teacher. A small number of Chinese teachers also reported social isolation and rejection.

### *Place of Social Inclusion*

Teachers were asked: "Where does social integration or inclusion take place the most?" Table 2 presents the results. Both groups of teachers shared the opinion that social inclusion took place most often inside the classroom and under the teacher's supervision. The cross-country similarities largely ended here. The Canadian teachers regarded social inclusion as most commonly occurring at recess and lunch time, or on the school playground. However, the Chinese teachers evaluated collective activities (group activities) as generating the most opportunities for social inclusion. The Canadians also highlighted inclusion taking place anywhere in the school or in specific contexts (such as the library or music class) while the Chinese observed it happen more generally in the school or at home.

Table 1

*Themes and Frequency by Group of Teachers' Response to "How Included or integrated Are the Children with Disabilities in Your Class?"*

Theme	Canadian		Chinese	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. Fully included (Canadian: fully integrated.)	40	47.1	34	52.0
2. Borderline, not yet integrated (Canadian: when [hearing impaired] are outside they do not play with anybody but themselves.)	26	30.6	1	0.1
3. Depends on child, some are more integrated than others/some exceptions (Canadian: depending on the child-when they're ready they go out more.)	12	14.1	3	4.6
4. Moderate/partial integration (only in one or some activities) (Canadian: [hearing impaired] participate in all the activities with the other children . . . but in choosing teams they will often be left to the very end.)	2	2.4	10	15.3
5. Integration is not natural (Canadian: integration is not natural; integration has to be cultivated.)	1	2.3	0	0
6. Isolation	0	0	6	9.2
7. Special class	0	0	11	16.9
6. Miscellaneous (Canadian: depending on the child and teacher modeling; teacher still learning how to adapt my P.E. program; inclusion [happens] only 50% of the time.)	5	5.9	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>102.4</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>98.1</b>

Table 2

*Themes and Frequency by Group of Teachers' Response to "Where Does Social Inclusion or Integration Take Place the Most?"*

Theme	Canadian		Chinese	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. In classroom/inside (Canadian: it's not taking place on the playground; more in the classroom with direct adult supervision forcing it.) (Chinese: in mainstream class, but after class they do not play together.)	23	31.9	38	41.3
2. Recess and lunch time/on the school grounds (Canadians: it's definitely taking place on the playground; outside on the school grounds; the kids during recess and lunch time.) (Chinese: between classes, during breaks.)	21	29.2	10	10.9
3. Overall integration/everywhere (Canadian: it's an overall integration . . . they are fully integrated.)	9	12.5	0	0
4. Specific room/place/task (Canadian: library; music classes.)	7	9.7	0	0
5. During cooperative learning activities	3	4.2	0	0
6. Experiencing some difficulties (Canadian: K. is quiet and shy--very much with neighborhood kids, but other girls help her.)	3	4.2	0	0
7. With teacher and aides only (Canadian: J mostly interacts with me and his teacher's aide.)	1	1.4	0	0
8. At home and school (Chinese: it happens in the school and at home.)	1	1.4	7	7.6
9. Collective activities (Chinese: collective activities - our class takes part in almost all school activities with normal kids such as sports meetings and planting trees; in public places - going to the park with normal children.)	0	0	37	40.2
10. Miscellaneous (difficulty) (Canadian: not in this school-she's not accepted here; the playground is the most difficult place because there are no adults there making sure that guidelines are followed.)	4	5.6	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3

*Themes and Frequency by Group of Teachers' Response to "What Types of Activity Generate Most Social Integration?"*

Theme	Canadian		Chinese	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. PE/physical play time (Canadian: physical things in the gym; play type of activity) (Chinese: non-academic activities, e.g., school sport-meeting, can generate social integration.)	20	25.0	44	56.4
2. Group work times (Canadian: group times, when she has a chance to engage the children beside her.)	16	20.0	0	0
3. Unstructured classroom time/free play/recess (Canadian: during center time it would be games-she has games that also attract other children; snack time, she likes to share for snack.) (Chinese: during break, and in after-class activities.)	10	12.5	19	24.4
4. Arts (Canadian: arts; drama; music)	8	10.0	0	0
5. Special commercial programs (Canadian: the Second Step Program has done a lot with giving them models to practice what to say in different situations; programs like peer helping or being lunch monitor.)	7	8.8	0	0
6. Specific work activities/in-class activities (Canadian: very specific exercise, e.g., sorting; work activities; anything that is hands-on or manipulative.) (Chinese: in class - all students encourage her, giving her support.)	3	3.7	10	12.8
7. Math/science & language arts (Canadian: language - anything to do with reading and writing; probably reading with him; she likes to read to her buddy.)		7.4	0	0
8. Opportunity for interaction when working (Canadian: anything that we're doing in class where I let them talk as they're working; during free play; allowing the hard of hearing children to do some activities that will encourage them slowly.)	3	3.8	0	0
9. Clubs and activities outside school (Canadian: structured dance club, after school and lunch. (Chinese: in public activities in which both disabled children and normal children can do together, e.g., watching movies, going to park.)	2	2.5	3	3.8
10. Does not occur (Chinese: the child in my class has problems playing with other kids because of his sight problem; no integration.)	0	0	2	2.6
11. Miscellaneous (Canadian: dependent on the child; taking turns being someone's helper.)	5	6.3	0	0
Total	74	100	78	100

Table 4

*Themes and Frequencies by Group of Teacher's Response to "What Places Present the most Difficulty for Social Integration or Inclusion?"*

Theme	Canadian		Chinese	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
1. School subjects/school tasks/structured activities (Canadian: anytime that we have to be quiet and work.) (Chinese: it is the most difficult to take place in the classroom when the teacher is teaching.)	17	27.4	29	45.3
2. Unstructured time (play, recess, social) (Canadian: for some children, recess definitely is a difficult time.)	15	24.2	0	0
3. Social activities/public environment (Canadian: things like birthday parties -- when other children are going to birthday parties and they are not invited.)	7	11.3	6	9.4
4. P.E./field trips (Canadian: probably something like P.E.)	6	9.7	0	0
5. Physical difficulties (Canadian: he misses big chunks of school time because of physically getting him up and down the lift.)	4	6.5	0	0
6. Communication (Canadian: communication probably; inappropriate social statements.)	6	9.6	0	0
7. General difficulty with integration and activities (Canadian: it is pretty hard for them to do much right.)	1	1.6	6	9.4
8. Competitions (Chinese: it hardly happens in the activities in which excellent students show their abilities, for example, competitions)	10	1.6	15	23.4
9. Isolated environment (Chinese teachers: home; special school)	0	0	7	10.9
10. Miscellaneous (Canadian: she doesn't really have great difficulty; it depends on where the child is at and what kind of skill they have and what kind of support they have; can function with children in structured situation; when with no adult guidance)	5	8.1	1	1.6
Total	71	100	64	100

### *Types of Activity with the Most Social Inclusion*

Teachers were asked: “What types of activity generate the most social integration or inclusion?” Table 3 presents the responses. Both groups of teachers identified physical education or physical play time as generating the highest degree of social inclusion. Both groups further reported that unstructured classroom time, free play, and recess were also arenas that produced social inclusion. However, these activities were emphasized more by the Chinese teachers; twice as many of them highlighting this aspect of inclusion. Both groups also reported a list of other structured activities such as subject areas (including language arts, math and sciences), as being places of social inclusion. The Canadian teachers alone identified group work, arts, and commercial programs that teach social responsibilities as other activities which generated social inclusion.

### *Places with the Most Difficulty for Social Inclusion*

Teachers were asked: “What places present the most difficulty for social integration or inclusion?” Table 4 shows the themes and the frequency of the responses. While both groups of teachers identified school subjects and instructional activities as being the most difficult area for inclusion, this was reported by more Chinese than Canadian teachers. The two groups also identified, although to a lesser degree, social activities/or public environment as being difficult contexts for social inclusion. Differences between the groups appeared in all other dimensions. In particular, while Canadian teachers singled out unstructured time (e.g., play, recess), physical education, physical activities, and communication as being the next most difficult areas for social inclusion, the Chinese teachers reported competition and environmental isolation (specifically associated with the home and special school) as being the main constraint.

## **Discussion**

Based on the perspectives and experiences of teachers who were from Canada and China, this study examined the contexts of social inclusion within the elementary school classroom. The study addressed such issues as the state of social inclusion as well as the settings and activities related to it. The results show both similarities and differences between the countries along most of the issues. Only about half of the teachers in each group regarded social inclusion for children with disabilities as having taken place in full. However, more Canadian than Chinese teachers reported that social inclusion had only marginally been realized. More Canadian teachers also perceived social inclusion as

being dependent on the children themselves, with some being more included than others. Thus amid differences, there is the consistent observation that children with disabilities experience social exclusion even in classes aimed to induce more social acceptance and interaction. These results corroborate the earlier finding that children with disabilities are in general socially isolated (Odom, 2002; Tur-Kaspa, 2002; Siperstein et al., 2007); DiGennaro Reed et al., 2011). Such a state may be more pronounced in some regions than others as indicated by the present results comparing Canada and China.

Chinese and Canadian teachers shared the observation that social inclusion took place more inside the classroom. However, the Canadian teachers stressed that recess and lunchtime on the school grounds were also important times during which social inclusion took place; they also considered social inclusion to be taking place throughout all activities. On the other hand, the Chinese teachers reported that collective or group activities were where social inclusion occurred the most. Both groups noted that physical activities, group playing, social or free-time activities, and classroom activities, structured or unstructured, were the activities that generated the most social inclusion. Both groups of teachers further expressed both similar and different views regarding the places or activities that presented the most difficulty for social inclusion. Academic subjects and social activities were similarly viewed as posing problems for social inclusion. However, the Canadian teachers perceived unstructured activities and biological limitations and the Chinese teachers viewed competition to be the variables most obstructive to social inclusion.

Thus, with regard to the context, the above comparisons found similar views in both groups of teachers in that the opportunity for social inclusion was dormant in a variety of activities – structured or unstructured and inside and outside the classroom. However, the Chinese teachers emphasized the greater potential in collective activities for germinating social inclusion. In a similar vein, with regard to the types of activities, both Canadian and Chinese teachers considered academic and social interaction to present challenges for the actualization of social inclusion. However, while the Canadian teachers attributed the lack of social inclusion to the biological limitations of children with disabilities, the Chinese teachers blamed competition that was practiced in schools as the cause. These results thus suggest that opportunity abounds for social inclusion across school contexts and activities which can be ignited by the classroom teachers. Teachers thus may be key to the presence of social inclusion. The results may also reflect the influence of cultural beliefs in that individualism typical of the Western culture may have prompted the Canadian teachers to assign biological and individual limitations

as a possible factor for the lack of social inclusion; whereas the Chinese teachers held competitive classroom practice responsible.

The results of this study suggest that social inclusion may appear in different places within the school environment and in different activities or forms. The results also suggest that there are places and activities that may promote or impede social inclusion. Similarities between the two countries suggest that there may be certain universal features associated with social inclusion. Locations and activities facilitative of social inclusion may be structured and unstructured activities engaged in during school breaks (i.e., recess and lunch time). For both countries, academics appear to be the most difficult arena for engendering social inclusion. There are also places and activities, which are unique to countries as facilitators or inhibitors of social inclusion. Examining cultural value systems may help to explain the differences.

The results of this study suggest that social inclusion remains a distant goal for many children, especially in Canada. There is thus a great need for deliberate efforts to continue to promote social inclusion in Canada and China. This may also be the case for other countries as well.

On a more universal level, the presently identified contexts and activities that promote or inhibit social inclusion can serve as the foundation for intervention to improve social inclusion. Places and activities that generate social inclusion may be enhanced while activities and places that inhibit social inclusion may become the focus of intervention. Of particular importance here is the common observation, on the part of teachers from both Canada and China, that academics constituted the contexts least conducive to social inclusion. Intervention may particularly focus on this domain. For this purpose, educators may make use of the activities and places that were presently found to generate social inclusion in the teaching of academic subjects. Structured teaching, such as group work or cooperative learning (Slavin, 1995), may thus be encouraged within unstructured environments inside or outside the classroom. Different countries may also consider their unique cultural systems in designing places and activities that would be facilitative of social inclusion.

This study has expanded the database on inclusion beyond the largely American base by producing cross-national data and elaborating on the specific contexts of social inclusion. The data generated from this study, based exclusively on the perspectives of teachers who are intimately involved in the children's classroom life, could help facilitate the development of effective intervention programs to promote social inclusion across

such nations as Canada and China, and possibly beyond. The cross-cultural data may also enhance international awareness of social inclusion. The study therefore possesses much educational significance. The contexts identified presently may be tested quantitatively. Further cross-cultural study of social inclusion beyond that presently examined would further advance knowledge and programs designed to promote social inclusion across different countries.

This study may have been weakened by the inclusion of a small number of special education teachers in a sample dominated by general education teachers. However, a random comparison of the special education teachers and the general education teachers presently failed to detect group differences on the assessment of the state of social inclusion. Nevertheless, future research may reduce the bias by including only general education teachers.

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# Inclusive Early Childhood Education in Nigeria: The Journey So Far

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## Abstract

*The education of children with special educational needs in Nigeria is recognized and supported by at least three policy documents. All the three documents state that inclusion or integration should be at the heart of education designed to meet the needs of children with special educational needs. But since 2004, when government started providing preschool education in the country, the education of children with special educational needs, as well as the issue of inclusion, has been relegated to the background. Therefore, this study examined Nigeria's educational policies, available resources and the extent to which the government has been providing Inclusive Early Childhood Education (IECE) in Nigeria. The study revealed that the educational policies were not specific, resources were grossly inadequate and government had not been supporting inclusion. The study concluded that the Nigerian educational system did not appear to be ripe for IECE. It is suggested that the government should consider using integration as a transitory effort towards inclusion.*

Enshrined in the Nigerian constitution is, inter alia, the right for every Nigerian child to quality education, friendship, and environment where holistic development of their potential is ensured irrespective of any developmental challenges that they may have. The minimum standards for early child care centers in Nigeria, the pronouncement of Convention on the Right of the Child, the World Summit for Children and the Millennium Development Goals to which Nigeria is a signatory, are a testament to this fact (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, 2007). The early childhood education given to the Nigerian child is expected to be of high quality, holistic, functional, and developmentally appropriate. To achieve this lofty objective, the educational system in general and early childhood education in particular should embrace global best practices to ensure that the citizenry are well educated irrespective of their gender, race, or disability.

Early childhood education is the education given to children during their formative years. While some believe that early childhood should cover ages birth to six (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004; Oduolowu, 2011), others are of the opinion that it should be for children of between birth to eight years of age (UNESCO, 2006; Division of Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). In this study, early childhood education is used (as defined by Nigerian National Policy on Education) to refer to the kind of preschool education that is given to children between birth to five years that is, prior to their entry into the statutory primary education (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004).

One of the benefits of early childhood education is that it promotes early identification of any developmental delays among children thereby facilitating the provision of early intervention (Oduolowu, 2011). This benefit accommodates both typically developing children and children with special educational needs in the same learning environment. Byington (2010) identified three key elements of this type of early childhood education that is access, participation, and support. It was apparently for this reason that the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated various policies to back up the education of both children without disabilities and children with special educational needs in the same learning environment. These policies include the National Policy on Education (NPE) (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004), the National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers in Nigeria (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, 2007), and the National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, 2007). These policies propose inclusive or integration systems of education for young children.

In order to put this study in context, it is necessary, first, to define the terms integration, segregation and inclusion. Wang (2009) defined segregation as the system of educating children with disabilities in traditional self-contained classrooms, specifically designed to cater for such children. In Nigeria, the practice of segregation gave rise to special schools such as schools for the deaf, schools for children with intellectual disabilities, among others. Integration involves designating special classes for children with

special educational needs in a regular school setting (Berg, 2004). This system of integration is often considered to be better than segregation because the children with special educational needs are afforded opportunity to mingle with their peers without disabilities in the same school. Such an arrangement has considerable social benefits for the children. The term inclusion can be defined as a system of education that supports educating children with disabilities in the same environment as their peers without disabilities (Soodak et al., 2002). According to the joint position statement by the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) as reported by Byington, (2010):

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every infant and young child and his or her family, regardless of ability to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. (p. 1)

Inclusive early childhood education therefore, entails that all children, including those with disabilities, learn together in the same classroom, accessing the same curriculum (Byington, 2010; Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, 2011; Soodak et al., 2002). This system of education for all children is informed by many factors, some of which are encapsulated in the strong argument against separation of children with special educational needs from their peers without disabilities in either schools or classrooms. The separation often leads to stigmatization and labeling; on the contrary, inclusion should make us appreciate the fact that the children with special educational needs and their parents are full members of the society and that they have the right to full participation. They should be allowed equal opportunities for development and learning that would develop a sense of belonging in every child (Division of Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Byington (2010) identified three key elements of quality inclusive early childhood education: access, participation, and support. According to Byington (2010) every child, irrespective of disability, should have access to a variety of learning opportunities, activities, settings, and environments; they need to be able to fully participate in play and learning activities which can be accomplished by providing children with individualized supports and accommodations. Their educators need a support system which includes professional development

on effective inclusive practices and access to resource services. The Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (2011) identified the following important components of a good inclusive early childhood education program: a) Written program materials should express a philosophy that welcomes all children and families; b) The physical environment should be accessible to all children and families and should support children's independence and involvement; c) There should be administrative support for inclusion to work (written policies consistent with an inclusive philosophy, adequate staffing, training, equipment, planning time, and consultation as needed); d) Families and professionals in education should collaborate and work toward mutual goals.

An inclusive system with this kind of program has a great benefit for all children, their teachers, and other professionals working with them, as well as their parents and the society at large. For children with disabilities, such a program promotes better academic outcomes, better socialization skills, improved self-respect and self-esteem, and increased employability (Wang, 2009). Their peers without disabilities also benefit by developing better awareness and understanding of individual differences, which will reduce stigma (Berg, 2004). Both general and special education teachers also tend to benefit via sharing of knowledge and effective pedagogical skills (Wang, 2009).

The Nigerian system of education has just been changed from 6:3:3:4 (i.e., 6 years in primary, three years in junior secondary; three years in senior secondary and four years in post-secondary school) to 1:6:3:3:4 (i.e., one year in preschool; six years in primary, three years in junior secondary, three years in senior secondary and four years in post-secondary). The preschool period is what is termed early childhood education in Nigeria and it was made compulsory in 2004. This level of education was recognized by the first National Policy on Education published in 1977, but then the provision and funding of preschool education in the country was left in the hands of private individuals, religious bodies, and non-governmental organizations (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1981). The Nigerian government accepted the responsibility of providing and funding one-year preschool education less than a decade ago. The following policies were formulated about inclusion:

- a. National Policy on Education section 96, subsection c (i): "to provide inclusive or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the UBE scheme" (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004)

- b. National Policy for Integration Early Childhood Development, section 8.7 (The last bullet): “government will make provision for early detection and management of children with disabilities” (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, 2007, p. 8).
- c. National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers, section for special children “school will screen children at intake and periodically to detect any special needs; provide requisite facilities to assist children with special needs; motivate and ensure full participation of physically challenged children in learning activities and appropriate referral when necessary” (Nigerian Education Research and Development Council, 2007).

Other efforts made by the government towards the education of children with disabilities include establishing preschool sections in the existing public primary schools and employing and deploying teachers to these sections. Unfortunately, there was no standard or curriculum guiding the practices of these centers; neither inclusion nor integration was defined in any of these documents. Now that the government is directly providing preschool education, one expects that government-owned preschool centers, and their educational practices and standards would be models for the privately owned ones. However, for nine years now since the government has been providing and funding one-year early childhood education, nothing is known about what has been done. Indeed, there is dearth of information about the education of children with special educational needs in Nigeria. Besides, there is no research on this subject, to the best knowledge of this author. It is against this background that this current study set out to examine the extent to which inclusive early childhood education has been achieved in the country. The policies made and the extent of the provision of early childhood education for children with special educational needs are examined.

Based on the above premises, this study was guided by the following research questions: 1) Based on the country’s national policies on early childhood education, is Nigeria ready for early childhood inclusive education? 2) Do Nigerian public primary schools have the necessary infrastructure for inclusive early childhood education? 3) To what extent is inclusive early childhood education being implemented in Nigeria?

### **Method**

The study employed a mixed methods design,

utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods. The qualitative component consisted of analyzing the inclusive early childhood education policy documents while the quantitative research design was used to gather data from a sample of participants using descriptive survey of the questionnaire (by e-mail and postal mail) type. The population of the study consisted of the stakeholders in the education of children with special educational needs, including (i) the officer in-charge of special education in the State Universal Basic Education Board (The Desk Officer of Special Education); (ii) the head-teachers of the preschool sections in public primary schools, and (iii) lecturers teaching special education courses in tertiary institutions across the country. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed to select the sample for the study. There were 37 State Special Education Desk Officers in the country (one for each for the 36 States and one for the Federal Capital Territory [FCT]); the questionnaire was sent to all of them through e-mail.

To select the head-teacher of preschool sections in the public schools, stratified random sampling technique was used. The six geo-political zones in the country were the strata recognized. Four states were randomly selected from each zone, making a total of 24 states out of the 36 states in the country. From each of the selected states, 10 schools were purposively selected and the criteria for selection were: (i) the school must be a public primary school; that is, it must be owned by the government, (ii) the school must have a well-established preschool section because, as at the time of collecting this data, not all public primary schools had a preschool section; and (iii) schools that admitted children with disabilities were given priority in the selection. Information about these schools was accessed from the Department of Special Education at the University of Ibadan, where a degree and graduate programs in special education are offered. The names, addresses, and/or e-mails of these schools were accessed either from the departmental records or their graduate students that were from almost all parts of the country. At the end of this process, 240 public primary schools were selected and the head teachers of the preschool sections of these schools received the questionnaire.

One university and one college of education were randomly selected from each of the six geo-political zones of the country. The questionnaire was sent, by email, to two lecturers in the Department of Special Education from each of the selected institutions. Information about these lecturers was obtained through contacts from the Department of Special Education, University of Ibadan and the Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, Oyo State. At the end of this,

24 lecturers of special education were involved in the study.

Based on the selection process, the sample of the study was supposed to be 301 (37 desk officers, 240 head-teachers and 24 lecturers) stakeholders in the education of CSEN in Nigeria, but only 216 (71.7%) fully participated in the study. This comprised 26 desk officers, 17 lecturers and 173 head-teachers. The remaining 28.3% (That is, 11 desk officers, 7 lecturers and 67 head-teachers) did not complete the questionnaires sent to them.

Qualitative data were gathered from four sources: three policy documents - National Policy on Education (NPE), National Policy for Integrated Early Childhood Development in Nigeria (NPIECD) and National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers in Nigeria (NMSECCC) - and one self-designed open-ended research instrument (questionnaire) titled Implementation of Inclusive Early Childhood Education Policies Questionnaire (IIECEPQ). The IIECEPQ has 12 open-ended items wherein two items address awareness about existence of National Policies for IECE, three items measure inputs put in place for IECE and seven items are on the extent of provision of IECE. The items on the questionnaire were generated from the literature.

The IIECEPQ was validated by three lecturers in the Department of Special Education and a lecturer in the Institute of Education, University of Ibadan; the four experts determined the face, content, and construct validity of the instrument before administration. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, twenty copies of it were administered to individuals not part of the sample of the study. Using test-re-test technique, a coefficient of 0.73 was obtained.

The policy documents were analyzed using a qualitative method. That is, the provisions in the documents were critically analyzed. The filled questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentage. Pie and bar charts were also used where necessary.

## Results

### *Research Question one*

*Based on the country's national policies on early childhood education, is Nigeria ready for early childhood inclusive education?* The first policy document that feature inclusive early childhood education is the National Policy on Education (2004), section 96, sub-section c(i) which promises "to provide inclusive or integration of special classes and units into ordinary/public schools under the UBE scheme". This

indicates that the government that formulated this policy was not sure about whether to provide an inclusive system or an integrated system because the terms are not the same. While integrated system implies the creation of special classes within the regular school designated for children with special educational needs (Berg, 2004), an inclusive system is more comprehensive and all-encompassing; it is a system of education whereby all categories of children learn together in the same classroom, are exposed to the same curriculum, guided by the same policies, and where there is collaboration among different professionals, families and communities. Inclusive education is also individualistic in nature in that the curriculum, the physical environment and methods of teaching and learning are planned such as to cater for every child with or without a particular disability (Soodak et al, 2002; Byington, 2010; Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, 2011). It should also be noted that the needed resources for these two systems are not exactly the same. The educational policy in this current form might have been a result of the fact that those who formulated it were not experts in special education. If experts in special education were not part of the committee that formulated the policy, the formulators might not have been well informed about the practices as well as the proper use of the terms in that special area of education. Again, the criteria used in selecting people that participated in policy making might not be based on the relevance of their qualification and experience. Most of the time, those who were invited to participate in policy formulation were cronies of those who invited them, and it seems they were invited simply to come for their own share of "the national cake".

The second policy document that mentions inclusive early childhood education is the National Policy for Integration Early Childhood Development (2007). The only pronouncement related to inclusive early childhood education in that document is found under section 8.7 (The last bullet) which states that "government will make provision for early detection and management of children with disabilities". This pronouncement is too short to guide the practices of inclusive early childhood education in public schools. For the system to be accessible, participatory in nature and supportive for the children with special educational needs as highlighted by Byington (2010), it should be more than a one-sentence policy. Also, inclusive early childhood education should be an educational program with materials expressing a philosophy that welcomes all children and families. In addition, the physical environment is expected to be accessible to all children and families and support children's independence and involvement and there

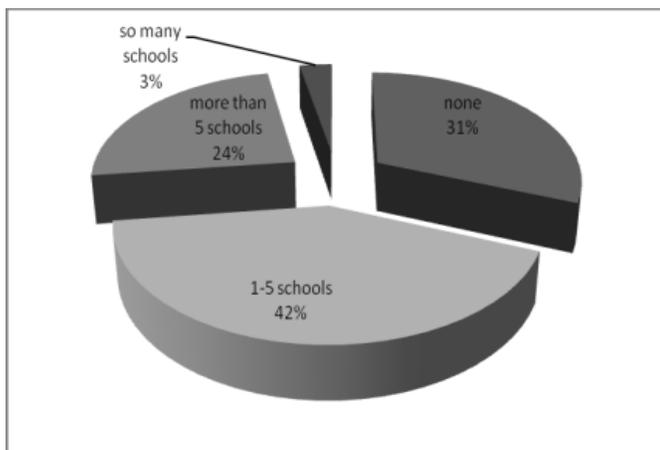


Figure 1. Participants response on number of schools that practice IECE.

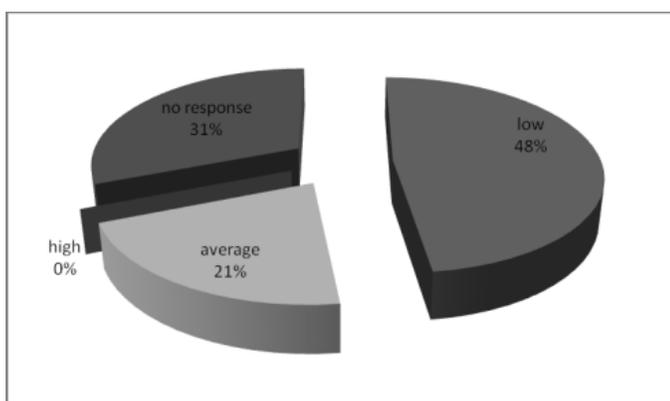


Figure 2. Responses about level of equipment in the IECE.

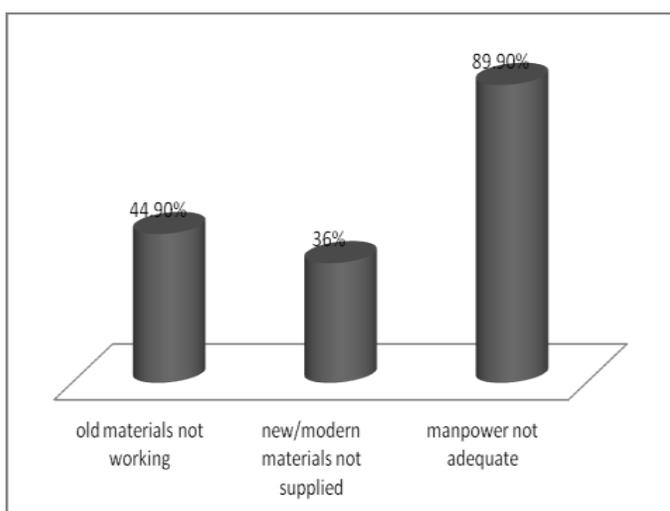


Figure 3. Comment of stakeholders about resources for IECE.

should be administrative support for inclusion to work. In other words, written policies consistent with an inclusive philosophy, adequate staffing, training, equipment, planning time, and consultation services and families, care and education professionals and even the community should collaborate and work toward mutual goals (Center for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies, 2011). For Nigeria to have such an educational system there is definitely need for more than a one-sentence policy.

The last document, the National Minimum Standard for Early Child Care Centers (2007) has the policy statement under the section for special children, which states that schools will: “screen children at intake and periodically to detect any special needs; provide requisite facilities to assist children with special needs; motivate and ensure full participation of physically challenged children in learning activities and appropriate referral when necessary” (p. 8). This four-point standard is all that we have to make all centers that will practice inclusive early childhood education effective. This is considered grossly inadequate and not specific enough. For instance, the standard fails to specify the type of building structure that should be used by such a center, how to make such an environment all children-friendly and independent, the specific resources that must be available for different categories of children, and most importantly, the structure of the curriculum in order to give room for individualized instruction. The four points adumbrated in this policy document are too general and loose to guide the practices of the centers. The Centre for Community Inclusion and Disability Studies (2011) states that whoever is planning to have inclusive early childhood education should review the selected resources and virtual toolkit to learn more about inclusion and meet with care and education professionals to talk about and plan for the inclusion of all children in the setting, among others. The policy documents that were examined here revealed that Nigeria is yet to adequately articulate the meaning of inclusive education and the practices and what it takes to have inclusive early childhood education.

### Research Question Two

*Do Nigerian public primary schools have the necessary infrastructure for inclusive early childhood education?* To answer this question, the responses of the 216 stakeholders to the education of children with special educational needs were quantitatively analyzed. Table 1 indicates that 216 participants were involved in this study. Out of this, 31% ( $n=67$ ) indicated that none of the public primary schools practiced inclusive education;

Table 1

*Extent of Inclusive pre-primary and Primary Schools in Nigeria*

Items	None (%)	1-5 schools (%)	5-10 schools (%)	More than 10 (%)	Total (%)
In the state you reside, how many public primary schools practice inclusive pre-primary and primary education? (None/1-5/more than 5/so many)	67 (31)	91 (42.1)	52 (24.1)	06 (2.8)	216 (100)

Table 2

*Extent of Equipment in Public Early Childhood Centers for Inclusion*

Items	Low extent (%)	Average extent (%)	High extent (%)	No response (%)	Total (%)
If there are public primary schools with inclusion in your state, to what extent are they equipped for better inclusive education? (Low/average/high) extent	103 (47.7)	46 (21.3)	(0.0)	67 (31.0)	216 (100.0)

Table 3

*General Comments about Inclusive Public Early Childhood Centers for Inclusion*

General comments	Frequency	%
1. The old materials in the special school are no more functioning	97	44.9
2. Materials are not supplied	78	36.1
3. Manpower is grossly inadequate	194	89.8

Table 4a

*Extent to which Government Provide IECE (Part A)*

Items	None (%)	1-5 schools (%)	5-10 schools (%)	More than 10 (%)	Total (%)
How many schools educate children with special needs in your State?	4 (1.9)	46 (21.1)	151 (69.9)	15 (6.9)	216 (100.0)
How many of these schools practice inclusive education?	64 (29.6)	105 (48.6)	40 (18.5)	07 (3.2)	216 (100.0)
How many of these schools practice inclusive early childhood education?	69 (31.9)	111 (51.4)	23 (10.7)	13 (6.0)	216 (100.0)

Table 4b

*Extent to which Government Provide IECE (Part B)*

Questions	No (%)	Yes (%)	Total
Is there private school(s) that educate children with special needs in your state?	14 (6.5)	202 (93.5)	216 (100)
Do the private schools practice inclusive pre-primary/primary education in the state?	165 (76.4)	51 (23.6)	216 (100)
If yes, do these private schools charge school fees?		216 (100)	216 (100)

about 42% ( $n=91$ ) indicated that between one to five public primary schools were practicing it, 24% ( $n=52$ ) stated that more than five schools practiced inclusive education while 3% ( $n=06$ ) claimed that many schools practiced inclusive education. The fact that some of the participants believed that none of the public primary schools in their states practiced inclusive education might be because they had a different understanding of inclusion than the schools. These participants might be the lecturers and some of the teachers that were trained in special education. For those who expressed the view that some public primary schools did practice inclusion, their opinion might be because of the controversy surrounding the meaning of inclusive system of education in Nigeria. Inclusion and integration were also used interchangeably in the national policy (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). According to the Division of Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) the lack of a shared national definition has contributed to misunderstanding about inclusion. Therefore, some of the stakeholders might be mistakenly referring to integration as inclusion. This information is graphically depicted in Figure 1.

Table 2 indicates that 69% ( $n= 149$ ) of the total participants responded to the item on the extent to which the system of education is equipped. Also, 48% ( $n = 103$ ) indicated that the schools were ill-equipped, 21% ( $n = 46$ ) indicated that the schools were averagely equipped while no one indicated that the schools were highly equipped. That some of the respondents admitted that the schools were ill-equipped is certainly because government had not been making provision for the needs of public primary schools. Unagha (2008) and Imam (2012) state that the implementation of the educational policy is not well attended to and the provision of necessary resources is lacking. The participants who indicated that the schools were averagely equipped might have come to this conclusion as a result of the fact that some of them were still referring to special schools (segregation) where children with special educational needs were being taught separately with equipment that had been in place since the 1970's and 80's (most of this equipment has stopped functioning). This might be why some participants thought that these schools were not

fully equipped. This information is graphically presented in Figure 2.

Responding to the general comments, Table 3 revealed that 45% ( $n = 97$ ) of the participants indicated that the old materials given to the schools were no longer working or were outdated; 36% ( $n = 78$ ) indicated that necessary and modern materials were not supplied and 90% ( $n = 194$ ) indicated that manpower needed for inclusive education was grossly inadequate. Again, this finding is in support of Unagha's (2008) and Imam's (2012) finding that government had failed to supply the necessary resources to the schools and the educational sector was underfunded. This information is graphically presented in Figure 3.

Based on results of this current study, it is clear that Nigerian public primary schools do not have the infrastructure to practice inclusive early childhood education. This finding supports the findings of Olubadewo (2007) and Imam (2012) that the funding of public education in the country was extremely poor, which lead to virtual nonexistence of necessary equipment and things in the system. Another dimension of this is the attitude of some government officials to the education of children with disabilities. The position of most of the government officials about the education of CSEN is that there is no need to be bothered about that kind of education when much has not been done about the education of the regular children (Fakolade, 2013). This implies that the education of children with special educational needs in Nigeria is taken to be less important compared to that of children without challenges. This might have accounted to the reason why necessary resources are not provided for the education of children with special needs. Soodak and colleagues (2002) emphasizes how important human capital and material resources are to the education of people with special needs because the education is resource driven. Nevertheless, every nation is expected to provide this kind of education because of the benefits; besides, children with special needs have the right to education and development.

*Research Question Three*

*To what extent is inclusive early childhood education being implemented in Nigeria?* Table 4a indicates that a

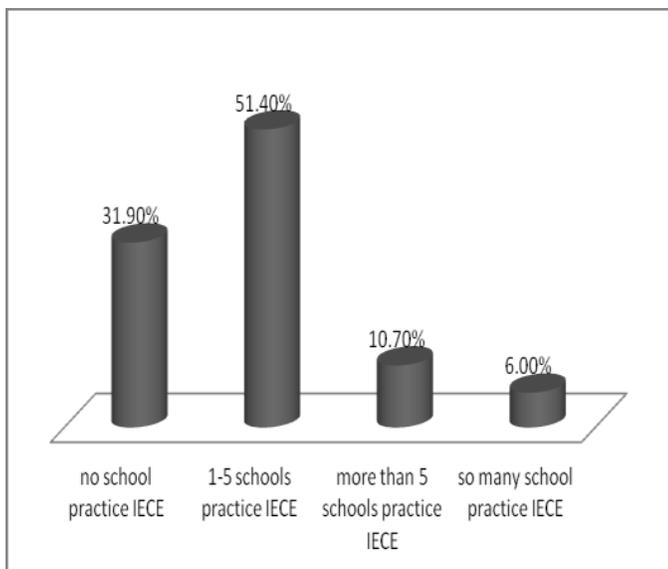


Figure 4. Level of providing inclusive ECE.

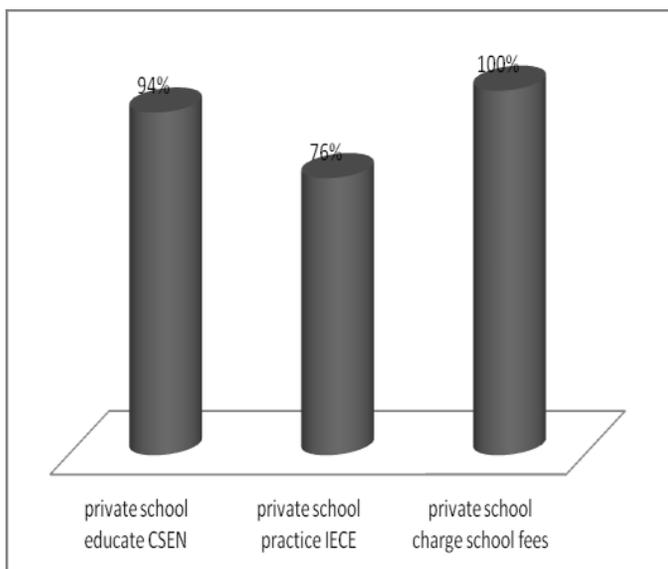


Figure 5. Level of private intervention into education of CSEN.

majority of the respondents 70% ( $n = 151$ ) indicated that there were more than five schools in their respective states that provided education to children with special educational needs. It was also revealed that 30% ( $n = 65$ ) indicated that none of the schools practiced inclusion while 49% ( $n = 106$ ) indicated that between one to five schools practiced inclusion. Also, 32% ( $n = 69$ ) indicated that there was no inclusive early childhood education while 51% ( $n = 111$ ) said inclusive early childhood education schools available were between one and five schools. This implies that many schools educated children with special educational needs while

very few of them practiced inclusive education, and even less practice inclusive early childhood education. See Figure 4.

Table 4b also reveals that 94% ( $n = 203$ ) of the participants indicated that privately owned schools were the ones educating children with special educational needs; that 76% ( $n = 164$ ) indicated that none of these schools were practicing inclusive early childhood education and that the privately owned schools charged fees. Figure 5 presents this in a bar chart.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the participants to this study (i.e., Desk Officers to special education in the Ministries of Education; lecturers teaching special education in the colleges and head-teachers of early childhood education centers) agreed more on the fact that privately owned institutions educated children with special educational needs more than the government owned schools but that the privately owned institutions did not practice inclusive education and that they charged school fees. This finding could be because some non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and private individuals had special schools. Some of these schools include, school for individuals with physical disabilities, school for the blind, school for the deaf and so on. These types of schools are very prevalent across the nation. In fact, many parents of children with special educational needs prefer the privately owned schools than the public ones because of availability of resources, better care for their children, and supervised and monitored academic activities in the private schools. This corroborates Olubadewo (2007) and Imam (2012) who observed that despite the fact that there were good educational policies in the country the policies were not implemented as expected. It seems that the failure of the government to give quality education for the citizenry had invited many individuals (qualified and unqualified) to take education of Nigerian children as a business – “give little and earn much” kind of business. The only noticeable product of this practice is increase in ineffective and non-functional education and exploitation of the masses to the extreme. It is unimaginable that a private primary school could be charging over N200 000 per term as school fees in a country where the minimum wage is N18 000.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Proper recognition was given to early childhood education in Nigeria in 2004 when the government agreed to provide one-year preschool education in the public primary schools in the country. Since then, there has been silence about the education of children with special educational needs. But there is reference, in the

educational policies, to an inclusive system of education. This current study examined the policies, provision of resources, and level of implementation of the policies. Results demonstrated that the policies were not specific enough, resources were not provided, and inclusion was not being practiced in the country. The government should first seek to practice full and well planned integration before an inclusive system can be introduced.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered for the development of effective education of children with special educational needs in Nigeria:

- There is need to be specific regarding the terms used in educational policies and the pronouncements of the policy documents. This can be achieved by inviting experts in the area where policy is to be formulated such as special education. Also, drafts of such policies should be made available across all educational institutions and other concerned organizations for their review. This could be made available online. Input from the various stakeholders should be well analyzed and incorporated into the policy and attempts should be made to make the policies implementable.
- Based on the meaning of inclusion and what it takes to practice it, it appears that the Nigerian society and its educational system are not ripe for it. It is better to first think of an integration system where some classrooms will be dedicated to children with special educational needs in the public pre-primary and primary schools. Such classrooms should be established in every school across the nation.
- All necessary resources should be made available in such schools, including individualized curricula, qualified teachers from all relevant areas, learning aids and assistive technology, and other instructional resources.

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# **Learner Diversity: A Successful Blended Professional Learning Approach Promoting Quality Inclusion in the United Kingdom and New South Wales, Australia**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper describes the development of an online training model for teachers and teaching assistants working with students with special educational needs. Originally developed as part of a government funded initiative in the UK, the model has been successfully applied in other contexts, most notably in New South Wales, Australia where it has had a significant impact on the inclusion agenda over most of the country. The deployment of the model across public schools in New South Wales (NSW) is described. The factors leading to successful continuing professional development for teachers are identified from a literature review, and the critical success factors in the online training model are highlighted.*

Although educational legislation in England is centralized through the UK parliament, over 150 Local Authorities (LAs) carry responsibility for making educational provision in their area and are directly accountable to locally elected councillors. Like many countries around the world, the UK is a signatory to the 1994 Salamanca Statement, and has legislation and guidance in place promoting inclusive practices in schools; each LA is free to interpret this legislation in different ways, with case law providing the only definitive interpretation. As a result, parents have often complained that provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) varies from one LA to the next, amounting to what is termed a 'postcode lottery'. This lack of consistency has also been experienced in New South Wales. In response to this, in 2000, the Government in the United Kingdom funded a network of 13 Special Educational Needs Regional Partnerships throughout England, whose remit was to promote greater consistency in services and provision for children with special educational needs within their region. The model followed was bottom-up, in which the LAs in each region determined their own priorities within a flexible framework defined by what was then called the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Training of teachers and others working with pupils with SEN was identified as a regional priority within the South Central region, comprising 13 LAs in the south of England. An audit of further professional development in SEN was carried out by one of the authors, revealing widespread variation across the region ranging from very little provision to support for high level specialist

training at master's degree level for a small minority. What did become clear, as has been experienced widely, was that there was no consistent approach applied in any LA to providing training for those working directly with pupils with SEN, such as non-specialist class teachers and teaching assistants, at a practical level and in a timely manner.

Consequently, a decision was taken by the South Central Regional Partnership, to develop an online training model which would provide consistency across the region, available on a flexible 'just-in-time' basis, to be delivered by local support services normally available to schools. The first course was developed in 2001 in partnership with Invalid Children's Aid Nationwide (I CAN – a UK national charity for speech and language difficulties) and the Isle of Wight, and focused on young people with speech and language difficulties in secondary schools. This area was chosen as it was felt that it was an area of educational need regularly overlooked with many young people not adequately supported following their transfer to secondary school, resulting in some of them rebelling and presenting behavioral problems. The first course was run with unqualified teaching assistants and the impact was independently evaluated by an educational psychologist in training. The results demonstrated positive impact on both the observed behavior of the teaching assistants and on pupil outcomes. Over the next few years further courses were developed in a range of SEN, employing the expertise of specialist staff from participating local authorities to develop course content. At the same time

the online training framework was developed through an iterative process based on user feedback.

By 2008, when government funding was withdrawn from the regional partnerships, courses in five areas of SEN were available, with a sixth under development. The impact of these courses was such that a number of LAs chose to directly fund the continued delivery and development of these courses through a not-for-profit company (OnLineInset) established specifically for this purpose.

### *Effective Continuing Professional Development*

In 2006 the UK Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) reviewed practice in 29 schools, previously identified through the inspection process as demonstrating good practice in managing and using continuous professional development (CPD). Arrangements for CPD were seen as a logical chain of procedures in these schools, involving identifying school and staff needs, planning to meet those needs through a program of relevant and varied activities, involving support staff alongside teachers, monitoring progress, and evaluating impact. CPD was seen as most effective where senior managers gave it a central role in planning for improvement.

However, few of the schools succeeded in evaluating the impact on teaching quality and pupil outcomes, largely through a failure to identify expected outcomes at the planning stage, and none had any means of assessing value for money. In about one third of the schools planning for the professional development of individuals was poor, and the inspectors felt that insufficient use was made of coaching and mentoring across all schools. Hustler, McNamara, Jarvis, Londra & Campbell, (2003) carried out a survey of teacher's perceptions of effective CPD, summarizing data from 2500 returned questionnaires from 429 English schools. Whilst online learning was featured in this study, it was restricted to personal online learning, i.e., using the web as a learning resource. Practical application of the content of the CPD was clearly identified as the most significant factor in successful CPD. Other factors, such as tailoring to individual needs, organization, delivery pedagogy, presentational style, provider knowledge and experience, and focus on within school issues were perceived as being of lesser importance.

Within the health education sector a meta-analysis was recently completed of the influence of different educational techniques employed in CPD on learning outcomes (Bluestone, Johnson, Fullerton, Carr, Alderman & Bon Tempo, 2012). Sixty-nine articles from peer-reviewed journals were analyzed providing

evidence of the influence of factors such as timing, setting, delivery media, etc., on learning outcomes. The findings suggest that the use of multiple techniques that allow for interaction, and the processing and application of information are the most successful in achieving learning outcomes. Didactic approaches involving passive learning, such as reading and lecture, are the least effective, having little or no impact. In particular, the evidence points to the use of case studies, practice and feedback, face to face interaction, simulation, role play, and repetitive interventions set in the workplace or a similar environment. With the exception of any explicit focus on simulation and role play, all these elements are present in the online training model.

Bluestone and colleagues (2012) further state that whether instruction is delivered face-to-face, or by computer is less important than the techniques selected. "Computer based learning can be equally or more effective than face-to-face instruction and more cost efficient, but case-based techniques, opportunities for practice and interaction with the educator should be prioritized" (Bluestone et al., 2012, p. 2).

### *The Online Training Model*

The online training model was originally founded in some basic principles based on the experience of one of the authors in delivering in-service training to serving teachers as a practicing educational psychologist. The first of these is that to be effective, training needs to be delivered in the context in which it is to be applied. Centralized training models, in which staff attend a course led by experts at a location remote from the workplace, tends to have limited impact, staff regressing to their previous practice on return to the workplace after a short period of time. Training needs to be delivered in the context of the workplace and the support which is normally available to schools. The second is that training needs to have immediate practical application in the workplace. Whilst CPD needs to be founded in evidence-based practice, the skills that need to be developed relate to everyday classroom practice, and not to the ability to produce written reports, essays, and other products associated with higher education. The pursuit of educational qualifications is therefore, a secondary not a primary purpose. The third principle is that training intended to support inclusive practice needs to be targeted at those in most need, in particular class teachers and teaching assistants who, for example, have recently received a student with autism into their class. Such staff are unlikely to have previously accessed specialist training, either through lack of opportunity or

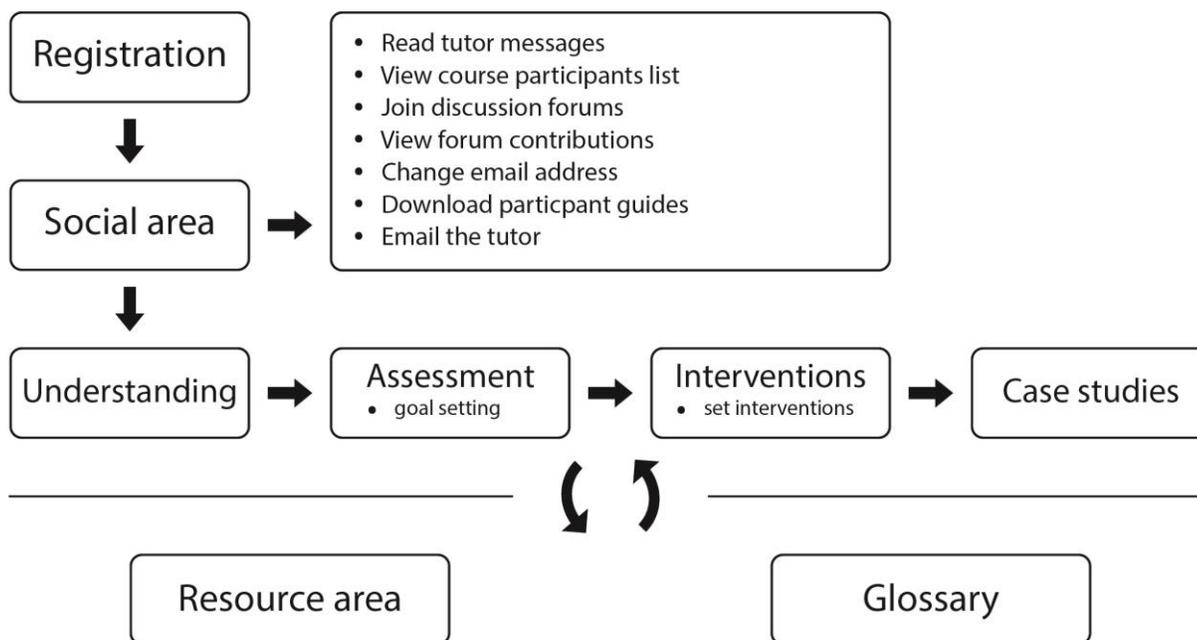


Figure 1. A schematic representation of the online training model.

motivation, but nevertheless find themselves in the front line of inclusion.

Each online course follows an identical format, with content distributed across four main sections labelled Understanding, Assessment, Interventions, and Case Studies. The first of these provides general information about the special need in question whilst the Assessment and Interventions sections contain both specific and more generalized information about these processes. The Case Studies then provide examples of specific applications. Participants are required to carry out an assessment and intervention with a young person with whom they are working as they progress through these sections, which they are later required to report back on after a 90-day period using a Goal Attainment Scaling model (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968).

Each time a participant logs into the system they are directed to a social area containing a number of administrative functions shown schematically in Figure 1. They can also access a resource area and glossary at any point whilst progressing through the main sections.

#### *How The Online Learning Model Has Been Blended With Daily Teacher Practice In New South Wales Public Schools*

The online training model has been introduced progressively in public schools in New South Wales since 2009. It is delivered through a blended learning

approach in which face to face interaction is mixed with tutored online learning. In each course three face-to-face sessions are interspersed with the online experience. Online tutors are drawn from those who would normally provide support and advice within and to schools. These include school-based executives, specialist or advisory teachers, or educational psychologists.

Online tutors are supported by a comprehensive learning management system which enables them to set up online forums and discussion groups to track the progress of course members, determine criteria for passing the course, and to issue Certificates of Online Completion for formal accreditation. A small central team is responsible for: a) systemically supporting schools, b) providing technical support and advice to tutors and participants, c) working closely with the UK originators of the model to develop and adapt courses for local use, d) training all department tutors, e) instructing tutors in new courses prior to them being released systemically, f) implementing quality assurance through monitoring of the online site as well as visits to tutors and cohorts, g) developing and providing systemic analysis of data and evaluative feedback, h) maintaining course registrations, and i) supporting start-up of Online Learning programs in other Australian education jurisdictions as well as ongoing tutoring.

The web-based format means content can be presented in a variety of ways to suit different learners, and while the online material could be completed in less

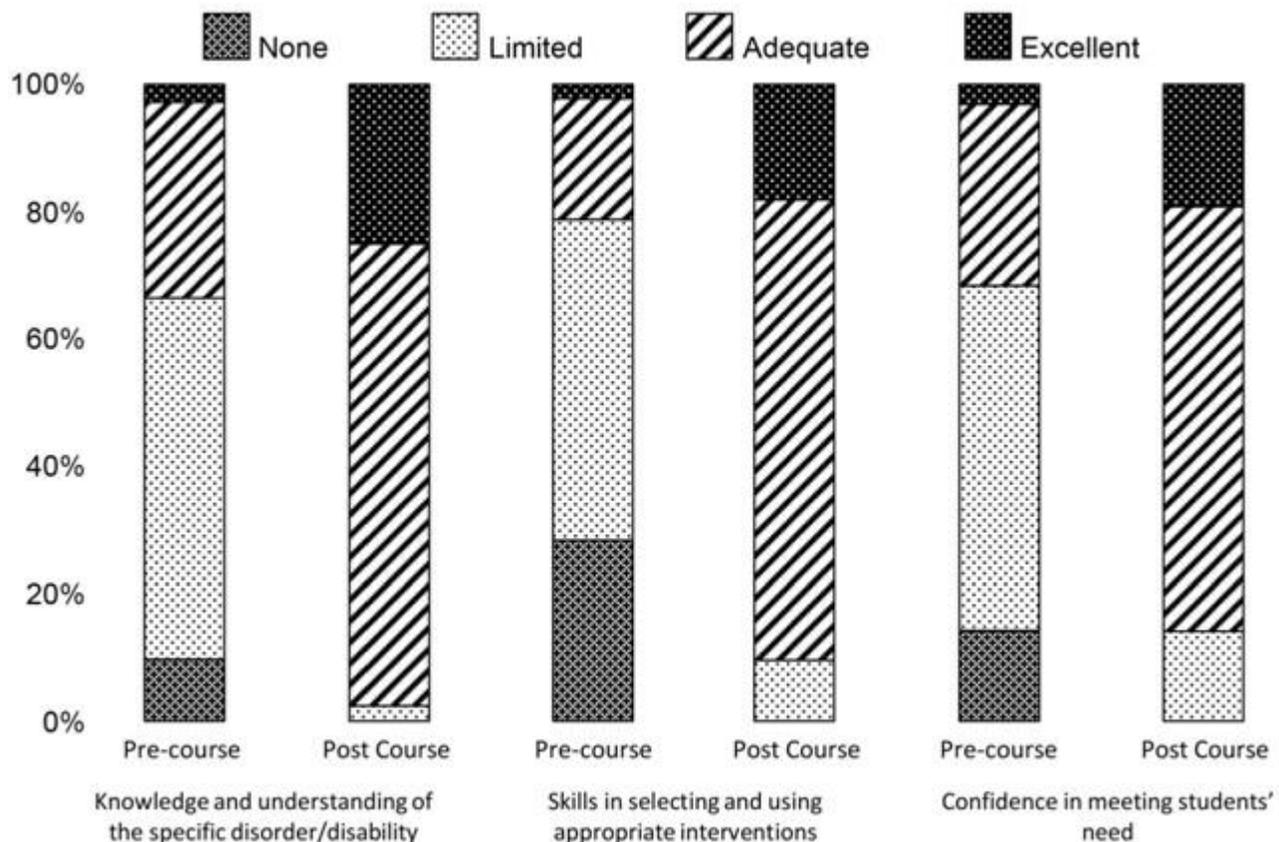


Figure 2. Pre- and post-course participant survey results (to end of 2012).

than 20-hours study, the interactive elements require the implementation of skills in the workplace through the setting of goals and completion of interventions to achieve these goals. Each course is conducted over a 10-week period in tutor lead learning cohorts of 10 to 12 participants. Each course is accredited for 20 hours of professional learning with the Board of Studies, Teaching and Educational Standards (BOSTES), the NSW government body to sustain and improve the high standards of achievement in NSW schools.

Other interactive elements include animations, self-assessment exercises, quizzes, video clips, printable resources, and online forums. The latter are asynchronous, and provide opportunities for tutor guidance and mentoring, as well as providing a community of practice in which participants can learn from one another. Online forums allow for further discussion and support to be extended over a much longer period so that the learning, which has taken place, can be embedded in practice.

Evaluative data are systematically collected from course members, including the use of Goal Attainment Scaling (Kiresuk & Sherman, 1968) to assess the extent to which targets for individual children and young people have been achieved as a result of the courses. At the end of 2013 there were 19,782 course registrations undertaken by 13,465 participants. This represented over 20 per cent of the public school education workforce. These include classroom teachers, specialist teachers, school principals and other executive staff, teaching assistants and teachers in local support positions. Six courses were available as follows: a) Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD, 6,589 registrations), b) Understanding and Managing Behavior (MB, 4,877 registrations), c) Motor Coordination Difficulties (MCD, 1,221 registrations), d) Inclusion of Learners with Speech, Language and, Communication Needs (SLCN, 3,149 registrations), e) Understanding Dyslexia and Significant Difficulties in Reading (DSDR, 3,491 registrations), and f) Understanding Hearing Loss (UHL, 455 registrations).

There have been 2,219 training cohorts established since 2009. These have been led by 499 tutors throughout the system. Each participant completes a pre and post survey for each course undertaken. Three aspects of the training are surveyed through a 4-point Likert scale ranging from excellent, adequate, limited, to none, and the results are shown in Figure 2. These aspects are: a) knowledge and understanding of the specific disorder/disability (pre-training - less than 20 percent have excellent or adequate knowledge and understanding, post-training - more than 95 percent and above have excellent or adequate knowledge and understanding), b) selecting and using appropriate interventions and skills to deliver them (pre-training - less than 20 percent have excellent or adequate intervention knowledge and skills to deliver them, post-training - more than 93 percent have excellent or adequate intervention knowledge and skills to deliver them), and c) confidence in meeting students' needs (pre-training less than 25 percent have excellent or adequate confidence to meet student needs, post-training - more than 85 percent have excellent or adequate confidence).

Ninety-five percent of participants state that they would recommend the training to other staff. The Northern Territory began implementing the training with support from the NSW public school system in 2010. Other state jurisdictions then followed incrementally during 2012 and 2013. Preliminary data indicates very similar outcomes to those from the NSW public education system. In 2013 the Australian Government planned an independent evaluation of the training as part of its national reform of special education.

#### *Critical Success Factors in The Online Training Model*

Whilst all the information contained within the courses could be researched and gathered from the internet by a resourceful independent learner, the way in which it is presented and organized is crucial to the success of the model described here. The clear and logical structure shown in Figure 1 has been applied across all courses without modification since the second iteration in 2003. A blended learning model has been followed in which tutor-led interaction such as face to face or video-conferencing is mixed with tutored online learning. The number of tutor led sessions varies in different settings. There is a minimum of three tutor led sessions this in the NSW public school system.

Online tutors are drawn from those normally providing advice or support directly to NSW public schools to maintain continuity once the online content has been delivered. This is supported by continuing

access to asynchronous online forums for an indefinite period, allowing the development of a community of practice. This is coupled with an option to report back on the effectiveness of interventions and the achievement of goals 90 days after course completion.

Whilst course content is evidence-based and reviewed regularly by specialists in the field, it is presented in a variety of formats to engage participants, making use of both novelty and humor. More academic elements are generally presented as resources for optional independent study. Whatever the context, the commitment of senior managers to delivery of the online model is crucial to success. This is particularly evident in the implementation described in this paper, where NSW have deployed the training across the whole state, adopting a localised model supported by a small central team.

### **Discussion**

It has often been proposed by policy makers that the three broad areas of resources, attitudes and skills are necessary for successful inclusion (see for example, Training and Development Agency for Schools 2007 (Bui, Quirk, Almazan & Valenti, 2010). McDonnell and Brown (2010) provide a detailed summary of the range of skills required by teachers to promote inclusive practice, and many other authors have emphasized the expanded skill set needed for successful inclusion (e.g., Villa & Thousand, 2003). These elements are not independent of one another and the development of appropriate skills through the current online training model appears to impact on attitudes, which in turn can impact on resource use.

The internet provides a medium with many potential advantages for reaching a wide audience relatively quickly, providing what has been termed "just in time" learning for those with an immediate need for skill development (Riel 1998). Properly used, it can provide a consistency of learning that is hard to attain by other means, although this in itself demands a high level of integrity in course design and content. Whilst a whole new industry of online learning has grown around the web, our review of the literature suggests that relatively little thought has been given to what works in an industry where there appears to be little objective verification of learning gain. Online resources can be as dry and uninspiring as the textbook, and our own review of online courses targeting the same groups showed that online learning is often presented in a repetitive format that discourages sustained attention. Merely "putting something online" falls far short of achieving the level of outcome that this medium can support.

The model described in this paper provides one example of successful online training where learning benefits for teachers have been demonstrated, both in knowledge and skills, and also in confidence in meeting student needs. There is also a large volume of data on the impact on pupil outcomes although this is not reported here. Online training can therefore, provide a more flexible and potentially cost efficient basis for CPD if used as part of a package of blended learning which meets the critical success factors outlined in this paper.

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# Supporting Teachers' Journeys Towards Full Inclusion of Students on The Autism Spectrum in New Zealand

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## Abstract

*Research indicates that some teachers still have a long way to go in regards to the full acceptance of students on the autism spectrum as learners with potential (Goodall, 2013). The gap between theoretical knowledge and actual understanding of individual potential of students with autism is difficult for many teachers. A lack of understanding can obstruct the development of appropriate learning opportunities for students on the autism spectrum. This current research aimed to examine the ways in which teachers respond to complex demands of their teaching context to effectively teach their students on the autism spectrum. This current study found that increasing teacher knowledge around students on the spectrum did not improve teacher effectiveness for the students. Rather, an increase in understanding of the autism spectrum and of autistic experiences was most likely to facilitate more effective teaching of the students. For example, teachers who developed an understanding of why students on the autism spectrum did not comply, were able to see how finding mutual solutions could facilitate more effective teaching and reduce stress to both teacher and student/s.*

Research indicates that teachers are still on a long journey to full acceptance of students on the autism spectrum as learners with potential (Goodall, 2013). Despite theoretical knowledge of the autism spectrum some teachers struggle to understand the potential of students on the spectrum and therefore haven't provided appropriate learning opportunities (Attwood, 2011; DeClerc, 2011; Bascom (Ed.), 2012). The attitude of teachers towards their students has been found to be implicated in student outcomes. For example, findings that teachers' attitudes towards disability are a key factor in the inclusiveness of teaching (Macartney & Morton, 2011; Tait & Purdie, 2000). This current research focused on teachers and their students on the autism spectrum who are included in a mainstream primary school setting in New Zealand. Bevan-Brown, Bourke, Butler, Carroll-Lind, Kearney and Mentis (2012), claim that inclusion of children on the autism spectrum into "mainstream settings creates challenges for teachers and students, and issues for students" (p. 634).

## Method

This qualitative research examined the contextual factors involved in teaching six students on the autism spectrum in a regular primary school in NZ. The research was not aiming to judge educators, but to try and find out if specific contextual factors influence effective teaching of students on the autism spectrum in regular classrooms. A social constructionist approach framed the research approach, together with a constructivist understanding of teaching and learning.

These methods were used in conjunction with a philosophical activity theory base to explore mediators within the complex teaching and learning contexts. Following the research proposal approval, ethics approval was obtained. Ethics in educational research is important to ensure protection and privacy of research participants and their autonomy within the research process (Howe & Moses, 1999).

Canterbury Primary was chosen as the base for research as it was a school within which I worked part-time that had a large number of students on the autism spectrum. Due to the organizational nature of primary schools, research needed to be carried out over one academic year. This was important as a teacher may have a student on the autism spectrum in their class one year, but not the next. The teachers were selected using judgement/purposeful sampling techniques. That is to say, I actively selected the most productive sample to answer the research question (Marshall, 1996). In this case, that meant the teachers needed to have a student on the autism spectrum in their class for the school year and to be working on the days that I was able to be in the classroom too.

Purposeful sampling was chosen instead of random sampling of a population, as random sampling is only likely to be a representative sample "if the research characteristics are normally distributed within the population. There is no evidence that the values, beliefs and attitudes that form the core of qualitative investigation are normally distributed, making the random sampling approach inappropriate" in qualitative research (Marshall, 1996, p. 523).

<b>TENSION</b>	<b>TYPE</b>	<b>RESULT IF TENSION PRIORITISED</b>
National curriculum (NC) suggestions for learning order	<b>RULES</b>	Student on the AS seems to be ‘stuck’ at lower level, even though student may be able to do tasks that are more difficult. This belief is because student cannot demonstrate linear progression, so if student cannot grasp a level 2 skill they will not be offered opportunities to do level 3 skills until level 2 is completed with mastery of learning
Previous experience of teaching students, nearly all of whom learn and make progress in a linear manner (as suggested in the NC)	<b>TOOLS</b>	
Previous experience of short support interventions enabling students to make visible progress. Student can then progress further with no extra support.	<b>DIVISION OF EFFORT /LABOUR</b>	If student on the AS does not make visible progress during a short support intervention, student is seen as unable to make progress (presumption of cognitive impairment). If student does make progress during intervention but stops making progress after intervention, teacher may think either – student requires more support to make more progress, or that student did not really consolidate learning.
Student success is defined by academic achievement and desirable behavior	<b>COMMUNITY</b>	Student on the AS can be defined as a failure or as unlikely to succeed in school (in current setting).

Figure 1. Example of Adapted Activity Theory Framework Table used to analyze effect/mediation of contextual factors.

The major contextual factors being looked at through this research were ones that I suspected may be influencing the effective teaching of students on the autism spectrum were teacher skills and knowledge and/or teacher willingness to implement a teaching and learning program that would meet the needs of the student(s) on the autism spectrum. For a finding to be validated or refuted, I needed detailed observations relating to the teaching of the students on the autism spectrum and conversational data to develop an understanding of the teacher’s skills, knowledge, and willingness in this area.

Data were collected for the whole school year, through detailed biweekly classroom observations, using running records of every observed phenomenon in the classroom that involved either the teacher and/or the student(s) on the autism spectrum; this was followed by one-on-one discussions between myself and the classroom teacher to examine and comment on my observations and the teacher’s experience. Notes were taken of everything that I saw or heard in relation to the teachers’ interactions with their student(s) on the autism spectrum, whether one on one, or one to small group, or one to whole class. Conversations were noted down as they were happening and supplemented by further details immediately after. I have a good auditory memory and used this in combination with searching through the notebooks of conversations to collate the data. To ensure credibility, the teachers were able to see my observational and conversational notes and member-checked the early drafts (Buchbinder, 2011; Harrison, MacGibbon & Morton, 2001). The data were constantly analysed through an iterative process (Lichtman, 2006).

In addition, an initial and final time trail observation was undertaken for each student on the autism spectrum. These observations of the classroom and interactions

between the participating teachers and the students on the autism spectrum focused on presence, participation, and learning. These were analysed to indicate the percentages of time the students on the autism spectrum were physically in the classroom, when they were participating in activities with their peers, and when they were learning. For this purpose, learning was recorded when students were actively engaged or demonstrating an understanding of new concepts/topics or new skills.

There was also a final discussion between myself, as researcher, and each individual teacher to summarize the year in relation to their experience of teaching the student(s) on the autism spectrum and to get feedback from the teachers with regard to the usefulness of the support, or lack of, that I provided in my roles as a support teacher and as a researcher. Following this, I was able to analyze the data and write drafts and ensure the participating teachers were given time to read and approve the drafts. This ensured member validation as the research participants could both recognize and understand my descriptions as reflecting their thoughts and actions (Neuman, 1997).

Analysis of the data gathered reflected the complexity of teaching and the myriad of mediators (Lampert, 1985) involved in teaching students on the autism spectrum. The use of activity theory philosophy enabled the development of adapted activity theory framework tables (see Figure 1) to aide data analysis. These tables facilitated the categorization of observed and communicated data into mediators that were affordances or constraints of the effective teaching of students on the autism spectrum.

## Results

### The Adapted Activity Theory framework (AAT)

tables were used, which revealed several key factors that observably influenced teacher choices. Some of these factors afforded or constrained the goal of effective teaching of students on the autism spectrum, while others were not clear cut, varying between teachers as well as within teachers depending upon the mediating factors of other contextual elements. The ways in which teachers responded to internal and external contextual mediators were found to directly affect the amount of personalized interactions and curriculum adaptation that the teachers put into practice for their students on the autism spectrum. Through conversations, it became apparent that at times this was subconscious and at other times it was a conscious action on the part of the teacher. Constructive thinking suggests that teaching and learning are profoundly affected by the context, the “ways in which educational institutions are governed,” (Burnett, 2000, p. 2), with governance representing community and rules in the AAT framework.

In looking at the teachers’ inclusion of their students on the autism spectrum, conversations and early observations of the teachers and the children suggested that the initial information given by teachers about their knowledge of autism and attitudes towards students on the autism spectrum were framed by their personal values of children and their understanding of what it means to be a teacher. This agrees with constructivist beliefs of knowledge (Yamagata-Lynch & Haudenschild, 2009). Teachers who said they had experienced difficulties themselves, or teachers who had strong beliefs in the value of all students were more able and willing to see the students on the autism spectrum as individuals and to take into account the students’ needs and wants.

Analysis of the complexity of teaching and the myriad of mediators involved in teaching students on the autism spectrum uncovered a number of key mediators (Lampert, 1985). One of the key mediators was found to be teacher construction of the student on the autism spectrum as competent, which was linked to the construction of teacher as competent (Morton, 2011). Key affordances to viewing the student on the autism spectrum as competent were the teacher having a belief in the value and worth of the student as a person and a learner, and having an understanding of what it means to be a student on the autism spectrum. Teacher willingness to be student-focused was found to be an important affording mediator, where there was a perceived conflict between student need and school or national policies.

The teachers focus on rules; in particular, rules in relation to literacy assessment and behavior policies were crucial factors affecting teachers’ choices that directly impacted their students on the autism spectrum.

However, analysis of the data gathered revealed that the key factors involved in teachers effectively meeting the needs of students on the autism spectrum were an understanding of autism, a willingness to try and meet the needs of the individual students, teacher ethics/values about the inherent value of all students, including teacher belief in the difference and potential of students and a willingness to facilitate the development of this potential.

During the data gathering, it was apparent through classroom observations and in talking with the teachers that teaching the students on the autism spectrum was at times more difficult and required more energy (both emotional and physical) than teaching other students in the class. This current research indicated that teachers are still on the long journey to full acceptance of students on the autism spectrum as learners with potential, with some teachers being unable to frame the students as capable. It has been suggested that teachers who fail to see the potential of a student then see themselves as unable to teach that student (Morton, 2011). This was observed in my research where teachers did not notice small steps in progress, they began to frame the students on the autism spectrum as unable to learn or as having minimal potential when compared to peers. These teachers then started to feel as if they were not able to be effective teachers of those students, which compounded the cycle of ineffective teaching and learning. Self-advocates for autism spectrum argue that understanding of the autism spectrum is vital to the acceptance and valuing of people on the spectrum (Sinclair, 2012; Winter, 2012).

Inclusion of students on the autism spectrum in regular classrooms is the norm in New Zealand. However my research indicated a lack of understanding of the autism spectrum by general teachers (Goodall, 2011). McGregor and Campbell (2001) found that although mainstream teachers were accepting of the idea of the inclusion of students on the autism spectrum into the mainstream, they expressed several concerns. These ranged from concerns about the effects on mainstream pupils to feeling that they lacked the skills and knowledge to teach students on the autism spectrum to have extra teacher input in order to achieve, and that this input could be seen to be detracting from the class (Goodall, 2013).

This research found that teachers were aware of the need for specific input for their students on the autism spectrum. This input was perceived of in terms of teacher time to teach, or time to prepare to teach due to communication difficulties and/or differences in learning levels and/or styles from the rest of the class (Bacon, 1994). Whether or not the teacher was willing, or able,

to supply this extra input varied both between teachers, and for each teacher. Teachers who are not themselves on the autism spectrum often struggle to see how students' differences in communication and learning can be reconciled with an ability to learn, achieve, and potentially excel in any field. This is compounded by a lack of knowledge of adults on the autism spectrum in the workplace, community, or media. Research indicates that children and adults on the autism spectrum have a different style of thinking from other people and that this is pervasive throughout all aspects of life (De Clerq, 2011). Therefore, when teachers fail to understand students on the autism spectrum they can miss opportunities to identify potential learning opportunities. This misunderstanding occurs regularly as school is a social arena based on oral and written language, both of which children on the autism spectrum usually interpret differently from their peers and teachers. This is due to the way children on the autism spectrum and adults interpret language literally until they have learnt each idiom or expression used commonly by their peers, families and educators. Working with teachers, following my research, I have found that teachers can develop their understanding of people on the autism spectrum through the use of lived experience examples and open and honest discussion. Additionally, scaffolding this understanding to problem solve difficulties in the classroom enables these teachers to plan and deliver more appropriate learning opportunities for their students on the autism spectrum.

## Discussion

This research was initiated by my observations that some teachers were less willing or less able to facilitate engagement in learning for students on the autism spectrum than other teachers. I wanted to know why this was the case. My search for the why was grounded in my constructivist belief that people have different concepts of knowledge/truth because of their differing understandings of the world. For example, on a basic level, a noise can be perceived as both loud and quiet by two people standing next to each other at the same moment in time. On a more complex level, the competence of a student is taken to be at a certain level by one teacher and a completely different level by another, and even yet another by a parent of that student.

My own experiences growing up in various parts of the world has taught me that we do not all understand and interpret experiences in the same way. Through my engagement as a researcher on this project, I came to understand that interpretation and re-interpretation are on-going processes. Having lived in three different

continents by age eight, I took it as a given that people had different views because they have different socio-cultural experiences and contexts within which they construct their views (Burr, 1995). Constructivism highlights the unique experience of each individual, as they create meanings through an active process of engagement with the world. Whilst collecting and analyzing the data to tease out the teachers' constructions of the autism spectrum and how they engaged with contradictory contextual influences, I developed a greater awareness of the continual process of meaning making as self-interacts with others and with evolving contextual factors.

Airasian and Walsh, (1997) suggest that knowledge is tentative, subjective, and personal. Knowledge can be reconstructed or consolidated over time and in relation to the context. This research aimed to analyze the data to first, tease out the teachers' constructions of the autism spectrum and second, to understand how the teachers engaged with contradictory contextual influences. To understand the contextual affordances and constraints for the teaching of students on the autism spectrum, data were collected via observations and conversations.

Classroom observations utilized my strengths in noticing and recording details, while attempting to capture as much of the complex context as possible in order to analyze social (co-)constructions as they were evolving (Crotty, 1998). Follow-up conversations about teacher constructions of their students on the autism spectrum, what teacher perspectives and values were, and how these interacted with the cultural context of school, community, and national education policy utilized active listening techniques. These techniques aimed to ensure accurate noting of teacher thoughts and interpretations of their actions/inactions.

Expressed teacher beliefs were valued because they provided teacher perspective (Ratner, 2005). Where our opinions differed I hoped to develop co-constructions that would lead to the viewing of the students on the autism spectrum as learners with potential. However, my initial interpretations were challenged as my awareness of teacher voice and the impact of contextual factors on teacher actions.

Teaching is an activity that is situated in a complex context involving the interaction of the teacher with the contradictory demands of the educational context. Activity theory addressed the need to study individuals within their complex contexts in order to gain an understanding of their actions (Daniels & Cole, 2002). I was able to use social constructivism alongside activity theory as a philosophical lens through which to analyze how the teachers socially constructed their views and opinions within the complex contexts in which they

worked as both are philosophies focused on the socio-cultural context (Jonassen & Rohrer-Murphy, 1999).

Activity theory's stress on the multiple mediators of a complex context (Engeström, 1999) guided me to keep looking and listening, to develop a deeper and richer picture of the internal and external contexts of each teacher, and from there to analyze through co-constructing conversations and cross referencing of key contextual factors. Being autistic, I enjoy the myriad details within the big picture. Adapted activity theory (AAT) tables were used to arrange detailed data collected in a manner that facilitated my analysis of effect of contextual factors, observed effects of contextual factors, and then to analyze these tables to elicit findings.

Engeström (1999) suggests contradictions in activity manifest themselves through large or even small unremarkable changes in practitioners' everyday work actions and that the challenge is to uncover these changes and analyze them. Within this research, I observed and heard contradictions and small changes related to 1:1 time spent with students on the autism spectrum, effort to communicate effectively, modifying tasks, interactions with parents, and individual education plan (IEP) contributions. Changes in teacher practices were mediated by contextual details of time/energy/external assessment regimes/prior constructions of the autism spectrum and/or interpersonal interactions (or lack of).

Additionally, my views on teaching of students on the autism spectrum became more nuanced as co-constructions of contextual influences developed. I reconstructed my own ideas in relation to deficit theorizing of teachers, so that my circle of collaboration was shifted to include the teachers, rather than just the students. I came to understand (know) myself with more clarity and to understand the importance of interaction between internal and external contexts (person and world) for myself, the teachers and the students.

The ways in which teachers responded to internal and external contextual mediators was found to directly affect the amount of personalized interactions and curriculum adaptation that the teachers put into practice for their students on the autism spectrum. The data did not support the idea that increasing teacher knowledge and skills around students on the spectrum improves teacher effectiveness for the students. Rather, I observed evidence that knowledge of the spectrum is not the same as understanding the autism spectrum (De Clerq, 2011; Peeters, 2011). The distinctions between 'knowledge of' and 'understanding of' came to be of critical importance to this thesis.

	Teacher	AS Student
Perceived problem and reasoning		
Possible solutions		
Mutually acceptable solution		

Figure 2. Example of analysis template for collaborative problem solving.

This study drew on constructivist understandings of learning and constructing meaning. Using constructivism, I was able to gain insights into teachers' and my own understandings of the contextual mediators involved in teaching and supporting the teaching of students on the autism spectrum. An understanding of autism, a willingness to try and meet the needs of the individual students, teacher ethics/values about the inherent value of all students, including teacher belief in the difference and potential of students and a willingness to facilitate the development of this potential were all key factors involved in teachers effectively meeting the needs of students on the autism spectrum. Low levels of understanding of the spectrum seemed to lead to deficit framing of the students and higher levels of understanding to the construction of these students as individuals, with their own range of skills and areas of difficulty.

Only when teachers see potential will they teach towards that potential (Morton, 2011). Developing teachers' understanding of autism and the variety of lives adults with autism lead should be an effective way of enabling teachers to understanding the behaviors and learning potential in students with autism. This can be achieved at any school, through the sharing of lived experience of adults with autism, in terms of their experiences at school, which for some were very unpleasant. There are a number of books, websites, and blogs written by young people and adults with autism which could be used to garner information if the school does have access to actual people in the locality.

Examples of how to communicate effectively with students on the autism spectrum can be shared between teachers and a note kept in their classroom. When students need to transition from one activity to another, the students on the autism spectrum often have difficulty knowing exactly what to do. The following sequence illustrates the sort of language needed; succinct and clear:

'Marama, you need to put your book down now. (Wait until book put down.) Now you need to go and get your reading folder. (Wait until Marama has reading folder.) Now come and join your reading group,

Marama. (Wait until Marama has sat down.) Thank you for coming to reading group quickly.' (Goodall, 2013)

The collaborative problem-solving matrix could be adopted as standard procedure for use with students on the autism spectrum. This could prevent teachers from feeling that they should be trying to force students on the autism spectrum to comply and facilitate compliance and learning. The matrix could be presented as shown in Figure 2.

As teachers develop their awareness and understanding, they could note down the students' sensory sensitivities so that they can plan to mitigate possible issues. Parents, the students on the autism spectrum themselves, or other family members may be able to do this for the teacher if they are asked to do so.

### **Recommendations**

In order to support teachers in the development of their understanding of the autism spectrum and the experience of education of individuals with autism, I developed an intensive three-hour workshop. This workshop focused on real lived-experience examples of the way people on the autism spectrum experience their environments and their reactions to these experiences. A range of children and adults on the spectrum gave permission for their examples to be used to help teachers understand that the presentation of an autism spectrum changes over time, but that the thinking style remains the same. For example a child who is initially non-verbal may end up with earning college degrees and full-time employment (Grandin, 2010).

Some of the lived-experience examples illustrated thinking styles, including logical thinking and visual learning as well as fixated thoughts. The examples were introduced, discussed, and then explained in terms of resultant issues within the educational context. Other lived-experience examples focused on language, communication, and sensory sensitivities and these were complemented by the use of short video clips.

Following up from written participant feedback of 17 teachers requesting more examples of why students refused to participate in particular activities or tasks, the course was lengthened to a full day with the afternoon used to explore participant teachers' classroom issues from the perspectives of both an individual on the autism spectrum and a non-autistic (teacher) perspective.

A student on the autism spectrum not participating in writing is one of the most common issues brought up by teachers (Goodall, 2011). A number of examples are given to illustrate a range of the possible issues involved for students on the autism spectrum. Some examples of these include: a student who would only write in a

particular color or with a certain writing implement, a student who would only write words that were spelt out for them due to perfectionism, a student who could not choose what to write because the task was too open, and a student who did not want to do handwriting because they said they already knew how to write. The rationale behind each students' thoughts or words are explained and discussed, enabling the teachers to explore how people with autism think and process their environment and the events within it. Seeing the perspective of individuals with autism facilitates a paradigm shift for the teachers, from viewing the students on the autism spectrum as difficult or incapable to seeing them as complex students with a range of skills and challenges (Shore, 2012).

As teachers develop the ability to see a problem from not only their perspective, but also that of a child with autism, they are able to build-problem solving skills which result in solutions that are acceptable to both teacher and the student on the autism spectrum. This idea of mutually acceptable solution-seeking can be difficult for teachers as traditionally students are required to follow the instructions of the teacher. Some teachers reported that they found this idea challenging to their authority or to their ability to manage a classroom and teach effectively. The concept of mutual involvement in solution seeking is put into the context of the autistic experience, particularly fixated thoughts and the difficulty students on the autism spectrum face in trying to work in classrooms that create sensory overload whilst being surrounded by autism spectrum unfriendly communication strategies. This enables teachers to see the benefit of working with rather than trying to impose on the students.

In the whole day workshop, the participants are told which of the examples are from my own personal experience as a student at school at the end of the morning session. This provokes intense discussion as the participants have to confront the reality of a professional and education colleague being on the autism spectrum, which challenges the prevailing discourse of autism as a childhood disability (Stevenson, Harp & Gernsbacher, 2011). Many teachers are very surprised that someone they have just been perceiving, moments before, as intelligent and articulate could have had such difficulties understanding the everyday language and tasks of a primary school classroom. This surprise is often accompanied by disbelief as the teachers state the need to reframe their previous ideas of autism and the potential for students on the autism spectrum as they grow into adults.

To counter the disbelief, I provide additional examples from everyday life around purely social

situations and classroom events. These examples are either from me or other people on the autism spectrum, including teenagers and primary school students. I also introduce a number of adults on the spectrum who illustrate the potential of children on the autism spectrum, for example Temple Grandin, an author, public speaker, and professor, Satoshi Tajiri, who created Pokemon, Derek Paravicini, a blind autistic pianist, and Carly Fleischmann, a non-verbal young autistic woman who has just started university and has authored a book and a blog.

Participant feedback of this workshop from over one hundred teachers suggests that teachers who are not on the spectrum had been thinking that difficulties in understanding demonstrated by of students on the autism spectrum were as a result of cognitive deficit, rather than neurological difference. The idea of students on the autism spectrum lacking in potential or ability to learn does not agree with the known potential of students/adults on the autism spectrum when given the right supports (Winter, 2012). When faced with an articulate, tertiary educated teaching professional, who openly states they are on the autism spectrum and personally experienced classroom difficulties, these teachers were forced to re-evaluate.

The communication misunderstandings examples appeared useful to teachers without autism in gaining an understanding of autistic thinking. This in turn, gave the teachers a better understanding of autistic thought processes. Another benefit of this workshop was that it provided teachers with a safe, non-threatening, non-judgmental forum in which to discuss lived experience, reactions, and interpretations. Participants openly shared their changing insights regarding the students on the autism spectrum within their classroom. Further to this, they genuinely appeared enthusiastic to implement strategies to maximize the child's learning and improving self-esteem, while minimizing miscommunication (and hence 'melt downs').

Lived-experience examples were provided to support teachers developing understanding. One of the examples related to a student on the autism spectrum who had neat and precise handwriting, which she would use to write three to four times as much as her peers. However, following a comment by her teacher that he would not grade a piece of work because it was written in pencil and all students were meant to use pen, this student changed her whole attitude towards writing, not just for that teacher but for all following English teachers for the rest of her school life. From being focused and on task the student was usually anxious as she did not like using pen to write and wrote extremely slowly so as to write as little as possible. When asked about these changes, the

student explained that she didn't see the point in making any effort when the teacher was just going to rubbish her work.

This explanation illustrates another aspect of autism spectrum thinking, which is a tendency to over dramatize negative comments or challenging aspects of life. Grandin (2010) explains that children on the autism spectrum get used to people being negative to or about them, that they start to lose self-esteem. Combatting low self-esteem is far more difficult than preventing it, as long as teachers consistently praise the students on the autism spectrum for things they do well or with good focus. This praise can also form the basis for fixated thoughts of a more healthy type than negative thoughts.

The participants are also led through the differences between melt-downs and tantrums and how to respond to both. Students on the autism spectrum are often perceived to have difficult behavior or be immature because of their melt-downs and tantrums. Through discussing the difference, teachers are able to see their role in ensuring the environment does not provoke melt-downs as well as the benefits of mutual solution seeking to avoid melt-downs.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions for Future Research and Interventions**

Helping teachers to perceive students on the autism spectrum as learners with potential rather than difficult students who automatically have challenging behavior is beneficial for both the teachers and their students. Hawkins and Klas' (1997) study of perceived stress among mainstream classroom teachers found that time-management was the highest ranking stressor for teachers. Teachers who understood why students on the autism spectrum did not comply; lack of understanding of instructions, lack of ability, sensory/emotional overload or lack of challenge/interest, were able to see how finding mutual solutions could facilitate more effective time-management and thus reduce teacher stress.

It may be useful to collect a large number of lived experience examples of communication misunderstandings, positive and negative experiences of school, to share with teachers in order to help them understand the students on the autism spectrum and their experience of school (De Clerq, 2011). Furthermore, it would be advantageous to collect a more comprehensive set of examples of the presentation of autistic thinking styles because a 'one size fits all' mentality is very unhelpful for the children and often only serves to further marginalize them.

Future research could look at whether workshops presenting autism spectrum lived experiences are effective in different cultures and countries. Additionally, comparisons of effectiveness could be made between online and live workshops. If online workshops are just as effective at enabling teachers to develop an understanding of the autism spectrum and ability to collaboratively seek solutions, this would be a more cost effective way to reach a larger number of teachers.

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# Teachers Working Together: How to Communicate, Collaborate, and Facilitate Positive Behavior in Inclusive Classrooms

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The use of a schoolwide positive behavior intervention and support (PBIS) framework is well-established as a beneficial model for the majority of students taught in general education classrooms (e.g., Bradshaw, Mitchell, & Leaf, 2010). Some students, whether at-risk for or school-identified with emotional-behavioral disorders (EBD) or other disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, autism), may need individualized instruction and reinforcement related to their behavior to be successful in inclusive settings. Today's special education teachers must work closely with general educators to provide useful and practical interventions and supports within multitiered systems (Hoover & Patton, 2008; Simonsen et al., 2010). Effective communication and collaboration between special educators and their general education colleagues is essential for this process to succeed. This article describes challenges facing this effort and offers suggestions for teachers as they work together to promote positive behavior for all students. It concludes with an overview and implementation steps of an evidence-based intervention, Check-In Check-Out (CICO; Fairbanks, Simonsen, & Sugai, 2008) as an example of a collaborative strategy.

## Challenges to Working Together

### *Expectations in Inclusive Classrooms*

In order for large general education classrooms to run efficiently, teachers expect students to readily comply with rules and routines, work well with peers, and follow directions given to the whole class. Students are expected to work independently or in small groups, transition smoothly between activities and locations, and wait patiently for teacher assistance. Many of these procedures are taught at the beginning of the school year, but they may not be reviewed or reinforced enough

for students with or at-risk for EBD to consistently exhibit the necessary behaviors independently.

### *Incompatible Individualized Interventions*

Some students need targeted interventions in order to meet classwide expectations. In separate settings, special education teachers can readily implement effective but labor-intensive strategies, such as an individualized contingency contract with a token economy, to encourage positive behavior. Such teacher-mediated strategies can be time-consuming and difficult to implement in an inclusion setting without support.

### *Lack of Time*

Perhaps the biggest challenge to communication and collaboration is lack of time. Teachers have essential responsibilities for planning, instruction, and assessing student acquisition of the academic curriculum. In addition, they participate in grade-level and schoolwide meetings, parent conferences, and extra-curricular activities. General and special educators also may be separated by daily schedules, duties, and physical location within a school.

## Strategies for Working Together

In order to work together more productively, special educators can initiate changes in their communication, collaboration, and facilitation roles in their school.

### *Communicate*

In order to improve communication, special educators should set aside time for brief, but regular face-to-face meetings with general educators to discuss

Time	Participants	Activity
7:55	Student Special Education Teacher	Check-In Check parent signature on behavior report card. Review daily goals and strategies to meet them.
9:30	Student General Education Teacher	Feedback Mark behavior report card. Provide specific praise for meeting goals. Offer corrective feedback for challenges.
11:30	Student General Education Teacher	Feedback Mark behavior report card. Provide specific praise for meeting goals. Offer corrective feedback for challenges.
1:30	Student General Education Teacher	Feedback Mark behavior report card. Provide specific praise for meeting goals. Offer corrective feedback for challenges.
2:30	Student Special Education Teacher	Check-Out Review behavior report card. Praise specific goals met. Discuss strategies to meet challenges.  Reinforcement Time – Activity or Token

Figure 1. Example schedule for CICO meetings with student and teachers throughout a typical school day. Note. The times and locations can vary depending on the needs of the student and schedule of the teachers.

students' progress and problems. Teachers can also request common planning times or sign up for similar duty schedules (e.g., lunch, bus) to have more face-to-face contact. Preprinted checklists, short mailbox notes, emails, or text messages can be useful for quick updates.

#### Collaborate

To assist with collaboration efforts, special education teachers should promptly follow up on informal conversations or concerns brought up in Individualized Education Program meetings. When planning to observe in an inclusive classroom, it is important to discuss teacher expectations and skills needed by students to appropriately perform a range of behaviors, including transitioning between activities, working with peers, and asking for teacher assistance. In a post-observation collaborative session, the special education teacher should be clear and realistic about the types of supports that can be provided and the time frame needed for implementing them. Special educators can also offer instruction or professional development for general education teachers to acquire more or different behavior management skills and self-monitoring checklists to track the fidelity by which they implement these practices (MacSuga & Simonsen, 2011).

#### Facilitate

Finally, special education teachers can facilitate the adaptation of individualized evidence-based strategies for inclusive settings. For example, group contingency contracts and activity reinforcers are used to support and reinforce appropriate behavior for one or all students in a class. Cue cards or other visual prompts, written on small index cards or posters, help all students remember rules, routines, and procedures. In order to encourage attention, compliance, and independence, students learn to manage their own behavior through strategies such as self-monitoring, goal setting, and self-evaluation (e.g., Mooney, Ryan, Uhing, Reid, & Epstein, 2005).

#### Collaborative Strategy for Inclusive Classrooms: Check-In Check-Out

Check-In Check-Out (CICO) is a versatile research-based intervention that is used for students who need more than universal support within general education classrooms (Fairbanks et al., 2008). Individual students are provided with a daily progress report card that targets specific behavioral goals and expectations. They meet each morning (*check-in*) and afternoon (*check-out*) with a special educator or other school personnel (e.g., school counselor) to review progress, set daily goals, and plan

how to manage potential challenges (Campbell, Rodriguez, Anderson, & Barnes, 2013). At designated times during the school day, the general education teacher offers performance feedback and verbal reinforcement on the same set of goals and expectations. Students can also be taught to self-monitor and track their own behavior. Parents participate in the process by reviewing the report card daily. Token, activity, or tangible reinforcers can be provided for attaining behavior goals.

CICO, also known as the Behavior Education Program (BEP; Hawken & Horner, 2003), can be adapted for student age, level, and targeted challenges. It has been successfully modified for use with preschool children using pictures of goals and expectations and a *thumbs-up* system for rating behavior (Steed, 2011). See the Appendix for detailed information about CICO that can be readily shared. These materials include introduction letters for teachers, parents, and students; a flow chart of the collaborative process; and fidelity checklists for effective implementation. There is also a list of resources for various types of behavior report cards that can be used during CICO. Some include standard goals (e.g., *follow directions, be respectful*) and others are blank cards that can be individualized according to student needs.

### **Implementing Check-In Check-Out**

Special education teachers can facilitate the CICO process in inclusion classrooms by working together with general education teachers to implement the strategy. Below are a list of steps to follow and a typical schedule (Figure 1) that can be adapted to meet individual needs.

#### *Teachers Meet and Plan How to Implement CICO*

- Special educator describes the purpose and process of CICO.
- General educator shares classroom expectations.
- Both
  - discuss challenges in meeting and maintaining expectations.
  - identify two to three essential student goals.
  - make a plan to support student in meeting expectations and goals.
  - brainstorm contingencies to address potential problems.
  - determine check-in check-out meeting times and locations with special educator.

- establish at least three times during the day for the general educator to provide feedback.
- Special educator provides a behavior report card that includes goals, rating scale, times, and signature lines.

#### *Teachers Share CICO Strategy with Student*

- General educator reviews essential expectations and goals.
- Special educator teaches strategies to meet expectations and goals.
- Both explain daily check-in check-out procedure and schedule.

#### *Teachers and Student Use CICO*

- Special educator meets with student every morning to set daily goals and review strategies.
- General educator provides feedback and reinforcement for target goals at least 3 times a day.
- Special educator meets with student every afternoon to review progress in meeting goals and offer reinforcement and support.

#### *Teachers Meet to Check on Progress of CICO*

- Communicate regularly to assess feasibility, practicality, and effectiveness of CICO.
- Decide if student needs more or different supports to be successful in inclusion classroom.
- Determine if goals have been met, if they should be revised, or if new ones should be added.

### **Final Thoughts**

Special education teachers are increasingly taking on roles of intervention specialists within multitiered schoolwide systems (Hoover & Patton, 2008). They must be willing to share their expertise with general educators, overcome challenges to effective communication and collaboration, and creatively facilitate the use of targeted and individualized strategies that promote positive behavior. By working together, they can provide students the support and reinforcement they need to become successful members of inclusive classrooms.

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## Appendix

### Free Resources for Recording and Communicating Student Progress: Check-In/Check-Out System and Behavior Report Cards

Name	Resource	Description
Check In Check Out (CICO)	Michigan's Integrated Behavior and Learning Support Initiative (n.d.). <a href="http://miblsi.cenmi.org/MiBLSiModel/Implementation/ElementarySchools/TierIISupports/Behavior/TargetBehaviorInterventions/CheckInCheckOut.aspx">http://miblsi.cenmi.org/MiBLSiModel/Implementation/ElementarySchools/TierIISupports/Behavior/TargetBehaviorInterventions/CheckInCheckOut.aspx</a>	Michigan Department of Education site provides information about CICO for teachers, students, and parents. It includes an overview flow chart, examples, and downloadable resources for training, tracking progress, evaluating fidelity, scripted dialogues, and implementation.
Behavior Rating Scales Report Card Maker	Intervention Central (2013). <a href="http://www.interventioncentral.org/teacher-resources/behavior-rating-scales-report-card-maker?step=1">http://www.interventioncentral.org/teacher-resources/behavior-rating-scales-report-card-maker?step=1</a>	Three steps to custom-make daily or weekly reports that include options for specific goal statements, locations, subject areas, comments, and signatures. Reports may be printed or emailed to stakeholders.
Classroom Behavior Report Card Resource Book	Wright, J. (2003). <a href="http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfs/docs/tbrc/tbrcmanual.pdf">http://www.jimwrightonline.com/pdfs/docs/tbrc/tbrcmanual.pdf</a>	97-page manual that includes ready-made report forms for daily and weekly use. Various formats for elementary- and secondary-age students target acting out and socially withdrawn behaviors, inattention, and academics.
Direct Behavior Ratings	Direct Behavior Ratings (2013). <a href="http://www.directbehaviorratings.com/cms/">http://www.directbehaviorratings.com/cms/</a>	Comprehensive system of assessment, communication, and intervention. Included are report forms for general and specific behaviors; sharing results with teachers, intervention teams, and parents; how to implement incentive programs and self-management protocols.

# Using Captioned Tactile Jigsaw Flashcards in Teaching Vocabulary to Children with Special Educational Needs

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The aim of the present paper is to show how captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards (CTJF) can be used in teaching English vocabulary to children with special educational needs. The idea of the following technique, inspired by Montessori's Three Period Lesson (1964, 1967a, 1967b), was presented by this author and colleague Dorota Bełtkiewicz in March 2012 during the "Child with Special Educational Needs in the Perspective of Integral Development" conference organized by Jan Kochanowski University in Kielce, Poland, as well as during the Open Days of the Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland, in 2012 and 2013. It was implemented and tested in two first grade primary classes in Ludwika Wawrzyńska Inclusive School Complex nr 105 in Cracow in the second term of the 2012/2013 school year.

## Step-By-Step Directions

The procedure described below is based on English language, but could be similarly used to stimulate vocabulary learning for any modern language. Preparing the tasks, one should bear in mind that a multitude of possible associations and multisensory stimulation are indispensable in teaching vocabulary to young learners, especially those with special educational needs. For example, findings from one of my studies indicate that learning foreign language lexis in a video-based context, with the support of the teacher providing other aids such as flashcards, TPR (Total Physical Response) actions and gestures, proves to be quite an effective technique for inclusive classrooms (Król, 2013). The more senses are engaged, the greater the likelihood of long-term remembering. Overall, it has been argued that vocabulary items deduced from a context may later be recalled and used more successfully than words attained in decontextualized learning in which they are only presented with their translations in the first language (Sun & Dong, 2004).

The exercises described below concentrate on teaching names of the following animals: giraffe, parrot, lion, monkey, hyena, peacock, elephant, which are presented on tactile jigsaw flashcards. The three-dimensional representations of animals are accompanied by jigsaw captions both in the mother tongue (Polish in Figure 1) and the foreign language. The photographs of

flashcards I used were prepared with the help of colleague Dorota Bełtkiewicz (Pedagogical University of Cracow, Poland). See Figure 1 for photographs of the flashcards.

Teaching materials for children should attract their attention, be aesthetically made of colorful and varied texture. Captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards should follow a consistent pattern: one card, one multidimensional representation, two captions (one in the native language and the other in the foreign language). The teaching procedure involves adult navigation, sensory stimulation and naming of the objects. Flashcards presentation may also be accompanied by sounds such as roaring (lion) or trumpeting (elephant), smells or tastes.

Using a puppet to introduce and facilitate the lesson often eases tension and fear associated with such language learning activities. I suggest that a foreign language lesson (or a part of it) with the use of captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards be conducted in three, alternatively four to five, proper stages. This model has been inspired by the Montessorian Three Period Lesson (introduction/naming; association/recognition; recall), which was originally developed by Séguin (Montessori, 1964, 1967a, 1967b).

Taking from Séguin and Montessori, I suggest the following, slightly modified and adapted for the purposes of teaching foreign language, step-by-step procedure of using of lexical CTJF with children with special educational needs:

1. Association of sensory experiences with names.
2. Recognition of representations corresponding to names.
3. Recall of names corresponding to representations.
4. Matching of captions to corresponding tactile cards: jigsaw (optional).
5. Arranging names from a dimensional alphabet (optional but always preceded by stage

During the first introductory stage – association of sensory experiences with names – the teacher or the puppet (the facilitator) introduces English names of zoo animals, calling them out and pointing to corresponding tactile representations:

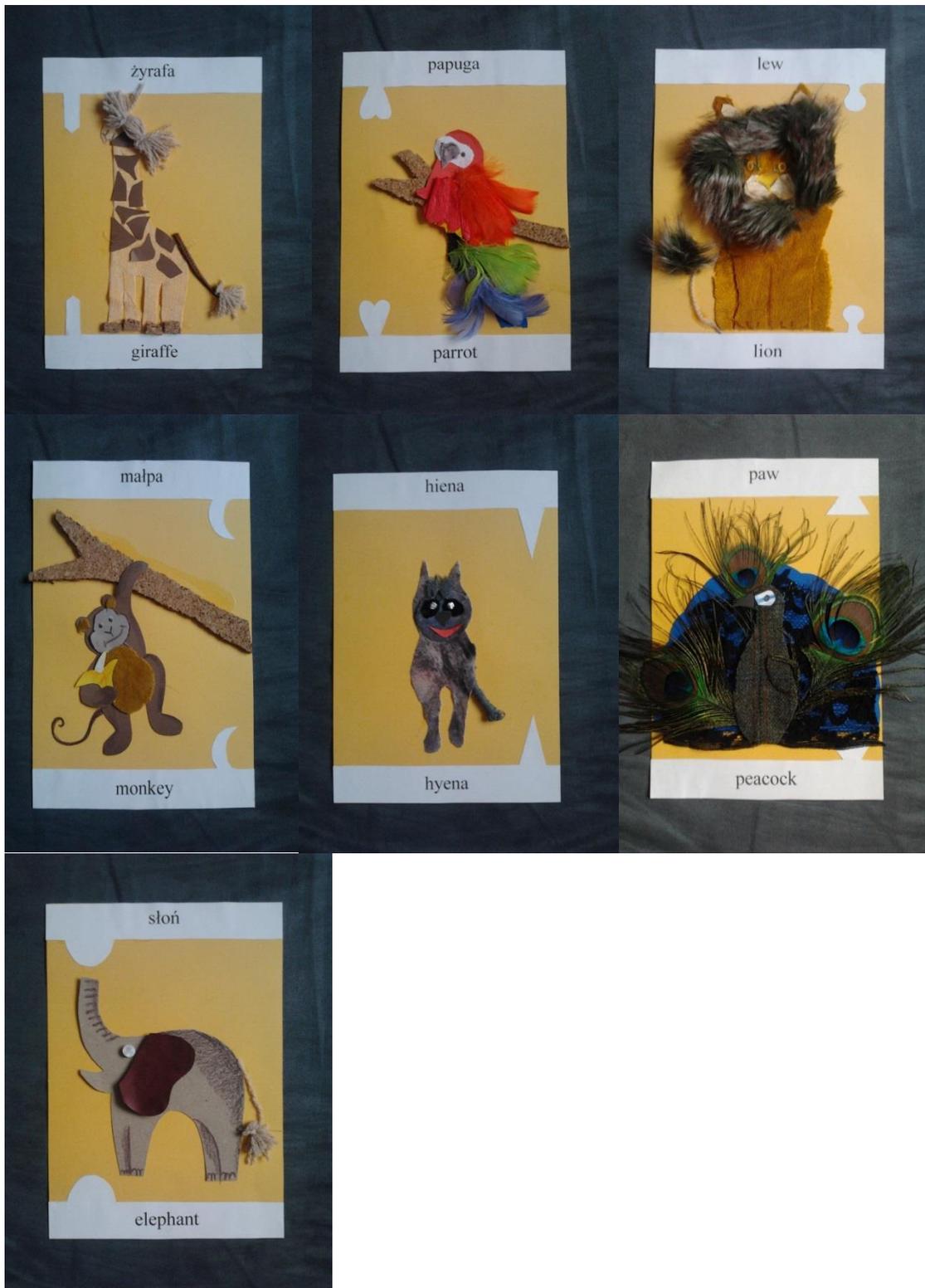


Figure 1. Captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards – zoo animals.

This is a giraffe.  
This is a parrot.  
This is a lion.  
This is a monkey.  
This is a hyena.  
This is a peacock.  
This is an elephant.

Additionally, in order to strengthen the sensory experiences and the associations created in children's minds, it is recommended to play the sounds made by each animal. Children in this phase listen to the recordings, look at and touch the flashcards. This stage is meant to be repeated several times and the facilitator should pay attention to correct pronunciation, changing the tone and pitch of voice to arouse children's interest. The second consolidation stage - recognition of representations corresponding to names - checks whether mental associations between the names and the graphic-spacial representations have been recorded in the children's brains. The facilitator asks in turn:

Where is the giraffe?  
Where is the parrot?  
Where is the lion?  
Where is the monkey?  
Where is the hyena?  
Where is the peacock?  
Where is the elephant?

Children point at the cards and in this way the teacher will know if the associations have been made. If a child has difficulty pointing at the appropriate animal, the facilitator should return to the first stage.

The third controlling stage - recollection of names corresponding to representations - aims at checking if the two previous stages were effective. The facilitator points at the flashcards and asks "What is it?". If the child acquired the knowledge of the newly introduced words, the child would answer giving English names of the indicated animals. Therefore, this phase is effective for children and evaluative for the teacher.

The three-stage process requires the gradation of difficulty according to the individualization for children with special educational needs. If a learner manifests difficulties in the unassisted naming of pictorial representations, we should come back to the previous stages, until the goal is achieved. Likewise, if a learner begins repeating words unprompted by the facilitator, the facilitator should support the child in moving through the stages more rapidly.

The optional fourth stage is intended for children who are interested in continuing to learn more after the initial learning endeavor. Here, the captions can be

detached from the dimensional pictures, creating a jigsaw puzzle. Jigsaw puzzles provide for enhanced visual-motor perception as well as visual analysis and synthesis. Moreover, jigsaw flashcards of different shapes allow for self-correction. Each caption puzzle piece should have a different ending, for example, a triangle, a heart, a half-moon (Figure 1). This strategy allows children to learn at their own pace without fear of making mistakes, as they can easily correct themselves without leaving a trace.

Enabling children to self-correct is concordant with Montessori's (2011) way of thinking. Montessori promoted the idea that children should be offered materials allowing for the control of mistakes. Indeed, the possibility of doing exercises with self-correction, helps children think critically and attentively, concentrating on the final effect to be achieved. This process allows a child to predict and monitor his or her own steps while doing other types of exercises.

The fifth stage, also optional, involves arranging names from a dimensional alphabet, copying the captions. First, it can be done in the mother tongue then in a foreign language. Such a task stimulates the process of learning letter shapes through tactile and kinesthetic experiences. The alphabet I used was made of wood. But, as long as it is mobile and convex, it can be made of any kind of material, for example plastic, cardboard, modeling clay or foam rubber.

## Conclusion

In the 2012/2013 school year, the first three stages in two inclusive primary grades (Ia and Iib) were tested. I evaluated both the passive (P) and the active (A) knowledge of students. The class average of typically developing children in grade Ia equaled 87 % when it comes to the passive knowledge (understanding) and 71 % when it comes to the active knowledge (production). As for the children considered to have special educational needs, one child with ADHD scored 86 % (P) and 57 % (A), while another child with a psycho-pedagogical opinion scored 100 % (P) and 57 % (A). Grade Iib's average of typically developing children was 71 % (P) and 57 % (A). One boy with autism in this class scored 100% (P) and 79% (A), whereas another pupil with physical disability scored 86 % (P) and 50 % (A). As can be concluded, the use of captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards in teaching vocabulary to children, including those with special educational needs, proved to be quite effective and thus can be recommended for other practitioners.

When it comes to teaching vocabulary to primary school children, the amount of new lexical items should oscillate between seven and nine, at the most. The items should be concrete and proper for audiovisual

semantization. The stages of using CTJF with young learners stem from my personal observations which indicate that primary school pupils are characterized by natural curiosity for the world, readiness for taking up new tasks and the tendency to imitate. Captioned tactile jigsaw flashcards are children-friendly, attractive and stimulating sensory channels. All these factors contribute to their appropriateness for primary classrooms, including inclusive ones.

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