

PARENTAL ATTITUDES OF INCLUSION

by

Jody M. Worthman

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DEDICATION

To my nephew, Jack, for teaching me more than a thing or two about perseverance in life. I love you.

To my stepchildren, Lisa and Myles, for your love and encouragement to always try my best. I love you both.

To my wife, Lesley, I will love you forever and a day.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to develop an understanding of parents' attitudes towards inclusion. This investigation focused on parental perspectives of inclusion based on their child's receipt of educational services. Perceived implications of inclusion were relative to each participant; therefore, results could not be considered generalizable.

This study employed purposive sampling in acquiring participants. Eligibility for this study included being the parent/guardian of a child who received special education services in school. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, allowing participants to tell their story about their experiences with inclusion. Parents in this study were eager to share their attitudes towards inclusion, speaking candidly about their children's successes attributed to inclusion as well as issues experienced. Parents identified a number of outcomes of inclusion, namely, social interaction, self-esteem, instructional support, and normalcy.

CHAPTER I

Picture a floating dock nestled near the shore. Though waves gently push and nudge against its edges, supports in the water and on land help keep the structure stationary to walk across. Now imagine a floating dock connected by cables with individual steps to move across. With weight, each step adjusts to the pressure by dipping - almost submerging - the foot, yet its structure rebounds and moves a person onward. When one step dips, its neighbour bobs; steps change based on the forces of wind and water to move steps “to and fro.” While steps are separated, each one contributes to achieve a goal, regardless if people run, walk, or hop.

The floating dock analogy parallels that of the education system - more specifically, the continuum of segregation to fully inclusive models of education. Many societal forces act upon these philosophies in the form of attitudes, whether positive or negative, which, like the dock, can be deep-rooted. Floating steps, like an educational paradigm, may sway a little but remain steadfast over time. What inclusion might mean to one person may be seen in a completely different way to another, based on experience; it is this experience that acts as a force for or against the delivery of education. In beginning this exploration, the first “step” is to examine education through an historical lens to understand the context for research.

Context for Research

There is a general belief that education is integral to both “individual well-being and national development” (Miles & Singal, 2010, p. 3). Many consider education a powerful tool in providing a sense of dignity and yielding an improved quality of life for citizens, as stated by UNESCO (2008): “Education is a public good and an essential human right from which nobody can be excluded since it contributes to the development of people and society” (p. 15). However, a sense of caution should be used here, since “this rationale builds on values shared in democratic, egalitarian societies where most of the discussions on inclusion are situated” (Reindal, 2010, p. 2). Indeed, the term “Majority World” was used to describe the majority of population, landmass and lifestyles of western society (Kay & Tisdall, 2012). It would be exclusionary to explore early attitudes towards inclusion solely through a Western societal lens.

According to Miles and Singal (2010), children who have disabilities in many developing countries have had their dignity and identity stripped, resulting in a separation from the rest of humanity. Many children with disabilities were considered “ineducable” (p. 2), so much so that the responsibility of children with disabilities did not fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education, but rather through Health or Social Welfare. This attitude also resonated in research by Reindal (2010), who stated: “In many developing countries, the issue of special educational needs is often ignored because these learners have not been identified as legitimate learners entitled to

receive education” (p. 3). Ben-Porath (2012) described educational rights of children with disabilities as secretive:

For most of Western history children with moderate to severe cognitive, physical, and emotional disabilities were denied admission to many public schools. For example, in the 1970s only seven states in the United States provided education to more than half of their children with disabilities. As a result, many children were hidden at home or sent to residential communities where often their educational needs were not appropriately met (p. 26).

Additionally, dependency of children with disabilities on adults portrayed these children as “lesser” by society (Kay & Tisdall, 2012). Clearly, approaches to disability appeared unjust through an equality lens.

Early research concerning children with disabilities tended to overlook the opinions of the children themselves regarding social implications of their disabilities. According to Watson (2012), “research emphasised the experiences of living with or of acquiring a chronic illness or condition, with disabled children being presented as passive and ‘vulnerable’” (p. 193). Researchers, then, began to explore the self-worth of families of a disabled child. “There was also a great deal of emphasis on the impact of a disabled child on the family, on their care needs and on the ‘burden’ they imposed on families” (Watson, 2012, p.193). It became evident that societal perception viewed children with a disability as a collective liability.

Being different, either economically, physically, or mentally, from some preconceived standard gave rise to separation from the rest of society (Wang, 2009). Many educators initially felt teaching children with any type of disability was most effective in a segregated setting, away from peers who conformed to a perception of “normal.” As a result, children with disabilities became educated alongside other

children with similar disabilities. Some educators eventually felt that a shift to learning in the regular classroom setting would provide supportive coping skills required for adult life. Not only was learning affected in a segregated setting, so, too, was teaching. Segregation, then, brought with it a wealth of controversy. Essentially, the initial movement toward inclusive education swayed the equilibrium of student learning and educational setting (Wang, 2009). Since education facilitated an opportunity to contribute to the quality of students' lives, the culture of schooling can be explored through several theories.

Theoretical Framework

A theory, according to Gable (2014), occurs "when knowledge is able to make a contribution to our understanding of the world and is therefore collectively considered an improvement on prior ideas" (p. 88). Theories are deemed *good* when they marry both the research agenda and contribute to a framework for practicality. Essentially, there is a purpose for which a theory typically "fits" (Gable, 2014).

Human Capital Theory

Theodore Schultz first coined the term *human capital* in 1960 to reflect vast economic growth in Europe after World War II (Gilead, 2012). According to human capital, the value of education on individuals and society can be measured economically. Advancing individual skills and knowledge provides opportunities for children to expand their interests and abilities (Ben-Porath, 2012). From this perspective, children become "productive" members of society based on their earning capacity as a result of schooling. Integrating individuals into the workforce presents

benefits of individual and societal monetary gain, and an improved quality of life for citizens. According to Björk, Lewis, Browne-Ferrigno and Donkor (2012), the long-term return on investment for not only individuals but even countries can be directly correlated to the building of human capital during schooling years.

Collectively, society invests money up front for potential return on investments in the future, which may not serve as the most effective approach from an inclusionary lens. This confines education to those children who are deemed to most effectively contribute an economic return to society by paying taxes in the future (Ben-Porath, 2012). Education, then, may be paradoxically detracting an individual from achieving a sense of happiness, rather than helping to attain it (Gilead, 2012).

From an inclusionary point of view, human capital theory may present limitations. Some children, particularly those with more severe disabilities, may only be able to work in highly structured environments, which actually endorses exclusion because of the dependency it places on children and their families. Ben-Porath (2012) suggests, "the utility of investing in their education may be negligible; from a purely economic perspective, it might make more sense to keep them out of school" (p. 28). Despite the sentiment that human capital theory is entirely framed in dollars and cents, Björk et al. (2012) argued that "no discussion of human capital development can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values, and habits of their children" (p. 248). In particular, parents can play an influential role in the educational attainment of their children and often realize, and advocate for, their children to achieve their full potential.

Educational attention is shifting from a purely economic focus to more of social and human interconnectivity. As evident from the 2001 document *The Well-Being of Nations*, "the ultimate goal of education is the evolution of total, and not just economic, well-being - a stance that has since been adopted by a growing number of government and other organizations that set educational policies" (Gilead, 2012, p. 274). Education seen as human capital often minimizes a person's, or even a society's, perception of happiness, but Gilead (2012) suggests that "happiness or well-being are seen as resulting from the maximization of whatever one chooses to maximize" (p. 278). The sense of choice focuses on individual strengths and interests - this serves as the crux of the capability approach.

Human Capabilities Approach

The human capabilities approach, originating from Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Menashy, 2014), uses a lens beyond fiscal resources to include individual well-being and social phenomena. This approach looks at the possibility for citizens to live in a society at their fullest potential; such potential involves human functionings (states of 'being' and 'doing') connected by opportunities to achieve this quality of life (Ben-Porath, 2012). Unterhalter (2009) suggested human diversity is an integral component of interpersonal comparison. Looking at what people are able to *do* and *be* bestows respect on individuals, regardless of whether they have a disability; potential is appreciated, not perceived as deficit thinking (Hedge & MacKenzie, 2012). According to Felix-Lozano, Boni, Peris, and Hueso (2012), the focus is not on individual achievements, but rather having the option to *choose* an action or behaviour. In fact, the

capabilities approach examines how individuals can lead lives they value. Many recent policymakers are beginning to align with the capabilities approach when developing new proposals for social change (Unterhalter, 2012).

When discussing disability, the capabilities approach often acts as a conceptual framework for determining potential for people who have a disability (Ben-Porath, 2012). In helping to realize potential, such an approach can help frame out what people need relative to their current situation; this has been used to argue the educational response to disability. This approach acts as a counterbalance to that of the medical model, where failure to learn in a certain way is connected to deficit thinking (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). By contrast, the capabilities approach looks at what *could be*, not what something *is not* through the endless pursuit of a diagnosis (Ben-Porath, 2012). Holistically, the capabilities approach goes beyond the internal characteristics of individuals to identify the process of how these characteristics are acquired (Felix-Lozano et al., 2012).

Nussbaum emphasizes that the capabilities approach looks foremost at a person's dignity. According to Hedge and MacKenzie (2012), "Dignity has no price and cannot be traded for an equivalent item such as a skill for no equivalent exists" (p. 330). The goal for education of the capabilities approach is to help individuals be change agents of their own lives (Felix-Lozano et al., 2012).

Importantly, an examination of difference is recognized with the capability approach. Walker (2008) suggests that human differences of gender, age, race, and disability are valued as part of the equality discussion, explaining variations in human

capacity. In terms of shaping outcomes, differences contribute to the space of capabilities (Unterhalter, 2009). Walker (2008) states, "what a capability perspective adds is the argument that education falls short of its own equality goals unless the capabilities necessary for these rights are effectively achieved" (p. 153). In the end, the capabilities approach emphasizes contextualizing prior to analyzing (Menashy, 2014).

Ecological Systems Model

First utilized by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1986), the ecological systems model "proposes that human development is influenced by the multiple interdependent interactions of an individual with its environment and different ecological levels (i.e., family, neighbourhood, school, society, culture, and national law)" (Guhn, 2009, p. 339). Each system in this framework is interconnected; these systems include the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem (Wolowiec Fisher & Shogren, 2012), and, most recently, the chronosystem (Paat, 2013). According to this model, "the child's learning occurs within the context of normally occurring routines in familiar settings" (Xu & Filler, 2008, p. 56). It is very important to understand the complexity of a child's environment to effectively address educational goals and objectives. The ecological systems model promotes social relationships and life goals related to social well-being (Wolowiec-Fisher & Shogren, 2012). As each of the systems are non-linear, Crossley (2000) declares that the United States' *No Child Left Behind* policy "fails to take into account the complex and dynamic nature of education and represents an inappropriate oversimplification of educational outcomes and their measurement" (p. 1). Despite the supposed simplicity of each subsystem, the child remains as the core of

each of Bronfenbrenner's nested environments (Meyers, Meyers, Graybill, Proctor, & Huddleston, 2012). The ecological systems theory relates influences of the student across multiple settings, many of which are outside the realm of the classroom (Sontag, 1996).

Microsystem.

The most intimate level of interaction in the ecological systems theory is the microsystem (Sontag, 1996). In this system, focus occurs around face-to-face interactions with the student in an environment with tangible connections among family members, classmates, and any special events occurring in a student's life (McGuckin & Minton, 2014). According to Lane (2013), a student's characteristics consists of personality traits, attitudes, and background information. Interestingly, as the number of these interactions increase, the number of microsystems proportionately increase, and so should a child's development (McGuckin & Minton, 2014). Despite the layout of the immediate environment, the basis of the ecological systems theory places individual perception of the environment as having the most influence in the microsystem (Sontag, 1996).

Sontag (1996) discussed the need to examine the characteristics of the people with whom the student interacts, including classmates and school staff. Personality and social proficiency of these people play a role in terms of social development for the student. Parents can have a strong influence as a microsystem regarding cultural values and beliefs, along with the dynamic of family structure and family capital (Paat, 2013). Yet, special education research has traditionally focused solely on the student

and does not account for the social competence of those in the immediate environment; this adds another dimension to the micro-level perception of inclusive education from the point of view of identity development (Lane, 2013).

Mesosystem.

Mesosystem is the interaction of two microsystems (Wolowiec-Fisher & Shogren, 2012); these interactions comprise interrelations across more than one setting around which the student actively participates, such as school, home, and friends (Sontag, 1996). Under this hierarchical structure, Bronfenbrenner identified several relationships between school and home. *Multisetting participation* occurs when a student takes part in activities in more than one setting, such as home and daycare; this is deemed a first order interconnection. An *indirect linkage* transpires when an intermediate person, such as a parent, establishes a connection between two settings, such as when a parent and teacher meet to discuss plans to help a student achieve success at school. *Intersetting communications* involves communication among two microsystems for the purpose of information sharing, such as school newsletters sent home to parents or parents writing a message in their child's agenda for the teacher. Finally, *intersetting knowledge* may exist in the mesosystem when a person in one setting has information about another setting, such as when a neighbour provides knowledge about a school (Sontag, 1996).

Essentially, the strength of interrelations within this system can determine the subsequent degree of development in a child (McGuckin & Minton, 2014). Over-protective parents can strongly influence the potency of certain relationships within the mesosystem, while other parents may encourage potential bonding and friendships with

peers (Paat, 2013). Students, themselves, may have a preference within select subsystems of the mesosystem based on aptitude, where, according to Lane (2013), "individuals may perform well in one context, yet experience an inability to assert themselves in another context" (p. 15). A push-and-pull effect within the mesosystem illustrates the competition among microsystems in molding the child's overall development.

Exosystem.

At this level, McGuckin and Minton (2014) suggest "the focus is on the experience of systems in a social setting in which the child is not actually involved, but which nonetheless exert an indirect influence upon their life" (p. 39). Several exosystems have strong familial influence: parents' workplace, parents' social networks, and community influences (Sontag, 1996). If parent does not accept particular values or beliefs of the greater community, less trust is established, and consequently minimized "social solidarity" (Paat, 2013, p. 960).

Macrosystem.

The macrosystem is an overall collection of the micro-, meso-, and exosystems intended to construct a societal blueprint for the child, containing values, beliefs, and goals for the child as development takes place. Influence now begins to stem from larger institutional settings, such as government, school, church, and family (Sontag, 1996). With the technological age, the internet is a significant means of influencing people to the different values, beliefs, and goals that societies exert on the people that reside within, and even beyond these communities (McGuckin & Minton, 2014).

Children, parents, and society in general need to understand diversity. Xu and Filler (2008) state, "to be culturally proficient, one needs to understand the concept of diversity that encompasses acceptance, inclusiveness, and respect" (p. 66). Cultural influence contributes to each daily routine and guides explicit thoughts and actions (Xu & Filler, 2008). Government decisions and laws filter down to each school and its school members, which inversely influences broader social systems (Meyers et al., 2012). A child's immediate environment can change daily, yet the broader society can entrench values and beliefs for generations (Odom et al., 2004).

Chronosystem.

As a final subsystem, Bronfenbrenner included the chronosystem as a means to temporally examine the historical context of a child's development. The chronosystem can be used comparatively regarding developmental milestones to identify social and biological transitions (Lane, 2013). This structure also accommodates ongoing periods of time throughout the developmental lifespan - i.e. changes in financial situation of the family, family dynamics, changes in residence, etc. (McGuckin & Minton, 2014). Even though the ecological systems theory is conveyed through concentric circles, the structure may require periodic reorganization depending on the degree of individual development, and the chronosystem would document change over time (Sontag, 1996). Another element concerning the concept of time is "the notion of the lasting impact of interpersonal activities on developmental outcomes, invoking the idea of history and the long-term impact of interactions between environmental characteristics and the developing child" (Sontag, 1996, p. 333). Accordingly, the historical context of the quest

to see human normalcy transform into a celebration of difference has spanned generations. Social justice is being framed to better understand the term disability, and, consequently, expressing that human difference can be viewed as natural variation (Connor & Gabel, 2013).

For the scope of this particular research, each of the three theories presented contain relevant elements of inclusive education. Human capital theory measures societal rate of investment based on earning capacity through schooling (Ben-Porath, 2012). Identification of human potential and well-being comprises the core of the human capabilities approach (Hedge & MacKenzie, 2012). Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological systems model recognizes interdependent relationships in a child's familiar settings.

Statement of Problem

A wealth of global literature exists on inclusion from many perspectives, namely, students, parents, teachers, and administrators (Gable, 2014; Cochrane-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012; Kay & Tisdall, 2012; Reindal, 2010). A paucity of literature, however, explores attitudes towards parents from Newfoundland and Labrador (Philpott, 2002). Parental attitudes can provide insight into the effectiveness of inclusion based on the political, cultural, and economic forces of this province; these attitudes can inform other parents who have children with an exceptionality of the possible implications that inclusion may present for their particular children. Building on existing research, this study explored the following questions from a parental perspective: What factors, if any, contributed to successful implementation of inclusion? What value was placed on inclusive education?

Disability

While the concept of disability appeared covered with hierarchical layers of understanding, Gable (2014) noted, "It should be mentioned that while this description of the strata appears fixed and possibly finite, in reality this ordering is messy and may not account for all the layers and mechanisms that research has yet to describe" (p. 93). Parental anecdotes can qualitatively convey such "messiness" of real life experiences for the reader. As with inclusion, even professionals struggle in attempting to define *disability* (Gable, 2014).

The *Education for All* standard has been widely adopted by political leaders, school personnel, and the greater society as an educational panacea of inclusive education. According to Miles and Singal (2010), "Education for All represents an international commitment to ensure that every child and adult receives basic education of good quality" (p. 3). Trying to make sense of such a global promise came with it a unified struggle of what "all" represented. When examining theories through the same lens, can there exist a *theory-for-all*?

Unlike the medical model, which examined disability through a solely medical lens, Gable (2014) discussed *critical realism* (CR) - a multifaceted approach of explaining disability as a "real life" phenomenon. Biological, economic, psychosocial, chemical, and genetic factors comprised the paradigm of the critical realist meta-theory. Watson (2012) suggested that with this model, components of disability paralleled the issues and complexity that weave into a person's daily life, emphasizing that cultural, political, and economic factors will not be standardized; in fact, hierarchy was nonexistent.

For schools, theories serve as educational frameworks that help provide insight into many intricate factors of a school community. Gable (2014) argued that contradictions regarding theories of disability culminated in tension among educators:

This conflict in theory is problematic in its potential to complicate and therefore impede the delivery of meaningful educational responses to students with disabilities as practitioners navigate a divided professional knowledge base (p. 89). Compounding such tension is the obstruction of equitable education through economic, cultural, and political forces (Gable, 2014). Thus, Watson (2012) argued it was very easy for researchers, in particular, to become entrenched in a singular ideology. Yet, these very disability theories facilitated opportunities to challenge many cemented school practices.

Consequently, from a critical realist outlook, theories of disability could be complementary, and not at odds, as simplistically viewed by many (Gable, 2014). Such a position was supported by Watson (2012), who stated a "one-size-fits-all model" (p. 195) would have been difficult to construct, since children with disabilities experience such a diversity of needs. Gable (2014) proposed discarding the notion of a mega-theory:

[...] the 'all or nothing' approach to theorising in favour of practitioner evaluation of disability knowledge that is sensitive to the context in which they are personally situated and on which practitioners judge the relative worth of one theory over another (p.88).

The fluidity between theories permitting practitioners to utilize professional judgment was referred to as interplay (Gable, 2014). Interestingly, inclusion can have as much influence over the researchers as it did its participants, which illustrated the complexity and perhaps persuasion of this phenomenon.

Equality of opportunity in the context of children with disabilities has been an unquestionable area of concern from the standpoint of education (Read, Blackburn, & Spencer, 2012). A global look at disability indicated that most theories have been shaped by influences from western and northern populations (Kay & Tisdall, 2012), which was, in its own right, an incredulous form of exclusion. Originally developed by Indian economist Amartya Sen from the south (Reindal, 2010), the *capability approach* somewhat geographically balanced an equality of theory.

According to Reindal (2010), the capability approach centered around the foundations of functioning and capability. Functioning referred to a person's achievements, or what a person could do, such as read and/or write. Capabilities were deemed actions to living that had value, or the potential of a person's well-being. The capabilities approach emphasized what a person could do with hope, potential, and possibilities. Reindal (2010) stated, "...the capability approach emphasized the possibility of freedom a person has to lead one kind of life or another" (p. 5). Promotion of choice contrasted with the economic approach, as described by Ben-Porath (2012): "The utility of investing in their education may be negligible; from a purely economic perspective, it may make sense to keep them out of school" (p. 28).

If the overarching goal of inclusion from a disability standpoint was to ensure that every student had a stake in schooling and, indeed, their own future, what would happen if society deemed that children with disabilities could *not* do particular things? If humans were defined solely by what they could (or could not) do, would these children have been defined by this in school? "The purpose of inclusion is to contribute to the realisation of the 'equality of what' for all pupils - that is, enhancing a person's capability

to achieve functionings that he or she has reason to value" (Reindal, 2010, p. 10). My support for the capability approach centered around the conception of "allowing" children with disabilities the opportunity to be change-agents, and not to depend on societal structures to dictate what others think was possible. Essentially, removal of possibility separated itself from the very democratic values that contributed to a mindset of capability, or what was possible.

All theories have supporters and critics. Those opposed to the capability approach suggested that inequalities existed due to consequential trade-offs:

...among different members of society (for example, in preferring to provide more educational opportunities to the majority of mainstream children at the expense of the fewer children with disabilities) or among different capabilities (as in providing for mobility but not for academic opportunities) (Ben-Porath, 2012, p. 31).

Interestingly, the economics approach framed its entire ideology on economic trade-offs in terms of investment in education for return on investment in future economic capital. According to Ben-Porath (2012), some have considered education "a primary good" (p. 35), whereas others viewed schooling as an opportunistic way of contributing to a person's quality of life. With the capabilities approach, perspective focused on difference and not deficiency.

Significance of the Study

This qualitative study explored parents' attitudes towards inclusion. A focus of the investigation was to explore perspectives of parents whose children received special education services. Discovering perception was significant for a number of reasons: parents spend more time with their children outside the school environment than educational stakeholders, in most cases; they develop partnerships with teachers and

administration that can influence school decision-making and, ultimately, public policies of their children's education; and parental attitudes can help the reader gain individual insight into the effects of inclusion beyond the classroom. Research by de Boer et al. (2010) suggested that in many countries, parents served as catalysts in driving the inclusive education movement. According to Gable (2014):

[...] The theory-to-practice question is not just aligned to the politics of knowledge, but also to understanding the constraints on what can be known and what knowledge can be usefully implemented in real-world classrooms (p. 93).

Significance of parental attitudes was also conveyed by Loreman, McGhie-Richmond, Barber, and Lupart (2009), who stated: "Parents are critical to the success of inclusive education, and their views should be of interest to any school jurisdiction attempting to follow an inclusive approach" (p. 22). Additionally, parents whose children had an exceptionality faced an increase in stress when dealing with their children's daily activities compared with parents whose children had no exceptionality. Exploring parental attitudes of inclusion was also deemed a "key aspect of the health of children as they progress through their education" (Loreman et al., 2009, p. 32). In essence, parents serve as decision-makers, teachers, and advocates (Loreman, 2007).

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

Parents in this study discussed their attitudes toward inclusion as it related to their child's experiences in the classroom. Prior to the reader getting a sense of these attitudes, though, it was necessary to review relevant literature to get a sense of the workings of both special education and inclusion in placing such attitudes into context.

Societal Beginnings

Being different, either economically, physically, or mentally, from some preconceived standard gave rise to separation from the rest of society (Wang, 2009). Many educators initially felt educating children with any type of disability was most effective in a segregated setting, away from peers who conformed to a perception of "normal." Children with disabilities were educated alongside other children of similar disabilities as a way of increasing their confidence being by others who were their "normal" in the way they looked, learned, and interacted. Some educators eventually thought that a shift to learning in the regular classroom setting would provide supportive coping skills required for adult life. Not only was learning affected in a segregated setting, so, too, was teaching. Teachers noticed their skills had become stagnant when separated from their teaching peers. Segregation, then, brought with it a wealth of controversy (Wang, 2009).

Special Education

Although Alexander Graham Bell supposedly coined the term *special education* at a meeting in 1884 (Salend & Garrick Duhaney, 2011), societal, political, and economic influences gave rise to its beginnings sometime earlier. Many questions were woven into special education's initial discussions: *Who* would receive special education? *What* would be its goals? *How* would teacher instruction be maximized? *Where* would be the most applicable place to educate students with exceptionalities? Ironically, many of these same questions are still being passionately debated today.

Human rights movement. According to Philpott (2007), it was not until after World War II that societal pressure from human rights catapulted special education into the public spotlight. People with disabilities were beginning to be viewed with more openness and understanding, which shifted society's outlook. It was this openness that began to solidify the education of children with exceptionalities, particularly in North America. In the United States, Crossley (2000) indicated that "Prior to 1975 the government was not concerned with the education of children with special needs" (p. 241). Interestingly, this position was comparable to their Canadian counterparts.

Kohen, Uppal, Khan, and Visentin (2010) suggested that prior to the 1970s, Canadian definitions of *disability* were restricted mainly to diagnostic or prescriptive language. Emphasis was placed more on the diagnosing of "patients" who were followed by medical professionals in an institutionalized setting. Since the 1970s, however, equal rights of persons with disabilities have been viewed as something socially created from public pressure.

Even though policy for school-aged children with disabilities was not on the political radar, equality rights for persons with disabilities were solidified in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Kohen, Uppal, Khan, & Visentin, 2010). The Charter “prohibited discrimination based on handicapping conditions” (p. 10), making education in all provinces and territories both free and appropriate.

Special education did much more than “seep” into schools – it became normalized - giving children the right to attend their neighbourhood schools. As societal perception of disability teetered from total segregation to mainstreaming to inclusive education, legislative policies consequently followed suit (Philpott, 2001).

Newfoundland and Labrador’s development. Newfoundland and Labrador demonstrated a paradigm shift which began as total segregation. Rowe (1976) suggested the geographical makeup alone was set up for an initial segregated philosophy, with rural communities scattered primarily along the coastline. Add strong religious lines to the equation and it was easy to see how a segregated stronghold on education began in this province (Philpott, 2002).

Memorial University was established shortly after confederation with Canada, and with it came the pedagogical expansion of special education (Philpott, 2002). The recruitment of professors brought Canadian and American perspectives, which influenced societal attitudes of the time. Many of the textbooks studied at the university were American-influenced with discussion of American Public Law. Newfoundland’s parental expectations, in particular, began to reflect their American counterparts when it

came to the services afforded to their children's education and how society viewed the term *disability*, so much so that the Schools Act was amended (Philpott, 2002).

Inclusive Education

The field of education has consisted of many global topics, one of which continues to be inclusion. Placing students who have an exceptionality in a "regular" classroom with their chronological peers for most, if not all, of the school day draws both supporters and critics (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994/95; Blankenship, Boon, & Fore III, 2007; Lombardi et al., 1994; O'Connor, 2007; Wang, 2009). Despite polarized outlooks, both sides look to solidify their positions with further research (Kauffman, 1993; Lloyd, Crowley, Köhler, & Strain, 1988).

Introductory legislation. On the surface, planning and teaching to student needs sounded rather simplistic – provide the appropriate education and needs will be met; however, placement of education has absorbed much attention in inclusionary circles (Blankenship, Boon, & Fore III, 2007; Philpott, 2002). Several laws contributed to a paradigm shift along the continuum of segregation, integration, and inclusion. The United States' "Education for All" Act (1975) authorized that children with an exceptionality be educated in classrooms with their nondisabled peers. Subsequently, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), introduced in 1990 (PL 101-4), regulated that all students, regardless of (dis)ability, be educated in the same classrooms with their peers in neighbourhood schools (ElZein, 2009). The Salamanca Statement (1994), signed by representatives from 92 countries at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), promoted education

through inclusive measures (Frederickson, Dunsmuir, Lang, & Monsen, 2004). These policies and regulations served as catalysts for changing the way school communities viewed not only *how* education was delivered, but *where* it was delivered. In 2004, IDEA modified its name to the Individuals with Disabilities Education *Improvement* Act to reflect improvements in standards for not only students with disabilities, but special education teachers as well (Kohen, Uppal, Khan, & Visentin, 2010). As societal perspectives changed, so, too, did “images” more accepting of disabilities. Since emphasis about inclusion focused more on values, society began to see *why* education was delivered the way it was (Wang, 2009).

Canada, unlike its American neighbour, made provinces and territories responsible for its own educational legislation (Dworet & Bennett, 2002). Legislation among provinces has often been wide-ranging, and sometimes has differed within provinces and even between school districts. Criteria for eligibility of educational services for children with an exceptionality and their parents may be accepted in one province but denied in the next, depending on provincial criteria (Kohen, Uppal, Khan, & Visentin, 2010). This could potentially fuel confusion, anger, and exclusion among affected children and their families towards the education system.

Inclusive thinking. The paradigm of inclusion has shifted from total segregation to inclusive education in many instances, creating a balancing act among school stakeholders: students with exceptionalities, those without exceptionalities, teachers, and parents (Blankenship, Boon, & Fore III, 2007). Swedeen (2009) suggested that inclusion was more than sharing physical space in a classroom, or being educational roommates, and “[...] requires as much focus on communication, interaction, and

relationship-building as it does on curriculum modifications and accommodations” (p. 3). Although societal attitudes helped move special education from one point on this continuum to the next, Kauffman (1999) warned of placing all inclusionary expectations in one proverbial basket when he stated, “...we could observe that overenthusiasm for inclusion is likely to suffer the same fate as overenthusiasm for exclusion” (p. 245). Until the 1970s, students who required special education services were often educated in segregated settings, away from their non-disabled peers. According to Philpott (2001), The Commission of Emotional and Learning Disorders in Children (CELDIC) tabled the report “One Million Children,” which helped cement the quality of education for children with exceptionalities in an integrative setting. This report, in conjunction with parental pressure for improvement in the legislative rights of their children, paved the way for inclusive thinking.

Criticisms of inclusion. To suggest that inclusion has been the long-awaited panacea of education would be premature. Philpott (2001) indicated that with inclusive thinking also came its criticisms. Oftentimes, school administrators lacked confidence when implementing any number of inclusive models of education, which sent an unclear message to the overall school community of the lack of clarity surrounding inclusion in the classroom (Scrubbs & Mastropieri, 1996). Additionally, with most of the discussion surrounding children with exceptionalities, research by Jenkinson (1997) suggested that children *without* exceptionalities have inadvertently lacked appropriate assistance in the classroom due to a lack of attention from teachers. Idol (2006) proposed many administrators felt that extra adults could make inclusion work if they could assist children of all abilities in the classroom, regardless of whether they received special

education services. Interestingly, Wang (2009) stated, “Success or the ease of inclusion shouldn't be decided on the basis of who requires the least fuss needed to monitor emotional and social well being” (p. 155).

The inclusionary model of education has presented challenges to not only students and parents, but to teachers themselves. Klingner et al. (1998) proposed that many general classroom teachers have felt unprepared and, consequently, stressed when attempting to teach students with exceptionalities, particularly students with severe disabilities. Such feelings of apprehension were chronicled worldwide, documenting the global impact that inclusion can have on teaching and learning. In an Australian study (Elkins, van Kraayenoord, & Jobling, 2003), a lack of training was a key concern for teachers around disabilities in the classroom, while a study in Lebanon revealed concern over teacher qualifications for an inclusive setting to be effective (ElZein, 2009). With concern about teacher training, Ritter, Michel and Irby (1999) stressed the importance of classroom teachers possessing a wealth of necessary skills for accommodating so many needs, yet many teachers feel uneasy with such expectations.

Benefits of inclusion. Despite its criticisms, an inclusionary classroom can prove beneficial for students, for it can serve as a mechanism for social interaction to nurture and grow (Swedeen, 2009). Klingner et al. (1998) claimed that inclusion in the regular classroom facilitated more time with students to interact with their peers that would otherwise be lost with general and special education students being educated in separate settings. This has been supported by Ritter, Michel, and Irby (1999), who stated that the inclusive classroom values students with exceptionalities who remain in the same room with peers.

Global inclusive perspectives of parents. Inclusive education can seep across gender, socioeconomic status, parental experience with schools, and community attitudes. Parents who feel they have input into the decision process of their own children's education typically have a more favourable push for inclusive education. Yet, one of the most critical reasons for framing inclusion in a negative light stems from a blurred definition of what constitutes inclusive thinking (ElZein, 2009). Segregation may occur among parents who do not have a child in the school system requiring special services, bringing the inclusionary debate to an even broader level. Parents generally feel that teachers must be highly qualified to help all children in a class, regardless of their degree of ability (Dimitrova-Radojichich & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014). Overall, potential for social interaction mirrors "real world" opportunities that sheds inclusive education in a positive light (Miller, Strain, Boyd, Hunsicker, McKinley, & Wu, 1992).

Gap in the Literature

Much has been written about the impact of inclusionary education from perspectives of both students and teachers (Ritter, Michel, & Irby, 1999; Klingner, Vaughn, Schumm, Cohen, & Forgan, 1998; Guetzloe, 1999; Wang, 2009). Parent perspectives of inclusion and the impact it has had on their own children, however, have been minimally discussed in the literature, particularly in Newfoundland and Labrador (Elkins, van Kraayenoord, & Jobling, 2003). Moreover, much of the research about parents and their viewpoints was not recent (Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1988), creating a gap in existing literature. Current parental perspectives of inclusion, then, could establish a valuable link between home life and school for today's 21st century

learner. On inclusion, Guetzloe (1999) underscored the importance of relevant research when she indicated, “We need real data, not propaganda” (p. 97).

CHAPTER III

Methods

While many studies examine perception of teachers and students regarding inclusion (Read, Blackburn, & Spencer, 2012; Winzer & Mazurek, 2011; Reindal, 2010; Idol, 2006; de Boer et al., 2012), a limited amount of recent literature exists on attitudes of parents whose children receive special education services; this pool of literature is further reduced pertaining to Newfoundland and Labrador (Philpott, 2002). In this particular study, an evaluation of feelings and values were paramount and were collected through participant narratives (Creswell, 2008). I wanted to understand why participants (“co-researchers” in qualitative research) responded the way they did about inclusion as it related to their child – the underlying reasons surrounding the value placed on this educational philosophy. Since this study focused on attitudes and feelings, outlooks were not meant to be concrete, but suggestive. Themes, both collective and individual, were constructed as these thoughts and emotions emerged from the data. Emphasis was on probing data to understand complexities and nuances that participants experienced in their lives from their own days as a student, conversations with their children about education, and discussions with other parents. This study’s qualitative design embeds the reader into the research to get a feel for reasons why participants responded the way they did about inclusion.

Recruitment of Participants

This study employed purposive sampling in acquiring participants, whereby potential participants were selected based on the characteristic of having a child in the

school system who receives special services. Purposive sampling permitted this particular subgroup of parents/guardians to be studied in depth, based on the purpose of this research and participant experiences of inclusion. I also utilized snowball sampling, where one participant recommended the study to another parent (Creswell, 2008).

To be considered a potential participant, individuals must have been the parent/caregiver of a child currently receiving or having received special education services. Additionally, students must have been educated by both pull-out programming and inclusion, each for a minimum of one term (four consecutive months). One term would be deemed an appropriate minimal timeframe for the purpose of this study, since participant responses may lack perspective if their children have not each experienced pull-out programming and inclusion for this minimum period of time. Another participant requirement was for their child to have attended the same school while experiencing pull-out programming and inclusion. Switching schools prior to both styles of education may have exposed potential participants to differing educational philosophies from teachers, administrators, and, ultimately, schools.

Potential participants were selected based on the diagnosed exceptionality of their child. Cognitive, physical, learning, emotional/behavioural, and medical are some exceptionalities that exist in today's classrooms, and I obtained feedback in some of these categories to yield various perspectives.

As I was concurrently a special educator, the possibility of a power imbalance existed between the researcher and potential participants. Knowing that many parents at my school ran the risk of providing socially acceptable responses for this study,

parents from my school faced automatic exclusion as potential study participants.

Consequently, interviewing parents from other schools minimized the possibility of such an imbalance from occurring, making data more authentic.

I recruited potential participants for this study at advocacy agencies in the St. John's and surrounding areas by distributing an informational poster (refer to Appendix A); agencies consisted of the Autism Society of Newfoundland and Labrador, Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Tourette Syndrome Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Cerebral Palsy Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, Spina Bifida Association of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the Easter Seals Society.

Gathering Data

Six participants - all females who were recruited through the recruitment ad - volunteered to share their story in this study. Once the selection of participants had occurred, parents were contacted by either telephone or e-mail to establish dates for interviews at locations that were mutually convenient for each participant and me. Interviews were conducted between January 17 and March 26, 2013. Prior to these interviews, potential participants were briefed on the study's purpose, potential benefits and risks, and participant expectations (refer to Appendix B). Participants were asked to sign a consent form before the interview process could formally begin; all parents agreed to this.

During semi-structured interviews, all participants were asked the same set of questions (refer to Appendix C). Parents explained inclusion in their own words, offered

factors that may have contributed to inclusionary success or failure, articulated any effects of inclusion, and reflected on potential implications of their child's education. Interviews, which were audio recorded and transcribed, ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in length and were reviewed by the researcher for the generation of themes or categories.

Data Analysis Plan

Bracketing is a phenomenological method employed to group any of my personal biases or prejudices and allow an impartial journey into the life experiences of each participant (Creswell, 2008). My reasons for bracketing biases were two-fold. Firstly, I am a special educator, and have my own experiences of inclusion in the regular classroom, working with many students and classroom teachers since the beginning of my teaching career. Secondly, I have a relative who has a physical disability, so my interest in this particular topic was also personal. I have knowledge of some of the barriers her family faced when she was in the school system. Although I am not the parent of a child with an exceptionality myself, I do, however, have a vested interest in this topic.

Although each interview was audio recorded with written participant consent, participants were given the option *not* to be recorded. I transcribed all interviews verbatim and compared each transcript to the audiotape for further accuracy. Once transcribed, I analyzed data by initially reading and rereading each transcript in search of key phrases that began to surface from participant data. Transcripts were continuously scanned to ensure both individual and collective themes were identified.

As interviews can yield mounds of transcript data, lean coding was employed to assign a few codes to make the coding process more manageable (Creswell, 2008).

Upon completion of the coding process, the next phase was the identification of themes which were predominant throughout the study. It was essential to determine common and contrasting themes among participants (Groenewald, 2004). Data were also organized by participant, where a separate file was kept for each person interviewed.

All interview transcripts and other data were stored in the researcher's office in a locked filing cabinet for added security purposes, with the researcher having sole access to the cabinet. All data will be retained for a minimum of five years, as per Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. Additionally, to provide participant anonymity, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant, which minimized the identification of participants' real names, their children's names, or their school(s).

The themes found in this study were common to most, if not all, participants; these themes included: 1) conceptualizing inclusion, 2) factors for inclusionary success, and 3) outcomes of inclusion. Subthemes for conceptualizing inclusion were comprised of defining inclusion and inclusionary language. Inclusionary success generated subthemes of one teacher, many needs, equality versus equity, peer education, and acceptance. Outcomes of inclusion produced subthemes of social interaction, self-esteem, instructional support, and normalcy.

CHAPTER IV

Results

The purpose of this section was to examine factors which actually set the stage for inclusion to be a positive or negative experience for parents and their children. Themes included conceptualizing inclusion, factors for inclusionary success, and outcomes of inclusion. Though not generalizable, investigating these aspects from participants' points of view may create awareness of implications for parents whose children receive special education services.

Each aspect of inclusion was non-linear. No one issue was deemed more important than another, similar to the spokes of a wheel – parental attitudes indicated each element played a role in inclusive education. Using the floating dock analogy, no step was more important than the next, since skipping a step would not jeopardize the stability of the dock; this kept in line with societal beliefs preventing the segregation-inclusion continuum from excessively swaying.

Conceptualizing Inclusion

Inclusion was a vast topic. Rather than ask parents to arbitrarily begin a general discussion, I used semi-structured interviews as a reference point. Initially, making sense of inclusion was a daunting task for some, but, to speak frankly about inclusion, each person began by attaching her own individual meaning to the term; this laid the footing for subsequent topics. Experiences helped justify why parents felt the way they did. The following categories described important personal connections, which included defining inclusion and inclusionary language.

Defining inclusion. Before exploring possible complexities of inclusion, it was important in terms of a starting point to define what inclusion meant from a parent perspective; this serves as a benchmark for the reader when making thematic connections throughout the results section. Interestingly, attitudes and experiences attached to inclusion varied which, like the floating dock, illustrated environmental forces acting on strong-held beliefs.

According to Ruth, inclusion took on societal overtones and was viewed from a global perspective. She stated:

Inclusion is the bringing together of people. Inclusion not only happens in schools to build better classrooms, but you need inclusion to build better communities. The thing that people need to know is that inclusion is not a thing, it's a way of life, a philosophy, a way of thinking that people need to be aware of in their daily lives. Inclusion, at the same time, requires the proper services that children need to be placed in an environment to achieve success. So, inclusion is a mindset when children are placed (in the classroom) with their peers, and having an opportunity to be integrated with students the same age. Tolerance among people begins with inclusion, so it's really important that we not only introduce this idea in the school system, but in society in general. I think inclusion is really important for all people in society, not just children going to school.

Unlike something tangible, inclusion could not be simply placed into a classroom or, conversely, taken away from a room. Ruth noted it (inclusion) was a mindset that harmonized attitudes and people, not separated them.

Continuing to define inclusion, Ruth noted that patience and time should be considered. Through her experiences, she said that:

We have to be patient when trying to make inclusion work because it's not something that's going to happen overnight, and you walk into school the next day and it's basically set up and ready to go. The goal of inclusion is something that takes time and patience, not only from teachers, but students, parents, administration, school boards, and even the Department of Education. I think

we all have a part to play, whether we have a child in the school system or not. Inclusion builds community; it's important that people know that.

Simply because an inclusionary policy was implemented in the school system doesn't mean it will be effective immediately and achieve success. From Ruth's point of view, inclusion required nurturing before the whole community begins to see results. Patience as a factor identified a vagueness pertaining to inclusive thinking, since every classroom contained its own dynamic of personalities (including permanent teachers and substitute teachers). Since inclusion may be viewed a little differently for each teacher, this may be reflected in the classroom atmosphere. If inclusion, then, took on societal overtones, society would ultimately influence what inclusion looked like.

Complementing Ruth's perspective, Emma viewed inclusion through a holistic lens. She explained:

Inclusion is when everyone, regardless of his/her ability or disability, is a part of our society, attends school, church, community events and groups (i.e. Brownies, Girl Guides, Beavers, etc.). For a person with a disability, he or she may need support (sometimes paid supports and sometimes not paid supports).

Unlike Ruth, Cathy concentrated more on teaching and learning in sharing her inclusionary definition. Individual needs of students began to surface, as well as the layout of a "typical" classroom. Cathy commented on inclusion this way:

How I'd define inclusion, I guess, would be for children with exceptionalities being included in a regular, structured classroom, and receiving their education within that structured classroom. So I guess knowing that within that classroom there are a number of different techniques and methods to teaching each individual child based on what their needs are, and what their exceptionalities are.

For Cathy, teaching and learning was the “first thing thought of” when making a personal connection to inclusion in the classroom. Cathy also referred to the competency of the classroom teacher by implying a differentiated classroom.

Mona took yet another approach, focusing on an overall sense of belonging.

According to Mona:

The main thing with inclusion, I guess, is that everybody, of course, likes to feel like they’re part of a group – that they’re the same as everybody else. My child never felt any different; he never felt he wasn’t part of the school or the classroom, or that he wasn’t included in most things.

Mona indicated an emphasis placed on social ties to the school through inclusion. Her child was a part of the collective whole and, because of an inclusionary environment, was welcomed and accepted as a contributing member of the school community.

Sandra paralleled Mona’s attitude toward inclusion from the angle of peer involvement. She indicated, “Inclusion to me is full involvement and participation of all peers/students in a particular activity or event. It’s the accommodations made to ensure that all participants have equal opportunity to reap full benefits.”

When asked to define inclusion, Katie provided yet another outlook. Unlike others, she interpreted the term to mean “full inclusion” and offered this explanation:

I would define full inclusion in the classroom to mean that my child would be in the classroom with her peers at all times and would never be taken out for any of the courses or classes that she would be involved in.

Katie declared that full inclusion aimed to keep all students in the same classroom, regardless of any exceptionalities, for the duration of the regular school day. She said society, though, needs to look beyond the physical boundaries of a classroom, regardless of its “special” or “regular” designation. Acceptance of special education

services blending into the inclusion equation can force societal attitudes to become murky, keeping this paradigm in constant motion. Even the word “keep” demonstrated an invisible line of acceptance, giving schooling the unwritten role of student gatekeeper.

Although all six participants were asked the same question in defining inclusion, responses were wide-ranging based on experiences with their child’s education. Responses ranged from partial time spent in the regular classroom to one hundred percent of the time. Such diversity indicated how parental attitudes help shape general perceptions. Evidence began to emerge around the language each parent used when discussing this topic. Despite difference in perspectives, common links existed in the terms and language.

Inclusionary language. Participants had to be a parent or guardian of a child who is receiving, or who has received, special education services in a school. Despite only two participants ever having met, each parent made use of many common inclusionary words and terms.

Exploring inclusionary language was important because it pointed out expressions used by each parent, both explicit and implicit. Any embedded language indicated the influence of personal and societal beliefs and attitudes.

According to many participants, there existed an overlap between the classroom teacher and special education teacher. Cathy spoke of this “blending” in her discussion of an inclusionary approach:

So it's possibly more one-on-one as such, but I'm assuming even if it was inclusion the teacher would still be within that classroom, so that particular person that teaches the child when they're pulled out would be in the classroom instead, so it's not like a regular teacher up front, correct?

The "regular teacher up front" referred to the classroom teacher.

Several "regular classroom" comments surfaced throughout participant feedback. Although "regular classroom" may or may not have been considered inclusionary, it illustrated societal conflict between special education and inclusion. Labels and terms do not seem to fit into neat categories, which is how many people make sense of their surroundings. Terms such as this contributed to the attitudes, experiences, and feelings of parents regarding inclusion; yet, ironically, language surrounding teacher roles may have contributed to a lack of clarity to the whole discussion. Cathy noted that teacher terms were in constant flux:

But then there's the special needs teacher, but that's not the right word or term I know, learning resource teacher...the name changes so often that you can't keep up...the other part is then it becomes a little bit disjointed, in that you don't know who you're supposed to be talking to.

With inclusionary language being so fluid, Cathy noted it became easy for people, parents of children who receive special education services in particular, to use much of this language interchangeably; according to participant feedback, this may have created misinterpretation or disparity.

Instead of viewing classrooms as "regular," Ruth based terminology on parent experiences when parents, themselves, attended school. She declared:

They (parents) think back to when they were young and back in school, where you had special ed students and 'special rooms' that students went with another teacher because of the work load, or the distractions in the room, or whatever.

Based on Ruth's comments, the term "special" was woven into the culture of inclusion.

In some instances, "special" rooms were located away from the "regular" classroom; proximity of classes was a point that emerged from Katie's interview. Having a child with a physical disability, Katie spoke to how teaching and learning was set up by discussing the school's layout, "I think full inclusion could work if the staffing was there and the resources were there and the actual physical layout was there, I could see full inclusion being a wonderful thing that worked well." Katie remarked that the special education room in her child's school was located nowhere near the "regular" classroom; under the *old* model of education, this only served to further categorize teaching and learning into "regular" education and "special" education.

Teaching and learning language was normalized through inclusion. For students whose needs were more adequately met outside the regular classroom through the *old* education model, instructive work came with its own set of labels, according to Sandra, who stated, "In our case, my son does not participate in French class but attends an alternate course in social learning." Sandra noted there were often courses that students attended outside the regular classroom to help with social skills, communication, and conflict resolution. Under the *new* model, these courses are being normalized into today's curriculum in the regular classroom.

Many factors shaped parent attitudes of inclusion; they thought it equated to trying to put together a puzzle without a picture as a reference. Based on individual definitions, it was important to discuss factors which could lead to success from a parent perspective.

Factors for Inclusionary Success

Inclusion did not simply materialize overnight. Some parents said that parts of an inclusive classroom were visible through posters and banners, yet much of what happened in the classroom people could not see, but feel. Attitudes of tolerance and understanding helped create unity in the classroom, which emphasized what could be done rather than what people could *not* do. Parents felt inclusionary success needed to come from the entire school community, for if certain sectors had no voice, was it truly an inclusive environment?

Parents suggested inclusion had no universal formula to achieve success in schools. Feedback recommended successful inclusion was based on a number of influences. Many subthemes played a role in inclusionary achievement, most notably: one teacher, many needs; equality; peer education; and acceptance.

One teacher, many needs. Of all the influences contributing to an inclusive classroom, parents felt the classroom teacher was one of the most central. With students spending at least some of their instructional day in the regular classroom, parents noted dependence on the capability of classroom teachers to accommodate many diverse student needs. Participants spoke of the responsibility of classroom teachers, and the diverse training necessary for inclusion to meet with success.

Cathy stated that classroom teachers need the proper training to properly assess and plan for students with a variety of exceptionalities. According to Cathy, such training needs to exist prior to teaching in the classroom.

A regular teacher, say, who doesn't have a special education background, I wonder if they even have a good explanation of inclusion, because really if they haven't done anything in school at the university level in terms of having an understanding of different exceptionalities, then how can we expect them to explain it to somebody else when they're not receiving the education themselves? Compared to years ago, we do expect a lot from teachers, we do...and you know what? I, myself, didn't realize it until going through this process, and realizing that they (teachers) don't learn this stuff in school, and they should – you just assume they do. Then you think to yourself, how do we expect children to be fully included and there to be full inclusion when the person at the front of the classroom hasn't even gotten the training that they need to do that? Does that make sense?

Cathy believed that a major factor contributing to inclusionary success was the teacher(s), but such a mindset will not be successful if teachers lack the necessary knowledge to move inclusion forward.

As for teacher training, Katie also agreed that education was required at the university level. From her perspective, classrooms today are becoming more and more diverse in terms of behaviours, home life, and stresses. Katie said teacher education was vital for inclusionary success:

I think full inclusion is the least effective way to optimize education and learning. I say that because classrooms today have classroom teachers with no required training in special needs – none. Some do it because they choose to, but for most classroom teachers out there today, if they're not required to do it, they're not going to do it. You've got classrooms with every type of special need you can imagine thrust upon a classroom teacher, they're responsible for these kids, and if you have full inclusion, then they're not going out to a special needs teacher or anyone with understanding of what the disability is, and can guide the teacher or help them.

Furthermore, Katie discussed teacher training from another viewpoint besides overall understanding of exceptionalities – student safety. According to her, knowledge for the classroom teacher can provide valuable proactive strategies for keeping the classroom, and everyone in it, safe.

You've also got behavioural problems (in the classroom) – my child can't run away from people either. If you have a classroom teacher who's there by themselves with possibly 35 students and there are students with attention deficit or behavioural issues or aggressive students...so to me, I don't think 100 percent inclusion is working.

Classroom management, then, should be contemplated when considering the success of an inclusive classroom for both teachers and students. Seating students in traditional rows may need to be replaced by creative ways to form groups in class, particularly if the classroom is supposed to mirror "real life" experiences, with more emphasis on problem solving and less on hierarchy.

Should an inclusionary education require teaching and learning of a variety of outcomes, Ruth articulated that instruction may be unrealistic due to teacher time restrictions. She said:

Now, how is one person supposed to teach outcomes to so many students and get through what he or she needs to do in the run of a day? I mean, come on. There needs to be teacher assistants, or another teacher at least, teaching in the same room – 2 teachers. That way, one can look after some of the students with extra needs and the other teacher teach the rest of the students in the class.

Teacher training also served as an essential part of the inclusion equation. Katie noted that medically fragile children are living longer:

Schools are so short on resources and teachers and special resource teachers, and the needs are getting higher and higher because the other thing is that the medical system has improved so much that children who would never have lived before are now living into their 20s and 30s and beyond, so they're going right through the education system, and your classroom teacher is responsible, basically, for teaching them; they're overwhelmed and overworked, and they just can't cope, a lot of them. To them (classroom teachers), this is like a burden on them that they can't manage and, to me, it's a recipe for disaster to try and educate a child with any type of special need in that type of system.

We live in a very diverse society with extremely diverse need.

Diversity exists in all classrooms. Classroom teachers constantly encounter an assortment of academic, behavioural, and social needs. To do this with a degree of inclusionary success, all parents commented on the importance of teacher education focusing on exceptionalities. Ruth's comment echoed each participant's perspective surrounding teacher education, "One person can't be expected to teach with so many needs in one classroom."

Based on earlier definitions of inclusion, an important issue arose: Is it realistic to expect to move inclusion forward if teachers are not receiving mandatory education for teaching students with exceptionalities? Parents indicated that teacher education was not the only factor for inclusion to be successful. A discussion of equality also surfaced.

Equality and equity. On the surface, everything visible on the floating dock can appear equal. Steps are equidistant apart. What may not be visible is the location of the pontoons below the water; these floats help support the entire structure strategically placed in areas under the dock – areas that need it most. At a classroom's surface, it may appear that every student gets treated equally, but beneath the culture of equality lies assessing what students need to succeed. Fundamentally, is student equity being used to *make* all students equal, rather than celebrating differences? In this study, equity versus equality drew polarized opinions. All parent attitudes, however, demonstrated the complexity of societal forces that continue to act upon inclusion.

Emma declared that for inclusion to have any measure of success, all students should receive an equal amount of time with the teacher. She noted:

The keys to a successful story like my child's are: the right attitudes, the belief that everyone belongs, the right to learn and grow alongside her peers, and the

right supports so no child suffers because the teacher has to spend more time with one child than another.

According to Emma, inclusion involved each student having equal opportunity to learn in the classroom.

Students being treated equally were opinions with which Cathy agreed. Equality, as stated by other participants, contributed to an inclusionary environment:

If it is indeed full inclusion that, in an ideal world, if you have other students understanding of what inclusion meant and the different exceptionalities – in an ideal world, everybody's treated equally. The supports and services are in place so that full inclusion can occur, meaning that the other supports in the classroom besides the teacher up front who is going around and helping individual students with where they're to with their work.

Cathy said full inclusion can work if teaching and learning time for each student was equally allotted in the classroom.

Though Katie's feedback aligned with student equality, she contributed a different perspective on inclusionary learning:

To me, the system that's in place now is not working for anybody – I don't think it's working for kids that don't even have a disability. Not only that, it sort of creates an animosity towards the kids who have all these needs because it's taking so much of the teacher's time, so I think you're creating this bullying situation from this whole system of education. If the teachers are all taken up with trying to do lesson plans and programs to suit 5 different groups of kids or different levels, you're actually taking away from everybody else's learning.

Katie commented on differentiated instruction and student equality. For inclusion to take place, she emphasized that a lack of time and resources must be addressed as part of the equation.

Equity, an outlook involving tolerance and open-mindedness, gives people what they need to succeed. In keeping with equity, Ruth articulated student support through differentiation, expressing learning in this way, "Parents don't fully understand that not

all students learn in the same way, that they have a number of different needs.” This attitude was also communicated by Sandra, who stated the importance of difference. She remarked, “It is important to be able to adjust learning or teaching styles to match to ensure the child has the opportunity to learn the same information as his/her peers on the same level with adjusted expectations and outcomes.” Differentiation, Sandra noted, can facilitate successful student achievement through inclusion.

Interestingly, the issue of equality offered different opinions. Despite its diversity, it was recommended by all parents that peers should be educated on different exceptionalities that are present, for understanding and empathy.

Peer education. Society infers that when children are educated at school, they follow curriculum to achieve success. Education that may be overlooked (either unintentionally or intentionally) involves finding out about others, since individualistic positions send children out in the “real world” with the mindset that everybody holds the same beliefs and skills; this only segregates thinking even further. Education about peers for students and teachers is a necessary “step” in developing diversity and tolerance.

Parents emphasized the importance of creating awareness of student characteristics present in their children’s classes. Educating peers was another important consideration for inclusion to be effective. Speaking to her son’s experiences in school, Sandra discussed the lack of communication in the classroom that conveyed confusion and, often, isolation among peers; she expressed frustration:

He (son) was placed in a classroom with other students as a child with autism, and his peers never ever received any education or information of what to do or

how to help or what was wrong with him – just told that he was different and not to ‘get him going!’

Sandra continued her story by noting the eventual improvement in her son’s education with enhanced communication; she stated:

Now, in high school, with new teachers and a new approach, my son is flourishing in the inclusion program where the students have finally been educated and are realizing that he really can’t help how he is and that he is not choosing to act/ behave in the way he does.

Overall, Sandra spoke to the significance of educating all students across the entire curriculum, not just for part of the curriculum, which developed understanding and belonging. “I believe with proper education and knowledge for the teachers, education and knowledge for the peers and the student with the special needs, this program would be an incredible learning and growing opportunity for all.” Sandra’s outlook illustrated education beyond the daily curriculum for inclusion to be a positive experience.

Cathy’s story complemented the importance of educating fellow students (and teachers) for effective inclusion. According to her, children not knowing about particular behaviours can cause a lack of understanding, generating questions that may go unanswered. Cathy recalled a situation involving both her and her son in the inclusive classroom:

So my little boy has come home and he’s asked some questions (about another student in his class), so we’ve actually gotten a book from the library and I’ve gotten stuff off the internet, and I’ve tried to explain to my little boy, ok, that these are some of the characteristics of autism, and this is the reason that he’s not sharing his dinkies or this is the reason why he sings out in class and nothing to do with whatever. I’ve tried to help my little guy to explain to him different exceptionalities so that he understands but, in saying that, it’s really good that the school system has started using inclusion but I think they actually dropped the ball. What I think they did was included children with different exceptionalities but they have done no work whatsoever with the remainder of the class so that other kids don’t understand why Johnny doesn’t share his

dinkies, why Johnny has some behaviour sometimes, why Sally is screaming out or she doesn't talk to anybody and they kind of think they're ignored, or whatever. Because of that piece, I think the kids don't understand because of something different, that person is not really included, quote-unquote, because to me, inclusion – it's alright to say that someone is receiving an education while in the classroom, but if you're not going to do that other piece in terms of educating children regarding what the different exceptionalities are, then you're really not including them.

Cathy explained that inclusion can play a positive role in the education a child receives, but peer education must factor into the classroom.

Katie recalled a lack of education experienced by her daughter in the classroom.

According to Katie, her daughter experienced loneliness and separation:

You're almost ostracizing that child by placing them there (in the regular classroom) with no support. So, to me, inclusion wasn't a very good thing because it isolated her, then it made her more shy and quiet, she was embarrassed.

"Supports," Katie said, "are critical for inclusion; without it, inclusive teaching and learning may close some students down rather than open them up to ways of expressing themselves." A goal of inclusion should be to provide a voice for everyone, not further segregate those who already feel oppressed.

Katie's comments supported Ruth's, who discussed school-wide procedures.

Academics, Ruth suggested, make up only part of a child's education. She stressed that:

If there is somewhat of a proper protocol in place to help deal with student needs, then this could help with coping skills involving frustration, anxiety, and whatever, that needs to be addressed along with the academic needs in schools as well.

Ruth suggested schools must be proactive to meet children's diverse needs.

Emma explained that for successful inclusion, students both need and want to learn about each other in a positive way. Participants felt children were supportive and encouraging if they understood about peers. According to Emma's experience:

For children on different learning paths and learning styles, it is ok for other children to learn and understand what the different programs are all about...her (child's) peers often came over to help her when they had their own work completed. They understood she learned differently but that was ok, they wanted to be a part of what she was doing.

For Emma's daughter, inclusion worked well when peers offered support, which helped to make friends and generate a sense of belonging.

Although inclusion can increase self-esteem, lack of peer knowledge may provide the opposite effect, which was the case with Cathy's child. Students who receive pull-out programming may or may not be told the purpose of why they receive programming in a location other than the regular classroom, which led to confusion on behalf of Cathy's son prior to inclusion being implemented. She explained:

My little guy, the majority of it is pull-out programming, and as he gets older, he didn't mind it as much when he was younger, as he gets older (he's in grade 4 now) and his peers are asking him, "Why are you going out? What do you have to do?" And I find it's having an impact on his self-esteem...that worries me. I've tried to practice with him ways in which he can answer some of these questions from his peers.

Educating peers dispelled myths, according to Cathy. She said this education should be provided in school:

That's been a real struggle for me because it's hard as a parent to try and explain it to him so that he understands and, at the same time, it's alright to hear it from mom but it's just lip service when all you see is you're going out (to another room).

The "lip service" spoke to not only *what* they learned, but *why* they learned it in this environment, noted Cathy.

Sandra's experience also spoke to informing students of exceptionalities. Her son's classmates displayed a helping attitude, which may not have occurred without appropriate education:

They (peers) pay attention when he talks about what life's like living with autism and they are sincere in helping him succeed, encouraging him to follow rules, preventing self-harm, providing prompting cues for social rules and interactions as they see needed.

Highlighting differences contributed to the success of inclusion, emphasizing differences, not uniformity. Acceptance served as a pillar of inclusive thinking.

Acceptance. At first glance, uniformity reigns in school. Look in classrooms to find students grouped by chronological age. Yet, students enter school on a continuum of academic, social, and psychological readiness. Add to this their experiences with home life and it begins to surface that children are different on many levels. An inclusive classroom uses difference to teach acceptance.

Parents spoke of experiences of inclusion for not only their own children, but for all students. They collectively agreed that attention should be focused on acceptance of diverse learning abilities of their children. Sandra viewed inclusion as an opportunity to look at each student holistically. She explained, "Inclusion must focus on acceptance of special needs and differences, and build up the child to be more than just a person with a disability...to teach peers understanding, compassion, and acceptance."

Ruth agreed this universal point of view of inclusion contributed to acceptance in schools. According to her, inclusion served as the glue comprising many societal forces. Ruth's comments spoke to this universal thinking:

To have tolerance in society, whether it's the colour of someone's skin, the way they talk, where they're from, whether or not they have a disability, it's all part of the big picture. Inclusion is the one piece that can bring all of this stuff together on a big scale.

Ruth discussed the acceptance of people being different in many ways, and the importance of viewing inclusion as more than “dealing with” students with an exceptionality.

For Katie, emphasis on being different for her child was not necessarily a positive experience, particularly as students became older. From her perspective, Katie explained a culture of difference which may actually damage self-esteem: “Parents don't seem to understand that once you get to junior high – look, if you have different hair colour, if you don't wear the same sneakers as everyone else, and if you're really different, it (inclusion) almost becomes impossible.”

Agreeing with this statement, Cathy suggested that acceptance of difference serves as a standard for an inclusive classroom. She clarified:

It would be nice for (my child) to receive instruction in the classroom and for no one else to know that he's any different than what anybody else is. Because he's not...everybody's different – that's the thing. We should be putting more focus on the fact that everybody is different than being the same. We try to knock everyone with a hammer into a square peg, and we do the same, too, because of the services out there.

Emma said accepting differences must come from teaching differences to others, whether they are peers, teachers, parents, or the school community in general. She explained that differences in how students learn should not justify segregation.

...(Without inclusion), my child would have missed out on all the really great opportunities she had and the other kids would have missed out on being a friend or peer to another student solely because she had a disability and learned differently than most students.

Being empathetic and developing understanding of differences was enabled through inclusion. Comments by Cathy spoke to the importance of being non-judgemental.

Inclusion is about inclusion – it's about making sure that all kids understand that there are exceptionalities and there are differences, and everybody's different, with students who are good at math who may need help in English (language arts)...It's as a whole, too, like in terms of the stereotypes and the whole oppression of a group of individuals as opposed to, I guess, embracing the fact that everyone has differences, no matter how big or small they are.

Acceptance of differences was a factor which contributed to inclusion. This element provided stability for these parents and their children. With meanings based on individual experiences for their child in the classroom, parents defined what acceptance meant in relation to inclusive thinking.

Outcomes of Inclusion

Inclusion was not something that happened overnight; as a result, it took some time for parents to actually notice many of the outcomes of inclusion. Parental attitudes were based on what their children communicated to them about the day-to-day operations in the classroom, a general sense of their children's outlook toward school, as well as academic progress reports. Evaluating some outcomes may have appeared problematic without quantifiably recording child responses, but parents provided powerful qualitative descriptions and subsequent implications of each outcome.

Parents identified a number of outcomes, listed as subthemes: social interaction, self-esteem, instructional support, and normalcy. Each subtheme played a role in evaluating the effectiveness of inclusion.

Social interaction. Classrooms were dynamic environments. In some instances, students were arranged by rows, pods, horseshoe formation, and various interactive patterns. Each student brought diverse sets of academic and home-life experiences to the classroom, regardless of whether they had an exceptionality. The sharing of information during instructional time was important to many parents, but others identified aspects such as non-instructional time (i.e. before school begins in the morning, recess, lunchtime, after school, etc.) as opportunities for their children to interact with peers. Some students also communicated with adults in school, such as teachers, student assistants, support staff, and parent volunteers. Below the surface, parents uncovered some links to social interaction that may have gone unnoticed from a quick glance into a classroom.

Many parents stated that having the opportunity for their children to make friends was extremely important, especially during school-age years. For many, being in the same room as peers created such a linkage.

Ruth spoke to the positive social impact inclusion had on her son. She noted the acclimatization as a result of this environment.

I think one of the ways my son has improved is by getting used to being around others, especially bigger groups of people. Inclusion, I mean, being around your peers, especially, gives the chance of building and establishing relationships with friends and people you know. Inclusion brings people together, not isolates or segregates them.

In her son's situation, Mona explained the social benefit of an inclusionary environment. Her child's extroverted personality also contributed to classroom interactions. She stated:

Inclusion was a major, major benefit for my child because of his personality and his out-goingness, that the other students were just awesome to him. Whatever classes he was in, everyone treated him with respect and kindness and students who are not even in his classes give him high-fives.

Creating and retaining social relationships were valued by both Mona and her child.

Social interaction was viewed from another perspective, according to Emma. Friendships were developed through academic interventions and social opportunities, where her daughter and peers bought into working together on small group and class projects.

This (inclusionary) approach opened many doors and opportunities for my child. She was involved in science projects, where one project, another student and her won a Gold Achievement Award. My child had peers who helped her plan her graduation rather than her parents or teachers having to help her.

Ruth suggested the social skills developed through an inclusive classroom can be used far beyond the years of schooling. Social interaction was a life-long outcome for her son; she conferred, “Children need to spend time with peers to develop the social skills necessary to get along, not only in school, but in society once they finish their school years.”

Emma indicated how social bonds began to develop for her child when classmates became interested in her daughter’s learning. She elaborated:

While academics are very important, the social aspect of an education is just as important...Her (child’s) peers often came over to help her when they had their own work completed; they understood she learned differently, but that was ok, they wanted to be a part of what she was doing.

Students in this particular class placed value on social bonding, which she attributed to inclusive thinking.

However, Katie explained that an inclusionary classroom does not necessarily equate to all classmates experiencing positive social interaction. “Her (child’s) friends are the same friends she’s made who also have disabilities,” declared Katie. According to Katie, her daughter’s social circle was solely made up of peers with an exceptionality. Katie’s experience with her daughter’s education told a much different story than that of Emma, Mona, or Ruth. Katie explained that her daughter did not make many friends in the regular classroom, only for the select few who attended an alternate setting for their learning. She recalled:

When my child would go with the other kids or there would be other kids in a unit as well, and they are her peers, and that’s who she’s most comfortable with, so she had this little ‘safe place’ to be out of the regular classroom, and she actually thrived in that environment outside of the regular classroom.

According to Katie, her daughter began to shut peers out in the regular classroom because she was uncomfortable in her surroundings; this would often transcend into academic work, when she would act as if she did not know an answer to avoid potential criticism from her peers in the classroom.

Parents indicated the value placed on social interaction in an inclusionary classroom. Opportunities for how to get along with peers would be an important lifelong skill that these parents felt needed to be nurtured in school. Developing relationships also played a role in a child’s self-esteem.

Self-esteem. Parents had mixed opinions about this outcome. Self-esteem was somewhat complicated to attribute to a phenomenon like inclusion because it was not measured before and after the introduction of inclusive education. Parents, however, identified self-esteem as an outcome of inclusion and they explained how an

inclusive classroom has changed their child's self-esteem in either a negative or positive way. This self-esteem carried over into home life, which meant that parents were much closer in getting a sense of what was going on – call it parent intuition.

Whether or not a student had an exceptionality, positive self-image was described by participants as important for all. Cathy suggested that pull-out programming has decreased her child's self-esteem:

The first thing that comes to mind is an inclusion versus segregation kind of thing, just a black and white kind of thing. The difference in their self-esteem and stigma that's attached and you're trying to encourage kids and increase the self-esteem, and pull-out programming, to me, is not the way to do it.

On the other hand, Mona suggested that inclusion for all subjects decreased self-esteem. According to Mona, achieving academic outcomes required for each grade can place pressure on students, as it did with her son. Standardized expectations can mean attaining a certain pace with peers that, according to Mona, can have a negative impact on a child's learning potential and, ultimately, self-esteem. Mona noted:

I think if I put my child in a regular classroom with curriculum that students required to advance to the following grade, I feel it would have been horrible for my child. I think he would have never come out with the personality and the confidence and self-assurance that he has because he would have felt left out, he would have felt unable to do it (curriculum).

Even with differing opinions of the impact of inclusion on self-esteem, parents agreed that having two teachers together in the classroom was an advantage for everyone.

Instructional support. Co-teaching contradicted a long-standing paradigm of one teacher meeting the needs of an entire class, which included planning,

classroom management, and achieving curricular outcomes. Participants described how the shift toward two teachers in one inclusive classroom, the continuum of services between students having exceptionalities and “others” began to change from “your” students and “my” students to “our” students in an inclusive environment.

In many cases with one teacher, the chance of meeting all needs was lower than having two educators. Inclusion, then, meant more than bringing students together. With both classroom teacher and special education teacher in an inclusive classroom at the same time, parents noted the advantage of having a second person to help with many student needs. As noted, “two heads are better than one.”

Cathy explained a tag-team approach to teaching in an inclusive classroom as a positive experience, particularly for students who do not receive special education services. According to her:

My understanding of having the teachers in the classroom is that Sally, who may not even be getting some extra services, as the teacher is passing by may notice that Sally may need a little extra support with this, and she can take a minute to do that with Sally and Sally is not in pull-out instruction kind of thing.

Another benefit may be seen for at-risk students whose likelihood of identification of needs is increased when two teachers share instructional responsibilities. As Cathy suggested, giving students what they need academically is possible in an inclusive classroom. Parents indicated social and academic development, supported through inclusion, helped shape normalcy in the classroom.

Normalcy. Oddly enough, normalcy comes in all shapes and sizes. For class photos, there are some people who always stand in the back row because of their height. There are people who wear glasses, those who are bald, and those who

move around in a wheelchair. There are those who read independently, communicate effectively with others, or make and keep new friends in school. Many questions swirl around this outcome: What is normal? Who, ultimately, gets to decide what is normal? How are those who fall outside normal parameters affected? How can inclusion figure into normalcy?

In this study, “fitting in,” whether academically or socially, resonated with many parents. Comments spoke to acceptance in the classroom, particularly for their own children. Ruth discussed normalcy from the standpoint of inclusion. In her child's situation, daily school routines occurred before instructional tasks in the classroom even began:

My own child, we dropped him off in the morning a little later when everyone had begun school. So when he turned junior high age and we dropped him off, and everyone was getting off the bus, he began to realize he was actually going to school like everybody else. Now, I thought to myself, why would I drop him off later?

Ruth realized that normalcy could be achieved even before her child arrived in the classroom, since inclusive thinking affects all aspects of a student's environment.

As for her son, Mona based normalcy on how classmates viewed her son. Fitting in as part of the group was an important piece, and inclusion facilitated this. According to Mona:

...(Inclusion) gives every kid a feeling of friendship, a feeling of accomplishment, a feeling that they're a part of the group – they're no different. My child thinks he's no different than a, I'll use the term broadly, 'normal' child. He thinks he's the same as everybody else.

Cathy echoed this attitude of inclusive thinking. “I think from a parent’s perspective it (inclusion) would make you certainly feel like you’re on a level playing field with everybody else.”

In conclusion, attitudes of parents regarding outcomes of inclusion varied in many areas relative to their particular child. Interestingly, opinions constantly repositioned the segregation-inclusion continuum in the same way that a player manoeuvres around a game board – forward and occasionally backward (with the die acting as societal forces). This study’s flexible design allowed participants to tell their story of the impact inclusion played on many areas of life, even beyond the classroom.

CHAPTER V

Discussion

Shifting back and forth from the floating dock analogy to actual parent attitudes about inclusion paralleled societal forces mixing with the reader's own set of beliefs, taking inclusion to a new dimension – “including” the reader. Whether parent attitudes matched or opposed those of the reader's, a first-hand continuum implicitly ranged opinions from agree, disagree, or somewhere in between. Differing parent attitudes were contingent on individual circumstances. This section went beyond a highlight of factors surrounding inclusion. Each aspect warranted a discussion of educational implications.

Nature of Participants

Parents in this study were both committed and eager to share their attitudes about inclusion. Some participants spoke candidly about the many successes to which inclusion has contributed in their children's lives at school, while others conveyed concerns about a lack of teacher education around inclusion. In any event, interviews provided opportunities to “chat” about some of the frustrations and successes experienced through inclusive education. As a result of discussing their own children, conversations were both authentic and passionate.

Factors for Inclusionary Success

Parents mentioned in this study, as well as their children, each had their own experiences with inclusion, since every classroom contained its own dynamic.

Common subthemes generated from the data yielded an assortment of attitudes about inclusion. These factors included one teacher, many needs; equality and equity; peer education; and acceptance.

One teacher, many needs. While I emphasized discussing the education of students, parent responses suggested the focus of education extend to teachers as well. Based on these responses, the teacher played an influential role in both creating and sustaining inclusion within his or her classroom.

Cathy recognized a culture of inclusion by mentioning that teachers had a good working knowledge of what inclusion was - its purpose and benefits - to move inclusion forward. An issue with this philosophy, according to Cathy, was that many classroom teachers lacked necessary teacher education to effectively accommodate the needs of students who require special education services. Winzer and Mazurek (2011) suggested the challenge of teaching and learning, where teachers are required to educate all students in a classroom, yet many of these teachers may lack the necessary education to identify and successfully meet needs of *all* students. These developments offer a collaborative opportunity to create "hybrid" teacher qualifications to reflect interdisciplinary skills needed in today's classroom (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012).

Katie talked about the diversity of students in her child's classroom, and the different stressors that students potentially could have encountered. Some students may have had issues related to emotional and behaviour disorders, physical disabilities, medical disabilities, learning disabilities, communication

concerns, or familial distress. In an inclusive environment, Katie said it was neither effective, nor acceptable, for a teacher to employ “blanket strategies” when attempting to accommodate students with such diverse needs. Having classroom teachers trained in exceptionalities would have allowed them to better understand symptomology, using strategies more appropriate for a student’s particular needs. Katie's beliefs coincided with data from Swedeen (2009), who stressed the importance "in equipping school staff for a very different way of teaching than most of us experienced when we were in school" (p. 3).

With the many demands placed on a classroom teacher, not only was the education of students important, but also ensuring overall safety for everyone in that particular classroom. Knowledge of antecedent, or trigger, behaviours helped classroom teachers understand why students behaved the way they did and how to effectively use intervention strategies to modify particular behaviours to ensure safety. Rather than intervene after a behavioural situation escalated, Katie noted that appropriate teacher education allowed teachers to deal with classroom issues in a more proactive manner. With this approach, safety became implicitly constructed into teachers’ classroom management (Winzer & Mazurek, 2011). Additionally, "proponents of inclusion should determine if teacher concerns about disruptive students might not be overshadowing those teachers' attitudes toward inclusion" (Idol, 2006, p. 92).

Advancements in today’s medical system have added a further challenge for teachers, highlighting the significance of those who do not possess training for students with exceptionalities. Medical advancements are not only extending the

lifespan of some students who would otherwise be unable to attend school, these students are expected to be educated in “regular schools,” in “regular classrooms,” with their peers, adding further consideration for classroom teacher education (Read, Blackburn, & Spencer, 2012).

According to participant data, teacher education regarding exceptionalities contributed to inclusion being a positive experience. With support from parental advocacy groups to provide education for all students, schools are challenged with meeting student needs in the same way versus differentiating instruction to meet individual needs. Parents identified the continuum of equality and equity (Dimitrova-Radojichich & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014).

Equality and equity. The adage “fair is not always equal” resonated in education (Wormeli, 2006). Opinions varied, but discussion enabled reflection on the value of inclusion from a number of different perspectives. Allocation of teacher time per student served as a dubious issue for many participants in this study. Emma viewed the classroom as having a certain number of students and one teacher (or two, depending on whether the special education teacher was in the general classroom). The value placed on treating all students equally, regardless of ability, was based on teacher capacity to allot an equal amount of instructional time to every student. Yet, a struggle for equality arose in classrooms, since students came with an assortment of academic, social, and emotional needs, and teachers were often not trained in the nature of various exceptionalities. Cochran-Smith and Dudley-Marling (2012) also recognized that inclusion often entailed potential dichotomies of teaching. Regarding equality, each member of the

community equally emphasized the importance of variance becoming the norm, despite societal pressures constantly reshaping this paradigm of what was "normal."

Cathy's comments about ensuring proper student resources and supports were in place to achieve equality in the classroom spoke to a time-based perspective of equality. A special education teacher in the "general classroom" can help students with exceptionalities meet academic needs, since these educators are trained to differentiate instruction based on specific requirements, as recorded in a student's individual education plan (IEP). Additionally, teaching accommodations or supports can also aid students in meeting their individual needs outside traditional instructional techniques; this has taken the form of computer software for written output, audio equipment to hear the teacher more efficiently (an FM system worn by the teacher, for example), or the presence of a student assistant to help a particular student focus on assigned tasks. Achievement of student outcomes, then, may have been one of equality, since all students worked to achieve similar expectations. On the other hand, supports and instructional services provided by the special education teacher in the general classroom can be viewed as enabling equity, since all students, regardless of ability, received services commensurate with their degree of need.

Suitability of teacher instruction to accommodate a variety of learning needs has been referred to as differentiated instruction (DI). Equitably, the essence of DI spoke to the provision of individualized education (EIZein, 2009), since, according to Ruth, "parents don't fully understand that not all students learn in the same way,

that they (children) have a number of different needs.” Use of “blanket instruction” spoke to inclusion from the position of equality (Ben-Porath, 2012). It was understandable for parent attitudes or mindsets based on their own past learning experiences to transfer to the educational experiences of their own children and influence their present attitudes around inclusion.

Peer education. Many of the issues in the literature around inclusion have focused on the “what” (Kay & Tisdall, 2012). In this study, parent feedback emphasized not only the “what” but also the “why” of inclusive education. Parents went beyond a mere listing of the issues encountered by their children and themselves on a daily basis.

Nurturing a culture of inclusion takes time, and the process of communication for all community stakeholders, predominantly students in the classroom, is valued (Swedeen, 2009). In this study, Cathy’s remarks about educating all students in the class about differences spoke to the value placed on inclusive thinking: “...but if you’re not going to do that other piece in terms of educating children regarding what the different exceptionalities are, then you’re really not including them.” Inclusionary thinking encompassed familiarity with as much information as possible; conversely, lack of knowledge, whether implicit or explicit, contributed to an exclusionary attitude. It was necessary for students to know the “why” as the basis for student behaviour in the classroom, since many people in this environment were affected in some way. Educating peers was not limited to understanding student behaviour, but to understanding needs as well.

Understanding can ultimately lead to acceptance which, based on responses, was a key component of inclusion (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012).

Interplay between parents, students, and teachers surfaced around educating peers (Narumanchi & Bhargava, 2011). A parent, with concern for confidentiality, may not have wanted the teacher to inform the rest of the class about their son or daughter. A request to withhold information may have potentially placed the teacher in an ethical dilemma; primarily, parental requests have to be honoured based on confidentiality, but informing remaining class members could provide valuable information from which peers could learn and understand. Ultimately, informing peers was based on back-and-forth societal points of view.

Participants in this study were influenced by what they heard and saw. Oftentimes, attitudes and understandings about inclusion were instinctively constructed (or deconstructed) based on comments from others. The same could be said for what was seen in the classroom, for children instinctively learned from what they saw and experienced. In this study, Emma spoke to the attachment of peers in her daughter's class and a willingness to include all students based on their experiences. Emma explained, "...her peers often came over to help her when they had their own work completed. They understood she learned differently but that was ok, they wanted to be a part of what she was doing." Educating peers through student experiences in the classroom, in turn, influenced how parents actually constructed attitudes toward inclusion (Gable, 2014).

Educating peers may have involved more than planning a lesson to discuss behavioural characteristics with an entire class; information also explained “why” particular students had to leave the “regular classroom” to be taught in an alternate setting for pull-out programming. Understanding the rationale for this type of education contributed to more informed perceptions of inclusion by parents, teachers, and students (Idol, 2006). This finding was supported by data from Cathy, whose son, in reference to pull-out programming, was faced with questions from peers such as, “Why are you going out? What do you have to do?”

Acceptance. It was important to discuss diversity in an inclusive environment. Each student in the classroom, according to Sandra, must be viewed holistically, with differences not only recognized, but celebrated. She explained, “Inclusion must focus on acceptance of special needs and differences, and build up the child to be more than just a person with a disability...to teach peers understanding, compassion, and acceptance.”

Sandra’s feedback described a limitation of inclusion as much larger than a conflict between special and general education. Her response indicated too much time is taken in schools to categorize students, typically by way of labelling. Students could be classified as “below level readers,” “LD (learning disability) kids,” or “behaviour problems” (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). With countless academic and/or behavioural descriptors already in use in classrooms, Sandra suggested the unfortunate likelihood of parents continuing the labelling pattern of behaviour, either implicitly or explicitly, was fairly high. As a spinoff, students who received special education services - in particular, those who

continue to hear (or even sense) this from multiple sources - may eventually begin to subconsciously self-label, which can alter their perceptions of their own inclusion in the classroom (Watson, 2012). Sandra pointed out that difference should be accepted not only in classrooms but at home, since parents, teachers, and the entire school community all played a part in endorsing an inclusive environment. Swedeen (2009) concurred with the whole community having a part to play, where inclusive practices "set an important example for the larger community on the importance of everyone having a valued role and making a contribution" (p. 11).

Ruth comprehensively discussed acceptance of difference as a responsibility of the entire community at large, let alone that of school and home life. She noted accountability must be guaranteed by all to ensure acceptance, which included embracing communal, inclusionary language. She described a wide-ranging attitude about acceptance in her statement, "Inclusion is the one piece that can bring all of this stuff together on a big scale."

For the purpose of this study, the theme "acceptance" not only directly impacted students, but applied to parents themselves. Mona advised parents, particularly those whose children received special education services, to accept their children's differences:

If you're going to put a child with a disability...into a classroom, and I know that parents are all about inclusion because I know they want their kids to feel they're exactly the same as everybody else, but the reality is they're not. That's a reality that a lot of parents just do not seem to accept. I've accepted this since the first day I was home with my child, I knew what it was going to be like.

According to Mona, parents want what is best for their child. Parents need to understand that inclusive thinking required that they also adopt acceptance and tolerance of differences experienced by their children. Watson (2012) and Reindal (2010) explained the importance of parental attitudes regarding what is “normal,” whether in the classroom or the community in general, unquestionably influenced opinions of how their child, in turn, perceived an inclusive environment. It was this flexible attitude that related to each participant’s individual experiences with their child.

The degree of success regarding inclusion was relative to each parent. Teacher education around exceptionalities would better equip teachers with the educational interventions necessary to meet a diversity of needs. Deconstructing the continuum between special and general education spoke to treating all students equally rather than accommodating individual needs. Educating peers about understanding and acceptance of individual needs taught empathy and compassion as a class; acceptance needs to extend far beyond the classroom to the community as a whole if an inclusive environment reaches life beyond school.

Outcomes of Inclusion

Data to this point explored factors contributing to the success of inclusion. The ensuing section offers parents' perceptions of some outcomes of inclusion, including social interaction, self-esteem, instructional support, and normalcy.

Social interaction. In an inclusive environment, support from peers is an integral part of togetherness in a classroom (Xu & Filler, 2008). Interview data in

this study also conveyed that inclusion played a significant role in the potential for their children's social interaction.

For Sandra, inclusion has extended her son's opportunities to not only socialize with classroom peers, but to create reciprocal teaching and learning occurrences for her son and his peers. Classmates exhibited acceptance and understanding regarding her son's autism, and took time to ensure social prompts were taught in a respectful, yet friendly manner. This form of social interaction, according to Sandra, was a win-win for everyone in the classroom - her son received help by way of peer teaching; classmates received both an opportunity to teach and reinforce for themselves the concepts of acceptance, empathy, and friendship. In addition, parents experienced a confidence that was potentially transferrable to home life and beyond.

Sandra maintained that an inclusive environment could produce a host of social spin-offs felt far outside the classroom. Emphasis on the academics of a student's schooling is central to achievement and social development. However, parents often viewed these areas separately. As Emma explained, "While academics are very important, the social aspect of an education is just as important."

Inclusive thinking acted as a springboard for students to develop social interactions in the classroom and often augmented friendships outside school, which created a potential dichotomy: in-school social experiences compared with out-of-school friendships. Some participants in this study clearly acknowledged the

significant role social interaction played as a transition mechanism for their children from school-age years into adulthood. Ruth solidified this attitude: “children need to spend time with peers to develop the social skills necessary to get along, not only in school, but in society once they finish their school years.” Inclusion, essentially, played a major role in facilitating social interaction for children in a classroom and beyond (ElZein, 2009).

However, Katie conferred that not all relationships in an inclusive classroom were necessarily interactive, let alone positive. Katie explained how, “my (child’s) friends are the same friends she’s made who also have disabilities.” Such feedback supported a divergent set of societal values that pushed and pulled the expectations of *authentic* inclusion. In the regular classroom, Katie’s daughter developed very few friends under the inclusive model, yet acquired and retained friends when educated in an alternate setting. Referencing peers in this alternate setting, Katie explained, “that’s who she’s most comfortable with, so she had this little ‘safe place’ to be out of the regular classroom, and she actually thrived in that environment outside of the regular classroom.” Katie added that although the potential for social interaction existed in any classroom, an inclusive classroom did not guarantee equality of social gains.

Self-esteem. Achievement of academic outcomes was important in classrooms (Reindal, 2010), but equally relevant was the pace at which such outcomes were expected to be achieved. Idol (2006) maintains that a seemingly pressurized pace, even indirectly, could have a significant impact on the self-esteem of a student receiving special education services. On behalf of her son’s

academic needs and self-esteem, Mona indicated her son required a pace significantly less hurried than that of the “regular classroom” to achieve success:

I’m a realist, and I think putting someone of my child’s capabilities in a classroom with every other student who can understand and comprehend and do almost everything and write and read...it would also have been an issue for him.

In addition to appropriate academic pace, parents described inclusion as teaching to students’ strengths. All too often, discussion around students, particularly those who receive special education services, involve approaches to what a student is unable to do (the reductionist model of education), as teachers attempt to bring students experiencing difficulty “up” to a certain academic standard. In this study, Mona explained that even though her son had difficulty with reading and writing, education in an inclusive classroom must be implemented to include strengths; she stated:

My other son, who’s only a year older than my child we’re talking about, he could only do certain classes because his strengths were in certain areas. I’ve felt my child was always included – every student in the school knows him, and he participated verbally in the classroom quite well because if there was something to do with memory, my child could do well.

Through an inclusionary teaching philosophy, instruction for Mona's son was synchronous with learning ability. As a result, her son felt good about himself and demonstrated a high degree of confidence, as evident from this comment:

...My child is very easy going, very soft-hearted, and he would feel, if he couldn’t get the questions right, that he was left out. But, because he was never put in that situation, he thinks he’s smarter than most.

Discussion around inclusion to this point has centered on teachers and students, but parental feedback suggested the need for self-esteem to be a

school-wide responsibility. Emma stated the removal of physical barriers in her school had increased her daughter's self-confidence:

Because Cindy and another student used a wheelchair for mobility and there were stairs to the stage where the students would come out and get their (graduation) diploma, the maintenance staff constructed a ramp and all students used the ramp rather than the stairs. Cindy had peers who helped her plan her graduation rather than her parents or teachers having to help her.

Emma acknowledged the wide-ranging effort of all community members who helped shape an inclusive philosophy for all students, regardless of ability. A school-wide responsibility for inclusion involved consideration of academic, physical, social, and emotional needs of students (Xu & Filler, 2008).

Instructional support. The focus of an inclusive classroom was not solely on students; participant attitudes suggested divergent procedures could be offered in a single classroom as well. Having both a special education teacher and general classroom teacher in the same room providing instructional support offered benefits to students of all abilities, which increases the availability of a teacher to help accommodate individual student needs (Idol, 2006).

While one teacher educated the entire class and the other assumed the role of offering more individualized assistance to students who experienced difficulties or had questions were assisted more efficiently, regardless of whether or not they received special education services. According to Cathy, this setup was more functional for her child:

...My understanding of having the (special education and general classroom) teachers in the classroom is that, Sally who may not even be getting some extra services, as the teacher is passing by may notice that

Sally may need a little extra support with this, and she can take a minute to do that with Sally and Sally is not in pull-out instruction kind of thing. Nobody is excluded and as far as everyone in the class is aware, I think in terms of services and funding and all that kind of stuff, to me would make much more sense to do it that way than to continue doing what they're doing.

Cathy also recommended that it would be beneficial for teachers who taught in the same classroom to alternate roles, leading to an even more inclusive philosophy, since both students and teachers would become more accustomed to sharing services.

Cloudiness of normalcy. Given the discussion on inclusion from a parental perspective, what criteria constituted what was “normal?” Who ultimately decided such criteria? These questions added to the intricacy of inclusive thinking.

Some parents viewed struggles of schools for uniformity as a rival of inclusive thinking. The importance of acceptance for “standing out” by way of academic, social, behavioural, or emotional reasons in a classroom varied with each parent. The discussed society's obscure boundaries of inclusion compared with exclusion. However, these views were not firmly polarized, which only added to the cloudiness of normalcy. Cathy illustrated such fluctuation by discussing her son's needs in the classroom:

...Inclusion to me, with regards to just my little fella, for him not to be pulled out every other day kind of thing, for pull-out programming, and for him to receive that same support in the classroom that can be done in a way that he receives it adequately, but without it being so that he doesn't have the stigma attached to him so that he's isolated...for everybody to know that he's receiving this. It would be nice for him to receive it in the classroom and for no one else to know that he's any different than what anybody else is, because he's not – everybody's different. That's the thing...we should be putting more focus on the fact that everybody's different than being the same.

Parents stated that standardization of expectations kept changing, depending on what society deemed typical. Using students in wheelchairs to illustrate this perspective, many people see the wheelchair (accommodation) before the student, while others see the person first and then the wheelchair. Somewhere in the “middle” was a murky area where, according to Mona, perspective of normalcy was subjected to an ebb-and-flow of opinions and personal experiences. Parent attitudes described normalcy as a swaying or changing feature of an inclusive environment.

A final link to the floating dock illustrated that, no matter how forceful waves sometimes moved steps in different directions, water eventually died down and the dock was no longer volatile. This trend corresponded to the intended normalized language used in this study. Terms shifted from words that opposed one another on scales: “special” education – “regular” education, normal – atypical behaviour, inclusion – exclusion. Additionally, the researcher emphasized words such as “regular classroom” and “normal” with quotation marks, hoping to somehow shock the reader with a splash of how societal perceptions can act as forces against inclusive thinking. An evolution of this study’s language became embedded as typical language (without quotation marks) – regular classroom, general education, and normal. It is the researcher's intention that the reader will contribute his or her own terms to the continuum of exclusionary-inclusionary language.

Limitations

Due to limited literature available on parents’ attitudes of inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador, participants were selected based on their experience with

inclusion in their child's school to gain greater understanding of this phenomenon. As a result of a purposive sample, results from this study could not be generalized to other populations (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, several exceptionalities were not included (i.e. intellectual disabilities); therefore, findings may not be generalizable across exceptionalities.

The six participants who volunteered in this study were female, so experience about inclusion from a male perspective lacked in this particular investigation; this will be further discussed as an implication for future research. A study by de Boer et al. (2012) revealed that attitudes from females (mothers) were generally more positive than feedback from males (fathers). Also, limited consideration occurred of possible academic benefits and barriers of inclusion compared with social benefits and barriers of inclusion.

A one- to two-hour time commitment was required to take part in an interview. Unfortunately, one individual could not participate in the study due to repeated schedule conflicts. Consequently, the sample was limited to those individuals who could share their opinions in a mutually agreeable timeframe.

As both special educator and researcher, potential participants who had a child attending the researcher's school would automatically be excluded from taking part in the research. Accordingly, one parent who had a child attending this school could not be accepted as a study participant.

Recommendations for Future Research

The investigation of parental attitudes about inclusion was purely descriptive in nature. Several issues materialized which warranted further inquiry.

Each participant provided invaluable insight into not only their attitudes pertaining to inclusion, but how such attitudes have been framed within societal contexts. Since all participants were female, further inquiry from a male perspective would extend inclusive thinking from a different perspective.

Children's educational experiences helped shape the attitudes of parents for the purpose of this study. With half of the children in this study having a physical disability, values and beliefs of parents of children with a greater diversity of exceptionalities could be explored.

One of the participant stipulations in this study was that the child must have attended the same school while experiencing pull-out programming and inclusion. Switching schools prior to both types of education may have exposed potential participants to differing educational philosophies from teachers, administrators, and school communities. Further research could qualitatively describe any transitional effects of inclusive education to the most recent school.

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APPENDIX A

Do you have a child with an exceptionality?
Is INCLUSION working for YOUR child?

If you are a PARENT /CAREGIVER and would like to share your experiences, YOU could be part of a research study to help understand parent attitudes of inclusion in today's classroom. This study is being completed as part of a master's thesis.

YOU COULD TAKE PART if you have a child who has received or is receiving pull-out programming (being educated in a different classroom) and inclusion for a minimum of one term (4 months) each in the **same** school.

This study will allow you to "TELL YOUR STORY" about the quality of education received by your child and the impact the education system has had on many areas of life, possibly beyond the classroom.

For your **1 to 2 hour** time commitment, your confidential information can help inform other parents of children with an exceptionality of the effects that inclusion may have on their particular children.

If you are interested in taking part in this study, please contact:

Jody Worthman
Student Researcher, Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
709.687.5399
d96jmw@mun.ca

Dr. Sharon Penney
Principal Supervisor, Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
709.864.7556
scpenney@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

APPENDIX B



Informed Consent Form

Title: Parental Attitudes of Inclusion

Researcher: Jody Worthman
Student Researcher, Faculty of Education
Memorial University of Newfoundland
709.687.5399
d96jmw@mun.ca

Principal: Dr. Sharon Penney
Supervisor: Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland
709.864.7556
scpenney@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled "Parental Attitudes of Inclusion."

This form is part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. It also describes your right to withdraw from the study at any time. In order to decide whether you wish to participate in this research study, you should understand enough about its risks and benefits to be able to make an informed decision. This is the informed consent process. Take time to read this carefully and to understand the information given to you. Please contact the researcher, Jody Worthman, if you have any questions about the study or for more information not included here before you consent.

It is entirely up to you to decide whether to take part in this research. If you choose not to take part in this research or if you decide to withdraw from the research once it has started, there will be no negative consequences for you, now or in the future.

Introduction

As part of my master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Penney to explore your attitudes of inclusion. While many studies examine perceptions of teachers and students regarding inclusion, little information on parent attitude exists from those whose children receive special education services (2). Your input can provide insight into the effectiveness of inclusion in the classroom and the impact it can have outside the classroom; these attitudes can be used to inform other parents having children with an exceptionality of the implications that inclusion may have on their particular children. Educational policymakers would also benefit from your perspective of children being educated within this philosophy.

To be considered a potential participant, you must be the parent/caregiver of a child currently receiving, or has received, special services (special education). Additionally, students must have received pull-out programming and inclusion, each for a minimum of one term (four months). One term would be deemed an appropriate minimal timeframe for the purpose of this study. Your responses may lack perspective if your child has not experienced both pull-out programming and inclusion (2).

Purpose of study:

A focus of the investigation will be in understanding the perspective of key stakeholders who do not physically experience these educational models in the classroom – parents of children who receive special education services (2). Discovering your perception is significant because you spend more time with your child outside the school environment than any educational stakeholder in most cases, provide a firsthand link to the relevancy of classroom programming, and develop partnerships with teachers and administration that can influence the decision-making of your child's education. Based on existing research, I would like to explore the following questions: What is your attitude toward inclusion? What is your attitude toward pull-out programming?

What you will do in this study:

This research study will require you to provide attitudes about inclusion based on your own child's and family experiences at school, home, and in the community. You will be interviewed to record these perspectives.

Length of time:

You will be asked for 1 to 2 hours of your time to be interviewed by the researcher at a time that is convenient for both you and the researcher.

Withdrawal from the study:

If, at any point in the research process, you wish to withdraw for any reason (i.e. time constraints, being uncomfortable with interview questions, etc.), the researcher would like to keep and continue to analyze any data collected to this point. As with all participants, your information will be retained for a minimum of five years, as per Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research. However, you have the right to have your data completely withdrawn from the study if you so choose.

Possible benefits:

This study will allow you an opportunity to “tell your story” about the quality of education received by your child and the impact the education system has had on many areas of life, possibly beyond the classroom. The intended audience for this study is parents of children receiving special education services (2).

Your information can provide insight into the value of inclusion; parental attitudes can be used to inform other parents of children with an exceptionality of the implications that inclusion may have on their particular children. Educational policymakers would also benefit from parent perspectives of children being taught by these frameworks, since feedback is authentic, practical, and passionate.

Possible risks:

It is important that you know about several possible risks involved with this study prior to consenting to take part. As a participant, you will be required to take 1-2 hours of your time to participate, which could result as an inconvenience for you. The recalling of potentially distressing events of your child’s educational experiences may also serve as a risk.

Note: For participation in this study, it is important to know that there will be absolutely no impact to your child’s grades or access to school programs or services (3).

Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

There is a difference between confidentiality and anonymity: Confidentiality is ensuring your identity is accessible only to those authorized to have access. Anonymity is a result of not disclosing your identifying characteristics (such as name or description of physical appearance).

Confidentiality and Storage of Data:

- a. Your identity will be protected by changing your name, your child's name, schools, and any identifying information for the purpose of this study.

- b. All interview transcripts and other data will be stored in the researcher's office in a locked filing cabinet for added security reasons, with the researcher having sole access to the cabinet. The study's supervisor will also be permitted to view the data (5[a]). Again, your data will be retained for a minimum of five years, as per Memorial University policy on Integrity in Scholarly Research (5). All data will be housed in the top drawer of the filing cabinet (in the event of a flood) in the researcher's office.

Anonymity:

Every reasonable effort will be made to assure your anonymity and that you will not be identified in any reports and publications without explicit permission.

Recording of Data:

You must provide written consent for the researcher to audio-tape an interview. If written consent is not granted for audio-taping, the researcher will take detailed notes during and/or immediately following the interview. Please see the checkbox below to select appropriate elements of the study.

Reporting of Results:

The information gathered in this study will be reported in summarized form to protect your identity. Direct quotations will not be used without (5[c]) your consent.

Sharing of Results with Participants:

The final compilation of information will be presented in the form of a report (thesis). Should you request a copy for yourself, one will be provided by the researcher.

Questions:

You are welcome to ask questions at any time during your participation in this research. If you would like more information about this study, please contact: Jody Worthman, Student Researcher, Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland. 709.687.5399 or by email at d96jmw@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 709-864-2861.

Consent:

Your signature on this form means that:

- You have read the information about the research.
- You have been able to ask questions about this study.
- You are satisfied with the answers to all your questions.
- You understand what the study is about and what you will be doing.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your possible withdrawal may be retained by the researcher (5[c]).

If you sign this form, you do not give up your legal rights and do not release the researchers from their professional responsibilities.

Your signature

I have read and understood what this study is about and appreciate the risks and benefits. I have had adequate time to think about this and had the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

- I agree to participate in the research project understanding the risks and contributions of my participation, that my participation is voluntary, and that I may end my participation at any time
- I agree to be audio-recorded during the interview
- I do not agree to be audio-recorded during the interview
- I agree to the use of quotations and that my name will not be identified in any publications resulting from this study
- I do not agree to the use of direct quotations

A copy of this Informed Consent Form has been given to me for my records.

_____ Signature of Participant

_____ Date

Researcher's Signature:

I have explained this study to the best of my ability. I invited questions and gave answers. I believe that the participant fully understands what is involved in being in the study, any potential risks of the study and that he or she has freely chosen to be in the study.

_____ Signature of Principal Investigator

_____ Date

APPENDIX C

Interview Questions

1. How would you define inclusion?
2. How would you define pull-out programming?
3. What do you see as benefits to inclusion? Drawbacks?
4. What do you see as benefits to pull-out programming? Drawbacks?

5. What is the biggest difference between inclusion and pull-out programming?
6. How has your child's teacher influenced your attitude toward inclusion?
7. Do you feel full inclusion is the most effective educational philosophy for optimal learning to take place? Why or why not?
8. Do you feel that parents receive an adequate explanation of the inclusionary process? Explain.
9. Who should be responsible for communicating the inclusionary process to parents?
10. Other than academics, in what ways has your child benefitted or been discouraged through inclusion?
11. Based on your experience, would you like to see inclusion occur in the classroom next year? Why or why not?