

Perceptions of Early Career Teachers Regarding Inclusion

by

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## Abstract

This research study examined early career teachers' perceptions of the inclusion of students with special education needs in the general education classroom. Six participants were included in this study. Three were students enrolled in the Intermediate Secondary Education program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and three were teachers from a school board in Newfoundland and Labrador. Qualitative methods were used to explore early career teachers' perceptions of inclusion and in-depth interviews served as the main source of data. The participants in this study indicated that while teachers generally held a positive view of inclusion, there was confusion about what was meant by inclusive education. The participants suggested several pros and cons of the inclusion of students with special education needs in the general education classroom. The pros included: social benefits of all students, exposure to curriculum, and a decreased stereotyping of students with disabilities. The cons included: teachers' limited ability to deal with students' experiencing behavioural difficulties, lack of training to implement inclusive policies, limited resources (including time and human resources) and participants' perception of increased workloads. There were discrepancies amongst the individual participants regarding the acceptance of students with disabilities; some participants reported high levels of acceptance whereas others described lower levels, especially as students aged. The participants shared that their university programs and/or professional development opportunities were not adequate in preparing them to teach in inclusive environments. These findings suggested that alterations to the implementation process, resources provided, professional development, and university programs may be required to ensure that inclusion is a successful and effective educational reform.

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## Chapter I: Introduction

This study investigated the following research question: What are the perceptions, attitudes and beliefs that early career teachers have about inclusion? This study included only early career teachers. Early career, for the purpose of the study, was defined as either pre-service teachers, (those who were enrolled in a teacher education program), or in-service teachers (those who were in their first six years of teaching).

Inclusion is a model of education implemented in the Newfoundland and Labrador's educational system (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013). The Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action (The Salamanca Statement) introduced in 1994 led the challenge to move attending countries towards an inclusive education system and society in general (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The Salamanca Statement clearly outlined that all students be accommodated within neighbourhood schools regardless of their ability or background (UNESCO, 1994).

In 1994, 92 governments and 25 organizations came together for the World Conference on Special Needs Education in Salamanca, Spain. The participating countries adopted the Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy and Practice in Special Needs Education and a Framework for Action as a guide for future directions in special education. The statement recommended "to further the objective of Education for All by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote the approach of inclusive education, namely enabling schools to serve all children, particularly those with special educational needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p. iii). The Salamanca Statement set in motion the

shift to a more inclusive environment within schools and communities.

Upon the establishment of the first school in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1722, children were segregated according to their cultural and religious backgrounds (Philpott, 2002). The only students with disabilities that initially received supports were those that were blind or deaf, these students attended a residential school in Nova Scotia (Philpott, 2002). A shift in the educational system came during the mid-1960s to mid-1970s. With the support of Vera Perlin, a community advocate in Newfoundland and Labrador, and parents of individuals with special education needs, the government gave school boards the option to accept students with disabilities if they wished and this led to the creation of Opportunity Classes (Philpott, 2002). Vera Perlin believed “that children with a developmental disability should go to school to be nurtured, by dedicated teachers who would help them achieve their potential” (Vera Perlin Society, para. 4). Philpott (2007) stated in The ISSP and Pathways Commission Report that by 1970 the practice of segregation, where students were being placed in Opportunity Classes, was questioned and integration including teaching to the needs of the exceptional child, not to the category of exceptionality, was demanded. As well, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982 clearly proclaimed guaranteed individual rights “without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability” (c. 11).

Another change introduced into the Newfoundland and Labrador education system was Individual Support Services Plan (ISSP). The ISSP is:

An interagency program planning document, its intent is to ensure coordination in the delivery of supports and services by providing a forum which brings together children/youth, parents and professionals from the Departments of Education, Health and Community Services, Human Resources, Labour and Employment and Justice. (Philpott, 2007, p. 26)

The ISSP replaced the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for students receiving services outside of the school. It allowed the child, parents, health care professionals and other community agencies or support services to work with schools to provide a comprehensive plan to best suit the needs of individual student. The introduction of the Individual Support Services Plan led to the development of a model of services that offered support to students based in individual needs, known as the cascade model. As outlined by Philpott and Dibbon (2008):

Educators viewed this cascade, or pyramid, approach with the regular classroom forming the base of the pyramid, the level where most children had their needs met without specialized planning. Moving up the pyramid, in decreasing numbers, other students would have their needs met in the regular classroom with some supports. Further up this pyramid, in lower numbers still, would be students who came out of the regular classroom at intervals to have their needs met in an alternate environment. Finally, at the very top of the pyramid was the recognition that a few students, because of highly specialized needs, required a separate classroom and curriculum. This resulted in students with very mild disabilities being accommodated in the regular classroom, while students with more



significant or more intrusive needs received programming in placements that were more segregated. The needs of students with severe cognitive delays, for example, were attended to in separate classrooms while students with mild or moderate cognitive delay were in part-time regular and part-time separate classrooms. (p. 6)

In an article outlining the history of special education, Philpott and Dibbon (2008) described the evolution of Special Education in this province and they explain how the cascade model described above led to the development of the pathways program in Newfoundland and Labrador. The pathways model involved five levels of service ranging from students who were taught the regular curriculum with no support to students who were taught a completely alternate curriculum.

In the 1980s and 1990s, a school reform was in progress, led by the release of *A Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983). As stated by Philpott (2007), the release of this report had a dramatic effect on curriculum, sparked debate of traditional special education programs, and led to the release of the report *Our Children – Our Future* which in turn led to an educational restructuring plan *Adjusting the Course* in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Newfoundland and Labrador became part of the Atlantic Provinces Educational Foundation in 1995, at which point a curriculum framework was implemented: “the curriculum that special education teachers were delivering to students of very diverse ability levels had to reflect the goals and objectives of the regular classroom, and the

regular classroom was seen as the preferred place for this to be done” (Philpott & Dibbon, 2008, p.9).

Inclusion continues today with the Newfoundland and Labrador’s Department of Education’s implementation of a new model of inclusion. The Department of Education has provided training and programming for teachers to assist in the implementation of their model.

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador’s Department of Education defined inclusion as:

The Department of Education promotes the basic right of all students to attend their neighbourhood schools with their peers, and receive appropriate and quality programming in inclusive school environments. Such inclusive education involves much more than just student placement. It embraces all students – not just those with identified exceptionalities – and involves everything that happens within the school community: culture, policies, and practices. For students with exceptionalities, inclusive education does not mean that every student is required or expected to be in the regular classroom 100% of the time. Some students, whether for medical, academic, social or emotional reasons, need to be taken out periodically in order for their needs to be met. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013)

The definition highlighted the need for education for all students. The above definition was supported by the research literature; therefore, was adopted for this study (Sharma,

Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006; UNESCO, 1994). Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, and Earle (2006) stated, “inclusion is an educational practice based on a notion of social justice that advocates access to equal educational opportunities for all students regardless of the presence of a disability” (p. 80). The Salamanca Statement outlined in detail the education of all children:

The guiding principal that informs this Framework is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, linguistic or other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, children from linguistic, ethnic, or cultural minorities and children from other disadvantaged or marginalized areas and groups. (UNESCO, 1994, p.6)

While the definitions above included the opportunities of education for all students, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador’s, Department of Education also outlined a philosophy of inclusion being not just the physical placement of students. Inclusion within Newfoundland and Labrador meant students were provided services dependent on the individual needs of that student. The definition suggested there might be times where withdrawal was the best option. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador further qualified withdrawal and provided teachers and administrators with the decision-making criteria used before a student was removed from the regular classroom. “[H]as it has been demonstrated that optimal learning cannot occur in the regular classroom? Have the purpose, timelines, intended outcomes, and evaluation plan for the intervention been

stated? Is there is a plan in place for the student to return to the regular classroom?”

(Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013)

The NL Department of Education developed a five-year implementation plan. The initial phase was implemented in the Fall of 2009 and the final phase of the plan began in September, 2013. The Department of Education provided teachers with training and supported the implementation phase of inclusion in schools through a variety of ways including:

- The use of the Index for Inclusion (a tool used by schools to determine their current level of inclusivity based on three scales: culture, policies, and practices)
- Differentiated instruction
- Collaborative teaching models
- Development of annual action plans. (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013, para. 9)

The NL Department of Education considered three areas when implementing its inclusive program within schools. First the Department of Education considered teacher attitudes and beliefs, second careful planning ensured success of the inclusive program and finally the implementation and maintenance of the inclusive program (McLeskey & Waldron, 1996 as cited in Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013)

University education programs and in-service teacher education professional development opportunities offered by the school boards were the first approaches to preparing teachers to work in inclusive environments (Lambert, Curran, Prigge, & Shorr,

2005; Mdikana, Nsthangase, & Mayekiso, 2007). The Salamanca Statement urged all governments to “ensure that, in the context of a systemic change, teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service, address the provision of special needs education in inclusive schools” (UNESCO, 1994, p. x). New teachers employed in Newfoundland and Labrador schools should have knowledge and experience in the inclusive classroom setting. As well, teachers were required to be comfortable and demonstrate a positive attitude towards inclusion. Therefore, effective education and training for current teachers was a big step toward successful and effective implementation.

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has one university, Memorial University of Newfoundland, which offers the only teacher education program in the province. At the time of this study the university’s education programs offered several special education courses. Students in the Primary/Elementary program were required to take one course and students in the Secondary program were required to take two special education courses. Before 2008 these courses, although offered, were not mandatory (B. Fraize, personal communication, July 10, 2013). Therefore, most teachers who were employed within the school systems in Newfoundland and Labrador during this study, unless they chose to take special education courses as electives, had no formal education in exceptionalities from their program at Memorial University.

The Bachelor of Special Education (B. Sp. Ed.) program was introduced at Memorial University shortly after recommendations from the Atlantic Provinces Committee on Special Education that students with handicaps be educated to their highest

potential (Faculty of Education, A Brief History of the Program, 1997). The Bachelor of Special Education program is a requirement to teach special education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The provincial governments plan to implement inclusive practices in the provinces schools led to the development of a personal interest in the perceptions early career teachers regarding inclusion. The purpose of this study was to explore and provide descriptions of the perceptions of students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Intermediate/Secondary) program at Memorial University and teachers within their first six years teaching within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. This study focused on early career educators and as such they provided in-depth knowledge about their teacher education programs and their experiences in the classroom.

Perceptions of the participants that were explored included:

- What were teachers' perceptions of inclusive education?
- What were teachers' perceptions of the positives and negatives of inclusion?
- How did teachers describe their professional evolution and their personal competency in teaching in inclusive education?
- What were teachers' perceptions of their comfort level in teaching inclusive education?
- What were their perceptions of peer and teacher acceptance of students with special education needs?
- What were their perceptions of the resources and supports that were available?

- Finally, what were teachers' perceptions of the effects of inclusion on teacher workload and planning?

These topics guided the interview questions for the study. (Appendix A)

### Importance of Study

This study began with a review of the literature and focused on teacher attitudes and beliefs towards inclusion, the knowledge and skills necessary for implementation, and attitudes and beliefs towards individuals with disabilities. The analysis of the current literature suggested that there was a need for further research. Conducting a qualitative study provided in-depth understanding of early career educators' perceptions and the underlying basis for their perceptions. It further provided information on what they felt they needed to teach successfully in an inclusive environment and what had affected their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills. The implementation of the current model of inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador was still fairly recent (2009) and was not yet studied; therefore, very little literature was available that dealt specifically with Newfoundland and Labrador teachers. This gap in the current literature provided the rationale for the exploration and description of the perceptions of the early career teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador.

### Theoretical Framework

This study focused on the perceptions of teachers regarding the pedagogical shift towards inclusion. Inclusion was considered a complex perspective and the theoretical framework that guided the research moved from a model where students obtained

services based on a medical model, where disabilities are viewed as within students to a social constructivist model whereby disability was viewed as created within the person's environment. Although there was a continued shift in the model of education, how teacher attitudes corresponded to the model of education was important when inclusive practices were implemented. The medical model of education defined disability as something that was within the individual and "the typical response suggested by this way of thinking is to seek to change the individual in some way" (Low, 2001, para. 12). Grenier (2007) stated within the medical model of education, students were put into a system where their identity is determined based on their disability. A social constructivist model of education viewed disability as something within the person's environment or within society – society that in essence created barriers and excluded people with disabilities from participation in social activity (Low, 2001). Grenier (2007) argued that a social constructionist model of education encouraged teachers to consider the environment and the setting when they strived to enable students with disabilities to become active learners. I worked as a special education teacher for 10 years and I have been part of the medical model where students were identified and labelled and educational programs created based on those identifications. I also played an active role in the movement towards the inclusion of students with special education needs in the general education classroom, a more social constructivist model of education, where students with disabilities were included members of the school community. At the time of this study, one issue that arose was the fact that diagnosis and identification of students continued to be required for students in Newfoundland and Labrador schools who received special education supports and services. This was firmly rooted in the medical



model of education and that indicated there was something wrong within the child. This identification of disability within the students meant that the educational system did not embrace a social constructivist model of education.

My participation in both models of education, and especially the movement from one to the other, suggested a balance between the two models that must be sought and maintained. I did not believe that disability was a fault within an individual, nor did I fully believe there was a social constructivist model of disability but rather a combination of both. With the proposed model of inclusion introduced by the NL Department of Education teachers took information based on the identification of the students' disabilities and that aided the understanding of the special education programs and services needed by the students. It also encouraged teacher reflection and this in turn influenced teaching styles, classroom environment and school culture. As Lindsay (2003) stated "what is at issue is the interpretation and implementation of inclusion in practice. We need to ensure there is a dual approach focusing on both the rights of children and the effectiveness of their education" (p. 10).

## Chapter II: Literature Review

### Overview

The emergence of inclusion is part of an educational reform that has been underway locally and internationally. The education system in Newfoundland and Labrador began to gain an influence from other areas of the world into their education system with the opening of Memorial University. When Memorial University opened in the 1940s, different views of education were introduced: “the university recruited professors from outside the province who brought with them global paradigms of education, including a new view of disability studies” (Philpott & Dibbon, 2008, p.2). Prior to the 1970s, the only students with disabilities who received supports were those who were blind and deaf. These students attended a residential school in Nova Scotia (Philpott, 2002). Vera Perlin (a community advocate) along with parents of children with disabilities helped lead an educational shift in which school boards were given the option to include students with disabilities (Philpott, 2002). With the mandatory inclusion of students with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador schools, teaching practices and support services continued to evolve. Individual Education Plans (IEP) and Individual Support Services Plans (ISSP) were put into place to ensure the appropriate education of students with disabilities. The ISSP led to a model of services known as the cascade model and the pathways program which outlined levels of service for all students ranging from no support to a high level of support (Philpott & Dibbon, 2008). Special education services continued to be influenced by international, national and local reports that guided curriculum and special education programs.

The idea of inclusion and its implementation into schools in Newfoundland and Labrador continues to mirror global trends. The models of education implemented and legislation enforced in regard to inclusion in this province were influenced by Britain, America, and the rest of Canada and they parallel global trends in places including Sweden, Greece, and Australia (Philpott, 2002). Criticisms of the previous medical model of service delivery have led to a transformation of our educational system (Philpott, 2002). As stated by Philpott (2007), “the release of *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Educational Excellence, 1983) resulted in the school reform movement that has since dominated the educational agenda and forever altered the paradigm of special education” (p. 3). Inclusion is an inherently complex school of thought that reaches far beyond the classroom and into society as a whole. Thomas and Loxley (2007) posited, “the focus of inclusive thinking is diversity and social justice as much as it is mainstreaming and disability” (p. 1). While there is much debate surrounding inclusion, agreements such as the Salamanca Statement and the United Nations Convention in the Rights of Persons with Disabilities have ensured that inclusion will be the philosophy that drives our current and future educational practices. The NL Department of Education defined inclusion as the right of all students to attend their neighbourhood school and receive appropriate programming in an inclusive environment; students were to be placed in the regular classroom or withdrawn dependent upon their individual needs (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013).

At the time of this study, students with disabilities were increasingly being included in the general classroom. Inclusion of students with disabilities led to changes in

the roles of all teachers and affected their teaching practices. It was found that many teachers struggled with implementing inclusive practices as they felt they did not have sufficient training (Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Cooper, Kurtts, Baber, & Vallecorsa, 2008; Cullen, Gregory, & Noto, 2010; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Fox, 2005; Glazzard, 2011; Hwang & Evans, 2011). Curcic (2009) conducted a meta-synthesis that examined inclusion studies from 18 different countries. She found that teachers reported some positives outcomes of inclusion were increased social interaction, more exposure to literature, and increased reasoning and thinking skills for students. Training and knowledge, resources and supports, and the effect these changes had on the stakeholders, including the students, were some perceived negatives that were found in the literature (Brackenreed, 2008; Curcic, 2009; Glazzard, 2011).

Some of the main findings that emerged from this literature review and covered under separate headings were: attitudes towards inclusion, teacher competency and training, and resources. This literature provided insight into issues with implementation of inclusion, especially in regards to the above-mentioned findings, as well as outlining successful measures that have worked in other forums.

#### Attitudes towards Inclusion

Several studies showed that, in general, teachers held a positive attitude of inclusion (Avramadis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Daane, Bierne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Smith & Smith, 2000; Vidovich & Lombard, 1998). Sherman, Rasmussen, and Baydala (2008) suggested that a positive teacher attitude, among other factors including “patience,

knowledge of intervention techniques, an ability to collaborate with an interdisciplinary team, use of gestures when communicating with students” (p. 357), positively influenced the success students experience in an inclusive classroom. Norwicki and Sandieson (2002) stated that teachers with a positive attitude influenced the attitude of students without a disability towards students with disabilities in positive ways. Similarly, Carrington, and Brownlee (2001) found that “if teachers have negative views of disability, this will influence interactions with children who have disabilities who may be in their classrooms” (p. 356). Ryan (2009) outlined that actions of a negative teacher are noticed and understood by students and “obviously, the impact and the effects can be detrimental to the development of all students in this classroom who sense this treatment” (p. 185).

Several studies discussed teachers’ attitude and their effect on the willingness and ability of teachers to implement inclusion (Carroll, Forlin, & Jobling, 2003; Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006; Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Savolainen, Engelbrecht, Nel, & Malinen, 2012; Taylor & Ringlaben, 2012). The attitudes that teachers held regarding inclusion and students with disabilities greatly affected their personal efficacy and their ability to teach effectively in an inclusive environment, and to create and maintain an inclusive environment (Elhoweris & Alsheikh, 2006). Teachers were considered front line workers in the implementation of inclusion. Success in implementing inclusion was dependent on the attitudes of the teacher involved. Curcic (2009) found “beliefs may, therefore, be indicative of teaching practices that may be less or more effective, and consequently influence student achievement” (p. 531). “Teachers set the tone of classrooms, and as

such, the success of inclusion may well depend upon the prevailing attitudes of teachers as they interact with students with disabilities in their classrooms” (Carroll et al., 2003, p. 65). Taylor and Ringlaben (2012) found that teachers with positive attitudes regarding inclusion “are more likely to adjust their instruction and curriculum to meet individual needs of students and have a more positive approach to inclusion” (p. 16). Savolainen et al. (2012) conducted a study of teachers’ perspective of inclusion in Finland and South Africa. They found that “the more teachers believe that they are able to implement inclusive practices on a concrete and pragmatic level, the more positive their attitudes toward inclusion are” (p. 65). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) conducted a review of the literature on teachers’ attitudes towards integration and inclusion. These authors suggested that negative or neutral attitudes held by teachers changed if they gained experience and expertise as they went through the process of implementing inclusion. Forlin and Chambers (2011) noted that previous training, experience, or higher qualifications were not a factor that affected pre-service teachers’ attitudes about inclusion. However, they found that teachers’ perceived levels of confidence and knowledge were significant factors that influenced attitudes. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) found:

The level of commitment to inclusion may, in part, help determine attitudes and beliefs about children with disabilities, and about the classroom teacher's role with students who have disabilities. Teachers who are committed to inclusion may be more likely to seek help and, in doing so, be more likely to expand their repertoire of teaching behaviors (i.e., be more collaborative). (p. 178)

The literature identified that the nature of the student's disability was a factor that had an effect on a teacher's attitude towards inclusion (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Cangran & Schmidt, 2011; Hastings & Oakford, 2003; Morberg & Savolainen, 2003). Hastings and Oakford (2003) conducted a study with pre-service teachers and explored whether attitudes were more negative towards students with more severe disabilities. This study also explored teachers' attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities and compared them with students with emotional or behavioural disabilities. The study found that the pre-service teachers felt as though students with an emotional or behavioural disability had a more negative effect on peers, teachers, and the school environment. Hastings and Oakford (2003) also found that pre-service teachers (when compared with in-service teachers) were more positive about teaching older students with disabilities. Avramidis and Norwich (2002) found that "there is enough evidence to suggest that, in the case of the more severe learning needs and behavioural difficulties, teachers hold negative attitudes to the implementation of inclusion" (p. 142). In support of this, Morberg and Savolainen (2003) similarly found that teachers felt the regular classroom was not an appropriate placement for students with severe disabilities. The respondents in their study generally favored a segregated environment for students with severe physical disabilities as well as students with emotional and behavioural disabilities. The authors noted that some teachers felt segregation was better for students with severe physical or visual disabilities due to environmental circumstances such as long distances between the students' homes and the location of their school. Cangran and Schmidt (2011) conducted a study of Slovene teachers and their attitudes towards inclusion and found that teachers

more easily accepted students with physical impairments than students with emotional or behavioural issues.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002) suggested that the process of implementing inclusion should be carefully planned and supported in order to quell teachers' concerns and reservations. The authors found that pre-service teachers were more willing to teach students with mild disabilities and ones who did not require extensive modifications to their programming. Similar to these findings, Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that pre-service teachers were positive about including students with mild disabilities as opposed to students with more significant disabilities that needed supports such as communicative technology. Avramidis and Norwich stated teachers were less positive about including students who were aggressive towards others. After completing a course on diversity, the teachers in their study were somewhat more positive. Subban and Sharma (2006) found that pre-service teachers were apprehensive about including students with emotional behavioural disorders. Hastings and Oakford (2003) also found pre-service teachers were less likely to include students with emotional and behavioural disorders. Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) stated, "in order to prepare pre-service educators for inclusive classrooms they need to feel comfortable interacting with persons with disabilities and embrace the philosophy of inclusion" (p. 783). Ryan (2009) studied 160 pre-service teachers based in Ontario who completed a special education course. Ryan found that "participants in this investigation put forward a positive perception of inclusion, suggesting that it does work, and given the necessary teacher effort, facilities and support, all students in the inclusive classroom will achieve as necessary and as expected" (p.



185). Mousouli, Kokaridas, Angelopoulou-Sakadami, and Aristotelous (2009) conducted a survey study on the attitudes of pre-service physical education teachers. The researchers found teachers in their study held an inadequate understanding of disability, special education and inclusion; they posited that better information regarding students with special needs increased acceptance of students with special needs. Sharma et al. (2008) conducted a study on pre-service teachers from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and Singapore to determine the effects of inclusion training on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. The researchers concluded "the content and the pedagogy of a programme are by far the most significant predictors of pre-service teachers' attitudes, sentiments and concerns about inclusion" (p. 783). Sharma et al. found that when pre-service teachers have contact with individuals with disabilities, know local policy and legislation, and have assignments that deal with their issues and concerns they are more likely to be positive towards inclusion.

Acceptance of persons with disabilities, as well as teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards those with disabilities, influenced teachers' acceptance and implementation of an inclusive model of education. Loreman (2007) described seven pillars of inclusive education required to support students with diverse needs. He discussed positive attitudes of teachers as one of the necessary pillars. He argued "there is a tendency in Canada to see children with disabilities as fragile, incompetent, unable to communicate in ways which are valued, and as having special needs rooted in deficit" (p. 25). The remaining pillars that Loreman described included supportive policy and leadership, school and

classroom procedures grounded in research-based practice, flexible curriculum and pedagogy, community involvement, meaningful reflection, and training and resources.

In reviewing literature for their study on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2006) found that when teachers had familiarity with dealing and working with people with disabilities there was a positive effect on their attitudes toward inclusion. A study by Carrington and Brownlee (2001) showed that exposure to a teaching assistant with cerebral palsy within their pre-service program had a significant effect on the attitudes of the pre-service teachers. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) conducted a research project that examined the inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. They presented some lessons learned from the project regarding the planning of teacher education programs. These included: developing teacher commitment to inclusion, classroom teacher as key, practicing the science of education, importance of effective teaching principles, and participating in inclusion as professional development. Stanovich and Jordan suggested the amount of contact a teacher had with individuals with disabilities was not the only factor that affected their acceptance of including and teaching students with disabilities. The authors suggested another aspect of acceptance was how they viewed disabilities. Those who believed that developmental challenges would improve by effective teaching strategies were more tolerant of students with disabilities in the classroom (Stanovich & Jordan, 2002).

Peer acceptance of students with disabilities was also something considered with the implementation of inclusion. The process of creating more inclusive school environments led to increased interaction between students with and without disabilities.

Several studies outlined social interaction as a positive benefit of inclusion (Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Curcic, 2009). In a review of the literature it was found that, in general, students were accepting of others with a disability (Horne & Timmons, 2009). Idol (2006) found that students in both elementary and secondary schools were generally unaffected by the presence of students with a disability in the regular classroom. In the case of both elementary and secondary students, their attitudes towards students with disabilities remained the same or improved with the implementation of inclusion.

Valas (1999) studied students (with and without learning disabilities and students who were low achievers) in grade four, seven and nine. The students diagnosed with a learning disability were either placed in the regular classroom, had partial placement outside of the classroom, or had a second teacher in the classroom for support. Valas (1999) found that students with learning disabilities were less accepted by their peers, had lower self-esteem, and grade four students in particular felt lonelier. He posited that the label of learning disabled affected how peers without disabilities felt about those with disabilities.

The results of the Valas study (1999) and the Idol study (2006) seemed to be contradictory. Both studies had participants from schools with special education programs where students received varied levels of service from full inclusion to partial inclusion in the regular classroom. One difference that contributed to the variance in findings could be geographical. The Valas study took place in Norway while the Idol study took place in the United States. Lastly, the time that the studies were conducted could have influenced the findings; as Valas's study took place in 1999 and Idol's study took place in 2006, the

seven years difference meant students with disabilities have been included in the regular classroom for a longer period of time. This may have led to increased knowledge, comfort, and acceptance of students with disabilities.

Katz, Porath, Bendu, and Epp (2012) explored the perceptions of 31 students from British Columbia, Canada, in grades four to seven regarding academic inclusion, social inclusion, and factors that facilitated inclusion. Participants were interviewed and presented with case studies of various scenarios regarding students with disabilities to discuss with the researchers. Katz et al. (2012) analysed their data and reported four themes emerged from their research: empathy, disability awareness, learning from peers, and skills. In general, students expressed empathy for students with obvious disabilities and understood that these students wanted friends and acceptance. When the disability was less obvious, peers initially felt the accommodations students received were unfair, but when disabilities were discussed, increased awareness and empathy for these students returned. Students in the Katz et al. study commented on the presence of a student aide with a student with a disability as being negative. They suggested learning from peers was more important than learning from a teacher's aide; therefore, the authors concluded that students with disabilities should be included with students without disabilities in order to have the same learning opportunities. Lastly, Katz et al. found students expressed a desire for strategies or skills to assist them in successfully including students with disabilities in their classrooms. The Katz et al. study also included students' perception of the barriers to inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. Students reported the following barriers to inclusion: a negative effect on their academic

achievement (grades), the lack of completion of tasks in a timely manner, and the presence of educational assistants in the classroom. Students reported the presence of an educational assistant marked someone as different.

In summary, the literature suggested increased social interaction due to inclusion of students with disabilities in the regular classroom had both positive and negative effects on students. In some instances, the label of learning disabled had a negative effect on how students felt about themselves and their acceptance by others. Teachers in general seemed to have a positive view of inclusion. Teachers' attitude influenced the experiences of their students and their willingness to implement inclusion. It was noted that the nature of the disability affected both the attitudes of both pre-service and in-service teachers.

### Teacher Competency

This section of the research literature related to the implementation of an inclusive model of education and the transformation of the role and responsibilities of teachers. This section included: an understanding of inclusion, the policies and legislation regarding inclusion, and teaching practices related to inclusion.

Stanovich and Jordan (2002) stated classroom teachers must be comfortable and capable in altering curriculum and instruction to meet the need of all students, those with and without disabilities. Similarly, Sharma, Loreman, and Forlin (2012), stated that increased teacher efficacy is key in building a successful inclusive classroom. Sharma et al. developed a scale that measured the self-efficacy of teachers' inclusive practices and used the scale with teachers from Australia, Canada, Hong Kong and India. They found

that it is possible that teachers would be more efficient in an inclusive classroom if they were capable of implementing successful teaching strategies, collaborate with others, and control disruptive behaviours. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) found similar results regarding collaboration and also outlined that being a team member, knowing when and who to ask for help, what questions to ask and how to get resources as attributes that assist in being an effective teacher for all students. Regarding teaching skills, Stanovich and Jordan stated that efficient planning and instruction delivery, accepting responsibility of all students, and effective management of instructional time are necessary skills. Lambert, Curran, Prigge, & Shorr (2005) conducted a study of the effect an introductory course on inclusion had with pre-service teachers' dispositions regarding inclusion. The authors stated that competency affected teachers' ability to effectively implement inclusion; this included adapting the curriculum and altering instructional strategies to accommodate all students. They found that one course had a positive effect on teachers' instructional competencies.

Hamill, Jantzen, and Bargerhuff (1999) surveyed 111 practicing educators in 10 elementary and secondary schools to identify competencies needed by teachers and administrators in an inclusive environment. They found:

Effective teachers in an inclusive environment must be flexible. For example, they need to be willing to individualize instruction, restructure the classroom, and adjust the way they spend time. They have to be able to adapt instruction to meet the needs of a variety of students with and without disabilities. They need to have a thorough knowledge of students with disabilities, be well versed in alternative

assessment, know how to organize an inclusion classroom, be experts in classroom management, and know how to address different learning styles. They also should promote hands-on active learning, students' self-esteem, and developmental curriculum. (p. 33)

Loreman (2007) suggested one of the seven pillars to support effective inclusion is meaningful reflection. He stated that teachers' reflection on their practice was an important strategy for teacher improvement, as "educators need to be able to reflect and study because research-based practice is necessary if educators want to stay relevant" (p. 31).

Mdikana, Nsthangase, and Mayekiso (2007) found that when pre-service teachers lacked the necessary skills required to teach in an inclusive environment it resulted in negative feelings, so even the thought of implementing inclusive practices created anxiety. Lack of skills can lead to an unwillingness to reflect on and adapt pedagogical practices. The Mdikana et al. study suggested pre-service education students overwhelmingly felt a requirement for competency within an inclusive environment was the need for special teaching skills in inclusion. Forlin and Chambers (2011) investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of inclusion before and after a course on diversity. Forlin and Chambers concluded pre-service teachers' confidence and knowledge were positively affected by their attitudes towards students with disabilities and negatively affected by their apprehension regarding inclusion. In their review of the literature, Forlin and Chambers found positive attitudes and knowledge were important prerequisites for good inclusive teaching.

Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma, and Rouse (2007) conducted a study that gauged the effect a new course on inclusion and enhancing inclusion content in existing courses had on teacher preparation programs. Van Laarhoven et al. found there were substantial gains in content knowledge in both instances. When teachers were expected to change their teaching practices, they were conscious of their lack of knowledge, skills, information about disabilities and inclusion itself. Having these apprehensions hindered teachers' willingness to implement change (Hwang & Evans, 2011). Hwang and Evans (2011) found that:

Many general education teachers were aware of their limited skills and knowledge regarding inclusion, including the relevant skills and knowledge, and even the very nature of disability and inclusion. This appeared to make teachers fearful of change and hesitant in accepting the new educational agenda of inclusion. (p. 142)

In summary, lack of teacher competency led to negative attitudes, an unwillingness to implement inclusive practices, and students' needs not being met. Teacher preparation programs that focused on inclusion gave teachers the knowledge needed to become more competent and successful.

### Teacher Training

Teacher training in this section includes university preparation programs as well as professional development. The content of courses and experiences in hands-on situations impacts the efficacy of teacher training (Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-



Richmond, 2009; Jung, 2007; Lambert et al., 2005; Loreman, 2007; Midkana et al., 2007; Sharma et al., 2008; Stanovich & Jordan, 2002; Van Laarhoven et al., 2007).

Mdikana et al. (2007), found inclusion content in teacher education programs as well as professional development in the schools was crucial to the successful implementation of inclusion. A focus on inclusion content helped to ensure that teachers were knowledgeable about disabilities, were aware of inclusive practices, knew how inclusion was best implemented, and had knowledge about best practices for programming, instruction, and assessment. There were several quantitative studies conducted to explore the effect of courses with inclusion content in pre-service programs on the attitudes and dispositions of pre-service educators. These studies concluded courses with inclusion content significantly affected the attitudes and dispositions of pre-service teachers (Lambert et al., 2005; Van Laarhoven et al., 2007; Sharma et al., 2008). Lambert et al. (2005) further concluded that even one course had a significant effect on attitudes of pre-service teachers toward inclusion. In contrast to these findings, Jordan et al. (2009) suggested that it was more difficult to alter the teachers' beliefs. A pre-service teacher's personal pedagogical philosophy was influenced by hands-on experiences, such as internships in their education program and experiences teaching in the classroom. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) suggested "teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms can be affected by their success or failure at doing so" (p. 183). Stanovich and Jordan further suggested experiencing inclusion positively affects teachers' attitudes if it was a successful experience and negatively affects teachers' attitudes if it was not a successful experience. Jordan et al. suggested

aspects of students' internships in teacher education programs were ones education programs had the least control over. What teacher candidates encountered during field experiences was not regulated and it was different from one teacher candidate to the next. Jung (2007) also found that field experiences had a more significant effect on teachers' attitudes than coursework alone. Jung suggested reading about inclusion was beneficial in gaining information; however, it was often more efficient for pre-service teachers to observe and to be able to put their knowledge into action to solidify their learning. Observing and implementing inclusive practices significantly increased confidence levels and allowed pre-service teachers to emulate and carry that information into their personal experiences. Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2006) put forth some recommendations for programming that could be used in pre-service training programs that influenced attitudes toward inclusion. The recommendations included: offering coursework on inclusive education and disability studies, inviting successful inclusive teachers as guest speakers, and practicing disability simulation strategies that allowed students to experience how it felt to have a disability.

One of the seven pillars that Loreman (2007) discussed to support inclusion included pre-service and post-service education and training. He found that teachers felt in-class support and collaboration from professionals and colleagues were effective forms of training. Deppeler (2006) outlined a successful model of collaboration to educate teachers and to guide their experiences in a partnership between a university and schools. Researchers from a university acted as facilitators to guide staff at the schools through a

collaborative inquiry process in order to improve inclusive practices. The researchers' role as facilitator was to:

Support teachers in identifying and reading evidence from published research, making decisions regarding research methods, design and implementation strategies. Facilitators also supported participants to share reflections regarding progress on research projects and to discuss issues and questions about student learning and practice with each other, with members of other teams, consultants and facilitators. (Deppeler, 2006, p. 350)

The study showed that the collaborative inquiry process “empowered teachers and leaders to move inclusive practices forward” (p. 357). The author also noted that collaborative inquiry partnerships were more effective if continued over time and ensured a value of collaboration and inquiry. Stanovich and Jordan (2002) shared similar views on the positive effect of collaboration, “a major benefit of including students with disabilities in general education classrooms when practiced within a collaborative framework is that it serves as a highly effective means of professional development” (p. 183).

In summary, this review found that it was not clear if coursework alone prepared teachers for teaching in an inclusive environment. Hands-on experience, along with collaboration and partnerships between colleagues had positive effects on teacher preparation for teaching in an inclusive classroom environment.

## Resources

This section of the literature review outlined resources that were deemed necessary for the successful implementation of inclusion. These resources included time, administrative support, and human resources. This literature review showed that many teachers felt proper resources were not always available to them; in turn, this led to teacher stress.

Brackenreed (2008) in a study of Ontario teachers found that teachers reported they did not have supports necessary to successfully implement inclusion. Brackenreed reported that teachers were left to figure inclusion out on their own and make do with what they had. Brackenreed (2008) stated a lack of training and competency, student behavior, and parents' demands were sighted by teachers as high stressors. Brackenreed indicated there was a need for supports, "as the teachers in this study noted, inclusion is not perceived as a significant source of stress when the appropriate supports are in place" (p. 143). Brackenreed (2008) stated that lack of proper supports created an increase of new teachers leaving the profession, teachers requiring disability leaves, and increased incidences of depression in teachers that stayed in the profession. Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that participants in their study were "most concerned about inadequate resources and a lack of staff to support inclusion" (p.24). Loreman (2007) discussed that schools were not able to adequately resource an inclusive model of education along with a model of education such as segregation, "inclusive education needs to be supported, and resources which were formally in place in segregated systems should be directly transferred to supporting inclusive placements" (p.33).

Several studies noted, time, was a resource that teachers found lacking in an inclusive environment (Berry, 2011; Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Idol, 2006; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Lohrmann Boggs, & Bambara, 2006; Loreman, 2007; Ryan, 2009). Lohrmann et al. (2006) reported teachers felt that trying to meet the needs of all students, including those with a disability, led to frustration and worry. Teachers reported concerns that new students being included in their classrooms resulted in a less time to focus on the other students (Lohrmann et al., 2006). Teachers felt pressured by the lack of time to plan, implement, and assess students in their classrooms and their many required responsibilities. With the implementation of inclusion, time became a greater worry, as there were so many student outcomes to cover. Teachers needed time to teach as well as to collaborate and plan to meet the various needs in the classroom (Horne & Timmons 2009).

Some resources that were found to sustain inclusion included time as mentioned above, as well as support from administration, and human resources (Berry, 2011; Blecker & Boakes, 2010; Idol, 2006; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Loreman, 2007). In Horne and Timmons's (2009) study, participants identified administrative support as necessary for successful implementation of inclusion. These authors noted for inclusion to be successful "the principal is needed to provide supports, such as teacher assistant time, planning time, leadership at meetings, smaller class sizes, and special education teacher support" (p. 281). Loreman (2007) stated that administrators "can foster respect for individual differences; promote consultative, cooperative, and adaptive educational

practices; promote the goals of inclusive education; and empower teachers through providing them with some level of autonomy and recognizing their achievements” (p. 26).

Human resources, including student assistants and instructional resource teachers (special education teachers), were deemed a necessary resource to implement inclusion effectively (Forlin & Chambers, 2011; Horne & Timmons, 2009; Lohrmann et al., 2006). In a study conducted by Lohrmann, et al. (2006), all participants’ shared in-class support personnel were important. The teachers felt that without the support of in-class support personnel they would not have been able to meet the needs of students with disabilities and the remainder the students in the class. Also, Loreman found that the relationship between the teacher and the in-class support personnel was important. If the relationship was not positive, it had a negative effect on the efficacy of the support. Forlin and Chambers (2011) found that participants were very concerned with a lack of support staff to implement inclusion successfully.

Stanovich and Jordan (2002) summarized the importance of resources and the effects on teachers and inclusion:

Teachers who receive resources and supports in their classrooms (i.e., are part of a collaborative team) and, as a consequence, experience success at including students with disabilities, raise their sense of efficacy about working with those students in their classrooms and are more willing to do so in future. Unfortunately, the cycle can also become a negative one. Teachers who do not receive appropriate resources and supports in their classrooms when they are asked to

include students with disabilities and, as a consequence, do not experience success, lower their sense of efficacy and become more negative about inclusion.

(p. 183)

In summary it was found that resources, including time, administrative support, and human resources are deemed crucial in the successful implementation of inclusion. This literature review clearly outlined the lack of the resources indicated above can lead to worry and stress in teachers.

The following section outlines the methodology and data collection procedures, how data was analyzed and the ethics considered in the completion of this study. In-depth description of this study allows for replication at a later date.

### Chapter III: Methodology and Data Collection Procedures

As educators, we experience a variety of challenges on a daily basis and the implementation of different theory into our teaching practices, such as inclusion, is one of them. The question remains: Are teachers adequately prepared for this paradigm shift? This study explored the perception of beginning teachers with regard to their preparation for inclusion practice. It considered their coursework, internship, professional development, and the availability of resources.

#### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative methodology. Creswell (2008) stated qualitative research:

Is a type of educational research in which the researcher relies on the views of the participants; asks broad, general questions; collects data consisting largely of words from participants; describes and analyzes these words for themes; and conducts the inquiry in a subjective biased manner. (p. 46)

The focus of my research was built on participants' perceptions of inclusion as an educational theory driving instruction in schools today. Qualitative research was best suited for this study because it provided a "complex, detailed understanding of the issue" (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Implementation of inclusion has become a mandated reality in schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a teacher with 10 years experience, I was interested in exploring the perceptions of education students and teachers regarding inclusion. I wanted to explore their evolving thoughts and ideas as they progressed



through their training or professional development for inclusion. This study used qualitative methods to gain a more in-depth understanding of early career educators' perceptions, the basis of their perceptions, what they felt they needed to teach successfully in an inclusive environment, and what had the greatest effect on their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills. As inclusion is being implemented in schools in Newfoundland and Labrador and it was beneficial to study teachers' perceptions. There is a need for in-depth exploration and description of the shared experiences of the participants regarding inclusion.

#### Research Recruitment and Sampling

Participants were recruited from the Memorial University's Faculty of Education and a school board within Newfoundland and Labrador. Originally my study called for education students as participants; however, I was unable to recruit enough participants; therefore, I extended the recruitment to include early career teachers. Memorial University was selected; it is the only institution that offers an education degree program within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a result, the majority of teachers within Newfoundland and Labrador schools now responsible for establishing an inclusive classroom are trained at this institution. It was convenient for me as the researcher to conduct research within the environment the participants were located. Saumure and Given (2008) described convenience sampling as selecting participants that are readily accessible, this type of sampling is time and cost effective even though results cannot always be applied to the population at large.

This study used criterion based purposeful sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Miles and Huberman suggested that the researcher should determine the criteria for inclusion in their study. In this study, the following criterion was used: a student currently enrolled as a student in the Faculty of Education program at Memorial University, or a teacher within their first six years of teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador. I initially intended to have 10 to 12 participants but only six participants volunteered for this study. The recruitment process was based on a pragmatic approach where all students enrolled in the Faculty of Education's Intermediate/Secondary program and all teachers within their first six years of teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador were provided the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the study. Students from the Intermediate/Secondary program were chosen because of the shorter one-year length of their education program. Students moved through their program in its entirety while the research data for this study were collected and analyzed, this allowed for the participants to reflect on their program experience when they were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and add any information. All participants were made aware of the study through an explanatory email describing the intent of the study, the methodology, and the role of the participant and researcher. The introductory email also provided a timeline for the study, an explanation of how data would be managed, how participants' identities would be kept confidential, and how the results would be used (Appendix B). An email was sent out to all Intermediate/Secondary education students at Memorial University through their university email accounts as well as to all teachers employed by a school board in Newfoundland and Labrador through their school board email accounts.

Education students in the Faculty of Education are exposed to the courses within their program and their internships. They are expected to enter the teaching profession with both knowledge and understanding of inclusion, and how to implement inclusion effectively in their classroom environment. The teachers included in this study would have been exposed to board-directed professional development, and would have also been provided with resources from their school board. However, there may be some variability in professional development available in individual schools. Teachers may have also completed professional development opportunities on their own.

It was essential to obtain written permission from all participants prior to the beginning of the study (Creswell, 2007) and this was done for each participant involved (see Appendix C). Before commencing this research, ethics approval was obtained from both the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research (ICEHR) and the school board. Informed consent was outlined and explained to each participant in this study; participants were required to sign the informed consent forms and to acknowledge that the consent process was explained to them prior to the actual interview (see Appendix C). A pseudonym was used for each participant for all recordings and documentation.

### Data Collection and Analysis

I conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews with five of the participants (two pre-service participants and three in-service participants). Opdenakker (2006) states that synchronous communication, such as face-to-face interviews, can benefit from social cues

like no other method, “social cues, such as voice, intonation, body language etc. of the interviewee can give the interviewer a lot of extra information that can be added to the verbal answer of the interviewee on a question” (para. 7). I also conducted one asynchronous interview via email with one pre-service participant as they were in another part of the province completing their internship. As stated by Jowett, Peel, and Shaw (2011), online interviews present the “ability to overcome some of the barriers faced by the conventional in-person interview such as geographical distance and the time and cost involved in travelling to meet with participants” (p.355). Using interviews as data allowed me to explore with participants their attitudes and beliefs about the use of inclusion in schools. As part of the research, an interview protocol was developed for the interview sessions (Appendix A). Creswell (2008) defines an interview protocol as “a form designed by the researcher that contains instructions for the process of the interview, the questions to be asked, and space to take notes of the responses from the interviewee” (p. 233). I conducted interviews using the same questions for each participant; as well, the questions were open-ended and allowed the participant to elaborate on the topics presented. The interview questions I asked were informed by the review of the literature I had completed. The five face-to-face interviews were recorded using audiotape; audio recording provides researchers with a more accurate account of the interview for analysis. “In addition to the greater accuracy in comparison with a lack of any recording, audio-recording also provides additional detail by capturing elements of tonality and emphasis” (Morgan & Guevara, 2008, p. 41). With permission of each participant, I took notes during the interview. These notes were also used as a source of data and helped me to

make sense of the recorded interviews. Contained in the notes was information that could not be captured on audiotape such as the participants' emotions, tone and body language.

All face-to-face interviews were conducted in a soundproof interview room at Memorial University. The use of this room allowed for fewer distractions. Before commencement of the interviews, all informed consent letters were read, signed and verified. The participants were allowed time to ask questions and for the researcher to provide clarification of the research study. Follow-up was conducted with all participants. To do this, I provided participants with an electronic copy of the interview transcript, they were asked to check the transcript to ensure its accuracy. They were given the opportunity to add to or make changes to the transcript. The verified interview transcripts and all field notes were dated, analyzed, and stored. Due to issues with the voice recorder, the audio portion with one of the interviewees, "Nancy", was not usable; therefore, I was only able to use the personal notes that I had taken during the interview for the data analysis.

The interview and notes were analyzed and coded to identify themes. I relied on phenomenological research methods to guide this process. Moustakas (1994) outlines the analytic steps of identifying themes. Using this as a guide, I first focused on horizontalization of the data. According to Moustakas (1994), horizontalization is when you list every expression that is relevant and rank each with an equal value. By listening to the audio recordings and reading the transcripts and field notes several times, I located statements made by the participants that highlighted their experiences with inclusion. I then created a list of statements that did not repeat or overlap. These significant statements were then grouped into themes or meaning units and I proceeded to write a

description including information of what the participants experienced. This section includes verbatim quotes from the transcripts. There were ultimately four themes that emerged from the analysis of the data, which I condensed from a larger list into overarching themes:

- 1) Understanding, attitudes and perceived barriers of inclusion
- 2) Acceptance
- 3) Resources
- 4) Teacher competency and training, and comfort level with teaching in an inclusive classroom.

My intent was to obtain a detailed description of the perceptions of early career teachers regarding their thoughts and ideas of inclusion. Their views provided insights that may fill a gap in existing literature, guide future education program development, as well as inform in-service development for inclusion at the government or school board level.

## Ethics

Tite (2010) stated, “subjectivity is key to qualitative research. As qualitative researchers, we must recognize the value of our own subjectivity/subjectivities, and recognize that it lends credibility to our research” (para. 8). As a teacher, I have my own personal perspective, beliefs, and ideas regarding inclusion that will be present in my research. I intended to bracket or attempt to put them aside so that the focus of my research can be “directed to the participants in the study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). I

intended to put my personal ideas and beliefs aside by just focusing on perspectives of the participants. I did not allow my personal perspective to cloud my thoughts about what the participants were sharing with me.

Trustworthiness of my research was something that I took into account throughout the research process. As noted by Tite (2010) “because qualitative research consists of naturalistic inquiry in particular settings or contexts, it makes no promise of generalizability” (Trustworthiness, para. 2). The results are limited to the small group of participants and cannot be generalized or account for the feelings of all early career teachers in different programs, school boards, and locations. The use of triangulation and precise description ensured the trustworthiness of this research study. Triangulation “involves the careful reviewing of data collected through different methods in order to achieve a more accurate and valid estimate of qualitative results for a particular construct” (Oliver-Hoyo & Allen 2006, p. 42). One method of triangulation I used was member checking. Member checking is:

The practice of researchers submitting their data or findings to their informants (members) in order to make sure they correctly represented what their informants told them. This is perhaps most often done with data, such as interview summaries; it is less often done with interpretations built on those data. (Vogt, 2005, pp. 191-192)

All interview transcripts were sent to the participants via email; along with a request for them to review them to ensure accuracy and to provide an opportunity to add additional

clarification. Another form of triangulation used was my supervisor checked my data analysis process. A randomly selected interview was read and coded by both my supervisor and myself. We both highlighted significant statements and shared our results to assess commonality. These significant statements were the baseline established to process the remainder of the interviews and to assist in the development of the themes. Triangulation of the data was also achieved through note taking. During each interview, I took notes of the participant's responses, further questions their responses may have elicited, or any other thoughts I may have had. These notes were used along with the transcripts in the data analysis process. In one situation, the audio recorder failed, the field notes were used as the data for the participant. When I realized shortly after the interview that the audio was not usable, I went through my field notes and added information discussed in the interview from memory.

Through precise description, my intent was to establish credibility by clearly identifying the boundaries of my research; ensuring my analysis and discussion of results stayed within these boundaries. By using description, my aim was to show the limits to the transferability of my research. Describing all aspects and conditions of my research outlined what was necessary to replicate my research at a later date.



## Chapter IV: Results

This chapter presents the findings from the interviews I conducted. The data were analyzed by finding common themes as outlined by Moustakas (1994). The analysis was completed by focusing on the horizontalization of the data (Moustakas, 1994). I immersed myself into the data by listening to the audiotapes and reading the transcripts and field notes. Analysis required that I located statements made by the participants that revealed or spoke to their experiences with inclusion (Moustakas, 1994). I created a list of statements based on the exact words of the participants; the statements did not repeat or overlap. These significant statements were grouped into themes or meaning units and the four main themes that emerged were:

- 1) Understanding, attitudes and perceived barriers of inclusion
- 2) Acceptance of students with disabilities and the effect of increased social interaction
- 3) Resources
- 4) Teacher competency, training, and comfort level

The following chart outlines the participants in this study; I assigned pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants and to make it easier for the readers to follow the individual participants throughout the results. The participants' years of experience as teachers, placement in the education program as students, are presented as reported by each participant.

Participants			
Pseudonym	Teacher or Student	Teacher: Years Experience	Student: Semester (of 3)
Lucy	Student		Final semester
Amanda	Student		Final Semester
Jennifer	Student		First Semester
Megan	Teacher	6 years	
Sarah	Teacher	4 years	
Nancy	Teacher	2 years	

The study consisted of both pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. The study found a substantial overlap in themes for both groups. All participants in this study were female.

#### Understanding, Attitudes and Perceived Barriers of Inclusion

The first theme is the understanding, attitudes and perceived barriers that each participant discussed regarding inclusion. The participants' understanding of inclusion varied a little; some were confident in their understanding of inclusion and what it entailed while other participants lacked confidence in their understanding. While attitudes of participants were generally positive, there were several perceived barriers mentioned by participants.

Many participants discussed the concept of inclusion as an education of all students. As one participant stated “inclusion, put simply, is equal rights and opportunities for all students within our education systems in the least restrictive manner” (Lucy). Similarly Amanda felt that “inclusion is giving every student an equal opportunity at the same education.” Megan elaborated by stating that all students are to have an equal education “regardless of learning capabilities.” Lucy extended the scope of inclusion to consist not only of all students but all community members as well; “inclusion is the idea/practice which keeps all community members integrated.” Not all participants viewed inclusion the same. This was clearly established by Nancy when she stated, “there are different and inconsistent interpretations of it.”

Both pre- and in-service teachers discussed students with special education needs being included more in the regular classroom, although there were some differences in how the inclusion of students was perceived. Some participants noted that the decision to include students was based on the idea of the least restrictive environment. Each student is considered on a case-by-case basis to determine the best educational opportunity for them. Another participant discussed inclusion as meaning the same education for all students: “well I teach Grade 6 so they should all be reading at a Grade 6 level, they should all be doing the same work...?” (Sarah). Sarah furthers questions her understanding of inclusion: “I think if it was a completely inclusive model...do you mean no one would be taken out?” This lack of knowledge and understanding of inclusion shows that Sarah, as a current teacher in a Newfoundland and Labrador school board, had not yet been given information and training to successfully implement inclusion. In her

interview, Sarah discussed that her school was not yet in the process of implementing the most current model of inclusion and that she had not yet received professional development on inclusion. Nancy described some misunderstandings that teachers and school personnel have regarding inclusion that she had experienced. She discussed the misunderstanding that every student should be working on the same learning goals and completing the same work in the regular classroom. Nancy felt that some teachers believed, (one she felt is misinterpreted), that inclusion meant that all students are to be in the general classroom at all times. Her understanding differed from this; as she believed that students were to be placed in the environment that was best for their individual needs, the special education classroom, the general classroom, or a combination of both. This could be attributed to the participant's belief that the current definition of inclusion was gradually filtering into schools and to teachers, as was the situation with Sarah's lack of understanding of inclusion. Teachers, not exposed to inclusion in their undergraduate degree, or those whose school not yet received training and supports with the inclusion model, may not fully understand inclusion.

Participants' attitudes towards inclusion were generally positive in nature, although most believed that there are barriers and detriments related to its implementation for both teachers and students. With respect to barriers and detriments that pertained to teachers, participants noted communication, lack of resources, lack of training and awareness, and increased teacher workload and responsibility. Megan outlined the need for communication:

First of all, I believe that in order for inclusion to work there is a need for good communication amongst teachers and Instructional Resource Teachers (IRT). This enables both teachers to plan lessons and activities efficiently and based on the needs of the individual students. (Megan)

One support that Sarah noted as lacking was manpower:

In theory it is great, in practice you need supports which are not available. I think if you had two teachers in the classroom it would definitely work. For one teacher in the classroom I know from experience this year does not work.

Lucy discussed several barriers that she has noted in her experience such as, “not enough resources, old and dated techniques being delivered, restrictions being found with students instead of with delivery, and stigmatizing and labelling not being dealt with at the school level.” When Lucy said that “restrictions are being found with students” and methods of delivery she was referring to teachers finding fault in the ability of a student to learn material and not with the way information was delivered, or the teaching methods used. This coincided with the discussion regarding the medical versus social constructivists’ model of education discussed earlier. Jennifer outlined several barriers that she felt coincided with inclusion:

I don’t feel like teachers are prepared going into it, especially pre-service teachers like myself going through the program...I don’t feel like there is enough awareness and understanding and that may be on the part of the schools, the school staff, the school faculty, that maybe on the part of the students, on the part of the parents.

Amanda stated that increased teacher responsibility was a barrier she experienced while completing her teacher education internship:

This inclusion program places a great deal more responsibility on the teacher to accommodate these students. It is difficult to have Sally understand the content when she has to take breaks and cannot easily comprehend complex theories or notions, while at the same time keeping Jason engaged in the same material when he is capable of more than what Sally is.

Amanda elaborated on her thoughts further when she reported that inclusion can be successful within the classroom; however, methods need to be implemented that reduced teacher responsibility with shared responsibilities in the following statement:

I think inclusion is possible, but less responsibility has to be placed on the teacher. Parents need to be more involved and teacher aids need to be in the classroom more often than not. While there are parents who take on a huge role in their child's specialized education, there are some who leave it up to the institution. There has to be more emphasis on the needs of the student, and not simply following the SCOs (specific curriculum outcomes outlined in the curriculum guides) curriculum. For some, they're just going through the motions. I think that the inclusive programs have great potential, but there has to be a mutual and equal share of the workload.

The participants, in general, had a positive attitude about inclusion. There was some variability in understanding of inclusion and what it is supposed to look like in the

classroom. The barriers that participants noted were communication, lack of resources, lack of training and awareness, and increased teacher workload and responsibility. The next section discusses the acceptance of students with special education needs by teachers and their peers and the effect increased social interaction will have.

### Acceptance of Students with Disabilities and the Effect of Increased Social Interaction

As the current model of inclusion placed further emphasis on the inclusion of all students into the school and community, the visibility and engagement of some students may be increasing. The participants varied in their opinions regarding acceptance of all students in an inclusive community by their peers, parents and teachers.

All three pre-service participants and one of the current teachers felt as though there are some classes and/or students that are more accepting of students with differences than others. Lucy stated that acceptance:

Depends on the year and the type of students in your classroom. Some students respond very well to students with disabilities and are very helpful while sometimes you have others that are there to make fun....and kind of disrupt the classroom.

Amanda provided a similar view of acceptance regarding a student in her class, "I am so glad that she is in my class and not the other two classes because my class is fantastic with her...my class would be fine, the other class I would be afraid for them." Nancy's experience suggested that students with special education needs are accepted, although

she noted that the older the students become, the lower the acceptance that was shown. She stated when students transitioned from Grade Six into Grade Seven, the drop in acceptance of students with special education needs was most dramatic.

One participant stated the type of disability contributed to the degree of peer acceptance of students:

There are some students with less physically obvious learning disabilities that are totally accepted by their peers in the regular classroom...some physical limitations such as a wheelchair restrict socialization to a certain point, but from my experience, the students still treated these students equally and with respect.

(Amanda)

Acceptance by peers was not the only issue that was addressed in this theme; one participant noted that there are varied levels of teacher comfort when students with disabilities were placed in the regular classroom. Jennifer noted the following “you are going to have some teachers that are not going to be comfortable with it, but I think that with awareness brought into the program I think that you can address that issue.”

Several participants reported on the effect of inclusion on both the academic and social aspects of school. This included students that were previously segregated, as well as students in the regular classroom who may have had little interaction with students who were segregated. “I believe inclusion aims to improve the learning and development of all students socially and academically. I believe inclusion enables all students to feel accepted and included in the regular classroom.” (Megan). Nancy furthered this idea



when she described students in the regular classroom who see differences amongst their peers but learn how to work and deal with these differences. Sarah also saw potential for positive change in the students within the regular classroom, when she stated that when everyone is being included it leads to a decreased “stereotypes about people having to leave the classroom for any reason” One participant noted that different disabilities limited the extent of interaction but “the students are still developing social skills easier than if they were segregated” (Amanda).

Participants discussed both positive and the negative aspects of increased social interaction amongst students with and without special education needs. Some negatives that were raised included behavioural issues and students being singled out, because they were not completing the same tasks as the other students in the classroom. Megan examined social interaction that relates to behavioural issues:

Not all students can and will cooperate in an inclusive classroom. This may in turn cause behavioural issues and hinder the learning of all children. I feel it is necessary to be aware of what issues may arise before engaging in inclusionary practices.

As Megan stated, teachers need to know what situations may potentially arise due to the needs of certain students and she also suggested that having knowledge of how to deal with these situations was considered crucial. Training and collaboration with instructional resource teachers (special education teachers) was valuable in achieving this knowledge. Sarah felt that a potential negative to increased social interaction was having students in

the regular classroom completing work that may be different than the rest of the class. She believed that this leads to students having an awareness of these differences and “the sense that they know they are doing something different, they don’t want to be singled out in class like that.” Students who were previously segregated were in an environment in which they worked at their own level or in some instances on a separate curriculum from their peers in the regular classroom. Sarah’s comment provided the impression that she envisioned students with disabilities placed in the regular classroom would still remain on a separate educational program. In truly inclusive classroom instruction, programming and assessment would be based on individual student needs. Students could be completing different activities in a classroom for many different reasons such as interest, not solely because a student has a disability.

Some participants felt as though some students were more accepting of students with disabilities than others; one participant believed that there is a drop in peer acceptance with the transition to Grade Seven. Lack of teacher comfort was also reported, and one participant believed awareness could be the solution for this. Positives of increased social interaction reported by the participants are the learning and social development of all students, while some negatives that were noted included behavioural issues and students being singled out. The following section outlines the participants’ perceptions of resources for inclusion.

#### Resources

The importance of resources was also a theme that emerged from the interview data. The resources that the participants generally discussed included: time (such as

planning time and time for collaboration with peers, instructional resource teachers, itinerants, administration or parents), human resources (including instructional resource teachers, itinerant specialists, and student assistants), administrative competence, and parental support.

As outlined in the literature review, time to plan, time to implement inclusive practices, and time to assess outcomes were common concerns for teachers faced with having to implement inclusion (Horne & Timmons, 2009; Lohrmann et al., 2006). In line with these findings, the participants in this study reported time as a resource that was lacking. Megan stated, “one of the big issues here is time. There is no time allocated to teachers to actually plan or work with other teachers.”

Human resources, including support from instructional resource teachers (special education teachers), itinerant teachers and/or student assistants are resources that many participants noted they currently lacked. When asked for a personal view of inclusion, Sarah replied:

In theory it is great; in practice you need supports, which are not available. I think if you had two teachers in the classroom it would definitely work. For one teacher in the classroom, I know from experience this does not work.

Megan similarly states that the need for human resources is important, specifically Instructional Resource Teachers. Amanda also spoke of the need for support in the classroom by way of student assistants, stating that they should be present in the inclusive classroom more often than not.

Administrative and parental supports were other resources discussed in this study. Amanda discussed the need for parental involvement as a tool for successful implementation of inclusion, “while there are parents who take on a huge role in their child’s specialized education, there are some who leave it up to the institution.” She feels as though parents should be more involved in their students’ education, especially those with special needs.

One participant, Lucy, focused on the effects a lack of resources played on teacher practice in an inclusive classroom:

Exceptional and gifted learners may miss out on major curricular outcomes; they may not be able to obtain goals and benchmarks in their personal IEP...I believe that lack of resources is at the heart of my distaste for inclusive classroom practices. Without the proper staff, aides, technology, space and attitudes, how is it possible to make the general classroom the least restrictive environment?

While the majority of the participants noted that they lacked resources, Nancy provided a different point of view. She reported while time, support from instructional resource teachers (special education teachers), and administrative support were needed to prepare teachers to teach in an inclusive environment, there were informational resources available to teachers (through their schools or through their school boards) if they chose to avail of them. Nancy’s statement suggested that she felt that some of the onus was on teachers to take responsibility for their own learning about inclusion.

## Teacher Competency, Training, and Comfort Level

When programming changes were introduced into the educational system and teachers mandated to implement the changes, there was a period of preparation and training. The participants in this study are coming from two distinct places. The three in-service teachers were faced with inclusion in their environments; the data from their interviews focused on professional development and the need for information regarding inclusion available to teachers. The three pre-service teachers were preparing to go into their own classrooms. One of the pre-service participants was also able to reflect upon her experience in her internship. The data from these interviews provided information that focused on how courses and opportunities within the teacher education program were preparing them to teach in an inclusive setting.

All of the in-service teacher participants discussed a lack of training, supports and resources that were available to them. Megan stated that there were certain types of resources that should be offered to teachers: “yes there are books and yes there is online activities you can do but in order to make it successful you need to have one on one training or group training during professional development.” Megan also discussed the need for support and time from both the school board and their individual schools:

There is no professional development offered from the district centered around strategies to plan effectively for inclusionary practices...there just isn't any time to improve our classroom pedagogical approach. As teachers we need to be given the support and time from the Board of Education and on a school level.

Sarah discussed the effect the lack of training has on students in her classroom. Sarah reported that she required specific knowledge and skills to successfully teach in the inclusive classroom:

I am lacking in training, I can, I will do what I consider good teaching practices...but when it comes to specifics I haven't been trained in it so...I know for a fact, I will go on the record, I know I am not meeting the needs of them...I have zero training in selective mutism.

Nancy felt that her teacher education program did not prepare her, and she indicated that she did not receive appropriate or sufficient training from her school or her school board. She described feeling as though her knowledge of inclusion was obtained through her internship while in her teacher education program and through her own experiences in the classroom.

At the time of the interview, Lucy was one semester from completing the education program. She stated her program provided the minimal amount of information regarding inclusion. "To put this lack of training in perspective, it seems illogical to send an electrician in to complete a rewiring if they do not understand electric currents. Let's hope they do their own studies and grow as professionals outside their training."

In 2008, Memorial University implemented a mandatory course in Special Education for all education students. The course ED 4240, Introduction to the Exceptional Learner, "is an introduction to the nature of exceptionality in the student. Topics include an examination of special needs resulting from exceptionality, approaches to meeting the

special needs, issues of exceptionality, and a consideration of selected categories of exceptionality” (Faculty of Education, Course Descriptions n.d.). Lucy discussed the expectations for that course:

I know that my expectations of ED 4240 [Introduction to the Exceptional Learner] are huge; I want to know everything about exceptional learners this course has to offer me. I know that I will further my education in inclusive classroom practice from the general teachers point of view as well as the instructional resource teachers point of view.

When following up with participants with the transcripts of their interviews, I corresponded via email with Lucy after she had completed the ED 4240 course. She stated, “4240 [Introduction to the Exceptional Learner] was a complete waste of time. They told us about the problems/disorders/spectrums we might see and then told us that it is hard to diagnose them. Course over. Waste of time.”

Jennifer also discussed Education 4240 [Introduction to the Exceptional Learner] course:

The only way you are going to figure out what that student needs and how you can help them is by talking to them. Talk to the student, talk to the parents, talk to the support team, it’s a team effort and I just don’t feel like you are given enough in that course, I feel like exceptionalities in general should be addresses in every single course that we do... and if it’s not, how are you supposed to apply what you learn in exceptionalities to what you learn in Mathematics education, to what you learn in Language Arts, to what you learn in Children’s Literature, you can’t do it.

Amanda discussed limitations with her teacher education program. She suggested that inclusion may not be covered as much within the program because of the time limits and the amount of material to be covered prior to the students engaging in their internship:

I think that there's a lot of material to cover before you start your internship, so they try and get in all done, and I guess inclusion is fairly new so they want to get as much as the stuff they know absolutely for sure is going to be involved in your internship done. You know, I think inclusion sort of took a back seat this term...honestly I don't think that my education so far has prepared me a whole lot.

Amanda also discussed her experience during her time spent in a school. She stated, "there were inclusive practices being implemented, although it is unclear how these programs or practices worked. There seemed to be a lack of coherence and organization with the inclusion programs." Student teachers during their internships are exposed to the beliefs and practices of their cooperating teachers and the schools' culture. The internship experience that student teachers are exposed to was part of the knowledge that teachers have to draw from when formulating their personal pedagogy and teaching style. If student teachers are exposed to negative or uninformed views of inclusion during their internship, this attitude may have a big effect on the future views and skills of these teachers.

Most participants stated that they felt a low comfort level when beginning to teach in an inclusive environment. They attributed their lack of comfort with a lack of training.



Most participants reported that after they implemented inclusive practices in their classrooms, or for the student teachers they gained some experience within internships, their comfort levels increased significantly.

When the present model of inclusion was introduced in one of the participants' classrooms, Megan, a current teacher, noted that she already using many of the strategies and principles of inclusion. She noted that her transition to the model of inclusion was easier as a result of this previous experience:

I have been teaching in an inclusive classroom for the past several years. I feel comfortable with teaching in an inclusive classroom.... from experience I have taught and differentiated instruction/evaluation a number of times... I find myself using more of these strategies each year and I have noticed positive feedback from both students and parents.

Nancy became a teacher more recently. After two years of teaching, she found she still regarded her positive internship experience as one of the main reasons for her increased comfort level with inclusion. She reported that the internship experience provided the opportunity for her to see inclusion in action. Amanda also discussed the internship process in relation to her comfort level. She stated "I had a couple of students with learning and physical exceptionalities in some of my classes, so I think I'm more comfortable with teaching in an inclusive classroom now than I was when I first started my internship." Lucy also shared information about her experiences during her internship,

but she felt as though the university had not adequately prepared her as a teacher for the inclusive classroom:

Before my internship I would have said that my comfort level was at 0. I mean how do you accommodate for that many personalities, needs and wants? However, now that my internship has ended, I feel comfortable enough to teach my own classes in an inclusive classroom as long as the administration is supporting inclusive school culture; this is due to my cooperating schools ideals and action towards inclusion. My internship showed me that practice makes perfect, you need to lead the inclusive classroom to really get a feel for it, but I would have enjoyed a thorough understanding of inclusion before the baptism by fire approach I received during my internship.

Two participants reported on both their own comfort level and teacher comfort level in general, as well as their students' comfort level. They reported that they felt that it was important to explore how students feel about the decisions being made regarding their placement in either a segregated or inclusive setting:

I think if that student doesn't want to be...I mean some students, you shouldn't force, you should never force anything, you shouldn't force a student to be segregated and you shouldn't force a student to be included...they might have a social disorder, some kind of anxiety disorder and if they really aren't comfortable being in the classroom with other people to the point where they are physically

distressed I don't think it's fair to try and force that on them, so it really depends on the situation with the student. (Jennifer)

Sarah used her own personal experience and described some of the students she taught, and reported in their comfort level as a student with a disability:

I have one student who, she does different things and she has no problem whatsoever, she has the highest confidence you will ever meet and she doesn't care she is doing something different. There are other students in other classes who hide, they will do their recycling or whatever they are doing during the day and as soon as they see another student coming they hide because they don't want them to know.

The in-service teacher participants noted a lack of training, supports and resources that were available to them and the effect this had on their teaching. The pre-service teachers displayed a hope for and/or disappointment in the special education course ED 4240, Introduction to the Exceptional Learner. Overall, participants felt that experience, from being in the classroom or through internships, had the greatest effect on their comfort level in teaching in an inclusive environment. The next section will provide a summary of the key findings.

## Conclusion

The participants in this study were generally confident in their understanding of inclusion. Pre-service teachers demonstrated a knowledge and definition of inclusion that may be partially attributed to information gathered from mandatory coursework in their

educational program. The in-service teachers' understanding varied depending on their particular background. Some had a special education background and had taken special education courses while others did not; some were in schools that were actively implementing inclusion and others were not. Due to these conditions, there was more variability in the in-service teachers' understanding of inclusion, to the point that one teacher was unsure of what inclusion was. Several barriers to inclusion were discussed and the participants' perceptions of obstacles to successful implementation of inclusion were reviewed. Overall, participants felt that (student) peers accept students with disabilities, although it is noted that in certain situations acceptance is much lower depending on the classroom atmosphere and the age of students. The participants felt all students are affected by inclusion and social interaction is one of those benefits. Several participants discussed the mutual benefits of the increase in social interaction between students with disabilities and students in the regular classroom, but negatives such as behaviour and being singled out were also mentioned. Participants felt that the necessary resources are something that is lacking in the implementation of inclusion, and outlined resources they felt were important to have. These resources are ones that can, and should, be provided by the Department of Education, the school board, communities, administration, and parents. All participants mentioned a lack of training as being an issue. In-service teachers felt as though there was not enough training provided through professional development in the schools, and pre-service teachers felt as though the education program did not adequately prepare them. This lack of training can lead to feelings of incompetency and a decreased comfort level with an inclusive environment. Hands-on experience was something that was mentioned as a beneficial training method.

The experience of the practicum was described as increasing knowledge and comfort level more than that achieved by the in-class training provided.

## Chapter V: Discussion

Inclusion is a mandated reality in Newfoundland and Labrador schools as outlined by the Department of Education (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013). The aim of this study was to garner an understanding of early career teachers' perceptions of inclusion. This study was relevant and timely because Newfoundland and Labrador began implementing a model of inclusion into schools in the 2009-2010 school year. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador plans for all schools to be using this model by the end of the 2013-2014 school year. Researching the thoughts and experiences of early career teachers allowed for a better understanding of teachers' perceptions of inclusion. Understanding the perceived benefits and barriers that Newfoundland and Labrador teachers faced enabled me to reflect on the efficacy of Newfoundland and Labrador teacher education programs, in-service training, access to resources, school climates and teaching practices.

One theme, the understanding of participants with respect to inclusion, demonstrated that all the participants viewed inclusion as the education of all students and most participants mentioned that inclusion encompassed special education students in the regular classroom. The results of the study suggested teachers held a belief that inclusion means including special education students in the general education classroom. The amount of time a student is placed in the regular classroom, full-time or part-time based on student need, was something that teachers in this study suggested caused confusion. While one participant questioned if inclusion meant that all students were in the regular classroom all the time, most participants discussed the need for withdrawal to be

determined on an individual basis. The definition from the NL Department of Education touches on this as well, “for students with exceptionalities, inclusive education does not mean that every student is required or expected to be in the regular classroom 100% of the time” (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2013).

Many participants discussed the social effect of inclusion. Participants suggested that when inclusion is in the best interest of the child, it provides students that may previously have been placed in an alternate setting the opportunity to spend more time in the regular classroom. Time spent in the regular classroom allows for more social interaction between students with and without special education needs. As Amanda states:

I can definitely say that the students who are in the classrooms because of the inclusive program are benefiting from the interactions with the other students.

There are some physical differences sometimes that limit the level of interaction, but the students are still developing social skills easier than if they were segregated.

Only one participant suggested inclusion needed to have a community initiative and not just what was going on inside the classroom and within schools. The literature review suggested that inclusion is an inherently complex philosophy that reaches far beyond the classroom and into society as a whole. Thomas and Loxley (2007) posited “the focus of inclusive thinking is diversity and social justice as much as it is mainstreaming and disability” (p. 1).

One participant, a current teacher, was unsure of her views of inclusion. She was unable to articulate what inclusion was and how it was to be implemented in her school. This suggested that while professional development may be available, it was not mandatory for all teachers. This also suggested that there were issues disseminating information about inclusion at both the school board and school levels.

As stated by Elhoweris and Alsheikh (2006), “the attitudes that teachers hold toward inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom are critical for the success of inclusion” (p. 117). They stated that teacher attitude is so important because of the effect on teachers’ personal efficacy and ability to teach effectively in an inclusive environment. Elhoweris and Alsheikh also suggested that teacher attitude influenced teachers’ ability to create and maintain successfully an inclusive classroom environment. All participants in this study described a relatively positive attitude towards inclusion of students with special education needs but not all believed that the model of inclusion was being implemented properly. Participants cited the lack of resources and supports, the management of students’ behaviour, and the increased teacher responsibility as barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion. In a study of Prince Edward Island teachers, Horne and Timmins (2009), found that while teachers held a positive attitude towards inclusion overall, teachers recommended that training, supports and planning time were critical for successful inclusion.

Pros and cons of inclusion identified in this study showed that pre-service and in-service teachers held some similar views in this area. The participants in this study indicated social benefits for all students, curriculum exposure, implementation of



differentiated instruction (DI) strategies, and decreased stereotypes of students with special education needs were positive outcomes of inclusion. This coincided with Curcic's (2009) statement "positive aspects included increased social interaction among students, increased exposure to literature, and improved reasoning and thinking skills" (p. 530). Blecker and Boakes (2010) also found that teachers in their study thought that students with disabilities benefited from interactions with students without disabilities.

Participants identified some negative consequences of inclusion. Participants stated they experienced difficulties with students who exhibited behavioural issues and/or uncooperative behaviours in the general education classroom. They were particularly concerned about the effect of these behaviours on other students in the general education classroom. Participants identified that students may be singled out because of awareness that their work or activities were different than their peers.

Other negative perceptions identified in this study were based on the effects of inclusion on teachers. These included a lack of teacher training, lack of resources, lack of awareness of inclusion and an increased teacher workload. Brackenreed (2008), Curcic (2009), and Glazzard (2011) also found that resources, training, and the effect on students were perceived negatives of the implementation of inclusion. Brackenreed (2008) stated, "the most stressful were those perceived as interfering with a teacher's instruction time, including ever-increasing amounts of paperwork, extracurricular demands, and interpersonal conflicts. Other stressors identified included workload, time management, lack of general support, and insufficient teacher preparation" (p. 132).

The next theme, acceptance, was discussed in terms of teacher acceptance and student acceptance. One participant felt that there will always be students who will make

fun of others who are different, while several others feel that students within some classrooms are more accepting than others. While most participants in this study stated that not all students are accepting of those with a disability, Horne and Timmons (2009), found quite different results:

All teachers surveyed in this study agreed that students in their school accept classmates with special needs. All five teachers interviewed stated that students were very tolerant and accepting of other students with special needs in their class. In this study, students appeared to become more tolerant and accepting of students with disabilities when they understood the nature of the disability and felt free to ask questions. PEI teachers made a commendable effort to communicate this information to students in recent years. (p. 283)

One participant noted that as students move towards adolescence, the less accepting they are of students with differences. Another participant specified that students with less visible disabilities were more easily accepted than others. This was in contrast to the findings of Cagran and Schmidt (2011), who reported “It is also necessary to point out that pupils with physical impairments were also better accepted by their peers (p. 192). Brown (2011) also found contrasting results in that individuals with physical disabilities were more accepted than students with intellectual disabilities.

The topic of resources was one all participants discussed in their interviews. As stated by Brackenreed (2008), “teachers support the basic philosophy of inclusion but feel they have been left to their own devices to survive the stresses created by including all students in the regular classroom without appropriate supports” (p. 143). Consistent with

the current literature, each participant discussed the lack of resources that were available for the implementation of inclusion. One resource that several participants mentioned was time. Lohrmann, Boggs, and Bambara (2006) conducted a study investigating the attitudes and confidence levels of pre-service teachers when working with students with disabilities.

A related struggle was the amount of time that was needed to plan for and then implement strategies in the classroom. Some teachers expressed frustration with finding the balance between meeting the needs of the student who was included with the needs of the entire class. There was concern that it was unfair to other students when the focus student took up too much of their time. (Lohrmann, Boggs, & Bambara 2006, p. 164)

Horne and Timmons (2009) also found that “teachers are already burdened with doing much planning and correcting on their own time. Teachers do need more time to provide an effective education for all students” (p. 283). The participants outlined a lack of information, technology, instructional resource teacher time, administrative supports, student assistant time, and parental supports as areas of concern. This is similar to the findings of Berry (2011), “resources in support of inclusion models generally include administrative support, time for planning and consultation, materials, and so forth (Idol, 2006; Lopes et al., 2004; McLeskey et al., 2001; Talmore, Reiter, & Feigin, 2005)” (p. 638).

Teacher competency, training, and level of comfort were reported as major obstacles in the successful implementation of inclusion. This included the teacher

education program as well as professional development and training within the school system. As stated by Mdikana, Nsthangase, and Mayekiso (2007) “pre-service training in inclusive education and continued professional development are of paramount significance if inclusive education is to be successfully implemented” (p. 130).

Participants in this study, in general, felt as though they had not received the appropriate training to allow them to feel comfortable to teach in an inclusive environment. The pre-service teachers felt as though the paradigm of inclusion was not sufficiently addressed due to the demands of other coursework. This study showed that the pre-service teachers felt their internship experience increased their comfort level and allowed them to gain the most valuable information about inclusion. Those participants who had not yet completed the special education course held high expectations for obtaining the appropriate knowledge. Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) posited “it is challenging to transform teachers’ beliefs. The development of pedagogical skill in the interactive aspects of teaching is left almost entirely to field experiences, the component of professional education over which we have little control” (p. 541). In relation to pre-service internships, Jung (2007) conducted a quantitative study that concluded interns exposed to “guided field experiences expressed significantly more positive attitudes than student teachers who only completed a course toward including students with special needs in inclusive classroom setting” (p. 110). This was also shown in this study when pre-service teachers discussed that their internship placement had more effect on their knowledge of inclusion and their comfort level in teaching in an inclusive environment than their course work. The experience that students had with their internship was greatly

influenced by the cooperating teacher's attitudes and beliefs. If the cooperating teacher is opposed to inclusion, this may in turn influence the intern's attitude.

In general, the in-service teachers felt as though the professional development offered, if any, was not adequate. Due to this lack of training and knowledge, this study suggested that inclusion in Newfoundland and Labrador schools may not be implemented as efficiently as possible. "Unless general education teachers are competent in modifying and adapting their curricula and instructional practices, one essential stakeholder of standards-based education, students with special needs, will continue to be at a distinct educational disadvantage" (Lambert et al., 2005, p. 4). Participants felt that more focused professional development, including individual or small group training would be best. Hunzicker (2010) stated that professional development that comprised a onetime session or sessions where participants sit and listen to information being disseminated was less effective. Information disseminated in this way was more likely forgotten and not applied to daily classroom routines. The article outlined effective professional development as "anything that engages teachers in learning activities that are supportive, job-embedded, instructionally focused, collaborative, and ongoing (p. 178).

The results of this study suggested that while the participants hold a generally positive view of inclusion, there was some doubt of what inclusion really means and if it was being properly implemented. It was felt that lack of resources and supports, management of students' behaviour, and increased teacher responsibility are barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion. The pros of inclusion noted by the participants were: social benefits, curriculum exposure, differentiated instruction, and

decreased stereotypes while cons included were behavioural issues, lack of teacher training, few resources, low awareness and an increased teacher workload.

Most participants stated that not all students are accepting of those with a disability, and this becomes more apparent as students transition to junior high school and with students who have more visible disabilities. Resources participants felt were lacking include; time, information, technology, instructional resource teacher time, administrative supports, student assistant time and parental supports. Generally, the participants felt as though they had not received appropriate training for inclusion, and more focused professional development would be useful. It was noted that hands-on experience had the most influence on a teacher's competency and comfort level. This exploration of the thoughts and experiences of early career teachers aided in understanding the participants' perceptions of the perceived benefits and barriers that teachers face in Newfoundland and Labrador, and allow for reflection of the efficacy of provincial teacher education programs, in-service training, access to resources, school climates, and teaching practices.

## Chapter VI: Conclusion, Limitations and Implications

The aim of this research was to explore the perceptions of early career teachers with respect to inclusion. This particular study was limited to a small number of participants; therefore, it cannot be generalized to all early career teachers. Also, all the participants in this study were female so findings cannot be generalized to male teachers. However, the participants' personal experiences provided insight and suggested that teachers in this study held both positive and negative views of inclusion. They also identified some barriers to the implementation of inclusion. These findings do align with the current literature as well as shed some light on additional concerns within the geographical area in which the study was conducted. This information can be a starting point for future research on training models and practices to adequately prepare teachers for the movement towards the current model of inclusive education in Newfoundland and Labrador schools.

I decided to focus on inclusion for this research study as inclusion encompasses a paradigm shift taking place within the professional practice of teaching. As a teacher, I was very interested in investigating the perceptions of teachers as the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador introduced a new model of inclusion that teachers were expected to implement. The initial invitation to participate in this study was sent to pre-service teachers in the Intermediate/Secondary Education program at Memorial University. I wanted to focus the research on pre-service education students as they prepared to enter the work force to allow me to analyze their views of inclusion. I was interested in the effectiveness of their training to prepare them adequately in acquiring the

appropriate knowledge, skills, and comfort level to teach in inclusive classrooms. Interest in this study was not as high as I had expected. I had planned on 10 to 12 participants, but only received interest from three education students. The recruitment advertisement was sent out to all students registered in the Intermediate/Secondary program; therefore, anyone in this program was eligible to participate. To recruit additional participants, I decided to alter my plans by including in-service teachers within their first six years of teaching in Newfoundland and Labrador. I decided to limit the experience of the teachers, as they would be relatively new to the profession and not have a great deal of personal experience. Early career teachers would potentially be able to comment on their teacher education training along with their professional development. In response to the recruitment advertisement that was sent to teachers, I received replies of interest from three teachers.

The main findings that resulted from this study included understanding of inclusion, attitudes and perceived barriers to inclusion, acceptance of students with disabilities and the effect of increased social interaction, needed resources, and teacher competency, comfort level, and necessary training. For the most part, the participants had a positive view of inclusion and the benefits potentially provided to students. As highlighted by the literature reviewed for this research, this positive attitude was essential for the successful implementation of inclusion. With this in mind, the study suggested that it is highly probable that if teachers were provided with the proper supports, effective implementation was likely to occur. In regards to acceptance, there was a discrepancy in the findings, which was also present in the current literature. While some participants saw



peers generally accepting students with disabilities, others felt as though there would always be students who did not accept these children, especially as they got older. This discrepancy may be due to personal experience of the teachers, the culture and climate of the school or a variety of other factors. Increased social interaction was generally seen as mutually beneficial for all students. The need for resources was an issue that was cited in the literature as well as in this study. Every participant commented on the lack of available resources including time, information, and necessary human resource support. It would be interesting to further explore the effect this lack of resources would have on participants' views of inclusion over a longer period of time. All participants in the study also commented that teacher competency and training were major obstacles in the effective implementation of inclusion. The participants felt that both the teacher education program and professional development offered within the school board did not adequately prepare them to teach in an inclusive environment. The internship offered in the education program influenced the pre-service teacher's pedagogy, confidence, and comfort level the most. This was consistent with the research literature. In order to equip teachers better to teach all students who may be found in the inclusive classroom, the education program could offer internships for a longer period of time or provide an increased number of internships. Professional development made available to current teachers could encompass more focused training or the availability to visit model classrooms/schools where inclusion is currently being effectively implemented.

Limitations of this study include the small number of participants and schools. While the results cannot be generalized to a larger group, the findings obtained were able

to provide a glimpse into the perception of female early career teachers in this geographical area in regards to the implementation of inclusion. This provided us with valuable information that can be used to help guide decisions for training and allocation of resources at the school, school board and university levels, as well as guide future research.

Future research could explore the discrepancy regarding the acceptance of students with disabilities, the effect the lack of resources has on teacher attitude over time, and the need for appropriate training opportunities including more field experience in the teacher education program and professional development. Future research should also involve a higher number of participants, as well as an expanded participant base, including other stakeholders such as students, administrators or parents.

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## Appendix A:

### Interview Questions – In-service Teachers

How do you define inclusion?

What do you think about inclusion?

Describe what you believe to be the positives of inclusive education?

Describe what you believe to be the negatives of inclusive education?

What is your comfort level in teaching in an inclusive classroom?

Do you believe that students in special education can be educated in the regular classroom?

Do you feel as though there are enough supports, training and resources made available to teach in an inclusive classroom?

Do you think that students with disabilities will be accepted by their peers in the regular classroom?

What do you feel is the role of administration in the effective implementation of inclusion?

What effects do you think inclusion will have on your workload, planning, teaching practices, and working with other teachers?

### Interview Questions – Pre-service Teachers

What education program are you enrolled in? How far along in the program are you?

What courses have you completed that have dealt with inclusion?

How do you define inclusion?

What do you think about inclusion?

Do you think that students with disabilities will be accepted by their peers in the regular classroom?

Do you believe that students in special education can be educated in the regular classroom?

Describe what you believe to be the positives of inclusive education?

Describe what you believe to be the negatives of inclusive education?

What is your comfort level in teaching in an inclusive classroom?

Do you feel as though the education program adequately prepares you to teach in an inclusive environment?

## Appendix B

### Subject: Call for Participants

I, Gail Sooley, a graduate student at MUN, am conducting a research study for completion of my thesis.

This study is titled: Perceptions of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers Regarding Inclusion.

This is a call for participants who are teachers within their first five years of teaching.

Inclusion is a paradigm shift that is currently taking place in our educational system. The implementation of inclusion is highly debated and while still in the initial phases much of this debate revolves around if we as teachers are adequately prepared for this change. By studying the perceptions of pre-service teachers I hope to gain insight into what is needed to prepare our teachers for the inclusive environment.

You will be asked to participate in one interview. This interview will take place during the month of March or April. Specific dates will be decided depending on availability. The interviews will be approximately a half an hour to an hour in length and can be held at your school or an office in the education building at MUN. This interview will allow you to share your thoughts, ideas, and experiences regarding teaching in an inclusive classroom.

If interested please contact Gail Sooley at [gailsooley@esdnl.ca](mailto:gailsooley@esdnl.ca)

Appendix C  
Informed Consent Form

Title: Perceptions of Pre and In-Service Teachers Regarding  
Inclusion

Researcher Gail Sooley  
Masters Student - Faculty of Education Memorial University of  
Newfoundland and Labrador  
E-mail: e83gs@mun.ca

You are invited to take part in a research project entitled “Perceptions of Pre and In-Service Teachers Regarding 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, Gail Sooley, 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

I am a graduate student at Memorial University and as part of my Master's thesis, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Sharon Penney.

Inclusion is a paradigm shift that is currently taking place in our educational system. The Eastern School District defines inclusion as “an attitude and a value system that promotes the basic right of all students to receive appropriate and quality educational programming and services in the company of their peers.” The implementation of inclusion is highly debated and while still in the initial phases much of this debate revolves around if we as teachers are adequately prepared for this change. By studying the perceptions of pre and in-service teachers I hope to gain insight into what is needed to prepare our teachers for the inclusive environment.

#### Purpose of study:

The purpose of this research study is to explore and describe the perceptions of two groups; students enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Primary/Elementary and Intermediate/Secondary) program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador as they are prepared to teach in an inclusive education environment and teachers within the Eastern School District and are in their first five years of teaching. At this stage of the research, the perceptions of the participants will be generally defined as; what they believe inclusive education is, the evolution of their professional and personal competency in teaching inclusive education throughout the pre-service education program and provided in-service, their comfort level in teaching inclusive education and how this may change throughout the education program, completion of in-service and experience in the classroom, what they feel they need to know to be prepared to teach in an inclusive classroom, and the participants in-service training plans or plans for further education.

#### What you will do in this study:

You will be asked to participate in one interview. These interviews will be audio-taped. After your interview, and before the data are included in the final report, you will be able to review the transcript of your interview, and to add, change, or delete information from the transcripts as you see fit.

#### Length of time:

Each interview will be approximately one hour in length.

### Withdrawal from the study:

If at any time you choose to withdraw from this study there will be no consequences to you for this decision. Any data that has been collected up to that point may be included in the research study with your permission.

### Possible benefits:

A benefit of participation in this study is an opportunity for self-reflection and formulation of personal pedagogy.

There are currently few qualitative studies that focus on the perceptions of both pre and in-service teachers in regards to inclusion. I hope that this study will garner a more in-depth understanding of pre and in-service educators' perceptions, the basis of their perceptions, what they feel they need in order to successfully teach in an inclusive environment, and what specifically has the greatest impact on their beliefs, attitudes, knowledge and skills. These results will add to the body of literature that exists as well as aid in course and in-service development.

### Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

There is a difference between confidentiality and anonymity: Confidentiality is ensuring that identities of participants are accessible only to those authorized to have access. Anonymity is a result of not disclosing participant's identifying characteristics (such as name or description of physical appearance).

### Confidentiality and Storage of Data:

You will be interviewed individually and the audio tapes and transcripts will be given a pseudo name so it will not be possible to identify individuals. Moreover, the consent forms will be stored separately from the transcripts and audiotapes, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.

All transcripts and audio tapes will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in my office. Dr. Sharon Penney, my supervisor, will have access to the data. I will retain all data for five years after publication per Memorial University's Policy on Integrity in



Scholarly Research. At the end of this period all data collected throughout this study will be destroyed.

#### Anonymity:

The only information that will be included in the research report will be the fact that you are a student enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Intermediate/Secondary) program at Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador or a teacher within the Eastern School District and any further information that you provide in the interviews. No names of participants or schools will be included. You will have the opportunity to review each transcript before any data is included in the final report.

#### Recording of Data:

All interviews will be audio-taped. You will be asked to consent to your interviews being audio-taped.

#### Reporting of Results:

The data collected will be used within my thesis report and your identity will be kept confidential. Although I may report direct quotations from the interview, you will be given a pseudonym, and the only identifying information will be the name of the institution, Memorial University of Newfoundland or the Eastern School District, will be included. Results potentially may also be published in a peer reviewed journal(s) at a later date, if so no identifying information would be included in the publication.

#### Sharing of Results with Participants:

A copy of the final report will be made available to all participants that take part in the study.

#### 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: Gail Sooley at [e83gs@mun.ca](mailto:e83gs@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](mailto: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 you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason, and that doing so will not affect you now or in the future.
- You understand that any data collected from you up to the point of your withdrawal will be retained by the researcher for use in the research study.

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 but do not want my name to be identified in any publications resulting from this study.
- I do not agree to the use of quotation.

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

