

**Factors that Support Inclusive Schooling**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates the factors that support inclusive schooling in five school districts in British Columbia. Factors supportive of inclusive schooling were identified through a review of the literature and a questionnaire was constructed to guide the interviews. Individuals representing six different roles in the education system, from five school districts, were interviewed for their responses.

It was found that the factor that supports inclusion more than any of the factors investigated in the study is a strong belief and commitment to the idea of inclusion. A belief in inclusion was followed by leadership at all levels of the system, inservice and preservice training, clear written policy at a district level, and needed supports, particularly in the form of time for collaboration and problem-solving activities. Areas for further study include: behaviourally disturbed children and inclusion, teacher contract language and inclusion, the merger of special and regular education and the role of the special education assistant.

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# **Chapter One**

## **Introduction**

As a society we have been moving consistently, if slowly, in the direction of increasing awareness and promoting acceptance of groups of individuals who have, in some way, been previously disenfranchised. While many groups have been formed as support and information-sharing networks, all have in common the desire to create a more informed public. Certainly in the case of persons with epilepsy, autism and AIDS, an educated public is a powerful tool in discouraging a variety of isolating and discriminatory practices.

Because many individuals, regardless of medical diagnosis, share physical and/or mental impairments, the movement to encourage acceptance and provide access for these individuals has cut across the boundaries of many groups and created a broad base of support for initiatives concerned with access and inclusion. Those working in the field of disability recognize the importance of gaining access to quality educational opportunities. It is the key to gaining true citizenship and social inclusion.

Individuals like Rick Hansen and Terry Fox have inspired and motivated us. Their heroic deeds have raised our awareness level and allowed many of us to focus not on their disabilities but on their rather extraordinary abilities. The fact that their accomplishments have taken place in a society designed for the able-bodied, has made them all the more remarkable.

Few then would argue with the basic assumption that we have a collective responsibility to encourage acceptance and provide access in any way possible. "It is not comforting to think that in the past it was actually decided that some children or adults should be excluded from regular lives, classrooms and communities" (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p.7). If all

children, regardless of disability, are to take their rightful place in the community after graduation, they must be part of the regular education system. The regular education system must not only accept them but seek actively to achieve a common, high quality general education for all; a system that honors and celebrates diversity (Crawford & Porter, 1992). The goal of honouring and supporting students with disabilities in regular classrooms is central to the idea of inclusive schools.

### **Inclusive Schools**

The term inclusive schools is used throughout this paper instead of the terms of integration and mainstreaming which also refer to the idea of including special needs children in regular classrooms. In the year 2000 educational reform in British Columbia, the term integration has a variety of meanings. It refers to the combining of once distinct subject areas into broader umbrella courses like Humanities. It refers to the combining of loosely related concepts into one teaching unit, called an integrated theme unit, and to many it means the inclusion of identified special needs students in regular classroom settings.

The term mainstreaming is more commonly used in the educational literature from the United States and suggests to some a core of accepted educational practice (the mainstream) into which special needs children must fit (Stainback & Stainback, 1989).

Inclusive schools are ones that provide opportunities for all students to be in regular classroom settings, when it is appropriate. All students may at some time require specialized instruction outside of the regular classroom but it is important to note that the amount of time spent in such settings is central to the child's ability to feel included. Schnorr's (1990) study indicated that a student included only part-time in a general education class with the majority of time spent in a segregated special class was considered a visitor in the general class rather than a classmate. Inherent in this idea of inclusion is the provision of programming that is challenging but geared to individual needs. Curriculum

adaptations take on many forms and are central to the success of including all children in regular classrooms. Along with this is the need for appropriate student and teacher supports that again are tailored to individual, classroom and school-based needs.

### **Definition of Inclusive Schools**

Inclusive schools are those that promote full inclusion and adhere to the following criteria:

- they include students with disabilities in regular classrooms with their same-age peers in neighborhood schools.
- they afford open access to students with disabilities in the sense that the student, regardless of the nature and extent of his or her disability and needs, is assured acceptance by the school without first having to prove he or she deserves to be there.
- identifiable school, classroom and instructional practices which promote inclusion and make real involvement possible, are being practiced.
- social inclusion is occurring in ways that enable students with disabilities to take part in all aspects of the social life of the school (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

That inclusive schools include all children in regular classrooms and provide some curriculum modifications and support to those children and their teachers may seem obvious. Less obvious is the idea that inclusive schools should not be concerned with trying to *fit* special needs students into existing classrooms and schools but should rather be working towards the goal of developing school and classroom cultures that support and nurture the educational needs of every student.

It is one thing for a school that has not previously had experience with including special needs students to actively problem solve around the issues of an identified student whose parents are seeking to have the child attend a school. It is an entirely different and richer way of thinking to have all schools preparing to include children with special needs who

are currently unknown to the school and staff. All schools, regardless of the makeup of students, would then be inclusive schools.

### **What Factors Support Inclusive Schooling?**

To realize the dream of inclusive education in our schools, we need to consider how best to provide supports to students and teachers in the mainstream of education (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). While many believe that the inclusion of students with disabilities is just good educational practice that benefits all students, others fail to see this relationship. For many it adds a layer of complexity to the already complex nature of education (Crawford & Porter, 1992). Although some are strong advocates for inclusion while others struggle with the question of who actually benefits, all would agree that inclusionary practice provides a formidable challenge to the education system; one that requires a major rethinking of policy and funding issues (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Fullan, 1992).

In 1984, William and Susan Stainback published an article entitled “The Rationale for the Merger of Special Education and Regular Education.” Those who were advocates for REI, or the integration of all students in age-appropriate regular classes in neighborhood schools, questioned the need for special education and its effectiveness (Crawford & Porter, 1992). They also advocated that educators move away from teaching and assessment based on competitive, norm-referenced educational practice towards a more student-centered and cooperatively oriented approach.

The idea that there would no longer be a group of students and educators under the umbrella of special education outraged most educators then but is still unthinkable to many at the present. The proposal has and will continue to engender much heated but necessary debate. The increasing numbers of students with disabilities who attend regular classrooms in neighborhood schools attests to the success of the inclusive schools movement and indicates the strong grass roots support for the breaking down of the special and regular



education barriers. Commenting on the merger of general and special education, Lieberman (1985) wrote, “We have thrown a wedding and neglected to invite the bride. If this is an invitation to holy matrimony, it was clearly written by the groom (special education), for the groom, and the groom's family. In fact, the bride (general education) wasn't even asked. She was selected” (p. 513). Since 1985, a great deal has occurred to make the “proposal of marriage” more acceptable. As Lieberman states in his advice on marriage, “At first in a marriage there is a period of adjustment which requires some giving and taking on both parts. Both parties must be willing to compromise and talk through their roles and responsibilities” (p. 513). These ongoing discussions about the roles and responsibilities of educators towards the least powerful members of the educational community-the children-continue to nurture the inclusive schools movement.

Many educators, especially those involved with special education, were quick to support British Columbia's Ministry of Education's Year 2000 initiatives. The Year 2000 documents propose significant changes in the education system to support learner-centered curriculum delivery, activity based learning, authentic assessment and evaluation procedures and the involvement of parents as partners in their children's education. The Year 2000 symbolizes a move away from teaching and assessment based on competitive, norm-referenced practice towards teaching that is individualized and cooperatively oriented. It discourages segregated settings or streaming based on labels and instead challenges educators to provide viable options for all students. In contrast, the present system is seen by many to focus on the provision of a good *academic* education with other strands that students in effect fail into. Special educators have always subscribed to the fundamental principles that the Year 2000 is based upon because these principles are believed to allow everyone to be successful.

Other general education practices may support inclusive schools. The ungraded primary program, collaborative work structures, decentralization, effective schools and invitational

schools movements have all placed a greater emphasis on bringing the collective strengths of educators to bear on the programming needs of students.

The potential for classroom instructional practices such as whole language, cooperative learning and activity-based learning to support the inclusive schools movement and meet the needs of individual learners is enormous. Unfortunately many powerful ideas in education are implemented in only a very limited way. A lack of effective inservice and on-going support and monitoring of the implementation process means that teachers are trying to use new ideas with a limited knowledge base and little support (Allan & Sproul, 1985). The identification of factors that support inclusion as well as the barriers that impede full inclusion are central to moving forward with necessary supports and confidence.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The literature on inclusive schooling (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Porter & Richler, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1992) identifies district practices, school-based practices, and classroom instructional practices that are supportive of inclusion. District practices include the development of policy, appropriate inservice initiatives, provision of needed supports and the inclusion of students with disabilities in age-appropriate classrooms in neighbourhood schools. School practices include accessibility, provision of therapy, curriculum approaches such as ungraded primary and multi-age groupings and the development of collaborative work structures and problem-solving strategies. Classroom strategies include learner-centered instruction, cooperative learning, peer tutoring, activity-based learning and curriculum modification. Factors identified are, for the most part, not based on empirical research. There is a need for more systematic research.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the factors that support inclusive schooling in five school districts in British Columbia. Individuals at the district and school-based levels,

along with parents, were interviewed for their responses to questions based on a review of the inclusive schools literature. As well as identifying supportive factors in these five districts, the study aims to investigate any differences between the perceptions of district-based staff, school-based staff and parents. Perceptions may be closely tied to the role an individual plays in education. Articulating possible differences is important in ascertaining support for inclusive schooling.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provides a context for the study in terms of factors that support inclusive schooling.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Review of the Literature**

This chapter sets the context for the study in light of current literature relevant to the research question. The literature is addressed under the following headings:

- Education and Inclusion
- Policy and Legal Issues
- District Practices
- School Practices
- Classroom Instructional Strategies
- Obstacles

#### **Education and Inclusion**

“It has been estimated that more than 80 percent of all students could be classified as learning disabled by one or more definitions now in use” (Ysseldyke et al., 1983, cited in Wang et al., 1992, p.35). In the academic year 1988-89, 48 percent of all children [in the U.S.] were identified as handicapped. Little reliable information exists to justify these classifications or the placement of students in special programs. The placement of students in special education or compensatory programs can be justified only when the programs have distinctive qualities and show efficacy (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick, 1982).

“Unfortunately, we seldom meet such standards” (Wang et al., 1992, p. 35).

*Twenty-first century studies of children with special needs focus mainly on the necessary modification of instructional programs. Children are not labeled; rather, the programs are labeled. It is common, for example, for selected children in the primary grades to receive extended and intensive reading instruction. Others receive extended instruction in social and*

*friendship skills. Children with poor vision are taught to read by Braille methods . Classification is strictly in terms of instructional needs; therefore, classifications may be relevant only for a brief time. (Wang et al., 1992, p. 37)*

An ongoing struggle with language in our society has particular impact in the field of special education; “What may be acceptable terminology in one area is seen as backwards and regressive in other areas” (Porter & Richler, 1991, p. 4). Different terms are used to refer to the practice of including students with disabilities in regular classrooms.

Mainstreaming, integration, inclusion and now *full* inclusion are all terms that are in current use. The children who are targeted in an inclusionary model may be identified as students with mental handicaps, students with physical handicaps, students with special needs or exceptional students.

While some use the terms *integration* and *inclusion* interchangeably, others see integration as a distant second to the finer philosophical ideal of inclusion. In the eyes of some, integration puts the child outside of the regular classroom, hoping to be included while inclusion grants the same rights to all children, unquestioningly (Stainback & Stainback, 1991).

There seems to be little agreement on acceptable terminology. Some continue to use labels that identify children according to the nature of their disability as in “student with a physical or mental handicap,” while others prefer more generic or liberal terminology such as “student with special needs” or “exceptional student.” A variety of other terms such as high incidence/low incidence are used to differentiate students with learning disabilities (high incidence) from those (low incidence) who have more severe disorders like Down Syndrome, autism or cerebral palsy. There are many more high incidence children in the system and they have traditionally been the responsibility of the school. Low incidence children have been the responsibility of the district. The terms high and low incidence are

often used in combination with low need/high need in an attempt to move away from targeting or labeling individual children in favour of identifying groups of children and documenting the extent of their needs.

The World Health Organization discourages the use of the term *handicap* when referring to an individual. The term is more correctly used in discussing the environmental response to an individual with a disability; thus an individual may be handicapped in a school that does not provide accessibility and not handicapped in one that does.

The “state of the evolution of the language and the diversity of opinion” (Porter & Richler, 1991, p.4) as well as the differing perspectives and experiences of the individuals involved in education colour the literature pertaining to inclusive schools. Many look forward to a time when the issues that currently engender heated debate in special education will no longer be issues (Biklen, 1985; Porter & Richler, 1991; Stainback et al., 1992). David Jory, a parent, shares his perspective:

*After all these years, I do not like to use the word “integration” any more. The use of the word, however, is necessary because, for far too long, our school systems have practiced systematic discrimination against pupils with a mental handicap. “Integration” is simply the process of righting that wrong. I prefer to think of an integrated school system in which the educational needs of all pupils are met appropriately, and I hope that soon the word “integrated” will be unnecessary. But we are not at that stage yet.*  
(cited in Porter & Richler, 1991, p.4)

Most discussions involving the terms *integration*, *mainstreaming* and *inclusion* require that the participants clarify their understanding of the terms before proceeding.

“The authors of this chapter hope that it will soon be possible to simply talk about providing a quality education for all students” (Stainback et al., 1992, p. 3). Until that time

however, the term inclusion is being adopted because it communicates more accurately the idea that all children should be included in the educational and social life of school and community and not merely placed in the mainstream. Inclusion reflects preferred philosophy and practice while avoiding confusion with curriculum integration (B.C. Teacher's Federation, 1992).

One assumption underlying the term inclusion is that traditional schools and classrooms are structured to meet the needs of the so-called "typical" child and any student entering that classroom must fit within what was designed for the majority (Stainback et al., 1992).

Central to the idea of inclusive schooling is provision of supports for all students rather than a small number of students. The whole special education initiative was built on the premise that special needs cannot or will not be accommodated within the regular classroom (Keogh, 1988). It is also based on the assumption that teachers of special needs students require special training and intensive skill development that can only take place outside the regular classroom. The lack of transfer from specialized settings to the regular classroom or community has caused a major re-evaluation of these special education assumptions (Zigmond & Baker, 1990).

A movement which initially began to keep mentally handicapped children at home, out of institutions, and educated in the community resulted in the creation of special education classes (Richler, 1991). While successful in terms of its original intent, the special education movement resulted in isolation for the children who were deemed appropriate candidates for special education services. This isolation does not end when school ends. It comes as no surprise that children who spend their lives in a system that parallels, but does not interact with, the system created to educate "normal" children, continue to live in isolation in the community.

Supports that are directed to only a small number of students continue to reinforce the tenets of the whole special education movement. Schools that rely too heavily on specialists reduce the chances that true support and friendship networks will develop and flourish (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Biklen (1985) identified quality education as respectful of the needs of all students; creative, exciting, and welcoming of children regardless of their differences. "Not only does integrated education prepare children with handicapping conditions to become part of their communities, it also prepares the children without any identifiable handicap to do the same." (Porter & Richler, 1991, p. 27)

If nothing else, the discussions about education and inclusion and the controversy over the dual special education/regular education systems point to the inadequacies of the present system and the need for reform.

### **Policy and Legal Issues**

A basic premise of equality is inherent in inclusive schooling: "No one should have to pass anyone's test or prove anything in a research study to live and learn in the mainstream of school and community life. This is a basic right, not something one has to earn" (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p.7). Of all the reasons given for encouraging inclusion, none is more important than the fact that it is the fair, ethical and equitable thing to do (Crawford & Porter, 1991; Gartner, 1986; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

The struggle for inclusion began when the parents of children with mental handicaps came together to form associations which took the lead in fighting for services and opportunities within the community for their sons and daughters (Richler, 1991). Their efforts resulted in the development of special education classes and then special education schools. The success of the movement could be measured in terms of the proliferation of services, group homes and sheltered workshops that resulted. By the mid 1980s there was growing dissatisfaction with the fact that "programmed childhood was leading to programmed



adulthood” (Richler, 1991, p.38). Participation in the life of a community is believed to be closely tied to education in the mainstream.

In 1985, the Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded changed its name to the Canadian Association for Community Living. Over the next two years, the association developed a plan entitled Community Living 2000. The plan incorporates the ideas that individuals will attend regular classes in their neighborhood schools, be supported by a network of family and friends and have meaningful work in the community.

The work of the group was grounded in a belief of normalization (Richler, 1991) which challenged traditional notions of segregating individuals according to a medical diagnosis, identified set of learning problems or score on a norm-referenced test. Efforts to create a new reality for mentally handicapped individuals resulted in the realization that restructuring segregated services did little to eliminate the barriers to inclusion.

Two other initiatives, combined with the work of the Association for Community Living, have provided fertile ground for the seeds of inclusive schooling. The educational reform movement in Canada, and most significantly in British Columbia, has contributed to making classrooms more adaptable to a broader range of children. Activity-based learning, learner-centered curriculum, and cooperative learning, combined with a growing appreciation for individual learning styles and a variety of approaches to teaching have all contributed to the changing face of traditional classrooms that previously catered to only a select group of students.

In 1985, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which had prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, or age, was amended to prohibit discrimination on the basis of mental or physical disability (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Richler, 1991). Arguments surrounding issues of inclusion can be framed by reference to the Charter.

The strong support for inclusion provided by the Charter does not mean that all children will have access to inclusive schooling. There are many variations across Canada in the way that provincial legislation is framed and interpreted. This in turn affects the way special education programs are conceived and funded (Crawford & Porter, 1992). While some legislation is more supportive than others, none could be said to actually require inclusion; the best that one can hope for is that it be permitted (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Porter & Richler, 1992).

Court cases that have resulted from the lack of inclusion for a child have highlighted the problems that school districts experience in working under old financing formulas. Traditionally children have been labeled for the purpose of placement in appropriate settings, but with this labeling goes a funding category. A child who falls into a “low incidence” category will also fall into a high funding category. Boards faced with the forced transfer of a child out of a segregated setting may not be able to access the same level of funding since the child may no longer be considered “special needs” (Crawford & Porter, 1992). In the past, parents have actually fought to have their children categorized or labeled in this way because of the funding that flows as a result. Those same parents are now asking educators to see their children in the same light as they do all other children and not as a number or a label.

The inclusive schools movement highlights the difficulties that occur in grass roots movements. Without top down change to support the grass roots initiative, the struggle is long and hard. While many educators agree with the basic philosophy of inclusive schooling, many continue to be thwarted by policy that was put in place to support the dual track system of special and regular education.

Those who support the basic tenets of inclusion recognize that much more than mere placement of a child in a regular classroom is at stake. Skrtic (1986) maintains that a radical

“paradigm shift” is needed to move practice onto a higher level (cited in Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 9).

The Director of Education of a Roman Catholic school board in Western Canada describes such a paradigm shift in his rationale for dismantling the separate structures:

*In 1982...I took the Student services Department out of the organizational chart and said there will be one department, and it will be Instructional Services. I said if Student Services is part of Instruction then it has to be part of that department right at the board level too. We didn't wipe out the staff, but we [incorporated] Student Services [into] Instructional Services...People often want to keep the functions separate. My contention is that organizationally we've got to have them together. If there's a sense of education being integral and being for everybody, then those services have to be in the one department. (Cited in Porter, 1991, p. 23)*

Provincial differences highlight the fact that even the Charter cannot ensure inclusion. Saskatchewan has had a law permitting but not requiring integration since the 1970s but it did not prevent a school board within that province from operating a segregated school for children with special needs during the 1991-92 school year (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

Ontario's Bill 82 encourages but does not require integration (Porter & Richler, 1991). Significant numbers of students in that province still attend segregated classrooms and families often feel frustrated in their attempts to have their children placed in regular classrooms (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

New Brunswick's Bill 85 is seen by many to be the most supportive provincial legislation with regards to inclusion (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Richler 1991)) since it states that alternatives to integrated programs are to be considered only after every attempt to make integrated programming work has been exhausted (Porter & Richler 1991, p.65). Despite

the progressive nature of the legislation there is a wide range of accepted practice in New Brunswick and one family went to court to ask for compliance with the legislation (Porter & Richler 1991).

A number of provinces are conducting reviews of educational policy in general or special education services in particular and giving specific attention to the question of integration (Crawford & Porter, 1992). These include Alberta, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Ontario and British Columbia.

Some other factors related more to policy and practice than law appear to facilitate the move towards inclusion. In *Obstacles to Implementing School Integration*, Sage (1989, p. 11) notes that “school districts whose special education departments were primitive” in terms of their development, have been much more successful in moving towards full inclusion. This is true of smaller rural districts and of the Roman Catholic school system, in general, since the only school available may be the neighborhood one.

Some features, other than size and limited availability, have contributed to making Catholic Schools more accepting of the idea of inclusion (Porter & Richler, 1991). Firstly, traditional segregated schools and classrooms have passed Catholic schools by because these structures have been closely tied to the public school system (Forest, 1983). Secondly, the commitment to Christian values, family and community are consistent with inclusionary practice (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

*What is critical and essential in the Catholic School System is the sense of community that reaches out and accepts everybody; not just the football or basketball player, but [also] this youngster who had to be pushed in a wheelchair; who had to be taken to the toilet; [a sense of community that sees] his sense of humour despite his disability and pain...He was the one giving support to the others at times...I can talk about [integration] from an*

*educational, philosophic point of view. I can [also] talk about it from a religious point of view and the two move hand in hand* (Porter in Porter & Richler, 1991, p. 24).

In general, it appears that the framing of inclusionary ideas in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms along with supportive provincial policy facilitates the move towards inclusion, but exceptions can be seen on both sides of the issue.

The Catholic School System and many rural school districts are exceptions for the reasons stated previously. They are examples of inclusion being operationalized in absence of policy and, in the case of one Catholic School District in Ontario, there was a conscious decision to avoid creating policy that would focus attention on special needs children and cause educators to look at them as anything other than children. The Director of Education for a Catholic School District in Ontario was quoted as saying, "Policy can be attacked, whereas values cannot" (In Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 28).

The opposite is also true as seen in the New Brunswick experience. The Charter combined with inclusive policy couched in very supportive and encouraging language can still fail to be operationalized, and in at least two instances, be challenged in a court of law (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Richler, 1991).

The trend towards decentralization means that schools are given major roles in determining how education dollars will be allocated (Crawford & Porter, 1992). Along with this goes the freedom to be liberal in the interpretation of policy related to inclusion. It follows then that attitudinal differences towards inclusion, lack of comfort or experience with children with disabilities, and issues of support and accessibility may all play a role in determining the direction that any individual school may take when faced with a request for inclusion.

Despite the growth in philosophical support for inclusion, entrenched practice still determines direction. In the classic special education hierarchy, "low incidence" children

have been the responsibility of districts while “high incidence” children have been the responsibility of individual schools (Crawford & Porter, 1992). District services are administered through certain, but rarely all, schools in a given district. Parents are then often faced with the choice of a neighborhood school with limited resources and equally limited or non-existent support, or a *designated neighborhood* school with the full complement of services and support.

Although the Charter of Rights and Freedoms now provides parents with a legal basis for their demands, parents who have challenged the placement of their children in segregated settings have been left responsible for their legal expenses while taxpayers covered the costs incurred by the school board and their administrators (Porter & Richler, 1991). “The element that permeates all of the legal challenges by parents on behalf of their children is one of struggle” (McCallum, 1991, p.69). The struggle involves a huge commitment of time, money and emotional resources. Despite this, McCallum states:

*Where the goal is inclusion, the power of parents is inexhaustible. It will continue to whittle away at the barriers that persist in practice and in law. Those who resist the inevitable transition to integration should recognize that because the power of parents is exercised in the name of equality, it will prevail.* (McCallum, 1991, p. 71)

## **District Practices**

School districts within each province are given considerable freedom when it comes to implementation issues and inclusive schooling is no exception. As previously mentioned, there is no real agreement on the meaning of the term inclusion and certainly a wide range of practice when it comes to determining responsibility for inclusion. Reluctance to enforce policy exists within school districts, particularly in urban areas (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Stainback et al., 1989).

One area in which there is considerable agreement is the area of written policy. “Where policy is defined....and operationalized accordingly, there is a greater likelihood that students will be assured access to inclusionary education in their community” (Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 29). Schools that attempt to implement inclusionary practice in the absence of stated policy find the process very challenging. As one principal comments:

*If we had written policy from the district we could have done more sooner. This way all the responsibility for change rests on the back of the person or persons doing it. This, of course, means that if the person controlling the policy leaves, the policy may leave as well. (Cited in Crawford & Porter, 1992, p.29)*

The idea that inclusionary practice is tied to the leadership of an individual principal means that parents will seek out a school with a reputation for inclusion. This is not in keeping with a philosophy of inclusion since it is unlikely that children will attend their neighborhood schools. It also prolongs the struggle for parents and children since uncertainty about placement will emerge again as the child moves out of the elementary system and into junior and senior high school. If the neighborhood schools are not inclusive schools then the parents again must go through the process of identifying a suitable placement for junior and perhaps senior high school. The child who has developed friendships and a support network in elementary school is isolated once more as peers go on to their neighborhood high school.

Ministries of Education across the country as well as many individual districts use the term “least restrictive environment” (Crawford & Porter, 1992) to talk about the best placement for students with special needs. The term is meant to imply that children won't be restricted academically, socially or emotionally through placement in a segregated setting. It is meant to ensure that *special needs* children are offered the same educational opportunities as *typical* children.

However, to some extent the term “least restrictive environment” has validated the enormous variety of placements that are accepted within a district (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). One educator may feel that the needs of a mentally handicapped child are primarily academic in nature and best met in a small segregated setting with an emphasis on skill instruction. In discussing the needs of the same child another educator may feel that the highest priority should be placed on the child's social and emotional needs and therefore favor placement in a regular classroom with same-age peers. Both may be able to justify their positions through use of the term “least restrictive environment” (Rioux, 1991).

Where policy has been more clearly defined, it includes the following:

- placement in a regular classroom
- attending the neighborhood school-the same school that the child would attend if he or she did not have a disability
- age appropriate placement
- provision of needed supports so that the inclusion can be assured
- most importantly, the systematic capacity to provide these services without major barriers or resistance being offered (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

The distribution of funds and resources to support inclusion can also be an important determinant of the success of the venture (Crawford & Porter, 1992). An important strategy in ensuring the success of inclusion is for a district to integrate not only students, but personnel and resources as well (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

In the dual track system of special education and regular education, resources and energy from the special education budget have gone to support the process of classifying, labeling and making placement decisions. “Current practices in classification and placement take much of the time and energy of administrators and specialized professionals such as school



psychologists and social workers” (Wang, et al., 1992, p.36). Money and personnel have been tied to the individual child and based on funding categories that supply differing amounts of money depending on medical diagnosis. A child in British Columbia with multiple handicaps falls into the highest funding category under this system. When that child is included in a regular classroom, it is desirable to integrate the resources and use them to meet identified needs within the mainstream.

Despite the fear that has often accompanied the integration of mentally and physically handicapped students into regular classrooms, teachers currently identify behaviorally disordered children as providing the greatest challenge to the system (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Porter & Richler, 1991). Behaviorally disordered children fall into the *high incidence* category and are not funded in the same way as *low incidence* children are. A teacher may have one or two behaviourally disordered children, with no extra support, in a classroom while another teacher may have a low incidence child with a full time aide in a classroom. The second teacher will most likely find that the support provided significantly contributed to making the inclusion experience a positive one (Porter in Richler & Porter, 1991), while the first teacher will feel overwhelmed. The allocation and integration of resources based on need rather than labeling and funding categories, can result in support for all students *and* teachers in the mainstream.

When special schools for the mentally handicapped were first closed, districts designated certain schools to replace them. The number of schools depended on the size of the district. Many schools refer to these schools as *neighborhood schools* because of the practice of including special needs students in regular classrooms within these schools. The schools, however, are rarely “in the neighborhood” for special needs students unless parents actually move in order to be close to a school of choice. The transportation of children to *designated* neighborhood schools is very expensive. “These resources could be better used in enriching instruction in regular school programs” (Wang et al., 1992, p. 37). Growing

awareness of the importance of the role that friendship and community play in true inclusion has prompted parents to seek inclusion for special needs children at *true* neighborhood schools and not at *designated* neighborhood schools (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). For full inclusion to be realized, the funding that has traditionally gone into a few schools within a district must be redistributed on a needs basis.

Classroom teachers have been encouraged in the past to adhere to the expert model (Little, 1985) and those experts were provided by the district. "The message inherent was that regular class teachers were not qualified or competent to provide education to a student with a significant learning problem" (Porter & Richler, 1991, p. 23).

As an educator in Alberta stated, "We need commitment to professional development, to move away from specialists to a support system based on empowerment, consultation, [and to] wean teachers off dependency on outside specialists" (cited in Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 45). Guidance and leadership for systematic staff development is a support that the district must provide.

The leadership provided by a district cannot be overstated. "In every case examined in the present research where inclusionary education is practiced, there has been a leader" (Crawford & Porter, 1992). Leadership must be provided in developing attitudes and philosophies that are supportive of inclusion as well as the more practical strategies for school and classroom that actually make inclusion happen.

Not all educators believe that all children have a right to, or can benefit from, education in the mainstream. And more importantly, many simply fear different aspects of the process (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992) that range from safety for the physically disabled child to the teacher's ability to provide the best education for *all* students within an inclusive classroom. Teachers must have time to discuss their concerns with colleagues and to broaden their knowledge base about specific disabilities. Much of the fear surrounding inclusion is fear

of the unknown, but that fear, in turn, drives the reluctance to include a special needs child (Jory, 1991).

Often the best inservice involves colleagues sharing “best practice” scenarios and the district is instrumental in orchestrating these opportunities.

*We find that fears are based on emotion rather than fact, and there is plenty of experience to show that the fears are generally unfounded. One of the most heart-warming aspects of our efforts over the years was seeing some teachers who were afraid of ‘integration’ become its strongest advocates once they tried it. (Jory, 1991, p. 85)*

## **School Practices**

Educational reforms, combined with the realization that the best working environment for teachers is a collaborative one, (Fullan, 1992; Villa & Thousand, 1992) have created favorable conditions for inclusive practice.

A number of practices can be considered inclusive. Collaboration, problem-solving strategies, leadership, special education assistants, ungraded programs, multi-level instruction, computer aided technology, accessible facilities, transportation and therapy will be covered in this section.

## **Collaboration**

One of the major organizational shifts in schools has been towards a collaborative culture (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Fullan, 1992; Skrtic 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1991).

Teachers have traditionally practiced their craft in isolation. Marie Geleen, a new teacher who had undertaken the full-time integration of exceptional students, remembers :

*When I arrived at the school I soon found out that teachers believed in the closed door syndrome. I had no idea what was going on in other classrooms. There was little kid-talk in the staff room-mostly complaints. I felt as if I was working in a vacuum. Classroom management had never been a problem for me before, but these kids were the most obnoxious, poorly motivated kids that I had ever had to deal with. I was never quite sure if the negative attitudes were being fostered by the home-room teachers. That year I spent a lot of time upset, questioning my competence, questioning my instructional strategies, and looking for a different job. (In Fullan, 1992, p. 21)*

Teachers prepare for their careers in teaching by choosing areas of strength and expertise as they go through their university training. Only a few educators have theoretical or practical experience in dealing with children with special needs, yet in today's teaching environment children requiring individual education plans are a given. "The expectation that any one teacher will have all the expertise needed to do the job of effectively teaching all students in the classroom is simply not sustainable in an environment that requires full inclusion" (Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 38). Schools that practice full inclusion need collaborative work structures as a means of support. Teachers who have experienced collaboration attest to the benefits of this new way of working:

*What really changed me...was the integration of the special education children into my classroom in 1987. Now there were other... teachers in the classroom, and we had to learn to work together. (Cited in Fullan, 1992, p. 22)*

A teacher, Marie Geleen, quoted previously at the beginning of her career is quoted four years later after the school staff had united to improve the professional culture of the school:

*There is a family atmosphere....I know that I can make mistakes and say that I tried this and I'm not happy with it. There is much more collegiality-more openness. There was little interaction before, but now there is lots of sharing. Staff members are more enthusiastic about how kids learn* (cited in Fullan, 1992, p. 22)

## **Problem Solving Strategies**

Hand in hand with collaborative work structures go problem-solving strategies. Most schools practicing inclusion have initiated the use of school-based teams (Crawford & Porter 1992). A typical team is made up of an administrator, one or more consulting or resource room teachers, counselors and regular classroom teachers. There is growing recognition that no single type of support can provide the range of assistance needed by ...teachers in inclusive classrooms (Stainback & Stainback, 1990, p. 27).

Problem-solving is most commonly done through the school-based team although some schools and districts use more formalized processes like the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992) to achieve the same goals. The MAPS process is people working together to make something better happen for an individual child. "The MAP is more than anyone can do alone. It proves what we strongly believe-together we're better" (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992, p. 27).

The purpose of the MAPS process is to create an action plan to be implemented in a regular classroom. The individuals who facilitate the MAPS process must understand it thoroughly and "must believe 150 percent that full inclusion is possible for all" (Forest & Pearpoint, 1992, p.27). The main role of the facilitators is to pool information from all members of the team and integrate it into an action plan. Although the MAPS process is not an IEP, the information can be used for that purpose as well.

## **Leadership**

The importance of leadership has already been discussed under the heading of district practice, but leadership at all levels in the system cannot be overstated (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Fullan, 1992; Stainback & Stainback, 1990, 1992). Superintendents hope for leadership and direction from the Ministry of Education, principals look for leadership from the superintendent and parents, teachers and school-based staff look for leadership from the principal. All play a major role in achieving full inclusion (Biklen, 1985; Porter 1991). In discussing a school that embarked on a plan to do full-time integration of exceptional students, multi-grade classrooms, the whole language approach and cooperative learning, Fullan (1992) comments:

*The whole experience changed Don Real. In three years, largely through the active but by no means dramatic leadership of the principal, the professional culture of Torah has changed. (p. 22)*

## **Special Education Assistants**

A very small portion of the literature on inclusive schools is devoted to the discussion of special education assistants. This may be due in part to the fact that there is an ongoing struggle with appropriate language in the field of special education (Porter & Richler, 1991). Terms such as support staff, resource staff, integration facilitator, teacher aide and special education assistant are used in discussions of inclusion. In some instances it is very clear that a particular term refers to a non-teaching staff member, but in others instances it is not .

Traditionally, Special Education Assistants have been assigned to individual exceptional students (Perner, 1991). The amount of time that an assistant is assigned to the child is sometimes determined by the categories used by districts to allocate funds to schools where

special needs students are in attendance. Sometimes the amount of time is needs-based. This means that two children categorized as *dependent handicapped* could receive full time aides based on their diagnosis or category or could conversely receive differing amounts of one to one assistance because their needs are very different.

There is increasing concern with the practice of labeling and categorizing children (Jory, 1991; Rioux, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1989, 1990) for the purpose of providing improved educational services. This practice has important implications for the role of the special education assistant and that individual's relationship with the classroom teacher.

Teacher's aides play an important part in the integration of students with disabilities (Porter & Richler, 1991). Their primary purpose should be to assist students with learning and to support the classroom teacher in the delivery of the educational program (Crawford & Porter 1992). Children with severe physical disabilities or multiple disabilities may also require the special education assistant to provide movement around the school, toileting, feeding and personal care.

Regardless of the extent of the child's needs, it is important that the special education assistant be assigned to the teacher or the classroom and not to the individual child (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Porter, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1991). The classroom teacher must maintain ownership of the exceptional student and the educational program for that student to prevent isolation within the regular classroom (Perner, 1991).

If the educational assistant is assigned to the teacher rather than the student, the teacher is responsible for making sure that the assistant provides a variety of supports for a variety of children (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Perner, 1991; Stainback & Stainback, 1990). The assistant then becomes an integral part of the class providing supports for all students (Stainback et al., 1989) in the mainstream.

The notion of “shadowing” a child should be avoided (Crawford & Porter, 1992; Strully & Strully, 1989). This refers to the practice of attaching an aide to one particular child exclusively. This can often result in further isolation for the child since the impression is that the exceptional child really *is* unusual or different and completely dependent. It discourages other children in the class from becoming involved with the special needs child, or taking any responsibility. It effectively eliminates the possibility that any meaningful relationships will result. The aide and the child become “an island in the mainstream” (Biklen, 1985, p. 18).

*Where teachers have taken the initiative in accepting a child with a disability and are actively working to promote acceptance and interaction, the child has been accepted by peers in the classroom. Conversely, when a child with a disability has been supported entirely by a teacher assistant, with minimal teacher interaction, he or she has not become a true member of the class.*  
(Collicut, 1991, p. 191)

### **Ungraded Programs and Multi-Level Instruction**

It is of primary importance that teachers see themselves as central to the process of full inclusion (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). It is important also for them to adopt practices that allow them to teach the whole class while providing for individual needs. The ungraded primary program and multi-level instruction are examples of school initiatives that support such a philosophy.

An ungraded primary program is currently being implemented in British Columbia schools. The ungraded program will replace the formal structure for the K-3 years. Children will be involved in learner centered activities that will allow them to progress at their own speed and will employ a variety of strategies that take individual learning styles into consideration. Generally a team of teachers works with a team of children who are



regrouped frequently according to the particular task and/or needs of the student (Pavan, 1992). For many, the Primary Program in British Columbia has validated existing practice and is consistent with the learning needs of young children, with or without a disability (Crawford & Porter, 1991). A synthesis of the research on the effectiveness of non-graded schools found that at-risk students benefit from a non graded program (Pavan, 1992) but the extent of the benefit depends on the particular features of the non graded classroom (Slavin, 1992).

Multi-level instruction is based on the premise that one lesson will be taught to the whole class. The flexibility is provided in the following ways:

1. key concepts to be taught are identified
2. various methods of presentation are incorporated that will accommodate individual learning styles
3. varying activities will be acceptable
4. students may represent their knowledge in different ways
5. the evaluation process will be individualized (Collicutt, 1991).

The fact that the same lesson is presented to the whole class supports inclusion since special needs children are not working on a separate curriculum within the regular classroom. The flexibility that allows all students to participate to their fullest extent is provided in terms of a variety of presentation and evaluation methods (Collicutt, 1991).

### **Computer Aided Technology**

For many, Dr. Stephen Hawking is the embodiment of the empowering nature of computer technology for the disabled. A brilliant physicist, he has been severely motorically impaired over the past ten years due to ALS. Since the condition does not affect cognitive functioning, without technology, an individual with ALS may be trapped in a variety of ways. Provision of a wheelchair, a computer and specialized adaptive devices that provide

access to the computer allow individuals to continue to realize their potential. Dr. Hawking has maintained his involvement with the academic community and continued to contribute to physics through the use of technology.

Technological advances in access equipment and portability of computers will result in significant increases in the use of computer aided technology to support students (Asch, 1989). Specialized technologies exist which will allow children with impaired hearing, vision, speech, and/or motor output to be full contributing participants in regular classrooms.

The school system relies heavily on the ability of students to communicate verbally or in written form. Technologies that provide speech output, voice recognition, and a means to produce written text have great potential for students unable to communicate in traditional ways (Biklen, 1991).

The rapid advancements in technology and the complicated nature of computer driven systems provided for students add a layer of complexity to the integration process. Many educators are unfamiliar with the technologies and lack the time and expertise needed to use them effectively (Crawford & Porter, 1991).

### **Accessible Physical Facilities, Transportation and Therapy**

Young people requiring modifications to the physical environment at school are under-represented in regular classrooms by fifty percent (Crawford & Porter 1992). It would therefore be safe to presume that accessible physical facilities are not available to the degree that they are needed.

When district based schools for the disabled were first closed down, the district targeted certain schools to receive students with physical disabilities. Parents who wish to send a disabled child to the neighbourhood school have had to fight the battle on many fronts; the

first one being accessible physical facilities (Steinbach, 1991). Progress is being made but much more needs to be done.

The process of providing accessibility for a variety of disabled students with a range of disabilities is a formidable task. Most existing schools were not built with special needs students in mind and difficult economic times make it less likely that all schools in a given district will be made accessible. This increases the likelihood that placement decisions will be based on accessibility issues rather than educational ones.

Physical accessibility issues and transportation issues are closely linked. If a child cannot attend the local school because of a lack of accessibility then transportation must be provided. Many school boards in British Columbia provide transportation for those students who must attend a school that is out of the neighborhood. The issues are like a double-edged sword. It is very expensive to provide transportation and equally expensive to make old buildings accessible for the disabled. If all children could attend neighbourhood schools, then transportation would cease to be an issue (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

Therapy, like physically accessible buildings and transportation, is a service that some children must have in order to participate in regular classrooms (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). Therapists form an important part of the school-based team and schools are taking advantage of the knowledge that these individuals provide (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

It is important that therapy be provided in a manner that supports inclusion. Interruptions to classroom routines that often accompany the integration of special needs children continue to remind everyone of the differences rather than the similarities between disabled children and their typical peers. Providing therapy within the classroom can provide opportunities for positive peer interactions as evidenced by this student's comments on one of his classmates:

*When he said his biggest dreams are to be able to walk and drive a car, I felt like jumping up and saying, 'I'm with you all the way Aidan,' because I want to help him* (cited in Stone & Campbell, 1991, p. 244).

The teacher commented, "If Aidan had been sent to therapy outside of the classroom for this exercise, he would have missed the opportunity for peer encouragement and interaction that being in the classroom afforded him" (cited in Stone & Campbell, 1991, p. 244).

## **Classroom Instructional Strategies**

To be truly inclusive, schools must demonstrate that every student, regardless of need or disability, belongs there (Biklen, 1985). One way of meeting the needs of a greater diversity of students in regular classrooms is to employ a wider range of teaching strategies (Collicut, 1991). The literature identifies certain strategies that are central to the process of supporting inclusion.

### **Cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning methods are among the most extensively evaluated alternatives to traditional instruction in use in schools today (Slavin, 1992). Cooperative learning methods are particularly valuable in inclusive classrooms since a synthesis of the research has shown that cooperative learning methods work equally well for all types of students (Slavin, 1992).

Cooperative learning teaches children how to work in groups to achieve common goals. The strategy facilitates the inclusion of students with diverse needs since individual goals can be addressed within the group structure (Ford, Davern, & Schnorr, 1992). Traditional instruction with its emphasis on individual achievement and rigid academic standards does not provide the best learning environment for students with special needs. The competition

inherent in individual achievement does not improve learning outcomes for students and negatively influences self-esteem (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

Teachers who have used cooperative learning report that it is a powerful tool for teaching children to respect and get along with each other, thereby improving the social and academic climate of the classroom (Stone & Campbell, 1992). One teacher shares her experience:

*We worked in groups often. In these groups, no matter what, there was always something that Dennis could do successfully, whether it was describing pictures, repeating words or role playing. It did not take long for the other students to become adept at creating ways that Dennis could actively participate in their group. Their ideas and suggestions often far surpassed my own .(cited in Stone & Campbell ,1992, p. 242)*

### **Peer tutoring**

Like cooperative learning, peer tutoring is effective in addressing diverse needs while promoting socialization and friendship (Stainback & Stainback, 1989; Strully & Strully, 1989). As one classroom teacher observed:

*How better to teach a student who is blind to get to the cafeteria than to practice with her seeing classmates in the hubbub of everyday school life? How better for a student with severe retardation to learn when to laugh, how to dress, and how to walk, than to observe his so-called non-disabled peers? (cited in Knoblock & Harootunian, 1989, p. 204)*

Peer tutoring allows classroom teachers to provide more individualized instruction than is traditionally available in a regular classroom.

To foster full inclusion, peer tutoring should not be limited only to academic needs or to certain students (Crawford & Porter, 1992). All students will require support in a variety of areas as they pursue their education so peer tutoring should not be restricted to students with disabilities. Peer tutors can offer academic assistance, friendship or counseling services to all students in the mainstream.

One important feature of peer tutoring is that of choice. It is important that tutors choose to be involved and choose the area in which they feel most comfortable. The role of the giver and the role of the receiver should be interchangeable (Grenot-Scheyer & Falvey, 1986; Matthews, 1992).

### **Other strategies**

The emphasis of meeting the needs of all students in an inclusive classroom places extraordinary demands on teachers (Stainback & Stainback, 1989, 1990, 1992).

Traditional teacher-directed learning is of limited use in this environment and ways must be sought to maximize the learning opportunities in inclusive classrooms. Cooperative learning, multi-level instruction, and peer tutoring offer alternatives to traditional teaching as does activity-based learning. Activity-based learning is essential in an environment like an inclusive classroom because of the wide ranging learning styles. Children learn best when the activity is intrinsically motivating. If children enjoy playing with ideas and dealing with problems in an experiential, hands-on way, then learning becomes intrinsically motivating (Eisner, 1991).

The collaboration of regular classroom teachers with special education teachers allows a sharing of ideas that have traditionally been the domain of one or the other. The merging of strategies benefits all children. Baumgart (1982, cited in Falvey et al., 1989) outlines some basic principles:

- 1 Adapting skill sequences-using a calculator if a child cannot master multiplication tables, for example.
- 2 Adapt rules in games to encourage cooperation and build on strengths-allow a student to throw the baseball at home plate if he/she is unable to hit the ball with a bat.
- 3 Learning pairs-buddy systems for those unable to complete the task independently.
- 4 Facilitate attitudinal change by modeling the involvement of special needs individuals in teaching situations.
- 5 Adapting instruction-talking books for the visually impaired.

## **Obstacles**

The major obstacle to full inclusion is the deeply entrenched support for the dual system of regular education and special education (Biklen 1985; Crawford & Porter, 1992; Rioux, 1991; Stainback, Stainback & Bunch, 1989; Villa & Thousand, 1992; Wang et al., 1992). There has been growing support for the idea that the two systems should be merged to provide an effective and equitable education for all students (Reynolds, Wang & Walberg, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Advocates identify a number of issues that concern educators and lend support to the idea of a merger (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). This paradigm shift would involve a move away from teaching and assessment based on competitive, norm-referenced educational practice towards a more learner-centered and cooperatively oriented approach to teaching (Crawford & Porter, 1992). Although advocates of the merger point primarily to the negative effects of placing children in segregated settings, they maintain that the regular system has also suffered as a result of these practices. In the words of Porter and Richler, "A school that passes over all the students with learning problems to a separate special education system undermines its capacity to be a holistic unit that serves all students well" (Porter & Richler, 1991, p. 22).

Proponents of the merger of special education and regular education point to the negative effects of labelling students, programs, and teaching staff by disability categories (Biklen, 1985; Fink, 1992; Stainback & Stainback, 1991; Villa & Thousand, 1992; Wang et al., 1992) that forms the basis of the special education system. The placement of students in special programs can be justified if learning outcomes are improved but there is little evidence that this is the case:

*There is an absence of a conclusive body of evidence which confirms that special education services appreciably enhance the academic and/or social accomplishments of handicapped children beyond what can be expected without special education . (Wang et al., 1992, p. 35)*

The practice of testing students and of using the results to place children in special programs is common across America (Biklen, 1985). The time and energy that goes into this process, combined with the complicated bureaucracy to support it, exhausts resources that could be devoted to enhancing student learning (Wang et al., 1992). Although it could improve the quality of education for low-achieving students, in general it is felt that testing is not used for that purpose (Biklen, 1985; McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993). Of even greater concern than the tests are “the beliefs, practices, and policies of test users, which are probably more difficult to change than the tests themselves” (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993). Commenting on a state-wide basic skills test for third graders, one principal stated:

*We have that third-grade test that we have to deal with. So we either have to exempt the kid from taking the basic skills test through special ed or get him ready to take the test. So what I say to the second grade teachers is, “Any kid you have that is LD and you think is probably going to fail that test, I want him exempted. (cited in McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993, p.22)*



Figures on the growing numbers of children identified as having special needs through testing were stated on page one of this chapter. Special education and retention practices cost a lot of money (Dyer, 1992). They are expensive both from a monetary point of view as well as an educational one since there is little evidence to show that children benefit from participation in special programs or that their chances in life are significantly improved. For some, the issue of testing and placement is simply not equitable; for others it is unethical (McGill-Franzen & Allington, 1993). Supporters of a merger between special education and regular education see little point in continuing such unsound practices.

In the discussions on testing, labelling and categorization that permeate the literature on inclusive schools, there are frequent references to the amount of money that is wasted on such practice (Stainback & Stainback 1990; Wang et al., 1992). Educators in British Columbia, who are experiencing cutbacks to special education programs as a result of recent contract settlements, may cite lack of funding as an obstacle to full inclusion. Certainly any of the factors perceived as supporting inclusion: accessibility, transportation, special education assistants, leadership, teacher inservice and attitude, could be seen as a funding issue. The literature on inclusion does not identify *lack* of funding as an issue; however, advocates of inclusive schooling recognize the fact that systemic change such as the special education-regular education merger would require a major reallocation of the funds currently being used to support the dual track system (Biklen, 1985; Crawford & Porter, 1992; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

A study considered to be the richest source of data on the funding issues surrounding special education indicates, as many other studies have done, that special education services cost overall about twice as much per pupil as do those for students in regular education (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989). A recurrent theme in the literature is that, while leaders in education espouse integration objectives, funding arrangements encourage segregation

(Biklen, 1985; Crawford & Porter, 1992; Lipsky & Gartner, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

While some believe that more could be done with increased funding, others see the lack of vision or appropriate belief systems as a major obstacle to inclusion. There is considerable support for the idea that a fundamental change in education like inclusion requires a shared vision of the purposes and beliefs inherent in the process (Fullan, 1992). Ultimately the rationale for quality education for all students may have little to do with funding, research on effective practice, law or pedagogy, but on values: "What kinds of people are we? What kind of society do we wish to develop? What values do we honour?" (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, p. 389).

Teacher attitude is often cited as a perceived obstacle in the literature, but consistently it is reported that teachers who actually experience inclusion not only dramatically change their attitudes, but in fact become strong advocates for inclusion (Giangreco et al., 1993; Jory, 1991; Perner, 1991; York et al., 1992). Teacher attitudes tend to be driven by fears surrounding knowledge base and perceived lack of support for inclusion (Jory, 1991). Several studies have investigated the nature of teachers' fears and address the issues of pre-service and inservice training needed to alleviate the feelings of inadequacy that often accompany inclusionary experiences (Csapo & Baine, 1985; Hill, 1988; Hummell et al., 1986; Lilly, 1989). The authors of these studies maintain that teacher attitudes are one of the most powerful factors affecting the success of inclusion (Darvill, 1989).

Closely tied to the issues of restructuring the current special education model and teacher preparation is the role of the universities in supporting inclusion:

*The face of teaching is changing as the students who enter schools change. Teachers need to enter their careers understanding that students will be diverse in their educational needs and abilities. This diversity is both a*

*resource to be celebrated and a challenge to be mastered.* (Pugach & Johnson, 1990, p. 135)

There is generalized support for the idea that teachers require a qualitatively different kind of pre-service training to support them in inclusive classrooms (Csapo & Baine, 1985; Hill, 1988; Hummell, Dworet & Walsh, 1986; Lilly, 1989). More serious than the lack of effective teacher preparation is the idea that universities are actually instrumental in supporting special education. Despite the change in attitudes, special education still has many defenders and it provides many jobs. The faculties of education at our universities are one of its major defenders (Jory, 1991, p. 80).

Jory (1991) further states that universities “cling to outdated segregationist ideology” (p.84) and fail to give teachers the experiences and knowledge base that they require to be effective in inclusive classrooms.

The obstacles to inclusion cited in the literature are usually tied to individual roles (parent, teacher, administrator, director etc.) or to the institutions charged with providing education to teachers and children. It is easy therefore to overlook the fact that the educational establishment is an enormously complex system that involves the interests of a large number of people in provincial ministries, local school boards, teachers’ unions, schools and homes (Crawford & Porter, 1992). There is an enormous inertia that characterizes such systems and a well documented inability to change (Fullan, 1991).

*The history of educational change reflects this point. Most ideas for change that have been developed and promoted within the educational field have had only limited implementation. The history of special education and, in particular, the inclusion of students with disabilities within regular classrooms, has certainly been consistent with this pattern.* (Crawford & Porter, 1992, p. 16)

Despite the difficulties inherent in systemic change of this nature, it appears that the well-known Talmudic saying holds with respect to inclusion: “You are not required to complete the task, but neither are you free to refrain from it “(cited in Sapon-Shevin, 1990, p. 248).

## **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to clarify what selected literature states about the factors that support inclusive schooling under the following headings:

- Education and Inclusion
- Policy and Legal Issues
- District Practices
- School Practices
- Classroom Instructional Strategies
- Obstacles

Because of the negative associations with labelling and segregation in the education system that in effect prepare special needs children for a life of isolation, the factor supporting inclusion that holds the greatest promise is the breaking down of the walls that have traditionally separated regular and special education. Changes in law and policy combined with strong advocacy movements, headed by the parents of special needs children, have been instrumental in changing belief systems that have justified the placement of certain children in special segregated settings. A feeling that society has simply denied basic rights to a large number of individuals continues to drive the change process. Changes in teachers’ working environments, the effective schools movement that holds educators accountable for the learning outcomes for all children, and educational reform all play a role in creating fertile ground in which the seeds of inclusion can grow and flourish.

Organizations that began as a small group of parents banding together for moral support have evolved into effective tools for change. Parents are now seen as key change agents. Educators don't just tolerate them; they actively seek out their involvement in matters that

concern the education of their children. It may be the first time that educators have actively acknowledged the wealth of expertise that parents can provide in determining appropriate educational goals.

The study is exploratory and attempts to identify the factors that support inclusion and perceptions of the different stakeholders involved in inclusion in the districts selected for the study .

The next chapter describes the methodology used to explore the belief systems related to inclusive schooling that exist amongst educators and parents in five school districts in British Columbia.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology**

This chapter describes the study's methodology, including development of the interview questions, selection of the school districts, selection of interview candidates, data collection and limitations. The researcher works for a Provincial Resource Program funded by the Special Education Branch of the Ministry of Education. This position provides the opportunity for a close working relationship with individuals charged with supporting special education services within districts in the lower mainland. It is from this perspective that the researcher views the structure of district staffs and the way in which special education services are provided in the lower mainland.

#### **Development of the Interview Questions**

The purpose of this study was to identify the factors that affect inclusion from the perspective of individuals in the different roles involved in inclusive education. Samples were taken from five lower mainland school districts. The perceptions of these individuals are compared across roles and with factors reported in the literature. The six roles are:

- 1 District level staff responsible for special education.
- 2 District instructional support staff.
- 3 School-based administrator.
- 4 Classroom teacher.
- 5 Special education assistant.
- 6 Parent.

Data was collected through face to face interviews; however, a questionnaire was used as an interviewing guide. The questionnaire paralleled the factors identified in the literature .

This provided a means of organizing the interview thematically. This structure highlights similarities and differences between the information given by participants and that reported in the literature. A major source for the structure and the questions was a questionnaire used by The Roeher Institute for a study conducted in 1992 on inclusive schooling in Canada. For the purposes of reporting data, the questions were categorized under the following headings:

- policy
- district practices
- school practices
- classroom practices.

Several questions were general in nature and not tied to district, school or classroom practice. It was hoped that this would provide a vehicle for participants to report on any factors or personal impressions that were not the result of direct inquiry.

One issue discussed in the literature was examined in a different way. The idea of the merger between regular education and special education was put forth in 1984 (Stainback & Stainback, 1984) and debated extensively in the literature. However evidence of the idea in practice is not apparent in the districts selected for the study. The issue generates much heated debate and is particularly controversial for those currently employed in the field of special education. Since several of the interview candidates are responsible for special education, the researcher wished to avoid having the interview derailed by raising this controversial issue. For this reason, direct questions were not included in the questionnaire; however, the opportunity for participants to identify this *big idea* spontaneously was provided in the general questions.

## Face Validity

As a pilot study, six educators with experience in the field of special education were asked to answer the questions prior to the formal data collection process. The purpose was twofold:

- 1 To determine the face validity of the questions and refine the questionnaire.
- 2 To determine if there were issues that should be covered that were not covered in the questionnaire.

As a result of this assessment, two significant changes were made to the questionnaire and interview process.

- 1 It was determined that the interviewer should state at the outset that the study was designed to elicit personal beliefs and/or personal experience with the issues rather than definitive answers. Several of the six individuals involved in the face validity trial expressed the concern that they might not *know* the answers. The researcher felt that it was very important that participants felt relaxed and confident in their ability to answer the questions.
- 2 Question 1 under policy asked: *Is there clear written policy that requires inclusion?* The second change was to elaborate on the term *policy* and suggest that it could be a vision statement rather than policy. Three of the six respondents felt that statements in support of inclusion in their districts could not be accurately referred to as policy. Three other respondents did not question the term *policy* but two of this latter three went on to describe written statements that were indeed couched in language that could be more accurately described as a vision statement.
- 3 The third question under the Policy heading asked: *How well has the policy been accepted by educators, by parents (Scale 1-5)?* Four of the informal respondents asked if the question referred to *all* parents or if there was any attempt to differentiate between parents of typical children and parents of special needs children. The researcher had not intended to differentiate but thought that this was an interesting perspective. In the formal interviews the question was asked as it appears (Appendix A). If respondents answered without questioning the intent, or without qualification,



the interviewer then asked if there would be any difference between the two types of parent.

- 4 Question two under the heading of School/District practices asked: What *school practices contribute to the success of inclusion?* A list of factors identified in the literature, including effective schools correlates, followed the question. Three of the six informal respondents were not familiar with the effective schools literature, and required some explanation. The interview process was altered to include elaboration of the effective schools literature.

With the exception of the two questions identified above, the questions were well understood by the six respondents. No additional questions were added.

### **Selection of the Districts**

The purpose of the study was to investigate the factors that support inclusion. As well as identifying supportive factors the study hoped to investigate any differences between the perceptions of district-based staff, school-based staff and parents. Six educationally related roles were identified for the interviews. Because there is only one person responsible for special education at the district level and only one individual charged with instructional support for the district, it was necessary to interview candidates from more than one district. It was decided to seek approval from five districts making a total of 30 interviews which seemed manageable in terms of the nature of such qualitative data collection.

Application was made to ten districts in hopes of ensuring permission from the five districts needed for the study. One district declined to participate because several studies on issues related to inclusion were already underway in the district. Two other districts declined to participate, citing problems related to ongoing job action. Five districts were selected from the remaining seven. Three criteria were used in selecting districts:

- 1 Districts had to be on the lower mainland to facilitate the process of interviewing.

- 2 Districts had to be large enough to have individuals in the positions or roles outlined at the beginning of this chapter.
- 3 Representation of districts with differing inclusionary practices were to be included in the study. One of the five districts selected has undergone significant restructuring while another district selected reflects the more traditional organizational model. The other three are somewhere on the continuum between the first two districts, depending on the factor being investigated.

### **Selection of the Interview Candidates**

The letter sent to districts requesting permission to do research described the participants requested for the study and enclosed a copy of the questions and a letter to be signed by participants. The letter requesting permission to do research stated that the participants had to represent certain roles within the education system and have responsibility and/or experience with inclusion.

Using this information, two districts identified the participants, obtained their permission to be interviewed, and submitted their names to the researcher. In the remaining three districts, the selection of the person with district-level responsibility for special education and the person responsible for instructional support at the district level was unnecessary because only one person holds that position. The school-based administrator, teacher and special education assistant in these three districts were chosen from names suggested by the person in charge of instructional support for special education. Again, the criterion for selection was experience with inclusion.

Selection of parents for the study was based on the researcher's personal and professional contacts. The researcher has a child with multiple handicaps and is involved with several parent support groups. Four of the participants in the parent role were identified through this involvement. The fifth parent was suggested to the researcher by a colleague. All the parents have disabled children.

Five districts were involved in the study and six individuals from each district were identified for interview, bringing the total number of interviews to 30. One interview with a school-based administrator did not take place at the scheduled time, and the individual was unable to re-schedule. Therefore only four interviews with school-based administrators took place. The total number of participants was twenty-nine.

## **Data Collection**

The interview participants were contacted in May and interviews were held in June and July. Many participants expressed concern about being identified in any way in the study. Although the permission letter guaranteed anonymity, some participants expressed concern that even unidentified quotes, contained in the final thesis, might be attributed to them in some way. Participants who expressed this concern said that they felt more comfortable having their comments recorded through the use of a laptop computer rather than a tape recorder. The researcher had access to a laptop computer, could see the advantages of collecting data in this way, and wanted to increase the comfort level of the participants in any way possible, so a computer was used.

All district level staff, instructional support staff, and administrators were interviewed at their offices, with the exception of one individual who asked to be interviewed away from the office. All of these individuals requested that there be no interruptions during the interview and the process was approximately one hour in length.

Teachers and special education assistants were interviewed both at school and at home depending on the participants' time constraints and preferences. All parents were interviewed in their homes. Interviews in the home setting were very relaxed in contrast to interviews at places of work. Participants interviewed at home made cookies, muffins and coffee for the researcher so the tone was very different. Participants interviewed at home

could not always control interruptions so the interviews tended to be longer; some lasted two hours.

The parents interviewed for the study have very demanding lives. All have disabled children to care for and juggle a variety of other responsibilities in caring for non-disabled children, working outside of the home, involvement with parent advocacy groups and managing relationships with husbands and aging parents.

The two districts identified the participants and sent them a letter asking for their permission to be interviewed along with the questions. The district then submitted the names of the participants and the researcher contacted them to set up an interview time. The process in the remaining districts has already been described. The result was that some participants had the questions in advance, either through district channels or by direct request. No district-level personnel or parents requested the questions in advance but several teachers and special education assistants did. Two participants indicated that they were worried that they “might not know the answers.”

## **Limitations**

It is assumed that the perceptions of individuals about the factors that support inclusion can be gained through the use of interviews. However there are some limitations to such data:

Participants in the study identified district, school and classroom practices that support inclusion in their district. There are no claims here about the extent to which their perceptions are veridical.

District-level participants normally want to support or defend the practice of the district they represent. These individuals may have been instrumental in the development of district policy and want to make sure that the researcher understands why individuals in the district charged with the implementation of the policy, might not see it in the same light.

Individuals from the field want to hold the district responsible for any limitations that they are experiencing in implementing an inclusive classroom.

The literature on inclusive schools attests to the fact that the most unsupportive, even fearful, teachers are those who have never experienced inclusion while the biggest advocates are those just recently converted by the experience of having a special needs child in their class (Jory, 1991). This study required participants to have responsibility for, or experience with, inclusion. Based on the literature, this criterion creates a bias in the study.

Teachers and special education assistants were identified for the study by district staff, and all were from the elementary setting. All districts indicated that the elementary school culture is presently much more supportive of inclusion. District staff felt that elementary teachers have more experience with inclusion because a child in an elementary setting will be there nearly all day, five days a week while secondary teachers see their students only three or four times a week.

All of the school districts involved in the study are from the lower mainland and part of the public school system. Most parents living in the lower mainland can choose between several schools in fairly close proximity. Parents of a special needs child can therefore choose a school with a good reputation for inclusion, if the one in their neighborhood is not an inclusive school.

Neither parents nor schools in rural communities have this flexibility. Most children in rural communities are bussed to school and choosing between schools is not an option for parents. Schools in rural communities cannot refuse a special needs child and direct the parents to the school down the road. The literature on inclusive schools makes it clear that the Catholic School System has been more successful when it comes to inclusion because the idea of accepting all individuals, regardless of disabilities, is a part of the belief system and religious training (Crawford & Porter, 1992).

This study then is limited in terms of external validity since the schools were not randomly selected to allow for the differences in inner city schools and rural schools.

## **Summary**

This chapter described the study's methodology including development of the interview questions, selection of the school districts, selection of interview candidates, data collection and limitations. Chapter four presents the findings.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Results**

This chapter presents the findings under the following headings: Policy, District Practices, School Practices, Classroom Practices, Support Systems and Obstacles. The responses of the sample as a whole are reported first with any significant differences across the groups reported second.

#### **Policy**

The first question asked if there was clear written policy that required inclusion. In response to the question on policy, 57% of the participants said that there was no policy, 28% said that there was and 14% said either that they didn't know or that they thought policy might exist. Of those that replied yes, many went on to say that there was a vision statement and/or a practice that supported inclusion; two used the term “least restrictive environment” in describing the policy that existed.

Of those that stated that there was no policy statement within the district, one respondent qualified that reply by pointing out that in her view, policy really comes from the Ministry. Others who said no, pointed to contractual language between teachers and school boards as a type of policy and others talked about “a very clear direction,” “guidelines” or philosophical statements, rather than policy.

In comparing responses across roles, five out of the six groups had mixed response patterns combining yes, no, and I don't know or I think so. The group representing school-based administrators was an exception; 100 % reported that there was no written district policy. In terms of a yes response, district staff had the highest percentage at 60%.

In responding to the question that asked if the policy required, encouraged or just permitted inclusion, 85% of the respondents stated that inclusion was encouraged by whatever policy, vision statement, or contractual language existed. One representative of district staff, who reported that there was a policy statement, said that it required, encouraged and permitted inclusion all at the same time. Six percent of respondents reported that policy *permitted* inclusion and 6% said that policy *required* it. One respondent said that inclusion was encouraged, but only at certain schools rather than across the district.

When asked about the level of acceptance of the policy on inclusion, on the part of educators and parents, 90% of respondents indicated that parents are more supportive of the policy than educators. Of those respondents (18) who did not differentiate between parents of typical children and parents of special needs children, 100% said that the level of acceptance on the part of parents was 4-5 on a scale of 1-5. Of those who differentiated between parents of typical children and parents of special needs children (11), 75% estimated that the acceptance level of parents of special needs children would be a 5 while 62% reported that the level of acceptance for parents of typical children would be a 3. Several respondents commented on the fact that inclusion has really been driven by the parents of special needs children so it is not surprising that they are such strong advocates of the policy. The parents of children classified as low incidence were characterized as *thrilled* and *ecstatic* by two respondents, one of whom was a principal and the other who is a representative of instructional support.

There were two types of parents identified by participants as being most resistive to inclusion. The first was parents of typical children who felt that their children's education had been compromised as a result of having a behaviourally disturbed child fully included in the regular classroom. The other group identified by respondents were parents of gifted children who again felt that inclusive policies only increased the load for the classroom



teacher and made it less likely that their gifted children would have their needs met. One respondent reported: “Parents of gifted children would like their children *less included*.”

The level of acceptance on the part of educators covered a much wider range than that of parents and was consistently lower. Many respondents had much more difficulty assigning one number as representative of educators and therefore tended to use a scale themselves in responding. For some the scale was 1-3, others 2-3 and for some 2-5. Many also chose to differentiate between elementary educators and secondary educators and in 100% of those cases the level for secondary educators was two points below that for elementary educators. One respondent chose to single out administrators in his response and said that he would estimate their level of acceptance at 1-2.

For those able to attribute one number to educators without differentiation, 4% gave educators a 5, 28% a 4, 28% a 3, and 19% a 2. The respondent who gave educators a 5 was an administrator in a school targeted by the district, for inclusion. It is not a neighbourhood school in that most of the low incidence children are bussed there from out of the area. The statement was qualified by the comment, “There are some concerns but not around the child being there.” A teacher from the same school as this administrator, gave educators a 3 and qualified the statement with many comments: “They pay lip service to it, don't know how to do it, don't do it effectively, don't agree with it, are afraid of it.” Many respondents mirrored this teacher's comments with indications that only a small number of teachers are really committed but “the bulk would be happier if it didn't happen” or “some just can't fathom inclusion.” Several respondents indicated support for the “lip service idea” indicating that there is a difference between accepting the policy from a philosophical point of view and actually *having* a special needs child in the class. One administrator characterized inclusion as desirable for educators because of the full time aides provided in the classrooms. The school was in a district where inclusion had been piloted and heavily supported at a few sites but was virtually non existent in the rest of the district. The

particular school in question had 15 aides in the school so all teachers benefited in this administrator's estimation.

Three parents had a hard time talking about the level of acceptance on the part of educators since most of the responsibility for their child's education and/or management in inclusive schools and classrooms fell to the special education assistant and not to the teacher. One parent stated that "It didn't really matter at this point." because all the necessary supports were provided, primarily by non-teaching staff.

Some respondents said that the level of acceptance on the part of educators was closely tied to the "type of child." Children in the dependent handicapped or intellectually challenged category had once caused a lot of concern for educators but this concern, in the eyes of respondents, has been virtually eliminated for teachers who have had experience with such children. They attributed this in part to the fact that fear of the unknown was the driving force and also due to the fact that these children get a full time aide who shoulders much of the responsibility for the child while providing an "extra pair of hands" for the teachers. Respondents identified "behaviour kids" and ESL children as causing the greatest concern for educators. One respondent cited "a most challenging situation;" a classroom where ESL children outnumbered English speaking children. Several respondents indicated that the issue of encouraging reluctant educators to open their classroom doors to all student, puts collaboration to a real test.

Only 5% of the respondents indicated that there had been no major change in district policy in the last two years. The other 95% said that there either had been change in policy or change in direction and practice. Of those who said that there had been a change in policy, 100% went on to describe a change in direction or practice. The change identified most often was a move to neighbourhood schools from "designated neighbourhood schools, targeted schools or pilot schools" as well as a move away from segregated settings within schools. Two representatives from the same district believed that their district was actively

seeking neighbourhood schools for all special needs students, but wondered if financial constraints would cause them to move away from this expensive initiative. One district staff representative indicated that inclusion at the secondary level was 98% and at the elementary level 90% because a move to neighbourhood schools had been the major change within that district in the last two years. Many respondents who indicated that a move to neighbourhood schools was the major policy change in the last two years also indicated that most *low incidence* children still attend designated schools.

When discussing policy change in the last two years, several participants talked about the change in *ownership* of low incidence children. Two district staff representatives from two separate districts said that teachers no longer look to the district when it comes to special needs children in general, and low incidence children in particular. Both expressed the idea that the children belong to the school, not to the district and that the schools have a responsibility to deliver a quality education to “*all* students regardless of ability.” Both saw this as an extremely important issue philosophically.

Another two individuals from the same district talked about a merger between student services (special education) staff and curriculum staff as the most significant change in policy, with respect to inclusion, in the last two years. The richness of the idea lies in the fact that “it symbolizes our belief system” and models appropriate practice for the field.

Five of the participants interviewed referred to the changes in teacher contracts as they relate to policy issues. One respondent said that the policy had not changed but the ability to put policy into practice was significantly affected by teacher contract language limiting the number of special needs children in one classroom. Another said simply that contract language made it impossible for children to attend schools out of their catchment area any more, they had to go to neighbourhood schools. Contract language limiting the number of special needs students made it impossible, in the eyes of participants, for schools with large numbers of special needs students to meet the guidelines. One administrator stated that

teachers who “three or four years ago had a special needs child in their class without support, would now demand support (always interpreted as another person in the classroom) before even knowing what the needs of the child were.” While all who commented on the contract language were sympathetic to teachers’ concerns, 100% felt that it was impacting negatively on inclusion and forcing the ongoing practice of labelling children so that teachers would only have so many children from any one category. Many wished for service to be driven by need rather than label.

Participants were asked if they felt that everyone benefited from the policy on inclusion and 95% said yes but only 43% of those responses were unqualified. Of the 95%, many agree in principle that all children benefit from inclusion, but want to clarify the meaning of inclusion. These individuals want to make sure that inclusion does not mean that a child spends 100% of the time in a regular classroom. One administrator cautioned against the idea that all children are better off in their neighbourhood schools. Another district staff representative summed up the ideas of others by saying, “That depends on how you define inclusion; it should be a feeling of belonging and success. It doesn't mean that kids spend 100% of the time in regular classes. We need to look at an array of opportunities so that all children can belong and be the best that they can be. That is inclusion for all.” Children with behaviour problems and children for whom English is a second language were identified again as problems for the system. Many feel that segregated settings, at least on a part time basis, are still indicated for these populations.

Other respondents shared the concern that the road to inclusion involves a long term growth process and we are not there yet. Issues identified were teacher training at the university, more inservice for teachers and special education assistants along with a variety of other resources and supports that need to be consistently in place for growth to occur. Two respondents raised the issue of medically fragile children and the difficulties of dealing with them in regular classes. This issue was raised from the point of view of ensuring the

safety and well-being of the children rather than from the perspective of supporting the teacher. Sixty percent of parents stated that everyone, without exception, benefits from inclusion.

## **District Practices**

Participants were asked to respond to a list of district practices thought to support inclusion and identified through a review of the literature. Furthermore, they were asked to prioritize the list and comment on the district practices in order of importance, beginning with the most supportive practice.

Respondents found this difficult to do for several reasons. One reason given was that not all participants have had experience with, or are knowledgeable about, all district initiatives and therefore chose to comment on select ones. Another reason given was that some believed the factors to be so intertwined that they couldn't imagine giving more weight to one than another. One participant stated, "They just all have to happen." Five felt that placement of students in regular classes, age appropriate placement, and neighbourhood schools were so interrelated that they found it hard to prioritize them in any way. Others commented on the fact that, for them, these three particular factors were just a given and that everything else flows from that. One administrator was quoted as saying, "Having kids in age appropriate classrooms in neighbourhood schools is a given-once you have them there, the attitudes start to soften and you are well on your way. The very best inservice happens on the job in inclusion; it's hard to prepare people for something that they don't want to do."

This view of doing inservice as an on-the-spot type of training was not shared by 60% of participants who indicated that inservice is a priority in terms of supporting inclusion. Six respondents indicated that inservice had been good at the beginning of the move to neighbourhood schools, but that funding cuts combined with a feeling that "there's no

going back, we have to do it now” have resulted in a decrease in the amount of money being allotted for inservice. Others who identified the need for inservice said that it needed to be very specific. Some felt that inservice should focus on particular disabilities, giving school-based teams information on the causes, manifestations, and strategies for dealing with autism, down's syndrome, and/or cerebral palsy for example. One respondent said that there is a need to “desensitize teachers to particular disabilities through inservice and after that you need to go practical.” Two other respondents talked about the need for inservice on such topics as school-based teams, collaborative consultation, problem-solving, technology for special needs children and strategies for dealing with behaviour disorders. In discussing inservice needs, one respondent first said that inservice was the number one priority but then said that what was really needed was not really inservice but time to collaborate and problem solve with colleagues and parents. Two other respondents talked about the need for inservice to change teachers' attitudes about inclusion and help them “see the big picture.” One parent stated that inservice is needed to ensure that the correct “attitude and philosophy have been established before the regular classroom is ready to receive a child.” Inservice was given top priority by individuals who are field based: teachers, special education assistants and parents. District staff, administrators and instructional support staff rated policy as their top priority.

Two district staff representatives, three instructional support staff and two principals said that policy was the most important factor supporting inclusion. Three of these used the word “central” in describing the role of policy in inclusion and another three (not the same three) said that “it gave the direction.” One said that a policy statement gives direction to the individuals charged with inclusion but more importantly “it directs resources.” Two individuals from the same district commented on the lack of a policy statement that is “current and powerful” in their district. One of them said that the staff have really been moving forward in absence of a policy statement and that “much credit was due to them” for this. This same individual said that policy is an important driver for the movement to

inclusion and that the growth of the movement needs to be celebrated on a regular basis through district initiated events. Another individual spoke of the need to define inclusion as part of the policy statement. This was deemed important in this individual's eyes since many different practices are being considered inclusive when only a very few really are. Two individuals from different districts expressed concern over the fact that their districts have good policy but that it is not well communicated to the field. One cited a lack of leadership and a growing "chasm" between the school board and the field-based staff who actually implement the policy. One school-based administrator talked about the importance of policy being clearly articulated at all levels of the system. A teacher planning to come to this school should know that, "if you work in this school you integrate students in age appropriate classrooms."

The third most important factor supporting inclusion at the district level, as identified by individuals in this study, is the provision of needed supports. When discussing the role of teacher contract language in the move towards inclusive schooling one administrator stated that "support is always interpreted as another person in the classroom" and this idea was expressed again by other participants who indicated that the provision of needed supports was one of the top three factors. Three administrators identified special education assistants or "human resources" as being the most sought after classroom support. Another administrator said that special education assistants are "always talked about, followed by inservice, but once they have the kids they are sold." This feeling was not mirrored by two special education assistants and two teachers who felt that human support was the focus for teachers and that districts needed to respond to this by providing more funding for staff.

Two of the district staff representatives indicated that they had "a lot of SEA's in the system;" in fact one representative said that his district had the highest ratio of SEA's to students in the province. Neither felt that increasing the number of special education assistants in the system was the answer in itself. One described in detail the process that is

being used within the district to provide more effective use of human resources since the special education assistants are “highly valued but not really effectively used.”

One administrator identified another caution in the provision of needed supports. Key players may be indicating a need for more support but it is important that the person being supported really has that experience: “If an occupational therapist comes in and supports the child but demands more time from the classroom teacher, that is not viewed as supportive from the teacher's perspective.”

Placement of students in regular classrooms, age appropriate placement and neighbourhood schools were grouped together by most participants interviewed. For the representatives of one of the districts interviewed, these three factors are not common practice since only one school in the district enrolls children in regular classes, and the majority of those children are not attending their neighbourhood school. All other schools in the district enroll the children in special classes and then attempt to “shoe-horn them in” to regular classes.

Teacher contract language governing the number of special needs children in any one class makes this almost impossible to do even if *age-appropriate* is loosely interpreted. The staff interviewed from this district feel that a great deal has to be done in the way of articulating policy, changing attitudes, providing appropriate inservice, and re-allocating resources, before children will attend regular classrooms in neighbourhood schools. For two of the other districts interviewed, these three factors are accepted practice and there was no need for the representatives of these districts to put a high priority on factors that had already been achieved. Representatives from these districts and from the two other districts not highlighted in this present discussion expressed the need to look at a variety of interpretations when talking about *neighbourhood* and *age-appropriate*. These individuals cautioned against using the term *neighbourhood* in a restrictive fashion. They pointed out that many children choose to attend schools out of their geographic neighbourhood to pursue certain program like French immersion. Special needs children may choose to do



the same. Some may choose to attend the school where siblings are attending and that may not be the *geographic* neighbourhood school. So placement in neighbourhood schools may mean different things to different people. For the parents interviewed in this study, the geographic neighbourhood school was the school of choice for them and all of their children were attending those schools. Three parents said that the neighbourhood school was central or essential to the inclusive schools movement and to the eventual acceptance of special needs children and adults in the community. One parent used the logo from an annual conference: "Neighbourhood schools-the heart of it all." Neighbourhood schools had only one definition in the eyes of these parents. One district staff representative cautioned that a "neighbourhood school is not necessarily an inclusive school."

The term age-appropriate was loosely defined, by those who commented, to include one year either side of the chronological age. One reason for this was again the difficulty in trying to meet the guidelines of teacher contracts. If the age-appropriate placement for a child meant that a teacher would exceed the number of special needs children in the classroom, then the staff would have to seek an alternate placement. This issue is particularly difficult for participants from schools designated to receive special needs children since the numbers of special needs children in these schools far exceed the number that any one neighbourhood school would receive. Another reason for the loose interpretation of the term age-appropriate is that the needs of the child should drive the placement in the eyes of teachers and parents. The whole picture of academic, social, and emotional needs has to be considered in determining the appropriate placement, according to two participants. One parent said: "You basically want a peer group but a placement with kids of another age may be more *appropriate*."

One participant from the district with a majority of special class placements is still concerned about the need for segregated settings for certain children. This individual expressed the idea that placement in regular classrooms is important, but "what about

having typical kids come into resource room settings rather than the other way around.” A district staff representative from another district expressed some of the same idea, “placement of kids in regular classrooms does not necessarily get you what you want. There is more to it than just being physically there, there is a social, emotional, and intellectual *there*.” Four parents expressed the desire for their children to have “real friends” as opposed to age-appropriate classmates, or assigned buddies. They felt that the only chance of that happening was full time placement in a regular class in the neighbourhood school.

### **School Practices**

As in the section on district practices, participants were asked to comment on the school-based practices that support inclusion. Again they were asked to prioritize their comments by talking about the most supportive factors first. As was the case in the section on district practices, not all participants commented on all factors. And, again, participants tended to group three of the factors and respond to them as a group. Those three factors were therapy, transportation, and accessible facilities.

Of the thirteen factors listed on the questionnaire, five were commented on by all six role representatives. These were collaboration, problem-solving strategies, flexible leadership, vision and special education assistants. The two factors identified by the participants as being the most supportive of inclusion were collaboration and problem-solving. Both were commented on 11 times by participants. This was both from the perspective of the number of times that these two factors were identified by participants as well as by the strong statements made by many individuals in speaking to these issues. The themes that ran through the comments made regarding collaboration and problem-solving were that inclusion is an extremely challenging concept and that no one person has all the answers; “the need for all players to work together to solve the problems collaboratively has never

been greater.” During the interview process, all key players were credited with contributing to the solutions for the myriad problems that have occurred as schools try to be inclusive. All of the participants who made comments about problem-solving and collaboration, talked about them together. Collaboration was seen as the vehicle for problem-solving. Words and phrases like critical, central, key and very important were used frequently when participants talked about these two factors. One said: “We won’t survive without collaboration.” Only one participant, a representative of classroom teachers, felt that colleagues were reluctant to use release time for collaboration and this individual didn’t think that “teachers would want to spend a day learning how to do problem solving effectively.” All other participants commenting on collaboration and problem solving strategies saw them in a very positive light. Representatives of district staff and instructional support staff demonstrated strong support for collaboration and problem-solving strategies. Representatives of the other four roles commented on an average of 8 of the factors and attributed similar weight to all 8.

The two factors that participants identified next, in order of importance, were flexible leadership and vision. Flexible leadership received eight comments and vision received seven. Like collaboration and problem-solving strategies, respondents used similar adjectives to underscore the importance of these two factors. Vision, attitude and commitment were used by many respondents to indicate the need for the key players to believe in the importance of inclusion. Three participants commented on the importance of strong leadership at the school level because “low incidence kids don’t belong to the district anymore and the schools need to be able to find their own solutions.” One participant brought up the issue of teacher contracts again and wondered if strong leadership would be enough in a school that was not supportive of inclusion.

The issue of special education assistants was actually commented on four more times than either collaboration or problem-solving strategies, but 44% of the comments included

some concerns about the role of special education assistants in inclusion and, for that reason, it is addressed after the other factors. Representatives from instructional support staff and special education assistants themselves saw the role as really supportive of inclusion. Words like key and central were again used by these individuals to describe the importance of this role. Parents identified assistants as supportive but only one gave this factor more weight than the others that they identified. Two teachers valued the time that the SEA (special education assistant) spent talking to parents at the beginning and end of the day. One participant said that a good SEA could solve problems but “others that I have seen just add to the problem base.” Two others commented on the need for inservice for these individuals, particularly in the area of vision and the “real meaning of inclusion.” Three individuals articulated concerns about the over-reliance of teachers, parents and students on special education assistants. One teacher expressed the hope that classroom teachers would take more responsibility for special needs children instead of abdicating responsibility to the special education assistants. This individual deemed it necessary for classroom teachers and administrators to monitor the work of the SEA. Another participant commenting on the same subject said: “... they are being touted as the big support but I see an over reliance on them.” Three participants addressed the issue of the special education assistant being assigned to the class rather than the child. One administrator said that their philosophy emphasizes minimizing the interventions and normalizing the child's environment and that it is not normal for one child in a regular class to be constantly with another adult. This administrator and two of the parents talked about the idea of the SEA being “invisible so that the child doesn't become invisible.” They expressed the need for the assistant to understand when to help and when to stay back. Those that expressed concern over the relationship between the child and the SEA pointed out that no *real* friendships can be formed unless the assistant accepts this delicate balance. Two respondents talked about the valuable contributions that special education assistants make in talking to parents at the end of the school day.

Computer-aided technology received five comments. Two individuals said that technology was important for the child who really needed it, but not really supportive of inclusion in general. One said that it was a mixed blessing since few educators are really trained in the effective use of the complicated technologies that special needs children often have.

Another said that it causes more problems than it solves and yet another said that for some children technology increases the chances that they can be independent and that their work will be “just like other kids in the classroom.” This same administrator said that, “We have an image of a person with a very twisted body having little or no intelligence-technology changes that.”

The ungraded primary program received three comments. One participant felt that the philosophy behind the ungraded primary and Year 2000 educational reforms were very supportive of inclusion. Another said that it can be and yet another talked about the mixed blessing of the ungraded primary. This individual said that the learner-centered, individual pace aspects were very supportive but that the environment in which the program is carried out is not suitable for many highly distractible special needs children.

Therapy, transportation and accessible facilities received three comments. One said that they were a given; another said that inclusion can't happen without these so they must be in place before any move to inclusion and the third said that therapy is supportive of inclusion if it is done in such a way that does not isolate the child or interfere with classroom routines.

In response to the question on school-based teams, 81% of those interviewed said that there were school-based teams. In two of the five districts interviewed, there was a lack of agreement on the subject of whether teams existed or not. Three respondents questioned the effectiveness of school-based teams because of the very diverse perspectives on inclusion that are reflected by the participants.

Ninety-five per cent of those interviewed said that there was flexible release time for teachers. Thirty-eight per cent said that it was not enough time and one special education assistant said that there is no flexibility built into that job description and that it needed to be.

The results of the question on the degree of parental involvement are as follows. The question asked respondents to indicate on a scale of 1-5 the degree to which parents are involved in their children's educational plans. Numbers given are the averages of the responses given within each group.

District staff:	3.0	Teachers:	4.0
Instructional Support:	3.5	SEA:	3.5
Administrators:	4.0	Parents:	3.5

Two district staff representatives stated that their "belief is a 5 but practice is a 3." Fifty-five per cent of the respondents indicated that it is a very individual matter and is dependent on attitudes of both teachers and parents. One parent stated that the "reality is a 2 for most parents, but parents who are strong advocates for their children are a 5."

## **Classroom Practices**

Seven instructional strategies were listed under the section on classroom practices. Participants were asked to indicate which strategies were being used and to single out any strategies that they believed were central to supporting inclusion in the classroom. Some participants talked about all strategies and some only highlighted the strategies that were most supportive in their estimation. Participants spent far less time in the interview discussing classroom practices than either school or district practices.

Forty-three percent of respondents said that all strategies were being used to some extent in all classrooms. Participants stated that these instructional strategies were primarily the

domain of elementary classrooms with the exception of peer tutoring and curriculum modification, which participants believed were being used in both settings. Five participants singled out peer tutoring as the most significant accommodation being made for special needs students at the secondary level.

Cooperative learning was identified by 64% of those commenting on strategies as the instructional strategy most supportive of inclusion. Participants pointed to the fact that it allowed teachers “to accommodate the special learner more.” Representatives from two districts said that cooperative learning was, “well established or institutionalized” in their districts.

Peer tutoring was identified by 48% of the respondents as being very supportive of inclusion. Peer tutoring was identified as a secondary school strategy primarily but buddy systems at the elementary schools were seen as similar in nature to peer tutoring. Two respondents stated that peer tutoring had real potential and should continue to be refined. One respondent felt strongly about the potential of peer tutoring as a factor supporting inclusion and suggested that students be given credit for their involvement in the program. One special education assistant stated that he had “nothing but bad experiences with peer tutoring.”

Learner focused instruction and curriculum modification were both identified by 33% of participants as strategies supportive of inclusive schooling. One respondent said that inclusive schooling was “all about learner focused instruction” and another said that it would be “extremely supportive if we got it going.”

Curriculum modification received as many comments as learner focused instruction but 43% of the comments indicated some concerns about the ability of educators to use curriculum modification effectively. One participant said that curriculum adaptation was a better approach because modification is “kind of like a whole new curriculum.” Two others

echoed this response in saying that they thought that it was too time consuming. Yet others indicated that, like learner focused instruction, educators were struggling with curriculum modification.

Nineteen per cent of respondents indicated that multi-level instruction and activity-based instruction were strategies supportive of inclusion. As well as identifying multi-age grouping as supportive from a curriculum perspective, one individual stated that again it was helpful in trying to accommodate the contract language governing the number of special needs children placed in any one class. Only one individual said that whole language instruction was a strategy supportive of inclusion.

Ninety per cent of participants indicated that students are pulled out of class for learning assistance or special instruction but 81% of these qualified their answers. At one end of the spectrum was the individual who said that she philosophically agreed with kids being pulled out since she believes that many kids still need it and at the other end was the individual who replied, "Yes they are still pulled out far too much." Two said that it is different for different children and two said similarly that it is "needs based." Two said that some kids are still pulled out but that most aren't and yet another said that kids are still pulled out but the practice is not promoted. One individual said that the program is still mostly pull-out due to teachers' discomfort with having another adult in the classroom. Two indicated the need to continue the practice with "behaviour kids."

In response to the question on students with disabilities being instructed in class with materials that were different than those of their classmates, 90% of respondents replied yes, but 71% of those indicated that in all cases attempts were being made to normalize the child's environment as much as possible.

There were no significant differences between the groups in terms of responses to these questions.



## Support Systems

In describing the model used for the in-school resource teacher, 60% of participants stated that this role had been replaced by an “inter-disciplinary team” or a “generic team.”

Respondents indicated that members on this team were no longer referred to in terms of ESL or L.A. etc. but that team members were seen as general consultants who provided support primarily to teachers and not to children. Fourteen per cent indicated that there were no models and that each school had to develop a model that worked for the individuals on staff there. Another 14% said that there were no school-based resource teachers or teams and that the school still relied on district staff for consultation. One principal said that they had used the staff allotment for a resource teacher to reduce class sizes throughout the school and another principal said that his resource teacher and staff co-teach and even change traditional roles so that both get relief from the kids who “demand so much.”

The special education assistants had a different perspective on the issue of the in-school resource teacher in that 60% of them indicated that the resource teacher pulls children out of regular classes for direct instruction.

In response to the question on equitable distribution of special education assistants in the system, 79% of the respondents replied yes. Of those, 59% gave an unqualified yes and 20% said yes and added qualifying statements like, “we come very, very close,” or “I hope so” or “We certainly try hard to do that.” Two described the process involved which included a district collaborative committee in one instance and a on-going evaluation committee in another district that meets monthly to assess and re-assess the allocation of assistants.

In looking at responses across groups, 60% of district level representatives, 60% of district instructional support staff, 60% of administrators, and 60% of teachers felt that there was

equitable distribution. One hundred percent of the parents and 20% of special education assistants felt that there was equitable distribution.

In responding negatively to the question, one district level representative stated that “there just aren't enough of them (SEA's) to provide equitable distribution.” A principal said that the process should ensure equitable distribution because it is needs-based, but he went on to say that it doesn't appear to because it is “based on the needs of the child and not on the needs of the teacher necessarily.” One special education assistant said that the process is diagnosis driven and not needs-based to the point where teachers who don't really require help, still get it. Another two special education assistants talked about the high degree of support that goes to pilot schools or designated neighbourhood schools to the exclusion of other schools in the district. One also said that it is very hard to assign assistants in an equitable fashion but in her experience there are still children who need more assistance than they are getting.

Although 100% of parents said that they thought that there was equitable distribution, their comments were based on personal experience as exemplified by the parent who said: “We have always had the support when we needed it.”

On the issue of inservice, 83% of respondents indicated that there had been major inservice initiatives at the start of the move towards inclusion and that inservice was on-going.

Participants described inservice aimed at the philosophical issues around inclusion as well as practical strategies. In the group representing district staff, one individual said that there had been an emphasis on inservice for administrators because “they are central in terms of making it happen.” Another from this group said that the inservice was high profile a few years ago but was more systematic now. Yet another said that budget cuts had curtailed inservice and celebrations of success in the past year and that more still needed to be done.

Instructional support staff reported on a variety of inservice that was offered and two used the word “lots” in their descriptions. School-based administrators also used terms like “enough” and “lots” in describing inservice and one said that there had been too much and that teachers were over-loaded. One administrator said that there was still a need for inservice for special education assistants since they came well trained in a “book sense” but not knowledgeable about working in an integrated setting. Another administrator voiced the same perspective in saying that teacher inservice was sufficient but that more was needed for special education assistants. Two administrators said that the thrust of current inservice was information on specific groups like children with autism or behaviour disorders. A teacher said that there was enough available if a teacher was really motivated to take part and this same individual talked about the importance of inservice for administrators because of their leadership role.

Five individuals indicated that they were not aware of any inservice that had accompanied integration. One special education assistant said that inservice was not available “to her knowledge.” Another said that she had sought opportunities to be involved in professional development in terms of conferences but that inservice was not offered to her by the district. Another special education assistant stated that SEA's were well trained but that teachers didn't have any special training other than involvement in discussions highlighting “best practice.” A parent stated that there had been very little in terms of classroom practice or philosophical issues, “very little to shape attitudes.”

Respondents were asked to comment on the needs, with respect to inclusion, that teachers currently identify. Only one respondent identified a single need. All other respondents identified 2 or 3 needs. More special education assistants was identified nine times and time (for collaboration, problem solving, curriculum modification) was identified seven times by the respondents. More resources and behaviour management strategies were identified four and three times respectively by respondents. Three participants also

identified the need for universities to take the lead in preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms. The need for knowledge about curriculum modification was also identified three times.

In commenting on needs, two district representatives said that “what is identified by teachers is driven by fear; those who take ownership don't need so much support” and “they ask for more resources (both human and material) because they are scared and more resources equals security in their minds.” Another district representative stated that “we have assumed that teachers will deal with this and I'm not sure that they will, no matter what we offer them. We are now telling teachers that they have to do something that they set out *not* to do.” Another comment from this group was that “diversity in a classroom is a big stress factor....behaviour disorders are big right now..... ESL is creating an unhealthy problem. We need to point out to educators the benefits (of diversity) to our children.”

In talking about more time and more special education assistants, three participants said that teachers believe that they need more of both but what is really needed is *effective* use of existing resources. One of these was a district staff representative, one was an administrator and one was a classroom teacher.

Two individuals commented on the need for inservice for special education assistants and release time for SEA's so that they could attend meetings. Two other individuals talked about the need to “maximize support while minimizing interventions in the regular classroom.” One said that teachers would probably like to have fewer people to collaborate with than they currently have.

People at the district level, more than representatives from the other roles in the educational system, pointed out that identified needs are related to current practice and that maybe the changes that need to occur are in the direction of changing existing practice or attitudes and not in the direction of continuing to pour in more resources.

When participants were asked to comment on the role of technology in supporting inclusion (scale of 1-5 with 5 indicating the greatest support) 37% chose 2, 27% chose 5 and 36% chose either 1 or 3. Two individuals said that there is a difference between the potential and the reality and three said that the potential is 5 but the reality is 2. Two said that “it is a 5 for the child who needs it” and when “they need it-they need it.” Two said that it normalizes the environment for certain children. One said that it can support inclusion but “it isn't big” and another said that the potential “remains untapped.” Two said that technology adds to the complexity of inclusionary classrooms because teachers lack the knowledge to use it effectively for special needs students.

## **Obstacles**

Participants were asked to comment on the obstacles that they have experienced with respect to inclusion. A list of seven obstacles to inclusion were identified in the literature and included in the questionnaire used to guide the interview process. Although there were three questions in the section on obstacles, participants tended to speak in global terms about obstacles rather than respond specifically to all three questions. Question one asked about obstacles that had existed in the past and question two asked about obstacles that continue to impede progress. In general, participants dealt with these two questions simultaneously. The majority said that impediments in the past had been minor in terms of the issues that were currently impeding progress. Issues like wheelchair accessibility, transportation, rooms for therapy, changing facilities and appropriate environments, procedures, and support personnel for the medically fragile were the ones that provided challenges in the early days when districts designated a limited number of schools to pilot integration. The more philosophical issues of leadership, teacher attitude, vision, and the nature of appropriate inservice are the challenges now as districts attempt to move all special needs children to inclusive classrooms in neighbourhood schools. Three participants talked about the fact that special education personnel were instrumental in the

planning for and supporting of the move towards inclusion which included a very small number of regular education teachers, while full inclusion will eventually touch all players in the education system and require the commitment of all educators.

Teacher attitude was identified by the participants as the obstacle that currently impedes inclusion more than any other factor. As they had previously in the interview, participants commented again on the fear that keeps teachers from supporting inclusion and drives them to request resources that are not necessarily needs-based and often beyond the ability of the school to provide. While participants identified this as the number one obstacle, the comments made in regards to teacher attitude were sympathetic in nature. One representative of district staff said that “teacher attitude is a big problem but not in a negative way.” This individual went on to say that schools were set up to deal with groups of kids and the whole thrust of inclusion is looking at the individual child and not in the “episodic fashion” that teachers normally deal with individual children. Two participants wondered if the people who really support inclusion know what an inclusive classroom is like when viewed from the teacher’s perspective. One other said that “teacher attitude is developing” but remains a real impediment at the secondary level where there has been much resistance. One representative of instructional support staff said that “attitude in general is a problem and not just the attitude of teachers.” Another representative of this group said that teacher attitude is central to the inclusive schools movement and that feelings of inadequacy - “a feeling that they have to be everything to every kid” is pervasive. An administrator said that teacher attitude is “very mixed.” Some are very supportive while others feel that the integration of special needs children “holds back the progress of the class as a whole.” This individual said that inclusion is a very demanding job and that teachers need to “be listened to and have their concerns validated.” Two administrators who had experience both in schools that had piloted inclusion and those that had not, attested to the fact that teachers who had been immersed in inclusionary schools were very supportive of the concept and those without the experience actively resisted it.

One teacher who had worked in a pilot school for many years said that her experience is that teachers fear the unknown. In commenting, this individual said that “even though the teachers see the kids for years, they start to panic when they actually get one. Part of this anxiety comes from teaching in front of another adult (special education assistant)-it's hard.” One parent said that “if you have the right attitude-you'll make it happen.”

The obstacle that received the second highest number of comments, five less than teacher attitude, was leadership. One representative of district staff made the following comments about leadership: “...if volumes are spoken but nothing is done to support the talk-nothing happens. If leadership at the district level modelled a problem solving approach then funding would follow and attitudes would change... A school-based leader sets the tone for the school.” Another representative from this group said that leadership is not a problem but it is development and “we are in a growth process.” Yet another said that leadership is very central in the inclusive schools process and all his experiences had been positive in that no school-based administrators had “refused him.”

Two individuals representing instructional support staff identified school-based leadership as central to the success of inclusive schools. Two school-based administrators identified leadership as an obstacle and one of them said that “there is no question that a person in a leadership role has to believe in inclusion...person needs to be open, trusting and willing to grow and change.” The other said that leadership and teacher attitude are linked in the sense that positive attitudes are the result of good leadership.

A teacher said that she had been fortunate in that most of her teaching experience had been with administrators who were supportive of inclusion and that she could attest to the fact that the attitude of the leader filters down to the staff. A special education assistant said that the principal “drives” inclusion and three parents identified the principal's attitude as very important with one stating that the principal “makes or breaks it.” One parent said that a

change in leadership, even in a school previously committed to inclusion, can be “devastating.”

Funding was the obstacle that ranked third according to participants. One district-based participant said, “I hate to think that we use funding as a reason not to include students-it doesn't take funding to change attitudes but it does to provide support.” Although few people commented on funding, those who did echoed this idea and elaborated by saying that funding provides more inservice, more special education assistants or more release time for teachers. No one said that money in and of itself would break down the barriers to inclusion. Two said that the issue was not money but effective use of existing monies. One said that effective leadership and commitment to inclusive schools at the board level would guarantee increased levels of funding. One school-based administrator said that “everything is related to funding.”

Three people identified lack of training as an obstacle to inclusion and included both training of teachers as well as training of special education assistants. None of the participants identified neighbourhood schools, parent support or models as obstacles to inclusion.

When participants were asked to identify the single factor that they believed was central to the inclusive schools process, 68% of respondents said that that factor was a “belief in inclusion, a belief system, attitude or commitment to inclusion.” One participant defined the commitment when he said: “Why would we differentiate between people?.” The remaining 38% identified leadership and funding as the single factor.

These findings will be discussed in Chapter Five in light of the research question and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.



## **Chapter Five**

### **Conclusions**

This chapter has four purposes. First it answers the research question, “What are the factors that support inclusive schooling?” from the perspective of individuals from five districts who represent six different roles within the education system. Second it highlights any similarities or differences that exist between the groups. Thirdly it identifies areas for further study and discusses the findings in light of the literature reviewed.

#### **What Are The Factors That Support Inclusive Schooling?**

##### **A Belief System**

According to the participants in this study, the factor that supports inclusion more than any of the other factors investigated in the study is a belief that inclusion is just the right thing to do. Individuals talked about vision, a belief system, a commitment to inclusion, an attitude, and/or a moral and/or legal obligation to ensure the rights of all individuals, but they were all talking about the same idea philosophically. Many other factors and conditions were identified and discussed during the interviews but the common thread that united the respondents was the idea that, at some level, people had to believe in inclusion or all the supports and resources in the world would not make a difference. Throughout the interviews, individuals talked about the attitudes and fears surrounding the inclusion of special needs children that act as barriers to achieving a common vision or belief system. Participants indicated that there is much work to be done in terms of educators' acceptance of the policies on inclusion and repeatedly identified the secondary school culture as a more serious problem than the elementary school culture.

The participants interviewed for the study, with the exception of one individual, were themselves wholeheartedly committed to the vision of inclusion. Most felt that much remained to be done and wondered about the ability of colleagues to continue to work as hard as they had under conditions of increasing financial restraint, but they were all strong advocates. The idea that a strong belief in inclusion is central to the success of the enterprise was modeled by the actions and heard in the words of the interview candidates.

## **Leadership**

Leadership at all levels of the education system, but primarily the leadership provided by principals, was identified as an extremely important factor in supporting inclusion. One district interviewed had focused early inservice initiatives on administrators because of the understanding that “they would make it happen.” District staff representatives, instructional support staff, principals, teachers, special education assistants and parents all praised the work of individual administrators or the group as a whole. Educators working in schools piloted for inclusion were particularly aware of the important role that principals had played in achieving the goal of inclusion with a staff that was all over the map in terms of commitment to the ideal. These educators heaped praise on their administrators and gave them full credit for the successful inclusion of special needs children and full credit for their instrumental role in building a school culture that validated and celebrated diversity. While participants believed that principals have always been instrumental in any implementation initiative, their roles are even more crucial now that districts around the province are decentralizing and moving towards school-based management.

While participants believed that full inclusion was not possible without effective leadership on the part of school-based administrators, leadership in the system as a whole was regarded as central to the success of inclusion. Participants believed that leadership at the district level in terms of written policy, inservice initiatives, financial support and the

modeling of collaboration and effective problem solving were all central to inclusion. Teachers, special education assistants and especially parents were all credited at different points in the interview with having provided leadership.

### **Inservice and Preservice Experiences**

Appropriate inservice is an important factor supporting inclusion according to the respondents. This was one of the areas most affected by financial restraints, in the eyes of participants, and all who commented raised concerns. Participants talked about the need for inservice aimed both at building commitment to inclusion and at providing effective strategies for inclusion at the classroom level. The need to balance the practical with the philosophical was a recurrent theme and provided support for the idea that a common belief system around inclusion is central to its success. Most participants, especially those representing districts that are further along in terms of inclusion, praised their districts for the inservice initiatives that had heralded the start of inclusive practice. These initiatives were credited with providing the fertile ground for inclusion that was enriched by the ongoing celebrations of best practice in the field. Participants from four of the five districts raised concerns about the cutbacks in inservice, especially inservice aimed at building commitment. These individuals believed that inservice combined with district praise and recognition of successful inclusive practice had created and maintained a core of strong advocates but that the majority of educators remained uncommitted. The solution, in the eyes of participants, is ongoing inservice that models collaboration and problem solving strategies.

While principals were occasionally identified by participants as being in need of ongoing inservice, teachers and special education assistants were identified as the individuals most in need of inservice. Several participants talked about the importance of involving all key

players in *celebrating* successes, a practice common at the start of inclusion, that had virtually disappeared.

Participants raised the issue of teacher education and the need for universities to prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms. Those with recent experience in working with student teachers from both lower mainland universities said that new teachers exhibit the same fears surrounding working with special needs students as teachers with many years experience in the field. Participants feel that there is no standing still or turning back when it comes to inclusion and that one important strategy for ensuring the success of inclusion is to have teachers enter the field with experience in inclusive classrooms, and an appropriate belief system around inclusion already in place.

## **Policy**

Participants believe that written policy has an important role to play in supporting inclusion. It doesn't stand alone in the same way that a belief system, leadership or inservice does, but it was seen by participants as a very important part of the framework that supports inclusion. Participants believe that, as one individual said, "Talk is cheap; if a district is really serious about its commitment to full inclusion, that commitment will be clearly spelled out for everyone to read." While no one felt they like to point to written policy as a way of forcing the hand of the uncommitted, several individuals interviewed said that some fellow teachers are encouraged and motivated by clearly stated, written policy.

Few respondents believed that the language which existed in their district could be described as "clear written policy;" that was seen as the domain of the Ministry of Education, and that policy was definitely seen as a driver for inclusion at the *district level*.

Considering the fact that participants believed that a clearly written policy statement was an important support of inclusion, it is surprising that inclusion is moving forward in five

districts where district representatives stated that there was no clear written policy. Ninety-five per cent of respondents indicated there had been a major change in direction, with respect to inclusion, in the last two years. This change had been in the direction of implementing neighbourhood schools; yet the majority of representatives from these five districts were unclear about the existence of policy but clear that the intention of any existing policy is to encourage rather than require or permit inclusion. The questions surrounding policy were the only ones that caused participants to hesitate before responding during the interview. Many were quiet for some time before answering. Many attested to the fact that they were sure that there *must* be a policy statement, but few had any direct experience with it or had actually seen it in print. This response may have resulted from the use of the word *policy* in asking about written language governing inclusion. One participant said that policy sounds like much more of an official statement or law than the statement that exists in that district.

### **Needed Supports**

Many of the participants believe that the move toward full inclusion will require an increase in the level of support currently available to classroom teachers. These individuals define support as human resources as well as a variety of other resources. Others believe that the resources needed currently exist and that the issue is one of effective use of existing resources rather than an increase in available resources. Still others believe that increasing demands for resources are driven by fear of the unknown. These individuals say that, in their experience, teachers who have little experience with inclusion tend to demand the greatest level of support, while a more experienced teacher will request far less support for the same child. Yet others say that the request for support is driven by the child's diagnosis rather than the identified needs of the specific children. Two children may fall into the same funding category and are therefore provided with the same amount of special education assistant time when in fact the need for assistance may be very different for the individual

children or in some cases better met through the use of peer tutoring or cooperative learning.

Provision of needed supports is definitely seen as supportive of inclusion by the individuals who were interviewed but it is unclear as to whether these supports currently exist and need to be more effectively used, or whether increased funding is necessary to provide additional levels of support.

The most sought after resource is the special education assistant. At least one representative from each of the six identified roles said that at some point in the interviews. However, a lot of controversy surrounds the role that the special education assistant plays in supporting inclusion. At one extreme are the individuals who believe that the success of inclusion rests squarely on the shoulders of the special education assistant and at the other extreme are the individuals who believe that the over-reliance of teachers on special education assistants has created a parallel to the regular classroom, that falls somewhere between the special segregated setting and the inclusive classroom. This latter group feels that a child constantly shadowed by an aide is not really included in the true sense.

As reported in chapter four, individuals commented on the need to normalize the environment of the special needs child, to encourage friendships within the classroom, to minimize interventions for the classroom teacher and the special needs child and to provide only the level of support that is needed. These goals cannot be met if the special needs child is shadowed at all times by another adult. The special education assistant and the child become as Biklen (1991) so aptly put it, “an island in the mainstream.”

Individuals who were interviewed for the study believe that the relationship between the child and the special education assistant is one of the inservice issues that needs to be addressed for both the teachers and the special education assistants. They believe that the teacher, with the support of a collaborative team, needs to be responsible for the education

of all children in the classroom; the special needs child's educational program is not the responsibility of the special education assistant. The special education assistant, according to those interviewed, needs help in knowing when to give support and when to pull back. One parent in the study said that the best special education assistant learns to be invisible so that the child can be visible.

Participants also feel that special education assistants should not be assigned to specific children but to classrooms so that all the children and the teacher in the class can benefit. The teacher remains in control of the educational program for the special needs child and the special education assistant provides assistance to any child who requires it. This maximizes the possibilities for the special needs child and increases the opportunities for meaningful peer relations and peer support in the classroom.

Two representatives of district staff indicated that they were very concerned about the role of the special education assistant and one said that they were monitoring the situation very closely. Others expressed the idea that inclusive classrooms are still very new to most educators and that sorting out roles and responsibilities is part of the growth process. These individuals believe that including all children in regular classrooms in pilot schools and now attempting to move them to neighbourhood schools is a very big idea educationally and one that will no doubt encounter many bumps along the way. One educator said that we have dealt with a lot in a relatively short period of time and now that kids are enrolled full time in neighbourhood schools, we need to "do some fine tuning." Inservice dealing with the role of the special education assistant is one of the areas that needs to be fine tuned.

The special education assistant has a variety of titles that possibly reflects the struggle with role and responsibilities in the districts that were selected for the study. Three individuals from the same district used three different terms to refer to this role. It appears to be part of the larger on-going struggle with appropriate language in our society and particularly in the

special education community. Several participants expressed concern with the term “assistant” and preferred instead facilitator or integration facilitator. The term special education assistant was viewed by one of these individuals as encouraging the idea that this person is an appendage of the special needs child and continues to reinforce the special education/regular education thinking that she feels is detrimental to inclusion. The term integration facilitator was favoured because, in this person's eyes, it is a more positive term and allows the individual to be treated more as a colleague than “assistants” usually are.

The study asked participants to respond to a question on the equitable distribution of special education assistants. Only 20% of the special education assistants interviewed for the study believed that there was equitable distribution, while 60 to 100% of the individuals representing the other five roles in the educational system felt that there was equitable distribution.

### **Collaboration and Problem-Solving**

Collaboration and problem-solving are school-based strategies that are extremely supportive of inclusive schooling according to the participants interviewed in this study. Time was often talked about during the interviews as a resource that is needed if teachers are to be successful in inclusive classrooms and the participants indicated that teachers needed to use that time primarily for collaboration and problem-solving with colleagues.

Inclusive schooling places a variety of new demands on teachers. Many have never experienced the presence of another adult in their classrooms. Many have never had the experience of dealing with a variety of professionals from other disciplines: counselors, therapists, social workers, and medical personnel to name a few. Teachers find that ,when it comes to getting advice on how to deal with these new professionals in their classroom, other experienced teachers are their best resource. Collaboration is particularly invaluable when it comes to inclusion because of the fact that teachers with no experience in inclusive



classrooms are the most resistant, according to the participants in the study, while those with even one year of experience become strong advocates. Providing the opportunity for these two sides to meet is a valuable resource that is currently available to all schools represented in the study since all are given flexible release time that is related to inclusive practice.

There don't appear to be any rules when it comes to inclusion. One teacher will cope well with a child than another finds unbearable. One will be willing to take risks while the other will proceed with caution. One will demand additional resources for a child that a colleague dealt with without additional resources. Some schools are believed, by participants in this study, to be over-resourced while others struggle with inclusive practice and minimal resources. Two children with the same funding category, regardless of whether the child falls into the *typical* or *special needs* population, will have very different needs and present different challenges for teachers. Despite the fact that including a special needs child in a new classroom setting or neighbourhood school for the first time involves intensive, long-range planning with large numbers of professionals, no one really knows what it will be like until the classroom door closes on the first day of school. The classroom teacher will require the on-going support of colleagues in order to meet the challenges presented by inclusion. Participants feel that the inclusion of each special needs child has required a lot of collaboration, problem-solving and creative solutions to date and that won't change. One superintendent pointed to the fact that schools have been set up to deal with groups of children and not focus on individual children to the degree required in inclusive practice. He also pointed out that teachers traditionally felt that they were trained for their jobs prior to entering the field and now they feel that they are learning on the job on a daily basis. He feels that the best way to prepare teachers for today's classrooms is to teach them the skills of collaboration and problem-solving.

All the parents interviewed for the study said that their children had presented enormous challenges for the teachers and schools charged with the responsibility of educating them and the success of the venture really rested on the ability of individuals to be good problem-solvers and come up with creative solutions.

## **Funding**

It was surprising to this researcher that, given the climate of restraint in funding for education in British Columbia at the time of the study, increased funding was not identified as a more significant factor in supporting inclusion in this province. In fact, participants who identified funding as an obstacle to inclusion appeared to feel uneasy with their comments and found ways to deflect any discussion about funding. One administrator exemplified this feeling by saying, “I hate to think that we use funding as a reason not to include students.” The lack of emphasis on funding as supportive of inclusion may come from the fact that every factor that supports inclusion can be in some way be interpreted as a funding issue and also because many participants believe that the issue is not funding per se but a reallocation of existing funding or resources. One administrator said that within existing frameworks much is possible.

## **Age-appropriate Placement, Regular Classrooms and Neighbourhood Schools**

Age-appropriate placement was not really an issue for the individuals interviewed for the study, nor is it seen as particularly supportive of inclusive schooling. The attempt is always made to place a child with his or her same age peers but both educators and parents are willing to go with an unwritten policy that allows a placement within a year or two of the child's chronological age. Changes like continuous progress, ungraded primary, and family groupings brought about through educational reform in British Columbia schools have de-emphasized the importance of same-age placement. Teacher contract language that

limits the number of special needs children in any one classroom has, on the other hand, made same-age placement impossible in some cases.

The placement of special needs children in regular classrooms is not really supportive of inclusion since there is no inclusion without it. Participants talked about the importance of defining inclusion since currently more teachers are accustomed to talking about integrating special needs students than they are about inclusion. Others feel that there are many practices termed inclusive but few that really are. For many, the amount of time that a child spends in a regular classroom as opposed to a segregated setting is the determining factor in deciding whether the child is being integrated or included. If special needs children spend the majority of their time in a regular classroom with same age peers, then that is an inclusive classroom. Therefore participants felt that if children are not included in regular classrooms for the majority of their school day, that that is not an inclusive school but one that integrates special needs children in an episodic fashion, while enrolling them in special classrooms.

It is important to note that most of the individuals interviewed caution that pull-out programs are still needed for many children and that full inclusion should not be taken to mean that children will not be pulled out for specific reasons. Children with behaviour disorders were singled out many times during the interviews as the children who are the hardest to deal with in inclusive classrooms. It is in the best interests of the child *and* the teacher that a place exists where the child can be taken when behaviours are unmanageable within the classroom.

Neighbourhood schools are definitely seen as supportive of inclusive schooling. The education system should prepare children to live in their communities and they should therefore attend school in that community to ensure that the friendship networks are formed that support all children as they move through school and into post-secondary education or work. Parents in the study had only one definition of neighbourhood schools-the school

down the street. Educators feel a need for a looser interpretation of the term since not all typical children attend the school down the street for a variety of reasons and it is reasonable therefore to expect that special needs children will do the same. Some of the participants in the study did not rate neighbourhood schools as a really high priority because they felt that they are there already, but none of the districts could say that all special needs children are in regular classrooms in neighbourhood schools. In fact, the majority of low incidence students do not attend the neighbourhood school. In some cases the district is unable or unwilling to supply the needed supports for a child to attend the neighbourhood school. Funding is certainly an issue here since few educators can imagine a time when all schools will be accessible to all children. Some parents therefore choose to keep their special needs children at designated neighbourhood schools because of the high levels of support or because they have no choice. Others are concerned about the emotional well-being of their typical children and choose to keep their special needs children at other schools. Some simply tire of fighting the system for what is accepted practice when it comes to typical children.

The move to neighbourhood schools is seen as desirable by all but extremely expensive. Parents whose special needs children have spent many years in a school that has over time become very well resourced are surprised to find that the neighbourhood school is unable to provide the same resources even if the staff is very willing to open the doors to the child.

### **Classroom Strategies**

In terms of classroom strategies that support inclusion, cooperative learning and peer tutoring were the ones that participants identified as the most supportive. They are also the ones that currently enjoy widespread acceptance on the part of educators, and in the case of one district, are even institutionalized. Cooperative learning strategies give classroom teachers a lot of flexibility in dealing with diverse needs within the classroom and help

typical children to become involved with special needs children. Cooperative learning was seen as a powerful strategy by all participants.

Peer tutoring was the other strategy ranked high in terms of its ability to support inclusion. Some participants felt that increased experience with peer tutoring would allow teachers to move away from the over-reliance on special education assistants and encourage friendship networks for special needs children. The secondary schools were given praise for their highly developed peer tutoring programs-the only praise given to secondary schools, with respect to inclusion, throughout the interviews.

Other strategies like curriculum modification, learner focused instruction, whole language instruction, and multi-level instruction hold the promise of being very supportive strategies in inclusive classrooms, but participants believe that for the most part these strategies are either not being used by teachers or that teachers do not have enough information to use them effectively. Several participants used phrases like, “we aren't there yet” in talking about the use of these latter strategies.

Curriculum modification is a strategy that was used extensively in three districts selected for the study but is considered by most to be too time consuming or inappropriate in inclusive classrooms. In talking about curriculum modification, participants who commented said that resource room teachers had once been given the responsibility for doing the curriculum modification for special needs students but that changing staffing arrangements and changes in the resource teacher's role make this no longer possible. Others said that curriculum modification often ended up being almost like a separate curriculum and isolates the special needs child within the regular classroom. Most participants prefer to minimize curriculum modifications and some think that curriculum adaptation, where necessary, is a more realistic goal. Curriculum modification is the creation of a whole unit geared specifically to the learning style of one particular child while curriculum adaptation may involve the use of peer tutors or cooperative learning groups as

the needs arise. Curriculum modification was deemed impossible for classroom teachers to handle and therefore discourages the goal of having the classroom teacher take responsibility for the educational program of a special needs child.

Participants were less than enthusiastic about the role of technology in supporting inclusion. The education system has certainly felt the pressure from the business community to prepare children for what all predict will be a highly technological future, yet many of those interviewed for the study were skeptical about technology and certainly felt that it was a huge problem for teachers who feel very inadequate in dealing with the very complex technologies that often accompany the severely disabled. The subject of Stephen Hawking, a physicist who is severely disabled and writes and communicates through the use of a computer and a voice output machine, came up on several occasions during the interviews, but participants did not believe that they had encountered a child with the same kind of potential and technology needs as Dr. Hawking.

In-school therapy for the physically disabled is seen as a mixed blessing for educators and not particularly supportive of inclusion since provision of therapy usually means interruptions for the classroom teacher or time spent away from the regular classroom for the child. Educators recognize the fact that it is essential for some children to have therapy during the school day, but for those who don't need it, therapy would be more suited to the home environment than the school. The issue once again is the need to normalize the child's environment in any way possible to promote meaningful relationships for the special needs child. Constant disruptions in the school day and absences from the classroom work against the goals of full inclusion.

## **Similarities and Differences Across Groups**

Individuals from five districts, representing six different roles in the education system were interviewed for this study. In general there was a considerable amount of agreement between districts and across groups in terms of the factors that support inclusion.

Of the five districts that participated, one continues the practice of enrolling special needs students in special classes and then integrates them into classes within the school. One school in the district has been a pilot school for the district and the staff there are very positive about their experiences but aware of the fact that the school is well resourced and in many ways it is the ideal setting for a teacher faced with experiencing inclusion for the first time. The administrator is well respected by his staff and given full credit for the success of inclusion at that school. The district will be moving towards neighbourhood schools in the next year and concerns are being raised about the fact that the same level of support provided to the pilot school will not be available to the neighbourhood schools. Schools in the district that enroll students in special classes are faced with the difficulties of accomplishing the goal of integration in light of contract language limiting the number of identified special needs students in each class. There is an added difficulty in this organizational model in that the teacher assigned to the special class is not as available to others teachers in the school as the resource teacher who does not enroll a class. The other four districts enroll the majority of special needs children in regular classrooms in neighbourhood schools. All four still have segregated settings and the majority of low incidence children in three of the four districts are still bussed to designated schools. As pointed out earlier in this chapter, this sometimes is the result of parental choice rather than district policy. Three of the four districts report much lower levels of inclusion at the secondary schools than at the elementary schools. Despite the overall similarities in these four districts, one is clearly much further along than the other four with respect to inclusion and another lags a distant fourth.

The district that is further along in terms of inclusive practice has restructured the district staff to do away with the separate departments of regular and special education. All inservice is done in a very collaborative fashion by district based teams that include an individual with experience in the field of special education. The intent is to model inclusive practice, collaboration and problem-solving strategies for school personnel. The ownership of special needs children in the district rests with the schools and not with the district. Allocation of special education assistants is done by a team at the board office but based on needs assessments done by the school-based staff. The process is a very open one with a clearly defined appeals process.

Despite the differences that existed in practice amongst the five districts, the individuals interviewed were remarkably similar in terms of their philosophical perspectives and the language that they used to talk about inclusion. Particular similarities were noted between district staff representatives and instructional support staff representatives who frequently used the same phrases when responding to questions. This no doubt resulted from the fact that all had had experience with or responsibility for inclusion and it appears from this study and the review of the literature, that experience with inclusion converts the unconverted.

Representatives from district staff and instructional support staff not surprisingly are more concerned with philosophical issues and the big picture than are the field-based representatives. District representatives see policy as the most important district practice in terms of supporting inclusion while field-based representatives rank inservice as their highest priority. District staff expressed concerns about the role of the special education assistants while field-based individuals tended to credit them with much of the success of inclusive practice to date. District staff are more supportive of time for collaboration and problem-solving while school-based staff prefer resources, particularly human resources.



Special education assistants believe that pull-out programs are still quite prevalent while representatives from the other five groups indicated that they still exist but are used in a very limited manner and primarily to work on identified needs for short periods of time.

### **Areas for Further Study**

Interviews with participants indicated four possible areas for further research. These are behaviourally disturbed children in inclusive classrooms, teacher contract language and inclusion, the merger of regular and special education, and the role of special education assistants.

### **Behaviourally Disturbed Children and Inclusion**

The parents of children who have mental handicaps were the pioneers in terms of knocking on the door of the regular education system and demanding that their children be given the right to appropriate educational programs in integrated, rather than segregated, settings.

Parents of the physically disabled, especially those with multiple handicaps, have challenged school boards across the country to educate their children in regular classrooms. Many of these cases have gone to courts of law and have received an enormous amount of attention because of the complexities involved in providing accessibility, appropriate educational programs, physical care and feeding and sometimes medical care on a routine basis, in neighbourhood schools. These are the children that have generated a lot of fear on the part of educators but they are not the ones currently providing the acid test for inclusion. That challenge is coming from the children with behaviour disorders.

Participants singled out children with behaviour disorders as the most difficult children to have in inclusive classrooms and the ones that teachers feel ill-equipped to deal with. One district representative identified children with behaviour disorders as the real stumbling

block for inclusion and said that the problem is not just a school issue but a societal one. However the school must try to deal with these children with virtually no funding.

When discussing the meaning of inclusion, many participants cautioned that full inclusion did not mean that children would not be pulled out of regular classes. In every case the "behaviour kids" were the ones identified as still in need of a segregated setting.

Teachers were characterized as *stressed* and *defeated* in their attempts to find effective ways of dealing with troubled children and some schools in the study had used resource teacher time to release classroom teachers from the relentless job of trying to teach under these difficult circumstances.

Educators have found ways to have severely disabled and medically fragile children in regular classrooms and report that their lives have been enriched by the experience. The same is not true for children with behaviour disorders. Many educators believe that the numbers of behaviourally disturbed children are increasing and that the behaviours themselves are increasing in severity.

A suggestion for further research surrounds the issues of including behaviourally disturbed children in regular classrooms and providing teachers with effective strategies for dealing with them.

### **Teacher Contract Language and Inclusion**

Participants in the study were sympathetic to the difficulties that teachers are experiencing in inclusive classrooms and believe that their concerns should be validated and supports provided wherever possible. Teacher contract language, limiting the number of special needs students in any one class, is seen by educators as supportive of teachers but, in many instances reported by participants, it comes into direct conflict with the most appropriate placement for some students.

The British Columbia Teachers Federation has been involved in research related to inclusive schools and the issue of teacher contract language conflicting with the most appropriate educational placement for special needs children may be an area for further research.

### **The Merger of Regular Education and Special Education**

The idea of a merger of regular and special education is discussed at length in the literature on inclusive schools (Stainback, Stainback & Forest, 1989). Stainback and Stainback (1990) say that the instructional needs of students do not warrant a dual system, that maintaining dual systems is inefficient and that the current special education system fosters an inappropriate attitude about the education of students classified as having disabilities and encourages the practice of labeling children for the purpose of funding.

Evidence of a merger was seen in one of the districts selected for the study. None of the participants raised the question of a merger. Many did however raise the issues of funding, labeling and allocation of resources that are tied to the dual track system and work against full inclusion.

While districts may be encouraged to move philosophically in the direction of a merger, the funding comes from the Ministry of Education in British Columbia and is driven by funding categories rather than individual needs.

Research into the idea of a merger would shed light on the implications and feasibility of such a move.

### **The Role of the Special Education Assistant**

As indicated earlier in Chapter Five, there is controversy surrounding the role of the special education assistant. Some are fully supportive of the role that the special education assistant

plays, while others see them as discouraging the very practice (inclusion) that they are intended to support.

A qualitative study that attempted to identify best practice situations and document the effective strategies employed would give some direction to the field.

### **The Relationship Between the Findings and the Literature Reviewed**

There was a great deal of agreement between the findings of this study and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The idea that inclusion is the only legal and moral thing to do is a strong message in both the study and the literature. Although both the study and the literature identify the lack of training and fear, on the part of educators, as obstacles to inclusion, there is no question that inclusive classrooms are the right of every child.

Effective leadership, at all levels of the education system, was identified in both the study and the literature, as being the most important driving force in terms of implementing and supporting inclusive schools. The significant role that parents have played in the last twenty years is particularly evident in the Canadian literature on inclusive schools. Both the study and the literature recognize the difficulties that grass roots movements, such as the inclusive schools movements, face when charged with making significant change in huge bureaucratic systems like the education system.

The study and the literature on inclusive schools recognize the fact that there are no answers that will apply to every situation. The variables of teacher attitude, teacher experience, school policy, and instructional strategies combine with the particular needs of the child to make a very positive experience for some parents and students and a very unsatisfactory one for others. The use of collaboration and problem-solving strategies are recognized in both the study and in the literature as the most successful tools to use in this most complex of enterprises.

Although the literature on inclusive schools talks about the importance of all the topics covered in the interview questions, the most influential writing on the subject of inclusion talks about the need for a major paradigm shift in the present educational system. The nature of this paradigm shift is a merger between the regular and special education systems. Although one of the districts that participated in the study has made some moves in the direction of a merger, no one who was interviewed for the study made any reference to this big idea. Although there was much talk of reallocating resources, there was little evidence of the knowledge that special education settings have traditionally cost the system twice as much as regular education settings and that some money should be flowing in the direction of regular education as the result of closing segregated settings.

Behaviourally disturbed children were identified in the study and in the literature as being the most challenging children to include full time in regular classrooms.

The one significant area identified in the study for further research, but not contained in any of the literature, is the impact of teacher contract language on the inclusion of special needs children in British Columbia Schools.

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## Appendix A: The Questionnaire

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### Inclusive Schooling: Interview questions and notes

#### Policy:

- 1 Is there clear written policy that requires integration?
- 2 Does the policy require inclusion, encourage it or just permit it?
- 3 How well has the policy been accepted by educators, by parents? (Scale: 1-5)
- 4 Have there been major changes in policy in the last two years? If yes, what is the nature of the changes.
- 5 In general do you believe that everyone benefits from inclusive education? (Scale 1-5)

#### School/District Practices:

- 1 What district practices contribute to inclusion?

- ☐ Policy statement
- ☐ Appropriate inservice initiatives
- ☐ Placement of students in regular classes
- ☐ Age appropriate placement
- ☐ Provision of needed supports
- ☐ Neighborhood schools
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

- 2 What school practices contribute to the success of inclusion?

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Therapy                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Effective schools correlates:                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Commitment to student learning               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible physical facilities              | <input type="checkbox"/> Focus on instruction and student achievement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special education assistants                | <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible leadership                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ungraded primary program                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Vision                                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Computer aided technology/assistive devices | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay in school initiatives                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Collaborative work structures               | <input type="checkbox"/> _____  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Problem-solving strategies                  |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> _____                                       |   |

- 3 Are there school-based teams responsible for supporting inclusion?
- 4 Are teachers provided with flexible planning time or release time that relates to inclusive policies?
- 5 To what degree are parents involved in educational plans for special needs children? (Scale 1-5)

**Classroom Practices:**

1 What instructional strategies are being used to support inclusion?

☐ Learner centered curriculum

☐ Multi-level instruction

☐ Cooperative learning

☐ Activity-based learning

☐ Whole-language

☐ Peer tutoring

☐ Curriculum modification

☐ \_\_\_\_\_

2 Are students pulled out of class for learning assistance or special instruction?

3 Are students with disabilities being instructed in regular classes with different activities or materials than those used for regular students?

**Support Systems:**

1 What is the model used for the in-school resource teacher?

2 Does the system ensure equitable distribution of special education assistants?

3 What training has accompanied integration?

4 What kinds of needs do teachers currently identify?

5 Do what degree does technology support integration? (Scale 1-5)

**Obstacles:**

1 What are the major obstacles that had to be overcome to achieve the current level of success?

2 What obstacles continue to impede progress?

☐ ☐ Leadership

☐ ☐ Funding

☐ ☐ Teacher attitude

☐ ☐ Parent support

☐ ☐ Neighborhood schools

☐ ☐ Lack of training

☐ ☐ Models

☐ ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

3 What single factor do you consider to be most central to the inclusive schools process?