SPECIAL EDUCATION ADMINISTRATION: PERCEPTIONS OF CURRENT PRACTICE

SHEELAGH OLSON

B.Ed., University of Victoria, 1983

A Project
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies
of the University of Lethbridge
In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF EDUCATION

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

LETHBRIDGE, ALBERTA

April 2004

Dedicated to

My family –

My husband, Randy, who encouraged me to choose a destination and then provided love, support and patience while I worked in that direction,

And my sons – Arthur, Graeme and Peter – because you are you – you helped me to keep my sense of humour and you let me know when I took myself too seriously.

Thank you to my mother, and in memory of my father, who always had faith in my ability and shared their love of learning.

Abstract

The Alberta government has indicated that inclusion of special needs students is the preferred placement for children with disabilities. Inclusion refers to "the provision of services to students with disabilities including those with severe disabilities, in their neighborhood schools, in age appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplemental aid for both children and teachers" (Kerzner-Lipsky and Gartner, 2000, p. 7). The purpose of this study is to examine the practice of inclusion through the perceptions of Resource Coordinating Teachers with respect to the support provided by the administration of the school. As an administrator myself, I hoped, through this research, to gain insight into those administrative practices that both help and hinder inclusion practices in schools. Twenty-six teachers responded to a questionnaire which covered such issues as the degree of support for inclusion from classroom teachers and administrators, the types of support that are in place, the successes and challenges of providing an inclusive education for special needs students, and the type of professional development that was occurring. In order to validate the responses given, follow up interviews were conducted with administrators. The results of the study indicate that there is support for inclusion at the administrative level, and that there is also support, with reservations, from classroom teachers. It was found that there are supports such as aide time in place for the benefit of both the students and the teachers and there are areas in need of improvement, such as more monetary and personnel support. Professional development was identified as an area which requires further planning and effective implementation in order to aid teachers in developing the expertise in educating students with special needs.

Acknowledgements

Arthur Olson, my father-in-law – thanks for lending me your ear and your wisdom over

many a Sunday dinner.

Robin Bright – thank you for your guidance.

Tom Sullivan – the right person at the right time.

And finally – thanks to the teachers and administrators who agreed to participate in this

study; your input was invaluable.

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Chapter One: Research Question and Background

<u>Introduction</u>

Margret Winzer (1996) states, "In a philosophical and humanitarian sense, all children are special" (p. 1). In that, she is absolutely correct. However, within classrooms, we find a multitude of children with varying ability levels. Those who have difficulty coping in the regular classroom are often identified as exceptional children. "The differences may be related to physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional, or social factors or a combination of these" (p. 1). As schools develop and change, classroom teachers are being asked to fully integrate special needs students into their classroom. Grebenstein (1994/95) contends that these children, "rarely need special or exotic teaching methods or technologies" (p. 87). Classroom teachers may disagree with this statement. They might say that these children need not only special attention but careful programming as well. Herein lies the basis for this study. There is a need to investigate the programming that is occurring for these students within classrooms to determine what special considerations are necessary. Since programming decisions are usually made by the administration of a school, this study focuses at this level.

This study was conducted in the Calgary Separate School District, the second largest school district in Calgary and the largest Catholic school district in Alberta. The school district has ninety-four schools and approximately forty-four thousand students. In the 2002-2003 school year, the school district adopted the philosophy that students with special needs should be included in the regular education classroom as much as possible. As a result, Resource Coordinating Teacher's were appointed in each school to facilitate programming for students with special needs. This study will examine what is currently

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occurring in elementary and elementary/junior high schools, with regards to administrative involvement in the planning and operation of programs for students with special needs. The significance of this study is in offering information to administrators to reflect upon as they refine programming decisions for students with special needs. This will be accomplished by providing a questionnaire to Resource Coordinating Teachers, who are the personnel in the schools that often work both with administrators and classroom teachers planning appropriate programming for students with special needs. Through the analysis of their feedback, a picture will be formed of the positive practices that are occurring in schools and the areas in need of further refinement.

Background

Classrooms present a mosaic of abilities and personalities. For approximately seven years, I taught in a segregated special education class that included students in Grades One to Three. The students were with me for about seventy-five percent of their day. I was responsible for not only teaching them some skills in language arts and math, but also for teaching them life skills, such as appropriate social interaction, tying shoelaces, or learning to take a bus so that they could find success in the day to day world. These students were with me for at least three years. I knew the children and their families very well, as a trust was built between us. The gains these students made were not always measured in leaps and bounds, but learning at many levels occurred in my classroom.

During my tenure as a special education teacher, I witnessed many philosophical and practical changes. The focus shifted from the view of my classroom as a homeroom to one of support for the regular education class, even though the students were in the

segregated class for most of their day. The make-up of the class changed as well, as students from Grade One to Six were placed in the program rather than the previous group of Grade One to Three students. These changes were not occurring in isolation – changes such as these were happening in schools throughout Canada and the United States.

As my teaching career progressed, I changed my career path from being a special education teacher to that of a regular education teacher and then to being an administrator. I can clearly recall how it felt to be in a classroom with varying degrees of support from the administration. Now that I am responsible for ensuring that special education programs run smoothly, I have refined my focus to those essential elements that I need to put in place for the teachers and students within the school.

The changes that have occurred in the last two decades have been drastic. Initially, special education programs were conducted in segregated classrooms or schools. Some programs for students with special needs were a composite of segregation for academic subjects such as Math and Language Arts and integration for the Fine Arts (music, art and drama) and physical education. In 1975, the United States passed Public Law 94-142, which changed people's view of children with special needs. The law stated that special needs students should be educated in the least restrictive environment because research showed inclusion (meaning full integration) was beneficial to students. Social interaction with peers was considered as important as academic success.

School programs, both in the United States and Canada, have adapted to these changes. Children with mild/moderate learning disabilities have gradually been integrated more fully into the regular education classroom. This is not to say that all special settings

have disappeared. Rather, schools have been asked to accept their neighbourhood children where feasible and work to meet their needs accordingly. As inclusion is the preferred model, the administrators within the school often make changes in the way they structure the school to meet the needs of students with special needs.

Many schools and teachers are reluctant to accept these changes – either because they feel unqualified to deal with special needs students or because they are concerned about the academic expectations for other students. It is up to the administration of the school to find ways of providing organizational structure and professional development to ensure success for the students and teachers. Research (Burrello and Zadnick, 1986; Cooper and Goldman, 1995; Friend and Cook, 1993; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1995/1995; Glick and Schubert, 1981; Holmes, 1999; Mamlin, 1999; McLeskey, 2000; and Winzer, 1996) has shown that there are particular aspects of a school plan or organization that contribute to the success of special needs students.

The focus I have taken for this project, then, comes from my experience as a teacher and as an administrator. It is imperative that administrators provide meaningful education for special needs students in a supportive environment – both for teachers and students.

<center>Goal</center>

This study's goal is to examine what is presently occurring in special education programs in a single school district with respect to the mandates set forth by Alberta Learning and best practices as described in relevant research. This goal will be achieved through gathering data via a questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire is to obtain

feedback from school personnel to determine positive administrative practices. In addition, areas of need will be examined to determine where practices can be improved.

Research Question

The umbrella question for this research is: What are the perceptions of Resource Coordinating Teachers vis-à-vis administration's support for special needs students and programs within their schools? The literature provides guidance as to how to best find the answer to this question. Several questions must be asked in support of the broader question; they are: How do teachers provide inclusion? Is collaborative planning occurring? Has advanced planning occurred? Are the necessary supports in place? Does administration support inclusion? What professional development is occurring for teachers? What are teachers' attitudes towards students with special needs?

Definition of Terms

In order to clarify what is meant by the terms used in this study, I offer the following definitions.

General Terms

Children with Exceptionalities- "those who have difficulty realizing their full human potential. Their intellectual, emotional, physical or social performance falls below or rises above that of other children" (Winzer, 1996, p. 601).

Special Education – "instruction that is specially designed to meet the needs of children and youth who are exceptional" (Winzer, 1996, p. 607).

Special Needs – "an educational term used to designate pupils who require special education" (Winzer, 1996, p. 607).

(The literature refers to these children as special children, exceptional children, special needs students and students with learning disabilities. The author will use the term special needs students to refer to all students with special needs).

Terms Related to School Settings

Classroom Teacher – certified teacher assigned to a class of students who is responsible for ensuring that the curriculum is covered.

Inclusion – "the provision of services to students with disabilities including those with severe disabilities, in their neighbourhood schools, in age appropriate regular education classes, with the necessary support services and supplemental aid for both children and teachers" (Kerzner-Lipsky and Gartner, 2000, p. 7).

IPP (Individualized Program Plan) – "written commitments of intent by education teams to ensure appropriate planning for exceptional students" (Alberta Learning, 2002b, p. 29).

Pull-out program – a program in which students experiencing difficulty are removed from the regular education classroom to another location so that the special education teacher can work with them individually or in small groups. The length of time they are removed varies depending on the needs of the student.

Regular classroom – a class of students at a given grade level within the school. The class size follows school district guidelines. The students are a mix of boys and girls and are of varying ability levels.

Resource Coordinating Teacher (sometimes referred to as Resource Support Coordinating Teacher) – a position designated by the Calgary Separate School District. The actual duties associated with this position vary between schools but it is generally seen as a position used to facilitate programming for students with special needs.

Types of Learning Difficulties

Alberta Learning (2002b) and the Learning Disability Council of Canada have recently revised the definitions for mild/moderate disabilities in children. The revised definitions are as follows:

Mild Cognitive Disability – A student with a mild cognitive disability is usually delayed in most academic subjects and social behaviours as compared to his or her same age peers.

Moderate Cognitive Disability – A student with moderate cognitive disability requires significant modification to basic curriculum, but is able to profit from instruction in living/vocational skills and may acquire functional literacy and numeracy skills.

Learning Disabilities - Learning disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information. These disorders affect learning in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. (p. 1-2).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Government Mandates

Students with learning disabilities have not always been included in the regular classroom. The norm for educating such students has evolved from educating them in segregated classrooms (or schools) to one recommending full inclusion. In the United States, the passing of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 and its update, Public Law 105-17, referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997 gave special needs students "the right to a free and appropriate education, which meant placement in the least restrictive environment where the student could benefit most in a setting most like the regular classroom" (Holmes, 1999, p. 3). British Columbia soon followed suit with its Year 2000 Program which mandated the inclusion of all children into their neighbourhood schools, thereby requiring all schools to provide special services to those students who need them.

Alberta, too, has seen a change in the delivery of special education programs. Alberta Learning, in its Standards for Special Education (2002c) has stated that, "educating students with special needs in inclusive settings is the first placement option to be considered by school boards in consultation with parents and when appropriate, students" (p. 1). This placement is based on the philosophy that inclusion recognizes the worth and dignity of individuals. It is also accepted that when students have the opportunity to participate in regular school activities, they are more likely to develop to their full potential (p. 18). While the government encourages the inclusion of all students, it also recognizes that appropriate education of students should be the primary consideration and therefore other placement options may sometimes be a better choice.

"Inclusion, by definition, refers not merely to setting but to specially designed instruction and support for students with special needs in regular classrooms and neighbourhood schools" (p. 1).

Within this framework, the Alberta government has described the requirements necessary to ensure that students are receiving the most appropriate education. The first of these requirements is access, which refers to students having an adapted or modified program which enables and improves their learning. "An adapted program retains the learning outcomes of the prescribed curriculum and adjustments to the instructional process are provided to address the special needs of the student" (p. 12). "A modified program has learning outcomes, which are significantly different from the provincial curriculum and are specifically selected to meet the student's special needs" (p. 12). Inherent in access to learning programs is the idea behind identifying the students' special needs through assessment and then ensuring that any specialized services that are required are put into place (Alberta Learning, 2002c).

The second requirement is appropriateness of the education. This area refers to the teaching staff. School boards must ensure that teachers "know and apply the knowledge, skills and attributes to accommodate individual differences for students with special needs" (Alberta Learning, 2002c, p. 6). In order to achieve this goal, teachers are expected to develop an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for special needs students. An IPP is developed in consultation with the parents and, where appropriate, the student. It is based on current assessment data which clarifies achievement levels. Then, measurable goals and strategies for achieving those goals are determined. Accommodations and adaptations which are required are documented. The IPP is an ongoing document which

is constantly reviewed and adjusted. Year-end summary and transition plans are formulated to ensure that the student moves to the next grade level with as little difficulty as possible (p. 7).

The third requirement is one of accountability. School boards must, in keeping with the standards of special education, develop and implement procedures for educating students with special needs. They must be able to provide written descriptions of the programs they provide and the staff who provide the program. Included in accountability is reporting to parents and monitoring the effectiveness of the programs implemented (Alberta Learning, 2002c, p. 9).

The final requirement is the right of appeal. In this way, should a dispute occur between a school board and family, a due process is in place to resolve the dispute. The preferred method of resolution is for the school board and parents to work collaboratively to achieve a solution, but if that is not possible, there must be written processes involved. If a resolution at the school board level is not achieved, parents have the right to appeal to the Minister of Education. (Alberta Learning, 2002c, p. 11).

Identifying and Assessing Learning Disabilities

Although the inclusion movement attempts to address students with special needs, one must be aware of the spectrum of diagnosed learning difficulties that can be found in classrooms. Winzer (1996) identifies accepted categories of exceptional children. These exceptionalities fall into the categories of intellectual differences, sensory handicaps, communication disorders, behaviour disorders, physical handicaps and impaired health and developmental disabilities (p. 10- 11). The manifestations of these exceptionalities

are as varied as the children themselves – there is no one specific description that encompasses all learning disabilities.

In order to manage the wide variety of student difficulties, the Alberta government has adopted a coding system to identify students with disabilities. Students with mild/moderate disabling conditions have been assigned a code 51 (mild mental disability), code 52 (moderate mental disability), code 53 (emotional/behavioural disability), code 54 (learning disability), code 55 (hearing disability), code 56 (visual disability), code 57 (communications disability), code 58 (physical or mental disability), or code 59 (multiple disability). Students who are considered gifted and talented have been assigned a code 80. Students with more severe disabling conditions have been assigned a code 41 (severe mental disability), code 42 (severe emotional/behavioural disability), code 43 (severe multiple disability), code 44 (severe physical or mental disability – including autism), code 45 (deafness), or code 46 (blindness) (Special education definitions – 2002-03).

The decision to assign an Alberta Learning code to a child occurs only after an assessment of the child's abilities is completed. "The basic purposes of assessment are to collect information, to clarify the 'why's' of a child's performance and behaviour and to make a decision" (Winzer, 1996, p. 91). Assessment attempts to determine how the child learns best, how behaviour affects learning and any physical impairment that affects achievement (p. 91). Winzer discusses the importance of using several different types of assessment. These include a medical examination, developmental screening, psycho-educational assessment, curriculum based assessment (measures student performance in a particular curriculum area), functional performance, and dynamic assessment which

provides information on a student's likelihood to respond to intervention (p. 91-98).

However, it must be noted, "data from screening and psycho-educational diagnosis are

only useful when used to initiate more effective services and programming for children"

(Winzer, p. 99).

<div align="center">Inclusion</div>

Inclusion is not a new idea – in the past it has been known as mainstreaming,

regular education initiative (REI), least restrictive environment and integration. Winzer

(1996) states, "Inclusive schooling defies easy interpretation. There is no single model of

inclusive education and it is not a fully developed structure with paradigms and a data

base" (Winzer, p. 71). However, most proponents agree that inclusion is a philosophy

whereby all children deserve to be part of a community in which diversities are valued

and celebrated (Ferguson, Meyer, Jeanchild, Juniper and Zingo, 1992; Friend and Cook,

1993; McNulty, Rogers-Connelly, Wilson and Brewer, 1996; Pepneck-Joyce, 1999;

Winzer, 1996). Staub and Peck (1994/1995) define inclusion as "the full time placement

of children with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities in regular classrooms" (p. 36). The

National Association of School Psychologists furthers this definition by stating,

"Inclusive programs are those in which students, regardless of the severity of their

disability, receive appropriate specialized instruction and related services within an age-

appropriate general education classroom in the school they would attend if they did not

have a disability" (Holmes, 1999, p. 3).

In order to successfully implement inclusion, it is generally accepted that working

towards inclusion requires a change in the professional practice of teachers in the school.

This cannot be mandated, but rather requires the school to become more collaborative

(McLeskey, 2000, Winzer, 1996). As schools begin to plan for inclusion, they must take into account many things. Holmes (1999) has outlined several key considerations. These are as follows.

1. The decision for placement should be based on the individual needs of the disabled child.

2. Every effort needs to be made to keep the student with a disability in an integrated setting.

3. Special children must have a complete spectrum of alternative placements available to the extent needed by the school district.

4. The needs of the students' peers should be regarded when making decisions on the least restrictive environment for the special education child.

5. When a more restrictive setting is chosen for a special needs student, the individual must be integrated into regular settings to the greatest extent that is appropriate for the child.

6. The burden of proof in defending the placement decisions will be borne by the schools. (p. 4-6)

Once the decision has been made to place a student in an inclusive setting, school personnel must ensure that the necessary supports are in place. This begins with resources and curriculum designed to meet each student's needs which can be achieved through ongoing assessment and individualized planning. To succeed, collaboration and co-operation is required from all staff members, including administrative support (Winzer, 1996).

At times, the main purpose of inclusion is to encourage social interaction between disabled students and their non-disabled peers in an age appropriate setting while ensuring that the special needs student receives an appropriate education (Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994/1995). One of the ways to accomplish this is to ensure that the rhythm of the day for the special needs student is similar to that of the other students. The supports must be as unobtrusive as possible so that the differences between students become an "ordinary" part of the day. Therefore, legally speaking, inclusion must satisfy two criteria: "(1) provide students with disabilities an education appropriate to their unique learning needs, and (2) do so in as close proximity as possible to normally developing, age appropriate peers" (p. 23).

Inclusion is not just about placing special needs students in the regular classroom. In order to avoid some of the negative issues surrounding inclusion, one must be aware of what is not part of inclusion. One must be careful not to place special needs students into the regular classroom without careful forethought and planning for support. In addition, there must be a balance between the number of special education and regular education students in the class. Students with special needs should not be isolated within the regular classroom; meaning that although they are in the classroom, they are not working as part of the class. Finally, the needs of the regular education students cannot be ignored. The classroom teacher should not spend a disproportionate number of hours planning for the special needs students, nor should she jeopardize the achievement of the regular education students by omitting parts of the curriculum (McLeskey, 2000).

It must be noted that inclusion is not right for every child. Fuchs and Fuchs (1994/95) state that "although it has become fashionable to complain that special

education flat out doesn't work . . . reviews of research indicate that many special education programs are superior to regular classrooms for some types of children" (p. 24). Not all students thrive in a large classroom setting. A number of severely and profoundly disabled youngsters are best served in settings where their cognitive development and social limitations can be addressed more intensely. In addition, many of these students need skills that should be taught in the environment where they are more likely to occur – the community, home or work setting (Winzer, 1996). Furthermore, opponents of inclusion say, "equal educational treatment does not necessarily result in equal opportunity to learn" (p. 74). In fact, some resource rooms contribute more to the success of some types of disabilities or emotional difficulties than regular education classrooms. Fuchs and Fuchs note, "that to abolish special education placements in the name of full inclusion is to deprive many of an appropriate education" (p. 25).

Various studies have indicated that there is a negative effect on peer relationships between disabled students and their non-disabled peers. King et al. (in Winzer, 1996) point out that there is evidence that "disabled children are often perceived in negative and prejudiced ways by their non-disabled peers; integration may even increase prejudice and stereotyping and rejection" (p. 74). Furthermore, many special needs students have difficulty forming friendships. Often times, although children with special needs are interested in forming friendships, the children they choose as friends do not reciprocate the friendship (p. 74).

Parents must be allowed input in the placement of their children – whether it is in an inclusion atmosphere or a segregated classroom. In some instances, parents feel that the "one-size fits all" method of instruction in a regular classroom does not address the

particular learning needs of their child. Rather, it will put them at a disadvantage. Fuchs

and Fuchs (1994/95) quote a parent who says, "I have no quarrel with [full] inclusionists

if they are content to insist upon it for *their* child. But when they try to force me and other

parents to dance to their tune, I find it highly objectionable and quite intolerable. Parents

need options" (p. 26).

  In another area of research, Mamlin (1999) discusses what contributes to the

failure of inclusion. The difficulties arise, she says, when "special education was truly

seen as a separate system and the ideas of collaborating with general education remained

foreign to the staff at [name of school]" (p. 45). She also indicates that students in special

education classes were viewed as qualitatively different from those in general education

classes. She addresses the success of inclusion in terms of the leadership of the school.

Two very valid points she makes are that "the readiness for inclusion needs to be

examined, including a careful look at the culture of the school and the understanding that

the school staff have about the proposed changes," (p. 47) and "by merely announcing

change rather than involving staff in the decision making process, the staff was not able

to become invested in making substantive changes" (p. 46).

  The Calgary Separate School District (CSSD#1) has many programs in place for

students with learning disabilities. For instance, there are segregated classrooms for

severely disabled students, classrooms where students spend time in both a segregated

and integrated program, one school where students with learning disabilities attend a

specialized program, and full inclusion settings. Recently, the school board has changed

its delivery method of support for students with mild/moderate learning disabilities. They

have moved from a program in which students were typically pulled from the regular

classroom for approximately fifty percent of their time to one recommending full inclusion.

Alberta Learning (2002a) has stated "Students with learning disabilities have the potential to be successful in school and life. Success is highly dependent upon identifying and understanding an individual's strengths and needs, and providing appropriate support during the school year" (p.1). The Calgary Separate School District offers three levels of support: a Resource Coordinating Teacher, a Learning Support Teacher and a Resource Support Teacher. Each school has a Resource Coordinating Teacher. The role of the Resource Coordinating Teacher is to:

- Provide strong SRT (School Resource Team) involvement and/or lead

- Assist teachers in differentiating classroom instruction

- Support implementation of Alberta Learning programming standards for students with special needs (full range)

- Support on-site professional development in collaboration with Instructional Services

- Assist in building staff capacity, with a focus on instructional programming related to students with special needs, particularly those identified as learning disabled. (CSSD#1, Unpublished document, 2003)

Two additional teaching positions in schools have been adapted to provide support in conjunction with the Resource Coordinating Teacher. The first of these is the Learning Support Teacher. The primary focus of the Learning Support Teacher is "[direct instruction related to] focus on literacy and numeracy; focus on early intervention; and focus on effective remediation strategies" (CSSD#1, unpublished document, 2003). The

primary recipients of this type of support are students in Division I (grade 1-3) with

continued involvement at the Division II level (grade 4-6) as needed. The goal is to

provide remediation before a more formal special education placement is required. The

second teaching position to provide support is that of the Resource Support Teacher. At

the Division III (grade 7-9) level, the position of Resource Support Teacher includes

duties such as:

> provid[ing] direct instruction to identified students with diagnosed learning
>
> disabilities (Code 54); support classroom teachers in differentiating instruction for
>
> students with learning disabilities; and; assist[ing] teachers and SRT in identifying
>
> and prioritizing student who would benefit from further assessment from IST
>
> (Instructional Services Team) or who may qualify for Student Health Partnership
>
> (SHP) services. (CSSD#1, unpublished document, 2003).

In all of these positions, however, "the ultimate goal . . . is to empower the classroom

teacher through modeling and sharing of expertise" (CSSD#1, unpublished document,

2003).

<u>Program Planning</u>

The key to successful inclusion of students with special needs is planning. It is

important that the planning includes all stakeholders: administration, teachers, parents,

and students. The school community must recognize that the development and

implementation of an inclusion model requires significant changes in the entire school

(McLeskey, 2000). Teachers within the school need to understand that it is not just a

"special education" issue, but rather one that requires changes in the teaching practices of

all teachers within the school.

Alberta Learning (2002a) has set forth guiding principles which must be taken

into account when programming for special needs students. They are:

- Programming must be based on an individual student's needs.

- Programming is an active process, which is continually monitored and

  adjusted to meet a student's needs.

- Students with learning disabilities need to participate in the regular

  curriculum to the fullest extent possible.

- Many practices used to support students with learning disabilities will

  benefit all students.

- The key components of programming are not discrete; they are processes

  that work together.

- Programming

  - involves a problem-solving process, and is dynamic, interactive

    and changing

  - requires consistency across settings and grades

  - requires teamwork and collaboration (student, parent, school

    personnel)

  - requires ongoing communication

  - requires an organizational structure and school culture that support

    the ongoing implementation of the components. (p. 2)

Effective planning is the responsibility of the administration. Burrello and Zadnik

(1986) examined critical success factors that administrators exhibited that contributed to

the success of special education programs. The highest ranked items on the list were, "the

establishment of rapport, communication and coordination with regular education personnel, demonstrating program efficacy and quality, managing conflict, and integrating special education into the school system in terms of planning, problem solving, and decision-making structures of the district(s)" (p. 373).

Administrators must be aware of elements which they need to develop so that inclusion is beneficial to students. Cooper and Goldman (1995) cite studies that identify four areas which are key to the success of an inclusive program. Teacher training in effective communication skills is of primary importance so that the special education teacher and the classroom teacher can work together to plan for the students in their care. A second area that should be addressed is ongoing professional development so that teachers are up to date on effective teaching methods. A third factor is adequate preparation time so that the teacher can effectively plan for all of the individual needs in her classroom. Finally, minimal classroom disruptions were seen as a need in order for teachers to present a concept or introductory lesson to the whole group. In that way, when asked to work independently, the students were more likely to successfully complete tasks at their own level.

Administrators must also take the time to address teachers' fears when implementing an inclusion model. The issues that need to be resolved at the planning stage are decisions about whom will be included, whether inclusion will benefit those to be included, whether the students with disabilities will have a negative effect on the regular classroom, how the teacher's role and responsibilities will change and who will have the time and expertise to implement the program (McLeskey, 2000). In addressing these fears, one of the most important aspects to take into consideration is the role of the

special education teacher and the role of the regular education teacher. The roles of each must be determined. The special education teacher must not become an aide in the classroom but rather, both teachers should be encouraged to work collaboratively to share the responsibility of educating all students.

Schools that successfully implement inclusive special needs programs have taken the time to prepare first. Friend and Cook (1993) list factors to consider so that the move to inclusion goes smoothly. They are:

1. Schedule regular planning sessions.

2. Support from the principal is crucial.

3. Inclusion is about attitudes. It works when teachers focus on students' abilities, not their disabilities.

4. Be flexible, be ready to change.

5. Be willing to teach in a classroom with another teacher.

6. Remind yourself, "A kid is a kid."

7. Address logistical problems such as scheduling, and broader issues such as assessment, as they arise.

8. Visit and draw on the expertise of other schools in which students with disabilities are already included in classrooms. (p. 55)

Ongoing professional development must occur in order for inclusion to be successful. McLeskey (2000) offers guidelines around the topic of professional development. He says that professional development should be school-based. In that way, coaching occurs in a collaborative atmosphere. If professional development is embedded in the daily lives of teachers, it is more likely to be meaningful and sustained. Finally, it

should be focused on student learning (p. 34). He suggests topics which should be included in the professional development plan. These include such things as instructional strategies and curricular adaptations, understanding the change process, alternative grouping strategies (peer tutoring, cooperative learning), school wide discipline, and conflict resolution and social skills training (p. 34). In order to be effective, professional development around the topic of inclusion must begin at the teacher training level. "Teacher preparation practices must be scrutinized to ensure that teachers enter the profession not only with the highest degree of knowledge about the best educational practices (ie instruction and assessment geared toward supporting diverse learners), but also with the ability to work collaboratively with other faculty to meet the needs of all learners" (McNulty, et al., 1996, p. 166).

Once inclusion has become the model for the school, it must be maintained. This can be accomplished by maintaining a planning team that revisits the goals of the program. Continuity of teachers ensures that the vision of the staff is carried out. Collaborative planning time and ongoing staff development are important so that staff can address the changes needed in accommodations for students. And finally, there should be a plan in place for ongoing evaluation of the program. In that way, meaningful changes can be made where required. (McLeskey, 2000). Administrators and teachers must be aware that school programs must not remain static. "A good inclusive school program can never be more than a work in progress" (p. 45).

Leadership

Successful inclusion begins with successful leadership practices. In this time of change, leaders must understand the nature of change and develop a culture within the

school that embraces the new reality. Several recent authors on the topic of educational leadership (Barth, 1990; Doyle, 2002; Fullan, 2001; Leithwood, 1999; Morgan and Demchak, 1998; and Patterson, Marshall and Bowling, 2000) have focused their attention on the necessity of addressing change within the culture of a school. Fullan's (2001) five components of leadership, combined with the ideas of others, introduce strategies to effectively lead others in a time of change. These ideas, put together with the principles of successful inclusion lead to a positive school climate.

The first area of consideration is moral leadership which is "acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers and society as a whole" (Fullan, 2001, p. 3). This is especially important when considering students with special needs because as Zepeda and Langenbach (in Doyle, 2002) state, "Inclusion is a philosophy . . . [and] is a part of the very culture of the school" (p. 40). When inclusion is approached in this manner it becomes an ordinary part of the school culture. The principal must model moral leadership if it is to be accepted by the members of the staff and community. The attitudes of the principal are often mirrored in the rest of the staff (Morgan and Demchak, 1998; Patterson, et al., 2000). Pretli (2002) presented what she termed "administrator mental models" that support programming for students with special needs. These "mental models" are internal images of how things should be and that administrators must be aware of as they institute the inclusion model. The two most important points she makes are that "principals' beliefs and actions are critical to the special education programs/services in their schools" and "a team approach is a necessary component of special education programming." (p. 1). Inherent in the idea of moral

leadership is the importance of defining a vision for the school so that all staff know the answer to the question, "Where are we going?" (Leithwood, 1999; McNulty, et.al, 1996).

The second component of effective leadership, according to Fullan (2001) is the need to understand the change process. Often, it is expected that the leaders of the school make changes, with little or no preparation. "School administrators feel unprepared and overwhelmed by the expectations placed on them to make their schools inclusion schools" (Doyle, 2002, p. 48). Furthermore, teachers feel resistant to change when the change has been implemented in a coercive manner, rather in a collaborative manner (Guzman, 1994, p. 4). If administrators bear these facts in mind as they initiate changes, they may be more likely to succeed. Fullan suggests that an "implementation dip" occurs early in the change process due to two types of problems that people experience – psychological fear of change and the lack of technical know-how (p. 41). It is expected that change will occur at first, but that as the process continues, there will be a decline in success before moving ahead again. As this fear and learning curve are attended to, a reculturing of the school occurs. "Reculturing is about visions, discovering, establishing and omitting of a set of shared beliefs. Reculturing for inclusion involves administrators who first, hold a vision of inclusion themselves, and then know how to facilitate reculturing in their schools" (Doyle, p. 52).

Fullan's (2001) third component of effective leadership is that of building relationships. Principals must provide an atmosphere of collegial support and professional development (Guzman, 1994). This can be accomplished in many ways. Leithwood (1999) suggests that relationships are fostered through building a school vision, establishing school goals, providing intellectual stimulation, offering

individualized support, modeling best practices, demonstrating high performance expectations, creating a productive school culture and developing structures to foster participation in school decisions. These things promote positive relationships among staff members in that the staff is engaged in the process and decisions of the school. Barth (1990) says that the relationship between principal and teacher will model what all relationships within the building will be. When participants have a stake in the outcome, they are more likely to participate in the process.

Fullan (2001) describes his fourth component of effective leadership as knowledge building. He says, "Effective leaders understand the value and role of knowledge creation, they make it a priority and set about establishing and reinforcing habits of knowledge exchange among organizational members" (p. 87). This is of paramount importance when creating an inclusive school. Knowledge building must begin with the principal. "Principals need to have the knowledge, skills, strategies and attitudes that will enable them to provide leadership for special education programs in their schools" (Patterson et al., 2000). Initially, principals must have knowledge of special education services, laws and regulations (both at the government level and at the school board level). They must participate in ongoing education as district policies change. From there, principals must encourage their staff to become educated in the areas of inclusion. This can best be achieved through collaboration. Barth (1990) says that collegiality occurs when teachers "talk about practice, observe each other, work on curriculum, and teach each other" (p. 31).

Fullan's (2001) fifth component, coherence making, is the next logical step. He says that the key features of coherence making are lateral accountability which is

encompassed in peer support and collaboration; a sorting process which is determining

what is working, and shared commitment to selected ideas and paths of action (p. 118).

These aspects can be achieved through ongoing professional development and skill

training (Guzman, 1994, Leithwood, 1999). Shared commitment to the goals of the

school leads to a feeling of shared responsibility for the education of all students. "Shared

responsibility incorporates a set of principles and techniques that gives members of the

school community the authority and responsibility to create what is needed, based on the

data and culture of their particular school and school district" (Conzemuis and O'Neill,

2001, Introduction section, ¶ 6).

Lambert (1998) discusses this shared responsibility in terms of the importance of

looking beyond the principal for leadership because, "schools, and the people in them

have a tendency to depend too much on a strong principal or other authority for direction

and guidance" (p. 3). She feels that all members of the staff must develop their leadership

skills for the betterment of the school and its students. The principal must first hire

personnel with the capacity for doing leadership work and then move on, "building

trusting environments with solid relationships" (p. 79). As the staff begins to demonstrate

leadership skills, they should be encouraged to become active participants in knowledge

building and improvement of the school as a whole. She admits that the change process is

difficult work, "requiring persistence, and patience" (p.86).

Burrello and Zadnik (1986) address the factors which administrators must cope

with as they implement special education programs. They recognize the pressures that

various interest groups place on special education programs and make recommendations

for responding successfully to these demands. They include such things as acting as a

resource, recruiting capable personnel, and planning and implementing quality programs (p. 373). They say though, that the most important thing is that the administrator/leader:

portrays a sense of confidence and respectability which facilitates the establishment of credibility and rapport with key constituents. Here the special education leader is able to communicate what must be done. This helps clarify the current situation and induces commitment to the future. (p.374)

Although the change process is not an easy one, administrators must come to realize that successful restructuring will come from reculturing of the school community. As teachers become more comfortable with change, they will also come to embrace the philosophy of inclusion. If teachers understand inclusion, they are more likely to participate in its successful implementation (Doyle, 2002). And, "Once teachers do volunteer, the problem for school administrators shifts to facilitating collaboration" (p. 51).

Conclusion

The literature review has examined the government mandates with regards to inclusion. The current reality is that inclusion has become the primary placement option for students with special needs, in part, as recognition of the importance of human worth and dignity. Inclusive classrooms celebrate all students' talents regardless of the their diversities. This is achieved through creating a culture of acceptance for special needs students. Once a culture of acceptance has been achieved, planning which involves all stakeholders – administrators, teachers, parents, and students – must occur so that the needs of all students in the classroom are addressed. This planning includes making accommodations and modifications to the curriculum. It also includes working with staff

members, both regular education teachers and special education teachers, to ensure that the necessary and appropriate supports are in place. It is the leaders of the school that model inclusive practices and develop positive working relationships with their staff as changes are introduced. It is in this spirit of acceptance and planning that successful inclusion occurs.

Chapter Three: Methodology

<u>Descriptive Research</u>

The method used in this project falls within the category of descriptive research. According to Gay (1996) descriptive research "determines and reports the way that things are" (p. 249). The areas of focus for this type of study are "assessment of attitudes, opinions, demographic information, conditions, and procedures" (Gay, p. 249-250). Survey research is often located within a paradigm of quantitative research. However, although the data collected can be analyzed quantitatively, the researcher decided that the data will be reported qualitatively in order to give a clearer picture of what is occurring.

A questionnaire was used to gather data for this research (see Appendix A). A questionnaire is, "A written collection of self-report questions to be answered by a selected group of research participants" (Gay and Airasian, 2003, p. 590). One of the advantages of using a questionnaire is that, "In comparison to the use of an interview procedure, a questionnaire is much more efficient in that it requires less time, is less expensive, and permits collection of data from a much larger sample" (Gay, 1996, p. 287). In addition, "It's a way of finding out what your audience knows and needs to know about your topic, and it contains up-to-date data which is not available from any other source" (*Designing a Questionnaire*, p. 1).

Questionnaires are made up of two kinds of questions: open and closed questions. Closed questions, usually in the form of multiple choice, "may be used to measure opinions, attitudes or knowledge" (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1993, p. 349). Open questions "allow for more individualized responses, but they are sometimes difficult to interpret" (Fraenkel and Wallen, p. 349). The questionnaire used in this study will include both

(Fraenkel and Wallen, p. 349). The questionnaire used in this study will include both kinds of questions. The purpose of the closed questions is to develop a profile of which administrative practices are occurring. These practices are in keeping with the literature presented. Open questions allow participants to offer more frank and detailed information about current practices within their schools.

Rationale for Questionnaire

It was decided that a questionnaire would be the most effective way to gather information from a large number of people. The questionnaire was formulated using the key concepts in planning that research has shown to be necessary in order to achieve success in special education programs. It was field tested with three Resource Coordinating Teachers in the Calgary Separate School District. These teachers answered the questions honestly and openly and the nature of their responses was taken into consideration in the refining process. A special education consultant with the school board also provided feedback. As a result, some of the questions were modified.

The questionnaire was distributed to a group of Resource Coordinating Teachers in the school district. The reason that this group of people was chosen is because they often act as a liaison between the administration and the teachers in a school. In addition, they meet regularly for professional development sessions with members of the school board. Therefore, they have an idea of the reasoning behind the decisions that administration is making and the feelings of the teachers with whom they are working.

Distribution of Questionnaire

There are ninety-six Resource Coordinating Teachers with the school board. Due to FOIP regulations, their names were not released to me. A member of the Instructional

Services Department contacted all of them via e-mail with a brief description of the research. If they were interested in participating in the research, they were invited to reply to the e-mail. Following this initial request, a list of twenty-eight interested participants was forwarded to me. I then sent each of them a letter of consent (see Appendix B) with a more detailed description of the research and a copy of the questionnaire. They were given two weeks to respond to the questionnaire and asked to return it using the inter-school mail system. At that point, eighteen questionnaires had been returned. A reminder e-mail was sent to the respondents who had outstanding questionnaires. Eight more questionnaires were returned for a total of twenty-six questionnaires. A twenty-seventh questionnaire arrived after the data was analyzed and therefore was not included. The final questionnaire was never returned.

<div align="center">Results/Analysis</div>

The questionnaires were collected and the data was analyzed. The first ten questions were closed questions in which the respondents were asked to check an appropriate box. Questions ten through thirteen were open questions. Analysis of the results will follow what Creswell (1998) describes as a spiral approach.

Initially, all of the questionnaires were read in order to have a "general review of all information" (Creswell, p. 140). The researcher was then able to determine what information was being presented.

The second step in the spiral is the "describing, classifying and interpreting loop" (Creswell, p. 144). This stage involves developing categories of data. The questionnaires were photocopied, cut apart and categorized by question number. Each question was analyzed individually. For the open questions, the responses were read through a first

time to determine the general nature of the responses. From this summary, categories were decided upon. The categories were not decided upon ahead of time although the areas mentioned within the research were taken into consideration. Following Creswell's (1998) suggestion, I attempted to "develop themes or dimensions through some classification system and provide an interpretation in light of their own views or views of the perspectives in the literature" (p. 144). Creswell also suggests that reducing the data to five or six categories is preferred. Each of the responses was then assigned to a category. A summary statement for each category was prepared so that similarities in responses would become apparent. In this way, trends in the successes and areas of need within the programs for special needs students could be addressed. The responses are depicted in a table format for the sake of clarity (see Appendix C).

The final loop of the spiral is the interpretation loop. "Interpretation involves making sense of the data, the 'lessons learned' as described by Lincoln and Guba (1995)" (Creswell, 1998, p. 144). The interpretation will take the form of reporting on the type of support that is currently occurring within schools and of identifying the areas in need of improvement.

<u>Interviews</u>

As a way to check the validity of the information received in the questionnaires, four interviews were conducted with school administrators. The administrators were colleagues who consented to participate in the study. The administrators interviewed were given a letter of consent with background information. The interview consisted of five questions (see Appendix D). The interviews were tape recorded for accuracy and then transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews were analyzed using a method

similar to the questionnaires. The transcripts of the interviews were initially read to gain a better understanding of the ideas presented. At that time, general categories became apparent. They were then photocopied and ideas of a similar nature were highlighted with the same colour and assigned to a category. Summary statements of each category were prepared to determine similarities and differences to the responses provided by the Resource Coordinating Teachers.

Chapter Four: Findings

Demographics of the Participants in the Study

Twenty-six people responded to the questionnaire. Nineteen of the twenty-six

people described themselves as the Resource Support Coordinating Teacher. The primary

purpose of this position is to "assist in building staff capacity, with a focus on

instructional programming related to students with special needs, particularly those

identified as learning disabled" (CSSD#1, unpublished document, 2003). The position of

Resource Support Coordinating Teacher is not usually held in isolation. These people

often hold the position of Resource Support Teacher or Learning Support Teacher in

addition to their duties as Resource Support Coordinating Teacher. They may also hold

the responsibility of being a classroom teacher.

Eleven respondents described all or part of their position as being the Resource

Support Teacher. The primary responsibilities of the Resource Support Teacher are to:

"provide direct instruction to identified students with diagnosed learning disabilities,

support teachers with differentiating instruction . . . and identifying and prioritizing

students who would benefit from further assessment" (CSSD#1, unpublished document,

2003).

Eight respondents act as the Learning Support Teacher within their schools. "The

priority of the Learning Support Teacher is to focus on literacy and numeracy, focus on

intervention and focus on effective remediation strategies" (CSSD#1, unpublished

document, 2003).

Six respondents answered in the "other" category, either in conjunction with the

above-mentioned positions or on their own. Three people indicated that their position was

as a Coordinating Teacher. This position is usually an administrative position in schools that do not have an assistant principal. One of the respondents acts as the school guidance counselor in addition to being the Resource Support Coordinating Teacher. One is the teacher in a self-contained special education class, and one acts as a member of academic services which supports special needs students at the high school level.

The respondents came from a variety of school settings. Eleven people taught in a school that encompasses kindergarten to grade nine students. Ten people are in kindergarten to grade six schools. Two people teach in a grade seven to nine school. One person each described their schools as kindergarten to grade three, grade four to nine, and grade ten to twelve.

There is a range of experience in the position of Resource Support Coordinating Teacher. The average level of experience from the twenty-six responses was 2.71 years. Seven people had one year of experience. Nine people had two year's experience. Three people had three year's experience. Three people had four year's experience. Two people had five year's experience and two people had seven year's experience. Several people felt that the question did not adequately describe their teaching experience so they put qualifiers to their answer. These included, "thirteen years total teaching experience," "ninth year as a Resource Teacher," "previously five years as Junior High Resource Teacher," "thirteen years with the district," "however, was [a] Resource Room teacher for many years," "twenty-one years in the district," and "four years resource."

<u>Delivery of Special Education Programs</u>

An overwhelming majority of the respondents, twenty-two, described their program as a combination of full inclusion and pull-out program. Two respondents

described their program as a full inclusion model. One of those two respondents qualified their response by saying, "I help teachers find suitable materials for students commensurate with their functioning levels and adjust assignments, tests, etc." One person described their program as "my homeroom with partial integration." Another person indicated that clinics are offered for students having difficulty. A third person indicated that students access the special programming as an option where they can drop in as needed. Otherwise, those students are in mainstream classes for the rest of their day.

Inherent in the delivery of special education programs is the decision-making structures that are in place in each school. The questionnaire included a question asking for clarification on who is the key decision maker in the school. In most cases, a team approach is used to make programming decisions for special needs students. Twenty-three respondents identified a team approach. Respondents were given the opportunity to identify the members of the decision making team. Most of the teams consist of the administration, the Resource Support Coordinating Teacher, the Learning Support teacher and the classroom teacher. In addition, the English as a Second Language Teacher, counselor, and parents have input into the programming decisions. One person commented, "Guidance counselor and I are trying to implement SRT as a P/S [problem solving] (action plan) model rather than just a 'discussion and referral' event." Outside of the school based team, members of the Instructional Services Team and Student Support Services aid in programming. Only one person said that the students themselves were part of the team making programming decisions.

Strategies Used to Provide Inclusion

The next question asked respondents to indicate which strategies are being used within their schools to support inclusion. They were offered four choices and also had the option of indicating other strategies not mentioned. Twenty-three people indicated that aide time was being used to support inclusion. Twenty-two said that they used the Learning Support Teacher in the classroom to support inclusion. Twenty people indicated that the Resource Support Coordinating Teacher worked in classrooms to support inclusion. Three people indicated that the classroom teacher alone was responsible for facilitating inclusion. Several teachers indicated other ways in which inclusion was being supported at their school. Their responses fell into two main categories. These included using the English as a Second Language teacher or aide to support all students who are experiencing difficulty. This support occurred both in the classroom and outside of the classroom. The second response was that the Resource Support or Learning Support teacher pulled students out of the classroom for support. The pull-out program also had elements of clinic work for those experiencing difficulty in a particular area.

Further on in the questionnaire, respondents were given an opportunity to describe what they felt were the most effective strategies to provide inclusion for students within their school setting. Their responses fell into seven categories.

Twenty-one teachers felt that the most effective way to include students was to plan and adapt to students' individual learning styles. There were strong feelings and many examples given in this area. One comment was that "We feel it is important to 'tap into' what their dominant learning styles are and how they learn best so that we can ensure that instruction is enhanced through the strengths that these students do have." In

terms of those learning styles, the comment was made that, "Every student's strategies are different and treated very much individually." One teacher noted that what was needed when planning was, "modification of the curriculum so that students are doing what the rest of the class is doing rather than a parallel program." When discussing adapting to learning styles, many comments were made that addressed classroom accommodations such as, "We use a lot of 'graphic organizers' of all types with these students," and "variety of strategies re: graphic organizers, readers, peer partners, scribes, computers, 'spelling ace', charts, visual aids, taped readings, alternate remedial material." Perhaps the comment that best sums up the feelings is that what is needed is, "differentiating instruction so that disabilities become invisible."

The second most commented area was the use of small group instruction. Twenty teachers indicated that this was an effective way of meeting the needs of special education students. Perhaps the feelings of the teachers can best be summarized by the comment, "We need the flexibility to be able to offer in class, clinic, and pull-out support depending upon the needs of both the students and the teachers." This sentiment was repeated again and again for reasons varying from, "I feel that a smaller class environment (pull-out) for some of the school day helps with confidence and self esteem," to "clinic work for students who are really struggling with specific concepts," to "integration into gym, religion, music, and other appropriate areas of curriculum." One teacher qualified her support of small group instruction by indicating that it was appropriate when, "purposeful, required and contributing to success in the regular classroom."

There was a strong sense that having adequate personnel was one of the strategies that contributed to the success of inclusion. Eighteen people commented on its importance. This personnel takes the form of aides, Resource Support Teachers, Learning Support Teachers, the administration of the school, the parents, and district personnel from the Instructional Support Team and the Teaching and Learning Team. According to participants, if all of these people are in place, inclusion is more likely to succeed.

The fourth strategy that teachers see as contributing to successful inclusion is collaboration. It is apparent that the eleven people who commented on the importance of collaboration have found a way to structure it to best fit the needs of their own school setting. There was a feeling that it was important to communicate students' needs to all relevant stakeholders even though that sometimes took the form of a, "quick word in passing". Some schools use, "communication between teacher and resource teacher to coordinate units/themes." Although finding the time for effective collaboration can be difficult, one teacher noted, "It's a very difficult juggling act for the Admin. We are flexible and creative." There is also a sense of optimism in the comment that one particular school takes the time to "celebrate the little steps."

One way to ensure that inclusion has a better chance of success is to develop teacher expertise in this area. Six people commented that it was one of the effective strategies used by their school. Two of the comments on teacher expertise centered around the teacher's attitudes and approach. The comment was made on the importance of having, "a teacher who teaches kids and not the curriculum (they can see the outcome in a different product and are not set in what the product must be)." One teacher said that, "classroom teacher PD and commitment to DI, inclusion, program modification, etc. It all

comes down to the individual teacher's personal beliefs and practices." With teachers in place who want to make inclusion successful, there is more a chance that it will succeed.

The last two strategies received two and one comment respectively. These were in the areas of professional development and self-advocacy. In terms of professional development, the comment was made that there is a need to, "access various workshops and inservices which outline strategies for working with special needs students." In addition, there was a positive note about the regular day six meetings of the Resource Support Teachers. One comment indicated that students experience success at the junior high level when they are trained to advocate for themselves and let the teachers know what they need.

There are a wide variety of strategies being used to successfully include students in the regular classroom. Each school examines their own situation and makes plans to best fit the needs of its population.

Support for Inclusion

Respondents were asked to comment on the amount of administrative support for inclusion within their schools. Eighteen people said that the administration of the school fully support inclusion. One person of those eighteen added the comment that administration also supports the pull-out program. Seven said that the administration supports inclusion with reservations. One person qualified their choice with the comment, "depending upon the needs of the students." There were no responses that indicated the administration does not support inclusion. And one person indicated, "They support it in situations where it works best in meeting student needs. They also support flexibility and pull-out if that seems more appropriate. Every situation is looked at individually."

The degree of support from the teachers within the school was examined next. Of the choices available, many respondents felt compelled to choose more than one response or add qualifying information to their responses. Three people felt that inclusion was fully supported by the teachers in the school, although one mentioned that that support was only at the grade four to six level. The majority of responses, twenty-one, indicated that the teachers supported inclusion, with reservations. One person indicated that only thirty percent of the teachers support inclusion at the junior high level. Eight people indicated that the teachers do not support inclusion (with one comment being that the teachers are very vocal about it). One person indicated that there were mixed feelings around the issue of inclusion.

Most of the comments written by the respondents centred around the issue of support, with reservations, for inclusion. These comments included things such as, "Support, with reservations, but they are still of the mind set that pull-out is better (especially the old Resource Room model where they seem to think we will take the students, 'fix them' and then return them at grade level)." Another comment was that there was support with reservations, "because our students are extremely needy and they feel they cannot always help them fully with inclusion." One person said, "Teachers feel that more time with the Resource Support Teacher would be valuable." And finally there was the comment that "about 1/3 staff are comfortable with support in class, 1/3 with some reservation and slightly less do not want teacher support in their classroom."

The main issue around not supporting inclusion is that teachers were familiar and comfortable with a pull-out program and they do not want change. One response was,

"Most do not support – long history of pull-out programs at this school – Resource, ESL, Sp. Ed., ECL, JHCL."

Once the administration has indicated its support of inclusion, it follows that it must then determine how that support will be put into place. The question was asked which supports are provided or facilitated by administration. Respondents were given a list of ten choices and asked to indicate how many apply to their school situation. Twenty-three people reported that aide time is used. Nineteen people said that the administration creates a culture of acceptance for special needs students. Seventeen reported that the administration facilitates communication with parents and sixteen say that they help to manage conflict with the parents. Thirteen said that administration helped to manage conflict with teachers. Eleven responded that the administration helps to plan for inclusion. Ten said that the number of classroom disruptions was kept to a minimum and the same number reported receiving extra preparation time. Six people said that the administration involves students in their own program decisions. Finally, three respondents said that administration worked toward achieving smaller class sizes.

In addition to allowing respondents to check off their choices for supports facilitated or provided by administration, they were invited to comment on any of the characteristics mentioned. Several trends became apparent in the comments provided by the respondents.

The first and most frequent trend had to do with the attitudes of the school community. Most of the comments were positive in nature. One person said that the "principal insists on working towards a culture of acceptance – focusing on each other's strengths, not weaknesses." Along that same theme, one comment was that there was a

"culture of acceptance by community of caring." Additionally, there were reports on the supportive nature of the administration such as, "the administration is always available," "administration is supportive of any strategy deemed to be in the students' best interest," and "Administration does support all our special needs, ESL and other needy students in whatever way they can. They spend endless hours with students and parents to help with education issues." The administration works with other adults to best meet the needs of the special needs students as illustrated by the comments, " Our administration is very supportive of getting as much adult help as they can to work with our students," and "they spend endless hours with students and teachers to educate them in any way they can." Perhaps the most positive comment about administrative support was,

> It is a pleasure to work in a school where my work is so valued and appreciated. Our admin team is totally supportive of my work here and the school staff, both teaching and non-teaching work together to meet the needs of our special needs students.

However, there was one negative comment as well. The respondent said, "Frankly, teachers are overburdened and overwhelmed with the workload and expectations within their classrooms. Inclusion is fine as long as support is given."

A second trend dealt with the issues of scheduling and the logistics of providing support. In general, it appears that the administration is trying to find ways to schedule with support in mind. One respondent said, "The principal timetables L.S., Resource and ESL teachers (and T.A.) according to the needs in each classroom. . . Each year, and several times throughout the year, the needs are reevaluated." One person said that they were "trying to keep Academic Support room open at all times so that students who need

accommodations for tests, ie. vocabulary explanation, more time, can come to write their tests." "Math and literacy are given special consideration with regard to class size (in the form of Relief Teacher)." In one case, the code 54 students are all placed in the same classroom. It is understood, then, that the Resource Support Teacher can spend more time supporting that one classroom teacher, but that when she is required elsewhere that there is extra strain on that classroom teacher.

Thirdly, comments on additional preparation time were made with regards to support. The comments were generally positive in nature. They included, "admin provides time for marking/collaboration", "extra prep time is provided to teachers for SRT consultation and for cross grade planning for literacy groups," and "admin sometimes provides time for group marking etc. by covering classrooms or putting all students together for an activity while teachers collaborate, work on IPPs or whatever is necessary." Another, more detailed comment was, "Our principal provides coverage (self or internal) to allow teams of teachers to meet and discuss curriculum. He is an excellent time manager, organizer and delegator."

There was also a trend to comment on aide time. Of all the comments made, these were the most negative in nature, usually dealing with a lack of aide time. Comments included, "Our aide time has been cut back this year. Aides are crucial for learning disabled and all students being successful. So many students need help." "We try to provide aide time for all our elementary teachers, but have a harder time meeting the needs our junior high teachers and students." One very angry response indicated that the school uses the aide time assigned to pay for a social worker. As a result, there is no aide time for the classroom teachers.

Professional Development Related to Inclusion

The responses to the question, regarding what types of professional development related to inclusion are the teachers in your school participating in, fell into five categories. Most of the professional development occurring is around the topic of differentiated instruction. Twelve respondents indicated that this was a topic that was of interest to them. Most of the respondents indicated that the focus for their school was on differentiated learning, but did not go into detail as to how that was achieved. One person stated that, "Differentiated Learning Committee is looking at and assisting teachers in supporting students in the classroom." And another said, "last year we focused (through AISI) on establishing a baseline for all teachers re: differentiated instruction." There were two people who indicated that inservicing around the topic of differentiated instruction was being planned for the second half of the present school year.

The second most common topic for professional development was with reference to IPPs. Once again, the answers tended to be of a general nature just indicating that this was a focus. Eleven respondents indicated that they were focusing on IPPs. Of those eleven, six teachers indicated that they were either giving inservices on the new IPP format or were working in conjunction with the homeroom teacher to develop and implement students' IPPs. One person indicated that members of her staff availed themselves of the IPP sessions offered by the school district.

Eight respondents indicated that professional development either stemmed from individual interest in topics or took the form of personal communication between the classroom teacher and the Resource Coordinating Teacher. Comments from the teachers involved included, "PD is mostly one-on-one advice I give teachers when I am mentoring

them, ie. providing them with visual organizers and encouraging their use for LD students," "Individual teachers are involved in TGP's [teacher growth plans] based on their own interests – no formal sharing", "Strong teacher to teacher communication," and "At this point teachers are responsible for their own professional development." One person indicated that the Teaching and Learning Consultant has offered workshops and in class support for the teachers in the topics of their own choosing. Another person indicated that as part of the professional development, the Resource Coordinating Teacher regularly met with the aides although the topics discussed were not indicated.

Five respondents indicated that their school is involved in learning communities as part of their professional development. One teacher said, "I consistently put professional articles in teachers mailboxes also to address DI, programming, special needs etc." Another said that there were, "academic discussions on current best teaching practices at staff meetings." A third indicated that the "Professional Development Study Group will be looking at differentiation as one of our areas of interest. The other two merely indicated that articles were read and discussed.

Four people viewed the School Resource Team (SRT) meetings as part of their professional development. Each school is encouraged to have an SRT process in which they can discuss the needs of students experiencing difficulty, brainstorm for possible strategies to help them cope and determine if further, outside assistance is required. The only specific comment made in regards to SRT's was that "This year the JH guidance counselor and I are spearheading the move to a P/S [problem solving] SRT model."

Finally, it must be noted that four people commented that no professional development around the area of inclusion was occurring. In response to the question, one person said, "None that I am aware of and that is very unfortunate."

Many of the respondents also took the time to indicate who is responsible for planning and delivering the professional development for their school. Of the twenty-six responses, ten indicated that the Resource Coordinating Teacher was the individual responsible for planning and delivering the inservices. An additional four people indicated that they used the services of the Instructional Services Team or school district personnel to provide inservicing for the teachers.

<u>Successes in Meeting Students' Needs</u>

Participants in the study were asked to comment on the successes they have had in meeting the needs of special education students. Their responses fell into four general categories – collaboration, attitudes of the teachers, providing a variety of instruction, and support services in place. Although the question asked for positive practices, several respondents choose to reply in the negative.

Collaboration was cited by eighteen people as one of the successes that they have had. The comments made by the participants were general but usually indicated that a team approach was being used in their school. The team members included the classroom teacher, the Resource Coordinating Teacher, the Learning Support Teacher and in some cases, the parents. Sharing of ideas and sharing resources are common as teachers experience success with inclusion. Several commented that this is not a static process and that ongoing learning will take place. Working together is making a difference as

illustrated by the comment, "Knowing they're not alone is a big part in having some success."

The attitudes of both staff and students contribute to the success of inclusion as seventeen people commented. Students' self esteem is improved and they are more likely to meet with success when they feel accepted for the way that they are. The comments made were that, "when students are empowered by teachers and truly feel successful, learning can occur," and "some feel they have a real 'advocate' at the school." One teacher quoted an LD student at her school who said, "If a kid isn't successful at our school it is because he doesn't want to be. The help is just amazing here."

Teachers do not feel compelled to include special needs students one hundred percent of the time if that is not the most effective way to meet their needs. Fifteen respondents indicated that there are alternate classroom settings or strategies that best ensure success for special needs students. Resource Support Teachers use a pull-out model for students who are at similar instructional levels so that all students can be supported. There has also been a move towards multi-age/ability settings for instruction in literacy activities. In addition, as teachers become more proficient with differentiating instruction, they are experiencing more success in their classrooms. One person made the comment, "We have teachers in our school that differentiate for their mix of students in their class. This has allowed us to be successful with some of the LD students." Another made the comment that, "students (LD) feel better about the support they receive when RS teacher modifies curriculum for them so they can succeed."

Eleven people commented on the importance of a variety of supports to ensure successful inclusion. Supports must be in place as soon as students are identified as

having learning difficulties. In that way, they will meet with success from the beginning.

Another teacher commented on the importance of, "Setting up 'resources' for teachers to

make it 'easy' for them to try new ideas for DI, modification etc." Teachers recognize

that support for students with special needs can benefit the entire class. The observation

was made that with, "in class support you can help more than just LD kids." The support

for inclusion must come from all levels of the school as this comment illustrates:

"Success is largely due to complete support by the administration team and the

caring/professional teaching staff."

Even though teachers were asked to comment on the successes of inclusion,

fourteen chose to share negative comments at this time. Most expressed their frustration

with the lack of adequate time, support (manpower and money), and resources to

effectively meet the needs of learning disabled students. Many of their comments were

echoed in the next question of the questionnaire so their sentiments will be addressed in

the following section.

<div align="center">Challenges in Meeting Students' Needs</div>

Participants in this study were given the opportunity to express their feelings

about the challenges they face when trying to include special needs students into the

regular education classroom. Once again, their responses were tabulated into general

similar categories. The categories that emerged were personnel/support for inclusion,

attitudes, class composition, time and professional development. The two areas that were

commented on by almost every participant were personnel/support and attitudes.

Twenty-four responses indicated that there is not enough personnel or that support

for inclusion was lacking. In terms of personnel, many felt that as the position of

Resource Support Teacher was reduced in many cases to a half time position the impact on the classroom teacher was significant. The manifestations of these cuts are that classroom teachers must do more to meet the needs of all students in their classes. One comment was made that, "Teachers are frustrated because there were personnel who used to do a lot of the background testing, IPP writing, working with students, etc., etc." The Resource Coordinating Teachers are empathetic to the needs of the classroom teacher as illustrated by the comments, "more support needs to be given to the classroom teacher so that there is no potential for resentment," and "We need to avoid the situation where a classroom teacher feels overburdened and lacks the motivation to meet the needs of all students because it is too difficult." In addition, one person recognized that the recent changes in the school board programs has strained those responsible for providing programs in the schools. The comment was made that because of a "lack of consistency in personnel . . . we have lost good people." In addition, comments were made that increased aide time with "qualified aides who understand the needs of LD kids" is needed. The type of support needed, that was most frequently mentioned, was that of applicable resources. The comments made were general, but it was felt that appropriate materials at a variety of levels were needed to aid with appropriate accommodations and modifications to the academic curriculum.

The second most commented upon area dealt with attitudes. Twenty-three respondents indicated that attitudes of parents, students, and teachers affect the success of inclusion. Often times, learning disabled students come to school unprepared for learning. Comments around this issue included, " students come to school without having their basic needs met – this interferes with learning. Our mandate, as teachers, extends far

beyond school issues," "We are experiencing great apathy among students who are LD. They don't care about grades, achievements, their own learning," and "Reaching some of the struggling students who may not be coded – or want no intervention." The attitude of teachers also contributes to the success, or lack of success with inclusion. As the instructional focus shifts to full inclusion of students with special needs, some teachers have not or do not want to adjust their delivery method of instruction. It was said that, "Teachers are still very curriculum driven rather than student centered. Curriculum/texts drive instruction rather than student needs" or "Programs and expectations not being modified for these students, lessons being taught to the majority". Three comments that dealt harshly with teacher's attitudes are, "Teachers unwilling to change their methods to be effective in teaching LD kids – they want them OUT of the classroom," "Some teachers have little regard for special programs and keep or send students indiscriminately to other rooms," "Often teachers don't want these students in their classes because they view it as a lot of extra work (IPP)." At times, negative teacher attitudes are not a factor of their view of special education programs, but rather as a symptom of the overall expectations and abilities of the individual teacher. The comments were made that teachers "are not trained to work with students with a learning disability," "They are overwhelmed and the LD kids get the short end of the stick," and there is a "frustration by not being able to do [their] best job." One respondent viewed meeting the challenges of inclusion as attempting, "to get all staff on the same page in supporting these students."

There were fifteen responses that dealt with class composition including the number of coded students that each Resource Coordinating Teacher is responsible for, in

addition to other high needs students, such as English as a Second Language students. One respondent commented that, "The job of Coordinating Teacher for 80 plus coded students takes too much time away from my job as a Resource Teacher – cannot offer support in class." Many of the respondents also indicated that class sizes were too big to effectively meet the needs of special education students. Two of the fifteen people felt that more small group instruction would benefit learning disabled students. The comment was that, "I really feel that my students would benefit from receiving more time in a small group/direct teaching situation. The research on LD indicates that Direct Instruction/Strategy Instruction is the best teaching setting."

For fourteen of the respondents, time was a challenge in meeting the needs of special education students. The comments tended to be around two issues. Teachers felt that they needed more time to complete the paperwork associated with special needs students such as completing IPPs. They also felt that they needed more time to collaborate with the Resource Coordinating Teacher and other specialists to ensure that a workable plan was in place for those students.

Lastly, professional development was identified as a challenge when accommodating special needs students. Six respondents indicated that they felt that there was a need for further professional development. It was felt that, "Teachers feel they don't have the knowledge or training to feel competent in supporting the special needs for some of the students" and that there was, "Not enough teacher training for teaching LD students". More specifically, one teacher felt that they needed a better "understanding and then assisting students with syndromes such as FAS, Tourette's Syndrome etc."

Interviews With Administrators

The purpose of the interviews was to check if the perceptions of the Resource Coordinating Teachers were similar to that of the administration. This additional data was helpful to see how administrators view their role in the special education/inclusion arena, and how their views supported and/or contradicted those of the Resource Coordinating Teachers. The interviews were conducted with four administrators from within the school board. One held the position of principal, one was vice principal and two were assistant principals. They were asked five questions which focused on the level of support for inclusion from both the teachers and administrators; the types of supports that are in place for inclusion; the successes of their program; the challenges of the program; and the level of professional development that is occurring around the topic of inclusion.

There were similarities between the Resource Coordinating Teachers and the administrators when asked about the level of support for inclusion. All of the administrators interviewed responded that the administration of the school gave their full support to inclusion, which echoed the majority of questionnaire responses. The administrators were able to expand on their philosophy for that support. One view for the full support of inclusion was that the administrator believed "that they [students] be given an opportunity to participate in as many activities . . . as they possibly can given the proper kinds of supports in place." Another administrator said,

> I believe that it is very important for the administration to model inclusion in terms of showing teachers how students can be accommodated in the regular classroom. And it is very important to set a tone, I believe, with the parents to assure them that all efforts will be made to accommodate their child.

The administrators mirrored the view that the classroom teachers had mixed feelings about including special needs students. However, the administrators clearly expressed their understanding of the teachers' frustrations when trying to fully include special needs students. The frustrations stemmed not from the special needs students themselves, but rather from the inability to provide the kind of support that teachers feel that these students need. This is seen in comments such as, "If you ask most teachers where do they think children belong in terms of all kinds of learners, they would say that they believe that they belong in the greater society of the classroom," but "if I said inclusion for kids with serious behavioural needs, probably many would not support it." Another administrator said, "I find teachers are accommodating and welcoming but they wish they had more resources and more time to do more."

The second interview question focused on the strategies facilitated by the administration of the school to support inclusive practices. Once again, the responses given by the administrators were similar to those given by the Resource Coordinating Teachers. The most frequently used form of support is using aide time effectively. One administrator said that, "there are no aides doing any other kinds of tasks, they are really supporting the learning needs of the kids." Another administrator commented that, "the teacher can't do it alone so we really work hard to give those teachers that have the children with special needs as much aide time as possible." Two administrators commented on creating a culture of acceptance within their schools. One said that, "the idea of an inclusive society matches well with our Christian values" and another said, "including these kids is here to stay and we've really pushed that, and so instead of how can we get this child out of the classroom, we've put that to the positive." Administrators

recognized the role that they play in maintaining positive communication with parents. All of them mentioned some form of communication with parents, with one of the most direct comments being, "There is a great deal of communication with the parents to make sure that the parents know that there is a separate or individualized program going on."

The administrators were asked to reflect on what they felt were the successes of inclusion within their school. Their responses generally fit into the same four categories as those of the Resource Coordinating Teachers – collaboration, attitudes of the teachers, providing a variety of instruction and ensuring that support services are in place.

Two of the administrators indicated that the Resource Coordinating Teacher is the key team member when working together. One said, "We have a very strong Coordinating Teacher" and combined with the Learning Support Teacher and Elementary Learning Support Teacher, " those three ladies in our building help the children to move forward." Another administrator indicated that the administration team encourage the Resource Coordinating Teacher to manage the program and work collaboratively with her to ensure success for the program.

All of the administrators felt that one of their key roles was to ensure that the necessary supports were in place. One piece of new information that surfaced which was not evident in the questionnaires was the importance of ensuring that the aides in place are well suited to the children that they work with, ""finding the right aide for the right child." Another new piece of information with regards to support was the importance of ensuring that the school has as much information as possible about the child's special needs before the child is placed in the regular education classroom. One administrator described a special needs child who punched a teacher, scratched an aide and took a

swing at the assistant principal within the first forty-five minutes of being at the school. The administrator said, "What I've learned about that is as an administrator, get as much information before the child is coming into the school as you possibly can; what works, what doesn't and get as much from the people who worked with him before." He expanded by indicating that the classroom teacher and the aide should have access to that information as well.

When asked about the challenges of including special needs students, two themes became apparent. The first of those was in the area of providing appropriate monetary and human resource support and the second was in terms of parental support. One administrator said, "Our biggest challenge is the amount of resources we have allocated to us in terms of the human resources. We just do not have enough support in terms of the people we need to implement the program." Respondents to the questionnaire commented more extensively and specifically on the human resources component of running a successful inclusion program. This may be due to that fact that the Resource Coordinating Teachers have daily experience with the classroom and administrators view the school as a whole. Regarding monetary support, one administrator commented on the:

> challenge in terms of the whole political aspect of making sure that the government who funds education realizes that there are some additional costs required with these students and that you cannot ignore that, that is just a reality. . . . The funding is definitely a challenge and has been in Alberta for a number of years and it's important to get more dollars into the classrooms.

The issue of parental support took different forms. The first was with regards to the parents of students without special needs. One administrator indicated that there were

"a number of cases in my past experience where parents have felt that the rest of the class was not learning to their full potential because of one child in the classroom." The other challenge with parental support is with the parents of children who have special needs. One administrator has dealt with parents who do not see the benefit of the special needs programs and so they make it difficult for the staff at the school to offer the appropriate supports. Two other administrators saw the challenges with parents take the form of pressures to exceed the limits of available resources. One said, "Some of the parents understand the limitations and others do not understand nearly as much how when you are running a regular ed school, you don't have some of the resources at your disposal." The other indicated that the resources of the school were pushed, "to the bitter end to where we've been frustrated with the parent because they are asking us to do too much that's outside of what we're actually capable of." This contrasts to what the questionnaires revealed about this issue, the respondents of the questionnaires made little or no comment on the effect of parental support and demand for resources.

The last area that the interviews explored was that of the type of professional development which is occurring in their schools and the member of the staff who is responsible for planning and implementing the professional development. The views of the administrators were very similar to those of the Resource Coordinating Teachers. The professional development that is occurring in schools is driven by the Resource Coordinating Teachers. They attend their regular meetings and bring back information which is then shared with the staff either on an individual basis or presented at staff meetings. At times, the Resource Coordinating Teacher will organize a session pertaining

to a particular topic or they will invite the district specialists in to offer presentations around things such as differentiated instruction.

As a whole, the sentiments that the administrators shared matched very closely to the information that the questionnaires provided. Each group shared the information that affected them the most; the Resource Coordinating Teachers focused more carefully on the classroom situation and individual teachers, whereas the administrators commented on the overall philosophy and school-wide logistics of providing inclusion. When taken as a whole, the message was the same – there are some aspects of inclusive programs that are successful and the frustrations shared by the two groups are similar. The new information presented from the administrators did not alter the comments given by the Resource Coordinating Teacher; rather, they provided a broader view of what is presently occurring in schools with regards to inclusion.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Recommendations

Limitations of the Study

A parameter of the research that must be acknowledged is the limitations of the study. Creswell (1994) says that it is important to "provide limitations to identify potential weaknesses of the study" (p.110). The researcher feels that this study is comprehensive in that it afforded many individuals the opportunity to provide feedback. However, it is not clear whether the respondents to the questionnaire reflected the opinions of those who chose not to participate in the study. At times, those most unhappy with the current reality are the most likely to voice their opinions. Therefore, in this study, interviews with administrators were used to determine the coherence of ideas between the two groups. The information obtained from the interviews matched closely with the responses to the questionnaire. At times, the interviews afforded the researcher the opportunity to understand the responses from another viewpoint. The researcher believes that the information gathered from the questionnaires and interviews portrays An overall picture of what is occurring at the present time in the school board.

Discussion

At this point, it would be useful to re-examine the questions posed at the beginning of the research. To rephrase, the purpose of the research was to examine the perceptions of Resource Coordinating Teachers with respect to what administrators were doing to support the inclusion of special needs students. In order to accomplish this, the areas of study encompassed whether inclusion was occurring, the attitudes of those providing the inclusion, the amount and type of support that was in place for both the

classroom teacher and the special needs students, the successes and challenges of inclusive programs and the professional development that is occurring.

In Alberta, the preferred placement for special needs students is within the regular education classroom. The basis of this mandate lies in the philosophy "that all these children belong and can learn in the mainstream of school and community life. The classroom is seen as a community where all children work, talk, cooperate and share. Diversity is celebrated" (Winzer, 1996, p. 71). The worth and dignity of special needs students is echoed in the research. McNulty, et al., (1996) say, "True inclusion will be achieved when individuals believe that all students bring their unique gifts to the classroom and that diversity should be celebrated" (p. 167). Pepneck-Joyce furthers this by saying, "The underlying optimistic hope is that the school, together with the parent can assist each individual student in achieving what is in the student's best interests based on equality, sharing, participation and the worth and dignity of the individual" (p. 16). The administrators participating in the interviews clearly indicated that they supported inclusion as the best placement for students, particularly with regards to the Christian values espoused by the school board.

In recent years, the Calgary Separate School District has altered the delivery of special education programs to one recommending full inclusion. The philosophy reflecting human dignity is entrenched in the district's vision statement which says, "Students are empowered to reach their full potential and reflect the image and likeness of God." (CSSD#1, Vision Statement, ¶ 1). The vision is drawn from the five district pillars, one of which is the dignity and worth of individuals. It states, "All individuals are made in the image and likeness of God. All individuals are sacred. Schools must foster a

spirit of understanding and tolerance." (CSSD#1, District Pillars Section, ¶ 6) McLeskey (2000) encourages schools to expand their circle of tolerance. He explains that there is a range of students' behaviour and academic aptitude that is considered "normal" within a given classroom and those children are considered to be within the teachers' circle of tolerance. He challenges teachers to expand upon what they feel is the "normal" range of ability to make a "broader range of differences ordinary" (p. 63). According the Resource Coordinating Teachers surveyed, teachers are beginning to expand their circle of tolerance especially at the elementary level. However, there are still pockets of resistance to including special needs students as teachers struggle with resources, support, and skills to effectively include these children. The administrators were more likely to have expanded their circle of tolerance, in theory, but they too expressed frustration at some situations and their inability to improve them due to outside issues.

Implementing an inclusive program begins with a vision of the education that the school would like to provide for all of its students. Usually, the principal of the school determines the vision. According to Doyle (2002), "They must first, attain the vision for themselves and second, understand how to facilitate it for others" (p. 54). Lambert (2003) describes principals who are able to facilitate leadership in others as capacity building. "Such a perspective requires that principals be clear about their own core values and confident in their own capacity to work well with others by influencing, facilitating, guiding, and mentoring. They need to resist using authority to tell and command" (p. 44). The interviews and questionnaires highlighted the fact that many principals have envisioned an inclusive school and are willing to advocate for children with special

needs. The challenge now, is for these administrators to encourage the staff to embrace inclusion and plan for successful implementation of a full inclusion model.

First and foremost, it must be understood that successful inclusive practices involve change in the current practices of the school. McLeskey (2000) cautions, "As members of a school community consider the issue of inclusion, it is important for them to recognize that the development and implementation of such a program entails significant changes" (p. 9). As classrooms become more inclusive and teachers look to improve education for all of the students in their classroom, "Inclusion becomes the same as school improvement rather than a school change endeavor that focuses on students with disabilities" (McLeskey, p. 143). Change does not occur quickly and as the model for including students is new, many classroom teachers do not view inclusion as a school improvement initiative. At the present time, many view it as an "add on" to their regular classroom duties. It is in this area that administrators, Resource Coordinating Teachers and classroom teachers need to explore their current practice to work towards improved education for all students.

Change is often about going outside of the comfort zone. Ruder (2000) says, "They had moved well beyond their comfort zone and no one quite knew the destination" (p. 50). The attitude of teachers has played a role in the success, or lack thereof, of the inclusion practices to date. Until teachers fully accept special needs students in their classroom and explore effective teaching methods, they will not find success with inclusion. The questionnaire showed that there are many classroom teachers that have yet to take this step. However, changes in attitudes cannot be mandated. Glick and Schubert

(1981) say, "Positive attitudes cannot be forced by law, they must be encouraged and carefully supported" (p.329).

At times, schools are not ready to commit to this change in attitudes because they have espoused a culture of segregation. Mamlin (1999) describes this as a phenomenon in which schools have become so accustomed to segregating students that they cannot envision any other way of doing business. As time goes on, the special education students are viewed as qualitatively different from other students. Then, " the principal and other administrators reported that the parents of special education students expected and desired self-contained settings for their children" (p. 45). The culture of segregation can extend to members of the special education department as they are often left out of decisions or sit apart at staff meetings. Responses from the questionnaires indicated that some teachers, both Resource Coordinating Teachers and classroom teachers, feel that the former pull-out program is the best way to meet the needs of special education students. As a result, instruction has taken a variety of forms. There are many cases of small group instruction, sometimes for the benefit of teaching a concept to a limited group of students, but at other times, because that is the way it has always been done and teachers prefer special needs students to be taught outside of the regular classroom.

Over and over again, the importance of collaboration was stressed. Winzer (1996) says that the "ultimate goal of inclusion is the creation of a collaborative school" (p. 72). It is a logistical challenge for administrators in the school to find ways to plan regular collaboration time for their staff. Mamlin (1999) says, "The principal also needs to foster a disposition toward lifelong learning for everyone from the administration to the students and to develop collaborative work cultures to help staff deal with innovations

(Fullan,1996; Servatius, et al., 1992)" (p. 37). As teachers become more adept at collaborating in small teams, the culture of the school will gradually move to one of collaboration. Resource Coordinating Teachers are presently performing the role of an "inclusion facilitator" who acts as a broker (get materials), adaptor (suggests changes in teaching plan) and collaborator (Ferguson et al., 1992). Given the current reality, finding time for collaboration is often difficult. The interviews and questionnaires indicate that although the majority of stakeholders understand the value of collaboration, it continues to take creative scheduling to make it happen.

Effective schools take the time to reflect and evaluate on the success of their program. McLeskey (2000) says that, "Successful schools involve teachers in planning and decision making, provide support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms, and achieve positive academic and social outcomes for students with and without disabilities" (p. 4). The next logical step then is to identify characteristics that successful schools exhibit in order to implement them in other school settings. Glick and Schubert (1981) identified characteristics that indicated successful programs. They are:

1. Good communication between regular and special educators

2. Frequent informal communication

3. Administrative support

4. Flexibility in scheduling

5. Positive attitudes on the part of the receiving (regular) teacher

6. Time

7. Special educators viewed as part of the total faculty

8. Special educators' attitudes

9. Peer acceptance of special students. (p. 328-329)

Assuming that the questionnaires and interviews create an accurate snapshot of what is occurring in the schools, in each of the aforementioned areas, it can be summarized that there are pockets of success in many settings. Schools should take the time to assess their programs in terms of these indicators. Merritt (2001) reminds us, "accommodations made for one child can benefit others as well; that the little victories count" (p. 69). She also says,

> My own experience has taught me that even a teacher with no special education
> experience can make inclusion work. There are no magic formulas for success –
> simply using good teacher sense is the best advice that I can offer. I approach all
> my students with the same high expectations, believing that just because a student
> has an individualized education does not mean that he or she cannot learn. (p. 69-
> 70).

Recommendations

Throughout the research, areas that could be improved upon came to light. One area that administrators should focus on is professional development. Fullan (2001) says, "Effective leaders understand the value and role of knowledge creation, they make it a priority and set about establishing and reinforcing habits of knowledge exchange among organizational members" (p. 87). The Calgary Separate School District has encouraged Resource Coordinating Teachers to take a leadership role in planning professional development activities for the staff members they work with. At the present time, very

little formal professional development is occurring. Professional development is mostly around the area of completing the necessary paperwork (IPPs and differentiated instruction plans) and brainstorming for possible strategies to accommodate students' needs through SRT's.

One effective way of organizing collegial professional development is to work in professional learning communities. Professional learning communities develop when there is leadership capacity as discussed earlier (Lambert, 2003). She describes learning communities as,

> an environment that is vibrant and unified around the shared purpose of student
> learning. High leadership capacity schools are excellent learning communities, as
> both environments involve most of the same features, including shared vision,
> inquiry, reflective practice, and collective responsibility. The members of learning
> communities are bonded to a whole that is larger and stronger than the sum of its
> parts. (p.36)

Newmann, King and Youngs (in Conzemius, 2001) observed that,

> A strong school professional community consists of (a) the staff sharing clear
> goals for student learning, (b) collaboration and collective responsibility among
> staff to achieve the goals, (c) professional inquiry by the staff to address the
> challenges they face, and (d) opportunities for staff to influence the school's
> activities and policies. (Chapter 1, Putting the Pieces Together Section,¶ 1)

Resource Coordinating Teachers have the opportunity to attend regular professional development sessions and they are encouraged to share the information that they receive

with the members of their school staff. Through the analysis of the questionnaires and the interviews with administrators it has become apparent that this is not yet occurring on a regular basis. Resource Coordinating Teachers need encouragement to develop professional learning communities within their schools so everyone feels a shared responsibility for student learning. It is understood that this can be difficult to do. Many of the questionnaires also indicated that teachers are feeling overburdened at the present time, so the expectation that they participate in professional learning communities may not be viewed in a positive light.

The other key area that must be examined is the supports that are in place for special needs students and teachers in inclusive settings. McLeskey (2000) discusses ways of providing resources to the classroom.

> This may be done in a number of ways, including adding a special education teacher for part of the day as collaborator (e.g., coteacher) with the general education teacher, providing the classroom teacher with an instructional assistant, or reducing class size (thereby giving the teacher more time to work with each student. (p.63)

Although most of the surveys and interviews indicated that at least the first two of these are occurring, they also indicated that neither is occurring to the degree that is making a significant difference in the education of the special needs students. Due to the number of students requiring extra assistance, there is just not enough help to go around. Reducing class sizes has recently become a government platform, but as yet nothing along these lines is occurring in the classrooms. Teachers and administrators repeatedly expressed their frustration at having too much to do in too little time.

The most significant form of administrative support is providing collaboration time for teachers. The value of building collaboration time into the schedule is that it shows administrative support for collaboration (Mamlin, 1999; Morgan and Demchak, 1998). Planning time for collaboration is occurring in schools that have enough personnel to provide coverage for teachers. Principals frequently act as a facilitator so that teachers can have collaboration time. However, this is not an ideal solution due to the demands on the principal to perform administrative duties or the need for them to be away from the building for meetings.

Once schools have adopted a culture of inclusion and have ensured that the necessary supports are in place, best practices should be examined on an ongoing basis. As they move forward "the inclusive teacher focuses on removing obstacles, providing materials, and emotional support, taking care of management details that make learning easier and possible, sharing in the comradeship of the experience, celebrating success, and then together identifying new worthy destinations" (Pepneck-Joyce, 1999, p. 28). Pursuing a model of best practice–professional learning communities, collaboration, and necessary supports-often leads to higher student achievement. "Together these factors give schools and teachers the tools they need to develop and sustain methods for improving curriculum and instruction in a continuous improvement cycle" (Conzemius, 1999, Putting the Pieces Together Section, ¶ 3). The questionnaires and interviews did not ask participants to reflect on the future of their inclusive practices as the changes that are occurring are new to them. At this time, the frustrations of coping with the new reality are clearly being expressed in terms of the need for more time and support to implement

the changes. However, administrators and teachers should be aware of what the next step should be.

To sum up, the perceptions of the Resource Coordinating Teachers generally laud administration's efforts on behalf of inclusion for students with special needs. Administrators have embraced a philosophy of inclusion and have introduced support in the form of efficient use of available personnel and examining effective instructional strategies. These are important first steps but administrators must continue to assess the success of inclusive practices. The program requires improvement in the areas of teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, the availability resources at the school and district level and more meaningful professional development. As schools look to the future of inclusive education, they must be willing to implement meaningful changes in their schools. Students with special needs are first, students; they should, according to teachers and administrators, be welcomed into an atmosphere of caring adults who are willing to expand their practice, strive for improvement and show the diligence required to help not only students with special needs, but for the betterment of all students in the school community.

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Appendix A
Questionnaire

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses will be invaluable in providing information regarding programming for special needs students within our school district. Please answer each question according to the knowledge you have of your own work situation. Please expand on your responses by making comments where appropriate.

1. What is your position? (Check more than one if appropriate)
   [ ] Learning Support Teacher   [ ] Resource Support Teacher
   [ ] Resource Coordinating Teacher   [ ] Other _____

2. What grade levels does your school encompass?
   [ ] Kindergarten – grade 6   [ ] Grade 7 – 9
   [ ] Kindergarten – grade 9   [ ] Grade 10 – 12
   [ ] Other _____

3. How long have you held your position? _____ years

4. What is the delivery method of support for students with learning disabilities at your school?

   [ ] full inclusion
   [ ] pull-out program
   [ ] combination of pull-out and inclusion
   [ ] Other _____

5. Indicate with a √ which strategies are being used to support inclusion at your school.

   [ ] Aide time
   [ ] Learning Support Teacher in the classroom
   [ ] Resource Coordinating Teacher in the classroom
   [ ] Classroom teacher only
   [ ] Other _____

6. To what degree do the administrators support inclusion?
   [ ] Fully support   [ ] Does not support
   [ ] Support, with reservations   [ ] Other _____

7. To what degree do the teachers support inclusion?

   [ ] Fully support   [ ] Do not support
   [ ] Support, with reservations   [ ] Other _____

8. Who is the key decision maker for learning disabled students within your school?

   [ ] administration
   [ ] Resource Coordinating Teacher
   [ ] Classroom teacher
   [ ] Team approach, consisting of _____
   [ ] Parents
   [ ] Other _____

9. Indicate with a √ which of the following supports are provided or facilitated by school administration.

   [ ] aide time   [ ] smaller class size
   [ ] extra prep time for teachers   [ ] managing conflict with parents
   [ ] managing conflict with teachers   [ ] planning for inclusion
   [ ] minimal classroom disruptions   [ ] creating a culture of acceptance
   [ ] communication with parents   [ ] involving the student in program decision

   Please expand on any of the above items.

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

10. What types of professional development related to inclusion are teachers in your school participating in?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

11. What do you feel are the most effective strategies for supporting students with learning disabilities in your school?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Please comment on the successes of meeting the needs of learning disabled students in your school.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Please comment on the challenges in meeting the needs of learning disabled students in your school.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Please detach the following to indicate your consent to participate in this research. It will be kept separate from your questionnaire to ensure anonymity.

I, _____, consent to compete the questionnaire for the research project, "Special Education Administration: Perceptions of Current Practice."

_____   _____
Signature   Date

Appendix B
Letter of Consent

Name of Coordinating Resource Teacher
October 22, 2003

Dear _____,

I am presently working to complete my Masters project at the University of Lethbridge. The title of my research is Special Education Administration: Perceptions of Current Practice. I am interested in creating a picture of what the administration in schools is doing to support programming for special needs students. This will benefit teachers and administrators by highlighting successful school practices and offering recommendations in the areas of need.

Thank you for responding to [Instructional Services Department Personnel] e-mail asking for interested participants in my research project.

I realize that your schedule is a busy one and that your time is valuable, but I am sure that you understand the value in commenting on the programs for special needs students in operation within your school. Your response will be kept completely confidential, I will not ask for any identifying information. I will ask you to sign and detach the consent portion of your questionnaire to indicate your cooperation. The results of the study will be shared with the Instructional Services Department. You may obtain the results of the study by contacting me upon the completion of my project in the spring of 2004. The information gathered may be used to make presentations to interested school district personnel. At a future date, it may also be used to support a written article or to give presentations. You have the right to ask questions about the data you have given me or to withdraw your questionnaire within two weeks of filling it out.

Dr. R. Bright, who can be reached at (403) 329----- is supervising this project. If you have questions regarding human subjects' approval, they can be directed to Dr. Cathy Campbell at (403) 329----- or through e-mail at cathy.campbell@uleth.ca.

Thank you in advance for your participation in this questionnaire. If you have any questions, I can be reached at Cardinal Newman School at 257-----. I look forward to your feedback through the questionnaire.

Sincerely,

Sheelagh Olson

Appendix C
Question-by-Question Response

1. What is your position?

Learning Support Teacher	8
Resource Support Coordinating Teacher	19
Resource Support Teacher	11
Other	6

2. What grade level does your school encompass?

Kindergarten – grade 6	10
Kindergarten – grade 9	11
Grade 7 – 9	2
Grade 10 – 12	1
Other	2

3. How long have you held your position?

One year	7
Two years	9
Three years	3
Four years	3
Five years	2
Seven years	7

4. What is the delivery method of support for students with learning disabilities at your school?

Full inclusion	2
Pull-out program	0
Combination of pull-out and inclusion	22
Other	2

5. Indicate with an X which strategies are being used to support inclusion at your school.

Aide time	23
Learning Support Teacher in the classroom	22
Resource Coordinating Teacher in the classroom	20
Classroom teacher only	3
Other	8

6. To what degree do the administrators support inclusion?

Fully support	18
Support, with reservations	7
Does not support	0
Other	1

7. To what degree to the teachers support inclusion?

Fully support	3
Support, with reservations	21
Does not support	8
Other	1

Note: This does not total 26 because some respondents picked more than one answer.

8. Who is the key decision maker for learning disabled students within your school?

Administration	2
Resource Coordinating Teacher	2
Classroom Teacher	1
Team approach, consisting of . . .	23
Parents	2
Other	1

Note: Once again, some respondents chose more than one answer to best describe their situation.

9. Indicate with an X which of the following supports are provided or facilitated by school administration.

Aide Time	23
Extra prep time for teachers	10
Managing conflict with teachers	13
Minimal Classroom disruptions	10
Communication with parents	17
Smaller class size	2
Managing conflict with parents	16
Planning for inclusion	11
Creating a culture of acceptance	19
Involving the student in program decisions	6

Note: Questions 10 – 13 were open questions. The responses were categorized. The following tables show the categories created by the researcher and the number of responses received is indicated.

10. What types of professional development related to inclusion are teachers in your school participating in?

Differentiated Instruction	12
Working on IPP's	11
Individual interests/personal communication	8
Professional learning communities	5
School Resource Team meetings	4

11. What do you feel are the most effective strategies for supporting students with learning disabilities in your school?

Planning and adapting to various learning styles	21
Small group instruction	20
Adequate personnel	18
Collaboration	11
Teacher expertise	6
Professional development	2
Self advocacy	1

12. Please comment on the successes of meeting the needs of learning disabled students in your school.

Collaboration	18
Attitudes	17
Variety of Instruction	15
Support	11
Negative Comments	14

13. Please comment on the challenges in meeting the needs of learning disabled students in your school.

Personnel/Support	24
Attitudes	23
Class composition	15
Time	14
Professional Development	6

Appendix D
Interview Questions

1. What is the level of support for inclusion from the administration of the school? From the teachers?

2. What supports has administration put into place to facilitate the inclusion of special needs students? How are the supports accomplished? (Will let them refer to the list of supports suggested in the teacher questionnaire).

3. What are some of the successes that you have had in providing inclusion for students with special needs?

4. What are some of the challenges you have meeting the needs of special education students?

5. Who plans professional development around the issue of inclusion and special needs students? What types of professional development in the area of inclusion are presently occurring?

With reference to question 2.

This is a list of possible ways that administration can facilitate or support inclusion within their school setting.

[ ] aide time   [ ] smaller class size
[ ] extra prep time for teachers   [ ] managing conflict with parents
[ ] managing conflict with teachers   [ ] planning for inclusion
[ ] minimal classroom disruptions   [ ] creating a culture of acceptance
[ ] communication with parents   [ ] involving the student in program decision