

**ISSUES OF INCLUSION: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TEACHER
ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSION AND TEACHER PRACTICE**

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Abstract

British Columbia's schools are mandated to serve all students. Educators must ensure that all students have equal access to learning and full participation in schools. While government policy can order inclusion, the ways in which policy is brought to practice differ considerably. Individual teachers, in particular, using beliefs and talents in ways and proportions which are unique and personal, effect the philosophy of inclusion in different ways and to varying degrees. Importantly, there is a notable, yet oft over-looked, gap between teachers' professional judgments on how to teach to diverse learning abilities and public perceptions of what should happen in schools. The resulting situation for teachers is a contradiction: they support a philosophy of inclusion, yet squarely bear the burden of difficulties in implementation. Qualitative data collected from individual interviews and focus group discussions conducted with a small group of northern BC school teachers is presented in this project. The results show that while including children with behavioural special needs in mainstream classrooms may present many challenges, success may be realised through positive and hopeful professional practice. The results also show that in addition to providing a system for inquiry, action research can provide an opportunity for professional communication and growth.

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Introduction

The goals and outcomes of education are varied and complex. Different teachers, influenced by different schools of thought and different belief systems, will express different outcomes and goals for their schools and classrooms. In turn, the selected goals may determine the teaching methods chosen and individual definitions of effective teaching.

Treder, Morse and Ferron (2000) present the following recapitulation of the different goals of education characterizing the various schools of thought:

- assisting students in reaching their full potential
- shaping students to be useful members of society
- producing responsible, self-sufficient citizens
- creating problem-solvers and critical thinkers
- imparting knowledge to students. (p. 207)

It is postulated that the priority teachers place on each of these educational goals will shape their resulting teaching practice. Understanding and greater appreciation for the experiences of teachers maintaining inclusive classrooms under varied circumstances from classroom to school to district is the underlying goal of the research. Through literature review, individual and focus group interviews, and an examination of my own experiences, attitudes, and beliefs, I hope to gain a broader understanding of these circumstances, and helpful classroom interventions for disruptive students.

Chapter One Research Question and Study Purpose

As long as I can remember, I have always wanted to be a teacher. Even though the reasons I wished to teach, and the reasons that motivate and compel me to continue teaching have changed, my desire to make a positive impact upon children's lives remains true. At the same time, there have been experiences and trying times which have significantly affected my thinking, behaviour, and teaching, in ways both beneficial and harmful.

Throughout my career I have been drawn to children with the ability to fill a classroom with their personality and leave their mark on it, for better or for worse. In retrospect, my own childhood classroom persona would have been more closely likened to a wallflower than to any such robust figure. And, while many experiences have stretched my range and I am very comfortable in front of the classroom - in a staff meeting, or leading an assembly - there are times when I would simply rather blend in than stand out. I continue to be fascinated by those with such apparent natural courage or abandon, especially in group situations. It seems, unfortunately, that classrooms and educational outcomes favour those who are able to wade in and adjust to the current, rather than those who oppose it.

It has become evident to me - as a student, teacher and parent - that what children believe about themselves is more important in determining their behaviour than any facts about them. I wondered how beliefs impact educators. How do beliefs about children, learning, and the education system affect the actions and practices of teachers?

A couple of months after I had begun my research for this project, a boy was moved into my classroom from another because he was experiencing behavioural difficulties and was disturbing the learning environment. It was thought by the principal that a fresh start in another room might be a good idea. The boy's mother and elementary school counsellor concurred, and during the first week of November he was moved into my room. Both the counsellor and principal praised me and my classroom practices and

said that the structured environment they've seen in my classroom would be just what was necessary. No one elaborated on what the specific behaviours were nor what the cause or triggers might be. At the time, I thought that they were blaming his current teacher, in a roundabout way, for the student's difficulty, but quickly put that aside. I chose instead to focus on integrating this new student into my classroom, already very much in progress. Part of me wished to prove my classroom practices as consistent and structured as they were perceived.

Despite the fact that the bulk of my ten years teaching experience has included many students with challenging behaviour and that for the past six years I have been working at a school with a reputation for being tough, I was in no way prepared for the life ride I was about to take. Perhaps, because my research was so intensely focussed on an area of education which, at the same time, was giving me such emotional angst, the result was deep professional soul-searching.

Human behaviour is complex and the theories describing behaviour and social interactions are no less complicated. I have refused to believe that biological determinants or physical factors could ever be the sole cause for a social problem such as behaviour in students which is disruptive, impulsive, or aggressive. I have pulled away from convincing studies about personality and heredity because of a feeling that they ultimately blame groups of people for social problems: poverty, illiteracy, or criminality. As well, the impression that if something is hereditary and nothing can be done about it is disturbing. Yet, using language to describe children at-risk which ignores potential contributing factors and assumes that circumstances surrounding students are universal, does a disservice to students. At what point is educational support or intervention most appropriate and most likely to be successful? If you consider social learning theory and believe that cognitive, vicarious, and self-regulatory behaviour is best learned by observing others rather than through rewards or punishments, what types of support can you realistically offer and provide as a classroom teacher?

It is difficult to identify appropriate sources for support when the path down which you see a student quickly heading has a very dismal destination. It is also difficult to offer support, when it is likely to be rejected. Likewise, it is impossible to simply demand that supports be put into place. I have included excerpts from my own journal about a series of events which led me, through fear, anger, and confusion, to some new realisations and to hopefulness for the future.

Teacher Diary

Monday, March 11, 2002. There is a child in my class. He is known by students as a bully; he's charismatic and he uses his personality to get what he wants. He's around average in an academic sense in many respects, somewhat lower in others, particularly math and writing. However, verbal tasks are his strong suit. Negotiating, persuading, arguing, manipulating others, twisting stories to suit his purpose. He straight out lies, too. You know how most kids have tells when they lie? Shifting weight from foot to foot, looking around, hand wringing or nervous gestures. Well, he has none of that. I'm sure that his heart rate doesn't even elevate a beat.

Anyways, a social worker involved quite extensively with the family came to visit me at school one day after I'd called. He said that the whole family is this way. He said the entire situation is "acrimonious", that was his word, and that I should trust almost nothing described to be happening by anyone from this group of people. Trust what they do, not what they say. He went on to say that the games that this family has been playing for more than a decade literally were so spiteful, hurtful and ruthless that the children, two brothers in this family, needed to become survivors very early on.

Well, I guess they learned to get their needs for tangibles met when their needs for emotional closeness and attention simply couldn't be. I'd called The Ministry for Children and Families (MCF) one day when the boy in my class had

gone on quite extensively for the teacher's aide and myself about how he had broken his cat's tail with a steak knife after he'd wrapped her up in a blanket. He talked about her tail and how it now has a permanent bend in it.

For a child to hurt others and seek revenge as much as I've seen him do, I imagine some pretty atrocious behaviour and events have occurred. I guess that's the price of growing up in a home where alcohol and drugs are receiving more attention than the children.

About a month ago now, the younger boy, the one in my class, punched me in the face and split my lip. I could hear three boys arguing in the hallway and asked them to come into my room to sort out their problems. As we walked into the classroom, he turned, looked me in the eye, and as he said, "I just did this!", made a fist and hit me. He hit me pretty hard. I was shocked. He split my lip and it bled and it swelled and turned blue.

My first stunned reaction was that it must have been an accident because I couldn't figure out how I could have caused such action. He refused to talk about this immediately afterward and currently continues to show neither remorse nor improved judgement. The principal at my school tried to coerce him into apologizing to me the afternoon it happened. He had him cornered in the boot rack area, but gave up and finally let the student leave and left the building himself. I left the school without anyone talking to me about what had happened.

When I got home, my husband met me in the kitchen, took one look at my face and rather than embracing me, and asking me how my day was, asked what exactly had happened at school. I explained it to him and he immediately handed me the phone and said he felt I should talk to someone from my union.

When we set up the meeting for the Violent Incident Report (VIR), neither the boy nor his mother said sorry or expressed any kind of compassion for me in this situation at all. In fact, the morning of our meeting she came into my

classroom, full with my pupils, two teacher's aides, and a parent, and threatened to write me up on the advice of her legal advisor. By the time we came to the VIR meeting, I was beside myself with anxiety. I have had no support from my administrator. Some principals in our district hate VIRs. I guess it makes it a whole lot harder to sweep a problem under the rug then. We are advised to fill them out and submit them, but my principal definitely seemed cross with me.

I was feeling pretty vulnerable and confused. It has been pretty difficult. This child continues to be very difficult in my classroom. The recommendation from the Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) rep was that the student be reintegrated into the classroom following counselling and anger management. This child has still not made it into the counsellor's office. And the counsellor hasn't even come into my classroom to observe him. Whether this is because he's just so busy with other things or because of my principal's attitude about the whole thing, I don't know. After all, it's only a recommendation, according to my principal.

Monday, April 15, 2002. He received no sort of formal consequence and he didn't miss a single day to suspension or spend a single minute in detention. Nor did we ever come up with a plan for restitution or any kind of plan for rehabilitation. The mother was not expected to apologize or make amends in any way and neither was the child. So effective was this entire process, that today he threw/slid a chair across the floor at me. I also found out today that he threw one at a substitute teacher on Friday, too. Rather than coming to get this child, known to him to be high risk, the principal just sent a message and it was left to her, a virtual stranger, to get this child to him.

I was calling him over to talk to me following a student complaint that he had used the f-word. I was about to talk to him about it and his response was, "What the frig!?" and he grabbed the back of a chair which was between him and

me and half-threw / half-slid it on the floor pretty hard at me. I stepped out of the way and it crashed into the container bins on the shelf behind me. On the way out into the hallway he kicked the wall and left a great black mark. Eventually, I got him to the principal's office. The boy ran from the room and took off. I looked at my principal. He went after the student this time. I went back to class. I didn't see the student for the rest of that day. He left the school. He refused to listen to the principal. No consequences. He came back the next day like nothing had happened.

I carry all the risk. I carry the responsibility. I have to try to manage the unmanageable all the while being scrutinized by parents standing in the hallway and my co-workers who are frustrated and irritated with the behaviour they see and also have to deal with from this child. My boss, the administrative officer who has instituted all of the decisions about how this child is integrated into my classroom, barely has to interact with him. He doesn't have the stress of planning lessons and units and wondering how this particular student will respond. He doesn't regularly have to deal with a child who is physically violent and absolutely refuses to take direction from adults. And he doesn't have to face my class, the audience to all of this poor behaviour. And he certainly doesn't have to do a single thing to support me.

Thursday, May 2, 2002. Well, it's been about two months from the initial assault - that's what it was - assault. That's what it would be considered anywhere outside of school. What if I had put my hand up to defend myself? What if, God forbid, I had hit him back? I've thought about this situation a lot. Too much, according to my family members. I've replayed it. I've rehearsed different responses in my mind. I've searched web-sites across the internet. For some of my searches I have used words like "delinquency," "aggression," and "anger." For some of my searches I have used words which make it sound like a plea:

“discipline,” “help,” “teacher.” I’ve gone through feeling the depths of sadness. Sadness at not being supported by my administrator. Sadness at being painted as the wrong-doer in this incident. Sadness at feeling so unlikeable and unworthy of my position as teacher. I’ve spent a great deal of time blaming and questioning myself.

I have been praised for my classroom practice over the years. I have had parents, students, and other teachers tell me that they see that I have made a difference to children. I have now set out on a quest to research and talk to teachers about including children with disruptive behaviour in their classrooms. I feel like a complete imposter. I started this quest feeling like I knew some of the answers. I don’t even feel fit to talk about this topic. Now I am questioning my ability to teach, to reach this seemingly unreachable student, and my will and ability to make a difference. By now, I’ve now blamed myself, society, his mother, my administrator, and our entire educational system.

And yet after all of this internal struggle, I’ve come to accept, several weeks later, that all I really have control over is my response to these events that occur in my class and how to structure my class to minimize the impact of such events. The biggest thing I have to come to grips with is that this child is difficult to manage. Other people, including the mother he lives with, every teacher he’s ever had, and our administrator, have difficulty managing him. I’ve decided to take as much of a positive outlook as I can and readjust daily. Truly, there is not much that I have absolute control over. I was pretty taken aback and a couple of weeks have passed where I’ve still been in a great state of anxiety in the classroom. I plugged on and have decided to come to a winning place for me and for this student. I’ve faked confidence and happiness for a little while now and I think it’s starting to work. I’ve got the hand I’ve been dealt and I’ll play it out to the best of my ability. If nothing else, June is coming!

*I recently came across a little story and I keep it with me. Here it is:
A Native American grandfather was talking to his grandson about how he
felt. He said, "I feel as if I have two wolves fighting in my heart. One wolf
is the vengeful, angry, violent one. The other wolf is the loving,
compassionate one."*

The grandson asked him, "Which wolf will win the fight in your heart?"

The grandfather answered, "The one I feed."

*Well, sometimes, even now after all this time has passed, I catch myself throwing
steak to the wrong wolf. I know which one I have to take care of if my spirit is
going to survive in the classroom. I need to find peace. I need to find
understanding.*

*I have made it a conscious effort every day to be as positive as I can be. It
has helped. However, I am fearful at times that I will have an unexpected
situation arise and fearful that I will have no support or back-up from
administration. I am still angry with my principal. He hurt me. I am preparing
myself that something similar may, despite my best efforts, occur again. I feel very
sorry that this family hurts so badly. But I am also hurt and angry that I've been
pulled into their mess in this way. I feel exhausted from the turmoil.*

*If I could have one wish for one tiny part of this whole raft of events to be
different, I wish that my principal would have been the kind of person to say, "I
know this isn't your fault. You didn't mean this to happen. I hope that you're
okay." If he had said these words to me and expressed the same sentiment to the
mother it would have made a world of difference to all of these events and my
perception of them.*

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Biological Background

In mainstream culture, much is made lately of brain development and the roots of intelligence, including emotional intelligence. Products aimed at the improved growth and development of babies arrive daily on the market. These include a multitude of books, audio-tapes, video-tapes, music CDs, and educational toys. Some products include: *Lamaze: Infant Development System* (TM) toys, *Mozart Effect: Music for Babies* (TM) CD-set, *Baby Einstein* (TM) video, and the *Brain Smart* (TM) audio-tape. A trip to the television, newsstand, or internet newsgroup can produce documentaries, articles and magazines relating the importance of early life experiences. Some specialty titles include: *Gay Parent*, *Solo*, *Twins Magazine*, *Christian Parenting*, *Brain*, *Child: The Magazine for Thinking Mothers* and *Working Mother*. Standbys include: *Baby Talk*, *Child Magazine*, *Parents*, *Parenting*, and *Today's Parent*. This list doesn't include the news magazines, *Time* and *MacLean's*, nor the science magazines, *Discover* and *Scientific American*, which occasionally contain features about parenting, children, and medical research. Research continues to press into the areas of genetics and pre-birth influences for our newest generation of babies (Nash, 1997).

Once thought of as a passive developmental period, the span between conception and toddler-hood is now seen as an energy-intensive and critical period in a human being's development (Afifi & Bergman, 1999). Scientists have discovered, and twenty-first century parents repeatedly hear, that these first three years of life are critical (Lerner & Dombro, 2000). From birth, and even before, trillions of brain cells proliferate. An embryo's brain overproduces neurons and those whose pathways are not reinforced through stimulating activity, simply atrophy (Afifi & Bergman, 1999). After birth, in successive waves of brain cell growth, the axons and dendrites explode with new connections. Electrical activity, triggered by early life sensory experiences, determines which connections will be saved and which will be trimmed. Functional imaging studies

have shown that early stimulation enhances brain function, while lack of early stimulation leads to loss of brain function (Afifi & Bergman, 1999).

Our present understandings tell us that at about age ten, these growth spurts draw to a close and the equilibrium of synapse creation and destruction takes a drastic shift. At this point, only those pathways stimulated and transformed by the magic of experience will be retained (Nash, 1997). By the end of adolescence, at about age eighteen, only those talents and latent tendencies which have received nurture will remain, poised to flourish (Nash, 1997).

Developmental research has shown that there are developmental windows of opportunity for different brain functions. Thus, the window of opportunity for emotional development is birth to two years, mathematics and logic is birth to four years, language is birth to ten years, and music is three to ten years. These windows of opportunity if not utilized by parents and educators will lead to the impairment or loss of appropriate function. (Afifi & Bergman, 1999, *Windows of Opportunity*, para. 2)

Interaction between the maturing brain and the social environment is essential: “even if young people’s neurological development is sufficient to allow them to reach the stage of formal reasoning, they may never attain it if they are not encouraged culturally and educationally” (Papalia & Wendkos-Olds, 1990, p. 539).

Psychiatrists and educators have long recognized the value of early life experience. With increased technology, in the form of Positron Emission Tomography (PET) Scans and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI), the long-held intuitive and anecdotally supported beliefs of teachers are now being reinforced. At the same time, many culturally-perpetuated myths are being flushed out. These include the notion that moderate drinking during pregnancy is acceptable and valuable in helping pregnant mothers to relax and that nicotine exposure causes negligible influence on developing children. Similarly, maternal nutrition, drug use, chemical exposure, and viral infections

are being examined for their potential influence in the development of various disorders, such as epilepsy, mental retardation, autism and schizophrenia (Nash, 1997). As well, in the decade in which the Human Genome Project promises that all three billion bases in human DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) are to be sequenced, a continued focus on genetics is undoubtable (Nash, 1997).

Hoping to make changes to improve the lives of young children and their families, many early childhood educators are deeply involved in advocacy (Goffin & Lombardi, 1988). Early childhood educators are speaking out about such things as developmentally appropriate curriculum, programs, legislation, public education, and many issues facing young children, their families, and the early childhood profession. Educators work with children and their families daily and “experience firsthand the impact of changing circumstances such as unemployment, lack of child care, inappropriate curricula, and conflicts between work and family before decision makers are informed that these issues are new trends” (Goffin & Lombardi, 1988, p. 3). Attention has recently fallen on the availability and assurance of quality early child-care and preschool programs in British Columbia. However, in times of economic uncertainty, will dollars follow research findings in this long-term investment?

It is reassuring that research has also shown that the young brain is, to a degree, malleable (Perry, 2001). Well-designed preschool programs can help many children overcome deficits from their home environment. However, it is important to acknowledge that “by the age of three a child who is neglected or abused bears marks that, if not indelible, are exceedingly difficult to erase” (Nash, 1997, p. 49). Many Canadian child-development experts point to the urgent need to coordinate social agencies and bring services to impoverished rural and inner-city households. Although preschool programs in BC are advertised and subsidized for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, often the first regular and consistent contact these children receive from a

social institution begins when they arrive for the first day of kindergarten at our public schools.

Anthropological Background

The value society places on public education is highlighted through the examination of the literature pertaining to past and future directions of education. The volume of documents discussing the purpose, structure, and direction of schools is vast. In some ways, current education models seem to have grown directly from the history and past purposes of schools. In other ways, these models seem to rail against values and methods of the past. What is the best of possible future directions? An answer to this, unfortunately, seems to be elusively beyond the grasp of individual educators.

Stripped of media, shopping malls, mass culture, business interests, paychecks, governments, and advertising, what do we accept to be true about humanity? From a biological and anthropological perspective, evolution has provided humans with a “powerful toolkit of predispositions” (Abbot & Ryan, 2001, p. 33). This goes a long way in explaining our ability to learn language, cooperate successfully in social groups, think across problems, and empathize with others. Inheritance of these predispositions prepares individuals, with a range of skills, for navigating and interacting flexibly with their environment. It seems that this evolution of predispositions has progressed at varied rates over time. It is thought by anthropologists that there have been no major changes in at least the last 30,000 years (Curtis, Swisher, & Lewin, 2000).

Logically speaking, the brain development of early humans progressed in virtually the same manner it does today (Breedon, 1997). In fact, it was likely less influenced by environmental factors, such as food additives, environmental toxins, caffeine, and alcohol than it is today. Citing a 1996 Health Canada report, Streissguth (1997) describes *teratogens* as substances now known to damage and disrupt the developing embryo and fetus, particularly the brain and central nervous system. The main detrimental influence in primal times might well have been the level of health and

nutrition of the mother (Breedon, 1997). Anthropologists teach that early humans specialized in cooperation (Curtis, Swisher, & Lewin, 2000). *Homo sapiens* developed an early social structure more complex than that of baboons and less based on aggressiveness (Breedon, 1997). The continued success and survival of early humans was probably enabled by these early social elements.

Tool use, bipedalism, cortical development, language use, social nature and other traits made humans profoundly different from apes quite early on. The actual causes and effects may never be deduced....Still, it would be quite interesting if the use of cooperation as a strategy, was a fundamental cause in subsequent human developments. (Breedon, 1997, para. 6)

Like those of other highly intelligent primates and mammals, human life histories are marked by an extended period of juvenile dependence and by a social structure placing great investment in the raising of children. Indeed, the survival of tribal groups was linked to cooperation and communication and to the passing of these skills and abilities to successive generations (Breedon, 1997).

The inheritance of predispositions for learning language and social skills, sustaining an extended childhood through social cooperation, and the maintenance of the high rate of brain growth for a year after birth are all important factors which have contributed to human survival (Curtis, Swisher, & Lewin, 2000). Because of the brain's tripling in size between birth and adulthood, human gestation should be regarded as more than the nine months which occur in the womb (Abbot & Ryan, 2001).

Raising and teaching children would have become more crucial as techniques for survival in tribal groups became more complex. It may be for this reason, as speculated by anthropologists, that certain members of tribes were entrusted with passing the morality or shared learned behaviors of the group to its young (Breedon, 1997). In a similar way, schools continue to serve an important function in modern society. Human survival is still complex and the period of juvenile development lengthy.

From early human times, each tribe is representative of an experiment in survival. Be they vegetarian, flesh-eating or cannibalistic, monogamous or polygamous, matriarchal or patriarchal, social groups have perpetuated certain strategies for survival. Modern interpretation of these strategies, and evidence of such, is undoubtedly filtered through our current culture and widely accepted behavioural and social norms. Nonetheless, while humanity continues to be variable, human survival continues to depend on the cooperation of family or social groups, particularly in order to raise and educate the young.

With agriculture and the domestication of animals, an early human family form existed from perhaps two million years ago to about fifteen thousand years ago (Conway, 1997).

If the life of the human species to this moment in time were twenty-four hours, the primitive family form existed for twenty-three hours and forty-six minutes. The more modern family form, which culminates in today's nuclear family, emerged only fourteen minutes ago....If in our twenty-four hour life of the species, the monogamous, patriarchal family emerged fourteen minutes ago, the Industrial Revolution, which ushered in the modern industrial nuclear family, occurred less than two minutes ago (Conway, 1997, p. 9-11).

The Rise of Public Education

Of course, the raising and educating of the young has been successfully accomplished in a variety of forms through the course of human history. More recently however, wherever humans, particularly those of European origin, have gathered, the establishment of public schools has been an unrelenting endeavor despite expense. When the Royal Marines arrived with the first convict ships in Australia in the late 1700s, one of the first goals was to establish a method of ensuring "the shape of a future society and the necessary standards of the commonweal" (Saul, 2001, p. 20). This was accomplished through the building of public schools.

In another colonial settlement, Canada of the 1800s was made up largely of illiterate and poor farmers. Yet, due to the work and support of these farmers, public education, no small undertaking in any era, was made possible. Were they moved by the ideals of democracy and a desire for their children to be active participants of their new society? Did these early settlers simply wish their children to learn, to read and do maths? Did they need a structure for keeping their children actively and safely engaged through their lengthy period of juvenile development? Were they motivated by self-interest and desire for wealth?

History is a continual expression of the individual's desire to live in society. Individualism itself is the expression of our life with others. We see this in our social habits, in the way we organize ourselves, the way we live together, in our relationships. These *expressions* may require optimism, but that doesn't make them romantic. Optimism is an essential tool in social progress. To be sensible is not to be pessimistic. (Saul, 2001, p. 29)

It would then seem, as social optimists claim, that human nature tends towards cooperation and shared knowledge. Saul (2001) points out that "every day most people are seeking how to take human relations beyond isolation and beyond self-interest" (p. 23).

Inclusion

In social terms, inclusion "means removing barriers and providing supports in order to allow individuals with disabilities to participate in all aspects of life to the best of their abilities" (Voices for Children, Fact Sheet #18: Children With Special Needs, 1999, para. 8). From an educational perspective, inclusion refers to and encompasses a movement in society and education that effects teaching strategies, teacher beliefs, classroom structure, materials, curricula, integration of support agencies, and school reform. Because it emerged as a narrow notion of social justice, it has also meant that "individuals are not restricted because of some unalterable traits" (Winzer & Mazurek,

2000, p. ix). Barnes and Lehr (1993) have put forth a definition of an *inclusive* school as one that is:

Structured to serve a wide range of students; the environment is flexible and organized to meet the unique needs of all students. In an inclusive school, everyone belongs, is accepted, supports, and is supported while having individual education needs met. (p. 82)

Proponents of inclusion argue that all children need and deserve a sense of belonging in their communities for self-esteem and healthy child development. According to Stainback (2000), the research shows that being with other children helps children with disabilities to learn social skills. It is also believed that by being included, individuals learn to lead active and independent lives (Stainback, 2000). Others claim a social benefit for all children of inclusive classrooms: greater awareness, sensitivity, and compassion. Vandercook and her colleagues found that “inclusion has an effect on the other children’s academic learning by increasing awareness of their own capabilities and respect for themselves and others, which affects the learning climate and susceptibility to learning” (1991, p. 1). After all, inclusion is a basic human right (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000).

School reform, which includes the endless debate about inclusion, is an inexhaustible issue for media, governments, parent and other interest groups, education critics, and academics alike. According to Winzer and Mazurek, (2000) “such an unrelenting assault on the content, processes, and outcomes of schooling has elevated school reform to a major movement for all levels and for all populations” (p. ix). At a time when public schools such as those in BC are now host to greater linguistic and cultural diversity than ever before, it is increasingly difficult to confirm the true purpose both of reform and of the school system. Nevertheless, according to BC Ministry Documents:

The purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy. (Ministry of Education, Student Assessment and Program Evaluation Branch, Province of British Columbia, 2000, p. 13)

Changing demographics have made concerns about access and equity “desperately more pressing” (Li, 1994, p. 132). Professionals, parents, and academics continue to question the effectiveness and structure of the delivery of special education programs within the confines of the mainstream classroom (Winzer & Mazurek, 2000). Some common concerns include: the relative value of integrated and segregated settings and the importance of enabling individuals to form their primary bonds with same-aged peers versus individuals with similar learning or behaviour issues and impairments (Voices for Children, Fact Sheet #18: Children With Special Needs, 1999).

Still, it seems the majority of British Columbia teachers do agree with the concept of including students with differences to the greatest possible degree.

Data were collected to ascertain teacher perspectives in the areas of: philosophy and practice; the availability of supports for integration; class composition; and dealing with aggressive and disruptive students....While most respondents philosophically support the concept of inclusion, they expressed disappointment and frustration at the difficulty of daily implementation. Respondents felt most strongly about what they considered the difficulty of meeting all student needs, limited resources, minimal supplies of modified or adapted curriculum resources, non-recognition of students with conditions such as Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, inadequate support from the Ministry of Education, and excessive paperwork. For many teachers, adequate time for effective implementation was not available. (Naylor, 2002, Executive Summary, para. 3)

One invariable concern is the manner in which the British Columbia government and local BC school districts support classroom teachers in maintaining inclusive classrooms, all the while addressing the extremely varied academic and social needs of the children in their charge. According to the directions initiated by the Year 2000 Primary Program in BC, the priority placement of each BC student continues to be in the regular classroom of each child's neighbourhood school with peers of like age (Ministry of Education, Program Development, Province of British Columbia, 1990). Only under rare and special circumstances are BC students retained in grade placements. Generally, students progress through the grades with their peers. As well, learning assistance support occurs, to the greatest extent possible and appropriate, in the regular classroom with minimal use of resource rooms or specialized settings (Ministry of Education, Program Development, Province of British Columbia, 1990).

The Primary Program "reflects current knowledge about early childhood development and learning along with new understandings of developmentally appropriate practice, and an increasing sensitivity to learner diversity" (Ministry of Education, Student Assessment and Program Evaluation Branch, Province of British Columbia, 2000, p. 17).

In terms of class composition, responses indicate that most teachers work in classrooms that integrate significant numbers of students with special needs, making integration an everyday norm of BC's schools. The data also provide evidence of considerable diversity in schools, with a wide range of students with special needs in many classrooms. They also present evidence that teachers believe that many more students with special needs are in schools, but are not recognized as such by Ministry designations. (Naylor, 2002, Executive Summary, para. 7)

Public schools now accommodate a broader spectrum of learning and social abilities and needs than ever before. It is due to teachers' work that inclusion has developed and continued to be possible. According to Naylor (2002),

(1) substantial progress has been made in terms of integrating students with special needs, but such progress is often unacknowledged, (2) some students' needs are not being met, while teachers' workload and stress has increased, and (3) teachers believe that there are many more students with special needs in BC schools than are recognized by the Ministry of Education. At a time of considerable change in BC's educational system, the future of implementing inclusionary policies is problematic, as government forces changes to collective agreements and introduces legislation that will negatively impact educational services to many students with special needs. This report indicates that teachers in June of 2001 did not believe that the implementation of inclusionary policies was adequately supported in ways that met students' needs. Both classroom and resource teachers stated that their workload and stress levels have increased because they are left to cope in an inadequately funded system with low levels of support. If that was the case in June 2001, then further reductions of support for integration are almost certain to result in even greater workload and higher stress for teachers in the coming years. (Executive Summary, para.10-12)

How can we marry this system of inclusion to the vision of a system driven by bell-curves and comparison grading? What are the indicators of a successful and credible school system when the student population is so varied?

For those not actively involved with the education system or their child's classroom, today's school life may be somewhat of a mystery. For some, the indelible images of their past childhood perspectives may comprise their timeless understandings of education and the classroom. However, the view the public holds and governments perpetuate is often opposed to what is the day-to-day experience of teachers and

principals on the frontline of education delivery. This is because headlines and cover stories in the news focus on single issues and frame them as either black or white. Unfortunately, most teachers do not or cannot articulate their experience of such false dichotomies.

Teachers focus not on explaining why the rules of the game should be changed, but rather on maximizing the test scores of their children. Bonus pay is increasingly related to one thing - improving test scores. Teachers see it in their interest to play the game of education as the rules tell them they should. For those teachers who do point out that they are actually limited in how much they can do for children by factors outside the school their reward is to be dismissed by political leaders as belonging to what the prime minister Tony Blair calls *the culture of excuses* [italics added]. (Abbot & Ryan, 2001, p. 19)

Prescribed learning outcomes now clearly outline what is to be taught for each grade and subject area. As well, BC Performance Standards, rubrics and samples of student work with which to compare the work of our own students, inform our assessments. In turn, Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests are now conducted annually in various subjects in grades four, seven, and ten. The results of these tests are reviewed in the development of annually submitted school growth plans. Schools are encouraged to compare the current year's results with the previous year's results. Included in the annual review is how well the individual school performed on the tests compared to other schools in the district and compared with other schools and districts in the province. Additionally, the Fraser Institute maintains a website and makes available these results for the media to publish and report.

It can be very demoralizing when one teaches at a school with a high enrollment of children who are impoverished not only financially, but socially, emotionally, and academically. Amidst the din of “we need to spend more time learning the basics...!” and “back when I was in school...!”, the odd teacher squeaks, “but I teach children, not

curricula.” As well, it can make teachers feel poor at their jobs, when in fact some of the best teaching, nursing, counselling, social work, and probably police and probation work, too, is going on within the walls of the schools with the most abysmal FSA test scores. To articulate the discrepancy between good teaching and good test scores, especially when confronted with the crisp bar graphs and rating scales of the Fraser Institute, seems to many teachers like scrambling for excuses.

According to Peter Cowley (2002), Director of School Performance Studies at the Fraser Institute,

The Report Card is widely published so that everyone with an interest in an individual school can see the results. Parents, who previously had little information upon which to base discussion with teachers and school administrators, use the Report Card as a starting place to discuss improvement....More and more now, parents can choose from among several schools for their children. They need to know how each school is doing so that they can make a good decision. The Report Card is one place they can turn to. The Report Card is also an aid to school improvement. By making evidence publicly available on how schools are doing, it encourages administrators and teachers to focus on areas where they can improve. (Cowley, 2002, Why the Report Card is Important, para. 8)

Claudia Hepburn (1999), Director of Education Policy at the Fraser Institute, summarizes Canadian education from a global context as,

Inefficient and inadequate: 33 percent of Canadian high-school graduates are functionally illiterate; 27 percent of Canadian adolescents drop out of high school with no diploma. The academic achievement of our students is mediocre compared to that of their peers in other countries. Public-opinion polls show that confidence in our system is at a 30-year low. If it is not to become obsolete, Canadian education needs to be redesigned.

Over the past 30 years, our Ministries of Education have tinkered with a variety of reforms, including smaller class sizes and higher salaries, in an effort to improve the public education system. In doing so, they have tripled the real cost of education. Despite their variety and expense, these reforms have failed to improve student achievement, and failed to solve the problem of mounting public frustration with the education system. (Executive Summary: Canadian Education in a Global Context, para. 1-2)

This view starkly contrasts with the spirit with which reforms introduced with BC's Year 2000 Program continue to be implemented and maintained by schools. These initiatives include inclusion and continuous progress of students with their same-aged peers rather than progress based on academic achievement (Ministry of Education, Program Development, Province of British Columbia, 1990). It is teachers who struggle to maintain these initiatives considered by many to be basic human social rights. And it is teachers who keep in check, for each of their students, human rights and personal safety.

Linda Darling-Hammond - based on her research into the tensions among assessment, accountability, and student achievement - offered this insight:

We have an inexplicable love affair with testing. We know that quality teachers are essential and that punitive tests don't work, yet many policy-makers still believe that if you scare students and teachers enough, students will learn more. Fear has no place in education. People learn well when taught well. (Norman, 2000, para. 1)

Embedded in the comments by Fraser Institute Administrators, Cowley and Hepburn, are two important perceptions about education in BC and Canada. Firstly, they allude to the growing belief that all BC parents have a right to and should choose schools for their children. Of course, this means that parents, who have the wherewithal and desire to choose, will do so. Those who cannot or do not, will likely allow their children to remain at their neighbourhood school. And, based on public-will, certain schools could

be closed. Secondly, they suggest a very one-sided, albeit very polished, view of determining the success and worth of a school and its community. Out of this seemingly very democratic system, the most likely result is that the top schools will become increasingly elitist and the bottom schools increasingly inclusive.

It is also likely, with the current trend into reduced district budgets, that the inclusion of children with learning and behavioural special needs will change in some ways. Smaller budgets may mean more children in each classroom, including children with academic and behavioural special needs, and reduced administrative and special education support. This is unfortunate since, even under the best of conditions, what it takes to make an inclusive classroom work is often elusive.

Parents of children with disabilities cannot take for granted that their child will be educated at their local school and many will have to fight for this if this is what they want. Despite the fact that there is greater acceptance of the idea of inclusion, there are not always the supports in place, or teacher willingness and ability to make it work. Current cuts to education funding pose a threat to the education of many children with special needs. (Voices for Children, Fact Sheet #18: Children With Special Needs, 1999, para. 7)

Thus, educational victories for those who desire successful inclusion will continue to be hard-won, while the definition and delivery of these programs will continue to be subject to change.

The January 2002 teachers' contract legislated by the BC government has obliterated language which once guarded many working and learning conditions in BC classrooms. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) will continue to monitor the consequences of increased class size, removal of staffing ratios, removal of the limit of students identified with special needs by the Ministry in each classroom, and the de-targeting of funds for high-incidence special education students. In 2001, a research team - using the *BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education* - began

investigating classroom conditions (Naylor, Kuehn, Schaefer, & Field, 2002). The first set of surveys recorded a baseline of classroom conditions in the province. These surveys will continue to collect data about classrooms, working conditions, and teacher philosophy and practice regarding the inclusion and integration of students with special needs. How the new legislation in BC will impact budgets and staffing ratios at the individual school level remains to be seen and felt. It is expected, however, that the composition of BC classrooms will change dramatically as early as the 2002-2003 school year.

Children With Disruptive Behaviour Disorders

A continuing discussion in this arena of special education and inclusion is the degree to which behavioural disorders are accepted within a special needs classification. Disruptive behaviour disorders can include such conditions as socially maladjusted, juvenile delinquent, anxious and withdrawn (including phobias and depression), conduct disorder (CD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), and attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). With *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* (DSM-IV, 1994) has come the addition of a section *Disruptive Behaviour Disorders* and diagnostic criteria for conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder. Attention deficit disorder and attention deficit with hyperactivity disorder were previously included but, with the DSM-IV, attention deficit disorder is currently differentiated in three subtypes: predominantly inattentive type, predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type, and combined type. These are again differentiated, as are conduct and oppositional defiant disorder, by onset: childhood or adolescence. With both conduct disorder and oppositional defiant disorder there is a high co-morbidity with attention deficit disorder and characteristic short attention span. Interestingly, the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems* (ICD-10) published by the World Health Organization, includes a

characterization of conduct disorders as “repetitive and persistent patterns of dissocial, aggressive or defiant conduct” (Kaplan & Saddock, 1998, p. 1202).

Since Hippocrates introduced the terms *mania* and *hysteria* to describe forms of mental illness, different many different classification systems have been developed. Of those used in BC schools today, DSM-IV, DSM-IVr, and the ICD-10 share some basic features that give a broad perspective to practitioners: description of the manifestations of disorders, diagnostic criteria, systematic descriptions which include associated features of disorders: specific age, cultural and gender-related features, prevalence, incidence, and risk, course of disorder/disease, complications, predisposing factors, familial pattern, differential diagnosis, and diagnostic uncertainties.

However, the introduction of disruptive behavioural disorders as a classification in these manuals is relatively recent. Practitioners, psychiatrists, doctors, and teachers alike have long struggled with the definition of mental health and normality. For a long time, mental health has been thought of and defined as the absence of glaring evidence of mental illness. Kaplan and Saddock (1998) refer to Offer and Sabshin’s 1984 work to give four perspectives of normality: normality as health, normality as utopia, normality as average, and normality as process (p. 18).

In normative studies, normality as average, the mathematical principle of the bell-shaped curve is applied to human behaviour. In this sense, the extremes are seen as the distal points on a spectrum of behaviours and all variations in between find their position on the distribution or curve. Some argue that classified disorders are simply points on the broad spectrum of human temperament and behaviour. Indeed, our classrooms are host to the wide range of behaviours present in the population of our community.

The DSM-IV lists many conditions associated with aggression including: “ADD, ADHD, conduct disorders, and childhood antisocial behaviour to name but a few” (Kaplan & Saddock, 1998, p. 155). It also includes a list of predictors of dangerousness to others:

High degree of intent to harm, presence of a victim, frequent and open threats, history of loss of control, chronic anger, hostility and resentment, enjoyment in watching or inflicting harm, lack of compassion, self-view as victim, resentful of authority, childhood brutality or deprivation, decreased warmth and affection in home, early loss of parent, fire setting, bed-wetting, cruelty to animals, and prior violent acts. (Kaplan & Saddock, 1998, p. 155)

Unfortunately, it seems that the best predictor of future behaviour is prior behaviour, especially in the absence of constructive intervention efforts. According to Meyer and Evans (1989), there are many non-aversive approaches to designing behavioural intervention plans and it is important to distinguish such plans from crisis management. As well, some interventions must be consistently executed to be effective (Meyer & Evans, 1989).

One of the secondary problems with aggressive behaviours is that because peers and teachers become wary of the aggressive behaviour of the student, avoidance behaviour occurs that could further restrict opportunities for positive social interaction. (Meyer & Evans, 1989, p. 25)

Violence In Schools

While many theoretical perspectives on aggression exist, research shows that “most adults with and without mental disorders who commit aggressive acts are likely to do so against people they know, usually family members” (Kaplan & Saddock, 1998, p. 156). This is good and bad news for teachers in the school system. Most research shows that the risk of students perpetrating crime against teachers is relatively low. However, collaborative research conducted by Simon Fraser University (SFU) and the BCTF; of violent acts in schools, shows that some level of risk does exist (Naylor, 1999).

Violence is defined in SFU/BCTF’s survey instrument as “any threatened, attempted, or actual harm to a person or persons” (Naylor, 1999, The Definition and

Nature of Violence sec., para. 1). This is consistent with the BC Workers' Compensation Board (WCB) definition, which defines violence in the workplace as,

The attempted or actual exercise by a person, other than a worker, of any physical force so as to cause injury to a worker, and includes any threatening statement or behaviour which gives a worker reasonable cause to believe that the worker is at risk. (Naylor, 1999, The Definition and Nature of Violence sec., para. 2)

The key finding from this report is that violence in schools appears to be predominantly reactive rather than planned and executed.

Respondents of the SFU/BCTF survey were asked to report whether or not they had been subjected to each of 13 types of violence from name-calling to physical attack with a weapon, and how frequently. Fifty percent of respondents experienced some form of violence in the 1997-1998 school year, and 81% reported having experienced some form of violence during their careers (Naylor, 1999). Prevalence and violence were inversely related: the less serious the violence, the more common its occurrence.

According to the study,

93% of violent incidents occurred in school, and most (60%) occurred during regular classroom activities or when the teacher was managing classroom behaviour. 4% of the total violence took place in portable classrooms, and 8% of incidents occurred during a parent/guardian interview. Poor lighting conditions, uncontrolled building access, and isolated working conditions (e.g., portable classrooms) were associated with higher risks of violence. (Naylor, 1999, Situational Characteristics sec., para 1)

A certain level of mistrust continues to exist between unions and management with regard to reported perceptions, beliefs, and incidents of school violence (Naylor, 1999). Indeed, the *BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education* will continue to collect data related to many aspects of inclusion, including aggressive and disruptive students in the classroom.

In 1995, The Solicitor General of Canada's Corrections Branch contracted the preparation of a report to examine the nature of school-based violence prevention policies and programs nation-wide. The first part of the study involved discerning the nature of school-based violence. The second was to look at the ways school boards were responding. It involved the participation of 116 school boards. The major findings of the study concluded that to be effectively pro-active against violence, school districts should have:

(1) Policies in place which are *internally consistent*, that is, each of the violence prevention policy statements should be logically related to one another, (2) board policies which are congruent with the violence prevention programs operating within each of its schools, (3) policies which are comprehensive and multi-faceted programs, (4) policies with a community focus, (5) supplemental programs, which are supportive and corrective rather than punitive, demoralizing, and inflexible, for students who are aggressive and violent and (6) violence prevention solutions which address the root causes of violence: biological, familial, environmental, social, and academic factors which place a child at risk. (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995, p. 1)

Clearly, the development and implementation of violence prevention policies and programs needs to occur by design rather than be left to be spontaneous, haphazard and sporadic (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995). As well, it is absolutely critical in determining appropriate solutions to youth violence, that an understanding of the causal factors associated with the development of aggressive and antisocial behaviour be sought. This includes the following associated features: impulsiveness, poor self-control, hyperactivity, and noncompliance (Day, Golench, MacDougall, & Beals-Gonzalez, 1995).

At the White House Conference on Early Years Learning in 1997, Hollywood director and actor, Rob Reiner, spoke:

If we want to have a real significant impact, not only on children's success in school and later on in life, healthy relationships, but also an impact on reduction in crime, teen pregnancy, drug abuse, child abuse, welfare, homelessness, and a variety of social ills, we are going to have to address the first three years of life. There is no getting around it. All roads lead to Rome. (Abbot, Ryan, & Lawley, 2001, p. 46)

While Reiner is specifically describing the situation in the United States of America, it does parallel the situation in Canada. Likewise, the root causes of violence which exist in the American context are not unlike the causes in the Canadian situation.

Generally, when addressing the causes of violence and aggression, researchers attend to the following constellation of related and causal agents: biological, environmental, familial, social, and academic. There are also many theoretical perspectives on aggression including: instinct, drive, social learning, and neuroanatomical damage. Frustration and arousal due to pain, physiological arousal and sexual arousal, observational learning, disinhibition, desensitization, environmental factors such as pollution (noxious odours and chemicals), noise, and crowding, hormones, drugs, and other substances, neurotransmitters, and genetics are many of the examples of causes which researchers have been examining in relation to aggression (Kaplan & Saddock, 1998).

Statistics Canada (2001) research of the past decade has focussed on *the new Canadian family*. There is a wide diversity of families in Canada today. In 62% of two-parent families, both parents work full-time. The number of families with children under 12 in which parents are separated or divorced has tripled in the last 20 years. One child in five grows up in a family headed by one parent, usually the mother. More than half of single parents raise their families on incomes below the Statistics Canada low income cut-off point. Sroufe (1988) writes that a secure attachment relates to "the child's developing sense of inner confidence, efficacy, and self-worth and aspects of intimate

personal relationship (the capacity to be emotionally close, to seek and receive care, and to give care to others)” (p. 26).

The number of children living in poverty in Canada has increased by 58% between 1989 and 1995, to approximately 1.5 million or 21% of our children. Children living in poor circumstances are twice as likely to be born prematurely and with low birth weight. They also have a shorter life expectancy and face twice the risk of chronic health problems. If a child lives with a close, stable and supportive family, this provides important protective factors which mitigate the possible negative factors of a low income environment. (Voices for Children, Fact Sheet #1: The New Canadian Family, 1999, para. 8)

Children and Youth At Risk

There is some discussion in the literature about whether the term *at risk* should be applied to an individual, a group, or be designated as a societal characteristic. This has important implications for interventions and whether programs and policies should target high-risk groups or individuals who have demonstrated symptoms of risk. The literature consistently identifies the following characteristics of, or predictors for, the designation *at risk*: socio-economic status, broken home (parental absence), marital and familial discord, family stress and instability, exposure to violence, parent confrontational behaviour, parent criminality, parental alcoholism or other addictions, neurological damage in children (ie. Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, poor nutrition, stress, exposure to toxins), parent psychopathy, inconsistent discipline (ranging from discipline that is lax or neglectful, erratic, to overly harsh or punitive) and inconsistent care.

By failing to provide young children with the supportive and nurturing environments in which they can develop their predispositions toward social, collaborative and team-building skills, young children’s brains react with astounding speed and efficiency to the violent world they experience around them

by rewiring trillions of brain cells that literally create the chemical pathways for aggression. (Kotulak, 1996, p. 17)

Tremblay and Craig (1995) elaborate that “cognitive deficits of all kinds are associated with criminal behaviour” (p. 199). It seems that failure to foster a child’s skills, to provide a caring environment and to encourage social values, puts that child at increased risk for poor school performance and delinquency.

Youths who are strongly attached to their school and are doing reasonably well in school are less likely to become involved in crime. Difficulty in school and illiteracy are both factors associated with criminal behaviour among youth.

(National Crime Prevention Council, 2001, p. 4)

Future Policy Surrounding Children and Youth At Risk

As the country becomes aware of the need for prevention rather than correction, high quality early childhood education will be employed widely. (Weikart, 1989, p. 285)

Current investigation by the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) and the Canadian Education Statistics Council (CESC) as part of the Pan-Canadian Education Research Agenda (PCERA) has led to two symposia, one in 1999 and another in 2000, to explore the research and policy issues surrounding education of children who, for whatever reason, are at risk of not meeting the normal expectations of the education system. The specific goal of the 2000 symposium was to promote further research on children at-risk, so as to inform policies designed to provide appropriate educational programming for such children.

At the Pan-Canadian Education Research Symposium (2000) that focussed on Children and Youth at Risk, Normand Dube, a teacher from the Eastern Ontario School Board, opened his presentation with a short vignette depicting some of the realities of dealing with at-risk children and their parents (p. 34). Afterwards, he postulated that he, too, was at risk - a teacher at risk. He went on to point out that for many of his students

risk no longer exists, but that risk has taken the form of problems; real problems in real classrooms that teachers must deal with. His final point was that greater efforts and funding by ministries and departments of education need to go towards better informing teachers about the latest research in this area.

At the same symposium, Allen Zeesman, of Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), presented findings of the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth (NLSCY, 2000). In 1997, 1.2 million children in Canada between the ages of 0 and 11 (27.6%) were vulnerable as they showed at least one learning or behaviour problem (p. 5). Zeesman proposed the following interventions:

- (1) A series of planned and coordinated early intervention pilot programs, throughout Canada, with the main objective of reducing the variance of developmental outcomes among children as they enter school, (2) universal preschool monitoring of developmental outcomes, on a population basis instead of a diagnostic of the child, (3) improved access to childhood databases especially those children with families on social assistance, (4) the collection of holistic and development outcomes in schools so as to focus on how children are performing, and (5) a significant increase in the knowledge support for parents. (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 33)

While it is undeniable that parenting is of prime importance in mitigating all other possible risk factors, real changes in behaviour and attitude cannot simply be forced upon individuals. As well, “holistic and development outcomes” have long been in place in BC schools. A decade of practice with Integrated Resource Packages (IRPs) and three years with BC’s Performance Standards show that this on its own is obviously not enough. Teachers already are, and have been so for some time, focussed on “how children are performing.”

Most children receive their first opportunity for regular and consistent contact with programs and services when they arrive on the first day of kindergarten at their

neighbourhood school. This is the situation for most children, despite their degree of vulnerability. What can we do to reduce the variance of developmental outcomes before children enter our schools? As well, not all children at-risk are from families receiving “social assistance funding.” The proposed invasive monitoring of social assistance recipients may be received as inflammatory and, in fact, cause more cracks for children at-risk to fall through.

Dr. Alan King from Queen’s University has studied exclusion and reintegration of alienated students. His findings showed that “regardless of social class, at-risk students come from homes where they do not feel comfortable” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 33). He went on to elaborate that schools were “not serving the function of reintegrating these students as they are further alienating them by judging students and by not providing adequate programming in response to their needs” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 33). Schools need to provide a broader range of recovery programs, including upgrading, retraining, and alternate school options, and to provide “a community that students can be part of” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 33). Importantly, “the home cannot keep pushing students out,” King stated, “the role of parents in addressing the at-risk issue is pivotal” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 33). Structural changes must first occur in the home.

In his wrap-up of the same symposium, Dr. Levin concluded that all stakeholders need to focus on the situations that create risk rather than predicting individuals’ outcomes, as ability to do so is really quite poor (Statistics Canada, 2000). He was careful to underline that the most important understanding to be addressed in the two-day event was that risk may really be a characteristic of situations, not of individuals. He also highlighted that schools are part of both the solution and the problem. Unfortunately, schools cannot single-handedly solve all social problems. He said that “we are caught in an ecology all of which needs to be considered at the same time” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 36). In summary, Levin suggested that the mandate of schools must be expanded to consider not only the needs of children, but also those of their families and

communities. People who work in schools may need to begin to recognize that they, importantly, are providers of necessary respite for families, local homeowners, and community businesses (Statistics Canada, 2000).

Levin warned that while we know that prevention is critical, programs have been difficult to implement. Successful prevention is not carried out in the same place that treatment occurs. As in health care, schools will contribute to prevention, but will not be the primary vehicle for prevention programs. He also pointed out the importance of politicians and senior policy makers paying careful attention to classroom realities. According to Dr. Levin, “if we have learned anything about change in education over the last 30 years it is that we can change whatever we want in the world of policy, but if it doesn’t fit with the culture/nature of the school and classroom, then it doesn’t happen” (Statistics Canada, 2000, p. 36).

Teacher Burnout

Before a teacher actually enters the classroom, the complexity of the work of teaching is impossible to appreciate fully. What do you do when 20 percent of the children in your class, not unlike any classroom under a model of inclusion, have learning disabilities? How do you adequately help students in your high school class who arrive unable to read? How do you work with students whose first language isn’t English? What adjustments do you make to your teaching and classroom environment to maximize success for students with behavioural issues and impairments? What about curriculum? How do you reach students where they are at and bring them to where the Performance Standards say they should be? How do you accommodate students who are at different levels?

Wanted, college-educated individuals who are willing to put in excessively long hours without commensurate compensation; who can work under adverse conditions, with unappreciative supervisors and even more unappreciative clients, many of whom prefer to be uninvolved, as well; who do not mind having

inadequate resources and support services; who agree to assume unspecified responsibilities without prior notification; but who will be held accountable for the satisfaction and performance of the unappreciative and uninvolved clients. Candidates for the positions also must be willing to receive inadequate wages and expect not to be able to double their income in constant dollars in a lifetime. Applicants are encouraged to send resumes to the Teacher Employment Office of the _____ School. (Dworkin, 2001)

The above quotation was part of a hypothetical ad campaign begun by Linda Darling-Hammond in 1983. It circulated through school districts and university education faculties for several years, depicting the working conditions of public school teachers, especially in urban areas of the United States.

Continued educational research in the area of classroom working conditions, class size and composition, administrative support for teachers, professional development for teachers, district hiring processes, and qualification processes will be needed to examine the many and varied factors unique to schools and their impact on teacher retention, student learning and classroom climate. Some research has focussed on the share of district budgets directly related to child learning. Such research has examined the proportion devoted to bureaucracy versus that spent on professional teaching staff and their training.

Unquestionably, classroom teachers are in a position to have great potential impact on the students in their classes. Indeed, when teachers feel valued, supported and well-prepared, they are best able to perform their duties, fulfill their perceived role, and are most likely to stay in the profession. Conversely, when professionals are unable to negotiate agreements on role performances or to determine the role expectations, a sense of powerlessness and meaninglessness can ensue (Dworkin, 2001). From a sociological perspective, burnout is conceptualized as a form of alienation. Dworkin (2001) explains that continuation in this manner may lead individuals to withdraw from social

relationships and begin to question whether continued participation in the organizational role is consistent with their self-concept.

Literature on the subject reflects two basic constructs for understanding teacher burnout: psychological and sociological. Using Freudenberger's psychological model, Dworkin (2001) describes burnout as a "malaise of human service professionals...that is characterized by feelings of *wearing out*". Dworkin (2001) elaborates that according to the work of many occupational researchers,

Burnout occurs when over-stressed individuals feel emotionally drained by their work environment, feel that their activities result in no benefit to those they had intended to help or to themselves, and come to blame their clients, patients, or students for failing to improve, get better, or learn, and in turn, for the professional's loss of feelings of accomplishment. (p. 70)

It seems, unfortunately, that burned-out individuals tend to blame their students, patients or clients for failing to improve. In fact, some human service providers may begin to feel that this *refusal* to learn or improve is intended to spite them (Dworkin, 2001). As well, individuals may begin to feel that their entire system is dysfunctional and learn through misfortune that to follow its rules only brings further negative outcomes (Dworkin, 2001).

Each new wave of school reform has had untold effects on the morale of teachers. Whether teachers are seen as part of the problem or part of the solution, policy, level of responsibility, funding, and management are influenced. As well, the greater the level of stress the greater the level of burnout (Dworkin, 2001). However, once burnout has reached a high level, the greater the degree of burnout with less stress (Dworkin, 2001). Burnout eventually can become a mechanism of coping through which teachers cease to care and thereby experience less stress (Dworkin, 2001).

Teacher Attitudes

Research shows that teachers have theories and belief systems that affect their perceptions, plans, and actions. According to Clark (1982), the research shows that thinking plays an important role in teaching.

Whether they verbalize them or not, educators hold deep beliefs about their work, their students, the role of schools in society, the curriculum, and teaching.

Furthermore, these beliefs are grounded in and congruent with deep personal philosophies. These philosophies are powerful predictors of behaviours, and they drive the perceptions, decisions, and actions of all players on the education scene.

(Costa & Garmston, 1994, p. 70)

According to Pajares (1992), beliefs are formed early on and tend to self-perpetuate. For someone to change beliefs in adulthood is a relatively rare phenomenon. Beliefs about teaching are generally well-grounded by the time a person gets to college. Belief structures tend to screen, distort, and reshape information processing and thinking. Therefore, because of their strong influence on perception, beliefs tend to be an unreliable guide to the nature of reality (Costa & Garmston, 1994).

According to Treder, Morse, and Ferron (2000), the goals a teacher selects as the primary purpose of education will, to a large extent, determine his or her definition of effective. In some of the research on *effective teaching*, improvement is defined by increased test scores on academic achievement tests. As well, research indicates that teachers differ in the level of responsibility they will assume for educating students who exhibit behaviours or characteristics often associated with students who receive special education services.

These differing levels of responsibility that teachers will assume play out in several related ways: (1) the type and number of students that teachers refer for special education placement, (2) the immediacy with which teachers initiate a referral once a student's problem becomes apparent, and (3) the degree to which

teachers resist the mainstreaming of students with special needs into their classroom. (Treder, Morse, & Ferron, 2000, p. 202)

In general, regular classroom teachers agree with inclusion on a philosophical level. However, when it comes to more practical issues at hand, many express reservations. This is consistent with the findings of Naylor, Kuehn, Schaefer, and Field (2002) in the *BCTF Worklife of Teachers Survey Series, 2: Special Education*. Some common educational concerns raised by Naylor and his colleagues (2002) are insufficient training and experience, lack of resources, and lack of time. As well, McIntyre (1990) found that teachers with strict classroom standards referred students for special placement at a higher rate than did teachers with lax standards.

Berliner (1987) has stated that it may be better to look away from process-product oriented methods in defining teacher effectiveness.

Our definition of effectiveness is not dependent on arbitrary cutoff points or statistical correlations...it should always be the result of a deliberative process by knowledgeable judges who use much more than test scores as indicators of student achievement. These judges must look beyond these scores because society asks teachers to do far more than have students achieve well. Students should love learning, desire to go on and take more courses in science and mathematics, read on their own out of school, want to attend school regularly, giggle often, and so forth. These outcomes of instruction are hard to measure in any formal way. When making judgments about a teacher's effectiveness, then, it is best to look at the academic performance of his or her students as merely one of a great number of indicators. (Berliner, 1987, p. 95)

Stated simply, there is more to teaching than meets the eye. Teaching is an activity that is rich in thinking, planning, and acting. The planning and action by teachers results in real classroom consequences. Likewise, the planning and action taken by teachers is mitigated by many and variable pre-existing circumstances such as behaviour patterns of individuals, student interactions, learning needs, and overall number of students.

Summary

The themes of this chapter represent some of the biological, social, and psychological trait theories used to describe and explain human behaviour. In the case of disruptive and aggressive behaviour in students, much of the terminology is harsh and seems to *blame* individuals for their poor cultural values and ineffective families. However, many theories exist and work together to give greater understanding of a particular student's situation. Before teachers plan behavioural interventions, a good understanding of theory is helpful. As well, contemplating a variety of theories offers greater insight into one's own beliefs and philosophies about learning and behaviour.

The issue of school violence and aggressive behaviour is of great interest and an understanding of causes has been researched by educators, psychologists, social workers, political scientists, biologists, criminologists, policy makers, anthropologists and sociologists. The prediction and assessment of aggressive behaviour and the intent to act violently is of importance to many. Sifting through the abundant theories is overwhelming and confusing. Schools are an important setting for addressing violent youth. The extent to which young people feel attached to their school has a bearing on the likelihood of later violence. From the sources cited in the literature review, inclusion is regarded by some as an improperly-funded program thrust upon unprepared teachers. Fiscally, Ministries of Education favour the inclusion of pupils with behavioural difficulties in mainstream classrooms over the creation of specialized classes and programs. An implication in the literature is that despite our best efforts, the numbers of children with behavioural special needs in schools is increasing and their problems are becoming more complex. Ultimately, therefore, the roots of the problem need to be addressed by more than a penal approach.

Faced with often overcrowded classrooms, ever-tightening budgets, and increased expectations, teachers need to continue to work their special magic with students. Especially under adverse teaching situations, teachers need to look deep into themselves

and find and celebrate their sources of power. Then, they need to be able to help their students discover theirs and inspire them to fulfill their own potential. This is a tall order. The potential for suffering anxiety, depression, or burnout is real. However, should teachers lose faith that there is value in their efforts, there is likely to be greater loss to their students and to themselves.

Chapter Three - Methodology

Action Research

Action Research is a process of systematic inquiry into a self-identified teaching or learning problem to better understand its complex dynamics and to develop strategies geared towards the problem's improvement. (Hamilton & Zaretsky, 1997, p. 3)

Thus, action research is a strategy which provides a structured process for investigating a problem or interest area. The *Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers* includes a description of an 11-step process used extensively by Dr. David Townsend from The University of Lethbridge (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000). Simply put, action research involves a series of stages: planning, action, observing, and reflecting (The Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000). However, according to Newman (2000), "there is no one right way of doing action research, or being a teacher researcher, or in engaging in critical reflection" (Introduction, para. 1).

Research Methods

When I was defining my research topic and thinking about the type of research I wished to do, I approached our district elementary counsellor and discussed some ideas. I told him that I wanted to learn more from teachers who were successfully including students or working in classrooms with high behavioural needs. We came up with the definition of successful inclusive-classroom teaching. It is based on practices and attitudes which (1) motivate children with behavioural difficulties to participate, (2) encourage on-task behaviour and active participation, and (3) are likely to keep children attending school and participating in the classroom.

Using the input of some administrators, the counsellor then gave me a list of teachers meeting this definition. In the initial definition, the characteristics of the school were not included. It turned out that all of the final participants in the study had worked or were presently working in schools with a lower socio-economic student population. I

approached ten teachers and told them that I was interested in their practice and their beliefs about children with behaviour needs in the classroom, and I asked them to work with me on my project. The study began in October 2001 with a group of seven volunteer teachers. In January 2002, one of the participants withdrew. She was taking parental leave and would not be able to attend any further interviews. She asked that data supplied by her be withdrawn. Therefore, our final group was made up of six participants and one moderator.

From the start, we talked about inclusion, classroom strategies, professional development offerings which they had experienced, memories of classroom experiences, their current experiences, their professional growth plans, and their philosophies and beliefs about teaching and learning. I asked them to place in order of importance to them the goals of education suggested by Treder, Morse, and Ferron (2000) as an introductory exercise at our first meeting in October, 2001 (Appendix A). We met once per month in a different classroom belonging to one of our group members. We reviewed the ranking of educational goals in March, 2002 and found that in the lapse of five months in a single school year teachers in this very small set had made no changes in their rankings. Interestingly, the participants, all considered to be successful with children with behavioural special needs, had unique profiles of their educational goals.

Personal experience research methods inevitably are relationship methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994). They permit researchers to “participate with the social world in ways that allow the possibility of transformations and growth....the opportunity to create a middle ground where there is a conversation among people with different life experiences” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 425). Individual and social change is made possible through the relationships among participants, researchers, and audiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994).

Research Goals

An action research and qualitative type of research strategy seemed very appropriate for this type of exploration of teacher practice. It also seemed highly applicable to the professional development of a group of educators and was in a research area about which I was hoping to gain greater understanding. I had noticed over my decade in the classroom in various schools and with a range of age groups that different teachers bring about the policy and practice of inclusion in very different ways. Participation in the focus group discussions had to relate very strongly to what was going on in their classrooms and not create different and extra work for the participants.

Problem Identification

My main focus in beginning this research was to discover the attitudes and resulting classroom practices and experiences which lead to the successful inclusion of children with behavioural special needs in the mainstream classroom. I had wished to gain a greater appreciation for the experiences of teachers in maintaining inclusive classrooms. I also sought greater understanding of beliefs and personal experiences thought by participants to contribute to the successful implementation of inclusion. As well, I wished to discover more about potential barriers. The essence of the experience of including children with behavioural special needs in the mainstream classroom for teachers is what would become, through the process of this research, the most meaningful element to me. I discovered, as Morse (1994) says, “the key to selecting a qualitative research topic is to identify something that will hold one’s interest over time” (p. 220).

In imagining what I wanted to find out, I began to conceptualize strategies, sources of data, potential participants, methods of collecting data, and feasibility of the project and methods. As well, this is the stage at which I began research for the literature review. This continued through all stages of data collection and the topics covered in the literature review include some of the themes brought to surface by the interviews and focus group conversations.

Data Collection

Difficult as it may be to tell a story, the more difficult but important task in narrative is the retelling of stories that allow for growth and change. We imagine, therefore, that in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story. As researchers, we are always engaged in living, telling, reliving, and retelling our own stories....We live out stories in our experiences, tell stories of those experiences, and modify them through retelling and reliving them. The research participants with whom we engage also live, tell, relive, and retell their own stories. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418)

When the participants and I came together in this project, each of us came in closer contact with our own personal experiences. Indeed, each of us, participants and researcher, would go back into our classrooms following our focus group sessions and be immediately reinforced and impacted in our next day's teaching.

In total, seven focus group interviews were held between early October 2001 and May of 2002. The meetings began after school hours in a different participant's classroom each time. We spoke for an hour and a half to two hours at each meeting. Generally, the topics of the previous session were recapped at the outset and each participant was given a turn to talk about any pertinent events, practices, or thoughts since the last meeting. After that, the members exchanged ideas and comments randomly. Occasionally, one of the members or myself asked for further elaboration or explanation.

I conducted two in-depth interviews with two different members of the focus group. One interview occurred in February and the other in May. Since the first individual interview was conducted after five of the seven group interviews were held, many of the questions evolved from comments made in the focus group interviews. The same basic questions were asked in both interviews (Appendix B). The February interview was held in the teacher's classroom. The May interview was held in the library

of the second teacher's school. As well, the two individual participants contributed comments about inclusion and students with behaviour needs which were of importance to them.

As the study participants began to understand the nature of the research project and areas of special interest, they began to offer information and ask some of their own questions. Morse (1994) refers to this phase of qualitative inquiry as *productive data inquiry*. During this phase, themes and relationships between the themes began to emerge. At the beginning of each of our focus group meetings, I would begin by sharing my notes of the previous session and, as the coding system evolved, I would share patterns I saw developing. Participants would then have a chance to elaborate on, question, or refute any data.

Huberman and Miles (1994) point out the vulnerability of qualitative studies "especially those done by inexperienced or lone-wolf researchers...when it comes to data management" (p. 429). Huberman and Miles (1994) go on to describe qualitative data as "raw experience converted into words...typically based on observations, interviews, or documents" (p. 430). Indeed, the systematic and coherent process of collecting and organizing data has been one of the more challenging aspects of the project.

With audio-tape recorder and inter-lined scribbler in hand, I set out to our first focus group session. For this meeting, and each one thereafter, I recorded the names or initials of all members present at the meeting. In the column, I jotted the participants' initials and then captured keywords and phrases of the person speaking. Emotions or other cues might also be described in my notes. Later, when I began coding the themes of our conversations, I wrote the abbreviations for descriptive terms and jotted memos to myself. The same process was used for individual interviews. Some of the themes and moods which emerged included: fear, hope, frustration, beliefs, common barriers, classroom challenges, teacher risk, disappointment, vulnerability, stress, workload, social responsibility of teachers, goals of education, funding, school climate, student success,

teaching social skills, support for teachers, teacher needs, classroom realities, classroom practices, and relationships.

According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994), personal experiences can be studied in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. To study internal conditions such as feelings, hopes, and aesthetic reactions is to focus inward. To study existential conditions or the environment is to focus outward. Backward and forward refer to focussing on temporality: past, present, and future. The focus of the inquiry was oriented inward from the outset, as the primary focus of the inquiry is attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. As the study progressed, linkages between the themes became more apparent. Then, towards the end of the school year, at our final focus group session, the participants had a last chance to give their final say on the research topic.

Focus Groups and Individual Interviews

According to Gibbs (1997), focus groups, often used in market and more recently in medical research, are under-used in social research. Focus group research involves organised discussion with a selected group of individuals to gain information about their views and experiences of a topic (Gibbs, 1997). Gibbs (1997) states that “focus group interviewing is particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives about the same topic” (para. 1). One of the limitations of focus group research is that it is difficult to discern the individual view from the group view (Gibbs, 1997). According to Gibbs (1997), the role of the moderator or research interviewer is very significant. Leadership and interpersonal skills are required to successfully moderate a group.

To balance the benefits and limitations of using a focus group format, individual interviews were also conducted. However, the two individuals had participated for several hours of group interviews prior to being privately interviewed. Citing the 1993 work of Morgan and Kreuger, Gibbs (1997) states,

The main purpose of focus group research is to draw upon respondents’ attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences, and reactions in a way which would not be feasible

using other methods, for example observation, one-to-one interviewing, or questionnaire surveys. These attitudes, feelings, and beliefs may be partially independent of a group or its social setting, but are more likely to be revealed via the social gathering and the interaction which being in a focus group entails. Compared to individual interviews, which aim to obtain individual attitudes, beliefs and feelings, focus groups elicit a multiplicity of views and emotional processes within a group context. The individual interview is easier for the researcher to control than a focus group in which participants may take the initiative. Compared to observation, a focus group enables the researcher to gain a larger amount of information in a shorter period of time. Observational methods tend to depend on waiting for things to happen, whereas the researcher follows an interview guide in a focus group. In this sense, focus groups are not natural, but organised events. Focus groups are particularly useful when there are power differences between the participants and decision-makers or professionals, when the everyday use of language and culture of particular groups is of interest, and when one wants to explore the degree of consensus on a given topic. (para. 8)

Analysis

Narrative inquiry is based on the view that human beings are story tellers. This is evidenced as an individual and collective experience. Human lives are built on story. We make choices and live our lives through the stories of others and, in turn, we share our own. To study these stories is to study the ways humans experience the world.

Narrative and metaphor comprise one of many approaches to the analysis of qualitative research. Literary discussion has long focussed on these two elements. Increasingly, metaphor and symbolism have been investigated by scholars of “indigenous cultures, oral narrative, narrative and metaphor in organizations, metaphor and medicine, metaphor and psychiatry etc.” (Myers, 1997, Narrative and Metaphor, para. 2). In qualitative research, the focus is largely on understanding language,

communication and meaning among systems developers and organizational members.

Eisner (1991) describes the use of metaphor in qualitative research as follows,

What is ironic is that in the professional socialization of educational researchers, the use of metaphor is regarded as a sign of imprecision; yet, for making public the ineffable, nothing is more precise than the artistic use of language. Metaphoric precision is the central vehicle for revealing the qualitative aspects of life. (p. 227)

The data collected for this study are mostly qualitative. Thus, data analysis involves an intellectual component: critical reading and listening, finding connections between data, forming research questions and determining answers to complex and broad questions. To analyse the transcripts of both the individual interviews and focus group discussions, I followed Pamela Adams's process for interviews outlined in the *Action Research Guide for Alberta Teachers* (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2000).

First, I drafted an initial set of potential group interview questions. As well, I asked participants to rank goals of education based on their personal beliefs and philosophy of education (Appendix A). For each group interview new questions were added to the list of potential questions and new questions arose spontaneously out of discussion from participants, as well as from myself. These were recorded in the focus group interview notes and captured on audio-tape.

Based on the focus group discussion questions, I designed a questionnaire for the individual interviews (Appendix B). After I had collected data from three focus group interviews, I began to identify recurrent themes. Later, during subsequent individual interviews and focus group interviews, connections to themes which had already emerged became evident.

When the interviews concluded in May of 2002, I began to connect related comments and themes and give them labels. During summer vacation, I organized the data into broad categories and renamed themes. Finally, as I began to address my major research goal - to gain a greater appreciation for the experiences of teachers in

maintaining inclusive classrooms - through my writing of the paper, did a more thorough analysis of the recurrent themes occur.

In conducting the focus groups and reading through my meeting notes and listening to the audio-tapes, I became aware that how teachers spoke about their practice might differ somewhat from how it might be perceived by another. Smith (2001) cites Argyris and Schön's (1974) theories about action: *theories-in-use* and *espoused theories*. Simply put, the first are the words we use to convey what we do; the latter, what we would like others to think we do. Indeed, the ability to reflect and to make sense of the connection between the two in our teaching, and how we describe it, is a powerful tool in the growth of educators.

Summary

The primary job of the classroom teacher is his or her work in the classroom with children. Anything which disrupts this commitment would have not been an appropriate type of professional development or growth experience. I also wished that the teachers would enjoy meeting and discussing their practice and would feel confident about presenting and discussing. It was, thus, important that the teachers in the group felt interested and committed to growing in this area and sharing their experiences and beliefs with others. As well, it was important that the participants, while not being perfect, were oriented towards growth in the area of working with children with behavioural special needs. Therefore, I believe that it was also important that the teachers in the group share this common goal and feel it an area worthy of focus and improvement. Thus, the purpose of the research work of our focus group was to discuss practices and attitudes which would:

1. Improve classroom teaching.
2. Test educational theory and discuss teacher beliefs about inclusion.
3. Develop and implement personal and group professional growth plans.

Another important focus for the study was to improve my own classroom teaching and pursue the same three goals. During the time of the study, a series of events occurred in my own teaching practice which proved to be, at least for a period, highly stressful. They impacted my teaching and happiness and comfort in the classroom. I wanted to heal. I wanted to understand what had happened to me and make changes. According to Newman (2000), the examination of critical incidents is a valid method for conducting research on yourself.

Critical incidents are those moments which allow you to stand back and examine your beliefs and your teaching critically. They are stories used as tools for conducting research on yourself. Critical incidents can be triggered in the midst of teaching, but they can occur in a variety of other ways. They can arise through reading, or overhearing a comment, or noticing how someone is doing something you've always taken for granted, or suddenly seeing your own teaching differently. Latent critical incidents are everywhere, not just in the classroom, and they offer important opportunities for learning about professional practice.

(Newman, 2000, para. 11)

While listening, taking notes, and writing, I was continually impressed by the undying spirit of hope these teachers had despite the potential for negativity - given the topic and my own affect at the time. The commitment of the participants to meet and talk without compensation was a testament to their dedication to students, their own professional growth, and desire for improving classroom practice.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

Research can often be more than an intellectual journey; it can be an emotional odyssey in which researchers confront who they are and what they carry as members of their culture. This became a very real part of my work with the focus group and was even more noticeable as I sifted through, separated, and sorted the data I was beginning to accumulate. My primary concern in beginning this research was to discover the attitudes and resulting classroom practices and experiences which lead to the successful inclusion of children with behavioural special needs in the mainstream classroom. This goal remained my focus throughout the research.

However, in order to do this, I had to investigate concepts of inclusion and definitions of success. I also felt compelled to explore the many believed causes of behavioural disorders and contributing factors in order to recognize and define which interventions and strategies might be more effective. As well, in focus group conversations and individual interviews, beliefs about the causes of behaviour difficulties in classrooms consistently arose. The involved educators shared their practical concerns over maintaining inclusive classrooms.

Above all, what I began to track and notice were the feelings of those so affected by inclusive classrooms and educating individuals with disruptive behaviour - our classroom teachers. It is arguable that children are most affected by inclusion. However, teachers are the ones who are held accountable for the success of programs. In the stead of caring parents, teachers must also ensure social justice in the classroom - mediating disagreements, meting out consequences for inappropriate behaviour, ensuring that classroom rules and student rights are not violated. This, of course, occurs for a group of individual students with different backgrounds, family values, and needs. As well, teachers are the ones who refine their skills and develop their teaching through experience. Accordingly, they have a vested interest in inclusion.

As the educators in this study shared their victories, struggles, and practical concerns while maintaining inclusive classrooms, relationships grew and bonds strengthened. I was working to achieve successful inclusion in my own classroom, just as all of the members in the focus group were, and under very similar circumstances. According to Clandinin and Connelly (1994),

Conversation entails listening. The listener's response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening, and caring for the experience described by the other. Once again, we see the centrality of relationship among researchers and participants. (p. 422)

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) reference the works of Dewey and highlight his belief that, "education, experience, and life are inextricably intertwined....Following Dewey, the study of experience is the study of life, for example, the study of epiphanies, rituals, routines, metaphors, and everyday actions" (p. 415).

More than simply collecting a pile of facts and classroom anecdotes, I was being afforded a rare glimpse of people's personal perspectives. Novak (1978) described a declaration of faith as "being unable to act without implicitly imagining the shape of the world and the significance of one's own role, the place at which the struggle is effectively joined" (p. 45). That is where I hoped to join this group of participating educators.

As we spoke and I recorded, I could see certain threads continue to surface. At the outset of our journey, BC's teachers became involved in job action resulting from failed contract negotiations and a government-legislated contract for teachers. Many important issues were left unresolved by this process and teachers were feeling vulnerable, betrayed, and dispensable. This reflected a larger international feeling of vulnerability and worry for the future following the 9/11 attacks in the US. For the course of our group and individual interviews, the theme of social responsibility and the role of teachers in

helping to nurture citizens, not only of our own communities but of the world, provided a steady undercurrent to our discussions.

Rather than deteriorating into gripe-sessions about the state of our provincial affairs, our discussions became more constructive and practical. A teacher of 16 years experience summed it up as follows in one of our introductory focus group meetings:

One thing I'd like to say is that it is time for people who elect governments, rich, middle-class, and poor people, to really stop looking to government as being the cause of all ills in our society, and begin to look at what they can or we can do as a group of people. Because as long as we see government at fault, we will never look seriously at what we as individuals are doing to help or to harm. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001)

This is not to say that the members of our focus group did not express fear for the impact of the legislated contract on such things as our own class make-up and size for next year and the limit to supplementary support. One teacher relayed a parent's comment during the teachers' limited job action, "How long can we just keep stuffing kids with problems into classrooms and not expect some kind of fallout?" (from focus group transcript, January 14, 2002)

At times, participant comments from both the focus group and individual interviews proved to be representative of more than one theme at once. These themes included: inclusion, social responsibility, goals of education, funding, classroom challenges, teacher beliefs, student success, school climate, teaching social skills, teacher risk, teacher support, teacher needs, relationships, hope, and teacher care.

Support for Children: Common Barriers

One suggestion that arose was that our district could offset some budget difficulties next year by implementing a systematic and open process for identifying students with special needs, both academic and behavioural. A teacher in our group, new to the learning assistance role, described her experience this way:

I was asked by a new teacher what the process in the district was for matching up children in need with support services or extra help. It hit me that it's easy to link up resources for children who are already identified by the Ministry, but for children who are as yet unidentified it is not so easy. There are some tests that I can administer, but after that we'd need to make some phone calls and figure it out as we went along. (from focus group transcript, January 14, 2002)

A kindergarten teacher with five years experience said,

We do a kindergarten screening for academic support. We should do that for behaviour support in our district, also. Primary teachers know who is able to get along with other children, who is able to control their temper and actions, and who is able to take classroom routines and instruction from a teacher. I mean, the worry is always there about making hasty judgments about children and their potential, but we certainly could tell by the end of kindergarten who isn't in need of such support and make it available for those who might. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001)

In an individual interview, an intermediate teacher furthered this sentiment, saying,

I think that a child in the early primary grades might accept being part of a social skills group or being pulled out for behaviour support and social skill teaching, more easily than a child in grade 6. By grade 6, kids are so concerned with their peer group and feel like everyone is aware of what they're doing. Also, we might prevent some of those damaging behaviours. (from individual interview, February 13, 2002)

It also became evident through focus group discussions that children with cognitive deficits and physical handicaps are much more likely to be adequately supported in the regular classroom. This includes school-based team members attending planning sessions involving parents, teachers, learning assistance teachers, district support teachers, support staff members, principal, counsellors, physiotherapists, health

nurses, and possibly speech and language pathologists and the recently retired district psychologist. This contrasts with the situation of a youngster with behaviour issues described by an experienced teacher,

I guess no one likes behaviour plan meetings. But at least we show up. This is the third time we've rescheduled and again, it's just me, the counsellor, and the learning assistance teacher sitting and waiting around the table staring at the box of doughnuts. We end up walking out because what's the point of drafting up this fabulous plan that no one cares about or will follow through with anyways? It's frustrating. There has got to be a better way of doing this. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

Most concerns were of a practical nature, but some involved the perception staff, student, and community members hold of children with behavioural special needs. Clearly, greater advocacy and understanding is necessary. In our district, we need many types of support for at-risk students. Staff training programs and current research, well-developed and executed behaviour plans, and administrative support were often mentioned in the data. Participants agreed that the barriers to inclusion are as varied as the abilities and interests of the children in our classroom.

The Social Responsibility of Teachers and the Goals of Education

Study participants constantly restated our obligation to our province's youth and an underlying belief that measures must be taken in schools to retain at-risk students in school. While all teachers could highlight things in their own classroom practice that they felt were keeping kids engaged, they were less able to identify strategies that might work on a larger scale and express what some universal initiatives might be. A primary teacher with 17 years experience said often in our sessions that,

School should be fun! A child's work at school in the early grades is learning and that should be through play. An interesting activity which gets kids involved is

one of the best remedies I can think of for children's misbehaviour. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001)

An intermediate teacher with 16 years experience frequently agreed, but expressed the following reservation:

I agree, but our job at school isn't solely to entertain children. Our job is to teach them to be self-sufficient. Some of school is work. That's the real world. And catching up and getting prepared to do that work is harder for some children than others and that's just a fact of life. Some kids just will have to work at it. And we'll just have to help them, if they want the help and will accept it. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001)

Considerable discussion in the group over the course of our school year together revolved around this particular issue. One teacher wondered,

How can you make school, and this is school not summer camp, fun for children who struggle so with the basics and lack so many basics of language and experience? It's just not realistic for us to play bingo and go to the gym and play games all day. Even though that is what would be thought of as fun to a good many of our students, I don't think we can do that professionally. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

However, the participants all agreed that keeping our youth in schools is an ideal worth striving for in our schools and in society. Healthy interaction, especially in the early years of life, among adults and children and between children creates people with emotional intelligence. The group members spoke of schools as essential given our current social circumstances. One participant stated that "teachers have a chance to affect the trajectory of people's lives." (focus group transcript, December 3, 2002)

Another teacher remarked that,

Things happen to some children that never ever should. Before we know it, these children will be parents with children of their own. Unless we can teach them new

ways of doing things, history will repeat itself, and old problems will be repeated and new ones will probably develop. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2002)

Study participants saw schools providing some students with their only chances for lessons in communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution because teachers are in the very best place to help children emotionally, behaviourally, and academically. Moreover, while teachers have very little control over many of the events that affect their work in the classroom, the study participants believed they can help children by modelling interactions which are characterized by justice, equality, respect and love for all members as best as they are humanly able.

Funding

Conversations about funding came up very often in the group's discussions. In a focus group meeting, the kindergarten teacher said about screening and support, "I guess the problem is, as always, funding. Why screen for it if there is not going to be a helping program for these children to be part of?" (from focus group transcript, January 14, 2002)

Many of the participants' comments seemed to reflect more than one theme. As I coded the meeting notes and transcripts, the theme of funding seemed to be consistently linked with at least one other theme. For example, the above-mentioned focus group excerpt highlights the problem of identification and support with a lack of funding.

Focus group discussions related widespread public pressure to cut taxes to a "survival of the fittest" mentality. This has led, participants believed, to a reduction in support services in schools and decreased confidence in the public school system. The end result of this can be seen in overwhelmed teachers, diminished both in morale and capacity to truly care for their students. Though study participants never discussed funding and budgets in terms of dollar amounts and allotments, the term *funding* was used as a representation of worth and public perception. A personal experience described by one teacher captures this effect:

The creation of an elitist school in our area has made ours more and more like an inner city school. Everyone who is concerned about it brings their kids to the dual-track English and French immersion school and everyone else goes to their neighbourhood school. I think it affects our school culture. The dominant culture here is poverty. The teachers feel it. We have a higher percentage of students in need of learning assistance support, but because our population has decreased we've had a reduction in our funding for learning assistance and other things, too. Our families are dissatisfied with us and they are leaving. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001)

To summarize, participants expressed the feeling of being caught between governments and parents in providing inclusive education in their classrooms. While expectations for teachers and the number and quality of things they are doing in their classrooms is increasing, the funding and support to enable them to do them is decreasing.

Classroom Challenges

All the teachers in the focus group expressed concern that there are children in their classes that they feel they are not reaching as well as they could due to classroom demands and their own limitations. Classroom solutions take effort and time and so does the alternative, disrupted environment. A teacher of 16 years shared the following comment:

I don't sit down. I remember other schools I've been at where you set a task, if there's a problem kids put their hand up, they come down here or I'll come up and see them. If there's two or three you stop the class and explain the problem. But here you just walk around the whole time. Are you okay? How's it going? Constant monitoring. I don't sit. I don't sit at my desk. It doesn't happen. It just is a convenient storage space for things until the end of the day. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2002)

All agreed that it feels good when you get to that point which is beyond “just putting out fires” in your classroom. A teacher with five years teaching experience spoke of her classroom experience and captured the essence of that classroom phenomenon,

Each evening before I go home, I write up my day plan for the next day. I think about individual students in need of re-teaching of certain things. I think about behaviour and how some kids will respond to certain activities. Then, I choose activities and materials accordingly and hope for the best. However, some days I look at my daybook and I realize that most of what I had intended to accomplish goes out the window because a fight happened at recess and it took half an hour to sort out and even then a particular student still didn't resolve himself to participate. This, as usual, completely absorbs my attention and the kids walk through my lesson, but it really isn't as good as it could be. And then there are those days where the planets align or something and things just run smoothly and you look around the room and there's harmony and light bulbs are flashing. Wow! That's awesome. (from focus group transcript, November 5, 2001)

The study participants expressed an eagerness to experience “the teachable moment” with their class and to really be connected with their students' learning. Despite the number of challenges and their magnitude, many comments from the study group expressed continual faith and hard work toward the goal of successful inclusion and the independence of students.

Teacher Beliefs: Student Success and School Climate

All of the teachers in the focus group claimed to be “teaching students where they are at.” This means that teachers believed that they are teaching to their students' needs rather than to curriculum goals or statements. A primary teacher with 17 years experience describes her efforts in this way:

In my class, the children write in a journal daily. During this time the First Nations support staff is in the room and she is able to circulate with me and work

with kids individually with ideas, grammar, punctuation and spelling. There is no set limit to the number of sentences or amount that children must write or penalty for number of misspelled words. The main criterion is that children are challenging themselves. The students set goals for themselves: the amount they're able to write, the challenging words they use, variety in sentence structure they're using, and creativity. I'd say that's pretty open-ended. It also allows children at different instructional levels to work at a like activity. The fact that we work on it daily means that the children know they'll be asked to do it and prepare themselves for it. It's really part of our routine. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

The group said that by providing opportunities for students to be participants in group activities, some may feel more successful. One of the teachers mentioned that a member of her staff had the concept of everyone in the school teaching math at the same time and grouping the children according to instructional level. Unfortunately, they had never tried it. Others spoke of school-wide reading programs and other multi-age groupings for special activities. All concurred that as well as providing opportunities to get to know and form bonds with children from different classes and grades, it might be a great way to enhance school climate.

Whether a staff is engaging in such activities or not, our group agreed that efforts should be consistently made to monitor the reading levels of all students and to adjust instruction appropriately. The member of the group currently involved with learning assistance said,

So many times, we have no idea what is causing a child to act out. If we can make sure that we're asking a child to perform tasks which are developmentally appropriate and not too frustrating, that can do a great deal to reduce tension. If we're doing that job we can at least look somewhere else to a cause for a student's misbehaviour. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

Similar assessments in mathematics and writing were seen by the group members as important.

The members of the focus group often spoke of minimizing the chances for children to experience difficulty and frustration. In other words, we recognized the need to set up for success those children with neurological damage from Fetal Alcohol Syndrome or those who are prone to distractions. However, many members of our group said that we need to do more of this. A teacher with six years experience, five years in Ontario and one in BC, said,

We wouldn't think twice about making provisions in our classrooms for a child with a wheelchair or a white cane, including aide support, but for a child with behaviour and emotional problems we seem to rarely rise to the challenge.

Because the child appears to be normal at first glance, we expect him to adjust to the classroom environment rather than the other way around. (from focus group transcript, May 6, 2002)

The participants believed that there are many students in our classrooms struggling with *invisible disabilities*. The definitions of success for each student are varied. Successful teachers are able to tap into the interests and desires of their students.

As well, these teachers recognize potential frustrations for individual students and then identify and apply appropriate remedies. Successful teachers interact with their students as individuals. This allows them to truly know their students and plan for them.

Teaching Social Skills

All of the teachers agreed that if students are not automatically demonstrating appropriate social behaviours, it is a valuable classroom exercise to teach them the skills and provide opportunities for practice and repetition of expectations. Many included practical concerns about how to accomplish this in the regular classroom. Ideas included: more classroom support, greater flexibility in scheduling and planning, the need for administrative support, communication to parents about programs, teaching aides, and

lesson plans. While some of these items require flexibility, teaching and thinking about things in a new way, many of them involved the funding word again. A teacher with eight years of classroom experience in a variety of grades (currently a learning assistance teacher) said,

I'd probably do things differently at another school, but here I think it's important to focus on "first things first." First, behaviour and working together in the classroom. This is an important area here. Then, work habits. And then, academics. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001)

Teacher Risk

The group's February conversation focussed on a general sense that there is less appreciation of the importance of public education within society than there was in the past, by both the general public and our provincial government. The reduction and rationing of special services makes coping harder for the students who need help the most. Calling for services and drawing attention to problems in classrooms seems only to draw criticism from the public and media who label these efforts as *self-serving*.

In an individual interview, a teacher stated that one of the most difficult things to deal with is your own sense of vulnerability when working with students who are disruptive and aggressive:

Understandably, parents want to believe the best about their child. I do believe that it is positive when they defend their kids so. However, you've got a child that is hurting and potentially likely to lash out and a parent reacting in a similar way.

Yikes! That's scary sometimes. (from individual interview, February 13, 2002)

Group members, many parents themselves, empathized with stressed and frustrated parents in the guilt they feel for their inability to give their children the time and attention they know they need. One of the experienced teachers remarked that the trend seems to be increasing and that, "many parents are over-loaded and react as if they cannot cope

with yet another problem from their child.” (from focus group transcript, February 11, 2002)

An intermediate teacher with 16 years experience described a personal dilemma as follows:

It got to the point that I didn't want to phone home if he had been in trouble that day. I didn't see any marks or bruises or anything, I mean, I didn't have any physical proof of abuse, but I just got the feeling that things weren't very good at home when I called about things. So, I made a decision to keep school problems at school, so to speak. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2002)

Along with the enormous responsibility teachers carry, one experienced teacher noted that “students today are only too aware that teachers have limited sanctions to discourage abusive language and actions and some of them act accordingly.” (from focus group transcript, February 11, 2002)

All of the teachers were acutely aware of their responsibility to act in the stead of a caring and judicious parent at all times. The new graduate of the group expressed the weight of this responsibility in the following way:

The bottom-line in all of this is what we believe causes a child to be aggressive or disruptive. If we think that it's lax parenting, then we'll combat it with strict rules and consequences. If we think it's physical or biological, we'll talk about medication or just decide that we're powerless to change it. Maybe we think they'll just grow out of it. If we think it's modelling, we'll try to show kids, as often as possible, positive ways of acting with people. But what if it takes a long time? What if we're wrong? (from individual interview, May 22, 2002)

Support From Parents

From their past experience, members of the group highlighted some conditions which have been very helpful in developing and maintaining an educational program for a student with behavioural special needs. Parental support and open communication were

described as essential. A teacher with seventeen years of teaching experience, spoke of her efforts to be proactive,

Well, I think that it's very important, perhaps as soon as you've identified a student that you're going to need to be in touch with the family a lot, that at least the first phone call happen very early in the school year and it have a very positive, or at least neutral, tone. You need to outline for the parent what your practices will likely be in the event of discipline or behaviour management, why you think that will be effective, and how they can support you before the need for it actually arises. This sounds like a simple thing, but it isn't always. (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001)

Support From Administrators

Another important element identified in group discussions was administrative support for classroom discipline policy and practice. A teacher of seventeen years said, We've had six different administrators at this school in that past six years and each one of them has been different. Our district discipline policy has remained the same, the way each one reads the policy is different. On staff we've had the experience of knowing that if you were called into a meeting with a parent and the principal, you would be supported. He might talk to you before or afterwards and go over a few things, but never cut you down in front of a parent. Our staff has always spoken favourably about having had that trust and security. Now I've had the experience of becoming the scapegoat for all the problems a child has ever had in their life in a meeting. Personally, I prefer to be treated with dignity. I don't need to feel like I'm always right. I just don't see much growth for anyone coming out of the second scenario, although it was a much shorter meeting. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001)

And a teacher with five years of teaching experience elaborated,

I love to have parents, and principals for that matter, in my classroom as much as possible. If they're in there and involved it is much less likely, I think, for them to criticize if they feel like they're part of what is going on. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001)

At least once in every interview, school administration was brought up by participants. This ranged from practical ways teachers have been supported by principals in their work with difficult students to the boosting of staff morale. As follows, a teacher described her work at an alternate school as the best teaching situation of her career:

Looking forward to going to school every single day. Laughing in the classroom and in the staff room. He walked in and out of classrooms all day long, but not once do I remember dreading it. Once before meeting with a parent - he knew I wasn't happy about it - he just made me feel so secure. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2002)

The Needs of Teachers

With teacher confidence, parental support, and administrative support in the planning and monitoring of a child's behaviour plan, the best outcomes can be expected. Without any one of these key elements, the group speculated, greater pressure is placed on the remaining two. A new teacher with less than one-year teaching experience said that new graduates from university education programs, like herself, lack specific classroom management and discipline instruction regarding students with high behaviour needs.

The classroom discipline systems known and used by teachers seem to be based on pre-inclusion norms for classrooms. A learning assistance teacher said,

Sometimes I talk to children who've been put on a time-out in another room or sometimes they get sent down here to the learning assistance room because things just aren't working out in the classroom. And I ask them, if you were the teacher in the room and there was a kid that's doing what you were doing and a kid that's

doing what they've been asked to do, which one would you give your attention to? And they say the one that's doing what he or she has been asked to do because that other one is being obnoxious. And obnoxious isn't the word they use. They're often much less kind. But they just can't get the connection between their behaviour and what just happened in the classroom. They say the teacher has it in for them. Or she's racist. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

As the diversity in our BC classrooms grows, so also must the skills and levels of awareness in our teachers. A new graduate added,

I think it's difficult when you are dealing with a number of kids, a variety of kids, to be fair with each kid in exactly the same way. I think that's a challenge. I think teachers try to address that, but I don't think that they always manage to. I think that when you go through your teacher training, it's something that's rarely touched on. I did my final practicum at a school with a lot of families on social assistance and we never talked about what you say to someone who is poor. You are taught that kids will be different, that their backgrounds will be different, but you're never taught about how to avoid discriminating. We don't talk about discrimination. We talk about minorities, we talk about ethnic groups, but we don't talk about specifics about what that means as far as classroom interaction and teaching. I think that would be something very interesting to have observed in your practice teaching. I mean, we look at how many times teachers talk to boys or girls during a lesson. It would be interesting to see how many times a teacher interacts with the poor versus the middle class. Actually, I think when kids are disadvantaged, a teacher tends to interact with them more because they are seeking attention or acting out. They get more attention, but it's for all of the wrong reasons. Then, they get themselves sent out of the room, when really they really want to be inside the room. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

Developing Relationships and Knowing Students as Individuals

All of the teachers in the focus group concurred that teaching is a constant balancing act: curriculum expectations, accountability, and teaching a group of human, living, breathing, individual students in ways that prove to be meaningful and useful to each. The data couldn't reflect often enough the importance the members of our focus group placed on striving to develop a meaningful relationship with each student. A teacher of five years spoke of her kindergarten experience and the importance of taking the learning and social needs of each student into account when planning,

There is a young boy in my class. He's been taking on some pretty grown-up roles in his life since, I'm imagining, he was just a babe. Am I hungry? I'll find something to eat. Am I tired now? I guess I'll lay down. And he's been pretty successful being in charge of himself. Then he comes to school and for the first time ever he's got me saying, "okay, everyone! It's 10:15 and we're all going to eat our snacks now!" or, "you need to wear your mitts outside today!" I think I might fight against that, too. (from focus group transcript, November 5, 2001)

Teacher Beliefs: Hope

Hope was one of the many emotions which recurred in the data. On our last day together, one of the more experienced teachers told of her belief that a student's gifts are revealed from within and that teachers get to help begin the unfolding process. In December, that same teacher of 16 years had said,

First thing in the morning this year, I've been having the students all take out what I call a goal-setting card. At the top they write their name and on the body of the card they write one thing they know that they'll do well today and one thing they want to work on. Sometimes they'll choose things that don't relate to the day we've had, but we're working on that. And then, at the end of the day we have a look at them. I'll give them a checkmark or a star and then they get to bring them home. The things that the students write on the card are sometimes surprises to

me and point out things, qualities and interests, that, sadly, I might have missed otherwise. I hope its helping to build character and goal setting skills. It's helping me get to know the kids. (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2002)

On May 6, 2002, our final group interview and gathering of concluding statements and ideas, the participants agreed that they, unfortunately, believed that teaching is a job with a level of complexity few appreciate; especially when it is being done well. The kindergarten teacher reminded group participants to celebrate their experiences and their lives as teachers,

Teaching children to express themselves in positive ways and deal with their feelings are what it's all about. Watching a child learn to draw a picture, read a book, or even share a hug renews my faith. We are helping kids put in place a foundation that the rest of their lives is going to be built on. (from focus group transcript, April 8, 2002)

Teacher Care

A big part of effective teaching, according to the focus group, is being emotionally available to students. That means really caring for and about them. An unfortunate consequence of burnout is that teachers simply can no longer bear the risk. One of the agreed-upon conclusions was that teachers need to work to protect themselves against possible ill-effects of working in a social-service profession.

The inclusion of students with special needs occurs throughout our school district. At some of the schools, where the population is more prosperous, there are fewer children with high levels of need in each classroom. It seemed to participants that where the population is less prosperous, classrooms have increased demands. The social climate of classrooms is impacted and classroom teachers must work harder to reduce opportunities for conflict, mediate disagreements, and solve social problems between students. Through the course of our discussions, I asked one of the very experienced teachers who

had been at her school for 12 years whether she had ever thought about moving to another school or district. She responded:

Sure, it would be pretty easy to work in a classroom where children have been hand-picked because of how they learn and are able to teach themselves. It would be pretty easy to teach in a classroom where the children mostly wanted to and were able to solve their problems with empathy. I've heard that there are classes who could work just as well for a cardboard cut-out and a tape recorder as for a teacher. I have known many such students in my classes. I have heard that every seven years or so every teacher gets such a dream class. Some days I feel that I'm due, but then something happens, an unexpected phone call of thanks or one of my students suddenly masters something and I remember why I'm here. (from focus group transcript, May 6, 2002)

Each classroom has its own set of challenges. Listening to the conversations of teachers, it became evident to me that the participants accept that individual classrooms are unique in their make-up, or range of educational and social needs. Members of this group are seeking to learn skills and gain understandings which will be helpful rather than simply blame students, teachers, schools, and communities for difficulties. In an individual interview, a teacher of 16 years said,

Some days I wonder what it is like to work with groups of children from higher economic circumstances....I wonder how many other primary teachers have seen detailed drawings of the RCMP building or the women's shelter in their children's journals. I wonder about the child who arrived suddenly in my class in November and then moved away, without word from anyone, at Spring Break. At our school, the pain of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome is evident daily and I wonder how many affected children are out there in our district. Sadly, I know that there are many others. (from individual interview, February 13, 2002)

I asked the participants what they thought some of the things they've seen teachers do that seem to protect them from stress and burnout. Some of the answers offered were familiar ones. They said that they believed that good teachers get very good at catching students doing positive things more often than negative; worked to focus on progress rather than on a few negative aspects; give their class more positive messages through praise, smiles, and compliments than negative or corrective ones; and make less favoured tasks more manageable for students by breaking them down and offering some choice to students. Some of the practices suggested by the focus group were:

“Catch kids being good” (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001).

“Focus on the white paper instead of on the black dot” (from focus group transcript, May 6, 2002).

“Discipline before instruction” (from focus group transcript, October 1, 2001).

- “Grandma’s Law: First, eat your peas and then you’ll get your dessert” (from focus group transcript, January 11, 2002).

“Reject ‘My way or the highway’ thinking” (from focus group transcript, November 5, 2001).

“The three rules of real estate are: Location! Location! Location! The three rules of classroom management are: Relationship! Relationship! Relationship” (from focus group transcript, May 6, 2002).

Summary

In comparing the themes of the literature review, chapter two, and the themes in the data, chapter four, one broad distinction between the two is that the themes of the first set are negative in tone and look towards a cause for disruptive behaviour that is outside of the classroom. The themes of the second set are more positive and express faith in the ability of teachers and students to change in ways which are productive, or even generative. Both sets of themes revolve around teacher attitudes and their possible impact on classroom practices and climate. The first set of themes paints a bleak picture for

students with difficulties in BC classrooms. The second set of themes acknowledges difficulties, yet expresses hopefulness. While it is important to be positive and hopeful when planning a program for a student with behavioural special needs, it can also be helpful to know some of the outside influences and barriers to successful inclusion over which teachers may have no control.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Kincheloe and McLaren (1994) contend that because the practitioner is closer to the purposes, cares, everyday concerns, and interests of work, practitioner research tends to distort reality less often than expert research. In educational research, this validates the experiences, understandings, and beliefs of teachers and implies that these may inform future practice. Passionate about conditions in classrooms and the social importance of supporting children with behavioural special needs in our classrooms, I face the data that I have been collecting.

The culmination of information from the literature review, the data from study participants, and my own personal experiences and understandings has led me to conclude that while there are many barriers to the successful inclusion of children with aggressive or disruptive behaviours, it is the ability of teachers to initiate and maintain relationships which will ultimately define a child's educational experience. This, of course, means being emotionally accessible to students who are likely to be difficult to trust, being relaxed around them, and being genuine in responding to common behaviour patterns.

Educational professionals who, at the outset of their careers, are the most empathetic, sympathetic, idealistic, and people-oriented, are sadly the ones who are most prone to the negative effects of stressful teaching situations. Many teachers who begin their careers with few protective barriers are the ones who, out of necessity, begin to develop them. A belief that extravagant efforts are not being appreciated or proving effective may cause teachers to extend less risk and give children fewer chances.

Several years and some negative experiences later, I find myself pondering some changes in my own teaching and the self I bring to my children in my class. I have begun to see that at the heart of working with all children is the willingness to invest in a relationship, often repeatedly. This tells the child that a teacher believes that his/her time and energies are well-spent. However, many barriers, intended to protect teachers, can

prevent them from forming relationships and bonding with their students. Inhibitions and characteristics of a person's personality are barriers. Hopes, beliefs and feelings that the efforts are worth it may be shrouded when negative experiences and memories of failed attempts or tragedy result in more barriers. Finally, physical and emotional reactionary responses to threat and aggression may further insulate and distance teachers from students. Perhaps, emotional responses cause further withdrawal. Teachers may also become distanced from students culturally, as a result of differing values and attitudes. As well, power imbalances and physical barriers can impede the development of relationships.

In the beginning stages of research for this study, I knew that there would be many perspectives on including children with behavioural special needs in the classroom. As well, because the situation surrounding each child is unique, I knew an understanding of the many potential contributing factors and circumstances would be necessary for appropriate functional assessment of a student's behaviour and the design of the intervention strategy and individualized education program. From an "espoused theory" point of view, I knew it was unfair and ineffective for a teacher to continually approach behavioural difficulties from the same perspective for each individual.

However, I gained many new insights and a much healthier appreciation for the different perspectives of my colleagues as I progressed through the challenges of understanding the data that was produced over time.

Outcomes of Research

Because participants consistently showed up to focus group discussions with professional growth plans, day plans, and classroom notes in hand, I believe they were committed to the process and interested in the outcome. I do believe such a process to be a valuable form of professional development, a way of staying in touch with current practice, and a way to learn about techniques which may have been new to some of the focus group members. One of the teachers mentioned that the discussion was "a type of

rehearsal for a new classroom activity or way of managing student behaviour in the classroom” (from focus group transcript, November 5, 2001).

There is a growing body of evidence that engaging in action research has positive personal and professional effects on practitioners (Lieberman & Miller, 2001). I had wished to gain a greater appreciation for the experiences of teachers in maintaining inclusive classrooms. Through the process of this research project, I became focussed on my own methods, perceptions, understandings, and approaches to teaching children with behavioural special needs. The participants in the study shared similar experiences and, in turn, exerted influence on things currently happening in their own classrooms and schools. Participants identified many related areas into which future research inquiries may probe: teacher preparation curricula, future directions of professional development efforts, examination of administrative practices to support classroom teachers and students, and school climate initiatives.

When we enter into a research relationship with participants and ask them to share their stories with us, there is the potential to shape their lived, told, relived, and retold stories as well as our own. These intensive relationships require serious consideration of who we are as researchers in the stories of participants, for when we become characters in their stories, we change their stories. In other places we have written that personal experience methods have the potential to generate new shared stories for participants and researchers in relationships that are akin to friendships. As researchers we are also changed, but because we enter the relationships with certain intentions and purposes and, as the ones most often initiating the research relationship, our care and our responsibility is first directed toward participants. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 422)

In chapter four, one of the study participants made reference to a concept for a school-wide math program which never was tried. Although staff members responded favourably to the concept, the energy and risk must have outweighed the perceived

benefits of its implementation. In stressful teaching situations, some of the remedies that people grasp are intended to increase their sense of control. Perhaps by making a conscious decision to reject the project, teachers were exercising their autonomy. Another remedy is to reduce, rather than increase, the emotional intensity of their relationships at work. Perhaps, these staff members were becoming alienated from one another, one of many symptoms of stressful workplaces.

My sense from the inception of this project has been that all of us hold a piece of the truth in improving the inclusion of children with behavioural special needs in our classrooms. Because not all children who are yet unready to learn or have emotional problems behave in the same way, dealing with different behavioural patterns can be troublesome for teachers. Children who are compliant or withdrawn and need our support every bit as much may, in fact, be the most difficult to reach.

From my experience, effective classroom management with some creativity can help students experience greater success and reduce the level of disruption to the classroom. Some common characteristics of children with behaviour or learning difficulties include: short attention span, being prone to distraction, and the need for attention. Opportunities for work in small groups, open-ended assignments, and developmentally appropriate activities can go a long way in reducing the need for students to act out in frustration. As well, children feel honoured when given the chance to take responsibility for some of their choices in activities and assignments.

The focus group members in this study felt that the best approach in a classroom or school where there is a high need for behaviour intervention is one that is pleasant and firm. Threats and coercion, the group members agreed, have generally been met with further frustration. It is extremely important for children in such environments to be able to form trusting relationships with the adults who care for them. Thus, another common thread in the discussions was the necessity of consistency in routine and teacher behaviour and responses. The group members believed that they were responsible for a

great deal of social control in their classrooms and schools. Furthermore, their behaviour expectations were high and very often teachable opportunities regarding behaviour took precedence over the planned instruction at hand, if even just momentarily.

Most people have ideas about schools that began forming when they were students. While working in a classroom is, of course, one of the most effective ways to update these ideas, group members felt that we need to find ways to share our experiences in classrooms with other teachers and the public in ways that honour and celebrate everyone in our diverse groups of students, rather than criticize or blame some of them, their families, or their teachers for their difficulties. Indeed, neither blaming the teacher nor blaming students has proven effective in reaching solutions to this issue.

When I began this study, I had perceived myself as a competent teacher with a variety of skills and a good attitude for teaching children from diverse backgrounds. I strongly advocated bonding with students. During the course of this study, my confidence was shattered. Stunned and angry, I began looking for answers in places which blame the student and absolve me of such burdens. I now think that it is helpful to view disruptive behaviour as a symptom rather than as a disorder. This thinking is likely to invite the teacher to investigate rather than feel guilty about probing or making assumptions about a child's background. This may be a less threatening stance to take with parents, as well.

Teacher Diary

Friday, August 30, 2002. As I prepare to go back into the classroom, I've had some time and quiet moments to think about the new school year. I've thought about the pain and anger of the last school year and I've had twinges of revulsion. Pulling up to the school, I thought about how many times I took a deep breath walking up the sidewalk, gaining the resolve to walk in and hold my head high and do my best to make it through the day.

I want to start the new year differently. I thought about the last day of school. A day normally of hugs and tears and laughs. At the time I knew that I

was only going through the motions of saying good-byes and wishing farewells, focussing only on retreat to my family to lick my wounds. With the benefits of rest and laughter my wounds have sealed. Now is the time to begin again. I wonder if my scars will show. They are the battle wounds of my own internal struggles. I've put them there myself.

Chapter Six - Summary

Reflection

A full year has now passed since the onset of the first focus group interviews and my classroom difficulties of the past school year. It has been a full year since the beginning of BC teachers' limited job action protesting proposed changes in education. Maintaining positive and professional relationships in an unpredictably changing school environment has been most challenging. It has also now been a full year since the immediate aftermath of 9/11. In a year of media sensationalism, it has been difficult to escape images of the results of violence

As well, it has been a year since I forged some valuable relationships with a small group of topnotch educators. Indeed, hearing the recurrent testimonials of hope and faith in children and in our system of education inspired me to hang on when I had lost confidence. Upon reflection, I can see I had lost a sense of control in my working life. Trapped in my classroom, suffering uncounted acts of disrespect and abuse, I learned there would be no restitution, no support from my administrator, and no respite. I was tired and angry from solely bearing all of the risk and responsibility. In darker moments, I felt that my administrator might as well have been throwing chairs and obscenities at me himself. Yet, the words of one of the study participants - "even though it is a difficult job we need to believe that there is value in what we do" (from focus group transcript, December 3, 2001), - helped me then and continue, even now, to keep me going.

Dealing with violence in our schools is confusing and overwhelming. Effectively teaching social skills and creating a safe and supportive environment is the ideal. Can teachers do this independently? Currently, teachers spend as much as half of their school day involved in discipline, teaching students to express feelings, defusing violent situations, and controlling peer aggression (Naylor, 1999). Despite this work, there is evidence that students and teachers continue to feel uneasy in their classrooms and hallways (Cromwell, 1998). Indeed, next to workload issues, classroom violence and

disruptive behaviours are the second most commonly cited reasons for teachers leaving the profession (Cromwell, 1998). Sending a teacher back into the classroom with a violent student without offering treatment or plans for restitution should not be excused.

A non-exclusionary school policy is an admirable ideal. Schools will not be doing society any favours by taking the most troubled and removing them from the one institution designed to support and teach them. However, teaching children to manage and overcome disruptive and aggressive behaviours rather than simply kicking them out of school, requires resources, research, and expertise. I had studied some teachers successfully integrating children with high behaviour needs before experiencing a difficult school year myself. Then I had an opportunity to experience, first-hand, the positive effects of engaging in a forum of “healing” through inquiry with competent professionals, and for that I am grateful. I have come to realize I am a part of an organization with many powerful and dedicated members, and I am inspired to continue talking to teachers about their sources of power, and determined to continue to recognize my own.

I am back in my classroom again this year. It has been a wonderful fresh beginning with its own new challenges and rewards. I feel whole. I feel safe. I feel emotionally available to the children in my care. I feel stronger. I feel enlightened by my inquiry and experiences. As this process has heightened my self-awareness and has allowed me to move ahead, I believe that I can be more supportive and available to my colleagues. As an extension, I have been focussing on supportive and open communication with parents in the school system, as well. I now realize more certainly that teachers are not alone in feeling the effects of legislation, funding, and class sizes and demands.

BC schools are currently in a transition. Districts in BC have adopted a philosophy of inclusion for schools, and teachers, such as myself, are learning to adapt to our classrooms and develop new ways to communicate programs and intended outcomes

to parents. The structure of classrooms in BC is changing. Even the BC Ministry term *I-16 Severe Behaviour*, a relatively new classification, is set to be changed to *Level 1 Students*. And it, too, may soon go by the wayside, an irrelevant funding term for which money and support is no longer available.

Conclusion

What is the relationship between teacher attitudes towards inclusion and classroom practice? The research question can be approached from three perspectives: (1) the literature review, (2) the interview participants, and (3) the researcher's perspective. From the sources cited in the literature review, inclusion is regarded as something to be feared and not trusted. Generally, the research cited tended to regard inclusion as an improperly funded program thrust upon unwilling and unprepared teachers. The tone of the literature is also that despite our best efforts, the numbers of children with behavioural special needs in schools is increasing and their problems are becoming more complex.

From the perspective of the interview participants, inclusion is a gift to all children in classrooms. The participants highlighted the commitment they felt to keep children actively engaged in school, despite many adverse conditions. Often the participants commented on the need for various forms of support, from support-staff time to parent and public education. However, despite practical shortcomings in program delivery, participants felt responsible to be the impetus for successful inclusion in their classes.

From the researcher's perspective, many theories of human behaviour and learning need to be considered. This is especially true, as teachers are largely responsible for designing and implementing intervention plans for children in their class with behavioural special needs. The needs for each student are unique and so are appropriate learning plans. Contrary to much of the literature reviewed, much of the misbehaviour

that I currently see in my classroom doesn't appear to be the result of a disorder or injury. Rather, it seems that much of my children's behaviour is learned socially.

The instructional activities teachers enjoy and value are different today. The skill set expected in a classroom teacher is different than it was a decade or two ago. Professional development opportunities to afford teachers the needed skills and understandings are vital, especially for new teachers entering the profession. One of our main goals in the classroom is to teach each of our children self-regulation and self-direction. John Dewey described discipline as a relationship between each of us and the world as we pursue our aims. This seems a very apt description given our current classroom situation.

Maintaining an inclusive classroom is like drawing the perfect blend and harmony of sounds from our students, just as a conductor works with an orchestra. This is not going to occur at each session. Children in classrooms are not like compact discs and teachers certainly have to do more than push play, stand back, and enjoy. While each student is learning to play an instrument, each must also learn how to relate to others playing at the same time. The conductor works to know everyone's strengths and challenges and works to draw out the best in each musician. While musical theory, fingerings, embouchure, and technique are essential for playing individual instruments, it is the multiplicity, or the relationship of all the individual parts to one another, that makes the music.

This is not to say that at times, musicians will not need to practice alone in a practice room. This is not to say that at times, individuals or groups will not need individual or specialized instruction. Inclusion is the music. It is elusive. It is fluid. It is dynamic. It is the teacher's job to maintain a balance, or homeostasis, between all of these varied parts of the classroom experience. The conductor nurtures the pleasant sounds and moods of the music and tempers and minimizes the less pleasant. Hopefully,

learning comes from the sour notes as well as the clear. It is the teacher's job to bring out the music in each student. Such is the fine art of teaching.

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Appendix A

Teacher Philosophy Questionnaire for Focus Group

November, 2001 - Focus Group Discussion:

There are many valid goals in education. As well, educators define effective teaching in various ways.

Treder, Morse and Ferron (2000) have put forward the following set of goals of education. The priority teachers place on each of these educational goals is thought to shape their teaching practice.

Please, rank in order of importance in your teaching practice and philosophy (with 5 being of greatest importance down to 1 being of least importance):

- ___ - assisting students in reaching their full potential
- ___ - shaping students to be useful members of society
- ___ - producing responsible, self-sufficient citizens
- ___ - creating problem-solvers and critical thinkers
- ___ - imparting knowledge to students

***If you can think of goals in your teaching practice other than those listed, please give them in this space below:*

Thank you so much for your thoughts. It is important to me in my own personal growth and to the completion of my study. I hope that you also find this exploration interesting.

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Reference:

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Appendix B

Interview Questionnaire

Personal Information:

1. Age?
2. Major area of study at University? (Eng., Science, Fine Arts, P.E., etc.)
3. Number of years in teaching? Administration?

Questions Relating to Teaching Practice and Attitudes:

1. How do you respond to the statement: "Inclusion will give students with special needs a better chance to readily fit into their community"?
2. How do you respond to the statement: "The child who is exceptional is likely to be socially isolated by regular students"?
3. How do you feel about special needs children in the classroom, including children with behaviour disorders (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and conduct disorders, etc.)?
4. How do you respond to the statement: "Classroom teachers should make the decision as to whether or not to take students with special needs in their classroom"?
5. Describe some strategies you have used to support children with academic needs in the general classroom. Children with behavioral needs?
6. What features of your classroom practice benefit children with academic needs in your charge? Children with behavioral needs?
7. How do you consider the needs of regular children and their parents in general inclusive classroom? What practices do you employ?
8. How do you respond to the statement: "I would be willing, as a general classroom teacher, to take extra training to be better able to handle the demands of teaching children with special needs"?
9. How do you respond to the statement: "I would be willing, as a general classroom teacher, to take extra training to be better able to handle the demands of teaching children with behavioral needs"?