For the Love of the Child: Bestowing Value amidst Inconsistent Inclusive Education Beliefs and Practices for One Student with Severe Disabilities

Laura Rae Mooney
University of Calgary

Bonnie Lashewicz
University of Calgary

Abstract

In this article, we chart developments of inclusive education practice and policy in Alberta, Canada, and conclude that much remains to be done toward achieving an educational system where all students, including those with severe disabilities, feel welcome and valued. We argue a need for deeper understandings of parent and educator beliefs about, and practices of, inclusive education in order to promote "mutual adaptation," built on shared beliefs and consistent practices. To this end, we present an *instrumental case study* examination of the inclusion experience of one Canadian student with a severe disability described from multiple parent and educator perspectives. We call attention to inconsistencies in educator beliefs and practices, yet we draw out shared beliefs rooted in "love of the child." Our study derives from Paulo Freire's understanding of love as key to educational pedagogy (1968/1970, 2005), and we uphold love as a point of convergence

for parents, educators, and other educatudial stakeholders striving for more consistent approaches to inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, students with severe disabilities, case study, critical pedagogy, bestowing value, love

Résumé

Dans cet article, nous tracer l'évolution de la pratique de l'éducation pour l'inclusion et de la politique en Alberta, Canada et conclure qu'il reste beaucoup à faire dans la réalisation d'un système éducatif où tous les étudiants qui ont des difficultés d'apprentissage sévères, se sentent bienvenus et appréciés. Nous soutenons un besoin pour plus profonde compréhension de croyances au sujet de parent et d'éducateur et pratiques de l'éducation intégratrice, afin de promouvoir «l'adaptation mutuelle» construite sur des convictions communes et pratiques cohérentes. À cette fin, nous présentons un examen de l'étude de cas instrumental de l'expérience de l'inclusion d'un étudiant canadien ayant une incapacité grave décrite de multiples perspectives de parent et d'éducateur. Nous attirons l'attention à des incohérences dans les pratiques et croyances de l'éducateur encore nous faire ressortir des convictions communes, enracinées dans « l'amour de l'enfant. » Notre étude dérive de comprendre l'importance de l'amour en tant que clé de Paulo Freire à la pédagogie de l'éducation (1968/1970, 2005) et nous défendons l'amour comme un point de convergence pour les parents, les éducateurs et les autres intervenants éducatifs pour des approches plus cohérentes pour l'éducation inclusive.

Mots-clés : l'éducation inclusive, les étudiants qui ont des difficultés d'apprentissage sévères, étude de cas, la pédagogie critique, conférant valeur, amoure

Introduction

Unified systems of education, which welcome and include all students, continue to be the gold standard for educational leaders worldwide (Marope, 2014; Opertti, Brady, & Duncombe 2009; UNESCO, 2015). The Government of Alberta, Canada, recently undertook a series of education reform initiatives to combine separate worlds of regular and special education (Alberta Education, 2010, 2011). Driven by findings of widely varying practices for including students with severe disabilities (Alberta Education, 2009), initiatives are aimed at having parents, teachers, and administrators (i.e., school principals), who were once immersed in either "regular" or "special" education programming, unify goals for a shared student population. However, top-down directives to unify can leave implementation open to interpretation, and resulting inconsistencies can lead to disruptions in students' academic progress.

Education researchers note that students with severe disabilities are considered hardest to serve in regular education settings and are thus particularly susceptible to the impacts of inconsistent inclusion practices. Practices for students with severe disabilities termed "inclusive" can range from students being physically present, yet working separately with an education assistant, to students who are being helped to participate fully in classroom activities. Correspondingly, these students comprise the largest group still served in segregated classrooms (Norwich, 2008; Timmons & Wagner, 2009). Continued efforts to achieve inclusive education goals require deeper understandings of the inclusive experiences of students with severe disabilities from the perspectives of those who shape day-to-day education.

In this article, we present an *instrumental case study* (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995) examination of the inclusion experience of one Canadian student with a severe disability described from multiple parent and educator perspectives. Through our in-depth account, we call attention to inconsistent educator beliefs and practices, yet we draw out shared beliefs rooted in "love of the child." Our aim is to facilitate reflection upon inclusive education practice and inform related inclusive education research and policy development.

Review of Literature

Inconsistencies in inclusive education *understandings* and *practices* for students with severe disabilities are prevalent among educators and parents (Boling, 2007; Crawford, 2005; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Runswick-Cole, 2008). In some schools, inclusion entails all students, regardless of nature and severity of disabilities, being contributing members of classes comprised of mostly non-disabled, same-age peers (Loreman, 2007). In other schools, students with mild or moderate disabilities are fully included in regular classroom activities while students with severe disabilities attend regular classes only periodically and spend most of their time in classrooms comprised of mixed-age peers who also have severe disabilities. Such incongruity fuels what Leyser and Kirk identify as "considerable, and sometimes heated, debate among education professionals...in regard to the interpretation of the principle of inclusion and in particular of full inclusion and its implementation in practice" (p. 271).

As educators struggle to agree on what inclusion should entail, researchers investigate understandings of inclusion, usually by methods that entail targeting single stakeholder groups. Researchers have focused on views of teachers (Athanases & de Oliveira, 2007; Brandes & Crowson, 2009; Boling, 2007; Pearce, 2009; Sze 2009), administrators (Anderson & Macri, 2009; Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; McGrew, 2008), or parents (Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Palmer, Fuller, Arora, & Nelson, 2001; Porfeli, Algozzine, Nutting, & Queen, 2006; Runswick-Cole, 2008). While such studies illuminate beliefs about inclusive education, conclusions are often drawn without accounting for perspectives from multiple stakeholders.

For example, Athenases and de Oliveira (2007) studied new teachers' attempts to advocate for marginalized students and collected accounts of new teachers' support for inclusion amid opposition from more veteran colleagues. One participant described a principal who had refused to invest in supports for a student simply because that student's parents had not requested these supports. Thus the principal used parent ignorance to justify directing resources—which would have been required to provide extra support—into other areas of school operations. Whether the participant understood the principal's motives can be debated, but moreover, we do not have access to views of the administrator or the student's parents about this situation.

Indeed, research targeting administrator perspectives on inclusive education for students with severe disabilities is limited. Andrews and Lupart (2000) warn that the business-like operation of schools, inherent to administrator roles, are on a "collision course" (p. 44) with inclusive education's emphasis on community awareness, equity, service, and greater consciousness of human dignity. Administrators juggle the demands of increasingly diverse student populations with shrinking budgets, fluctuating resources, and public expectations for maintaining, or more likely exceeding, the previous year's academic achievements. As such, today's school administrators face unparalleled challenges of managing the "business" of educating students in light of increasing prevalence of students with severe disabilities in their schools (e.g., Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring [ADDM], 2014, p. 14, reports 1 in 68 eight-year-olds in the United States now has a diagnosis on the autism spectrum, and statistics from seven of the eleven sites tested indicate 31% of these children have a severe developmental or intellectual disability).

 Focused on preparing school administrators to advocate for including students with severe disabilities, Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2008) interviewed three renowned educational leaders, namely, Richard Villa, Mara Sapon-Shevin, and Elise Fraturra. Each leader believes administrators who are not experienced or comfortable with leadership in inclusive education can still create clear, consistent, inclusive practices in their schools. Villa summarizes that fully inclusive practice is predicated on a view of inclusion as a social justice issue that cannot be addressed through practices of segregation.

Teachers and administrators who embrace inclusive practices are likely to work alongside colleagues who do not share their views. Further, teachers and administrators must accommodate parents of children with severe disabilities who remain divided in their support for inclusive education. Runswick-Cole (2008) and Palmer et al. (2001), who investigated parent views of inclusion, reinforce the need to bring together multiple stakeholders through their findings that many parents cite educator attitudes and lack of appropriate accommodations as reasons for their reservations about inclusion for their children. Runswick-Cole goes as far as stating that parents of children with severe disabilities may be "driven not by ideology, but by pragmatism" (p. 179) in choosing segregated placements. Further, Palmer and colleagues note that seven out of their ten themes describing beliefs of parents who preferred segregation are focused on "negative perceptions of general education classrooms or on beliefs that children with disabilities would

overburden the teachers or students in these programs" (p. 480). The sentiment of these parents—that segregation is the only place where their children will be welcomed and not seen as burdensome—suggests parents not having received educator messages about the value of inclusive education.

Correspondingly, researchers demonstrate that parents may switch their children from segregated to inclusive programs if their reservations about inclusion can be overcome. Turner and Traxler (1995) studied the experiences of 21 students who were transferred from segregated to inclusive classrooms. At first, some parents were "not in favor" (p. 15) of inclusion, but grew to like the move once they saw that their children were safe, accepted by other students, and well cared for by school staff. Many parents commented on improvements they saw in their children's social, emotional, and academic progress as a result of the inclusive environment. Although somewhat dated, this is one of few studies to converge perspectives from parents, teachers, and administrators. Turner and Traxler supply evidence on the experiences of students with an array of characteristics and educational needs and point out that changing from segregated to inclusive education can be positive; yet we are left with little detail about consistency of definitions and expectations held by parents, teachers, and administrators.

More recently, Bennett and Gallagher (2013) incorporate multiple perspectives (students, peers, teachers, education assistants, job coaches, employers, and parents) on inclusion for students with intellectual disabilities through a survey study of transitions from high school to workplace. Student participants include those whose disabilities range in severity from "mild to profound" and some were "non-verbal and not ambulatory" (p. 105). While this study illuminates some differences in perspectives on inclusion, the incorporation of issues facing students with severe (profound) disabilities is not described in detail.

Endorsing the importance of accounting for multiple and diverse perspectives, McLaughlin (2004), who studied organizational change, warns that until "mutual adaptation" is achieved at every level, there will always be contention and segmented progress, no matter how fundamentally good the cause for change may be. She argues that education reform will only be as effective as it is mutually understood and embraced by those responsible for its implementation (i.e., parents, teachers, and administrators). From this review of the literature, we argue a need to further understandings of inclusive education beliefs and practices in order to promote mutual adaptation built on shared beliefs and

practices that welcome and value all students. To this end, we offer our instrumental case study examination.

Through our case study of one Canadian student's experience with public school inclusion, we compare multiple perspectives to call attention to inconsistencies in beliefs and practices and, further, draw out shared beliefs and practices. We anchor our study in Paulo Freire's understanding of the importance of love as key to educational pedagogy (1968/1970, 2005) and we uphold "love of the child" as a point of convergence for parents, educators, and other inclusive education stakeholders.

Theoretical Orientation

Paulo Freire developed his pedagogical lens while working among Brazilian peasants and teaching them how to read. Freire's work in critical pedagogy has influenced education reform and teacher–student relations in many parts of the world, including the United States and Canada (Flinders & Thornton, 2004; Freire, 2000). We tap into Freire's (1968/1970) concept of praxis, which is the act of engaging equally in action and reflection of collective circumstances, in order to change those circumstances and achieve new goals. Action without reflection, and vice versa, leads to conflict and negates consistent implementation of common goals. We treat the continuous cycling between action and reflection as vital to attainment of inclusive education goals. Moreover, we join Freire in treating praxis, and attainment of educational goals, as rooted in the courage to love. Freire (2005) proclaims "it is impossible to teach without the courage to love, without the courage to try a thousand times before giving in" (p. 5).

While Freire does not explicitly define "love" in his pedagogy of the oppressed and marginalized, he consistently treats love as a "commitment to others" (Freire, 1968/1970, pp. 77–78). This same commitment takes the form of what Schoder (2010) argues as a "bestowal of value" on another (p. 1). Accordingly, Schoder claims that for Freire, love was both the "means to" and the "final aim of" educational pedagogy. Still, Schoder points out that despite an abundance of writings about Freire's pedagogy, little attention has been given to Freire's use of love. Thus, we take up a focus on love as key to Freire's concept of praxis in educational contexts. We do so by examining inconsistencies between inclusive education beliefs and practices of parents and educators of one

student with severe disabilities, and by drawing out evidence of consistent beliefs and practices driven by "love of the child."

Methods

Baxter and Jack (2008) explain that with instrumental case study design, the case "plays a supportive role, facilitating our understanding of something else" (p. 549). Our case provides a framework for examining inconsistent inclusive education beliefs and practices. We define our case as the inclusive education experience of one student with a severe disability (whose pseudonym is Oliver), attending public school in one district in Alberta from Grades 5 through 11 (ages 10–17), described from multiple parent and educator perspectives.

Case Context and Recruitment

Oliver's severe disability is defined in accordance with Alberta Education's (2012) coding criteria for those whose "medical diagnosis...creates a significant impact on [his or her]…ability to function in the school environment" and includes requiring "extensive adult assistance and modifications to the learning environment in order to benefit from schooling" (p. 9). Oliver's academic experience is described from the perspectives of his mother, father, five teachers, and one school administrator who, in combination, describe experiences across seven years (Grades 5–11) of Oliver's education. Oliver is not a participant, given that his limited modes of verbal communication would have necessitated accommodations beyond the resources available at the time of data collection. Further, because Oliver relies extensively on others for support, we are interested in how Oliver's experience is presented by those making decisions on his behalf.

Oliver's experience was selected for study in part because the first author had relationships of trust with Oliver's family and some of his educators through previous work as a consultant in Oliver's home and school environments. Oliver's stable home life and the consistency of his school placement (Grades 5–9 in one school and Grades 10–11 in a "feeder" school nearby) provided an opportunity to focus on Oliver's progress within a single school district. Further, the nature of Oliver's diagnosis (Down syndrome; displaying signs of severe autism) places him among the most severely disabled and

controversial populations of students included in regular classrooms. Finally, Oliver's parents provided permission to conduct research about their child's education.

Student profile. Oliver was born in a large city in Ontario, (Eastern) Canada, in 1994 to parents who have been married since 1988. Oliver has one sister, born in 1991, and one brother, born in 1996. Oliver has always attended regular education classes in public school with the exception of a private kindergarten. Oliver's family moved to a large city in Alberta, (Western) Canada, in 2004 when Oliver was 10 years old and beginning Grade 5. At the time of data collection, Oliver was 17 years old and in Grade 11.

Educator profiles. Educator participants were identified through a review of Oliver's education records spanning Grades 5–11, and invitations to participate in interviews were sent to 15 of Oliver's teachers and two of Oliver's administrators through an email describing the study goals, methods, and informed consent process. Of the 17 potential educator participants contacted, six agreed to participate as follows: two special education resource teachers, three regular education teachers, and one administrator (who was Oliver's school principal in Grades 5 and 6 and again in Grades 10 and 11). Appendix 1 is a profile of educators by (a) subject area, grade level, and teaching role held when teaching Oliver, (b) total years of teaching experience, (c) years of teaching students with severe disabilities prior to Oliver, and (d) pre-service training specializations.

Parent profiles. Oliver's parents are described by teachers as "well educated" (Teacher 1), "proactive" (administrator), and "very involved" in Oliver's education (Teacher 4). Teacher 2 remembered them having "very specific" expectations and wanting Oliver "included in all school activities." Teachers 3, 4, and 5 recognized Oliver's parents as "strong advocates."

His parents affirmed they are highly educated inclusion advocates. Each spoke of supplementing Oliver's education with private tutoring, purchasing and making their own modified learning materials, and supplying privately paid support staff and consultants to assist school personnel in strategizing for inclusion. Mom has background in disability studies including knowledge of the history of persons with disabilities and the community inclusion movement. Dad, on the other hand, revealed: "I hadn't really ever thought about this [educating Oliver] in terms of what the right thing was, but I very quickly cottoned

on to the difference between segregation and inclusion." While Oliver's parents shared a desire for Oliver to have a fully inclusive school experience, they also expressed empathy for parents who make different choices.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each participant shared stories of Oliver's inclusion experience during one-on-one interviews with the first author lasting an average of 80 minutes. Additional data were collected during one of Oliver's individual program planning (IPP) meetings involving five of the eight participants and attended by the first author.

During analysis, data from transcribed audio-recordings and field notes were chunked according to interview questions designed to elicit participants' beliefs about inclusion generally, and beliefs, practices, and perceived outcomes related to Oliver in particular. Passages of chunked text were examined for themes within interviews then across interviews; these themes, or "topics of talk developed by the interviewer and interviewee" (Roulston, 2010, p. 151), were created to reduce data to its most essential words, phrases, examples, and stories. Themes were used to develop participant profiles and to identify inconsistencies in including Oliver. We used Freire's concepts of praxis (1968/1970) and love (2005) to guide our interpretations of how participants understood and acted upon principles of inclusion.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of findings was increased through (1) members checking where parent participants checked/corrected our understandings of data collected, and (2) triangulation of investigators and sources where our findings are the product of the authors shared interpretations of data collected from multiple sources. Accordingly, parents' approved our unpublished analyses and the two authors negotiated at each stage of analysis and interpretation. Our triangulation of sources is embedded in our design of including perspectives from mother and father, and from educators with different perspectives on inclusion. Educators included teachers with experience in elementary versus junior high versus high school environments; teachers with different subject specializations and training; and teachers who worked with Oliver as a young boy versus teachers who worked

with Oliver as a young man versus an administrator who worked with Oliver at different ages.

Bias and Ethical Considerations

During the ethics review a question arose regarding the implications of this small study on the life of the student and his family should they be identified. In response, we clarified the following: Persons with severe disabilities, such as Oliver, typically have small circles of support and even smaller circles of lasting friendship. Any unexpected identification that stems from sharing the findings of this study could, in fact, lead to more targeted offers of support and future problem solving in both education and community settings for him. Nevertheless, risks to privacy, given the potential to be identifiable, were explicitly discussed and agreed to by Oliver's parents and included in the written informed consent signed by all participants.

Findings

Oliver's academic progress is influenced by inconsistent inclusion beliefs and practices which lead to confusion for parents, educators, and Oliver, and to lost teaching/learning opportunities. We present evidence of inconsistencies in themes of skepticism, apathy/ avoidance, and optimism. At the same time, a theme of valuing Oliver for what he brings to the educational arena was pronounced in our data.

Interruptions to Consistent Inclusive Practice: Skepticism

Months in advance of moving to Alberta from Ontario, Oliver's parents communicated desires for regular classroom (inclusive) instruction and school personnel reciprocated interest in working together. Yet, as the time for implementation approached, parents and the school administrator became skeptical about whether Oliver's transition would be smooth. Mom sensed the school's reluctance to fully include Oliver and describes her early memories:

> There was absolutely no tension whatsoever through these consultations preceding our move, flying in to meet with them. Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah,

yeah, yeah, yeah …right and, um, we met, [sighs] we, the meeting took place in the segregated classroom with the special needs teacher… Here we have been completely up front with what we want for our, our son…and here you hold the meeting in the special needs…classroom and it was their intention to persuade us, gently persuade us that, um, this is really where [Oliver] should be…

Mom presented this experience as an interruption to the progress of Oliver's academic education:

A large part of me was saying I left a great thing in Ontario and I just kind of want to jump in…where we had left off and here I realized we were back to square one…and when it comes to, um, teaching children with special needs, you can't afford, um, them just to sit around and do nothing…no other parent would, um, accept this.

The administrator confirmed that the school had attempted to persuade Mom to place Oliver in a special education classroom and he described his early skepticism about Oliver's inclusive placement in terms of his belief that Oliver's parents had overstated both Oliver's abilities and the abilities of others to understand Oliver:

Just from [what] the parents [said], I thought he was more advanced you know… as parents you, you have a relationship with your child so you see,…you read into your children, especially non-verbal children that they are communicating to you, ah, in a personal way and you start to understand that communication whereas as a stranger, ah, one wouldn't and so then would, one would believe that there is no communication because we're so built on the oral traditions.

The administrator noted later that after getting to know Oliver, and especially after meeting Oliver years later in high school, he revised his views to more fully support Oliver's participation in inclusive education. Yet the administrator remained concerned with inclusion in terms of the demands of finding the right education assistants [EAs].

What I remember was…how hard it was to find the proper aid…I think for suc-cess that is just primal…so important…so going through the subs, going through a number of people, I think we really need to take that into consideration when

you talk about inclusion and success of inclusion…that [EA] relationship is, is just huge.

Teacher 5 expressed skepticism about Oliver's learning in light of his reliance on an EA. Teacher 5 noted that when Oliver's EA took a five-day leave of absence, and Oliver worked with a substitute EA, he displayed a "renewed quality" in his work and attention span that Teacher 5 had only heard about from his junior high days. Teacher 5 explained her ethical struggle over Oliver's reliance on EAs:

> It was a professional um, conundrum for me. I met with my administrator several times. We are doing a disservice to him, knowing that there's more potential there. But...[sighs] we hunker down and we get through it and try and find a solution.

In discussing challenges associated with relying on EAs, the administrator expressed concern for corresponding difficulties classroom teachers can face:

> I just remember some of the challenges that she [Oliver's fifth-grade teacher] had and…it was never acceptance but it was more programming… How do you program with an aid that has, who had no experience at that time so…I think that took a lot of, of her time… She was exasperated I think.

Echoing the administrator's skepticism, some teachers qualified their support for inclusion. Teacher 1, reflecting on the year she taught Oliver in Grade 7 social studies, said: "It does not mean I did not want Oliver in my classroom or believe that, that inclusive education is important because I do and I do believe that he belonged there to a degree." Teacher 5 pointed out that modifying curriculum and brainstorming ways to include Oliver "takes so much."

Further evidence of skepticism took the form of teacher expressions of having included Oliver more out of obligation than a belief that he would learn anything of value. Teacher 1 recalled seeing Oliver in the halls prior to having him in her class and forming impressions that Oliver was not teachable. When she found herself responsible for Oliver in her social studies class she claims: "To me it felt like…I was…babysitting a two-year-old at the same time as I'm teaching 12-year-olds."

The administrator offered broader observations about educator skepticism, pointing out that the merger of inclusive policies with traditional public education practices

creates confusion for teachers and students. He believes government and educational leaders are "sending two messages" by asking teachers to "adapt and modify and differentiate curriculum" while at the same time prepare students for government tests that grade students against standardized levels of achievement. Students like Oliver, who cannot write these tests in their current format, become sidelined by teachers who are simply trying to keep up with expectations. Teacher 5 supports the administrator's views as she summarizes: "To expect a regular ed. teacher to work with those smaller ends, the more severe, it's just unrealistic."

Interruptions to Consistent Inclusive Practice: Avoidance and Apathy

Oliver's inclusive education was sometimes met with apathy from educators, as evidenced in statements indicating that teachers lacked commitment to, and in fact, avoided, actively engaging Oliver in academic curriculum. Oliver's inclusion in drama and music classes appeared problematic in both junior and senior high school. Teacher 4 explained that certain classes in Grades 7–9, including drama and music, were avoided simply because teachers did not want Oliver attending and school administrators did not enforce his attendance:

> I think teachers have this fear of not being able to help the kids in their classroom… They know they have to be accountable and when they are met with a student that they don't know how to help, it scares the pants off of them.

While Teacher 4 described avoidance reactions from teachers, apathetic reactions from teachers were evident during Oliver's Grade 11 IPP meeting, specifically when discussion turned to Oliver's employment opportunities. Mom and Dad expressed envisioning Oliver working in some capacity at a drama production theatre given Oliver's passion for anything related to stage plays. However, when the administrator inquired about how Oliver was included in drama classes at school, teachers responded that Oliver did not consistently attend these classes.

> Administrator: Now…has [EA] been able to spend some time with Oliver in drama or how's that?
> Teacher 5: They go to improv, I think. Is that [where] they go? What do these?

> Teacher 3: Um, no, they, it depends on the day. Sometimes not very often, improv
> 'cause that's Friday afternoon
> Teacher 5: Yeah.
> Teacher 3: Um, but a couple of times during the week. Um, he doesn't like to
> participate. He likes to just watch.
> Mom: Watch them perform.
> Teacher 3: But he's thrilled to be there. Sometimes we have a hard time getting
> [chuckles] him out of there.
> Administrator: Wow.
> Teacher 3: But yeah and, and again it depends what they're doing on that day.
> Teacher 5: Yeah, so once or twice he's for sure.
> Teacher 3: Sometimes, often it's Drama 10, that's just 'cause of the timing and
> that's when he ends up being in there.

Indeed, although Oliver's parents regard Oliver's participation in drama class as vital to Oliver's future, Oliver's teachers manage only to convey a sense of "it depends" about Oliver's participation.

Oliver's participation in other academic domains often fell short as evident in educator claims that Oliver's participation was left in the hands of support staff who were not certified teachers. Teacher 2 recalled that although Oliver and his EA "attended" Teacher 2's Grade 8 language arts classes, they spent much of the school day "in the halls" or "in the library." Teacher 1, speaking about Oliver's Grade 7 year, noted: "I did not get a sense that [EA] spent classroom time with Oliver." Further, despite her best efforts to train Oliver's Grade 7–8 EA to maintain inclusion routines for Oliver, Teacher 4 said that as soon as she left the room, this particular EA reverted to unstructured activities and often took Oliver out of the regular classroom—the consequences of which, Teacher 4 believed, were confusing for Oliver.

Further to educators' expressed reliance on EAs to initiate and sustain Oliver's participation in the regular classroom, Oliver's parents described his senior high teachers sending him to the segregated classroom while his EA took breaks or when they did not know what else to do with Oliver. The physical environment of the segregated classroom included a large bean bag cushion; jumping and sitting on the cushion became Oliver's favourite pastime while in this classroom. Although Oliver's parents accepted visits to the

segregated classroom for lack of other options, Mom was disappointed with how her son came to be viewed:

> The sad part about it is that they look at him and they go, "Well you see that he's…not ready to go into the regular classroom."… [However] he's jumping on the bean bag [chuckles] 'cause that's what's there for him. Put a desk and a chair there. You'd see, you know.

Educators further described apathy and avoidance in educating Oliver as they underlined differences between parent–child versus teacher–student relationships. Relatedly, Teacher 5 admitted her view of including Oliver changed with her recognition that more students like Oliver would arrive in the future and she needed to be prepared. In her words, "Oliver was…was a blip in my screen…it's not the case, right? We've got more kids."

Advancing Consistent Inclusive Practice: Optimism

While educators attending the IPP meeting had, either during the meeting or during individual interviews, expressed skepticism and described experiences with educator apathy and avoidance, the general tone of the IPP meeting was one of optimism. The administrator, for example, endorsed the group's consensus to tailor Oliver's Grade 12 IPP goals around preparations for adulthood, saying: "I really like that, working with the end in mind and then working back." Teacher 5 expressed satisfaction with what was accomplished in the IPP meeting: "It's always nice when we…meet and we're on the same page."

Mom and Dad emphasized Oliver's social and behavioural growth and attributed this to challenging Oliver with inclusive programming at school. Both parents noted gains in terms of Oliver's staying present longer at family gatherings and enjoying "celebrity" status with schoolmates. Mom also pointed to Oliver's gains in independence resulting from skills learned at school such as using his numbers skills to operate the microwave to heat his own snacks.

Dad's optimism stemmed in part from some of the obvious features of Oliver's disability to which educators can respond:

> In fact…we always had the advantage with [Oliver] having a disability that was a visible disability, right, so there wasn't anything to explain as opposed to there's a lot of kids out there, as we all know, who have disabilities and they're not visible and they don't necessarily get the same favourable treatment that [Oliver] gets from people understanding right off the bat…he has a disability. There's prejudices for sure but there's also benefits… You figure it [out] over time.

Mom's optimism stemmed from the satisfaction she derived from successes that stood out amidst struggles:

> Unfortunately there have been more negatives, but what's good about this is that when the positives do happen, they completely outweigh…the negatives so even though the, the positives in number are, are not there…they're weighted much more heavily.

Teacher 4 spoke for other educators as she described worries teachers experienced in having Oliver in their classrooms coupled with optimism over how teachers became more comfortable and effective with including Oliver:

> The hardest part about keeping him in the classroom is when [Oliver], um, for whatever reason, became boisterous or non-compliant and started to do some of his behaviours…so, um, between the don't know what to do with this kid… who's responsible ultimately for his education, um, and am I going to be held accountable if he's not passing Grade 7… Um, so even his Grade 7 math teacher, although he was the one that was most resistant to have [Oliver] in the classroom, he was one of the ones that was most involved with [Oliver] in the classroom. [Chuckles]

Teacher 4's optimism is further manifest in her description of an overall comfortable classroom dynamic that included Oliver:

> The more Oliver was in with the same group of kids, the less disruptive he was because the kids knew that some days he was going to do more yelling than other days and they, most of them, got to the point where it didn't matter whether he was yelling or not, he was doing his thing over in the corner [chuckles]…that was just Oliver and that's what he did.

Teacher 2 also recalls receiving Oliver into her classroom, saying she "didn't know what to expect," having never met Oliver or his parents:

> At the time, um, [Teacher 4] had also told me, um, that the parents were very involved… and had very specific things they wanted for Oliver and they wanted him to be included in all school activities…and again I didn't know what that meant. I hadn't met his parents. I didn't know anything about that so my mind was thinking more about okay so how can I make that happen.

Teacher 2 expressed having had few preconceived notions of including students with severe disabilities and openness to learning. Indeed, both Mom and Teacher 4 described Oliver's Grade 8 year in Teacher 2's homeroom as one of his most successful.

Advancing Consistent Inclusive Practice: Bestowing Value

Referring to teachers who seemed to have greater success including Oliver, Mom reflected: "I believe at a fundamental level they actually value Oliver. They actually do see him as, um, having potential." Later she added:

> The teachers who I think can do the best teaching, um, are those who have the most amount of respect for the students and…they already know intrinsically how to value the students for what they're bringing to the table here and now.

> An example of such valuing is evident in Teacher 4's disclosure of her having had a sister with severe disabilities who had passed away seven years earlier. Teacher 4 spoke in terms of acceptance and believing in Oliver's potential despite not having had much success communicating with him:

> Special needs kids are more capable than what people think. Um, ah, my sister was bedridden, non-communicative, um, from the time she was four years old because of an accident… They would call her a vegetative state except that, um, she, if you knew her well enough, she communicated through her eyes, through her, um, sounds that she made…but if you didn't know her, you'd never, you'd never understand that that's what she was doing… That's why I keep going back to the communication with Oliver. That's why it was so very frustrating for me, maybe

more so for me…than other people because I could communicate with my sister and I could not communicate with Oliver.

Several educators spoke in terms of *the value* of having Oliver as part of their schools and classrooms and expressed liking his sense of humour, his ability to love everyone, and his positive effects on others. Teachers 3 and 4, respectively, explained:

Teacher 3: For the most part, it's been a very positive experience for me…and the staff too, um, staff that we have in our area that have never worked with kids like that before…have come around and kind of connected with him and…and grown. I mean we've all grown as professionals, right, for having the opportunity to, to work with him in a setting where normally we probably wouldn't.

Teacher 4: Everybody knew that [Oliver] was different but he was still accepted…that was a, something that he provided for the other kids that they maybe wouldn't have gotten without [Oliver] in the school.

The administrator, in particular, bestowed value on Oliver as he reflected on lessons he learned from Oliver's overall style:

I think there was a free spirit of…him being able to do the things you know and not follow so many protocoling rules and regs so that there was an enjoyment of freedom of …if he blurted out something or if he yelled with excitement, there was a, there was a beauty to see that because I think our society we, have become regimented and, and not supposed to share certain things at certain times so I think there's those little lessons.

Dad accentuated beliefs about the positive impact Oliver had on others:

I remember my mom had a, a friend…who had a son who had…some severe, ah, you know sort of global developmental delays, and he would come over to our house and he was different, he was weird… I remember…being quite, almost frightened of him, right, because I didn't know what he, you know, how is he going to react to me?... Then seeing the kids react to [Oliver] being in the classroom, being with him…every day and how normal it became for them, right, and, and

they weren't afraid of him and they, you know, they were, in fact, they loved him. They loved interacting with him and I said this is the right way to do it.

The administrator reinforced Dad's view by sharing a story of Oliver's value in the school. During a musical performance in a school assembly, Oliver jumped up and started running around the gym "almost like he was a bird, he had wings." Fighting an impulse to "go grab him and…pull him aside," the administrator let the situation play out, much to his satisfaction and to the enjoyment of others: "We just let it be and let it go… and I think it, ah, it was a good feeling." This story was shared with Oliver's parents in the IPP meeting where Teacher 5 expressed her enjoyment of this novel situation: "[Oliver's] never done that before!" and "Everyone just went with it because they could see he was so happy."

Discussion

While participants gave evidence of inconsistent beliefs and practices surrounding Oliver's inclusive education experience, the importance of valuing Oliver was a consistent feature of most interviews. Teachers 2 and 4 gave evidence of valuing Oliver as they each described seeking ways to "help this kid." Teacher 3 spoke in terms of Oliver's value in boosting professional growth for educators, while Teacher 4 described Oliver's role in helping students in general to grow in their capacity as accepting human beings. Teacher 5's value of Oliver was clear in her fear of doing a "disservice" to Oliver, while the administrator wove together a commentary of valuing Oliver for having generated learning benefits for everybody at the school. Only Teacher 1's image of "babysitting a two-year-old" invokes images of Oliver as a "chore" rather than as a learner to be valued. Oliver's parents further invoke "bestowal of value" (Schoder, 2010) and Freire's (1968, 1970) concept of praxis as they call attention to educators who "value" Oliver as foundational to the realization and appreciation of Oliver's learning potential.

Through this instrumental case study, we enter the scholarly discussion about whether inclusive education research should be philosophical or empirical in nature (Erten & Savage, 2012), or, to use Freire's terms, reflection- or action-oriented. We provide a niche illustration of inclusive education research at a philosophical/empirical intersection that may be used to reflect upon and inform progress with inclusive education initiatives.

Our participants provide evidence of their beliefs about the principle of inclusive education as well as of their experience with the implementation of the principle in schools. Collisions are evident at this intersection in the form of beliefs that Oliver belongs in regular classrooms but only "to a degree." The parents' conviction that their son should be fully included collides with arguably subtle attempts by school administration to shift parent focus to special education by having a special education classroom comprise the setting for the introductory meeting between school and parents. Further chaos at this intersection is evident amidst inconsistencies between teacher philosophies toward inclusive education—such as when one teacher is open and optimistic about teaching Oliver while another thinks in terms of babysitting Oliver.

Inconsistent educator views and practices yield a lack of shared vision for Oliver's future and an imbalance in the relationship between action and reflection in his education. Sacrifice of action is evident when, despite Oliver's parents expressing a strong belief in Oliver's fit for a career in drama production, opportunities for Oliver's involvement in school drama programs are not taken up by teachers. Likewise, sacrifice of reflection occurs at points where, out of bureaucratic obligation, Oliver's education is left in the hands of support staff.

Gaps in Oliver's participation in drama and the utilization of support staff are part of a bigger pattern of inconsistency in Oliver's participation in regular classrooms. These inconsistencies contribute to, and flow from, confusion for regular classroom teachers and administrators who did not always know their roles relative to Oliver. Teachers were sometimes unfamiliar with Oliver's learning needs, much less his strengths and abilities, and had difficulty seeing themselves as able to support his learning. Oliver was unpredictably shuffled between regular classroom, hallway, library, and special education classroom; although we do not have Oliver's firsthand perspective, we imagine he felt confused as he followed his EA in and out of classrooms in which he was never a full-time student. The unstructured nature of Oliver's school experience left him facing reduced expectations for academic learning and meaningful interaction with peers. This leaves us worried that inclusive education, rather than resulting in the expanded opportunities for students with disabilities presumed under inclusive education mandates, may entail heightened confusion and disappointment for all stakeholders when raised expectations for inclusion are not met with consistency.

We argue that our findings of inconsistent inclusive practices inherent to, and flowing from, such philosophical/reflection and empirical/action collisions necessitate further dialogical praxis (Freire, 1968/1970) about missed learning opportunities for students like Oliver. Through our instrumental case study approach we prompt stakeholder reflection on the broader impact of inclusion as we converge multiple perspectives around a single student's academic experience. This leaves a multidimensional account of inclusion within which we are able to discern a theme of "bestowal of value," congruous with Freire's concept of love. Indeed, while descriptions of Oliver as a student, for whom teachers and administrators had to design instruction, were characterized by inconsistent beliefs and practices related to including him, descriptions of Oliver as an amiable, valued person were consistent. It seems it is in the teaching of the student, not in the loving of the child, where inclusive education for students with severe disabilities is more likely to fall short. Dwayne Huebner (1961/1999), education philosopher and curriculum scholar, tells us not to be ashamed of putting a discourse of love into education and warns, "The closing of the asking mouth and the shutting of the wondering eye lead eventually to the hardening of the responsible heart" (p. 12). In light of continued education reform in Alberta and elsewhere, perhaps love of the child may be used more intentionally to focus and propel the action and reflection necessary for progress in achieving mutual adaptation and shared inclusive education goals.

The main limitation of this study is the small and localized participant sample with whom we conducted limited members checks. Our findings cannot be generalized to other populations and we are cautious in our interpretations. Yet our method affords a depth of insights into the phenomena being investigated. We recommend continued study, drawing upon multiple perspectives toward furthering understandings of, and responses to, inconsistencies surrounding inclusion for students like Oliver. Students with severe disabilities are particularly under-included in many schools and under-represented in inclusive education research. Shier, Graham, and Jones (2009) claim that people with disabilities are living longer, healthier lives than ever before owing to medical and technological advancements, yet many still experience difficulties securing valued adult roles and relationships in community. Inclusion in school communities is a critical precursor to valued adult roles.

Appendix

Appendix 1. Profiles of participating educators.

Educator (current subject area)	Oliver's grade	Total teaching experience[a]	Experience[a] teaching students with severe disabilities prior to Oliver	Pre-service training specializations
Teacher 1 (Social Studies)	7	32	0	English Psychology Elementary Methods
Teacher 2 (Language Arts)	8	11	1	Textile Sciences Home Economics English
Teacher 3 (Special Ed.)	11	10 (last 3 as a Special Educator)	3	English
Teacher 4 (Inclusive/Special Ed. Resource)	7–9	18	15	Elementary Art Family Life French
Teacher 5 (Inclusive/Special Ed. Resource)	10–11	20	15	Special Education
Administrator (School Principal)	5–6 10–11	17	11	Social Studies French Religious Studies

[a] Years of teaching experience.

References

Alberta Education. (2009). *Setting the direction framework*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education. Retrieved from the Alberta Education website: http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/1082136/sc_settingthedirection_framework.pdf

Alberta Education. (2010). *Setting the direction framework: Government of Alberta response*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education. Retrieved from the Alberta Education website: http://education.alberta.ca/media/1296998/09545aeugovresponseenglish.pdf

Alberta Education. (2011). *Action on inclusion: Inclusive education in Alberta. Providing context for implementation of action on inclusion*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education. Retrieved from the Alberta Education website: http://education.alberta.ca/media/6452622/context_action_on_inclusion.pdf

Alberta Education. (2012). *Special education coding criteria 2012/2013*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Education, Inclusive Learning Supports Branch. Retrieved from the Alberta Education website: http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/825847/spedcodingcriteria.pdf (Note: If having difficulty opening this link, copy and paste URL into your browser.)

Anderson, S., & Macri. J. (2009). District administrator perspectives on student learning in an era of standards and accountability: A collective frame analysis. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *32*(3), 192–221.

Andrews, J., & Lupart, J. (2000). *The inclusive classroom: Educating exceptional children* (2nd ed.). Scarborough, ON: Nelson.

Athanases, S. Z., & de Oliveira, L. C. (2007). Conviction, confrontation, and risk in new teachers' advocating for equity. *Teaching Education*, *18*(2), 123–136.

Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM). (2014). *Community report from the autism and developmental disabilities monitoring (ADDM) network: A snapshot of autism spectrum disorder among 8-year-old children in multiple communities in the United States in 2010*. Retrieved from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/states/comm_report_autism_2014.pdf

Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *13*(4), 544.

Bennet, S. M., & Gallagher, T. L. (2013). High school students with intellectual disabilities in the school and workplace: Multiple perspectives on inclusion. *Canadian Journal of Education*, *36*(1), 96–124.

Boling, E. (2007). "Yeah, but I still don't want to deal with it": Changes in a teacher candidate's conceptions of inclusion. *Teaching Education*, *18*(3), 217–231.

Brandes, J., & Crowson, H. (2009). Predicting dispositions toward inclusion of students with disabilities: The role of conservative ideology and discomfort with disability. *Social Psychology of Education*, *12*(2), 271–289.

Causton-Theoharis, J., & Theoharis, G. (2008). Creating inclusive schools for all students. *School Administrator*, *65*(8), 24–31.

Causton-Theoharis, J., Theoharis, G., & Ashby, C. (2008). But we already do inclusion, don't we? *School Administrator*, *65*(8), 30–31.

Crawford, C. (2005). *Scoping inclusive education for Canadian students with intellectual and other disabilities*. Toronto, ON: The Roeher Institute.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing from among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Curcic, S., Gabel, S. L., Zeitlin, V., Cribaro-DiFatta, S., & Glarner, C. (2011). Policy and challenges of building schools as inclusive communities. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *15*(1), 117–133.

Erten, O., & Savage, R. S. (2012). Moving forward in inclusive education research. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *16*(2), 221–233.

Flinders, D. J., & Thornton, S. J. (2004). Reconceptualizing curriculum theory. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (2nd ed., pp. 119–124). New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: The Seabury Press. (Original work published 1968)

Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the oppressed, with introduction by Donaldo Macedo* (30th anniversary ed.). New York, NY: The Continuum International Publishing Group Inc.

Freire, P. (2005). *Teachers as cultural workers: Letters to those who dare teach*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus Books, LLC.

Huebner, D. E. (1999). Is the elementary curriculum adequate? In V. Hillis (Ed.), *Collected essays by Dwayne E. Huebner, collected and introduced by William F. Pinar* (pp. 10–14). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. (Originally published in 1961)

Leyser, Y., & Kirk, R. (2004). Evaluating inclusion: An examination of parent views and factors influencing their perspectives. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*, *51*(3), 271–285.

Loreman, T. (2007). Seven pillars of support for inclusive education: Moving from "why?" to "how?" *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, *3*(2), 22–38.

Marope, P. T. M. (2014). Learning and competencies for the 21st century. *Prospects*, *44*(4), 483–486. doi: 10.1007/s11125-014-9333-y

McGrew, A. M. (2008). *A case study of principal leadership in inclusionary education settings* (Unpublished doctor of education dissertation). University of Houston, Texas.

McLaughlin, M. W. (2004). Implementation as mutual adaptation: Change in classroom organization. In D. J. Flinders & S. J. Thornton (Eds.), *The curriculum studies reader* (2nd ed., pp. 171–181). New York, NY: RoutledgeFalmer.

Norwich, B. (2008). Dilemmas of difference, inclusion and disability: International perspectives on placement. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *23*(4), 287–304.

Opertti, R., Brady J., & Duncombe, L. (2009). Moving forward: Inclusive education as the core of Education for All. *Prospects*, *39*(3), 205–214.

Palmer, D. S., Fuller, K., Arora, T., & Nelson, M. (2001). Taking sides: Parent views on inclusion for their children with severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, *67*(4), 467–484.

Pearce, M. (2009). The inclusive secondary school teacher in Australia. *International Journal of Whole Schooling*, *5*(2), 1–15.

Porfeli, E. J., Algozzine, B., Nutting, B., & Queen, J. A. (2006). Predictors of parents' inclusion decisions. *Journal of School Public Relations*, *27*(1), 6–26.

Roulston, K. (2010). *Reflective interviewing: A guide to theory and practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage

Runswick-Cole, K. (2008). Between a rock and a hard place: Parents' attitudes to the inclusion of children with special educational needs in mainstream and special schools. *British Journal of Special Education*, *35*(3), 173–180.

Schoder, E. M. (2010). *Paulo Freire's pedagogy of love* (Unpublished doctor of education dissertation). Rutgers University, New Jersey.

Shields, C. M. (2012). Critical advocacy research: An approach whose time has come. In Shirley R. Steinberg & Gail S. Cannella (Eds.), *Critical qualitative research reader* (pp. 2–13). New York, NY: Peter Lang.

Shier, M., Graham, J. R., & Jones, M. E. (2009). Barriers to employment as experienced by disabled people: A qualitative analysis in Calgary and Regina, Canada. *Disability & Society*, *24*(1), 63–75.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sze, S. (2009). A literature review: Pre-service teachers' attitudes toward students with disabilities. *Education*, *130*(1), 53–56.

Theoharis, G., & Causton-Theoharis, J. N. (2008). Oppressors or emancipators: Critical dispositions for preparing inclusive school leaders. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *41*(2), 230–246.

Timmons, V., & Wagner, M. (2009). *Inclusive education knowledge exchange initiative: An analysis of the statistics Canada participation and activity limitation survey. Final report*. Retrieved from Copian/Le CDEACF website: http://en.copian.ca/library/research/ccl/inclusive_edu_know/inclusive_edu_know.pdf

Turner, N. D., & Traxler, M. (1995, April). *Observations of parents, teachers, and principals during the first year of implementation of inclusion in two Midwestern*

school districts. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for
Exceptional Children, Indianapolis, IN.

UNESCO. (2015). *Education for all 2000–2015: Achievements and challenges*. Paris,
France: UNESCO. Retrieved from UNESCO website: http://en.unesco.org/gem-
report/report/2015/education-all-2000-2015-achievements-and-challenges#sthash.
CDVDmdE9.dpbs