

**TEACHER VIEWS OF SUPPORT FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN BEIJING, CHINA****XU Xiaoli***University of Jyväskylä***MALINEN Olli-Pekka***Nillo Mäki Institute*

*This study reports teachers' views and experiences about the support they receive for their teaching in inclusive classrooms focusing on support from families, resource teachers, and school leaders and administration. The results are based on 16 individual and focus group teacher interviews that were conducted in four different schools in Beijing municipality. The teachers identified the lack of family support as a major challenge for their work. Several teachers reported collaboration with resource teachers but the scope of that cooperation was quite limited. The teachers expressed satisfaction with the support from school leaders both directly and indirectly through opportunities for professional development. Despite receiving different forms of support the teachers expressed that it did not adequately address to the challenges they face when teaching inclusive class of learners.*

**Introduction**

In mainland China, the first high-profile efforts to place children with disabilities in regular classrooms began in the 1980s (Deng & Zhu, 2007) even though there are anecdotes about individual cases of children with disabilities in mainstream schools already in earlier years (Deng & Zhu, 2007; Xu, 2012). In 1980s the Chinese educational legislation also became more supportive for inclusive education (Deng & Manset, 2000; Deng, Poon-Mcbrayer, & Farnsworth, 2001; Liu & Jiang, 2008; McCabe, 2003; Qian, 2003) and in the next decade the new policy of accepting children with disabilities in mainstream classes was given the name *Learning in Regular Classrooms* (LRC), or *suibanjiudu* in Chinese (Xu, 2012). There has been a vivid debate among Chinese scholars about the relationship between Chinese LRC and the Western notion of inclusive education (Deng & Zhu, 2007; Li, 2009; Liu & Jiang, 2008). As one aspect of this discussion some scholars have claimed a distinction between these two concepts (Malinen, 2013, p.21). Nevertheless, in this paper we use terms inclusive education and Learning in Regular Classrooms (LRC) interchangeably.

Currently there are many policies in the form of laws and regulations at the national, municipal level as well as district level, with purpose to support, instruct and promote the development of inclusive education in regular

Chinese schools. However, these policies often exist only as written documents and are not necessarily even known by the public. Another problem concerning these documents guiding the administration of inclusive education is that they contain a lot of soft words instead of hard regulations. Also in terms of the funding allocation, inclusive regular schools have received much less money than separate special education schools. (Peng, 2014)

With the adoption of inclusive education teaching can become considerably more multifaceted with greater responsibility being devolved to schools and individual teachers (Forlin & Forlin, 1996). Regular teachers in inclusive classrooms are confronted with various challenges and they need support to facilitate their work. A few Chinese empirical studies have investigated the support that teachers receive for their work in inclusive schools. One of the latest of these studies was a survey research by Wang, Wang, Cheng and Wang (2013) that was conducted among teachers of inclusive schools in Beijing. Their survey provided valuable information about the categories of support available for the teachers. Nevertheless, there is still need for studies that give a voice for teachers themselves to describe how these different forms of support are manifested in their daily work. This paper aims to address this need by reporting findings based on 16 individual and focus group interviews in four different inclusive schools in Beijing municipality. We concentrate on teachers' views and experiences about the support they receive from families, resource teachers, and school leaders for implementing inclusive education in their schools.

## **Method**

### *Participants*

The findings of this paper are based on interviews that were conducted by the other author and two local research assistants including between March 23 and April 12, 2012. The interview data was collected as part of an international comparative research project that studies teacher's roles in inclusive education in several different countries (Savolainen et al., 2012). The interviews took place in four inclusive schools located in four different administrative regions of Beijing Municipality. School A is a primary school located in Y County and about two thirds of its students are holding rural or non-local household residence permit (hùkǒu). School B is a secondary school located in H District. School C is a primary school located in X District. School D is a primary school located in S District, which is a new development area that is located relatively far from the city center. It is also worth mentioning that School D is located near a welfare house (fúliyuán) where many of its students are from. Therefore School D has quite high ratio of special education/regular students. It is worth mentioning that the four participating schools and their teachers do not necessarily represent typical inclusive school in Beijing. All participating schools had established contacts of the Beijing Municipal Special Education Center, which makes it likely that they were more experienced with implementing inclusive education than average Beijing school. This selection of schools was intentional since the target was to secure a rich-enough interview data for our analysis.

In total, 20 teachers participated on the study. The teacher participants vary in gender, age, teaching experience and experience of working with students with disabilities. The participants' experience varied from half a year to thirty-one years. Majority of the teachers are females. The subjects that they taught include Chinese, English, mathematics, science, calligraphy, psychology and painting. Two of them worked as resource teachers, responsible for operating resource room in their schools. Resource room (zīyuánjiàoshi) is a specially designed classroom that is used to provide individualized support for students with disabilities in regular schools (Yang & Xu, 2004) Both of them are only resource teachers in their schools. One of them has academic background in applied psychology while the other resource teacher does not have academic background in relevant fields.

In each school, three individual interviews and one focus group interview with a group of four teachers were conducted. This resulted into 16 separate interview recordings that had a total length little over 8 hours. Before the analysis the recordings were transcribed into Chinese writing by the same research assistants that were present in all the interviews. The transcription resulted in 135 pages of text that contain over 150 000 Chinese characters. The transcriptions have not been translated to any other language.

The interviews followed a semi-structured framework with questions dealing with participants' experiences and views related to implementing inclusive education in their schools. During the interviews the participants were encouraged to talk about their experiences through using open-ended questions and by asking follow-up questions based on their responses. The flexible nature of the interviews aimed to encourage depth and vitality and to allow new concepts to emerge (Dearnley, 2005). The interviews were carried out during school days at the participants' schools with the aim of saving them from transportation and other additional trouble. Each school provided a separate meeting room for the interviews to ensure the privacy of the interviews.

Three ethical principles guided the research. These principles informed by House (1990) were: 1) Mutual respect – understanding others’ aims and interests, not damaging self-esteem, and not being condescending; 2) Non-coercion and non-manipulation –not using force or threats or leading others to co-operate when it is against their interests; 3) Support for democratic values and institutions –commitment to equality and liberty. The participants were informed about the purpose of the interviews and that the data would be used for academic research purposes. In each school a permission to conduct the data collection was gained from a relevant school administrator. When reporting the results measures are taken to confirm the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants.

The data analysis began by categorizing the text in the interview transcriptions under certain themes such as teachers’ actions in inclusive classes, challenges teachers were facing and the availability of support for teachers. In this paper we will concentrate on teachers’ views of the support they receive for their work in inclusive schools. The interviews covered many different sources of support including nearby special education schools, regular peers of students with disabilities and other regular teachers. In this study, however, we focus on the support that originates from three different groups of actors which are 1) families 2) resource teachers, and 3) school leaders.

## Results

### *Family support*

It is clear that parents have a very important role on their child’s education. This is particularly true in the case of students with disabilities and other special educational needs whose schooling often requires more active family involvement. One key element of supporting this involvement is smooth communication between teachers and parents or other caregivers.

Chinese teachers generally raise many requirements on parents. Parents are asked to supervise children’s homework: to check that required quantity of homework is completed, requirements are achieved and texts are recited, to give children dictation at home and to sign in children’s homework (indicating that all the homework has finished). If possible, parents are also asked to tutor their children’s study at home. Many interviewed teachers mentioned parents’ insufficient involvement in their Children’s studies as support from parents as one major obstacle of their work. The lack of parental support is particularly obvious for teachers in School D where many students are from the nearby welfare house. *Of course we cannot require the teachers in welfare house to tutor these kids’ homework like parents because one teacher there has to take care of several children*, a teacher from School D said.

Both family and school have expectations on each other. Difficulties emerge when these expectations contradict. According to Huang (2001), Chinese schools are concentrating on academic education with the emphasis on students’ scores and enrolment rate to further education. In Chinese context schools often perceive themselves as the core providers of education and want parents to follow their orders thus extending class activities to the sphere of family life. The purpose of having parent-teacher conference is often not hearing parents’ *precious comments*, but raising demands on parents and putting pressure on them to support their child’s academic performance. On the other hand, some Chinese parents may actively seek to transfer their own educational responsibilities to schools comments like: *One sentence of teacher is much better than a hundred sentences of mine* (Huang, 2001, p. 25).

The contradictions between teachers and parents were discussed extensively in the interviews. A teacher from School C described the issue as *it makes my head ache the most*. Some teachers mentioned that the low level of parents’ own educational background as a major challenge of their work in inclusive class. *In my class, two kids’ mothers are illiterate, and some parents are not able to sign their own names*, one teacher from School C disclosed. Teachers in School A, even though acknowledging that the parents in general value education, told that parents’ low academic knowledge affects their Children’s academic performance: *Parents cannot do well in tutoring homework at home*. Some parents’ tendency to transfer educational responsibility from the family to school was also presented in the interviews. One teacher complained: *He (a parent) just pushes all the responsibility to teachers and takes it as granted, this is really hard for us to communicate, our education cannot get response from family education*

The teachers also came up with some practical suggestions how to help parents with low educational qualifications to support their children’s schooling. One such suggestion came from a School C teacher who said: *We need organize training on parents . . . circulate homework of good practice among parents so that parents would know . . . how to make requirement on their own kid*.

While the interviewed teachers saw the communication with parents with low educational and socio-economic background as a challenge, some found parents with high educational qualifications even harder to interact with. *They think their theoretic level is high, and what I said has already been understood by them, these parents with*

*high educational qualification usually respond to us with silence*, a teacher from School C complained and shared a story about a boy student whose father is a PhD at a well-respected national research institute. Once in a painting class when another student had touched the boy by accident the boy revenged it by painting the student's whole bag. Soon the boy himself realized his offense and apologized. Afterwards, when the student told his parents about ruining the fellow student's bag the parent(s) only comment was: *just compensate (with money)*. Another teacher commented the incident:

He just wanted to solve the (immediate) problem rather than prevent (underlying) problems. He just thought that if (the child) ruin something he will pay .He would not think how to do next, would not think how to prevent such startling occurrences.

Teachers themselves also realized that the collaboration with parents is a major challenge, particularly with parents of students with special needs. Better academic performance and higher scores are in the common interest of teachers and parents thus possessing a potential to smoothen contradictions. *When they see their children's scores improve, they realize what they did (collaborate with teachers) is good for their children*, one teacher described this phenomenon.

A teacher from School D shared a story of successful family-school collaboration in providing socio-emotional support:

There is a kid in my class, tall and handsome. But he was always being timid and dared not to answer questions in class. . . I visited his home and got to know his living situation. His mother said that he wasn't good at communicating with his stepfather . . . we decided to cooperate and help the kid develop his self-confidence. At home, his stepfather tried to communicate with him and play with him. At school, I entrusted him to organize class activities and encouraged him to play with other kids. Gradually he is more and more brave and his academic performance improved a lot.

Modern communication tools have potential to smoothen interaction between families and schools. In addition to more traditional ways like face-to-face meeting and phone calls, the interviewed teacher utilized a range of other channels to stay in contact with the students' caregivers. School A had adopted a system called *Home-school interaction (Ji Xiaohudong)* to facilitate the communication between teachers and parents. School D utilized a same type of service called *Home-school communication (Ji Xiaotong)* and School C was using *Fetion (Feixin)* instant messaging service in communication with parents. All these communication platforms allow teachers and parents to communicate via SMS. Teachers using the platform can send messages to a group of parents or carry out individual communication with one parent. School A teachers who discussed about the *Home-school interaction* platform saw it as a very useful tool that they use frequently for day-to-day communication with the families. One teacher saw it as narrowing the distance between the school and the parents who do not otherwise have time to discuss with them. Previously, many Chinese schools did not have a systemic and effective method to reach and communicate with students' parents. Even in areas with stable internet connection, email is not commonly used as a priority communication method. Many Chinese people do not even have an email address. Instead, mobile phone is ubiquitous in China. Phone call and SMS are probably the most effective ways to reach people and spread notification. It appears that our interview Schools had recognized the importance of support from parents and made efforts to smooth the cooperation between schools and families. The schools had adopted communication methods that would easily accessible to the parents, many of whom were migrant workers with long work hours.

#### *Support from resource teacher*

When implementing inclusive education in regular classrooms, teachers are confronted with various problems that require many types of support. Resource teachers and resource rooms are one emerging form of support services in regular Chinese schools.

Article 19 of *Trial Measures on LRC Work of Disabled Children and Adolescents* (State Education Commission, 1994), stipulates specific regulations on resource room and resource teacher. It requires that primary schools in counties and towns with adequate conditions or with an extensive population of students with disabilities should gradually establish resource room, and equip it with necessary teaching tools, learning tools, rehabilitation equipment and literature material. In addition, full-time or part-time resource teachers should be assigned to operate the mentoring room and the mentoring teachers should receive professional training for special education.

In Beijing Municipality the first resource room was established in 1997 to a primary school in Xuanwu District (Sun, 2013). More established policy of setting up of resource rooms in Beijing Municipality started in the period of

the *tenth five-year plan* (years 2001–2005) when the municipal commission of education invested to build resource rooms in 20 chosen inclusive schools (Yang & Xu, 2004). Lately, the policy of establishing resource rooms has also taken root at the national level. The *Promotion plan for special education (2014 -2016)* includes improving conditions for running schools as a main measure to improve special education. The plan stipulates government to support and undertake building resource room in regular schools with a relatively big number of students with disabilities studying under the LRC model (Ministry of Education, 2014). Among the four Beijing schools where the interviews were conducted at least three had set up resource rooms. School B had a resource room, with three full-time resource teachers; School C had a resource room with a part-time resource teacher, and School D had a resource room with a part-time resource teacher.

Although the interviewed schools had resource rooms set up, one cannot forget the highly unequal distribution of educational resources in China. Resource rooms are more common in wealthy regions like Beijing, Shanghai and Zhejiang Province, while in poorer areas, establishing resource rooms is not yet in the agenda. Even in Beijing, reminded a teacher from School D, resource rooms are not available for every inclusive school: *Our resource room was established in 2008, arranged by District Special Education Center . . . because our school is near to a welfare house, the center gave us the priority.* Statistics support the claim. In 2012 when the interviews were conducted the Beijing Municipality schools had 148 resources rooms which was much less than the total number (1091) of inclusive schools (Sun, 2013).

Resource rooms are mainly targeted for students with more severe disabilities who are officially registered as Learning in Regular Classroom students but they can also be used to cater for the needs with specific learning disabilities, behavior problems or psychological problems. Concerning the use of resource room for these other groups of student with special needs a teacher from School B disclosed:

Nowadays the work of mentoring student with disabilities studying under Learning in Regular Classroom model and psychological health education is in fact mingled together. Therefore, the function of resource class is not only mentoring some students with disabilities studying under LRC model, but also to address the psychological problems of some regular students by providing psychological counselling and instruction.

On the other hand, there are limits to which groups of students with special needs receive support in resource rooms. For example teacher from School C told that at least in their school resource room is not a place for student with behavior problems: *Normally students with behavior problems are not willing to go to resource room, if they don't want to go there, we teachers cannot force them.*

In addition to managing the resource room resource teachers have a consultative role of supporting the regular teacher's work. *When I am really busy and have no time to solve the problem or the problem is worth researching I would ask her to discuss the problem with me and do some research together,* a teacher from School D disclosed. School D, was in a fortunate situation to have Ms. L. who has an academic background in psychology working as their part-time resource teacher. Unfortunately such a support is not equally available in many other Beijing schools. Wang and others (2013) who conducted a survey among 1703 inclusive Beijing teachers found out that guidance from professionals in special education or other relevant fields was the least available form of support for the teachers.

In School D, Ms. L. who was a part-time resource teacher described her work in the resource room with the following words:

Currently there are five to six students participating activities in resource room regularly and there are some other students coming to resource room irregularly. There are some students from the welfare house, and they have relatively severe impairments both psychologically and physically so they would come to me every week. Generally I will arrange five to six students as a group and do group training. If class teacher reflects to me that some student is having a problem, I will have a private communication with the student.

Ms. L. did not see her role as a resource teacher solely as helping students with their academics. She viewed boosting the psychological well-being of students with disabilities perhaps even more important function of resource teacher. Ms. L. described this aspect of teaching in resource room by saying:

Resource room provides them (students with special needs) with a place, a space. We bring special kids into regular school and hope that they can grow up like regular kids. However, they clearly know that they are special. While in a resource room, they can think that they are equal with other people here, because here everyone is a child with special educational needs . . . when they come here, they regard themselves as alike, as equal. So I think that resource room . . . brings them psychological relief. It makes them truly realize that there are people who care about me . . . sometimes, they are quite proud of it, saying 'I have activity on Thursday, I can come but you (other students) can't'. Perhaps there is a gap between them and regular students in academic performance, but resource room is a good place for building their self-efficacy and self-confidence.

In China it is common for resource teachers to hold more than one position in inclusive schools. In 2012 Beijing schools had 218 resource teachers but only 52 of them were working as fulltime resource teachers (Sun, 2013). In addition to the work in resource room, resource teachers are often subject teachers in regular classes. Resource teachers have to do also administrative work, prepare materials, write reports, and participate in professional development. Since large proportion of the resource teachers' time is spent in other activities they are not able to reach all students' special educational needs. The lack of time devoted to actual resource teacher work was identified as a major problem already some decade ago (Yang & Xu, 2004) but the problem has persisted (Sun, 2013).

Lack of professional knowledge of resource teachers is identified as another major difficulty for the development of resource rooms. Some regional governments, including Beijing, have allocated money to set up well equipped resource rooms. The problem of finding appropriately trained resource teachers has remained as a bottleneck for fully utilizing this newly built infrastructure (Peng, 2014). Even in Beijing most resource teachers do not have a degree in special education (Sun, 2013). In the interview schools, professional development was used to compensate the resource teachers' lack of initial qualifications. For example Ms. D, who had been working in School C for 22 years and was in charge of the resource room at her school, received one-to-one instruction from an expert assigned by the Special Education Center of X District.

#### *Support from school leaders*

Higher salaries would be one concrete way for the school leaders to encourage inclusive teachers' work. In 1994 Article 24 of the *Trial Measures on LRC Work of Disabled Children and Adolescents* (State Education Commission, 1994) stipulated that local educational authorities and schools should take measures to remunerate teachers for working in inclusive classes, so to encourage teachers' positive participation in Learning in Regular Classroom work. Although this article was adopted over two decades ago in a major national policy paper for inclusive education, many teachers working in inclusive classes have not received any remuneration for their extra work. It is common that inclusive teachers get the same payment as regular teachers who do not have to take care of children with special educational needs. This was the situation also in School A. According to their teachers there was no extra remuneration for teachers working in inclusive classes. Instead of monetary incentives the leaders encouraged teachers to work for inclusive education by appealing to their spirit of devotion.

The interviewed inclusive school teachers may not receive financial rewards from the efforts but they reported receiving lot of support from their school leaders and administrators. According to the teachers from School B they could go to school leaders when a problem occurred: *Sometimes I go to Director L who is responsible for the Department of Junior High and sometimes I can even go to the principal to reflect my problem.* The teacher also saw practical value in these visits: *They usually have a more comprehensive perspective to view the problem and can offer me some suggestions thus I can adjust my own working conditions as soon as possible.*

It is possible that the teachers' praise of support they receive from the school leaders and administrators is at least partly motivated by the desire to portray their superiors in a positive light to outside researcher. Whatever the case, other Beijing based researchers have also found that the teacher evaluate positively the support that school administrators provide for their work in inclusive classroom (Wang et al., 2013).

Another way in which the administration supported teachers work was to organize in-service training in issues related to teaching in inclusive classrooms. According to our informants, all of them had experience in receiving in-service training arranged by schools, district education commission or municipal commission of education in the

form of seminars, workshops, demonstration lessons in special education or inclusive classroom setting.

*It is very common to have training opportunities in our school, there are trainings about general teaching, subject teaching, moral education, and many other themes, there is also some training for Learning in Regular Classroom, teachers from School A disclosed. The training related to inclusive education was arranged either internal training or externally. The internal training in School A was organized by the school itself, and external training was organized by district commission of education or municipal commission of education, usually in the form of demonstration lessons and seminars. When asked about the frequency of training in School A, the answer was not regularly scheduled.*

One teacher from School A had participated two trainings for inclusive education last year. The internal training was delivered by the school's Dean of teaching affair office and the external training included a field visit to other inclusive schools. Another teacher from School A told that in previous two years she had attended several trainings of municipal level. In general, the informants expressed that the trainings had been helpful and they would be willing to participate them. Through the training they had learned much about theories of inclusive education. When it comes to training in particular teaching methods one teacher expressed her wish that: *We should have more opportunities to see how other teachers do in class, we need to exchange experience and learn from each other.* Concerning the organizer of the training she preferred training which was *at least Beijing municipal level, or even on national level since there are multiple forms of inclusive teaching and every area differs from each other.* Another teacher expressed a wish for international training: *Actually I want to know how inclusive education is operated in foreign countries.*

School B is located within the administrative region of H District, which has specific policy concerning inclusive education in its twelfth five-year educational development plan. A teacher from School B disclosed that in order to implement the District policy of improving the quality of LRC, trainings had been arranged at different levels. H District Teachers Training College was providing trainings for teachers once a week with inclusive education among the training themes. This weekly training was compulsory for the teachers. Other district and municipal level trainings had various topics and targets. Some were organized for more accomplished teachers while other some targeted schools with relatively weak teaching quality. School B had also regularly scheduled internal training. Experts were invited to conduct this training and facilitate teachers' exchange of experiences. A teacher from School B described one such training:

Last semester, we had training on teaching in inclusive classes, both class teachers and subject teachers teaching in inclusive classes participated. We spent two weeks in training, discussing about how to prepare teaching plan and how to teach in class. Every teacher shared their teaching plans and experts were invited to help us optimize our teaching plans. At the end we selected Teacher W to be the representative of our school to give a demonstration lesson in Beijing Municipality.

In School C the teachers were receiving training for inclusive education from the Beijing municipal special education center, X District special education center and from their own school. A teacher from School C shared that *Learning in Regular Classroom is the specialty of our school so the school is paying high attention . . . and the special education centers are specially organizing trainings for us.* Teacher L who specialized in inclusive education in School C told that *this semester I participated in Learning in Regular Classroom district level activity . . . The activity was observing demonstration lessons and giving comments. We also listened to other schools' working experience on Learning in Regular Classroom.* Teacher L found that this kind of training fruitful since *they are actual and concrete lessons given in inclusive classrooms I learned from their experience and I learned some practical teaching methods from them.* School C was also organizing internal training for teachers in inclusive classes. Much of this training was organized by the resource teacher and school leaders. In addition the school had invited a principal from a special education school train the teachers how to teach and take care of students with special educational needs.

There was also common professional development for the resource teachers working in different schools. Ms. L, the resource teacher in School D, described her own experiences in resource teachers' professional development:

We have regular activity for resource teachers every Wednesday. Resource teachers from different schools gather together, communicate and exchange ideas. For example, if I know one teacher who is very good at

individual training, I can go observe her lesson.

Another regular teacher from School D expressed a wish that special education school would assign special education experts to school D to give them more demonstration lessons and conduct workshops. Unfortunately such opportunities were not frequent. *There seems to be only one this kind of demonstration lesson on LRC in every two to three years*, another teacher in School D added.

According to the interviews teachers in four inclusive schools participated in all kind of in-service training in school, district as well as municipal level on varying themes. Some training was compulsory for all teachers while other training could have specific access requirements for participants. The training for special education, inclusive education was often provided by special education schools and special education centers of their respective administrative regions. Due to the lack of pre-service training for special education and inclusive education, the teachers expected to have more professional development in these issues training. The expectations concerning the content of the training varied. Some teachers wanted to have more training on theories in inclusive education, while others wished to have more training on practical teaching methods for inclusive classes.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

We began this paper with a short introduction of the overall situation of inclusive education in Beijing Municipality but at the heart of this research are the stories, experiences and views of teachers of Beijing inclusive classes. The current study provides teachers' themselves a voice to reflect their daily work in inclusive schools. This type of approach has been very rare in the English language literature on inclusive education in China, with only a few exceptions (e.g. Feng, 2010). At the same time one must acknowledge that this study does not reflect the situation of inclusive teachers' in entire Beijing, let alone whole China. Further studies have to be conducted to capture the variation of inclusive teachers' voices around China.

The interviewed teachers identified family support or more specifically the lack of it as one major challenge for their work in inclusive classes. Although the teachers and schools had made considerable efforts to facilitate the cooperation with students' families the teachers complained that some parents' low educational attainment made it difficult to collaborate with them successfully. Somewhat surprisingly, there were also teachers who found even more dilemmas when communicating with parents who have high academic qualifications and socioeconomic background. Teachers felt that they could not get a proper response from the parents and found it energy-consuming to deal with parental/family issues. Two teachers even specifically identified interaction with families as the most challenging aspect of their work in inclusive classes. This finding resonates with the earlier results of Engelbrecht, Oswald, Swart and Eloff (2003) who found the family issues to be major stressors also for inclusive teachers in South Africa. On the other hand, there may be cultural differences, since Forlin (2001) who studied teachers in Queensland Australia found collaboration with parents to be among the least stressful aspects of teachers' work during inclusive education.

The interviewed teachers received some support also from resource teachers who manage the resource rooms in their schools. The regular teachers valued the resource teacher model but the resource teachers' actual role in their daily work was quite small. This is understandable since the availability of support from resource teachers in is still very limited even in the wealthier regions of China. In Beijing, which was the site of this study most inclusive schools do not have resource at all teachers, most resource teachers do their work only part-time, and most resource teachers are not adequately trained for their job.

Considering the general lack of specific funding for inclusive education in Chinese general schools it can be surprising that the teachers' reported many different forms of support they receive from their school and district administrators. According to the teachers, their received direct support and encouragement from school leaders and they gave quite positive comments on their leaders' work. Naturally, this sort of praise of school leaders has to be taken with precaution since the interviewees may have been motivated to present their supervisors in a positive light for outside researchers. To decrease this tendency we tried to assure the interviewees about the confidentiality of the interviews and conduct the interviews in places where outside persons could not hear the discussion. Our impression is that most people felt free to respond to the questions and share stories of both success and failure. Perhaps, they felt that they could talk openly for outsiders who possessed no authority to discipline them from criticism and unorthodox thinking.



The teachers also had gained support from professional development that was organized by different levels of educational administration. Almost all teachers expressed a wish to receive more training on themes related to inclusive education. It is possible that this wish is at least partly motivated by the need to give socially desirable answers. In Chinese school context there are also concrete incentives to participate in professional development since it helps to climb the career ladders in the teacher ranking system.

To sum up, the interviewed inclusive education teachers in Beijing municipality had many different sources of support, some of which are not discussed in detail in the scope of this study. Nevertheless one must emphasize that the amount of support was not yet adequate. Forlin (2001) recognized that teachers tend to worry that they cannot master progress inside inclusive classrooms. During the interviews teachers expressed often feeling overloaded by their work in teaching inclusive class and were sometimes helpless and worried about how to proceed with their work.

It is quite disturbing that this kind of sentiment of teacher helplessness can be found from Beijing schools with better resources and greater access to different support organizations than the vast majority of Chinese schools. The situation clearly demands concrete actions like increasing dramatically the training of resource teachers and assigning a specific budget to finance the inclusive education as many scholars (e.g. Peng, 2012; Fei, 2007) have demanded. It is clear that much more has to be done before Chinese teachers can feel confident to meet the challenge of inclusive education.

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