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# Roles of Special Educators in St. Lucia: Implications of Policy and Practice on Inclusion

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Abstract

Using an adaptation of Brownell and Smith's (1993) conceptual model, this study sought to examine the perception of primary and secondary special educators in St. Lucia of their roles as compared to roles of special education teachers universally. A survey, consisting of 89 Likert-scale statements and five closed ended questions, was administered to the entire population (i.e. 82) of special educators in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia. The data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including percentages, means, and t-tests. The independent sample t-test was used to determine the difference in the frequency of role engagement between the two groups of special educators. The results revealed that like special educators globally, special education teachers in St. Lucia engaged in all roles under study (i.e., Academic instruction, Non-academic instruction, Instructional Support, Responsive Behavior Management, Special Education Assessment, Classroom Assessment, Special Education Paperwork) but engaged in them at varying degrees. They regarded all but one role (i.e. Responsive Behavior Management) to be very-to-extremely important. Respondents utilized a continuum of practices from exclusionary to inclusionary but made greater use of exclusionary practices. Implications as well as recommendations to improve practice are discussed.

Keywords: *special educators practices, inclusion, educational policy, special education teachers, roles of special educators*

For decades, scholars globally have tried to explicitly outline the roles of special educators (e.g, Anderson, 1976; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Larsen, 1976). This has been a difficult task as there has been an evolving change in educational policies. However, some roles have been universally accepted. Research has shown that special education teachers across the world, in countries like Australia, Botswana, Cyprus, Finland, Greece, Hong Kong, The Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States, engage in similar roles (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Boutskou, 2007; Crowther, Dyson, & Millward, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2013; Pijl & Van De Bos, 2001; Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Takala, Pirttimaa, & Tormanen, 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). These roles include: teaching, providing support, assessing, managing behaviors and keeping records. Vannest, Hagan-Burke, Parker, and Soares (2011, p. 222) summarized special education teachers' roles to include the following:

(i) *Academic instruction*: teaching, presenting, and modeling academic skills and knowledge directly related to content areas;
(ii) *Non-academic instruction*: teaching knowledge and skills that are not directly linked to curriculum (e.g., study skills, social skills, functional skills);
(iii) *Instructional Support*: providing support to students and general educators during instructional time (e.g., monitoring student work, preparing activities for general educators);
(iv) *Responsive Behavior Management:* actions teacher engage in, in response to inappropriate behaviors (e.g., referring child to principal, dealing with inappropriate behavior themselves, calling parent);

(v) *Special Education Assessment:* assessing for placement, progress reporting, or dismissal of special education services (e.g., administering standardized tests)
(vi) *Classroom Assessment:* evaluating students' performance over curriculum (e.g., grading papers, administering class tests, grading projects);
(vii) *Special Education Paperwork:* reporting and documenting student performance for school and/or education officials (e.g., preparing IEPs, IEP invitations/meetings, recording grades, taking attendance, collecting signed documents, writing progress reports).

Special education, especially inclusive special education, is a fairly new phenomenon in St. Lucia, and over the last decade, special education teachers have had limited guidance on what exactly are their job expectations. As a result, teachers' engagement of roles has been very subjective as it is directed by teacher and administrative discretion, and/or guidelines and legislation which are almost two decades old (Bailey-Joseph, Lubin, & Polloway, 2017). Therefore, this exploratory study sought to outline the universal roles of special educators and investigate the perceived understanding of special education teachers in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia about their roles and responsibilities. The ultimate aim is to highlight whether St. Lucian teachers are engaging in global roles so they can monitor where they are at, and implement strategies to meet global trends. My hope is that this study provides clarification for all special education teachers on job expectations.

## History of Special Education in St. Lucia

Special education became an official part of St. Lucia's education system in 1981, when the United Nations declared the year "The International Year of the Disabled", with the theme "Full Participation and Equality" (Lubin, 2004). Special educators are found in three school settings: special (ages 5-18 years), primary (ages 5-11years) and secondary (ages 12-17 years) (Bailey-Joseph et al., 2017). St. Lucia's education system is patterned after the system of Great Britain where students are streamed based on perceived ability (Donelly, 2006). Special schools contain students with significant (i.e., severe) disabilities, including those with intellectual, visual and hearing impairments (Ministry of Education, Special Education Unit, n.d.). In 2012-2013, there were 315 students enrolled in special schools (Chitolie-Joseph, 2014).

Special education was introduced in primary schools in the 1980s and served students who were unable to keep up academically with their typically developing peers. Students in special education programs may not be given a formal diagnosis but display characteristics similar to students with high incidence disabilities, such as learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, and emotional/behavioral disabilities (Bailey-Joseph et al., 2017). In the primary setting, teachers may be assigned role of *special educator* based on teacher interest and/or administrators' perception of the general educators' ability in instructing "slow learners". Special education classrooms in primary schools are usually in the format of resource rooms (Ministry of Education, Special Education Unit, n.d.). In 2005-2006, there were approximately 1,500 (6.26% of the total school population) students being supported in the primary schools (Weekes, 2007).

In 2006, special education became part of the secondary school system, as "inclusion" became a goal of the Ministry of Education. With the inception of Universal Secondary Education, every child in primary schools, including those in primary special education programs (which previously may not likely have attended a secondary school), were given access to a secondary school (Weekes, 2007). At the end of primary school, students are evaluated using a regional standardized exam, and this determines student placement at secondary school. Students are tracked based on scores, and so those who attain the lowest grades are placed in similar secondary settings. These settings may or may not have a special education program, and so students are taught the general curriculum with little to no accommodation and/or adaptation. For schools with a special educator, students are taught for part of the day in the general education classrooms and part in the "support rooms" (Bailey-Joseph et al., 2017). There is no standardized structure or guidelines for special education programs in a secondary setting.

In each setting, teachers engage in roles which they think is best and there is little, in terms of policy and legislation, to standardize or guide what happens in special education classrooms. Inclusion has multiple meanings, as the teachers are guided by their perceived notions.

## Rationale for Study

This exploratory investigation was done to help clarify job expectations. Special educators in St. Lucia seek guidance for their practice from a document entitled *Special Education Student Support Program* (Ministry of Education, Special Education Unit, n.d.). This document states the number of students per special education classroom but does not delineate program structure or roles of special educators (Bailey-Joseph et al., 2017). Special education teachers decry that the *Special Education Student Support Program* document is either irrelevant, not applicable, or ambiguous and note that their roles and responsibilities are too generic, leaving it up to multiple interpretations (M. Samuel & F. Charles [pseudonyms], personal communication, October 4, 2014). Boutskou (2007) explained that vague guidelines are more disadvantageous than helpful. Administrators stated that there are no guidelines to evaluate the effectiveness of special education teachers at their schools (A. Jones [pseudonym], personal communication, October 14, 2014). This problem is exacerbated by the fact that the sole legislative

document guiding practice, *The Education Act* (Government of St. Lucia, 1999), has not been updated to include the roles of special educators in St. Lucia. The result is that teachers and administrators are uncertain over specific roles of special educators.

The clarification of roles of special educators is very important if teachers are to be effective. Many factors affect special education teachers' roles, including program structure (i.e. pull-out programs, self-contained classrooms, and/or co-teaching methods), principal support, availability of time, qualification and experience of the teacher, the type(s) of disability and educational policies (Franz et al., 2008; Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Vannest et al., 2011). For special educators, the greatest difficulties arise when policies and practice are not in alignment as it creates uneasiness, tension, dissatisfaction and frustration among teachers (Crowther et al., 2001). Therefore, outlining the roles undertaken by special educators will create great clarity, especially for novice educators.

## Conceptual Framework Guiding Research

The research was guided by Brownell and Smith's (1993) conceptual model which was based on the one developed by Bronfenbrenner (1976) for examining factors (and their interrelationships) that explain the attrition or retention of special education teachers. The model for this study was adapted to provide a mechanism for understanding the microsystemic and mesosystemic roles and practice of special educators.

The roles investigated include class-level roles or microsystemic roles which are those roles that teachers conduct in direct support of students with special needs and are mostly done in the classroom during the instruction period, such as academic instruction, non-academic instruction, instructional support to students, and responsive behavior management. The school-level roles or mesosystemic roles include the special educator's roles that provide indirect support and are mostly conducted outside instruction time. These involve instructional support to educators (i.e. working with other educators, seeking professional development), special education assessment, classroom assessment, and special education paperwork. This study also examined special educators' practice in terms of the structure of the special education program, which is the instructional style and setting used to educate students with disabilities. The program structure investigated includes inclusionary (i.e., practices where students with disabilities are educated within the general education classroom; Idol, 2006; Morewood, 2012) and exclusionary practices (i.e., practices where students with disabilities are educated outside the general education classroom). The conceptual model is based upon the assumptions that the roles and practices of special educators are multiple, complex and interrelated, and that some factors will affect roles more than others depending on the context/setting.

This research study investigated the roles and practice of special education teachers in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia. The study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. How frequently do special educators in primary and secondary schools engage in their microsystemic and mesosystemic roles (as globally established)?
2. What are the perceptions of special educators in primary and secondary schools of the importance of their microsystemic and mesosystemic roles?
3. To what extent do special education teachers use exclusionary and inclusionary practices?

## Significance of Study

From the literature reviewed to date, there has not been any research studies conducted regarding the roles of special education teachers in St. Lucia. Therefore, this study is significant as it adds new research to the field and informs readers of cross-cultural special education practices in an *unknown* geographic location. This study also advances the field of special education as the concept and construct of the microsystemic and mesosystemic roles have worldwide relevance and application. Readers globally will find relevance in learning the variance of educational policies across locations, the variety in program structure, and the impact of cultural beliefs on classroom practices. Overall, this study adds to the body of knowledge as it elucidates on important foundational information that is necessary to conduct a successful special education program in any part of the world. It creates a better understanding of the importance of standardized education policy and legislation on guiding special education practice.

# METHODOLOGY

## Participants

At the time of the study, there were a total of eighty-two ($n$=82) female special education teachers in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia. A cross-sectional survey design was used to garner information from the entire population of special educators in primary ($n$= 74) and secondary ($n$= 8) schools in St. Lucia. Sixty-one percent ($n$= 50) of teachers responded to the survey, including 58% ($n$= 43) primary and 88% ($n$=7) secondary special educators. Four additional (female) teachers from the secondary schools, with the roles of remedial, numeracy and/or literacy teachers, completed surveys. They were not part of the population but were included in the study because they carried out roles similar to special education teachers and/or in some cases function as a special educator but were referred to by a different title.

The teachers had a range of experience and credentials. The years of participants' teaching experience varied, with slightly over a quarter having 1-3 years of experience (i.e., primary= 26%; secondary= 27%) and approximately one-third (i.e., primary= 35%; secondary= 37%) having more than seven years of experience. More than half (i.e., primary= 51%; secondary= 55%) were trained special educators, with qualifications ranging from certification to a master's degree in special education. Thirty-one percent of all participants had a bachelor's degree or higher in special education. Secondary special educators seemed to be more highly trained as more than one third possessed a graduate degree in special education (primary= 14%; secondary= 36%). However, almost half (i.e., primary= 49%; secondary= 45%) had no training in special education.

Both groups of teachers utilized both inclusionary and exclusionary practices. Sixty-five percent of secondary teachers often used inclusionary practices such as co-teaching while twenty-one percent of primary educators often utilized the same method. Nine percent of secondary and three percent of primary teachers utilized inclusive practices often. Exclusionary practices were used on a slightly higher frequency by primary educators than secondary special education teachers. The most used exclusionary practice by both primary and secondary special educators were pull-out and self-contained classrooms. Almost all primary respondents (93%) stated that they used the pull-out approach often-to-always while 82% of secondary teachers noted that they used that method at the same frequency. In addition, approximately ninety percent of all respondents (i.e., primary= 89%; secondary= 91%) indicated that they often-to-always taught in self-contained classrooms. Twenty-seven percent of secondary and thirty-five percent of primary educators used only exclusionary practices, with an additional 47% primary and 36% secondary teachers using these practices often. Approximately one-fifth of educators (i.e., primary= 20%; secondary= 14%) used exclusionary and inclusionary practices interchangeably.

## Data Collection

Data were collected using a researcher created survey which was adapted from a single survey created by Crowther et al. (2001). This survey has been adapted and used by several researchers across the world, including scholars in Greece, Spain, Australia, Netherlands, and England (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Vann De Bos, 2001; Szwed, 2007) to measure a similar construct.

**Instrument.** The survey instrument was developed in two phases. In phase one, literature were reviewed and questions were chosen from a survey (created by Crowther et al., 2001). The initial draft (containing 90 items) was further revised using items from literature on roles of special educators and factors that affect roles. In the second phase, experts in special education reviewed the draft survey, which was followed by a pilot study, where four special educators in St. Lucia provided feedback (as done by other researchers including Berry, 2012; Miller, Brownwell, & Smith, 1999; Pijl & Van De Bos, 2001; Szwed, 2007; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Based on expert reviews, some questions were reconstructed, four questions were added, and two rating scales were modified. Based on feedback from participants in the pilot study, four questions were restructured to provide greater clarity. The final survey consisted of five sections with eighty-nine 5-point Likert-type scale questions and one section with five closed-ended demographic questions. Five different Likert scales were used. Section I and II contained 23 questions on frequency of engagement in roles (Likert-scale: never, trimester, monthly, weekly, daily) and importance of roles (Likert-scale: not very important, somewhat important, moderately important, very important, extremely important), respectively (adapted from Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Vannest, et al., 2011). In these two sections, questions were created to measure seven constructs (i.e., Academic instruction, Non-academic instruction, Instructional Support, Special Education Assessment, Classroom Assessment, Special Education Paperwork, and Responsive Behavior Management). Section III consisted of 22 questions (adapted from Littrell, Billingsley, & Cross., 1994) on principal support (Likert-scale: not at all, limited extent, moderate extent, large extent, very large extent). Section IV entailed 10 questions, divided into two subsections, [subsection one: Likert-scale {6-items}: do not use, not helpful, minimally helpful, moderately helpful, very helpful; and subsection two: Likert-scale {4-items}: never, seldom, sometimes, often, always] inquiring about educational policy (created by researcher using knowledge of St. Lucia policy documents). Section V comprised of 11 questions (adapted from Berry, 2012 and *Special Education Student Support Progra*m document, n.d.) examining program structure, i.e. inclusionary and exclusionary practices (Likert-scale: never, seldom, sometimes, often, always). Section VI contained five demographic data questions. Due to page limit and paper focus, this article discusses solely data from Sections I, II, V, and VI.

**Procedure.** The researcher obtained approval from the Ministry of Education, Special Education Unit and then, the Education Officer for Special Education provided a list of email addresses of special education teachers in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia. A standard invitation of participation was emailed to all teachers. Using Survey Monkey, an informed consent form and survey were emailed to all special educators in primary and secondary schools. Two weeks later, a second email was sent to all special educators with a note urging non-responders to participate. Each survey was assigned an IP address (connected to email address) so that researcher could keep

track of which educator had responded. Four weeks after, postal questionnaires (with paid postage) and informed consent forms were sent to schools of non-respondents. This was followed with three months of intermittent email reminders. Data from hard copies were manually entered into electronic database.

**Analysis.** The data were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 21. Data answering research questions one and two were analyzed in accordance to seven constructs measured in the survey (i.e., academic instruction, non-academic instruction, instructional support, special education assessment, classroom assessment, special education paperwork, and responsive behavior management). Five had acceptable co-efficient alphas (Cronbach $\alpha > .6$; Gersten et al., 2005) and one (i.e., responsive behavior management) had very low internal consistency (Cronbach $\alpha = .31$), so items were evaluated individually. One (i.e., academic instruction) contained only one item. Gersten et al. (2005) explained that an alpha of .6 or higher will indicate that the items are measuring the same construct. They emphasized that for newly developed measures in special education research "internal consistency of .6 or higher indicates that coherent measurement construct is being measured" (p. 159). Data in connection to research question three were analyzed under two constructs of program structure (i.e. inclusionary [Cronbach = .730] and exclusionary [Cronbach = .573] practices). The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics including percentages, means, and t-tests. The independent-sample t-test was used to determine the difference in the frequency of role engagement between special educators in primary and secondary schools.

## RESULTS

### Special Educators Role Engagement

All participants stated that all roles indices (i.e., academic instruction, non-academic instruction, instructional support, special education assessment, classroom assessment, special education paperwork, and two of responsive behavior management) were very-to-extremely important, except one responsive behavior management role (i.e. referring students to office) which they considered to moderately important. In reference to how frequently special educators engaged in their roles, the data showed that almost half (academic instruction= 41%; instructional support= 45%, refer student to principal= 50%) never engaged in some roles (see Table 1). The roles done most frequently (i.e. daily) by more than 30% of respondents were the instructional roles (i.e., academic and non-academic instruction) and dealing with misbehaviors (63%). A noteworthy trend among secondary special educators was either they engaged in academic instruction very frequently (daily 55%) or not at all (45%).

Regarding non-academic instruction, more respondents reported teaching social skills (44%) than functional (22%) and study (32%) skills on a more frequent basis (daily). Almost one-quarter (24%) never taught functional skills (see Table 1). Nearly one-half (49%) of secondary teachers (compared to 29% primary) engaged in non-academic instruction on a daily basis. In fact, the majority of secondary educators (55%) stated that they taught social and study skills more frequently than functional skills (36%). However, all (100%) secondary special education teachers noted that they taught functional skills as opposed to nine-tenth (91%) of special education primary teachers who taught social and study skills.

When it came to instructional support, in general, the data showed that a large percentage (45%) of special educators stated that they never provided Instructional Support. However, the frequency of instructional support varied dependent upon whom the teachers directly supported. Although almost two-thirds of all respondents stated that they never provided support to general educators (in terms of showing innovative practices-65%, organizing lectures-61%, and training-61%), a similar percentage (63%) provided support to students on a daily or weekly basis (see Table 1).

In reference to responsive behavior management, one half of all respondents stated that they never referred a child to the principal for inappropriate behaviors while, almost two-thirds (63%) reported that they directly dealt with inappropriate behaviors on a daily basis (see Table 1). Primary school participants seemed to take more ownership of managing behaviors then secondary educators. The majority of primary teachers noted that they dealt directly with inappropriate behaviors on a daily basis (primary= 65%; secondary= 55%), and never referred students to the principal for inappropriate behaviors (primary= 55%; secondary= 36%). In fact, the independent-samples t-test showed that that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) in primary and secondary special educators in terms of referring students who engaged in inappropriate behaviors to the principal. The mean scores revealed that special educators at the secondary level ($\bar{x}= 2.64$) referred students to the principal more frequently than primary ($\bar{x}= 1.76$) school teachers. Special educators at the secondary schools also involved parents more in behavior management as a larger percentage (secondary= 36%; primary= 5%) reported calling parents more frequently (i.e., daily or weekly).

Regarding special education assessment and classroom assessment, almost two-thirds of respondents engaged in these roles on a monthly or per trimester basis (see Table 1). Almost one-fifth stated that they never assessed students. Every secondary special educator engaged in classroom assessment roles on a weekly, monthly or per trimester basis as opposed to less than three-quarters

Table 1
*Percentage of Respondents who Engaged in Roles*

| Roles | Never (%) | Trimester (%) | Monthly (%) | Weekly (%) | Daily (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Academic instruction** | | | | | |
| Teach academic content | 41 | 0 | 7 | 17 | 35 |
| **Non-academic instruction** | **19** | **11** | **10** | **21** | **33** |
| Teach functional skills | 24 | 9 | 13 | 26 | 22 |
| Teach study skills | 17 | 15 | 11 | 20 | 32 |
| Teach social skills | 17 | 9 | 6 | 17 | 44 |
| **Instructional Support** | **45** | **16** | **8** | **16** | **8** |
| Provide support during instructional time to students | 17 | 9 | 7 | 39 | 24 |
| Introduce innovative teaching methods | 65 | 17 | 2 | 6 | 0 |
| Train general educators | 61 | 20 | 2 | 2 | 4 |
| Organize lectures for training of general educators | 61 | 28 | 6 | 0 | 0 |
| Prepare activities/materials for general educators | 26 | 17 | 7 | 28 | 17 |
| Evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods used by general educators | 37 | 7 | 24 | 20 | 2 |
| ***Responsive Behavior Management** | | | | | |
| Deal with inappropriate behaviors | 6 | 4 | 11 | 15 | 63 |
| Refer students to principal for inappropriate behaviors | 50 | 11 | 17 | 9 | 4 |
| Call parents to discuss child's behavior | 15 | 41 | 26 | 9 | 2 |
| **Special Education Assessment** | **15** | **38** | **21** | **14** | **10** |
| Assess students for placement | 6 | 43 | 18 | 15 | 15 |
| Tests for progress on IEP goals | 24 | 32 | 24 | 13 | 4 |
| **Classroom assessment** | **21** | **38** | **25** | **13** | **2** |
| Evaluate student's achievement of curricular goals | 15 | 26 | 24 | 26 | 5 |
| Grade papers and/or projects | 26 | 56 | 15 | 2 | 0 |
| Administer tests | 22 | 32 | 35 | 11 | 0 |
| **Special Education Paperwork** | **17** | **29** | **20** | **23** | **4** |
| Document & report performance | 6 | 22 | 26 | 30 | 11 |
| Write IEPs | 32 | 44 | 11 | 7 | 0 |
| Write group plans | 15 | 15 | 19 | 41 | 4 |
| Complete paperwork concerning students with special needs | 13 | 33 | 24 | 15 | 2 |

* low internal consistency & items evaluated individually
Note: $n = 54$

(69%) of primary educators who did it at similar frequency. The independent-samples t-test revealed that there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the frequency of engagement of roles of primary and secondary special educators in classroom assessment, with special educators at secondary ($\bar{x} = 3.11$) schools engaging in those roles more frequently than primary ($\bar{x} = 2.23$) school teachers.

In terms of special education paperwork, the data showed that most teachers reported engaging in special education paperwork roles frequently (see Table 1). More

than one-fifth did it on a per trimester, monthly or weekly basis. Almost one-third (32%) stated that they never wrote IEPs, including one-fourth (26%) primary and more than half (55%) secondary educators (see Table 1).

### Structure of Special Education Program Utilized

The data showed that more educators utilized exclusionary practices more frequently than inclusionary practices (see Table 2). On average, all respondents seldom-to-sometimes used inclusionary practices ($\bar{x}$ = 2.45) and often-to-always used exclusionary practices ($\bar{x}$ = 4.04). Less than one quarter (24%) of all respondents reported using inclusionary practices on an often-to-always basis while more than three-quarters (77%) used exclusionary practices at the same frequency. Approximately one-fifth (primary= 20%; secondary= 14%) of participants used a combination of practices, i.e. both exclusionary and inclusionary, with similar frequency.

The continuum of exclusionary to inclusionary practices revealed that almost one-third (30%) used solely exclusionary practices, with an additional 46% using these practices often. The most used exclusionary practices by both primary and secondary special educators were pull-out and self-contained classrooms. On the other hand, no participant used solely inclusionary practices, with only 3% using them often. The most frequently used inclusionary approach by secondary teachers was co-teaching (65%). The independent-samples t-test revealed there was a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the frequency in use of inclusionary practices by primary and secondary special educators. Secondary special educators utilize inclusionary practices more often.

## DISCUSSION

Although special educators in St. Lucia perceived almost all roles under study (i.e., academic instruction, non-academic instruction, instructional support, responsive behavior management, special education assessment, classroom assessment, special education paperwork) to be very-to-extremely important, they engaged in them at varying frequencies. Additionally, results show that teachers indicated that they used both type of practices, but mostly exclusionary practices.

### Roles of Special Educators

The pattern of engagement in academic and non-academic instruction by special educators in St. Lucia was inconsistent with findings in other research, where all high school special educators were expected to teach adolescents with disabilities a wide array of skills and content in social studies, geography and math (Edgar & Polloway, 1994; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2004). The pattern of engagement in academic instruction roles by special educators in St. Lucia was one of extremes, either they did it frequently or not at all. For non-academic instruction roles, special educators at the secondary schools were almost twice more likely than primary educators to engage in them. In fact, a large majority of primary special education teachers never engaged in non-academic instruction roles. All respondents prioritized teaching social and study skills over functional skills. This is a cause for concern, as functional skills are just as important a skill-set as other skills. If the mission of the Ministry of Education is to "enable all learners to realize their full potential... and empower them with the knowledge, skills, and values conducive to achieving successfully in a 21st century environment" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 13), then all skills, especially functional skills, should be a consistent part of the instructional program.

Wasburn-Moses (2005) reported that secondary special educators were more likely to teach under a content model, which includes engaging in academic instruction roles of teaching, reading, writing, math, social studies, and science as well as non-academic instruction such as study and functional skills. The use of "the content model creates an issue with out-of-field teaching" (Wasburn-Moses, 2005, p. 156) that is, teaching subject(s) outside of area of expertise. Takala et al. (2009) concurred that in this model secondary special educators are required to teach subjects with which they have limited knowledge. The content model may be harmful to teachers and students if implemented incorrectly (Ingersoll, 2001). It may lead to teacher burnout if teacher has work overload, role ambiguity and role conflict (Embich, 2001). In order to ensure that all teachers engage in their instructional roles, education officials will need to carefully examine the content model so that support measures may be installed to help teachers conduct roles effectively.

Although almost half of all teachers did not engage in instructional support roles, more than half frequently provided support to students. Teachers' inclination to carry out support roles depended upon the individual receiving the support. Teachers were more likely to engage in the microsystemic role of providing instructional support to students (and gave them higher ratings of importance) than in the mesosystemic role instructional support to general educators. The only support that they provided for general educators regularly was preparing instructional materials. This may be because the implementation of inclusion created pedagogical and ideological conflict.

This finding on special educators providing limited support to general educators is similar to that found in other studies that showed that although special educators are expected to engage in mesosystemic roles of working with general educators, in terms of giving lectures, introducing innovative practices, disseminating information, and helping train general educators, many special education teachers seldom conduct those roles (Agaliotis &

Table 2
*Means of Program Structure Utilized by Special Educators*

| Setting | All Respondents ($\bar{x}$) | Primary ($\bar{x}$) | Secondary ($\bar{x}$) |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Inclusionary** | **2.45** | **2.29** | **3.00** |
| Teach in inclusive setting | 2.72 | 2.64 | 3.00 |
| Teach in general education setting | 2.49 | 2.36 | 3.00 |
| Team teach and/or co-teach | 2.24 | 1.98 | 3.27 |
| Teach small groups within the general education classroom | 2.33 | 2.23 | 2.73 |
| **Exclusionary** | **4.04** | **4.07** | **3.85** |
| Use the pull-out approach | 4.43 | 4.53 | 4.00 |
| Use one-on-one instruction outside the general education classroom | 3.81 | 3.84 | 3.73 |
| Teach in small groups outside the general education classroom | 3.87 | 3.88 | 3.82 |
| Teach in self-contained/resource room | 4.13 | 4.05 | 4.45 |

Scale: Never= 1, Seldom= 2, Sometimes= 3, Often= 4, Always= 5
Note: all respondent ($n$= 54); primary ($n$= 43); secondary ($n$= 11)

Kalyva, 2011; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Pijl & Van de Bos, 2001). Limited time was cited as a major barrier to providing instructional support roles (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van de Bos, 2001; Takala et al., 2009). This finding of limited support to general educators calls for further investigation into why special educators seldom engage in those roles and perceive them as less important. There is also a need to examine the skill-set requirements (such as collaborative skills, conflict management skills) necessary for effective engagement in instructional support roles.

The majority of teachers viewed dealing directly with inappropriate behaviors as a very important responsibility. As a result, most dealt directly with students' misbehaviors regularly. This is similar to findings in Wasburn-Moses (2005) study in which 89% of secondary special educators dealt directly with behaviors on a daily basis. The least important and least used responsive behavior management role was referring students to the principal's office for inappropriate behaviors. Half of the teachers reported never engaging in that role. Secondary teachers were more likely to engage in a collaborative effort to deal with misbehaviors than primary educators as they consulted with parents more often and referred students to the principal more frequently. This may be because secondary teachers face greater behavior management challenges as they work with adolescents.

Assessment roles are very important duties conducted by special educators all across the world (Abbott, 2007; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van de Bos, 2001; Takala et al., 2009; Vlachou, 2006; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). The concerning factor in St. Lucia is the large percentage of teachers who did not engage in such roles, although they perceived them to be important. More than a quarter of secondary educators never engaged in special education assessment roles and were less likely to do them compared to primary teachers. Many secondary teachers never wrote individualized education plans (IEPs) and this may explain why they never tested for progress achievement on IEP goals. Special educators at the secondary level engaged in classroom assessment roles more frequently than primary teachers. This may be because secondary schools' curriculum are more content-focused than primary schools', and so require frequent assessment to measure achievement of curricula goals and objectives. Additionally, secondary teachers play a pivotal role in the quality of adult life of a student as they prepare them to write the secondary exit examination which determines employment and post-secondary education options (Chitolie-Joseph, 2014).

The majority of special education teachers in St. Lucia engaged in classroom assessment roles in a timely manner and perceived these roles to be very important. This is similar to practices in international communities where special education teachers stated the paperwork roles are a major part of their duties (Abbott, 2007; Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van de Bos, 2001; Takala et al., 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). According to special educators, limited time is a major deterrent to fulfilling those roles (Agaliotis & Kalyva, 2011; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van de Bos, 2001; Takala et al., 2009). Although most special educators in St. Lucia carry out those roles in the expected frequency, the concern is for those who did not engage in them. Special education paperwork roles are necessary requirements to help track and modify IEP goals and instruction. Therefore, some

greater accountability measures may have to be implemented to increase the number of teachers who create and maintain documentation.

### Practices: Program Structure

Most teachers in St. Lucia used a combination of practices and therefore utilized a continuum of placements and instructional styles. This is similar to stipulations with special education laws of the United States where the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEIA; Public Law 108-446, 2004) requires that students with disabilities be provided with an education in the least restrictive environment. This implies that effective practice includes instruction of students with disabilities within the general education class (inclusion), but exceptions may be made for some students who may perform better in more restrictive settings (exclusionary). Yell (2012, p. 272) expounded "that some children with disabilities may require placement in settings other than the general education classroom in order to be provided with an education designed to address their unique needs". This confirms that in order to meet the needs of students with disabilities both inclusionary and exclusionary practices are required. Yell (2012) explained that special education programs should provide a continuum of placement options to ensure that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. Presently, teachers in St. Lucia use their personal judgment to select their program structure for inclusionary or exclusionary practices. This subjective selection process needs to be replaced with legislative policy to minimize bias, increase consistency, and ensure that students are truly instructed in the least restrictive environment.

The program structure of special education in primary and secondary schools in St. Lucia seems to be partially inclusive. This is because special educators use both exclusionary (e.g., use pull-out approach) and inclusionary (e.g., co-teach) practices. However, the predominant practices used by both primary and secondary educators were exclusionary. Most teachers use exclusionary practices such as self-contained classrooms and the pull-out approach. Other studies have found that majority of special education teachers teach in self-contained classrooms and make great use of the pull-out approach (Takala et al., 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). One reason teachers noted for the predominant use of exclusionary practices was "lack the supportive organizational structures for co-operation" (Takala et al., 2009, p. 170). Takala (2009) reported that teachers also used exclusionary settings more regularly because they believed it was more supportive, produced a safe work space, and helped to effectively achieve goals. They noted the negative aspects of exclusionary practices (such as stigmatization). However, teachers stated that exclusionary practices were used because there was not enough time to collaboratively plan with other educators.

Regarding the usage of inclusive practices, teachers in St. Lucia reported utilizing them to a lesser extent, but secondary teachers tended to engage in these practices more than primary educators. This may be because teachers at secondary schools tend to teach more content areas as opposed to primary educators. The teaching of content requires collaboration with general educators, which would lead to an increase need for inclusive practices. Takala et al. (2009) reported similar findings that special educators who teach older students were more likely to practice inclusion.

The findings indicate that although more secondary teachers use inclusionary practices, overall, special educators were less inclined to use inclusionary measures. Some reasons may include being ill-equipped to handle inclusion and lacking understanding of inclusion (Abbot, 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2013). Other reasons may include: fear of a greater workload, fear of ability to manage larger workload, fear of change, lack of knowledge and skills on implementing inclusive practices and unclear educational policy on inclusion (Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2013). Teaching in inclusive settings expands roles in which teachers feel exhausted and overextended as they may be required to teach in classes outside their skill area (Embich, 2001; Takala et al., 2009; Wasburn-Moses, 2005). Many are placed in working relationships in which they are unprepared and may feel unwanted. Embich (2001) explained that special educators experience high level of emotional exhaustion, especially those who engage in co-teaching with general educators.

Having a strong microsystemic foundation is pivotal to the success of a special education program. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should have a clear vison for what inclusion should look like in schools. Education officials should advocate for legislative protocols that mandates the use of inclusionary practices. The international community has implemented legislation, such as, No Child Left Behind (2001); (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (2004) in the USA (Public Law 108-446, 2004), Every Child Matters (2003) in England and Wales (Chief Secretary to the Treasury by Command of Her Majesty, 2003), and Getting it Right for Every Child (2008) in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2008) to ensure that inclusionary practices are the norm in schools. In order to curb avoidance/lack of use of inclusionary practices in St. Lucia, teachers would have to be trained in the key skills necessary for effective implementation of inclusion (Takala et al., 2009). In inclusionary settings, special educators are required to take on the roles of diagnostician, interventionist (Abbott, 2007; Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Forlin, 2001; Pijl & Van De Bos, 2001; Takala, et al., 2009; Vlachou, 2006; Wasburn-

Moses, 2005), collaborator (Abbott, 2007; Forlin, 2001), manager (Arnaiz & Castejon, 2001; Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Szwed, 2007), and leader (Layton, 2005; Oldham & Radford, 2011; Rosen-Webb, 2011; York-Barr, Sommerness, Duke, & Ghere, 2005). Therefore, training will need to include experiential learning opportunities to practice using multiple skills required for effective teamwork.

### Limitations

There were some limitations to the study. First, the population used in this study was very small, especially the number of special educators at secondary schools, and so data have limited generalizability. Second, the study relied exclusively on self-reported data gathered via Likert-type scale survey questions. This may have generated different interpretations and/or misunderstandings of some items and limited participants' ability to explain responses (Pearson, 2008). The study utilized survey research, which is limited as it provides a broad picture of a phenomenon being studied. Third, this study investigated only one academic instruction role and so data generated on that category have limited interpretability as it does not capture other academic roles such as the teaching of reading, writing and math. Lastly, the data were analyzed using mainly descriptive methods, and so further research utilizing more inferential methods may be required to increase robustness of data.

## CONCLUSION

The data garnered in this study showed that: (a) teachers are aware of their microsystemic and mesosystemic roles but they engage in them at varying frequencies; (b) there is need for policy and legislation to guide practice; (c) there is need for a clear articulation of the meaning of inclusion as stating global trends on inclusion alone will not increase use of inclusionary practices; and (d) accountability measures are needed to increase consistency and effectiveness in which teachers engage in duties.

To enhance the quality of life of students with special needs in St. Lucia, it is imperative that policy makers and education officials make a concerted effort to standardize the microsystemic and mesosystemic roles of special educators. Presently, special education teachers seem to face challenges in conducting their roles as there seem to be confusion between education officials' expectations and teachers' understanding of job expectation. Therefore, the Ministry of Education should articulate a vision for inclusive special education and the roles of special educators in achieving that vision as research has shown that specifying the duties of special educators is a reliable predictor of effective instruction and student accomplishment (Franz et al., 2008; Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010; Vannest et al., 2011). Special educators need direction, useful and current policies, consistent support from administrators, and practical options on program structure. Policies should be more than "simply a rhetorical move, an awkward attempt to enunciate a new educational vision akin to international trends" (Liasidou & Antoniou, 2013, p. 503). Successfully including all students necessitates establishing clear policies to guide practice and aligning policies and practice.

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