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Jill Bradley-Levine
Ball State University, Muncie, IN

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Examining Teacher Advocacy for Full Inclusion

Jill Bradley-Levine[1]

Abstract: This critical ethnography examined the motivations of, and processes used by teachers to advocate for the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their Catholic school. Because students with exceptionalities have been marginalized in k-12 Catholic schools, learning more about teachers who have been successful advocates on their behalf is essential to building more inclusive schools, as well as inclusive local and global communities. The findings of this study help to identify some key elements for teacher-led advocacy including practices that align with ethical leadership and that encourage teachers to take risks and pursue passions when there is potential for positive student outcomes. As a result, school culture may be transformed to include more fully those students who have been marginalized within the school or community.

Keywords: teacher advocacy, inclusion, special education, teacher leadership, ethical leadership

This critical ethnography examined the ways that teachers advocated for the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their Catholic school. Students with exceptionalities have been marginalized by most Catholic schools (Carlson & Labelle, 2019; Scanlan, 2009). For example, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) reported that about 7% of Catholic school students have exceptionalities including students with mild learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, and physical disabilities; this percent is lower than national statistics, which indicate that about 11% of U.S. students have exceptionalities (Crowley & Wall, 2013; DeFiore, 2006; Taylor, 2005). In addition, the National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion (NCBFI) identified only 169 fully inclusive Catholic schools, or 2.3% of the 7,378 Catholic schools in the United States (National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion, 2019; National Catholic Education Association, 2019). Moreover, the National Catholic Education Association (NCEA) does not report enrollment data about students with exceptionalities, indicating that inclusion may

1 Ball State University, IN, Muncie

be a low priority (NCEA, 2019) despite the USCCB's support of revisions to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that would safeguard services for students who attend Catholic schools (Taylor, 2005). It is clear that many Catholic schools are choosing not to include students with exceptionalities (Taylor, 2005). This may result from the fact that Catholic schools are not required to comply with IDEA's mandate to provide the least restrictive environment for students with exceptionalities, although Catholic schools are expected to comply with some of the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) including assuring that facilities are accessible to those with physical disabilities (Taylor, 2005). Thus, there is a need to study the inclusion of students with exceptional needs in Catholic schools (Taylor, 2005). Moreover, learning more about teachers who have been successful advocates on these students' behalf is essential to building more inclusive Catholic schools, as well as inclusive local and global communities.

Teacher Advocacy as Ethical Leadership

This study considers the ways that teacher advocacy on behalf of a particular group of students can be viewed as a practice of ethical leadership. The literature on teacher advocacy is still developing. Picower (2012) identified teacher advocates as those who organized their classrooms to be both democratic and caring learning spaces, utilizing place-based and culturally-relevant instructional approaches to empower students. These teachers are motivated because they share similar cultural backgrounds or educational experiences with their students (Collay, 2010). Additionally, they seek solidarity with other teachers through collective struggle on behalf of their students rather than themselves (Stern & Brown, 2016). Nevertheless, advocacy is difficult for many teachers, especially when the student groups who need support are marginalized within the school and/or community (Larrabee & Morehead, 2010). For this reason, it is important to study the ways that teachers advocate on behalf of their most vulnerable students.

For this study, teacher advocacy was viewed through a lens of ethical leadership. Such leadership demands that teachers act toward social change. Foster (1989) insisted that school leaders approach leadership with an ethic of care, realizing the humanity of all people and working toward restoring and sustaining that humanity. For school leaders, this means taking an interest in social issues as they relate to the school, community, and world; and pursuing change at all levels (Foster, 1989). Leaders who work for social change are ethical because they surpass their limitations, constantly challenging themselves to do what is right instead of what is uncomplicated (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Starratt, 1986). These leaders also challenge their colleagues to surpass selfish desires, putting students' needs first and working consistently for social change in their schools and communities (Foster, 1989). This study examines how teachers act as ethical leaders through their work with students with exceptionalities.

Inclusion in Catholic schools

Inclusion is a combination of practice and principle, especially in the context of a Catholic school setting (Taylor, 2005). When included, students with exceptionalities have the opportunity to learn the same curriculum as students who do not have exceptionalities in the context of the general education classroom, but with additional support structures (Cosier et al., 2013; Taylor, 2005). In addition, inclusion embodies principles of diversity, belonging, and dignity (Cosier et al., 2013; Scanlan, 2009). In an inclusive classroom, all children are appreciated for what they bring to the learning experience, and teachers work to meet their individual needs in sensitive and responsive ways. Downing & Peckham-Hardin (2007) discovered that parents and teachers defined high quality inclusion as programming that allows children with exceptionalities to learn the general curriculum alongside "typical peers" in classrooms led by capable teachers who collaborate with each other to provide "individualized curricular and instructional supports" and have high expectations for all children in the context of a "positive and caring environment" (p. 22). Further, Mcleskey et al. (2014) found that successful inclusion programs utilize "resources efficiently, but flexibly to meet student needs," as well as implementing "data systems to monitor student progress" (p. 63).

Including students with exceptionalities in Catholic schools aligns with Catholic Social Teaching (CST). CST consists of seven themes, which highlight the ways that Catholics may work toward social justice and holy living (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2017). Scanlan (2009) identified three themes that are most relevant when considering the moral imperative of Catholic schools to include students with exceptionalities:

> The three core values of CST—human dignity, the common good, and a preferential option for the marginalized—compel Catholic school educators in general, and school leaders in particular, to structure their schools in certain ways. (p. 20)

First, Catholic schools should uphold the dignity of individual students, regardless of ability, since all humans are considered valuable in God's eyes. Second, Catholic schools should provide the opportunity for all children to participate in the life of the Church, including Catholic education. Third, Catholic schools should uphold the Church's preference for those who have been marginalized within communities and institutions (Scanlan, 2009). In other words, Catholic schools must restructure "patterns of recruitment and retention of students to apply a preferential option for students with special needs" (Scanlan, 2009, p. 17).

The writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas also provide a framework through which to consider inclusion of students with exceptionalities in Catholic schools. Carlson (2014) summarized Aquinas' teachings as they pertain to inclusion. In Carlson's words, Aquinas' approach is that "those who believe in God are bound together in communion and community while here on earth" (p. 68). This

bond reveals itself through benevolent acts that demonstrate an equity as one pursues happiness for others and oneself. Thus, Catholic families should fight for the inclusion of all children in Catholic schools, whether they have a child with an exceptionality or not. Further, Carlson points to Aquinas' demand that individuals share their abundance, and if they refuse, allows that the poor may justifiably steal from the rich. Carlson relates this to the struggle that some Catholic schools experience when trying to fund inclusion programs. She points out that Catholic families should be willing to pay for special services regardless of who will utilize them. Therefore, both CST and the writings of Aquinas provide a moral imperative for including children with exceptionalities in Catholic schools.

Additionally, Carlson and LaBelle (2019) draw from Gutierrez's Liberation Theology, Martin-Baro's Liberation Psychology, Freire's Liberation Pedagogy, and Dussel's Liberation Ethics to propose an "Ethical Christian Pedagogy" (p. 67). The foundation of this pedagogy is the view that all children are God's children and that children with exceptionalities are marginalized by society. The pedagogy acclaims the dignity of all humans including those who have been marginalized and supports the notion that access to Catholic education is a fundamental right, while rejecting "ableist, classist, racist, sexist, or other inauthentic education" (p. 67). It aims to raise the consciousness of students with and without exceptionalities by demanding new systems that recognize and rejoice in the "virtues, gifts and strengths found in various cultures, communities, and marginalized groups and individuals" (p. 67). Finally, it works toward four goals: (a) the inclusion of children with exceptionalities in Catholic schools; (b) curriculum and instruction designed to meet the diverse needs of all children including those with exceptionalities; (c) "authentic education for common good;" and (d) "unconditional love to mirror the love of God, bring each child to full flourishing, and hasten the coming of the Kingdom" of God (p. 67). Such a pedagogy permits students with exceptionalities "to become subjects of their own destiny in a Catholic setting, as well as enabling "fully-abled children to practice compassion and to be beneficiaries of the gifts that children with special needs possess" (p. 65). Important to this study, Carlson and LaBelle identify the need to provide an "advocate," who will struggle alongside students with exceptionalities (p. 68). It is this need that provides a purpose for exploring the ways that teachers advocate on behalf of students with exceptionalities through an inclusion pedagogy within a Catholic school.

Research Design

I collected and analyzed data for the study using a critical ethnographic design (Carspecken, 1996). This design falls under the umbrella of critical inquiry, which examines "power relationships closely to determine who has what kind of power and why" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 129). Building on the work of Max Weber, Carspecken identified three types of power that are relevant to this study: normative, contractual, and coercive. Those with normative power have a position that

affords them more authority than others with whom they interact. For instance, in the context of this study, based on their role alone, administrators of Catholic schools have the power to determine the admissions criteria for their school without considering a parent's desire for their child to participate in Catholic education. This has resulted in certain groups of students such as those with exceptionalities being purposefully excluded from Catholic schools. Therefore, it is important to discover why some Catholic school administrators and teachers choose to advocate for the inclusion of students with exceptionalities in their school.

Second, Carspecken (1996) describes contractual power as an exchange, or agreement to trade an action for a benefit. Within public schools, federal law requires teachers to provide specific supports for students with exceptionalities. Therefore, teachers are contractually required to meet these students' needs in order to continue to work for the school and draw a salary. However, this is not the case for Catholic schools. In other words, Catholic school teachers are under no contractual agreement to admit to their school or serve within their classrooms students with exceptionalities. Thus, it is important to discover not only the methods that teachers use to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities in Catholic schools, but also how teachers can be supported in this work when it is not part of a contractual agreement.

Finally, although it is more discreet, coercive power is similar to normative power in that it depends on the extent to which a person in an organization is in a role that allows them to sanction someone else. For example, a public school administrator has the power to sanction teachers who refuse to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities. However, because IDEA does not apply to Catholic schools in the same way that it does to public schools (Taylor, 2005), Catholic school administrators and teacher leaders must find other ways to motivate their colleagues to serve these students. As such, it is essential to explore the methods that both administrators and teacher leaders utilize to advocate on behalf of students with exceptionalities and influence their colleagues to meet these students' needs within the context of Catholic schools.

The research questions that guided the study focused on understanding why and how the participants accomplished their work: (a) What personal characteristics or experiences cause teachers to notice the need for advocacy on behalf of marginalized students in their school setting; (b) In what ways do these teachers meet students' needs and engage the students and/or their families in the process; and (c) How do these teachers garner support for marginalized students from administrators and colleagues?

Site Profile

The study was conducted in Saint Lucy School (SLS, a pseudonym), a Catholic school located in a suburban community near a large city. SLS serves kindergarten through 8th grade students, and also has an adjoining facility that houses an early childhood education program. A few more than

500 students attend SLS: 88% are white and 12% are students of color. Almost 12% of SLS students receive special education services. SLS is one of the schools recognized by National Catholic Board on Full Inclusion as a fully inclusive Catholic school.

Recruitment and sampling

I identified four special education teachers as "key informants" for the study because of their close work with students with exceptionalities. As a group, they represent 54 years of total teaching experience (mean=13.5) and 37 years of special education teaching experience (mean=9.25), see Table 1. Additionally, they have 26 years of total special education teaching experience (mean=6.5) in Catholic schools.

Table 1

Description of Key Informants

Participant Name	Total Years of Teaching Experience	Total Years of Special Education Teaching Experience	Years of Special Education Teaching Experience in Catholic Schools
Cindy	7	5	3
Alicia	7	6	6
Steph	9	6	1
Joyce	31	22	16

In addition, nine teachers, administrators, and parents were recruited for the interview portion of the study using snowball sampling (Mertens & Wilson, 2012); I asked key informants to suggest two to three other colleagues they thought would be important potential participants in the study. I then asked those who agreed to participate to provide the names of additional colleagues, who I also invited to participate, and so on. Interview data totaled almost 10 hours.

Methods and Analysis

Carspecken (1996) describes several stages for critical qualitative research. First, the researcher conducts unobtrusive observations through which a detailed description of the cultural space and interactive patterns is developed. For this study, I visited SLS nine times over six weeks for a total of almost 19 hours of observation. During visits, I spent time immersed in the culture of the school, and closely observed the behaviors of the key informants using a hands-off and eyes-on approach; I did not participate in classroom and/or school activities, but focused on taking detailed notes to describe interactive patterns among site members, as well as cultural practices and patterns.

Next, I conducted preliminary reconstructive analysis (PRA) (Carspecken, 1996). For PRA, I examined the observation data to identify possible meanings for participants' words and

actions. Carspecken (1996) identified this process as "reconstructive because it articulates those cultural themes and system factors that are not observable and that are usually unarticulated by the actors themselves" (p. 42). I completed PRA by reconstructing a set of possible meanings for what participants said and did in a search for deeper understanding.

In the third stage, I conducted interviews with participants to explore the possible meanings developed during PRA (Carspecken, 1996). This provided an opportunity to co-create data with participants through dialogue. I carried out in-depth interviews with key informants first. Next, I interviewed other teachers, administrators, and parents. These interviews allowed me to discover which meanings developing in PRA were closest to the participants' truths.

Finally, I conducted additional observations in order to explore confounding evidence. Then I revisited the analysis documents developed during PRA, revising them based on the interview and new observation data to develop a list of high-inference codes, which I used to systematically code all data using the qualitative analysis software, MAXQDA. Last, I sorted the coded data into patterns and themes.

Validity Checks

I conducted several validity checks of analysis documents and theme summaries (Carspecken, 1996). First, I shared interview transcripts with each participant for member checking. In addition, I shared analysis documents including coded data segments, data associated to specific codes, and thematic summaries with participants for member checking. I also shared these documents with colleagues for peer editing. I invited participants and peers to check my processes and provide insight about my interpretations of the data.

Findings

Several themes emerged in the course of data analysis. I will describe findings about teacher advocacy for inclusion across five themes: teacher dispositions, administrator support, inclusion practices, inclusive culture, and ethical leadership.

Teacher Dispositions

The key informants became special educators for several reasons. They all were general education teachers prior to completing their license to teach special education. Three shared that they grew up with brothers who were identified as having exceptional needs. Steph and Cindy explained that their brothers were excluded from learning activities because of their disabilities. Steph said, "He was the kid who had to leave the room to go take the test, and he was embarrassed by it." Cindy recollected how her brother's disability impacted them both: "My brother was not allowed to do swimming lessons with his peers. He and I had all our swimming lessons with other

special needs kids." Joyce recalled how she tried to help her brother, who "had difficulties" when they were growing up. One general education teacher pointed out that because these teachers have known someone with an exceptionality their whole lives, they have a richer understanding of how to meet students' diverse needs: "She has lived it. She gets it."

Unlike the other special education teachers, Alicia does not have a sibling with an exceptionality. However, she described being drawn to special education because of an experience she had working with a student with an exceptionality early in her teaching career: "I really wanted to figure out what made him tick, what made him learn." Alicia enjoyed the challenge of "figuring out the patterns of what helped him" because she noticed that "one thing that worked one day maybe didn't work the next day."

Administrator Support

SLS administrators provided support to special education teachers in a variety of ways. First, administrators negotiated complex procedures to secure external funding to pay for special education services. This process requires the principal to work with the local school district to obtain federal money allocated for special education services through the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). The principal also promoted revisions to the annual budget that have allowed her to hire additional special education teachers. Second, administrators have created a schedule to provide time for teachers to collaborate. They have also been responsive to special education teachers when they suggest changes. For example, Joyce described a time when the administrators modified her schedule because she was overbooked: "I felt [so] supported in that regard." A third support that administrators provided is instructional leadership and professional development opportunities. One administrator explained that the leadership team is always seeking advice from principals at other schools to figure out how best to include students with exceptionalities within general education classrooms. Administrators also arranged professional development opportunities that facilitate teachers' implementation of inclusive instruction. For instance, teachers worked with a literacy coach to learn differentiation strategies. They also attended an in-service designed to increase their awareness of and empathy for people with a variety of exceptionalities. Finally, several teachers visited nearby schools that have implemented full inclusion programs.

The key informants, as well as general education teachers, and parents agreed that administrators' actions clearly demonstrate that they welcome children with exceptionalities at SLS. One administrator said, "Parents want a Catholic education for all children, and as much as we can provide and support them with that we have. We are open, our doors are open to whatever their needs may be." However, a few participants reported that this message could be verbally communicated more clearly to the school community. An administrator shared that the "vision

and plan for the school" could be made more explicit to teachers, as well as parents and community members.

Inclusion in Practice

Participants explained the ways that SLS approaches inclusion as both a philosophy and a set of specific practices. They also described how inclusion is carried out across the school. Teachers use purposeful grouping and differentiation strategies, as well as engaging students in authentic learning activities. All of these practices are supported through collaborative structures and a focus on co-teaching.

Approaches to Inclusion

When asked to describe inclusion at SLS, participants shared two common understandings. First, several identified inclusion as the collective actions that teachers take to meet the diverse needs of all students within a school. One administrator explained,

> It is including all kids, whether it be a kid who has a rough home life, whether it be a kid who lives in poverty, whether it be a kid who has a bad temper, whether it be a kid who has experienced adverse childhood experiences. Whatever it may be, inclusion is doing what is best for a kid depending on where that child is emotionally, spiritually, socially, [and] academically.

This is a broad definition of inclusion that embraces students with exceptionalities, as well as those who have experienced other struggles in their lives. Steph focused this definition somewhat, explaining inclusion as individualized educational practices, an idea with which other teachers agreed: "Inclusion is not a placement. It's a philosophy … It's every kid, whether they are identified with X, Y, or Z, or they are identified with nothing." Likewise, another administrator pointed out that "modifications that are needed for certain kids are just good things for all kids." Alicia also described inclusion as "every student getting what they need." In other words, teachers and administrators shared the belief that many students can benefit from the use of differentiation strategies or accommodations offered for students with exceptionalities when they are implemented in the context of a general education classroom.

The second way that participants described inclusion aligned more with common definitions among many educators. Cindy, who worked in a public school setting before coming to SLS, considered inclusion to be the placement of students with identified exceptionalities in general education classrooms where "they are the responsibility of the general [education] teacher" and where these teachers "are to provide [students with exceptionalities] with accommodations and any modifications that need to be done." This conception acknowledges that the general education teacher is the expert in content while the special education teacher's role is to support the general education teacher in making appropriate accommodations and differentiating curriculum. An

administrator also focused on curriculum, saying, "The whole idea of inclusion is that all the kids are exposed to the same kinds of content…at that grade level." She regarded that it is less important that students with exceptionalities can master grade-level curriculum as it is that they are exposed to it in the first place. Another teacher expected that students with exceptionalities would be "in a regular classroom doing work geared towards them, but yet [that] isn't too far off the standard that we are supposed to be working on." These participants agreed that inclusion is an educational practice that provides access to at least some of the general education curriculum for all students regardless of identified exceptionalities.

Inclusive Teaching

Teachers utilized several strategies to meet the needs of all students. Using learning stations where small groups of students rotate through a variety of activities allowed teachers to work on specific skills with each group of students. One teacher described how small group instruction helps her students learn:

> I will pair [a student with a disability] up with another student so that person can help him … It is just a win-win for all of us to work together, and we all learn from this child as he learns from the rest of us.

In many classrooms, special education teachers were observed supporting students at one of the stations. This allowed these teachers time to work with many children in the class, not just those with exceptionalities.

Teachers also employed differentiation strategies to meet students' individual learning needs. An elementary teacher described, "[One student] can't write but he can spell so he will do his spelling orally … His list is at his level; his list is shortened." An intermediate teacher also differentiates:

> If they are not able to do 3-digit by 2-digit multiplication, I can obviously scale that back and do easier problems for them. If it is homework, we can do odd number problems where they are not having to do as much work but they are still exposed to it.

Differentiation allowed general education teachers to meet all of their students' needs more effectively, and was considered a hallmark of inclusion at SLS. As one teacher noted, "Each student isn't going to be expected to grow at the same rate, the same pace, but if we differentiate we can take each individual student and help each child reach their fullest potential." However, a few teachers acknowledged that differentiation can be challenging to implement: "Differentiating takes a lot more planning time … because it's not like you are just planning for the whole group. Now I'm planning for three, four, or five reading groups."

Special education teachers were often called on at SLS to address the behavioral issues of students with exceptionalities. In such cases, they advocated using a variety of strategies to keep students in the classroom. Steph shared that "sometimes it is [that] they just need a sensory break or sometimes it is that they just need … a pencil grip … Those things should be readily available to them." Whenever possible, special education teachers tried to help students learn to manage their behavioral needs so that they could remain in the general education classroom. Cindy encouraged students to use her classroom as a haven, describing one student who comes to her room when he feels anxious. He is allowed to listen to music or read until he feels he can return to class. Teachers and administrators agreed that it is important to maintain high expectations for all students, both academically and behaviorally, but to utilize a variety of strategies to meet their individual needs.

Several teachers pointed out the importance of engaging all students in learning through authentic and meaningful activities. For example, one teacher shared that rather than selecting a "classic" novel, she chose a young adult novel because she knew her students would relate to the content. Steph described another activity where students applied what they had learned about measurement to determine how much carpet they would need if they were going to replace the flooring in their classroom. These students measured the area of the room using various measurement tools, which Steph said was a practical, "life skill" for all of them.

Supporting Inclusive Teaching

Participants acknowledged that there are multiple ways to support inclusive teaching. A willingness to work as a team was deemed important by special and general education teachers, as well as administrators. Alicia noted, "When you have the general ed teachers collaborating and building teamwork with the special ed teachers and working together to plan the lesson plans and do small groups … true success happens for the students." For instance, a teacher described how she and a special education teacher "problem solve" by experimenting with different accommodations to see what works best for students: "I have gone to her and [said], 'I am not capable. I don't know what else to do.' She is like, 'All right. I've got this. We are going to figure it [out]." An administrator echoed the notion that all teachers, staff, and administrators collaborate to meet students' needs: "We don't look at it as they are your kid now. It's your issue. Go fix it. Everyone here is our kid and it takes all of us … It is a group effort." SLS employs several full-time support staff such as a school nurse and a school counselor. A speech language pathologist is also on site several days a week, and a school psychologist is available through the partnership they have with the county and local public school district. As a result, there are multiple professionals engaged in meeting the needs of students with diverse exceptionalities. In addition, this arrangement allows many students to receive interventions on site.

Special and general education teachers also use co-teaching as a strategy to support each other

as they address students' needs. Three of the key informants were observed in various co-teaching situations. Alicia explained: "The general ed teacher does a mini-lesson; [Then] we do rotations … and one [station] is a reinforcement lesson with me." One of the teachers who has co-taught with Alicia, as well as other special education teachers, described how flexible all of the teachers are about co-teaching arrangements. He noted that if something is not working with a particular group of students, they change the arrangement until they find something that does work. For instance, he and Alicia used stations with one group; however, he and another special education teacher divided the class into two larger groups so that they could each concentrate on the specific needs of students in their group. This teacher reasoned that having two teachers who are both collaborating to meet students' diverse needs is "better than what I can do by myself. So I am not that type of teacher who is going to be offended if you want to help out or you want to jump in at any time." Nevertheless, an administrator pointed out that one challenge to co-teaching revolves around collaborating not just during instruction, but also during planning time: "I have had to make sure that they share their lesson plans and they are getting those lesson plans out to everyone so that modifications can be made that are needed to be made."

Additionally, administrators at SLS facilitated collaboration through specific structures that support teamwork among staff. First, they utilized professional learning communities (PLC) so that teachers have scheduled time to partner. An administrator noticed that PLCs are spaces where behaviors are changing because teachers work with administrators, who guide them to try new instructional approaches that will better meet the needs of all students: "Those professional learning communities have really helped with inclusion." However, a complaint that special and general education teachers shared was that the PLCs are divided—general education teachers meet with grade level teams while special education teachers meet in their own PLC. Thus, PLCs do not necessarily support co-teaching. Another structure in place at SLS is a teaming process that Alicia explained:

> If teachers have a concern and they have tried what they think they should have done or they have tried [everything in] their bag of tricks, and it is just not working and the student is still struggling, they can fill out a form. We have a team … [to] talk about what strategies we can put in place.

Once general education teachers complete this form, the special education teachers, support staff, and administrators meet with the general education teacher to brainstorm possible solutions to the problem, and create an action plan. One team member takes responsibility for following up to make sure the action plan is carried out, and to check in with general education teachers to monitor progress. An administrator explained: "There are a lot of people in place to help [teachers], and it's not as if a kid with special needs is your kid or your kid. Every kid in this building is our kid."

Nonetheless, a few teachers shared that they need more supports to make inclusion work well: "We don't have the money to do it really well and to accommodate a wide variety of disabilities that we have here." Specific complaints common among general education teachers were the lack of adequate co-planning time, high case-loads among special education teachers, and the extra work it takes to modify learning activities and assessments. For example, Joyce explained that because she works with students across multiple grades and general education teachers are supposed to teach reading at the same time every day, she is unable to regularly be in every classroom to support all of her students and/or to co-teach with their general education teachers. In addition, a general education teacher who taught in a public school in the past revealed, "I have to accommodate my own tests, and I never had to do that in public school."

Inclusive School Culture

Multiple participants described SLS as a welcoming community that is open to all children. As one teacher said, "[SLS is] a safe learning environment for all. I mean that you are welcoming and inviting all kids into your classroom." The idea of welcoming all was echoed by an administrator, "When we welcome a new family . . .I always say, 'If you want to come in, come in' … I want you to see that your child will be welcomed with open arms." This administrator used the image of "open arms" to describe how all students are embraced within the inclusive culture of SLS. Similar concepts of openness were also common among other participants. A parent shared a story about what happened when her friend whose child has an exceptionality toured SLS: "So [my friend] came and they looked at the school, and [SLS] opened their arms to them, which is what God essentially would have done." Further, another administrator used the metaphor of "open doors" to describe SLS's inclusive culture: "Our doors are open to whatever their needs might be, whether it be learning disabilities, cultural differences, [or] academic differences." Finally, as with the parent who shared the story about her friend, being welcoming was associated with acting as Jesus would have. A teacher provided one example:

> We are trying to live out how Jesus would treat other people…We try to portray to the students…that even though we have people who are different here, Jesus would have accepted them. We are here to do like Jesus so we should be accepting them as well.

The fact that SLS is a Catholic school allowed teachers and administrators to convey a clear mission that justified inclusive practices within the school, as well as supporting an inclusive culture across the school.

Participants shared stories about how students help each other, especially those with exceptionalities. An administrator explained, "I see a lot of our students being helpful…They are just more aware and more kind in trying to help [students with exceptionalities]." Joyce noticed a difference between a school where she used to work and SLS: "Teachers would pick a buddy for

the child [with exceptionalities]. But here they do a much better job with making sure that it is not just one person who is consistently with that child to help and be supportive." Through the use of purposeful grouping, teachers have made a concerted effort at SLS to help students understand that not all children are the same. One teacher described her approach:

> Some of the behaviors that go along with ADHD make those kids singled out and isolated, which is hard for everyone because…people don't want to work with them. So [I] just have to get a little bit more specific with roles and what everybody is doing.

Another teacher revealed his high expectations for the way his students treat each other: "A lot of the students generally care about the kids who have special needs; they do. I don't see a whole lot of making fun. I won't let that happen." Cindy supports older students at the school, and has been impressed with how students in one class support their classmate who has a behavioral disability: "They notice when this student is [anxious] and they will just be like, 'Okay, why don't we try doing it your way then. This seems like this is very important to you to do it this way.'" So having opportunities to work collaboratively and get to know students who are different has helped all students at SLS learn to embrace one another's differences. As Steph said, "I hate to use the word acceptance because I don't think it is acceptance. I think it is learning how to collaborate and be with people who are not just like you." She and other participants believed that inclusion prepares students to live in a diverse world.

In addition, participants reflected about the ways that working with students with exceptionalities allows all students to learn how to be compassionate towards one another. Steph said, "[Students] are loving and caring, and showing compassion for each other based on who they are." A general education teacher agreed: "They learn that things don't always come easy … We are not all going to be perfect at everything … There are some gifts that some of our special ed kids have that our general ed kids [don't]." A focus on the recognition of differences and personal gifts was something that other teachers brought up when talking about students learning compassion: "They are learning compassion. They are learning love. They are learning how to help one another. They are learning that he…or she has gifts to offer as we all do." A parent also described how children appreciate each other's "quirkiness": [My child with an exceptionality] loves every single one of those kids, all their quirkiness, all their loudness, and they all love him." In order to continue to develop compassion among students, teachers and administrators continue to address diversity in a purposeful way. For instance, a teacher described how he helps his students respond with kindness to a student with an exceptionality:

> I have had discussions with the whole group, "We are accepting to all, and we are going to treat them [with respect], but we are not going to trigger them…We know what buttons can set them off. Let's not do those buttons, and let's accept who they are."

Further, administrators recognized a need to emphasize diversity across the school, and carried out an initiative to foster a more empathetic culture. Students are reading books about honoring diversity and difference, and noticing what makes each of them special. An administrator explained: "What we have been talking about with empathy is just identifying that everyone is different and valuing people for who they are, and [being] more accepting of differences." These efforts continue to create a more compassionate school community at SLS.

However, there remains some resistance to inclusion, especially among general education teachers. An administrator explained that some teachers have not had experience with teaching students with exceptionalities: "Some of them just don't have the training or they are a little bit [uncertain] how to differentiate yet." Other participants agreed that general education teachers may not feel confident about their abilities to differentiate instruction or may feel uncertain about how to meet the academic needs of students with specific disabilities because they have not had special training. Administrators also noted that some teachers are uncertain how to manage challenging behaviors: "A lot of teachers…[struggle with] the social, psychological, behavioral issues that they don't know what to do [about]. It's not that they don't want [to include those children]. They don't know what to do." All of the administrators and most of the special education teachers who participated agreed that teachers want to help their students, but many of them need additional supports and professional development. However, a few teachers believed that some of their colleagues simply aren't open to inclusion: "I don't see a lot of teachers who are willing to step outside their comfort zone so they are not going to ask for help. They don't really want to accept [students with exceptionalities]." Another teacher agreed: "If you are wanting to operate your classroom a certain way and you have a fixed mindset … [then] it would be a struggle because some of those are challenges."

Ethical Leadership Practices

Participants shared a common ideology that inclusion is something that aligns with the Catholic identity of SLS. This belief rests on the foundation that administrators welcome all children including those with exceptionalities. An administrator described how inclusion is like when Jesus "went to the lost sheep" and "the people who were blind and poor" because nobody is turned away. Another administrator noted that inclusion "meets the mission and philosophy of the Catholic Church…We aren't supposed to judge…we are supposed to be welcoming and open to all." Most participants agreed that inclusion aligns with Church teaching. According to one teacher, "Catholic means universal for all so we want to be welcoming for all the kids." He further described how SLS is different than other Catholic schools: "Some schools would cap their kids on [Individual Service Plans] at 10%. So once they reach 10% of that grade level, they won't take any more. We don't do that here." SLS does appear to have a strong commitment to serving as many children with exceptionalities as possible. However, an administrator did acknowledge that there are times when

SLS does not have the appropriate staff or resources to meet some children's needs. Nevertheless, administrators try to accept as many children with exceptionalities as possible because, as one adminisrator put it, "What we are trying to do for kids with special needs or emotional needs…is best for all kids…So we are finding that by focusing on a handful we are helping all."

The key informants also played a role in promoting the inclusion of students with exceptionalities at SLS. They advocated on behalf of students by making sure their needs are met in an appropriate way. For instance, Joyce described a time when a general education teacher wanted to include a behavior plan on an ISP. Joyce explained to the teacher that such a plan is typically used only when a child is exhibiting violent behaviors and that since this child merely needed positive behavior supports, adding a behavior plan to the ISP would be unnecessary. She knew that the child could be labeled inappropriately in the future if a behavior plan was added. Special education teachers also advocate for students with exceptionalities to be fully included in the classroom. Cindy recalled a time when she needed to make sure that a student with a moderate intellectual disability was included in the learning activity: "I wanted the child to have a presence in there. I didn't want them to be just overlooked and just sit there." In addition, the special education teachers use the case conference as a time to advocate for students with exceptionalities. Alicia explained, "It is really important for the children to know that every single person in the room knows that they are good at something and knows that they have strengths…especially if they really struggle." Alicia also shared that she takes the time to explain complex concepts to parents during the case conference. One parent described how Steph has been a strong advocate for her child: "We have had little advocates along the way, but [Steph] is the one who has really just taken him underneath her wing…She looks out for him."

In order to move the mission of inclusion forward, the key informants utilized a variety of approaches to influence their colleagues' practice. Cindy and Steph described how they try to model how to accommodate students' diverse needs. Steph explained, "I always invite teachers in to see what I do. I don't say or preach that what I do is best because some days I'm really good and some days I'm a hot mess." She said she "hopes to inspire" other teachers to try doing what has worked for her. Cindy also uses modeling:

> If you model it and praise them along the way, they are going to get more comfortable with it. And I think that has worked. We had one particular teacher who did not want any students [with exceptionalities in their] classroom and has taken on two this year.

Cindy recognized that some general education teachers have limited training and experience, and so they doubt their ability to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities. Therefore, she shows them what to do and how to do it. Alicia and Joyce shared that they typically speak with general education teachers in an effort to collaboratively solve problems. Alicia said she tries to

find a solution that everyone can implement comfortably: "[We] could both collaborate and meet in the middle because not everybody is going to think the same way…So just coming together to meet for the common good of the student is the most important thing." Alicia has found that using a cooperative approach with her colleagues is an effective way to help them implement inclusion. However, Joyce was able to use the credibility she has earned through her many years of experience to speak more directly to general education teachers:

> I usually have tried to very directly talk with the teacher. When [the general ed teacher] tells you, 'I have no training in that, nor do I want to get it' that makes for a very long year. So I do the best I can with trying to help her or him understand the need to change.

As a group, the key informants have been able to influence many teachers to try new strategies to accommodate their students' diverse needs. However, they recognized that they each must use an approach that feels both comfortable for them, and that will be received positively by their colleagues. As Cindy noted, when working with teachers who have limited experience with inclusion, it is important to help them understand that they are not alone, but that they cannot avoid the work that must be done: "We have to work together on this. It's not going to go away but it is our problem; it's not just yours, and I'm willing to help you with it."

Discussion

To begin, I will revisit the research questions. The first question asked what personal characteristics of experiences caused teachers to notice the need for advocacy on behalf of students who are marginalized. Three of the four teachers who demonstrated leadership through advocacy had a sibling with an exceptionality. This allowed them to understand and feel compassion towards their students with exceptionalities, something that other teachers noticed. They also shared that they appreciated the challenge of figuring out how to best meet their students' needs alongside general education teachers and administrators at SLS.

The second research question examined the ways that teachers meet students' needs and engage students and/or families in the process. The teachers and administrators at SLS approached inclusion as a philosophy and a set of practices. From a philosophical perspective, almost every participant discussed inclusion as aligning with the school's mission and Catholic identity. However, they also recognized that putting inclusion in place was an arduous task. To support teachers in the process, administrators secured funding to hire special education teachers. They also provided time for collaboration among teachers, as well as professional development opportunities. As experts, the special education teachers coached their colleagues in purposeful grouping and differentiation strategies that would allow teachers to meet the diverse needs of all students at SLS. In addition, teachers and administrators worked as a team to work through challenges. Participants

also shared how they engaged students to help each other because they recognized that when students support each other, they learn compassion.

The final research question probed the ways that teachers who advocate gain support from their colleagues for students who are marginalized. In the context of SLS, the special education teachers were strong advocates for their students with exceptionalities. However, administrators had a significant influence on the fact that SLS includes these students in the first place. Administrators took a clear philosophical stance, and did their best to provide adequate supports to improve teacher success in meeting the needs of students with exceptionalities. This commitment created space for the special education teachers to lead their general education colleagues as instructional coaches and mentors. The four key informants found that providing practical supports was the most effective way to advocate for inclusion in general and students with exceptionalities at particular at SLS.

Next, I will examine the findings in relation to the literature. The design of the SLS inclusion program revealed a program based in practice and principle. Students with exceptionalities were included in general education classrooms and exposed to the same curriculum as their "typical peers" (Cosier et al., 2013; Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). Additionally, special education teachers collaborated with their general education colleagues to provide appropriate supports for students with exceptionalities, while administrators afforded teachers multiple opportunities to pursue professional development to improve their capability in meeting the needs of these students (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007). Findings also demonstrated that the SLS inclusion program was founded in CST, Aquinas's teachings, and some elements of Ethical Christian Pedagogy. Foremost was the way that teacher leaders and administrators described the reasons for working toward the full inclusion of students with exceptionalities. They brought about a welcoming community where the focus was on the dignity of all children regardless of ability, and their right to access a Catholic education (Carlson, 2014; Carlson & Labelle, 2019; Scanlan, 2009). However, teachers and administrators at SLS did not reveal that an aim of inclusion at SLS is to raise consciousness of all students by demanding new systems that embrace difference, and work toward social justice, a primary aim of Ethical Christian Pedagogy (Carlson & Labelle, 2019). Nevertheless, among all members of the SLS community, findings revealed a commitment to creating a "positive and caring environment" (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007, p. 22) for all students, which does align with the goals of Ethical Christian Pedagogy (Carlson & Labelle, 2019).

The findings also align with some of the research on teacher advocacy. For example, three of the key informants were motivated to work with students with exceptionalities because they had witnessed someone in their family struggle in school (Collay, 2010). These teachers felt a kinship with their students with exceptionalities, and were driven to meet their needs because they could empathize with them. In addition, the findings revealed teachers who collaborated with

administrators to influence pedagogical practices in general education classrooms for the benefit of students with exceptionalities (Stern & Brown, 2016).

In examining teacher advocacy as a practice of leadership, the findings demonstrate that the special education teachers as SLS are indeed teacher leaders who utilized practices aligned with ethical leadership. These teacher leaders recognized the humanity of their students with exceptionalities (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Foster, 1989; Scanlan, 2009; Starratt, 1986). This conviction was shared by administrators, who challenged general education teachers to do what they considered right rather than what is easy (Cunningham & Cordeiro, 2000; Starratt, 1986). Collectively, the key informants and administrators influenced general education teachers at SLS, providing a space for the development of inclusive practices (Foster, 1989; Stern & Brown, 2016).

This study contributes to the literature in three ways. First, it provides evidence of how teachers in a Catholic school advocate for and support practices toward the inclusion of all children. Examining inclusion practices at SLS helps us understand inclusion as a combination of practice and principle. SLS provides an example of how teachers and administrators apply CST and the teachings of Aquinas. Catholics are called to be inclusive, and for teachers and administrators in Catholic schools, this means including all children as a matter of social justice.

Second, this study examines teacher advocacy as a practice of leadership, and identifies teacher advocates as teacher leaders. York-Barr & Duke (2004) describe teacher leaders as teachers who influence their colleagues to change teaching practices toward improved student achievement. The findings support that the special education teachers who advocated for their students with exceptionalities had a positive influence on the teaching practices of general education teachers. Through the inclusion practices that teachers implemented, students' needs were met. In addition, several participants noted that there are benefits of inclusion beyond academic achievement. For example, teachers and administrators described the culture of SLS as welcoming and noted that children help one another because they have learned to be compassionate. Thus, this study pushes the definition of teacher leadership beyond influence to improve achievement toward influence to expand students' affective learning.

Finally, this study aligns theories of ethical leadership with Catholic teachings. The special education teachers behaved as ethical teacher leaders because they influenced general education teachers to work outside their comfort by trying new strategies to accommodate students with exceptionalities. They also struggled alongside general education teachers, providing concrete supports. Additionally, most of the participants aligned their practice with CST and Aquinas' philosophical and moral principles. Taken together, the ethical leadership of the special education teacher leaders and administrators led to evidence of an inclusive school culture that embodied the moral ideals rooted in CST and Aquinas.

Conclusion

This study examined how the practice of ethical leadership supported the work of special education teachers, administrators, general education teachers, and school staff to develop an inclusive school culture where all children were welcomed and where adults made their best effort to meet all children's needs. An important goal of the study is to provide a model for how teachers in other communities might utilize ethical leadership practices in order to advocate on behalf of all students who are marginalized. The findings of this study help to identify some key elements for teacher-led advocacy including practices that align with ethical leadership. In addition, administrators support teacher advocacy and ethical leadership when they create an environment where teachers are encouraged to take risks and pursue passions when there is potential for positive student outcomes. Under these conditions, teachers, leaders and administrators will be able to develop responsive and constructive programs that meet students' diverse needs. As a result, school culture may be transformed to include more fully those students who have been marginalized within the school or community.

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