WHOLE SCHOOL EVALUATION AND INCLUSION: HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARTICIPANTS PERCEIVE THEIR LEARNING COMMUNITY[1]

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a program designed to foster authentic inclusion and excellence in an elementary school learning community and research results from the first phase of this on-going project. Actively Building Capacity for Diversity sees successful inclusion of students with exceptional needs as part of a continuum of excellent educational practices that respect individual differences in learners, address the whole person, start from where they are and challenge each student optimally, to ensure equal access and opportunity for ALL students. For the first phase of this program five questionnaires were developed to form the Diversity, Individual Development and Differentiation (DIDDs) school evaluation package for administrators, teachers, parents, education assistants, and students. The surveys were organized around five quality education indicators defined by the participating School District. Overall the findings indicate that there are high rates of agreement among School Learning Community participants regarding various aspects of quality education indicators. Specific areas where differing perceptions are described represent opportunities for the participants to focus future discussion and interventions in order to continue building effective inclusive practices.

Introduction

The field of special education has seen numerous promising developments in both theory and research over the past five decades (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Skrtic, 1995). Many gains have been achieved in our schools and in the provisions to support students with exceptional learning needs. The widely adopted special education approach was embraced in the 1960sand 1970s and has continued to be a strong element in present day schools. Recently, educational leaders have charged that the approach simply perpetuates the isolation and discrimination of students with exceptional learning needs (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Lupart & Webber, 2002; Skrtic, 1996). The special education approach, in practice, allowed schools and regular educators to carry on the way they always have. When certain students were considered to require something different from what was offered in regular education classrooms, they were simply "decoupled" from regular education and put in a special class with a special teacher, and not much else had to change (Skrtic, 1996). This arrangement was successfully practiced for about three decades in Canadian schools, with the apparent satisfaction of regular and special education stakeholders. However, with increasing emphasis on inclusion and the mass return of exceptional students to regular education classrooms in the 1990s, alarms began to sound. Teachers became confused and overwhelmed about their changing roles and responsibilities. Students and parents were raising their concerns about a "watered down curriculum" and the lack of services for students with exceptional learning needs. Moreover, the boundaries of students considered to be at-risk in our schools spread over to non-traditional special education categories such as students from cultural minorities, students who are culturally different, students who are ESL, and students who are from poverty backgrounds (Lupart & Odishaw, 2003). Clearly, radical change in our educational systems is required.

Several gaps and limitations can be found in current educational provisions for students with exceptional learning needs (Andrews & Lupart, 2000; Bunch, Lupart & Brown, 1997; Bunch & Valeo, 1998; Friend, Bursuck & Hutchinson, 1998; Lupart & Odishaw, 2003; Lupart, McKeough & Yewchuk, 1996; Lupart & Webber, 2002).

Schools

1) Regular class teachers have not changed their teaching practices to provide appropriate instruction for all students.

2) School systems are ambiguous about regular class teachers being responsible for the learning progress of students with exceptional learning needs.
3) Regular class teachers have not been adequately prepared to work with students with exceptional learning needs.
4) Regular class teachers have not been provided with adequate supports such as lowered pupil/teacher ratio and educational assistants.
5) Regular classroom teachers do not have sufficient time to consult and collaborate with special education teachers and parents.
6) The role expectations for regular and special education teachers are not clear.
7) School administrators rarely have an adequate knowledge base in special education and/or inclusion.
8) School policies and practices continue to be aimed at the mythical "average child" and minimum standards keep being raised.

Students

1) Students still need to be identified as exceptional needs before they receive special programming and instruction.
2) Students with special needs must successfully proceed through the 5-boxes of the special education approach (i.e., referral, testing, diagnosis, placement, programming) before they receive something that is different from regular class instruction.
3) The time period from initial referral to actual programming change can take up to six months, and even longer.
4) The costs involved in identification and diagnostic testing, and in some provinces coding, consume an inordinate proportion of the available funding.
5) An exceptional needs student may receive special accommodation in elementary school, and yet be without any assistance in junior or senior high.
6) There is insufficient "transition" planning from one level of education to the next and minimal school to workplace transition accommodations and procedures.
7) Programming options, particularly at the high school level, are often inappropriate for students with exceptional learning needs.

For well over three decades various attempts have been made to address the above problems. Beginning in the 1970s with the concept of integration (i.e., physical placement of special needs students within regular classrooms), to the 1980s with the concept of mainstreaming (i.e., specified provisions to support student learning, typically addressed in an Individual Educational Plan format) and finally leading to the current idea that authentic inclusion requires a deconstruction of traditional delivery systems of special and regular education and a transformational reconstruction such that all children receive an appropriate education within a unified education system, progressive inclusion has certainly taken place. These developments have had a direct impact upon school organization and service delivery in educational communities throughout the world (Timmons, Lupart, & McKeough, 2002; UNESCO, 1994). Significantly, programs and intervention approaches that have traditionally been offered in segregated special programs are gradually being incorporated into the general education system. Students who were once served within special education classrooms are being moved into general education classrooms for the purpose of creating learning communities for all students.

Despite these positive trends, inclusive education continues to be controversial, and inclusive practices remain the exception rather than the rule in many Canadian schools. Several barriers have slowed the shift towards a unitary system of education. Philosophical debates about the merits of inclusive education, and limitations in schools' capacities for change have impeded the transition towards inclusion. Arguments for inclusive education are often made on the basis of moral and ethical considerations. Despite the legitimacy of such arguments, many individuals are hesitant to endorse changes until the benefits associated with inclusive education are further substantiated (Kavale & Mostert, 2003). Although research has begun to address concerns surrounding the legitimacy of inclusive education, many remain unconvinced by its purported benefits. Even when support for inclusion is present, the feasibility of such an endeavour can thwart sustainable efforts towards inclusion. Engaging all relevant stakeholders in the change process seems critical in ensuring systemic school change.

One of the first steps towards inclusion involves identifying and understanding the perceptions and attitudes of those involved in the change process. Students, parents, education assistants, teachers and administrators of schools are those most acutely aware of the unique circumstances of the school community and of the particular needs of the school as this relates to

inclusive practices. However the joint perspectives of such individuals are often overlooked when undertaking strategies towards inclusion. Understanding what these stakeholders think about their school, about inclusive education, and about inclusive education within their school is important in the process of restructuring for inclusion. The present project attempts to engage stakeholders in this transition and to recognize the unique circumstances and needs of each participant school.

The main objectives of this project are:

1) to build community, and to establish inclusive values within participant schools;
2) to organize support for student diversity; and
3) to orchestrate learning and mobilize resources within schools.

The intent of this chapter is to present a description of an educational project designed to transition schools into more inclusive environments, and to provide the summary findings for the baseline assessment of one Elementary School involved in the project. As the implementation of the project is yet ongoing, results of follow-up assessments will be presented in the future.

2. ACTIVELY BUILDING CAPACITY FOR DIVERSITY

2.1. PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Actively Building Capacity for Diversity (ABCD) is a three-year project supported by local school districts and inclusion specialists, and designed for implementation within all levels of schools. In promoting more inclusive philosophy and practice, this project helps schools to address diversity amongst students and teachers, and aims to improve overall educational outcomes for all learners. The following section provides a brief overview of steps involved in implementation of the project.

a) Create a Core Team

A primary mechanism for guiding the project and the implementation of professional development activities and inclusive practices within a school is the *core team.* This team is comprised of a school district representative, an inclusion facilitator, a school administrator,

teachers and other representative school staff. Within the current project, the inclusion facilitator was external to the school. Her role was to provide meaningful support within the school and to address issues related to inclusive attitudes, beliefs and practices. Interested parents and students may also become involved in the activities of the core team.

Based on the level of school commitment and the status of the school at the time of entering this project, the core team determines the initial and subsequent levels of school involvement within the ABCD project. Regular meetings allow the core team to discuss and monitor the activities of the project and to redirect such activities when deemed necessary.

b) Administer Baseline Assessment

In the current study, the Diversity, Individual Development, Differentiation surveys (DIDDs) were the primary means for quantifying participant schools' growth in areas relevant to overall school functioning and specific to inclusive practices. Five surveys were developed to assess school functioning as perceived by students, parents, education assistants, teachers, and administrators. Questions included within these surveys addressed the school quality areas of effective schools identified by the school district School Quality Review (see Figure 1) within the board of education where the study occurred. The surveys aim to assess these qualities with questions that address the following themes[2]: sense of school community and shared values (*school culture*); physical and emotional safety of school environment (*safety and security*); school commitment to growth (*school development*); availability of necessary resources that enable quality education for all students (*student entitlement*); and the curricular focus and climate of inquiry fostered within a school

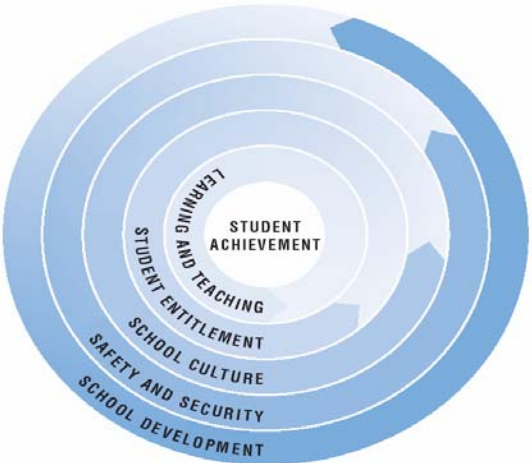


Figure 1 School Quality Characteristics (Calgary Board of Education, 2002)

[2] Questions on the DIDDs were chosen and developed in order to capture the five school quality themes identified by the school board of education. Factor analysis of the questionnaires confirmed that each theme represented a different factor.

(*learning and teaching*). This model of effective schools identifies student achievement as the central point of reference for evaluating school success. The primary means of determining improved student achievement will be evaluated based on results of provincial achievement tests.

c) Report Findings to Stakeholders

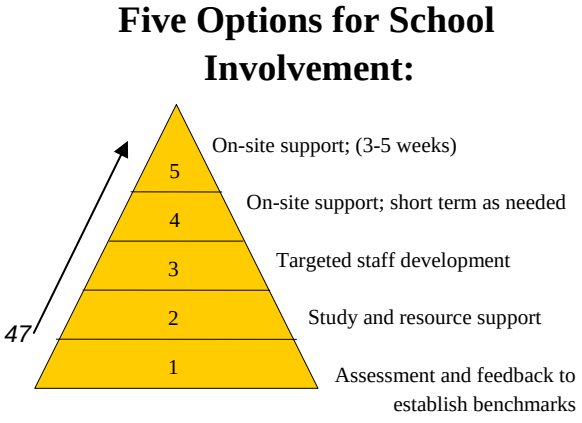
The information gathered by means of the DIDDs questionnaires is extensive. Researchers involved in the project administer the questionnaires, analyze and compile the findings, and upon completion of the baseline assessment, provide each school with a summary report outlining the mean scores of participant groups within the school (i.e., students, parents, education assistants, teachers and administrators). Copies of the summary reports are provided to schools in advance of a meeting where researchers review and highlight specific findings to the core team and other interested stakeholders.

The content of each of the questionnaires differ somewhat in order to successfully capture the perceptions and attitudes of the different stakeholders. As such, the questions that comprise each school quality theme sometimes differ across participant group. For this reason, direct comparison across these themes/factors is not always possible. However, a certain number of questions targeting areas of school interest is consistent across questionnaires. Comparisons of these questions across participant groups is provided within the summary reports.

d) Determine Level of School Involvement

Schools who agree to participate in the project vary in terms of their initial levels of inclusive philosophy and practice. At the outset of the project, schools are encouraged to determine at what level of involvement they wish to participate. The baseline assessment helps to inform this decision, as each school is given a baseline summary of areas of school strengths and weaknesses.

The 5 possible levels of involvement differ in terms of amount of intervention and external support provided. Options for school involvement are progressive and thus incorporate support from lower levels. Despite the varying degrees of school involvement that define each of these levels, all schools that



participate in this project agree to a minimum level of supported activities that includes the following: participation in a baseline assessment of inclusive practice and school functioning across the school quality characteristics; formation of a core team of representative individuals who commit to monthly meetings; attending project-sharing meetings with other schools involved in the project; and attending an introductory professional development day.

The resources of the project can be accessed at five different levels. At Level 1, project support primarily involves the provision of an inclusion facilitator at *core team* meetings and the facilitation of the baseline assessment and feedback process. Specifically questionnaire data is collected and analyzed to provide benchmarks of school growth in areas of inclusive practice. Level 2 incorporates the activities of Level 1 and further supports schools by means of providing them networked contacts and access to information and resources provided by the inclusion facilitator. At Level 3 the activities of the core team have direct implications for on-going teacher education as support is provided to adapt professional development activities addressed to meet specified needs within a school. The highest levels (4 and 5) of school involvement are differentiated from lower levels on the basis that external support provided by the inclusion facilitator takes the form of on-site involvement. Short-term on-site involvement at Level 4 directly engages the inclusion facilitator to support specific strategies that a school wishes to target and may involve observation, modeling, planning, and assessment and redirection based on the impact of changes. At Level 5 longer-term support (3-5 weeks) is provided to target broader school based changes identified by the core team.

2.2. SAMPLE

The findings presented within this chapter are based on responses of students, parents, education assistants, teachers and administrators of one Elementary School in the ABCD project. In total, 451 participants were involved in this baseline assessment. The number and percentage of participants as well as the percentage of participants in the respective groups who completed each form of the questionnaire is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Number and Percent of Participants in the Baseline Assessment for Each Questionnaire

Type	Grade 1-2	Grade 3-6	Parent	Education Assistant	Teacher	Administration
Number	73	129	219	6	19	3
Percent	49	42	39	85	100	75

2.3. ANALYSIS

The findings are presented in the form of frequency distributions and mean scores. Frequency distributions represent the proportion of the sample group who selected a particular response. The mean scores are, for the most part, based on a five-point scale and represent the average scores computed by summing total number of responses and dividing by the number of participants who answered the particular question. A 5-point Likert scale was used for the majority of questions where 1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4=agree, 5=strongly agree. A 2-point dichotomous response option was used on the questionnaires targeting grades 1 and 2 students where 1=no, and 2=yes. Students in grades 3 to 6 answered questions on a 3-point Likert scale: 1=no, 2=sometimes, 3=yes. When compared to adult participant groups, scores for students were prorated to a 5-point scale. Questionnaire items with a negative connotation were recoded to allow for the consistent interpretation of high and low scores.

3. FINDINGS ACROSS PARTICIPANT GROUPS

Several questions were consistent across questionnaires, allowing for direct comparison of mean scores for applicable participant groups. The following section provides the mean scores of questions that were of particular interest. In some instances the wording of these questions differed slightly across questionnaires to appropriately address the targeted audience, however these minor differences were not thought to alter the meaning of the question itself. The following tables include the questions as they appeared in the teacher questionnaire, and the grades 3-6 questionnaire.

3.1. WORKING TOGETHER

The importance of collaboration in the development and maintenance of inclusive classrooms cannot be overstated. According to Jordan (1994), collaboration refers to teachers and other professionals learning from each other's experiences and working in teams where all members feel that their contributions are valued. Many researchers and practitioners feel that collaboration between students, families and educator is an integral process for meeting the needs of students within an inclusive framework. In fact, taking more of a 'team' approach to educating students as opposed to the traditional one teacher per classroom model is one of the hallmarks of effective inclusion (Price, Mayfield, McFadden, Marsh, 2000).

3.1.1. Parent-Teacher Relationship

Creating a positive relationship between teachers and parents can greatly assist in the successful inclusion of a student. In fact, research has shown that the more extensive the collaboration between school and parents, the more successful, children are likely to be (Gallegos & Medina, 1995; Marcon, 1999). Schools can work with parents by valuing the expert knowledge they have about their children and providing opportunities for their involvement in their child's education. The following items provide some indication of the extent to which parents and school staff view their relationships with each other.

Item	Parent	EA	Teacher	Admin
I believe I have good communication with my child's teacher/students' parents.	3.50	4.00	4.05	5.00
I value the knowledge that parents have about their children.	4.07	4.50	4.53	5.00
There are numerous opportunities for parents to become involved in the school	4.21	4.33	4.26	5.00
Parental support is important for increasing and maintaining student achievement.	NA*	4.50	4.53	4.00

* No comparable item was included in the Parent Questionnaire

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

As can be seen in the table above, both school staff and parents appear to feel positively about their relationship and involvement in the school. Attitudes and beliefs are clearly more similar across respondents than different. However a discrepancy in perceptions can be seen between parent reports of communication with their child's teacher and school staff reports. Staff efforts

may be best focused on ensuring that parents not only feel welcome in the school but that frequent and meaningful contact is maintained between school staff and parents.

Since the beginning of the current school year, approximately how many sets of parents/guardians of the students in your class:	
Response Choices	Teacher
Participated in scheduled parent-teacher conferences?	1.74
Participated in scheduled student-led conferences?	1.37
Contacted you to discuss their child's academic performance?	1.32
Contacted you about their child's social interactions?	0.53
Contacted you about discipline issues?	2.84
Contacted you about concerns with your teaching?	1.74
Corresponded with you in writing (e.g., through a student planner or agenda)?	1.37
Volunteered in your school?	2.53
Volunteered in your classroom?	2.16
Attended special events (e.g., dances, assemblies, field trips, and sporting events)?	2.95

(0 = none; 1 = 1-4 sets; 2 = 5-9 sets; 3 = 10-14 sets; 4 = 15 or more sets)

Since the beginning of the school year, how often have you specifically contacted parents/guardians of the students in your class to discuss:	
Response Choices	Teacher
Good academic performance?	1.26
Poor academic performance?	1.42
Good behaviour?	1.39
Poor behaviour?	1.58

(0= none; 1 = 1-10 times; 2 = 11-20 times; 3 = 21-30 times; 4 = 31 or more times)

The results of this section are particularly interesting in light of the parent involvement results described previously. Parents did not feel that their communication with their child's teacher was as strong as school staff felt it was. As we can see in the tables presented above, relatively few sets of parents attend parent-teacher or student-led conferences. These meetings are one of the most effective and commonly used methods to facilitate productive partnerships between parents and professionals (Turnbull & Turnbull, 1990). Parent involvement appears to be focused on volunteering and attending special events which, while important, may not contribute to

academic success of students as strongly as communication with teachers. In fact, the highest rates of contact between teachers and parents can be seen in regards to difficulties students were having with behaviour and academics. This is a common finding in parent involvement literature (Catsambis, 1998; Shumow & Miller, 2001) but it serves as a reminder for school staff that is it important to work collaboratively with parents not only when problems arise but to help ensure success for students in a proactive manner.

3.1.2. Staff Collaboration

Collaboration between staff has been the focus of extensive discussion among proponents of inclusion (e.g., Ainscow, 2000). Typical examples include school-wide cooperation in planning, teaching, and decision-making. In fact many suggest that successful inclusive practice requires that staff have common goals, shared responsibility, valued expertise and equally distributed leadership (Friend & Cook, 1992; Pugach & Johnson, 1995). The following tables summarize the viewpoints of school staff regarding the extent to which these practices are evident in their school.

Item	EA	Teacher	Admin
To what extent were you involved in setting the school goals for this year?	NA	3.58	5.00
To what extent did you agree with the school goals set for this year?	4.00	4.11	5.00
The support service personnel understand their role in enhancing the learning and participation of all students.	4.17	2.42	5.00
I engage in collaboration and joint problem-solving when the progress of a student or group is the cause of concern.	NA	4.16	5.00
Staff are encouraged to draw on and share their skills and knowledge	NA	4.11	5.00
Staff members regularly collaborate with each other.	4.17	4.37	5.00
There are adequate district staff to share their expertise with regular staff.	NA	2.71	3.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

Over the past 12 months, to what extent were the following individuals involved in planning the professional development programs for the school this year?		
Individuals	Teacher	Admin
Principal	NA	5.00
Assistant Principal	NA	5.00
Teachers	3.44	5.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

It is clear from the mean scores listed in the tables above that teachers feel they are much less involved in making decisions than do the administrators. For example, contrary to administrators' beliefs, many teachers reported that they were not involved in planning PD activities. These discrepancies indicate that teachers and administrators at this school are still working towards truly collaborative relationships. A greater effort on the part of administrators to include teachers in setting school goals and planning for the year may result in improved relationships between these two groups and a shared focus.

3.1.3. Collaboration with Education Assistants

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

Item	EA	Teacher	Admin
I involve education assistants in instructional planning and review.	4.17	4.06	NA
I collaborate with the teacher in the planning of instruction and lessons and homework.	4.50	NA	NA
I provide a clear job description of duties and responsibilities to my Education Assistant.	4.50	3.88	NA
I seek out the views of the Education Assistant about the nature of their job/The teacher seeks my views about my role and responsibilities.	4.33	4.00	5.00

Education assistants (EAs), while often overlooked in collaborative school teams, are essential participants in the inclusion of students with special needs. Research suggests than in effective inclusive schools, EAs and teachers work as partners (Hutchinson, 2002). The above results indicate that EAs and teachers agree on their collaborative role in the school, although some teachers expressed difficulty defining the role of the EA in their classroom.

3.2. ACCESS TO RESOURCES

The success of an inclusive school is contingent upon whether adequate resources are made available to teachers and students (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995). Assistive technology, adaptive devices, and reading intervention materials are some tangible examples of the types of resources that might be used within an inclusive classroom (Friend, Bursuck, & Hutchinson, 1998). Inclusion facilitators also represent a resource made available to teachers in many inclusive

school as they offer a way to bridge the gap between what general educators know and what they need to know about inclusive philosophy and practices (Weiner, 2003).

Across studies on inclusive education, teachers report that they lack adequate time, training and resources to successfully implement inclusion within their classrooms (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Increased professional development activities and access to necessary resources would undoubtedly have positive implications for the implementation of inclusive practices within the school.

The physical organization of the school building, the appropriate allocation of staff and monetary resources, and the availability of necessary equipment and resources are all relevant in determining whether a child with a disability will be successfully included within a regular education classroom. Not surprisingly, administrators, teachers and parents all agree that access to resources is important in determining whether inclusion will be successful (Downing & Williams, 1997; Kniveton, 2004; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Nutbrown & Clough, 2004).

3.2.1. Staff

Please rate the extent to which each of the following met the needs of the class(es) that you taught this year.		
Resources	EA	Teacher
Instructional resources (e.g., curriculum documents, books)	3.00	2.78
School supplies (e.g., paper, pencils)	3.67	3.00
Space in your classroom	3.17	2.58
Computers for course instruction	2.33	2.47
Computer software for course instruction	2.17	2.93
Audio-visual equipment (e.g., TV, VCR)	3.33	3.28
Science equipment	3.50	2.47
Manipulatives for mathematics instruction	3.50	2.75
Special equipment for special needs students	2.67	2.47
The library	3.17	3.00

(1= Did not meet the needs, 4= Completely met the needs)

Item	EA	Teacher	Admin
The school building is physically accessible to all students.	4.50	4.00	5.00
Students are consulted about the support they need.	4.33	4.00	4.00
All students have ample opportunity to participate in activities outside the classroom at this school.	4.50	4.21	4.00
There is an open and equitable distribution of resources in the school.	3.67	3.63	4.67
Resources delegated to meet special educational needs are used to	4.33	3.95	5.00

increase the capacity of the school to respond to diversity.			
The library is organized so it supports the learning of all students.	3.83	4.32	5.00
Materials are appropriately adapted, e.g. large print or Braille made available for students with impairments.	3.17	3.50	5.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

The findings presented above suggest that EAs, teachers and administrators at this school hold generally positive views about the availability and distribution of resources to all students within the school. EAs and teachers rate the availability of necessary resources to be adequate. However, moderate scores suggest that the current availability of resources do not completely meet the needs of all students. Administrators appear to have the most favourable impression of access to resources within the school. When compared to the ratings of the administrators, the EAs and teachers have less positive perceptions as to the equitable distribution of resources in the school, and with regards to materials being appropriately adapted for students with impairments.

3.2.2. Parents & Students

Item	Parent	Gr. 3-6
There is a good choice of alternate programs within the school	3.42	NA
The computer facilities at the school are adequate	3.52	NA
The library facilities at the school are adequate	3.70	4.67

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

While students seem satisfied with the library facilities at this elementary school, parents appear to be less positive about the programming, computer, and library resources. As parents appear to support concerns reported by staff regarding the availability of resources, particularly computers, this school may choose to explore opportunities in the larger community to ensure that student needs are well provided for.

3.3. BULLYING

Bullying is prevalent in Canadian schools with reported rates varying from about 15 to 25% (Beran & Tutty, 2002). Clearly, peer victimization has no place in any school. However, there has been some concern expressed that as students with special needs are included in regular

settings, they may be at increased risk for bullying (Mishna, 2003; Nabuzoka, 2003). The creation of anti-bullying policies and practices in schools are yet another indication that staff are working towards creating truly inclusive environments.

3.3.1. School Staff and Parents

Item	Parent	EA	Teacher	Admin
This school has a clear policy statement about bullying which sets out in detail what behaviour is acceptable and unacceptable to the school.	3.89	4.00	4.16	4.33
Students know who to turn to if they experience bullying.	3.91	4.33	4.11	5.00
I/Staff actively discourage the incidents of bullying behaviour in my school.	3.65	4.67	4.63	5.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

3.3.2. Students

Item	Gr. 1 & 2	Gr. 3 - 6
Kids say nasty and unpleasant (mean) things to me at school.	2.98	2.31
I am bullied in school.	2.63	1.53
I am bullied on my way to and from school.	2.50	1.27

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

Clearly, school staff agree that bullying is being dealt with effectively in their schools. However, parents do not appear to be quite as confident. Mean scores suggest that some parents feel that school staff are not doing all that they can to discourage bullying. An examination of student reports shows that what bullying is taking place is mainly verbal in nature and that in fact most students disagree or are neutral in their assessment of bullying. Overall, bullying does not seem to be a major issue at this school. However, as has been found in previous sections, there are differing perceptions of parents and staff which should be addressed in order to ensure mutual understanding and cooperation.

3.4 ATTITUDES TOWARD INCLUSION

As attitudes often precede behaviour (Ajzen, 1988), researchers' interest in attitudes about inclusion is relevant in determining how inclusive philosophy might be operationalized in the classroom. Along with adequate resources and professional development, positive attitudes about

inclusion are also central to the successful transition of a school into an inclusive environment (Weiner, 2003). While research has focused primarily on the attitudes of teachers and administrators towards inclusive education, the perspectives of parents and students have more recently become the focus of inquiry.

3.4.1 School Staff and Parents

Based on the findings of past studies, teachers appear to be conflicted about the ideology of inclusion and what it means in practice. Although many teachers agree with the inclusion of students with special needs in regular education classrooms (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996), their concerns regarding limitations in resources and professional preparation (Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997; Forlin, 2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996) temper this support. With adequate training, resources and support, it can be conjectured that the divide between teachers' ideological stance on inclusion and their perceptions of its practical application should be lessened. In providing teachers what they need to be successful, we might expect greater support for the inclusion of students with disabilities, regardless of the nature of their disabilities.

Administrator attitudes about inclusion are also relevant to the successful transition to an inclusive school. While there is wide variability among administrators' attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities (Praisner, 2003), administrators, as compared to teachers, appear to have more positive attitudes about the inclusion of students with special needs (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Davis & Maheady, 1991). Administrators play a key role in restructuring schools for inclusion as they often times facilitate the development, implementation and evaluation of inclusive practices within the school (Boscardin, 2005; Riehl, 2000). Stanovich and Jordan (1998) found principals' attitudes toward inclusion to be a strong predictor of effective teaching behaviours in inclusive classrooms. Sustainable inclusive education would seem dependent upon the attitudes, knowledge and skills of administrators within inclusive schools.

Parent attitudes towards inclusion have also been the focus of some research in the field of special education. Both parents of children with disabilities (Leyser & Kirk, 2004) and without disabilities (Kniveton, 2004) vary in terms of their support for inclusion. Like teachers, parents appear to favour inclusion from a conceptual and philosophical standpoint, but voice concerns surrounding the quality of instruction and access to resources within inclusive

environments (Leyser & Kirk, 2004). Lack of teacher attention, rejection by peers and access to adequate services (Brown, 2001) are some specific examples of concerns with inclusive education highlighted by parents of children with disabilities. There is some suggestion that parents' attitudes towards inclusion can have implications for how their own children respond to the inclusion of children with disabilities within their classrooms (Kniveton, 2004).

Students report generally positive attitudes about the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Hendrickson, Shokoohi-Yekta, Hamre-Nietupski, & Gable, 1996). However, a large-scale Canadian study found that while the majority of students held above neutral to positive attitudes about peers with disabilities, a substantial number of students reported more negative attitudes (McDougall, DeWit, King, Miller, & Killip, 2004).

Item	Parent	EA	Teacher	Admin
I believe inclusion provides students with challenging needs the opportunity to reveal their learning potential.	3.74	4.00	4.00	5.00
Inclusion is a benefit for all students.	3.78	4.50	3.79	5.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

Consistent with findings from past research, the administrators at this school hold the most positive attitudes about inclusion and the benefit of inclusion for students. Relative to EAs and administrators, the above findings suggest that parents and teachers are somewhat less convinced about the positive implications of inclusion for all students. Despite these somewhat lower scores, all participant groups reveal relatively positive attitudes about inclusion. This is perhaps reflective of the inclusionary focus and philosophy of this school, even prior to its involvement in the ABCD project.

3.4.2. Students (no comparable question for Grades 1 & 2)

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

Item	Gr. 3 - 6
I believe that all children, even those with special needs, should be included in my school	4.84

Based on the above score, students at this school appear to be in favour of the inclusion of students with disabilities at their school.

3.5. SCHOOL CLIMATE

For a school to be inclusive, all staff and students must feel valued, accepted and respected. Teachers who work in supportive environments have higher levels of self-efficacy and are more willing to change their practice to better support students with diverse needs (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). As well, students who perceive their teachers, EAs and principals are willing to help them when they need it and hold challenging academic expectations have higher motivation, self-esteem and achievement (Anderson & Keith, 1997; Christenson & Anderson, 2002).

Research into the professional satisfaction of both teachers and administrators reveals varying levels of satisfaction among these groups. Findings of studies that have explored levels of professional satisfaction in teachers suggest that between 23% to 32% report feeling dissatisfied with their jobs (Perie & Baker, 1997). More than one-third of teachers surveyed in Mertler's (2002) study of teacher job satisfaction indicated that if given the opportunity to choose a career again, they would not select teaching as their profession.

3.5.1 School Staff

Item	EA	Teacher	Admin
Students who are having personal difficulties feel comfortable coming to me for help.	3.67	4.00	4.67
Staff treat students with respect.	4.67	4.63	5.00
The students treat all staff with respect, irrespective of their status.	4.00	3.47	5.00
Teachers feel comfortable going to the principal for help	4.60	3.06	4.67
I feel comfortable in expressing an alternative perspective to other staff members.	3.50	3.11	4.67
The principal is often seen in the school by staff and students.	NA	3.93	4.33
The staff at our school treat each other with respect, irrespective of their roles at the school.	4.50	4.37	5.00
Developing a supportive school community is as important as raising academic achievement.	4.67	4.47	5.00
Staff appointments and promotions at this school are fair.	3.83	3.50	4.67
All new staff are helped to settle into the school.	4.50	4.16	5.00
There are formal as well as informal opportunities for staff to resolve concerns over students by drawing on each other's expertise.	NA	3.79	4.67
I am making a difference in the personal and social development of students in my class.	3.83	4.16	5.00
I find my professional role satisfying.	4.33	3.58	4.67
If I had to do it over again, I would become a teacher/principal/EA.	4.67	3.28	3.00

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

3.5.2. Parents & Students

Item	Parent	Gr. 1 & 2	Gr. 3 - 6
I/My child like(s) school very much.	4.37	4.27	3.89
I/My child feel that (their) teachers like me (them).	4.29	4.77	4.22

(1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neither agree or disagree, 4= agree, 5=strongly agree)

School staff, parents and students agree on many aspects of school climate. This school clearly fosters strong, positive relationships between teachers and students which are essential for the success of inclusive schools. Older students appear somewhat less satisfied with school than their younger peers, a finding that is substantiated by previous research (Bowen, Bowen, & Richman, 2000). Among school staff, differences can be seen in perceptions of student comfort in asking for help with personal problems. EAs feel that students are less likely to approach them than teachers or administrators. As well, some teachers do not feel that students treat them with respect whereas EAs and administrators did not express this as a concern. This finding is an indication that school staff need to investigate further teachers' perceptions of their relationships with students in order to determine appropriate interventions and/or resolutions.

Responses also indicate that EAs, teachers and administrators have an overall positive perception of the professional atmosphere of the school. The extent to which teachers and EAs feel comfortable in sharing alternative perspectives and opinions to other staff members is central to the professional atmosphere within a school. In that moderate scores were found for both teachers and EAs regarding their level of comfort in sharing divergent views, efforts to improve communication among school staff would seem relevant.

With regards to levels of job satisfaction, EAs appear to be satisfied with their jobs and most convinced that their career choice was positive. Congruent with past findings on job satisfaction, the teachers at this school report moderate levels of job satisfaction, and in some cases, the desire to reverse their choice of profession, if given the opportunity. Relative to teachers, administrators report higher levels of professional satisfaction. However, in line with the findings of teachers, they also question their choice of profession.

4. SUMMARY

For years, debate about inclusive education has dominated the discourse of educational reform within North America. Although the trend has been to move students with special needs out of special education classrooms into regular education classrooms, there appears to be no standard way to provide services to individuals with special needs and the shift towards full inclusion is far from realized in many Canadian schools. The shortcomings in the effort towards sustained inclusive education may be explained, at least in part, by the failure to actively engage relevant stakeholders in the change making process. Riehl (2000) highlights the limitations of the top-down approach to restructuring schools. She states, «Real organizational change occurs not simply when technical changes in structure and process are undertaken, but when persons inside and outside of the school construct new understandings about what the change means» (p. 60).

Actively Building Capacity for Diversity is a project that provides promise in offering a model of reform that engages those involved in the transition towards inclusion, and that offers a way to gather empirical support for the outcomes of inclusive practices. The successful transition of a school towards inclusion requires monumental efforts and the support of all stakeholders. Understanding the differing perspectives of all those involved in the change process is critical in realizing sustainable school change. The findings presented within this chapter document the first step in one school's journey towards developing an inclusive learning community.

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