

# The Attitudes of Hong Kong Primary School Principals toward Integrated Education

**Umesh Sharma**

Monash University  
Australia

**Emily W. S. Chow**

Positive attitudes of key stakeholders, such as school principals, towards a new policy are considered a necessary pre-requisite to implement any such policy. Hong Kong has recently formulated a policy that supports the integration of students with disabilities into regular schools. This study investigated the attitudes of Hong Kong primary school principals toward integration, with a view to determining if these school leaders are prepared to implement integrated education practices in their schools. A modified version of the School Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusion scale (Bailey, 2004) was used to collect data from participants. Based on the responses of 130 primary school principals, it was found that their attitudes toward integration were slightly negative. Principals who had less teaching experience and who were administering schools with smaller student enrolment were found to hold more positive attitudes toward integration. The variable of "having a family member or close friend with a disability" had a significant and positive effect on the principals' attitudes toward integration.

Key words: attitudes, integration, disabilities, principals, Hong Kong

Hong Kong, with a population of nearly seven million, is part of the People's Republic of China. The total surface area of Hong Kong is approximately 1100 square kilometres (McDonogh & Wong, 2005). It consists of three parts: the island of Hong Kong, a Chinese peninsula (Kowloon, New Territories) and a number of other assorted islands (Crawford & Bray, 1994).

Hong Kong was a British colony from 1842 (Brown & Foot, 1997). The British Empire had held almost unlimited power to direct the affairs of Hong Kong. It controlled Hong Kong for over 100 years in terms of politics, academia and in terms of the economy. As of midnight on 30<sup>th</sup> June 1997,

Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China under the slogan of "one country, two systems", with the assurance of 'a high degree of autonomy' in all matters for 50 years (Brown & Foot, 1997), except foreign affairs and defence.

Schooling in Hong Kong has been compulsory for nine years by law since 1978. This includes six years of primary school education and three years of junior secondary school education. Virtual schools and education at home are not allowed as an alternative (Postiglione & Lee, 1997). Although English and Mandarin are official languages (Crawford & Bray, 1994), Cantonese is used as a medium of instruction in the majority of schools.

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Umesh Sharma, Monash University, Australia; Emily W. S. Chow, Monash University, Australia.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Umesh Sharma, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Victoria, Australia. E-mail: Umesh.Sharma@education.monash.edu.au

## **Integrated Education in Hong Kong**

Integration and inclusion of students with disabilities in

the regular school system have been widely discussed topics in education over the last few decades. There is an increasing trend towards placement of students with disabilities in regular schools than in segregated special schools in most developed countries. Conceptually, inclusion and integration have different meanings. Inclusion means that students with disabilities are primarily served in regular classrooms, under the responsibility of the regular classroom teacher. When necessary and justifiable, such students may receive some of their instruction in another setting such as a special class or a resource room (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2004).

Integration, on the other hand, simply means moving students with disabilities from more segregated settings to more inclusive settings. Luk (2005) emphasizes that integration follows a deficit model of disability, “where deficits and categorisation are stressed and usually disguised under the traditional special education provision” (p. 90). According to this belief, only those students who are seen as easy to manage are considered likely candidates for integration. Students who have severe disabilities and those who require high levels of support are often referred to segregated settings for their education. While inclusion requires changing the system to meet the needs of the child, integration has an inherent belief that a child will change to fit the system. Although the concept of inclusion is preferred internationally, integration is prevalent in Hong Kong and is used by the Hong Kong Education Department as an official term in its policy papers (Wong, Pearson, & Lo, 2004). Thus, the term ‘integration’ is used when the discussion refers to the Hong Kong context.

Hong Kong education policy has promoted the idea of integrating students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms since the 1970s. In 1977, Hong Kong had an official policy entitled “Integrating the disabled into the community: a united effort” that recommended integrating students with disabilities into mainstream schools (Luk, 2005). A range of support services including special classes and remedial support service were provided to students with special education needs (SEN) in ordinary schools. However, the move from segregation to integration has been slow and the success of integrated education has been very limited. The number of officially recognized integrated schools in 1997 was less than 10 (Luk, 2005). The growth of integrated education seems to be hindered by the elitist system in Hong Kong, which focuses predominantly on academic achievement,

and is driven by examinations. Many students, parents and teachers highly value the elitist system, as they believe that high academic achievement is the key to career success (Heung, 2006). Most schools are evaluated for their scholastic effectiveness and their reputation is based on the public examination results of their students (Wong, 2002; Wong, Pearson, & Lo, 2004). Even though students with disabilities still remain in ordinary classrooms with remedial help, there is insufficient support and guidance to students and schools. In addition to the rigid curriculum, most students with disabilities receiving intensive help in remedial classes are asked to sit the same examinations as other students without disabilities (Wong, 2002). Under such an educational environment, integration of students with disabilities into regular schools is often difficult, if not impossible, to accomplish.

The policy of integrating students with disabilities was endorsed in Hong Kong again as a result of the declaration of the Salamanca Statement by UNESCO in 1994. The Salamanca Statement clearly affirms that all children should be educated in regular schools unless there are compelling reasons for not doing so. Many countries are moving toward inclusive education as a result of this declaration. Hong Kong responded to the declaration by issuing the “White Paper on Rehabilitation – Equal Opportunities and Full Participation: a Better Tomorrow for All”, which has reiterated the policy of integrating students with SEN in ordinary schools (The Government of Hong Kong, 1995) as well as the Disability Discrimination Ordinance (DDO). The Chapter 487 section 24 of DDO clearly states that it is unlawful for an educational establishment to discriminate (except if it can be shown that it will cause unjustifiable hardship for schools) against a student with a disability, expel that student and refuse application of a person with disability for admission as a student (Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997). Since 1997, the Education and Manpower Bureau has been more active in responding to this policy by launching a two-year Pilot Project focussing on the Whole School Approach to integration (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). Schools that adopt this approach are entitled to receive extra funding for equipment and accommodation and alterations (Wong, Pearson, & Lo, 2004). They also get one extra resource teacher for every five students with special needs and one learning support assistant per school provided the school admits eight students with special needs (Wong et al.,

2004). This policy emphasises the need to create an inclusive environment by involving staff and school personnel to support students with SEN (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). The policy also recommends that both curriculum and teaching strategies need to be modified to meet the needs of all students. There is an increased emphasis on remedial teachers and ordinary classroom teachers to collaborate in lesson planning and cooperative teaching within classrooms (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). Furthermore, specialists and classroom teachers are asked to work together to improve the learning context as well as teaching methods. However, only students with mild intellectual disabilities, hearing impairments, visual impairments, physical and/or autistic disorders with average intelligence are eligible for integrated education under this pilot project. Even though the Hong Kong Department of Education encourages and supports integrated education, it still intends to retain a range of special schools for students with severe and complex disabilities (Yuen & Westwood, 2001).

Seven primary and two secondary schools participated in this pilot project and 49 students with SEN were integrated in these schools in its first two year of implementation. A significant increase in the number of schools adopting a Whole School Approach to integration took place after the evaluation of the project. It was found that students with disabilities educated under this approach made better academic and social gains in integrated classrooms. According to the most recent estimates, there are over 100 schools using Whole School Approach (Education and Manpower Bureau, 2005). It seems that there is a push for regular schools to become more inclusive of students with disabilities.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

Schools are now expected to identify and make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities in Hong Kong. This emerging emphasis on integrating students with special needs on one hand and maintaining the high academic standing of their schools on the other hand poses a significant challenge for school principals as well as to school teachers (Cheng, 1998; Crawford, 1998). The new educational culture that necessitates significant modification of the curriculum to include students with disabilities into mainstream schools is incompatible with the existing

schooling culture in which individualisation and competition is rewarded (Corbett, 1999). The development of integration policy in Hong Kong is primarily characterised by a top-down approach with little or no consultation with individuals (such as school leaders) who are most affected by such a policy. School principals are now expected to lead a change that will require their schools to move away from competitive and individualistic learning towards co-operative learning. It will also require more collaboration amongst school educators and with parents. This is by no means a small change in the Hong Kong education sector. Surprisingly little effort is made to understand the attitudes of school leaders towards this new move to implement integrated education in their school. There is research evidence (mainly from developed countries) that suggests that implementation of a new policy like integrated education is mainly dependent on the positive attitudes of the key stakeholders such as school principals (Bailey, 2004; Praisner, 2003; Riehl, 2000; Ryan, 2003, Sharma & Desai, 2008).

### ***Understanding the Attitudes of Principals towards Integrated Education***

The attitudes of principals toward students with disabilities are essential in facilitating inclusive practices (Cook et al., 1999; Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Sharma & Desai, 2008). This is because the decision to create and develop an inclusive environment for students with disabilities usually depends on school principals' values, beliefs and attitudes (Goodlad & Lovitt, 1993). If principals believe in inclusion, appropriate school restructuring or changes are more likely to be promoted. On the other hand, if they do not believe in inclusion, they might prefer to maintain the existing service delivery model such as separate classrooms for students with special needs (Hasazi, Johnston, Liggett, & Schattman, 1994). The present research is based on the premise that the person with the most organisation power in the school is in the best position to adversely or positively affect implementation of integrated education (Bailey, 2004). This paper is an attempt to fill the gap by providing an overview of primary school principals' attitudes towards integrated education in Hong Kong.

Several studies (e.g., Bailey & du Plessis, 1998; Praisner, 2003) have found a strong relationship between

principals' attitudes toward inclusion and the success of the implementation of inclusive education. Bain and Dolbel (1991) in their study investigated regular and special education principals' perceptions regarding the effectiveness of integration programs for students with disabilities. The results showed that the success of inclusive programs was directly related to the positive attitudes of teachers and principals. Morgan and Demchak (1996) also pointed out that the attitudes of school personnel and students' attitudes toward inclusion often mirror those of the principals. Guzman (1997) indicated that the beliefs and attitudes of principals toward inclusive education significantly affect their behaviours to students with disabilities. Researchers (e.g., Bailey & du Plessis, 1998; Praisner, 2003; Sharma & Desai, 2008) have consistently suggested that principals must display a commitment to and a positive attitude toward inclusive education for its successful implementation. To ensure the success of inclusion, principals must also demonstrate positive behaviours that advance the inclusion of students with disabilities in general classrooms (Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Sharma & Desai, 2008).

The chances of successfully implementing inclusion are greatly increased when school principals support inclusion. This is because principals can directly or indirectly influence teachers' commitment in their schools to include students with disabilities (Bain & Dolbel, 1991), even though teachers are more doubtful about inclusion than parents and administrators (Vidovich & Lombard, 1998). Thus, it is essential for school administrators and principals to display positive attitudes as well as a commitment to inclusive education (Praisner, 2003) to lead successful inclusion programs.

In order to better understand the attitudes of school principals, several researchers have looked at factors that may influence their attitudes toward inclusion. In general, it has been found that educators who have had some training in special education (Bender, Vail, & Scott, 1995; Loreman, Forlin, & Sharma, 2007; Subban & Sharma, 2006), and have come in direct contact with people with disabilities (Hodge & Jansma, 2000; Nolan, Duncan, & Hatton, 2000) tend to have more positive attitudes compared to their counterparts. In a study of 345 teachers from 39 secondary schools in Hong Kong, Yuen and Westwood (2001) found that those teachers who received guidance training (to work with students with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties) were more

positive in their attitudes to integrating students with disabilities in regular schools compared to those teachers who had not received such training. It can be inferred from this study that the teachers with guidance training may continue to have more positive attitudes when they are later appointed as school principals, thus suggesting that training in special education is an important contributor in forming positive attitudes. There is also some evidence that school principals with some experience of teaching students with disabilities tend to have more positive attitudes. A lack of contact with disabled students is more likely to lead to the formation of negative attitudes among educators. Harvey (1992) compared three groups of teachers with 'nil', 'some' or 'extensive' levels of professional teaching experience with children having special needs. His analysis revealed that teachers who had 'nil' experience had the most negative attitudes toward integration followed by teachers with 'some' or 'extensive' experience.

A number of variables studied in this regard have given mixed findings. These variables include gender (Desai, 1995; Hodge & Jansma, 2000); school size (Desai, 1995; Bailey & Du Plessis, 1997) and, length of teaching experience (Bailey & Du Plessis, 1997; Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998; Tanner, Linscott, & Galis, 1996). Considering the fact that there is little research on school principals' attitudes towards integrated education in Hong Kong, it is necessary to find out what variables might influence their attitudes to integration. The aim of this study was to investigate whether primary school principals are ready to embrace the philosophy of integration in Hong Kong.

More specifically, the research questions of the study were:

- What are the attitudes of Hong Kong primary school principals toward the integration of students with disabilities in the mainstream classroom?
- What is the relationship between the professional and background variables of principals, and their attitudes toward integrated education?

## **Method**

### *Participants*

There are 719 public and private primary school in

Hong Kong, spread across 18 districts. For the purpose of this study, 50% of the schools were selected using a stratified random sampling procedure, making a target sample of 360. The population of schools ranged from less than 200 to over 1,000 students. Of the 360 questionnaires that were mailed to Hong Kong primary school principals, a total of 130 (36.11%) were returned after three waves. Thirty nine questionnaires (10.83%) were returned in the first wave, 58 questionnaires (16.11%) were returned in the second wave, and 33 questionnaires (9.17%) were returned in the last wave. The low rate of return of questionnaires may reflect principals' disinterest in the topic of the integration of students with disabilities in normal schools. Not all returned questionnaires were completed. As the pattern of missing data appeared unsystematic, all 130 questionnaires were used to form the bases for statistical analyses for this study.

### ***Instrumentation***

A two-part survey instrument was used to conduct this study. The first part was used to determine the principals' attitudes toward integration. Respondents were asked to respond on a 5-point Likert type scale which ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. A higher score on the scale is suggestive of more positive attitudes toward integration. The attitude measurement instrument used in the survey was *School Principals' Attitudes toward Inclusion (SPATI)* (Bailey, 2004). It had 30 items, out of which 17 items were worded negatively and 13 items were worded positively. According to Bailey (2004), the presentation order for the items was determined by randomisation. Bailey indicated that randomisation and the use of a balanced set of negative and positive worded items ensured a level of objectivity and thus reduced the proximity effect. Bailey (2004) reported a reliability coefficient of 0.92 with 639 respondents. According to Gable and Wolf (1993), a reliability coefficient of higher than 0.70 is generally considered acceptable indicating an effective instrument.

Two items regarding teacher aides from the original questionnaire were removed because they were not appropriate for the Hong Kong context. Minor changes in the terminology used in the questionnaire were also made. The term "inclusion" was substituted for "integration" and "included" was changed to "integrated" as integration is a more preferred term in Hong Kong.

The second part of the survey consisted of demographic information about the principals (e.g., age, gender, years of teaching experience, number of years as a school principal, and qualifications in educating students with disabilities) and open-ended questions adapted from Bailey (2004). Additional questions regarding experience with family member(s) or friend(s) with a disability and the average class size were added to the instrument. Two questions were modified based on the Hong Kong context. One item about whether respondents had a Special Education Unit in their school was changed to whether respondents had a learning support team or remedial teachers in their school. Furthermore, instead of asking the participants whether they had a special education qualification, the question was changed to ask them if they had undertaken training focusing on the education of students with disabilities. This section also included a generic question regarding principals' attitudes toward integration.

## **Results and Discussion**

The sample of principals included 57 males (43.8 %) and 73 females (56.2 %). Respondents were found to come from multiple age groups, ranging from 32 to 64 years old, and the average was found to be about 50 years old. Participants had an average of approximately 25 years of teaching experience and 9.68 years experience as a principal. The average number of full-time teachers in their school was 35.26 with numbers ranging from 10 to 121. Their student enrolment varied from 120 students to 1430, the average student population in participants' school was 700. The mean class size in participants' school was 30-35. Over half of the respondents (54.6%) indicated having one or more students with disabilities in each class of their schools. Approximately 60% of the respondents had a learning support team in their schools to assist students with disabilities while 71.5% had remedial or special teachers. Additionally, 8.5% had other support teams such as speech therapists and educational psychologists in their schools to provide assistance to students with disabilities. Only 24 respondents had a family member or close friend with a disability. An overwhelming majority of principals had never undertaken training focussing on the education of students with disabilities. Furthermore, approximately 88.5 % of the respondents did

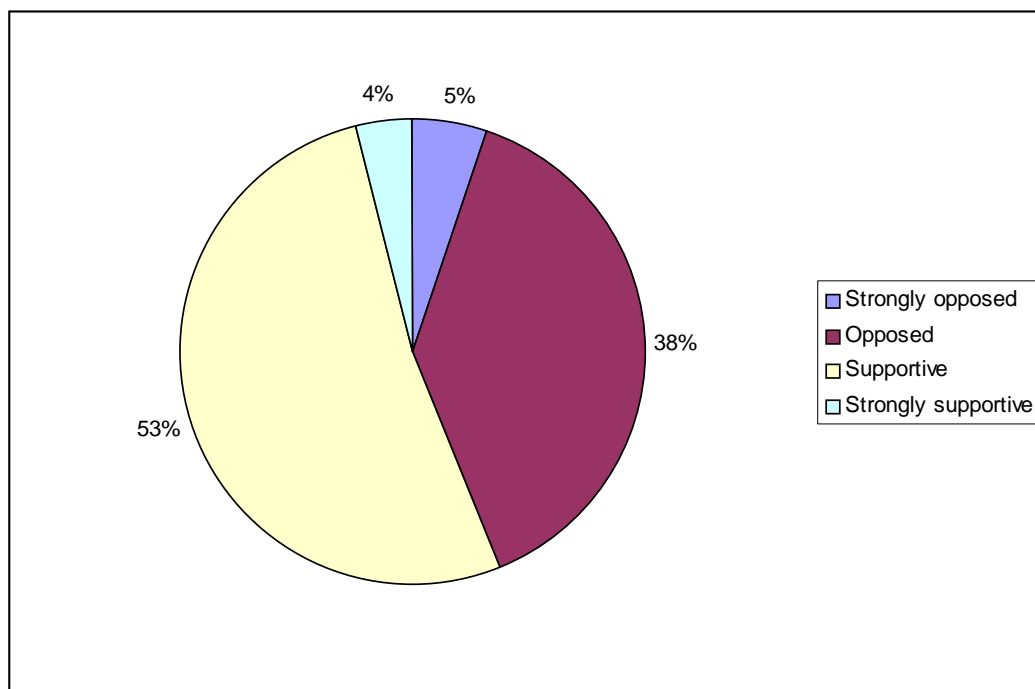


Figure 1. Principals' views about integrated education in Hong Kong

not have any teaching experience in a special school or unit.

All participants were also asked to choose a position reflecting their feelings toward educating students with disabilities in normal classrooms. Four options were available: 1) Strongly opposed, 2) Opposed, 3) Supportive and 4) Strongly supportive. Over half of the respondents were in favour of integration. See figure 1 for the summary regarding the principals' responses about their feelings toward integration. The results showed a fairly even spread of views on this issue.

#### ***Principals' Attitudes toward Integrated Education***

The items in the first section of the questionnaire were used to measure principals' attitudes toward integration. The standard deviation and mean on total attitudes scores and each item of SPATI were calculated. The principals' mean score on SPATI was 2.65 with a standard deviation of 0.42. On SPATI, a value of 2 (Disagree) suggested a negative attitude compared to 3 (Uncertain) which suggested neither a positive nor negative attitude. Thus, a mean of 2.65, suggested that principals' attitudes toward integration were slightly negative.

Compared to a previous Australian study which also used the SPATI scale (Bailey & du Plessis, 1998), the attitudes of the participants in the present study were found to be slightly negative. This may be due to the better provisions of resources as well as trained teachers and professionals to support the implementation of inclusion in Australia. Unlike Hong Kong which has no legislation currently in place to recommend education for students with disabilities in regular schools (Poon-McBrayer, 1998), Australia passed the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in 1992 followed by the passage of the Education Standards of the DDA in 2005. According to the DDA and the Education Standards of this Act, it is unlawful or illegal for school authorities from refusing to admit a child with a disability as a student. Schools are now required to modify the curriculum to meet the individual needs of a student with disabilities in regular schools. Thus, more regular schools are required to integrate students with disabilities in Australia. It is likely that as more school principals are involved in implementing inclusive education; their attitudes toward integration have become positive. In a case study of a rural school with over 1000 students in Hong Kong, Luk (2005) found that attitudes of most stakeholders including the school principal, teachers,

resource teachers and guidance teachers gradually became positive as they implemented an integrated policy. She called this phenomenon “learning through practice”, in line with Mel Ainscow’s (2003) idea that educators know more than what they use and that through practice schools find out things that would work for their school. It is possible that as schools in Hong Kong start practising integrated education, they will start feeling more positive and confident in implementing this policy.

Table 1 presents the mean rank orders and standard deviations of principals’ responses on each item of SPATI. From these results it appears that principals in this study agreed that students with disabilities ( $M = 3.81$ ) and regular students ( $M = 3.68$ ) did benefit socially from integration. They also had positive responses to statements regarding the integration of students with mild disabilities in regular classrooms ( $M = 3.77$ ). On the other hand, principals responded most negatively to the statements in relation to the lack of trained teachers to cope with students with disabilities ( $M = 1.75$ ), lack of access to professionals including occupational and speech therapists ( $M = 1.76$ ) and the integration of students with severe disabilities in regular classrooms ( $M = 1.77$ ).

One interesting finding in this study was that although overall the attitudes on SPATI was slightly negative, more favourable attitudes were noted on a generic question that

evaluated these attitudes. In a general question asking participants to indicate their feeling about integration, over half of the principals (56.1%) responded that they were supportive of integration. This inconsistency in the item responses may be due to what may or may not be socially desirable. Attitudes within society may incorporate anti-discrimination views; therefore, comments which may lean toward derogatory statements are frowned upon. This may also suggest that principals, in general, support integration; however, when they were asked to rate specific items, they tend to become more negative. This suggests that they are concerned about the practical aspects of implementing integration in their schools.

### ***Background Variables and their Relationship to Principals’ Attitudes toward Integration***

This study also examined the relationship between the attitudes of principals toward integration and their independent demographic variables. Table 2 displays the correlation coefficients between all continuous variables and the Attitudes Mean Score for principals.

It was found that the experience of having family members and / or a close friend with a disability ( $F = 4.31$ ;  $p = 0.04$ ) had a significant and positive impact on principals’ attitudes. However, years of teaching experience ( $r = -0.21$ ),

Table 1  
*Mean Rank Orders and Standard Deviations of Principals’ Responses on Top and Bottom 5 Items of SPATI*

Item description	M	SD
<b><i>Top 5 Items of SPATI</i></b>		
24. Students with disabilities benefit socially from integration.	3.81	0.86
9. Students with mild disabilities should be integrated in regular classrooms.	3.77	0.97
25. Regular students benefit socially from integration.	3.68	0.84
11. Special needs students belong in special schools where all their needs can be met.	3.42	1.14
4. Students who cannot read normal print size should not be integrated in regular classrooms.	3.31	1.28
<b><i>Bottom 5 Items of SPATI</i></b>		
28. There is sufficient funding to permit effective integration.	1.92	1.15
21. Schools have sufficient teaching resources to cope with integration.	1.91	1.01
22. Students with severe disabilities should be integrated in regular classrooms.	1.77	1.04
7. Lack of access to other professionals (e.g., occupational and speech therapists) makes integration difficult.	1.76	0.88
1. Regular teachers are not trained adequately to cope with students with disabilities.	1.75	0.89

Table 2

*Attitudes Mean Score for Principals and their Continuous Background Variables (N =130)*

		Attitudes Mean	Age	Years in teaching experience	Years as a principal	Number of teachers in school	Student enrolment
Attitudes Mean Score	Pearson Correlation	1	-.089	-.209*	-.011	-.083	-.206*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.322	.018	.905	.354	.041

*Note.* \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

and student enrolment ( $r = -0.21$ ) appears to have an adverse effect on principal's attitudes toward integration.

This study confirms the previous research undertaken by Nolan, Duncan and Hatton (2000) and Hodge and Jansma (2000) who suggested that contact with students with disabilities is associated with positive attitudes toward inclusion. Nolan et al. (2000) further indicated that there is a positive attitudinal change in those who have had positive experiences with students with disabilities in an inclusive environment. Such experience is a significant factor in producing a favourable impact on a principal's attitudes. It has implications for the training of principals in Hong Kong. It may be useful to design programs where principals get opportunities to interact with people with a range of disabilities.

The attitudes of principals with less teaching experience appear to be more positive toward integration as compared to those with longer teaching experience. The findings of this study are in line with previous studies (e.g., Tanner, Linscott, & Galis, 1996). This might be because principals with less teaching experience are recent graduates and may have had training that covered various aspect of education of students with disabilities, unlike those principals who have been school principals for a longer duration. However, this finding differs from the studies conducted by Bailey and du Plessis (1997) and Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) who suggested that years of experience have no impact on school principals' attitudes toward inclusion.

Principals in schools with lower levels of student enrolment were found to be more positive in their attitudes than those in schools with larger numbers of students. This

might be because it is easier to manage schools with a smaller student enrolment than those with a larger number of students. Small school size may also increase the interaction between students and principals. Therefore, their attitudes toward integration tend to be more positive. However, Bailey and du Plessis (1998) found that student enrolment has no significant impact on principals' attitudes toward inclusion. It is also possible that schools with lower student enrolments may be schools with larger populations of students with disabilities. Principals in these schools may have become more proficient in working with students with disabilities and in catering to their needs in their schools, which, in turn, contributed to the formation of their positive attitudes. Unfortunately, we did not collect data about the number of students with disabilities in schools. This (the correlation between number of students with disabilities and school size) may be an important question to investigate if we are to understand the attitudes of school leaders in future research

One other important finding that emerged from the study relates to the availability of Learning Support Teams or Remedial/Special Education teachers in schools. In both cases, a slightly positive (but non significant) correlation with the total mean attitude score was found. The correlation was slightly higher for Learning Support Teams ( $r = 0.03$ ) compared to just having a special and remedial teacher in school ( $r = 0.01$ ). This possibly suggests that having either Learning Support Teams or a remedial teacher might be helpful but is not sufficient to make principals feel positive about inclusion. There is definitely a need to identify other factors that are crucial to ensure that the gate keepers of change are supportive of integrating students with disabilities into their schools.



## Conclusion

Principals are in an ideal position to promote inclusive education and have the chance to lead people in the implementation of educational change in their respective schools (Fullan, 2001; Ryan, 2003). The degree of principals' support for inclusive education is found to be the strongest influence on effective inclusive teaching practices (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Their willingness to accept the inclusion of students with special education needs is absolutely critical to the success or failure of inclusive education (Cook et al., 1999).

The results of the present study have shown that Hong Kong primary school principals held slightly negative attitudes toward the integration of students with disabilities. These attitudes, to some extent, reflect more generally the views of the society in Hong Kong. Students with disabilities are not seen as really belonging to regular schools. To some extent this also reflects the invisible pressure on school principals to ensure that their schools continue to perform better academically even if it means that students with poor academic performance are refused entry into their schools. Perhaps there is a need in Hong Kong to review education policies where schools are encouraged to enrol students with disabilities. This will, however, require a fundamental shift in attitudes not at just the school level but also at the district and the societal levels.

The results also indicated that principals, who had less teaching experience and whose schools had lower student enrolments, held significantly more positive attitudes toward integration. It was also found that the experience of having a family member or close friend with a disability had a significant impact upon principals' attitudes toward integration.

It has been shown in previous studies that training has a positive influence on principals' attitudes toward inclusion. There is also some local evidence that school teachers trained to work with students with learning behaviour and emotional problems tend to have more positive attitudes toward integration (Yuen & Westwood, 2001). It may therefore be a useful strategy to ensure that school principals undertake further professional development in teaching students with disabilities and learn practical strategies. Most importantly, they need to undertake training focussing on leading change in their schools (Ainscow, 2003). Exposure to students with

disabilities during the training may be an efficient way to improve their attitudes towards students with disabilities as well as towards the integration of such students into regular schools. The acceptance of various teaching methods would enhance their knowledge in terms of both communication and interaction skills with their staff, students and parents. They may also need training in promoting successful teaching practices and collaborative leadership. Another suggestion would be exposing the principals to the reality of the classroom environment. It would help them understand the difficulties that may be prevalent within the classrooms and would allow them to be more supportive of teachers who are including students with disabilities in their classrooms.

The Hong Kong Education Bureau will also play a significant role in ensuring that school principals have positive attitudes by supporting principals in ensuring that the policy of integrated education can be successfully implemented in schools. The bureau needs to find ways to reward schools for being more inclusive of students with disabilities. Unless this support is available to schools from the bureau, school principals will continue to struggle to implement the policy of integrated education. Last but not the least, school leaders who are implementing the policy of integrated education successfully in Hong Kong need to be identified (e.g. Luk, 2005), recognised and rewarded so that other schools in the region can see that integration is in fact possible within Hong Kong despite the many challenges which exist.

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