IS A PARTNERSHIP POSSIBLE?
A COMPARISON OF ELEMENTARY TEACHERS' AND EARLY CHILDHOOD
EDUCATORS' PERCEPTIONS OF DISABILITY AND INCLUSION

by

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ABSTRACT

Education literature presents diverse perceptions of disability and inclusion by educators and scholars. Past research has shown that educators' beliefs influence their practice. The Full-Day Early Learning Program will commence in Ontario schools in September 2010, which will involve teacher and early childhood educator teaching teams. This qualitative research study presents two elementary teachers' and two early childhood educators' perceptions of disability and inclusion. Using a grounded theory strategy of inquiry, two interviews were conducted with each participant. A poststructural lens was used to analyze and interpret data. Key findings show distinct understandings of disability and inclusion between the two educator groups, which relate to their pedagogical beliefs and views of the purpose of education. This study draws on attribution theory and a social relational model of disability to explore the implications of participants' perceptions for children's education. Recommendations for future research and practice are identified and briefly explored.

Key Words:

'disability', 'inclusion', 'teachers', 'early childhood educators', 'perceptions', 'beliefs', 'attitudes', 'purpose of education', 'attribution theory', 'social relational model', 'poststructuralism', 'grounded theory', 'full-day early learning'

Acknowledgements

Dedication

For my mom Heather, whose voice was silenced by ignorance and fear....what do we believe when everyone tells us we can't? There is no limit to what you can be every day.

To children who have been "identified", marginalized, and excluded in education: Your worth is immeasurable.

To all educators of young children: Self interrogation is a requirement of all of us.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Education for young children takes a variety of forms. Each day presents an educational experience for children as they construct meaning about their surrounding world. Education happens in the home, on the playground, within the community; children are inundated with new forms of knowledge in every environment of which they are a part. Children spend a substantial amount of time within formal education settings, such as early childhood programs and primary classrooms where they learn important academic and social skills.

For a long time, educational institutions separated children on the basis of ability. Historical problems surrounding inclusive education ranged from one of inadequate resources to one involving deeply-rooted attitudes towards persons with disabilities, in both childcare centres (Irwin, Lero, & Brophy, 2004) and schools (Uditsky, 1993). These issues persist in our present day and present challenges for families trying to secure quality childcare (Killoran, Tymon, & Frempong, 2007). In addition, some school boards still believe that a separate special education program is most appropriate for some children (see Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Valeo (2009) notes that "in today's social climate, the understanding that it would be discriminatory to blatantly exclude Black children and girls seems reasonable while the desire to include children with disabilities may be unreasonable" (p. 98).

These perspectives represent contrasting education discourses. Discourses are sets of words and actions that construct certain meanings about the world (Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden, & Surtees, 2009). Education discourse represents attitudes, values, beliefs, and practices regarding education that are translated through language (Purdue et al., 2009). These

education discourses represent a common concern about the most appropriate education for children with disabilities; a concern rooted in the development of inclusion.

Although many definitions of disability exist within government reports and academic literature, there is contention about its origin (Norwich, 2002). One such argument involves whether disability is socially ascribed or biologically inherited. These conceptual models will be explored in a review of the literature. Disability must be defined within a context. For this reason and for the purpose of this research, various explanations and definitions of disability presented in the literature are explored.

Additionally, inclusion is a contentious topic within the field of education for those directly and indirectly involved in children's learning. Different interpretations of inclusion result in various meanings of the term in education discourses. Graham and Slee (2006) note, "inclusive education... is troubled by the multiplicity of meanings that lurk within the discourses that surround and carry it" (p. 4). For some, inclusion involves support for the child with a disability in order to appropriately meet her needs (Jordan, 2007). For others, "...inclusion represents a concept and practice with the potential to alter radically the way society perceives individuals with disabilities and their families and the way individuals with disabilities and their families perceive themselves" (Guralnick, 2001, p. 531). These descriptions respectively represent practical and ideological components of inclusion discourse. This study combines these two components to form one description of inclusion:

> Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every...
> child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of
> activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society (Division

for Early Childhood [DEC] and National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2009, p. 52).

This description of inclusion emphasizes the participation of all children within all aspects of social life. Lynch & Baker (2005) insist that "we should think in terms of the whole range of sites of learning, not just formal educational institutions" (p. 134).

However, children with disabilities continue to experience exclusion from schools and childcare centres on the basis of having a disability (see Valeo, 2009; Killoran et al., 2007). The educational attitude toward children with disabilities replicates the general social attitude towards disability (Carpenter & Austin, 2008; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Cigman, 2007; Terzi, 2005b). As Rieser (2006a) notes, "prejudicial attitudes towards disabled people and indeed against all minority groups are not inherited. They are learned through contact with the prejudice and ignorance of others. Therefore, to challenge discrimination against disabled people, we must begin in our schools" (p. 138).

Anti-discrimination must also extend to our childcare programs. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action asserts that "regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all" (UNESCO, 1994, p. ix).

Our society strongly values formal education. Education is a fundamental component of a life of freedom, opportunity, and well-being. Underwood (2006) argues that "...education [is] one of the social determinants of health, [and] is most effective when it is designed to support the other social determinants" (p. 78). The other social determinants are literacy, poverty/wealth, employment, social inclusion, housing security, and personal security (Underwood, 2006). The future benefits education affords underpin the importance of education for all children

(Underwood, 2006) for ensuring "equality of condition: ...ensuring that everyone has roughly equal prospects for a good life" (Lynch & Baker, 2005, p. 132).

Inclusion then, is a process that involves challenging traditional notions of education and attitudes towards disability. Lipsky & Gartner (2001) note that "central to the development of inclusive education is a reconceptualization of disability, special education, and the common school" (p. 41). However, as the literature will show, the educators who are involved in inclusive education have diverse perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs about disability. "Teachers' attitudes and tolerance are the vehicles for the construction of an inclusive and participatory society" (UNESCO, 2005). Therefore, part of the process of inclusion involves exploring educators' understandings of disability and inclusion, which also entails a consideration of their views regarding the purpose of education for children.

Objective and significance of the research

In September 2010, a new strategy for young children's learning will come into effect in Ontario schools. This initiative, the Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program, will require a partnership between elementary teachers and early childhood educators (ECE), an uncommon occurrence within the field of education. While teachers' and early childhood educators' roles – collectively referred to as educators from here on – are similar in nature, they may have diverse educational backgrounds. In addition, the political climate of each profession is different. Zaretsky (2005) insists that the "...multiperspectival instructional approach" (p. 76) within a partnership consists of combined knowledge that can strengthen educators' team ability to approach diversity within inclusive classrooms.

A comparative view of teachers' and early childhood educators' perceptions of disability and inclusion was not found within the literature. Such an investigation is relevant to and

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arguably necessary for the education community in Ontario, given the upcoming implementation of the Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program. Referring to the educational change process, Fullan (2007) describes the implementation stage as "...critical for the simple reason that it is the *means* of accomplishing desired objectives" (p. 85, original emphasis). The implementation stage can take as long as two years (Fullan, 2007), possibly longer given the scope of the early learning initiative.

The purpose of this research was to explore and compare elementary teachers' and early childhood educators' perceptions of disability and inclusion. The questions that guided all aspects of the study were: How do educators conceptualize disability and inclusion? What are educators' perceptions of the purpose of education for young children? How are their perceptions of these concepts interrelated? What are the differences and similarities between early childhood educators' and elementary teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards disability and inclusion?

Philosophical framework

Poststructuralism is the overarching framework for the research. Poststructuralism involves rejecting the notion of a common logic (Sullivan, 2003). It involves disturbing and disrupting common assumptions about "truth", "meaning", and "freedom" (Sullivan, 2003). "Poststructural theorists such as Foucault argue that there are no objective and universal truths, but that particular forms of knowledge, and the ways of being that they engender, become 'naturalized', in culturally and historically specific ways" (Sullivan, 2003, p. 38).

Poststructuralism guided the researcher in collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting the findings. A poststructural philosophy required the researcher to remain open to the participant's views, opinions, and attitudes in order to fully explore and understand multiple

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meanings of disability and inclusion. The theories presented in the literature review all draw on poststructural theory.

The research employed a social constructivist approach for all aspects of the research. The belief within a social constructivist approach is that people construct knowledge through subjective experiences. How an individual views the world is largely a matter of her interpretation of events, circumstances, and relationships with the social world (Creswell, 2003). Further, language and discourse give insight into individuals' personal philosophies, attitudes, and perceptions of aspects of the social world. "The meanings of words lie in people and not... in the words themselves" (Diestler, 2005, p. 262).

Thus, the research employed a qualitative design through which the researcher sought to gain insight into how educators conceptualize disability, inclusion, and education.

Literature Review

Inclusion, disability, and the purpose of education

The literature presents multiple components of the inclusion discourse; however two fundamental and inseparable components inform the basis of this research. One concerns the purpose of education (Leonardi, 2001) while the other component involves perceptions of disability (see Nind, 2008; Reindal, 2008, 2009, 2010; Slee & Allan, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Cigman, 2007; Terzi, 2005a, 2005b; Saito, 2003; Riddell, 2009; Zaretsky, 2005; Carpenter & Austin, 2008). Both components are grounded in the individual perspectives that inform education and disability discourses.

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Inclusion and disability.

There are two main components of the disability discourse as it pertains to inclusive education. One relates to the individual experience of disability irrespective of whether disability results from biological or social conditions (see Rieser, 2006a, 2006b). The other involves the sociopolitical context of disability (see Graham & Slee, 2006; Slee & Allan, 2001; Connor & Ferri, 2007). The individual experience is inevitably affected by the sociopolitical climate, while sociopolitical agendas respond to advocacy calls for equal recognition, emancipation, and non-discriminatory treatment of persons with disabilities within society (Norwich, 2002). For example, with the development of the International Classification of Impairment, Disability and Handicap (ICIDH) by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1980, the international Disability Rights Movement called for a revision that reflected the impact of environmental factors on the experiences of persons with disabilities (Hurst, 2003). The Movement's advocacy led to a dramatic revision of the ICIDH in 2001, now the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF), to highlight the relational quality of individual impairment and environmental barriers in producing disability (Hurst, 2003). Under the ICF model, *body function/impairments* replaced *impairments*, which was previously defined as, "any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological, or anatomical structure or function" (Vrankrijker, 2003, p. 562). *Disability,* defined as "any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered for a human being" (Vrankrijker, 2003, p. 563) was replaced with *activity limitations* and *participation restrictions.* Thus, disability was reconceptualised as an interplay between individual health characteristics and environmental factors (Vrankrijker, 2003; Reindal, 2009). In addition, *environmental factors* was introduced in the ICF and *handicap* was abandoned.

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The World Health Organization's recent conceptualization of disability under the ICF is a step away from individual causal factors towards an understanding of disability as an interplay between society and the individual (Reindal, 2008). "Knowing someone cannot understand the written word is no good unless you know why from an impairment perspective but also from an environmental perspective" (Hurst, 2003, p. 574). However, critics of the ICF argue that it neutralizes the disabled experience and thus obviates an understanding of disability as form of oppression (Reindal, 2008).

Inclusion and the purpose of education.

The purpose of education also has two components that exist along a continuum. One argument represents the practical purpose of education in preparing individuals for the workforce (Leonardi, 2001) through academic instruction. The other is the notion that education extends beyond preparation for work to encompass the development of the whole person (Lynch & Baker, 2005). Education is a vehicle for creating a better society, in which fundamental freedoms and rights are respected worldwide (Leonardi, 2001). This perspective is reflected in numerous international frameworks and policy guidelines for inclusive education such as the *Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action* (UNESCO, 1994), which states that inclusive education is "the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes [and] building an inclusive society and achieving education for all" (p. ix). In addition, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), article 26 states:

Education shall be directed to the full development of human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and

shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace (United Nations, 1948, art. 26).

Graham & Slee (2006) posit that in order to distinguish between the means and ends of education, inclusion discourses must be analyzed. "It is this problem of language and meaning that lies at the heart of the inclusive educational project" (Slee, 2001, p. 169).

An epistemology of education can be used to conceptualize inclusion (Leonardi, 2001). Epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge (Creswell, 2003; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). Therefore, an education epistemology represents beliefs about the nature (origin) of education, which we can translate to mean its reason or purpose.

In a Western context, perspectives of the purpose of education range from practical to idealistic (Leonardi, 2001). Some view the purpose of education as the attainment of academic skills (Barrow, 2001; Landrum, Tankersley, & Kauffman, 2003). Others believe that education is about developing individual social skills for contributing to the common good of society (Leonardi, 2001). These education discourses draw from paradigms and theories of other related disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, philosophy, and anthropology (Thomas & Loxley, 2001). This system of borrowing ideas naturally contributes to fragmented inclusive education discourses, especially when considering contributing discourses of disability, social justice, politics, and special education (see Evans & Lunt, 2002; Ferri & Connor, 2005; Lloyd, 2008; Pirrie & Head, 2007; Pivak, McComas, & LaFlamme, 2002; and Reindal, 2008: 2010; Slee & Allan, 2001; Thomas & Loxley, 2001).

The formation of attitudes

The literature shows that interpretations of inclusion vary widely in the field of education (Underwood, 2006). Zaretsky (2005) notes that educators are often unaware of their theoretical

orientations towards inclusion, which underpin their attitudes, beliefs, and ultimately their practice.

There is considerable need to support practitioners in understanding how they have come to know and understand special education, disability and inclusion in different ways. In the absence of these theory and practice connections, special education in practice will remain a highly contentious and conflicted school arena (Zaretsky, 2005, p. 66).

Inclusion research and literature show that educators' attitudes and beliefs are important components of inclusive education for children with disabilities (Silverman, 2007; Dinnibeil, McInerney, Fox, & Juchartz-Pendry, 1998; Lieber, Capell, Sandall, Wolfberg, Horn, & Beckman, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Arceneaux Rheams & Bain, 2005; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Ostrosky, Laumann, & Hsieh, 2006; Bruns & Mogharreban, 2007).

Parasuram (2006) defines attitude as "...a learned and stable predisposition to react to a given situation, person or other set of cues in a consistent way" (p. 231). Ostrosky et al. (2006) provide the following definition of attitudes and beliefs. "A subset of a group of constructs that name, define, and describe the structure and content of mental states that drive a person's actions" (Richardson, 1996 as cited in Ostrosky et al., 2006, p. 412). One's beliefs are closely aligned with her attitude and, as evident in Parasuram's definition, attitude informs an action or behaviour (Ostrosky et al., 2006; Silverman, 2007; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Kagan, 1992; Dobbs & Arnold, 2009).

Jordan and Stanovich (2004) claim that beliefs and knowledge are not necessarily distinct: What is regarded as knowledge may actually represent what an educator believes (Kagan, 1992). "Knowledge is generally regarded as belief that has been affirmed as true on the basis of objective proof or consensus of opinion" (Kagan, 1992, p. 73). Individual beliefs

determine what knowledge becomes part of one's own personal philosophy (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). One may only assimilate knowledge that supports her existing beliefs (Britzman, 1995; Kagan, 1992). The knowledge that forms educators' personal pedagogies may resist new knowledge that is inconsistent with their existing belief system (Britzman, 1995; Kagan, 1992). Thus, knowledge is filtered through belief systems and attitudes towards teaching and learning behaviours (Kagan, 1992), and effectively forms educators' epistemologies (Silverman, 2007).

Educators' attributions.

Brady & Woolfson (2008) researched teachers' attributions of children with learning difficulties. Their participants included 118 primary teachers who taught in general education classrooms, special education classrooms, or provided learning support within general education classrooms. The authors analyzed their data using attribution theory – a theory of achievement developed by Bernard Weiner, that claims a person's success or failure is the result of casual attributions based on his or her locus of control. A person attributes her successes or failures to either internal factors such as ability or effort or external factors such as task difficulty or luck (Weiner, 1986). Brady & Woolfson (2008) found that teachers' attitudes towards children with disabilities impacted stability attributions. Their most significant finding was that teachers had strong sympathetic attitudes towards disability which predicted stable attributions of learning difficulties (Brady & Woolfson, 2008). Research has shown that teachers who view a child's disability as stable and internal are less likely to engage in positive interactions with children (Jordan, 2007).

Kagan (1992) suggests that teaching efficacy relates to teachers' beliefs. She defines teaching efficacy as "a generalized expectancy concerning the ability of teachers to influence students, as well as the teacher's beliefs concerning his or her own ability to perform certain

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professional tasks" (Kagan, 1992, p. 67). Research has shown that high teaching efficacy influences positive classrooms behaviours (Kagan, 1992; Silverman, 2007) and may influence a teacher's ability to provide inclusive education. Further, educators' level of competency in working with children with disabilities is related to their attitudes towards inclusion (Ostrosky et al., 2006; Silverman, 2007).

Arceneaux Rheams & Bain (2005) state that educators' sense of efficacy consists of two factors: general and personal. Educators who have general teaching efficacy believe that the act of teaching has value for children's learning outcomes whereas teachers who have personal teaching efficacy believe that *their own* teaching ability influences children's learning (Arceneaux Rheams & Bain, 2005). Teachers who have only a sense of general efficacy may not believe in their own ability to affect children's learning and may view ability as stable (Brady & Woolfson, 2008). In contrast, educators who have high personal efficacy attribute children's difficulties more to external factors (Brady & Woolfson, 2008) and believe that their own ability to teach influences children's abilities to learn.

This highlights an important connection between models for conceptualizing disability and educators' attributions of their own abilities to teach and children's abilities to learn. Educators with an individual orientation towards disability view a child's learning difficulty as an internal stable trait; thus they may be less likely to attribute their teaching efforts to the child's successes or failures. In contrast, a teacher with a social orientation towards disability believes that external circumstances, possibly their own teaching behaviours, influence a child's failure or success (Kagan, 1992). Thus, a sympathetic attitude towards children with disabilities may influence a child's development of learned helplessness and an extrinsic orientation to learning and achievement motivation (Arceneaux Rheams & Bain, 2005). However, there are infinite and

overlapping potential causes of achievement (Weiner, 1986). Further, a teacher's level of efficacy may influence her belief about the nature of disability (Jordan, 2007).

Conceptualizations of inclusion

Graham & Slee (2006) explore issues of difference in conceptualizing inclusion using a broad poststructural framework to discuss the issues of "otherness" and "normal". They insist that the notion of inclusion suggests the existence of a core social group to which children are to be included: "...There is an implicit centered-ness to the term *inclusion*, for it discursively privileges notions of the pre-existing by seeking to include the Other into a prefabricated, naturalized space" (Graham & Slee, 2006, p. 4, original emphasis). On one hand inclusion presumes that children without disabilities will be in the regular classroom unconditionally. On the other hand inclusion is a privilege for children with disabilities, who educators may view as transgressing normative boundaries (Graham & Slee, 2006). A regular education classroom is one in which the majority of children do not receive specialized support (Leonardi, 2001). The view that inclusion is a privilege for children with disabilities suggests that the regular classroom offers higher quality education.

Riddell (2009) explored the interconnectedness of social justice, equality and inclusion. She suggests that there are two versions of inclusive practice among educators: radical and general. Radical inclusive practice supports the fundamental aspects of inclusive education that encompass equal access to educational resources and full participation in the regular learning environment. General inclusive practice is less concerned with the location of participation (Riddell, 2009).

Special education and needs.

Slee & Allan (2001) suggest that social politics drive exclusion. They suggest that segregated special education has a privilege over inclusive education in social policy because of the specialized knowledge of disability that is required to implement special education (Slee & Allan, 2001). There is "…an irreconcilability between inclusive education and traditional special education knowledge" (Slee & Allan, 2001, p. 178). Inclusion should not simply extend from special education knowledge and practice because it is conceptually different (Slee & Allan, 2001). Special education relies on specialized knowledge about teaching children with disabilities, which many general educators do not have (Landrum et al, 2003; Kauffman, 1999). Further, special education emphasizes individual differences and their perceived consequences. As Kauffman, Bantz, & McCullogh (2002) state,

> With regard to children's exceptionalities and the consequences of what we do about them, the observation of, the meaning of, and responses to difference are the substance of special education… understanding the meaning of difference is the first requirement of our science… (p. 151).

Kauffman et al.'s (2002) meaning of difference is apparent in their classification of emotional and behavioural differences as "disorders", a view grounded in the medical model of disability, which positions difference and disability as an individual, biological problem requiring professional intervention (Lindsay, 2003; Rieser, 2006a). Children with disorders or disabilities are perceived as having "special education needs" (Kauffman et al., 2002) – individual needs that require extra supports beyond those provided within regular education classrooms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

Wilson (2002) suggests that 'needs' is a relative term; there is difficulty in not only identifying needs but in distinguishing between what is necessary versus desirable. Kauffman et al. (2002) suggest, "anyone who responds to questions about children's (special needs) does so from a point of view grounded in a cultural context..." (p. 151) through which values are evident and judgements are often made. Conceptualizing children's needs is a process imbued with personal meaning. One cannot know that a child has special needs without referring to children whose needs fall within the norm (Allen, 2005). Therefore, the decision to provide special education involves comparing the severity of children's needs – an inherently difficult task (Cigman, 2007). Needs are not limited to disability; *all* children present with needs that may extend beyond the material body or transect with socio-economic status, culture, or family composition. Further, the view that some education must be "special" for some children devalues the education delivered within regular classrooms (Wilson, 2002).

Inclusion versus integration.

There is a difference between *including* a child with disabilities into a regular classroom or program and practicing *inclusive* education (Barrow, 2001; Graham & Slee, 2006). For example, in a synthesis of literature on rising numbers of children with Emotional/Behavioural Disorders (E/BD), Danforth & Morris (2006) refer to the placement of students within regular classrooms as inclusion. According to Allan (2005), this description of inclusion more accurately represents "integration". In Canada, integration "is a process involving determination of the amount of inclusion and development of a supportive regular class instructional program, and of supportive special education instruction in or out of the regular classroom" (Bunch, Finnegan, Humphries, Dore, & Dore, 2005). Integration is associated with special education and thus is

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distinct from inclusive education, which involves a flexible curriculum that supports the learning needs and abilities of all children (Bunch et al., 2005).

Allan (2005) states that integration is concerned only with the placement of students with special education needs in regular classrooms. Integration is not paired with program changes such as adapted curriculum and teaching and learning strategies (UNESCO, 2005). Connor & Ferri (2007) contend, "simply allowing students to be present and visible is not the same as promoting interaction" (p. 72). Further, Pirrie & Head (2007) argue that children with disabilities may not achieve stated learning outcomes through mere integration into classrooms without necessary supports to access the full curriculum. Underwood (2006) insists, "true inclusion is more than just a placement" (p. 77). Thus, inclusion is a process involving identification, removal of barriers, participation, collaboration, and achievement of all students (Allan, 2005; UNESCO, 2005; Bunch et al., 2005).

In the early childhood education sector, 'integration' and 'inclusion' may be confounded. Children with disabilities who are integrated into early childhood programs undoubtedly benefit socially from placement alongside their peers. Program inclusion however, is difficult to ascertain. Childcare programs that enrol a child with a disability intermittently receive early intervention (EI) support from a resource teacher (also termed Developmental Consultants and Early Interventionists) (Underwood & Killoran, 2009) who provide in-program support to both children and educators. However, EI is not sufficient support for ensuring a child's full inclusion into an early childhood setting. Integration must be accompanied by a centre policy on inclusion according to international standards, as well as local requirements for licensing in the City of Toronto (DEC/NAEYC, 2009; City of Toronto, 2010). Integration must also involve a child's meaningful participation in the program (City of Toronto, 2010; DEC/NAEYC, 2009), and

educators' positive attitudes (Pivak et al., 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Parasuram, 2006; Zaretsky, 2005; Silverman, 2007; Dinnebeil et al., 1998) in order to be truly inclusive.

Universalism and full inclusion.

Inclusion, however, is about more than the education of children with disabilities (Slee & Allan, 2001). Inclusion does not solely represent who is to be educated; rather, it "...involves a change in social realities" (Norwich, 2002, p. 493). Some view inclusion as a social movement with the goal of eradicating exclusion in education (Slee & Allan, 2001). Cigman (2007) insists that inclusion "...is also about the nature of a decent society" (p. 777). Allan (2005) refers to inclusion as an "ethical project" that begins with challenging attitudes and habitual ways of thinking about difference and disability. Educational institutions represent societal attitudes towards difference and disability (Carpenter & Austin, 2008; Thomas & Loxley, 2001; Cigman, 2007; Terzi, 2005b), and therefore, must be instrumental in challenging discriminatory attitudes towards persons with disabilities (Rieser, 2006a; Leonardi, 2001).

The relationship between educational inclusion and social inclusion is apparent in a "universalist" view of inclusion (Cigman, 2007). A universalist view supports the principles of a Universal Design for Learning: All children should have access to and benefit from teaching materials and practices that support their diverse needs (Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction, 2005). Universal Design for Learning aligns with the notion of "full inclusion": the acceptance of all children into their neighbourhood schools with adaptations to support their learning, regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities (Jordan, 2007).

In the education system, a Universal Design for Learning supports the uniqueness of every child through a flexible curriculum, differentiated instruction, and supportive and

adjustable teaching methods (Expert Panel for Literacy and Numeracy Instruction, 2005).

Through this design educators adapt curricular content, processes, and products to meet the

diverse needs, interests, learning profiles, and level of functioning of each student (Expert Panel

for Literacy and Numeracy Instruction, 2005).

However, there are arguments in the literature that full inclusion is a notion too idealistic

(Slee & Allan, 2001) to be supported practically within schools (Cigman, 2007; Slee & Allan,

2001; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Lloyd (2008) claims that the current focus on modern,

mainstream standards of education conflicts with policy initiatives that focus on social and moral

reasons for inclusive education. Similarly, Rogers (2007) and Terzi (2005b) insist that the

standardized testing, traditional teaching and learning performance, and highly academic

curriculum in schools conflict with the concept of inclusion. Thus, rather than trying to "fit"

inclusion into the existing educational system, greater reform in the organizational structure of

schools is needed (UNESCO, 2005; Slee, 2008).

A Universal Design for Early Childhood Education (UDECE) is a framework for full

inclusion in early childhood settings, based on the same principles of Universal Design for

Learning (see Darragh, 2007). The UDECE framework embraces an ecological approach for the

inclusion of all children in high quality early education and care (Darragh, 2007). An ecological

approach is based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory which recognizes the diverse

needs and goals of children, families, early childhood professionals, and education communities.

Each of these stakeholders is influenced by culture and the macro political and economic climate

(Darragh, 2007).

UDECE aligns with the Reggio Emilia approach to early childhood education, founded in

Italy and the High/Scope Curriculum of the United States. Both approaches are prominent within

early childhood programs in the Province of Ontario (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). The Reggio Emilia approach highlights children's interactions with the world as a key component in their construction of knowledge (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). Extensive research conducted on High/Scope has shown long term positive outcomes on children's learning. High/Scope's focus is constructivist learning in which children are active participants in their own education (Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning, 2007). Thus, early childhood environments appear to be conducive to the principles of Universal Design and full inclusion.

Perceptions of disability

Jordan (2007) notes that "...beliefs seem to have a powerful influence on the instructional practices that teachers select" (p. 29). In turn, teaching experience affects what educators believe and therefore know about different aspects of education (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004; Kagan, 1992). Thus, an educator's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and practices cyclically influence each other (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004) and may act as barriers to necessary change in approaches to educating children with disabilities when considering that research has found stability and consistency in attitudes over time (Kagan, 1992; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Educators' understandings of disability may influence their attitudes towards children who have disabilities or learning difficulties (Jordan & Stanovich, 2004). Further, their attitudes and beliefs about disability and inclusion may affect their teaching behaviour in the classroom or early childhood program (Ostrosky et al., 2006; Stanovich & Jordan, 1998; Parasuram, 2006; Jordan & Stanovich, 2004) or affect their willingness to include children with disabilities (Killoran et al., 2007).

In a study on how early childhood educators' beliefs translate into practice, Lieber et al. (1998) found that although educators used similar phrases to describe inclusion, there was a wide variety of meaning attached to these phrases. In addition, educators' approaches to inclusion in their programs varied considerably (Lieber et al., 1998). For example, while most early childhood practitioners believed that inclusion meant that all children were an equal part of the classroom environment, participation was facilitated quite differently. Some educators adapted the instruction so that children with a range of abilities could participate. Others delivered the same instruction to the whole group but had different performance expectations for the children with disabilities. In addition, there was general agreement among educators that inclusion benefits children without disabilities because it fosters an understanding and acceptance of differences. However, some educators believed that differences should be erased or minimized, while others believed in teaching explicitly about differences (Lieber et al., 1998).

Killoran et al.'s (2007) research shows that attitudes towards disability may determine whether a child is accepted into an early childhood program. In a study of inclusive practice within Toronto preschools, Killoran et al. (2007) interviewed childcare centre directors about their willingness to accept children with disabilities. They discovered that 35 percent would not accept a child with a disability in the centre. Further, the directors that claimed to be inclusive admitted that a child's individual circumstances may be the basis for refusing their admission into an early childhood program. Similarly, Dinniebeil et al. (1998) surveyed 400 childcare practitioners about their perceptions of inclusive education and found that 40 percent were unwilling to provide care for children with certain types of disabilities. These findings show that the acceptance of children with disabilities into early childhood settings often depends on perceived within-child factors.

Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996) reviewed research on teachers' perceptions of inclusion spanning almost 40 years. They found that although 65 percent of teachers supported the concept of inclusion, support for inclusion declined based on the severity of a child's disability (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Riddell (2009) insists that in schools, tolerance for children's behaviour difficulties has decreased. Similarly, Rogers (2007) found that within the context of schools, children with "easy dispositions" were more likely to be included into general education classrooms. Her research on parents' experiences with their children's inclusive education in schools found that children who had behaviour difficulties in addition to other disabilities experienced different forms of exclusion within general education classrooms. Although the classrooms in Rogers' research were identified as inclusive, children were excluded physically, which involved removal from the classroom for one-on-one instruction; intellectually when they could not access the curriculum in a way similar to their peers; and emotionally, when they did not have positive social interactions with other children in their classroom (Rogers, 2007).

These findings highlight that both early childhood educators and teachers have diverse understandings of inclusion and inclusive practice. In addition, the results point to conditional acceptance of children with disabilities into both regular education classrooms and early childhood centres. Children who have disabilities requiring greater responsibility on the part of the educator are less likely to be included (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Rogers, 2007; Killoran et al., 2007). Further, in early childhood centres, a child perceived as having a more serious disability may experience discrimination and her family may have a difficult time accessing childcare (Dinnebeil et al., 1998; Killoran et al., 2007).

Some studies have explored educators' views of barriers to inclusion, which may explain the disconnection between educators' attitudes towards inclusion and their willingness to provide inclusive education. For example, Dinnebeil et al.'s (1998) research found that 70 percent of childcare practitioners identified lack of knowledge as a barrier to providing inclusive education.

Pivak et al. (2002) conducted a study in Ottawa on children's perspectives of barriers and facilitators to inclusive education in schools. The results indicated that accessibility, staff and peer attitudes, insufficient knowledge about disabilities, and educational policies were barriers to inclusion. Interestingly, the child participants identified teachers' and peers' attitudes as the most harmful school experience (Pivak et al., 2002). Various other barriers to inclusive education in schools exist such as insufficient training and experience working with children with disabilities; unsupportive operating procedures; large class size; and inadequate environmental adaptations (Devore & Hanley-Maxwell, 2000).

The literature shows that attitude towards disability is a major factor in an educators' willingness to effectively include children with disabilities into childcare programs and general education classrooms.

The medical model versus the social model.

A dichotomy of conceptualizations of disability is apparent in two models that appear frequently in the literature: the medical model and the social model. Supporters of the medical model, also termed the individual model, perceive disability as inherent in the individual (Rieser, 2006a; Lindsay, 2003). Supporters of the social model argue that social structures create disability through insufficient accommodations for persons with impairments (Lindsay, 2003; Rieser, 2006a). These models underpin definitions of disability by the World Health Organization noted previously.

Social relational model.

Reindal (2008) uses a social relational model for conceptualizing disability. The social relational model positions disability on a continuum between a social model of disability and an individual model. Disability is neither inherently individual or a result of social and environmental arrangements; it is a form of oppression produced through the interplay of the individual and her social environment (Reindal, 2008, 2009). While the social relational model acknowledges the reality of impairment (Williams, 1999), it is distinct from the medical model because it also acknowledges that "scientific knowledge is socially moderated" (Zaretsky, 2005, p. 81).

Impairment and disability are distinguishable within the social relational model. Impairment results from biological conditions that pose certain personal and social constraints on an individual. The impairment, or reduced function, is considered a necessary condition of impairment effects, which are both personal and social (Reindal, 2010). Disability, however, is contingent upon "sufficient conditions" in the social environment (Reindal, 2009). Sufficient conditions are those that when not met, hinder an individual's ability to function within a social context and thus, contribute to her disabled experience (Reindal, 2009).

Impairment (reduced function) has social and personal implications but is not considered a disability in isolation from barriers in the social environment (Reindal, 2009). Social barriers in classrooms or early childhood programs may be negative attitudes (Pivak et al., 2002), a poorly structured environment, inadequate adaptations (Devore & Hanley-Maxwell, 2002) or limited learning tools that would otherwise enable a child to achieve a particular task and function in a particular way. Together, the individual's bodily state and social conditions create the disabled experience. However, whether the effects of the reduced function become a disability depends on

the various macro-level factors in society that impose additional social restrictions (Reindal, 2008).

Reconceptualizing inclusion and emphasizing children's agency

Components of the social relational model provide a foundation for conceptualizing an educational space that equitably supports the learning differences of all children. Both the social environment and the individual's limited functioning produce disability. However, this interplay also involves individual agency (Goodley & Roets, 2008).

Agency "involves the control that people exert over their destiny, which is matched against deterministic forces assumed to lie largely beyond their control" (Ogawa, 2005, p. 90, as cited in Shields, 2007, p. 136). Individuals can assimilate to or resist common conceptions of how persons with disabilities live, which contributes to their self-identification as disabled or otherwise (Allan, 2005; Goodley & Roets, 2008; Yates, 2005). "Everyone is subjected to the same norms in a given location but their identities are formed in relation to how they align with the norms" (Ruffolo, 2009, p. 292). As Ruffolo (2009) describes, the relationship between people and their social environments is one that always involves *power relations* (reciprocal power), even when the relationship imposes restrictions on individual ability. This is because individuals still have the capacity to act.

Of particular importance to inclusion, is the creation of a learning community that actively explores and challenges attitudes and behaviours that maintain a normalized view of children and disability (Thompson, 2007), as lacking and dependent (Cannella, 1997; Maudlin, 2007). In this space, diversity among children is assumed and embraced rather than tolerated, educators actively promote children's autonomy and empower them to engage in their learning, and children's agency is recognized and emphasized (Shields, 2007).

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Education has an important role in the degree of autonomy a child can develop (Saito, 2003; McDonough, 2007). White (2003) defines an autonomous person as "one who determines how he or she should live according to their own, unpressured, picture of a worthwhile life" (p. 147, as cited in McDonough, 2007, p. 799). Autonomy then, is an important factor in broadening children's capacity to choose the kind of life she wants to live. Developing children's autonomy must also involve recognizing and emphasizing their agency, which "...requires [children's] active engagement in learning" (Shields, 2007, p. 137).

McDonough (2007) emphasises a connection between autonomy and equal recognition that has important implications for those involved in children's education. Children's development of autonomy relies on their equal recognition within educational institutions, including children whose identities, in this case "disabled", have historically been marginalized (McDonough, 2007) either through discriminatory attitudes (Rieser, 2006a) or exclusion from social institutions such as schools and early childhood programs (Valeo, 2009). Inclusive education supports equal recognition of children and is, therefore, an important component in their development of autonomy and expansion of current and future life possibilities (McDonough, 2007).

However, inclusion as viewed through the social relational model depends on two important components: "inclusivity of the system", which corresponds with the social model and "additionality", which is the provision of extra support for the individual child within the regular classroom (Norwich, 2002). These concepts respectively correspond with the issues surrounding a child's educational placement and the development of an individual program. In Ontario schools, a child's placement as decided by the Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), can range from full placement in a regular education class with specialized support to a

full time special education class (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). If the IPRC determines the child to be in need of specialized support, program modifications are specified in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The IEP must involve parent input and the school principal must ensure that the IEP is developed and maintained (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Both of these components of special education policy are distinct processes, although in many cases they are in place at the same time for the same child according to the legislation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Norwich (2002) stresses that promoting inclusion and meeting individual needs are equally important educational values. "The key point is to avoid splitting the concepts of additionality and inclusivity" (Norwich, 2002, p. 493).

Reindal (2008) stresses the responsibility of society in creating inclusion. The work towards inclusion depends on the arrangement of contingent social conditions that either impose or lessen restrictions on an individual with reduced functioning (Reindal, 2008). Allan (2005) insists that inclusion starts with ourselves. Each person is a part of the greater environment and must be prepared to accept the responsibility and work that inclusion entails (Allan, 2005).

Education and Inclusion in Ontario

In Canada, education is organized, delivered, and monitored by provincial and territorial ministries (The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada [CMEC], 2008). Canada does not have a national system of education. Each ministry develops curriculum in accordance with the population needs of the province and/or territory (CMEC, 2008). Public school education is provided free for all children over the age of six, although there is some regional variance. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982 upholds the right of every child to access

education without discrimination (Frankel, 2004). In 1989 Canada ratified the United Nations

Convention on the Rights of the Child, which ensured every child's right to non-discriminatory

education (UNESCO, 2005). Canada is also signatory to several declarations and treaties which

support those rights, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 26 (United

Nations, 1948), and the International Covenant on Social, Economic, and Cultural Rights, article

13 (Underwood, 2006). The Education Act, 1990 recognizes every child's right to free and

accessible education (Ontario Government, 2010a). Further, the Ontario Government has made

several initiatives to promote inclusive and equitable education for all children. Examples

include the document released by the Minister of Education in 2009 titled, *Realizing the Promise*

of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, which was followed up later

that year with *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy*

Development and Implementation (Ontario Government, 2009). While these documents do not

focus specifically on teaching children with disabilities, they recognize varying degrees of ability

as one of many aspects of diversity in children. In 2005, the Ministry of Education released

Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction for

Students with Special Education Needs, Kindergarten to Grade 6 (Expert Panel on Literacy and

Numeracy Instruction, 2005). This report highlights Universal Design for Learning paired with

differentiated instruction for children who are identified as having special education needs

(Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction, 2005). However, a formal policy for

inclusive education at government level does not exist, which means that each regional school

board independently decides the appropriate educational process for children with disabilities. In

Toronto, the inclusion of a child with a disability in a regular classroom setting remains the

decision of the municipal school board via the Internal Placement and Review Committee

(IPRC) that considers the student's needs and the parents' preferences (Toronto District School Board [TDSB], 2009).

Many school boards within Ontario recognize the rights of children with disabilities to access and participate in regular schools and classrooms. For example, the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board's philosophy is to meet every child's needs, regardless of the challenges involved. Therefore, special education services are provided within the regular classroom whenever possible (Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board, 2007). The Toronto District School Board recognizes the importance of inclusive education for children with diverse abilities. For example, the *Equity Foundation Statement & Commitments to Equity Policy Implementation* states that the TDSB recognizes the existence of inequitable treatment of persons with disabilities in school system and society. The document further states TDSB's commitment to ensuring that its policies, programs, and practices represent their principles of fairness, equity and inclusion (TDSB, 2000).

Education for very young children, including preschool remains the choice of families. In the face of a changing economic climate childcare continues to be a necessity for many families. However, limited childcare spaces are available in Ontario (Killoran et al., 2007). In 2007, there were 133,740 full-time regulated childcare spaces in Canada, which is severely limited considering that in the same year, there were an estimated 674,900 children under the age of five living in Canada, 411,600 who had mothers in the workforce (Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 2008). Further, families who have a child with one or multiple disabilities face even greater difficulty in finding licensed child care (Killoran et al., 2007).

In January 2007, the Best Start Expert Panel on Early Learning introduced a framework for early learning and care (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007). Guided by worldwide early childhood

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education philosophies, this framework titled *Early Learning for Every Child Today* (ELECT)

provides a guide for developing curriculum in all early childhood programs, including preschools

and family resource centres as well as the Kindergarten program in the school system (Best Start

Expert Panel, 2007). A respect for diversity, equity, and inclusion is a core principle of ELECT,

which states,

> All children have a right to live in and learn in an equitable society. Children must grow
>
> up with a strong sense of self, in families and communities that promote attitudes, beliefs
>
> and values of equity and support their full participation (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007, p.
>
> 159).

ELECT is intended to complement the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) (Best Start Expert

Panel, 2007), which enforces standards and regulations for all child care facilities in Ontario

(Childcare Resource and Research Unit, 1998). While the DNA suggests including children with

disabilities into childcare (Ontario Government, 2010b) the decision to accept a child with

disabilities into an early care program lies with the centre director, supervisor, and/or teachers.

However, the Ontario Human Rights Code, Part I, Section 1, legislates the right of every person

to equal treatment with respect to services and facilities, without discrimination based on a

disability. Further, Part I, Section 9 states, "no person shall infringe or do, directly or indirectly,

anything that infringes a right under this Part" (Ontario Government, 1990). Therefore, childcare

centres have a duty to accommodate children with disabilities.

Until very recently, the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services governed all

regulated early childhood facilities. In April 2010, child care was transferred to the Ontario

Ministry of Education with the passage of the Full-Day Early Learning Statute Law Amendment

Act 2010 (Ontario Ministry of Education [MOE] and Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth

Services [MOCYS], 2010). As mandated by this act, all school boards in Ontario will offer full-day learning to four- and five-year old children (MOE & MOCYS, 2010). The Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program is an Ontario Government initiative based on the recommendations of Dr. Charles Pascal, a government appointed special advisor on early learning. The six fundamental principles that guide ELECT will also guide the Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten in Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010a). While full-day learning has several purposes, the general focus is ensuring that all children in Ontario receive "...the best possible start in life" (Pascal, 2009, p. 4).

In September 2010, the Full-Day Early Learning initiative will come into effect in nearly 600 schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010b). Each classroom will consist of a teacher and an early childhood educator to form the main teaching team for a class of approximately 26 children (Ontario Government, 2010b). While some separate responsibilities for teachers and ECEs have been recommended, the expectation is that both educators will be equally responsible for providing a child- and family-centered environment that fosters the social, emotional, cognitive, and physical development of all children (Pascal, 2009). The implication therefore, is that all stakeholders involved in the child's education within the full-day context will work in the interests of children and their families to support any special learning needs to ensure the child's full participation in his or her learning.

CHAPTER II

Methods

Participant criteria

Two elementary teachers and two early childhood educators were required for the research. Criteria for participation consisted of two components. Each potential participant had to be (1) employed with a school board or licensed early childhood centre in Ontario as either a certified teacher or early childhood educator, respectively; and (2) have current or recent experience teaching young children in a primary classroom or early childhood program that included children with identified disabilities. Children were considered identified through either the presence of an Individual Education Plan or a medical diagnosis by a health professional, as reported by participants.

Recruitment

Following ethics approval from the Ryerson Ethics Board, convenience sampling was used to recruit participants for the research. Through initial contacts with current and previous colleagues in the education field, the researcher received seven referrals to potential participants: Three early childhood educators and four teachers. The researcher emailed each potential participant outlining the nature of the study, criteria for participation, details of involvement in the study, and a request for their participation should they meet the required criteria (see Appendix A). An information letter and consent form (Appendix B) was emailed to each participant separately.

Six potential participants responded: four teachers and two early childhood educators. One teacher was unable to participate for personal reasons. Although willing, one teacher was not selected because he did not have experience teaching children with disabilities. This left two

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teachers, both who agreed to participate and thus were recruited. One of the early childhood educators worked within a program which, at the time of the research, did not have any children with identified disabilities. Although this aspect did not meet the participant criteria, she was recruited because she was one of the two early childhood educators who responded to the request and agreed to participate.

Recruitment efforts resulted in two male elementary teachers and two female early childhood educators who are described in the following section. As there were a limited number of participants from which to select, the gender divide between educator groups could not be avoided and may have affected the research findings. Pseudonyms are used to refer to each participant.

Participants

Both early childhood educators are employed in publicly-funded, regulated, cooperative early childhood centres. Jen has a Bachelor of Applied Arts in Early Childhood Education. She has worked as an early childhood educator for 30 years, during which time she worked with many children with disabilities. Jen works in a Kindergarten program with children age two and a half to five years where two children in her program are identified as having disabilities.

Sarah has a Bachelor of Arts in Early Childhood Education. She has worked as an early childhood educator for one year. Sarah has seven years experience working in early childhood settings, including specialized programs for children with disabilities and inclusive programs. Although Sarah was on maternity leave at the time of the study, she previously worked and is still employed in a preschool program with children age two and a half to four years. None of the children in her program have identified disabilities.

Both teachers work in public schools as classrooms teachers. Jack has a Master of Science Degree and a Bachelor of Education. Jack has one and a half years of teaching experience, one of which includes experience with children who have disabilities. Jack teaches a Grade One class with children age six and seven years. One child in his class is identified as having a disability.

Dan also has a Master of Science Degree and a Bachelor of Education. Dan has four years teaching experience, which include teaching children with disabilities. Until recently, Dan taught in a Kindergarten class with children age four and five years. Two children in his class have identified disabilities.

Data collection

Data were collected in two stages. One component of the first stage consisted of a questionnaire requesting information concerning participants' demographics, education, and experience (see Appendix C). The second component was one semi-structured, open-ended interview with each participant (see Appendix D). Each participant completed the questionnaire prior to the first interview. The second stage of data collection consisted of one semi-structured, open-ended interview with each participant conducted after coding the first data set (see Appendix E). The researcher developed both sets of interview questions. The first interview was based on the questions guiding the research. The second interview was based on the data collected during the first stage for the purposes of developing the emerging theory and clarifying participants' statements and descriptions recorded during the first interview. A question specific to each participant was developed for the second interview.

Interviews were scheduled at a time and location of each participant's choosing. The researcher advised each participant to select a location that would guarantee confidentiality.

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Two meetings took place in a community park, one in a coffee shop, and one in the participant's home. Each interview began with a brief synopsis of the study in which the researcher outlined important aspects of the information letter and consent form. Participants were encouraged to speak openly about their views and experiences. An audio recorder was used to capture all interviews. The researcher also took field notes during each interview in anticipation of potential malfunctions with the audio recorder. All recordings were successful and transferred to computer files immediately after each interview. The researcher transcribed all interviews on a private and secure computer.

Research Design

Data were collected, coded, and analyzed using a grounded theory strategy of inquiry within a qualitative design. Grounded theory recognizes "the complexity and variability of phenomena and of human action" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 8). It involves establishing a theory of an interaction or process grounded in the views of the participants through theoretical sampling (Creswell, 2003; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Theoretical sampling involves defining and redefining participants' meanings by going back and forth between collecting and analyzing data while maximizing the similarities and differences between participants (Charmaz, 2008). "As theoretical constructs evolve, precise information is sought to refine emerging ideas" (Draucker, Martsolf, Ross, & Rusk, 2007, p. 1138).

Two stages of data collection provided further insight into themes that emerged through initial stages of data analysis. The purpose of two stages of data collection was to enhance the researcher's ability to thoroughly and critically analyze and interpret participants' meanings. The researcher believes that investigating educators' perceptions of and experiences with children,

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disability, and inclusive education is fundamental to improving education for children with disabilities (Silverman, 2007; Lieber et al., 1998; Ostrosky, 2006).

Data Analysis

In grounded theory research, "data collection and analysis occur in alternating sequences" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 42). Data from the first set of interviews were coded and analyzed before the second interviews occurred. The first stage of coding involved two coding methods: open coding and axial coding. The qualitative research software *NVivo8* was used during the coding process.

Data analysis began with open coding the transcripts from the first interviews, which totalled 77 pages from five and a half hours of tape. Open coding involved line-by-line analysis of each interview transcript to develop small categories of meaning represented in the resulting descriptive and conceptual codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Draucker et al., 1998). Strauss & Corbin (1998) describe open coding as a free flowing process, part of which includes looking *at* the data rather than *for* something in the data (Jackson, 1990) in order to minimize bias. The researcher used questions to guide open coding of the data based on the recommendations of Strauss & Corbin (1998), such as, what are the properties of this stated idea or object? Who is involved and in what context? What possible meanings does this statement or experience hold for the participant? How does this statement relate to other statements made by the same participant? How does this statement or idea relate to those expressed by other participants? (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These questions assisted the researcher in drawing meaning from the data in order to develop codes. In cases where one line of transcript represented numerous codes the researcher revisited the original transcript in order to re-determine the context in which the statement was made. These particular lines of data were either included into already existing

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codes or a new code was created. Memos were made during this process as a record of potential links between codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Memos were also used for the purposes of recording emerging concepts and initial interpretations of the data to revisit later in the analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Coding of the first interview transcript resulted in 230 codes. The subsequent three interview transcripts were coded using the same method. For each transcript, data were either categorized under previously-developed codes or resulted in the development of new codes. A total of 274 codes were developed for the first set of interviews.

Axial coding involved looking for relationships among open codes in order to establish broad categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Eight categories were created during axial coding, into which open codes were organized. Axial coding was an important process in this research because the resulting categories informed the second set of interview questions. The comparison between teachers' and ECEs' perspectives extended the analysis and also contributed to the development of the second interview questions.

The second stage of data collection resulted in two hours of tape and 25 pages of transcript. Data analysis consisted of repeating the open and axial coding procedures. Open coding during the second stage resulted in 30 new codes, which were organized within the eight existing categories developed during the first stage of analysis.

The last stage of analysis involved selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). "Selective coding is the examination of the data for the purpose of unearthing the core category and achieving the integration of the theoretical framework" (Draucker et al., 2007, p. 1138). Selective coding involved revisiting the raw data and open codes to determine the most important and influential category.

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Reliability and Validity

The term validity is used to represent the truthfulness of the data and findings (Creswell, 2003; Golafshani, 2003). As mentioned previously, an audio recorder was used to ensure accurate recording of the data. The data represents participants' views and experiences and thus grounds the validity of the research. Qualitative research involves examining individual participants' stories; thus, research findings cannot be generalized to all elementary teachers and early childhood educators. However, the use of grounded theory as a methodological strategy assists in establishing validity through two stages of data collection and analysis. The second stage of data collection also served as a method for member checking through which the participants verified some of the statements they made during the first interview. This was an important process in validating research because the participants often relied on the use of metaphors to describe their feelings and experiences. The research findings also provide rich descriptions directly from the participants.

Reliability is a debated aspect of qualitative research (Golafshani, 2003). In this research, reliability acts as a reference for measuring quality, applicability, and dependability in the research design and process (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability is measured through the dependability of the interview protocol in that future researchers using the same protocol may obtain similar results.

Ethical considerations

During all stages of the study, the researcher respected the rights, needs, and views of each participant. Each participant was given a consent form and asked to sign and date it before the interview began.

The researcher adhered to all stated confidentiality commitments throughout the research process. Participants' names were used only for obtaining consent. All data is in the possession of the researcher, not to be disclosed to any other persons. Soft data is stored on a secure computer and hard data is filed within a locked cabinet in the researcher's home. All data forms will be destroyed after two years.

The researcher did not foresee any risks associated with participating in the study. However, the potential risks noted in the consent form were verbalized to each participant before beginning the interviews and each participant was reminded that at any time during the research he or she could withdraw participation. The participants did not express any concern or discomfort associated with their involvement in the research.

Limitations

A few factors present limitations to the present study. First, the use of convenience sampling as a method for recruiting participants resulted in a small group of prospective participants to choose from. As well, convenience sampling presents a greater risk for bias and a lower possibility of having a sample that represents the target population (Marshall, 1996). Second, based on a time restriction, only four participants were recruited for the study; therefore, the results cannot be generalized. Third, based on difficulty in identifying potential participants, only seven potential participants were contacted, which resulted in a small group of prospective participants from which to select.

An additional limitation is in the operationalizing of a grounded theory strategy of inquiry. Grounded theorists suggest that true grounded theory results in one core category which forms the basis of a theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In this research, although a core category

emerged from the data, it was beyond the scope of this report to include and thus is not reflected in subsequent chapters.

A final limitation is evident in the use of an audio recorder to capture the data. Although the participants consented to the interviews being recorded, they may have felt some discomfort and thus limited their responses to certain questions.

CHAPTER III

Findings

Introduction

The data are presented in a comparative format. Teachers' and early childhood educators' statements and descriptions are listed within corresponding subsections where indicated. This format shows differences between teachers' and early childhood educators' views of the given theme. In-group differences are also presented in these subsections. Common perceptions between teachers and early childhood educators are presented first.

Perceptions of disability

This section is characterized by the comments educators made in response to a definition of disability grounded in the social model (see Appendix D). The following subsections describe educators' attempts to express their views about the nature of disability, that is, what they believe disability actually is. The educators drew from their personal and professional experiences with persons with disabilities providing the researcher insight into who the educators classify as disabled and why. In the case of one teacher and one ECE, comments about disability labels were made. Their language use suggests that they have strong feelings about labelling.

Labelling.

One teacher and one early childhood educator spoke of the implications that disability labels have for children and their interactions with others. Sarah suggested,

All of a sudden the label is slapped on a child and then all of a sudden everything

changes... I would say a lot of times children have been labelled ADHD or ADD or even

on the spectrum of autism... it's just a behaviour coming out that's characteristic of that

but I think a lot of times once you accept that label you're almost damning yourself like

you're damning your child and as an educator, accepting that label I think either makes things easier or harder for you.

Sarah acknowledged that applying a label to characterize a child's behaviour changes how educators interact with the child and her parents:

The way they deal with the child is different and the way that they address the child is different and the way they address the parents is different and because everything surrounds "Timmy" who has autism or Timmy who has this or the child in the wheelchair instead of everybody needs to be addressed in a different way, we all learn differently so I think that as soon as you get a label, yeah I see it as negative for sure.

Sarah's statements indicate a belief that applying a label to describe a child's behaviours or physical condition has consequences for those involved in her education. Further, Sarah seems to believe that a label totalizes the child's identity, in that rather than the label describing certain behaviours or conditions it is used to describe the whole child, a process she views as negative.

Dan also stated that labelling a child under any circumstance can negatively affect both the child's personal and social experiences:

As soon as the student is labelled, just in general, not even just with a disability... they know that they've been labelled, there's now a new stigma put on them and they know about it and I think that there's a real problem with the labelling as disabled or they have an impairment of some kind because as soon as you identify that to the individual there are... you're already chopping the legs out from under them so the idea of labelling I'm completely against.

Both the ECE and teacher expressed a negative view of labels but for different reasons. In Sarah's view, a disability label affects how people respond to that individual.

Dan's statement suggests that labelling a child affects her self-esteem because children understand the stigma attached to the label. His reference to "chopping the legs out from under them" suggests that a label immobilizes the child and thus affects the child's ability to move forward in her learning.

Experience with and affective responses to disability.

The teacher's and ECE's beliefs about the effects of labelling may be owed to their experiences with persons with disabilities. Sarah described feeling initially afraid of working with children with disabilities but later felt the experience was "touching":

> I can clear as a bell remember my first day... I was terrified because I was afraid that I would do or say the wrong thing... I had no idea how to relate to these children and then throughout time and experience I think it was probably the most touching experience for me.

Dan's belief about the effects of labelling may have been influenced by his close relationship with a family member who has a cognitive disability. He stated:

> I just watched how the emotions it created and... how much it really did stress them out... I think that was something that was like I don't want to have that happen to anybody, no one should have to suffer through that.

Jack also described his affective response to a family member with a disability: "Because of the hearing um... problem she's had trouble making friends and that kind of stuff so it's been a little bit of a sad thing, like she doesn't have good friends and things like that". Jack attributes his relative's difficulty forming friendships to her hearing problem.

Teachers' perceptions.

Both teachers associated negative feelings with disability based on experiences in their personal lives. "Stress", "suffer", and "sad" were used to describe the perceived effects the disability had on the individual. Their language use suggests that they have negative perceptions of disability, which both teachers characterize as a condition residing in the individual. For example, Jack spoke about disability as an individual inability; however he expressed uncertainty about his own description:

> You almost want to say it's something that impedes somebody's ability to do
> something that, I want to say normal, something that's... fit in... Is it a quality that they
> don't have... disallows them to be a normal person, I mean that's the first thing that pops
> into my head to tell you the truth.

Dan also seemed unsure about his understanding of disability: "Disability to me is a function of a student's... not their inability but more their lack of... this is so hard because I'm trying to be politically correct". Dan struggled with finding socially acceptable words to describe disability.

Jack's and Dan's statements both reflect uncertainty about their own descriptions of disability, evident in Jack's response which was posed as a series of questions, and in Dan's challenge finding appropriate words. Although uncertain, these descriptions suggest that the teachers share a belief that disability is an individual condition that presents challenges for those who experience it.

Interestingly, Jack suggested that a child's disability may be unfixed and only applicable to certain activities: "He has a disability in reading and writing I mean but is that disability not fixable or is it just cause he's low right now". This statement suggests that the presence of a disability depends on the context the child is in; a child may have a disability in one aspect of

school and not another. This view suggests that for Jack, disability can change depending on external factors in the child's environment.

ECEs' perceptions.

The early childhood educators described disability in numerous ways; however, each description suggests the contribution of social factors in creating disabilities. For example, Jen stated, "I do think it's [mental illness] a disability, they are in a sense disabled. They can function but they're not included for whatever reasons, their behaviours tend to repel as opposed to generate... inclusion". Sarah described her view of disability in the following statement:

If you have a wheelchair you're not able to participate in a program or because you've been labelled with autism that means you can't participate in the program then I think it is kind of a... socially constructed, socially imposed label that in essence creates division.

Sarah expressed a belief that disability is an effect of how society views "normal" behaviour:

I think that society really, really kind of imposes on us what's normal, what's not normal, what you're capable of doing and what you're not capable of doing... society has mandated that unless you fall within a certain amount of guidelines you're not normal so we're gonna put a label on you and we're gonna say that you need therapy...

At some points during the interview, Sarah suggested that the existence of disability depended on a person's point of view. For example, she explained,

I think that there's really no such thing as disability, I think it's just your viewpoint of what people can and cannot do. If you consider everyone's a unique individual, everyone experiences things in different ways, everyone needs things to be different for them then that's, in my experience, I would call that normal. I would think that if you say oh we're all the same then those people are different.

Using a specific example, Sarah argued,

> Social anxiety disorder for a two and a half year old? Really? Give me a break you know
>
> and it's those types of things that I really have an issue with because I don't even think
>
> that exists normally you know like with an adult, how does it exist within a child.

Sarah's statements suggest a belief that everyone has unique experiences that should not be
categorized as disabilities; rather, disabilities originate in others' perspectives.

Jen made a similar statement that also questioned social responses to individual
differences. She stated,

> No one person is the same, no one person is this ideal or this perfect individual. How can
>
> we exclude one and not the other based on a disability or an imperfection, be it visible or
>
> learning... what I try to do with the children in my program is to look at them for who
>
> they are individually, not as a collective so by doing that then children with
>
> disabilities would be a part of the collective and if that involved a special chair or if that
>
> involved a hearing aid... then that's fine.

This reflects a belief similar to Sarah's that every person is different. Further, she suggested that
a notion of an ideal, perfect individual creates exclusion.

Jen also expressed uncertainty about whether she should recognize disability as part of a
person's essence. She stated, "I struggle with this because I don't want to look at it that way but I
think sometimes I might be diminishing the person by not acknowledging their disability... who
they are is a piece of that".

Sarah expressed that her experience within a specialized educational setting for children
with disabilities changed how she defined disability:

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Before I went to [name of field placement] in my second year I was terrified. I just

thought, I'm going into a classroom with eight kids who were all in wheelchairs and I

didn't know how to deal with it and I didn't know... and you know at that point, I mean

my definition of disability would have been totally different, it would have been you

know they have a problem, they have an issue that can't be resolved so we have to

change our environment in order to include them or there has to be a separate

environment for them to be in. I think that for me that was probably the most opening

experience.

Sarah seems to view her specialized work as highly valuable and a positive turning point in her

perspective of disability.

In Sarah's case, experience working with children who have disabilities changed her

feelings and views of disability. Dan's and Jack's perceptions, although stated tenuously,

acknowledge the individual experience of disability. Jen recognizes both the individual and

social experience of disability.

Interpretations of inclusion

This section presents the educators' responses to a definition of inclusion provided during

the initial interviews. Educators' were asked to respond to the following definition of inclusion

provided during the initial interviews:

...Values, policies, and practices that support the right of every [child] and his or her

family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as

full members of families, communities, and society. The defining features are: access,

participation, and supports (DEC/NAEYC, 2009, p. 52) (See Appendix D).

Their responses include descriptions of an association between inclusion and community, inclusive strategies, professional experiences with inclusive teaching, challenges in providing inclusive education, and exclusion.

Community.

Many similarities exist between the teachers' and early childhood educators' views of inclusion. Three educators believed that a sense of community was important for society, inclusive education, and schools. Dan suggested that fear in schools takes away from forming a sense of community:

> Now with a lot of... invaders to the school... a lot of these things that people are doing administration-wise like locking the schools and having limited areas for smaller children to play and having those extra monitors, I think those provisions... sort of give this jail-like sense to the learning instead of having it be a community thing... a place that is supposed to highlight the community as opposed to shun the community from accessing.

For Dan, schools should reflect the community but he believes that fear encumbers that possibility for children. He questioned:

> Why are we separating the classroom from the office, from outside, it should all be the same thing, everybody saying the same things, everybody saying the same rules and adhering to... the same models of behaviour... there's a gap that needs to be bridged there...

Similarly, Sarah expressed,

> I think we need to re-evaluate the way we're looking at education and say you know everybody's different, everybody's unique, let's come together, create a community-

based classroom where we all learn and take and give from each other and there is no

such thing as the right way and the wrong way to teach and learn.

Jen explained,

> I'm starting to think that perhaps it's the idea of interdependence that we need to focus
>
> on so that we're not doing for our children but we're allowing our children to do for
>
> themselves and in doing so they're able to connect and help each other as opposed to
>
> it's all about me. Inclusion is that idea of community so if you have that idea then
>
> inclusion is just built into it, it's not even something you consider as including cause it's
>
> including, there's no one on the outside, we have to all be on the inside.

Concept versus practice.

Both groups spoke about perceived barriers to inclusion. For example, both Dan and

Sarah distinguished between the ideology of inclusion and its feasibility within educational

settings. For example, Dan stated, "I think it's a great concept but like many things in education

you're only able to – the system is situated in such a way that you can only hit on one of those

sections at a time". This statement referred to the defining features of inclusion listed in the

definition: access, participation, and supports. Similarly, Sarah stated,

> You can look at a definition and say absolutely I agree with it but then in practice it is
>
> very, very different because it depends on personalities and who you're dealing with and
>
> what type of environment you're dealing with. You can say absolutely I want to include a
>
> child in a wheelchair but like at our nursery school, we're in the basement, how do we do
>
> that right? So there is an elevator but there's stairs even within the room so how do you
>
> include when the environment discludes.

While both statements are similar in nature, their reasons for the incompatibility between ideology and practice are different. Although Sarah's statement reflects her willingness to include, it suggests that the physical environment limits the possibility for including certain children. Dan's statement suggests that the system is not designed to simultaneously support all three features of inclusion.

Challenges with collaboration.

Educators also commented on the importance of a collective approach, in the forms of collaboration and a shared vision for inclusion. For example, Dan stated, "with so many differing opinions there's not enough collaboration towards a common goal, there's more separation between the homeroom teacher, the resource teacher, administration's ideas, parents' ideas, and students' requests". Similarly, Jen explained,

I think the biggest challenge is lack of vision or a collective or a philosophy that needs to be in place in any given centre and that is not based on what's politically correct as part of being inclusive but rather just for the – because they believe that inclusion is a part of what we're all about.

Dan and Sarah shared a similar belief that parents are an integral part of their child's inclusive experience. For example, Dan explained,

Often times what happens is you have, especially kids with severe disabilities... you have parents who are super, super concerned and they have a very specific way that they've raised their child and a very specific schedule to adhere to and when you try to create this... inclusion idea in your classroom and have them engaged in the normal curriculum, what you're setting out for the rest of the students and giving them the opportunity to experience that with everybody else, I think parents sometimes have a tendency to say

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well okay, you can't go too far. It's almost like a catch or they speak out of both sides of their mouth... ultimately it's the parents' decision, so it's up to the parents to sort of get on board or to stay stubborn.

Similarly, Sarah stated,

There was kind of a demanding parent that said I want my child to be included, my child doesn't have a disability but then when push came to shove... she wanted her child to be recognized as typically developing but there were certain things like she couldn't come on one day, she wanted to come on another day then she would kind of, I hate to say it but pull the disability card and say well you know she does have a motor problem so she does have to have therapy so you should make the exception.

These statements express the educators' experiences with parents' concerns about their child's education. Both experiences allude to a tension between educators' efforts in providing inclusive education and parents' concerns and suggest that parents' requests and concerns are inconsistent with the educators' practice and thus affect educators' abilities to include some children.

Interestingly, both early childhood educators and one teacher felt that the parent-teacher relationship was an important component of inclusion. For example, Dan explained, "working in conjunction with them instead of being the teacher and they're the parents, working together really created success for the student". Sarah also stated,

If you do have a good working relationship then I think that inclusion is seamless... it can happen no problem... I think that if the educator isn't willing to say you know, you're the expert on your child and you need to help me to help your child to be integrated, it's not going to happen.

Both educators' statements suggest that inclusion requires a collective commitment in both practice and philosophy.

Teachers' views.

Both teachers expressed a belief that inclusion benefits the child socially. Jack stated, "I think they benefit from interacting socially... that's just as important sometimes as learning to read and write". In reference to a specific experience, Dan explained, "his own motivation was greater because he was part of the group; he wasn't excluded in any way". In addition, Dan expressed that being part of the group,

> Gives them the sense of self to really have faith in themselves to continue with their
>
> education... instead of getting stuck at, oh I'm the idiot in the class or I don't belong
>
> because I go to the resource room.

Dan anticipates that the child may experience negative feelings about himself if he is excluded from the regular classroom.

In response to whether they would include a child with disabilities in their classrooms given the choice, both teachers stated they would. However, their willingness to accept children depended on certain conditions. In Dan's case, his choice to include a child with a disability depended on the child's behaviour and needs. For example, when asked if he would include children with disabilities Dan stated, "One hundred percent, if it suited their academic needs, their special needs, their social needs". Dan also stated,

> If the student's academic misunderstandings lead to social disruptions in the class
>
> constantly, like if there's a major outburst and anger issues, I've had students where if
>
> they didn't understand a concept or a certain idea they would break a ruler over the desk
>
> or snap a pencil and have a physical reaction to the lack of understanding and that caused

social disorder within the classroom... you really have to start addressing the fact that maybe separation or a lack of inclusion is maybe the better option, sending them to a different work environment because maybe that's what's causing the stress or that physical outburst is the thought that the peers are judging them or that the teacher is judging them...

Dan seems to attribute the child's behaviour to having challenges with schoolwork. Further, his statement suggests that the behaviour reflected the child's need for a separate learning environment.

Jack also believed that a separate learning environment might be the best solution for a child experiencing difficulty in the regular classroom:

When the child absolutely needs small group attention or a child is struggling in the classroom so much that a smaller group might be beneficial for them or someone who's better trained in that area... that's when they absolutely should be pulled out.

When asked how he identified the needs of the child, Jack replied, "it's an academic issue first, totally. I mean a student in my class, he had behavioural issues as well but that wasn't the source of the problem".

Jack suggested that his lack of experience teaching children with disabilities challenged his ability to effectively support their learning. For example,

I didn't know how to help him well enough... maybe if I was a teacher of ten years I'd know what to do... how to help this student who was very low in reading and writing so... it was my lack of experience that's the biggest thing that didn't allow me to help him as much as I could.

Jack also experienced challenges dividing his attention between the children in his classroom: "I had 20 kids and I can't spend my whole time with the one kid in my classroom who needs help... I have 19 other kids who are pulling my arm".

As Jack identified, the challenges he experienced may be attributed to his limited teaching experience.

ECEs' views.

The ECEs' personal attitudes towards inclusion were expressed in many statements they made about their views of inclusion. For example, in response to a definition of inclusion provided during the first interview, Jen expressed, "for me it's exciting, I wish that our centre had that vision". Sarah described inclusion as a simple concept: "It's such an easy concept to say absolutely, come on in... it's a no-brainer, you just do it and this child gets to participate in the program".

The early childhood educators made several references to others' attitudes and perceived unwillingness to include children with disabilities, which they felt in some cases, jeopardized important components of inclusion. For example, Jen stated, "participation factor is partial because how can it be full participation and fully inclusive if only... two out of four... are on board to make it about the child". Further, Jen shared details of her colleagues' attitudes towards inclusion: "I have co-workers who believe they didn't sign on for that, that's not why they went into this field. I guess they went into this field thinking that children were all the same and compliant". Similarly, Sarah expressed,

> I think that as an educator, you're afraid that all of a sudden instead of making an "exception" for one child you're going to have to do it for everyone and I think that a lot of educators are really afraid of that because that means more work for them and that's...

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the unfortunate reality of... inclusion because I think that if you're not willing to go the distance then some teachers view it as... it's too much work.

Both early childhood educators expressed a sense of responsibility in making their programs inclusive. They explained this responsibility in different ways. For example, Sarah emphasized her own responsibility in "going the distance": "That's my responsibility, to make sure that everything can be tailored for all of the children's learning needs. I think it's the teacher's responsibility to ensure that everything you're doing is inclusive and not just specific things". Jen expressed a responsibility for changing others' attitudes:

> The challenge is trying to change people's point of view and how do you do that when there's that resistance in the first place so that even if a child comes in undetected... how do you make that automatically a negative, because that's how they see it, into a positive when there's that mindset.

When asked how she does that, Jen replied, "If I had the answer I'd be doing it".

These statements suggest that for the early childhood educators, inclusion involves not only accommodating every child, regardless of ability, but also attempting to change others' points of view – a challenging task as Jen explained.

Both ECEs believed that inclusion is a far-reaching problem that extends to the social context. For example, Sarah expressed,

> This is looking at it not so much as an educator but looking at it as a social view. I think that society kind of tries to mainstream people to have one belief system and one way of learning and one way of kind of training people to be workers... our world is created and society is created for what we deem as normal and typical.

Similarly, Jen stated, "we've created this environment that excludes... we've developed a system or a society that everything is geared around those who... have the capability of functioning in the world without any supports". Jen questions this creation:

Sometimes I wonder how it even got to be inclusive and exclusive, I guess life is sort of like that, we do that with most things... the people who have the power to determine those decisions and the people on the outside...

For Jen, inclusion is everyone's responsibility: "I'm as responsible for our society as anyone else is". For Sarah, the problem with social exclusion is that, "it teaches children that there's an element of normalcy and that there's an element of problem". She further explained,

A big problem has been created, especially in Western society because of the way that we've taught children to view each other and I mean whether that's ability, whether that's race, whether that's gender, we've really, really taught children that distinction's important and instead of saying that inclusion, not necessarily in the sense of a special need or a disability but inclusion when it comes to the broader sense, we haven't taught children that that's important.

Inclusive practices

Teachers' practices.

The teachers provided examples of adaptations they made in order to include a child with disabilities into the classroom. These involved adjusting some components of the curriculum for the child with a disability or intentionally arranging the classroom in order to foster the child's learning. For example, Jack explained, "almost everything was adapted... he had his own program". In addition, Jack reported that curricular adaptations, as part of providing inclusive

education, were instrumental in removing the child's disability and allowed the child to function in a certain, expected way:

> We've been successful in finding something that works for him but it's not at grade level but it's at his level and we're hoping that either next year or years down the road he is going to eventually get to grade level so you can say that *we* have put something in place that is now helping him so... we're now accommodating him and... we're taking away his disability, we're allowing him to function at his own – I mean the way he needs to function... we're giving him work that helps him best.

Jack's understanding of successful inclusion involves modifying the curriculum for the child so he could function in the classroom. As Jack reported, this strategy involves "taking away his disability". Dan made a similar statement about eliminating a sense of difference:

> You want to eliminate that sense that they're different from everybody else... there is really a cruelty that comes from other students if you're placed in the resource room or something, there's so many negative things that get put to these kids and it's so sad to see because then that's all they think about.

In response to a hypothetical scenario provided by the researcher (see Appendix D), Dan stated he would provide different attention to a child with autism in his classroom:

> Creating a space for them so that they have a safe zone and speaking to that student individually before the rest of the class comes in or keep them in at recess just to talk to them. If you can talk to them one on one and sort of say okay, let's make you your special cool area and let's give you everything you need and let's just make it a secret between you and me and then that way they sort of feel like... they've got a different attention from the teacher.

Dan also considered a "checklist of strategies" a useful tool for including a child with disabilities: "you have a checklist of strategies that will, or have worked with other individuals or this individual previously".

ECEs' practices.

Both ECEs believed that knowledge about individual children enabled them to determine how to effectively support their inclusion in the learning program. Observing the child was seen as a useful strategy for gaining information about the child. Jen stated,

> Most of it comes from observations of the child and then reflecting on what you have observed... understanding that child... behaviours in the classrooms, what triggers things, how the child plays, interactions with other children... how the child responds to any kind of group circle time... what the child doesn't like...

Sarah felt that observations could be extended to the child's home environment:

> For me it would be so important to see the child within the home setting with their parents and whether that requires me coming on a weekend or after school, I think that's important... knowing when they're at home they act the same way or they don't or this triggers them at home just as much as it does here... I think that's really eye-opening to recognize how the child interacts with people at home 'cause as an educator you just see what happens at school so if all of a sudden the child is totally verbal at home but totally non-verbal at school that speaks to something, that speaks to something that I'm not doing for that child's sense of comfort... whatever it might be that's not happening at school.

Sarah acknowledges that inclusive education involves having an understanding of the child within different contexts.

Purpose of education

Expanding opportunities.

One teacher and ECE shared a belief that education expands children's opportunities and enhances their life experiences. For example, Sarah stated, "I'd like to think that education kind of opens up doors and broadens children's mindset and broadens the way children learn and experience the world. Similarly, Dan said,

> I think that education is something that helps build life skills, that help them sort of figure out what it is that they want, figure out what it is that they would like to take from life and sort of give them the access to all those different things... that's one of the main aims of education... to better themselves or better the situation they're in.

Teachers' beliefs.

Both teachers expressed a belief that learning specific skills is a purpose of education that enables their future participation in the workforce. For example, Dan stated, "I think those menial tasks that you teach at an early educational age help to build your abilities later in life or build those social skills and those work skills that you'd need for the workforce". Similarly, Jack stated,

> The biggest thing is that I teach them reading and writing... because I think it's the most necessary thing that we do pretty much in day to day life... reading and writing is the source of everything, how we interact with people, how we run our daily lives, to become a useful part of the workforce at some point in their lives... to be able to contribute to the economy, to be able to contribute to the country.

ECEs beliefs.

Jen suggested that education involves developing children's abilities to think critically about the world in which they live:

All we have to do is send our child to school and they learn what's necessary to become a good person or a functioning person or a well-balanced person... but I think... look at education as something bigger and that we want more for our children, we want them to be critical and we want them to think about things and not take everything somebody says as the truth... to be sceptical, to question things and to make a difference.

Sarah believes the purpose of education depends on the teacher and her philosophy of education:

I think that the purpose of education really kind of changes when you look at *who* is educating... what you deem appropriate and what you don't and I think that's really what changes... if I find art-based curriculum really, really appropriate then that becomes my source of what's important whereas if someone finds academics important, then that's what they teach to.

Pedagogical beliefs

This section presents educators' beliefs about how children learn, teaching approaches that support children's learning, their role in children's education, and their relationships with the children they teach. This section emerged from the participants' responses to interview questions about the purpose of education and their views of inclusion.

Responding to group dynamics.

One ECE and teacher expressed a common belief that adapting their teaching practice was a necessary response to changes in group dynamics. Jack explained,

You could tell when things weren't working, focus wasn't there, their attention wasn't

there and... you have to adapt quickly, you have to change things up... how can I get their

attention... there's a point where you can say they're not paying attention or this isn't

working or I have to do something different and you know it when it happens, I don't

know how to describe it but you know when you have to move on and do something

different because you've lost the class.

Similar to Jack's experience, Jen said,

Every time you have a change in one child, every time you have a change in one day,

there's a whole different dynamic in that room that needs to be addressed and you can't

address it doing the same thing every day.

Jack and Jen report being sensitive and responsive to changes in the group dynamic.

Instilling a sense of security.

Creating a safe context in which children felt secure in their learning was a practice one

ECE and one teacher believed was important. For Dan,

Students need to know that they can have as many chances as they need to be

successful... if you don't give that student extra time, either after school, during

lunchtime, during recess periods, you're going to lose them quickly so you have to create

that safe classroom environment in order to hit every student because you don't want to

leave anybody behind.

Jen stated, "my role is making everyone feel safe, going through this is where the bathroom is

and this is how you open the door". For Jen, instilling a sense of security within each child was

enacted through familiarizing each child with the immediate environment. In addition, her

perception of her role as "making everyone feel safe" suggests that her relationship with the

children is an important part of their feelings of security. For Dan, creating a safe classroom meant providing children with time and multiple opportunities to achieve.

Teachers beliefs.

Dan expressed a belief that play has learning value: "Teachers... they're stuck in their ways, they have curriculum to follow and they know that by this time in the month I have to have got to this period and they forget about how much is learned through play". In his classroom, Dan allowed children play time everyday:

> There's 40 minutes of playtime mandated a day so you have to incorporate that. I try to split it up so that it's 20 minutes and 20 minutes as opposed to giving them just 40 minute free-for-all because I found not only does it help build that sense of scheduling... but it also doesn't allow that time for boredom to kick in... so breaking it up I found throughout the day really sort of helped to engage the students better.

Dan stressed his responsibility for ensuring children are focused and engaged in learning:

> What's my responsibility to keep them straight is I guess as long as they're performing in my class and they're there and I can help them sort of better themselves... you have almost a parental role to make sure that the kids are mentally healthy, physically healthy because everything can sort of tie into what affects their attention span and what affects their ability to absorb information... I think nutrition... really affects learning because if you're sending your kid with all this sugar they're wired for the rest of the day and then as an educator you're almost losing your sense of self... you're becoming a glorified babysitter.

Dan also viewed parents' presence in the classroom as a deterrent to children's full engagement in learning:

Parents are always advised at the beginning of the year to sort of break that time of

coming into the class and as soon as they're on school property, students should know

that it's school time and it's not cry for mom time... that pampering really deters from

their engaging right away.

Dan often used rewards and competition to maintain children's engagement and motivation in

learning:

Creating competition in the classroom is like the ultimate, ultimate skill to have as an

educator because kids are intrinsically competitive, they want to beat their friends, they

want to get that one mark better than their friends so they can wave it in front of their

face so if you can create a situation to use that constructively... and reward that

competitive nature in a good way so that all members of the class sort of get their bonus

or get that sense of accomplishment from the competitive activities, then you really do

create a motivation that doesn't exist otherwise and I really think kids are drawn towards

educators like that because they want to impress that person, they want to prove

themselves to that person.

Dan's statements suggest a belief that structure is an important component of children's

education and that extrinsic rewards motivate them to engage in their learning.

Jack made several references to his rapport with children in the classroom. For example,

Jack explained,

I have a good relationship with my students... I listen to their stories and I listen to

them talk and give them feedback and I think I just communicate with them very well... I

am their friend in some ways but I make sure there's a very divided line, I am their

teacher, if you're too friendly with them they tend to walk all over you... they think they

can get away with a little more... be able to act silly in class and be able to get away with whatever they like but you have to remind them that you're their teacher and you have to discipline and you have to keep your thumb on them sometimes... you have to maintain the stability of the classroom.

This statement reflects Jack's belief that a formal teacher-child relationship is necessary for maintaining order and stability in the classroom.

ECEs beliefs.

Jen and Sarah both approach education with a child-centred philosophy. A child-centered education involves the use of constructivist approaches, such as emergent curriculum. For example, Jen explained,

My classroom is a play-based environment... how we develop emergent curriculum is based on the child as opposed to... expected skills... it's where their interests come from, whatever they want to learn and whatever they want to discover, I use whatever resources I can to complement that... to create what wants to be created... I don't see it as something we can compartmentalize from one area to another.

Similarly Sarah expressed,

I think that children naturally learn through play... play-based is totally the way to go, arts-based... kind of tailoring your program to what you see your children want to do and how they learn. If you have children who all want to sit around in circle time and do calendar all the time and learn specific academic things then that's what you do but I don't think that it's appropriate to expect that... I think it's appropriate to look at what children are dealing with and how you actually tailor your program to that.

Sarah expressed a belief in the value of child-centered learning, making mistakes, and her role in those experiences:

> Give children the freedom to make mistakes... but be there for them to kind of come to their own conclusions, their own decisions. I'm really big on autonomy and fostering that sense of giving children the freedom to wash their hands for five minutes instead of me doing it for them... and I think giving children the respect they deserve. I think a lot of times teachers kind of look at their role as I'm in charge and I tell everyone what to do, when to do it, how to do it. I give children the freedom to make those mistakes and learn from them in a positive environment. I think it's important to allow children to experience and explore and the less limits that are put on them, the better.

Jen described her role as a facilitator:

> My job is not a teacher... I'm there to facilitate... as situations arise we learn together and we troubleshoot together and I think it's important for children to problem-solve with the assistance of someone because that's how those skills are learned.

For Sarah, fostering autonomy, an important component of her role, meant providing children with the freedom to explore their environment and make decisions. Jen's role in facilitating children's learning involved helping children develop problem-solving skills.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion and Recommendations

Discussion

As previously stated, the purpose of the present study was twofold: First was to explore educators' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes towards the phenomena of disability, education, and inclusion. Participants openly shared many of their beliefs about the stated topics during the interviews. In addition, they made several statements from which the researcher drew meaning. The second purpose was to compare the responses of teachers and early childhood educators to determine the similarities and differences in their beliefs.

The following discussion presents key findings from the study in relation to the literature. The views of both educator groups are explored separately for the purpose of highlighting how their particular views of inclusion, disability, and education are interrelated.

Although some similarities exist, teachers' and early childhood educators' beliefs differ in interesting and significant ways. Distinct pedagogical beliefs about teaching and learning emerged from the educators' statements, which seem to shape how they view inclusion and disability. Slee (2008) suggests that inclusion is about what is being taught, where and how education is delivered, and the effectiveness of educators.

Teachers' beliefs.

Although apprehensively stated, both teachers expressed pathognomonic beliefs about disability, meaning that disability can be attributed to the internal state of individual (Jordan, 2007). In this view, a child's ability to learn is largely dependent on the child's level of functioning and has little to do with the actions or behaviours of the teacher (Jordan, 2007). As Jordan explains, pathognomonic "beliefs are more like a set of unexplored assumptions than a

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theory that consists of carefully thought-through propositions" (p. 25). Although Stanovich and Jordan (1998) associate pathognomonic beliefs with minimal intervention, discontinuity between assessment and curriculum, and minimal involvement with families, the teachers in this study did not report these behaviours. Rather, both teachers reported that in some cases they adapt the curriculum to meet the needs of a child with a disability.

Pathognomonic beliefs about disability are consistent with the medical model, which emphasizes dependence of the person with a disability and elicits feelings of pity and fear (Rieser, 2006a). Both teachers associated negative feelings with disability. Dan described how his sibling "suffered" with her disability. McDonough (2007) suggests that viewing disability as a kind of suffering disempowers children and can contribute to ableism, which Campbell (2001) defines as "a network of beliefs, processes and practices that produces a particular kind of self and body... that is projected as the perfect, species-typical and therefore essential and fully human. Disability is cast as a diminished state of being human" (p. 44). Jack expressed feelings of pity for his relative who has a hearing disability. Rieser (2006a) insists that this response to disability focuses only on the impairment and does not acknowledge the person's needs.

Jordan (2007) observes that educators do not simply ascribe to one belief about disability as either individually-based or socially influenced. Rather, there tends to be a fluctuation depending on the educator's level of efficacy in helping children achieve (Brady & Woolfson, 2008; Jordan, 2007). In this study, Jack, who has one and a half years of teaching experience, explained that his lack of experience resulted in his inability to effectively support a child with a disability in his classroom. This finding suggests that either general teaching experience or experience working with children with disabilities may influence a teacher's level of efficacy. Findings in Devore and Hanley-Maxwell (2000) suggest that more experience working with

children with disabilities can increase educators' confidence. In a review of the research, Ostrosky et al. (2004) report that teachers' competency in working with children with disabilities and direct experience with inclusion are related to positive attitudes towards inclusion. Combined, these findings suggest that with further experience, Jack's efficacy may increase.

In addition, Jack expressed difficulty in dividing his time between the child with a disability and the rest of the children in the class. This finding is consistent with the results of Forlin's (2001) study, in which 89 percent of teachers reported a reduced ability to effectively teach a class that included a child with a disability.

Jack suggested that a disability in reading and writing resulting from a low level of achievement in literacy may be "fixable", suggesting a belief that some disabilities are unstable. Brady and Woolfson (2008) note that teachers who view learning difficulties as unstable may have expectations for change and progress in children's learning. Although uncertain whether these expectations rely on the actions of the teacher or the child, this finding suggests that Jack believes education can play a part in strengthening certain abilities.

Dobbs and Arnold (2009) explain that teachers' views of children in one learning domain may influence their perceptions of the child's learning in other domains. Interestingly, Jack explained that one child, in addition to having a disability in reading and writing, also has behavioural difficulties. As Dobbs and Arnold (2009) state, teachers' descriptions of children's behaviours are not completely objective; rather, they are filtered through teachers' own beliefs. Jack's perception of the child's behaviour may be influenced by his knowledge of the child's difficulties in literacy-related tasks. However, while Jack identified this child as having behavioural issues, he stated that the problem was academic-related and not connected to the child's behaviour. Almog and Shechtman (2007) suggest that children may exhibit undesired

behaviour as a method of defence to hide their learning difficulties or to express their need for attention. In addition, Lynch and Baker (2005) observe that a child's engagement in learning is emotional as well as intellectual. For Jack, perhaps more classroom experience will foster a greater understanding of children's affective engagement in learning.

Pathognomonic beliefs about disability may result in necessary changes in practice being overlooked (Ainscow, Booth, & Dyson 2004). Teachers who have pathognomonic beliefs about disabilities feel that diversity in the classroom should be reduced (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Both teachers in this study implied that inclusive education meant removing or minimizing a child's disability. This finding is consistent with Lieber et al.'s study which found that for some of the educators, inclusion involved minimizing the child's disability (1998). The teachers in the present study seem to believe that the success of inclusion is generated by how well the child can fit into the classroom structure. This view privileges homogeneity and marginalizes diversity (Mac Naughton, 2005). As Mac Naughton (2005) states, "normality is the production of inclusion and exclusion" (p. 37). Attempting to have children conform conveys that difference is not wanted or tolerated in the classroom.

During the interviews, both teachers stated that they were attempting to be politically correct with their language use, which highlights their desire to be seen and understood in a positive light, perhaps because their intentions for all the children in their classrooms are positive. In a review of the research, Kagan (1992) notes, "teachers are often unaware of their own beliefs, they do not always possess language with which to describe and label their beliefs, and they may be reluctant to espouse them publicly" (p. 66). Zaretsky (2005) notes that educators are often unaware of the theories that underpin inclusive education and which embed their practices, behaviours, and beliefs and about disability and inclusion. This may partly

explain both teachers' apprehensive responses to the definition of disability provided during the interview. Disability and inclusion are messy concepts that create controversy in the field of education (Zaretsky, 2005). Both definitions of disability and inclusion provided during the interviews were grounded in a social model, which may conflict with the teachers' existing beliefs or understandings about these concepts. Both teachers' educational histories include science, which may contribute to their perceptions of the nature of disability. Pathognomonic beliefs about disability are consistent with the medical model, which is grounded by scientific, empirical understandings of disability as a biological condition. This view is well accepted by many researchers and scholars. In addition, media often portrays disability as an individual deficit, inability, or problem (Maudlin, 2007), which may shape others' perceptions of disability.

Both teachers believe that the purpose of education involves preparing children for the workforce. This is one component of education acknowledged by Rieser (2006b) who suggests that schools have a responsibility to prepare children for future economic contribution. Some of the pedagogical approaches they reported using in their classrooms include highly structured learning, creating competition, using rewards, and a formal teacher-child relationship. These approaches reflect a teacher-centered pedagogy and a desire for authority and control within the classroom, which Almog and Shechtman (2007) explain is a restrictive strategy. This finding is consistent with Krieg's (2010) study that revealed issues of power within novice teachers' explanations of their relationships with children. This desire for control and stability in the classroom may stem from expectations of teachers to foster children's academic learning in preparation for formal education and eventually the workforce.

Dan explained that he regularly used rewards and fostered what he believes are children's innate competitive tendencies in order to increase motivation. Dev (1997) notes that while

children function more effectively in school when their intrinsic motivation is higher, rewards can be a detriment to the development of intrinsic motivation. In addition, while research has shown that competitive environments can benefit boys and increase their intrinsic motivation, competition has not been shown to benefit girls (Conti, Collins, & Picariello, 2001; Gneezy & Rutichini, 2004). In fact, Conti et al. (2001) found that children's level of masculinity is central factor in their response to competition. Whether competitive behaviour is innate, a response to socialization practices, or a combination of both is uncertain. However, this finding suggests that Dan's masculinity is related to his desire to foster competition among children. Dev (1997) notes that rewards are a detriment to children's development of intrinsic motivation.

Although Jordan (2007) states, "working with students with disabilities and learning difficulties is in many ways no different from working with other students" (p. 45), the teachers in this study seem to have a contrasting belief. Separating the child from the regular classroom was reported by both teachers as necessary when the child required more help than the teacher was able to provide or when the child's behaviour disrupted the class. In both cases, the problem was attributed to the child's perceived needs and behaviours. This is consistent with Dinnebeil et al.'s (1998) study in which respondents felt that inclusion was not possible for children with behavioural difficulties. Forlin (2001) also found that the behaviour of a child with a disability creates stress for teachers. Almog and Shechtman (2007) explain that removing a child with behavioural difficulties is a restrictive teaching strategy associated with lack of experience and insufficient knowledge of how to effectively support children's behaviour difficulties. Their study found that in practice, teachers tend to adopt more restrictive strategies than helpful approaches in response to a child's behaviour difficulties. Further, they insist that restrictive strategies do not contribute to successful inclusion. However, Almog and Shechtman (2007) also

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found that in reality, many teachers adopt restrictive strategies, which they suggest may be based on the need to respond to and resolve classroom issues quickly.

In the present study, the teachers believed that removing the child from the regular classroom to a separate environment was the better option so that the child could focus on the work he was required to do. This belief aligns with the teachers' understandings of the purpose of education. Children's behaviour and additional needs are perceived as disruptive to the classroom structure and interfere with their necessary academic development. As Scruggs & Mastropieri (1996) note, "teachers regard students with disabilities in the context of procedural classroom concerns" (p. 71).

Positive attitudes towards inclusion were expressed by both teachers. They believe that inclusion has observable social benefits for children with disabilities and one teacher sees social inclusion as a motivating force in children's learning. However, their beliefs also suggest that they prioritize academic learning in their classrooms. For the teachers in the present study, the child whose behaviours disrupt the classroom or whose needs require one-on-one support should be removed from the classroom. Rogers (2007) identifies this practice as a form of exclusion within classrooms that appear to be inclusive.

Early childhood educators' beliefs

Both ECEs acknowledged that social factors are instrumental in producing disability. This belief is consistent with the social model of disability, which Rieser (2006a) explains is necessary for successful inclusion and Almog and Shechtman (2007) suggest relates to high teaching efficacy. Sarah expressed a belief that disability does not exist; rather, it depends on a person's perspective of difference. Both ECEs understand difference as being the "norm". In

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their view, everyone has unique and diverse abilities. They believe that ableist assumptions of the perfect and ideal human being create exclusion.

Interestingly, Jen felt that she might be diminishing a person by not recognizing the disability as part of the person's identity. Jen seems to recognize the diversity of the individual experience of disability (Rieser, 2006a). Her belief is very much aligned with a social model of disability which demands the right for self-identification as disabled (Obasi, 2008). Although beyond the scope of this study, the cultural and political nature of disability and identity are explored in Oliver (1990).

Both educators convey what Jordan (2007) terms interventionist beliefs. Educators who have interventionist beliefs attribute a child's learning difficulties to the interaction between the child and the environment (Stanovich & Jordan, 1998). Attribution theory explains that an educator's perception of a child is likely to influence her behaviour towards that child (Dobbs & Arnold, 2009). If an educator attributes the child's disability or its associated difficulties to environmental factors, then she will likely focus her efforts on changing the environment to accommodate the individual, rather than expecting the child to conform to the environment. Thus, the environment is understood as not fitting the child rather than the inverse. Social conditions prevent an individual from participating in privileged mainstream activities, which can lead to discrimination. Those with interventionist beliefs also feel a responsibility to create more equitable conditions through the removal of barriers that limit a person's participation in social activities (Jordan, 2007).

Both ECEs expressed their own responsibility for creating an inclusive environment for the children with disabilities. Allan (2005) insists that assuming individual responsibility is part of the ethical work required for inclusion: A set of principles that "tell you in each situation, and

in some way, spontaneously, how you should behave" (Foucault, 1987, p. 117, as cited in Allan, 2005, p. 281). Sarah believes that her responsibility as an educator is to ensure that every part of the learning environment, including her practice, is inclusive for every child. This belief aligns with Slee's (2008) statement that inclusion is about every child, not only children with disabilities. Allan (2006) confirms that inclusion involves looking at how our own actions create barriers to children's participation.

Jen expressed a responsibility for changing others' attitudes about inclusion. This is consistent with the respondents in Evans & Lunt's (2002) research who believe that inclusion is more than integration, it is a matter of attitudes and fundamental values. Rieser (2006b) also describes inclusion as a process involving a change in ethos. This ECE believes that negative attitudes are an overarching barrier to inclusion, such that they affect children's participation in the early childhood program. Inclusion literature is dense with explorations and analyses of others' attitudes towards inclusion, mainly educators' attitudes.

Although the ECEs in the present study expressed positive attitudes towards inclusion, their perceptions of the attitudes of their colleagues suggests that positive attitudes are not necessarily common in early childhood programs. In a review of the literature on ECEs' attitudes towards inclusion, Ostrosky et al. (2006) reported on a study by Richardson in 1996 that identified personal experience, teaching experience, and formal knowledge about teaching as three sources of educators' beliefs about inclusion. Both ECEs in the present study have experience working with children with disabilities, one of which also has extensive experience with inclusion. In addition, both ECEs have a four-year degree in Early Childhood Education – an attainment that exceeds the requirements for working as an early childhood educator.

Although beyond the scope of this study, their level of educational attainment may be a factor in their attitudes towards inclusion and disability.

Experience working with children with disabilities has been found to result in more positive attitudes towards inclusion (Dinnibeil et al., 1998; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009). Sarah expressed feeling afraid prior to her first experience working with children with disabilities in her second year university practicum. Further, she expressed that her view of disability at the time was quite different from her current understanding of it: Her perspective changed from one rooted in a medical model to one that attributes many of the problems associated with disability to the social environment. As reported, Sarah's practicum working with children with disabilities was a valuable experience that increased her efficacy in working with children with disabilities and positively influenced her views about persons with disabilities. This finding supports the results of Dinnibeil et al. (1998) and Devore and Hanley-Maxwell (2000) which indicate that participants who have experience caring for children with special needs have higher levels of confidence. In addition, Forlin et al. (2009) found that experience teaching children with disabilities resulted in more positive attitudes towards inclusion. Sarah's positive attitude towards inclusion is reflected in her description of inclusion as an "easy concept".

Both ECEs feel that observation is an important component of their role as educators. They reported that observing all children provides them with information about each child and supports their efforts in creating an inclusive program. This finding supports Bruns and Mogharreban's (2007) study which found that the majority of ECEs believed that observation was an effective method for learning about the needs and abilities of all children, with and without disabilities, to provide children with meaningful educational experiences.

For Jen, the purpose of education is to encourage children's development of critical thinking skills; a development which she believes extends beyond the responsibility of schools. Brantlinger (1997) suggests that underpinning inclusion is a belief that in education,

> Challenging, practical, and relevant experiences take place and... authentic, important questions are asked. Education should encourage the formation and expression of informed views, lifelong learning, an active search for solutions to serious societal problems, caring for others, and constructive community participation (p. 435).

For Sarah, the purpose of education depends on an educator's pedagogical beliefs. Sarah believes in supporting children as they develop autonomy through trial and error and exploration. In her view, placing limits on children can inhibit necessary exploration and experimentation within the learning environment. While this open approach may benefit some children in the early childhood environment, Mallory and New (1994) suggest that "the assumption that all children are driven to construct their own knowledge, and that they can do so given effective forms of social mediation, is a powerful claim with critical consequences for children with disabilities" (p. 328). Rather, they suggest that each educational setting respond to the diversity of children within it through the appropriation of practices that meet children's learning needs (Mallory & New, 1994).

Both ECEs reported using a child-centered teaching and learning environment. Silverman (2007) claims a child-centered approach is associated with high epistemological beliefs. In his study, Silverman (2007) found that educators who had high-level epistemological beliefs also had positive attitudes towards inclusion. According to Silverman (2007), epistemological beliefs exist along a continuum. At the low end, educators believe that children have innate learning abilities and authoritative sources have the "right" knowledge. At the other extreme, educators

believe children actively construct knowledge. According to this definition, the ECEs in this study hold high epistemological beliefs as identified by their constructivist pedagogical beliefs, which are congruent with their positive attitudes towards inclusion. While some scholars such as Rieser (2006b) insist that a child-centered pedagogy is a requirement for inclusion, others have contrasting views. "For many children, including those with learning difficulties, the development of some skills, abilities, and understandings requires instruction that is explicit, focused, and at times isolated, yet integrated into the larger... context" (Harris & Graham, 1994, p. 240). Further, Cannella (1997) argues, "the construction of child-centeredness as the way in which children learn creates the same truth that is implied by direct instruction as the one method of learning; there is one truth about how children learn" (p. 101).

Based on the ECEs' reports of their in-class practices, children are agents in their own education as they are involved in making decisions about their learning. Jen also described her role in facilitating children's problem-solving skills. She reported that learning and teaching is a shared and reciprocal process between herself and the children. This finding suggests that the ECEs in this study believe in fostering children's agency and autonomy through educator-child collaboration. Dev (1997) suggests that intrinsic motivation is higher when children engage in interesting tasks within their ability level and through their involvement in decision-making.

Both ECEs commented on the politics of inclusion and exclusion. Their statements are interesting and complex and highlight the importance of looking at the social, political, cultural, economic, and historical factors of inclusive education, disability, and identity that empower or disempower certain groups of people (Purdue et al., 2009). Sarah and Jen believe that society privileges what it deems as "normal" and thus any difference is excluded. Britzman (1995) insists that "arguments for inclusion produce the very exclusions they are meant to cure" (p.

158); a position that forces us to reconceptualise what inclusion is about and who is meant to be included. Seeking to "include" a child with disabilities into an existing system or structure implies that the system was never intended for that child in the first place.

Summary.

As the findings show, perceptions of disability and interpretations of inclusion are varied. The educators' beliefs about disability seem to shape how they view inclusion. The educators' reports of inclusion and practice also seem influenced by their pedagogical beliefs. The teachers' views of disability as an individual deficit are congruent with their belief that in some cases, children with disabilities require separation from the regular class so their needs can be met appropriately and the structure of the classroom can be maintained. These children are seen as not fitting into the regular classroom. In contrast, ECEs expressed social beliefs about disability. They attribute disability to individual perspectives, attitudes, and social arrangements. For them, inclusion involves every child, regardless of ability and requires a change in attitudes. Education is child-centered and teaching and learning constitute a partnership between the ECE and the child.

Reid and Weatherly Valle (2004) suggest, "what we think drives what we do, the way we frame difference has personal, material consequences for students" (p. 467). Attributing a child's difficulties in the classroom or program to internal factors can result in feelings of shame or guilt in the child (Weiner, 1986). On the other hand, a belief that learning difficulties are externally attributable will likely result in the educator making changes to the environment in order to effectively include the child. Stoiber, Gettinger, and Goetz (1998) suggest that educators' beliefs can influence how they implement inclusive practices for children with disabilities.

Although these findings are specific to the educators in the present study and therefore cannot be generalized, the marked differences between the teachers and ECEs in this study suggest a possible tension for future teacher-ECE partnerships in Ontario's full-day learning. All educators will present with different professional experiences, education, and beliefs. Although these differences may at first present some tensions, diversity is a natural and necessary component of any social institution. Further, conflict provides opportunity for improvement in practice, relationship building (Achinstein, 2002), and therefore better outcomes for all children.

A blend of perspectives may influence alternate ways of thinking about disability and inclusion, such as through the social relational model as presented in Reindal (2008). In this view, the social and individual factors of disability are understood as an interplay that requires attention to both an inclusive placement and program. Diverse beliefs may provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing and renewal, in which educators discuss their perspectives with one another and work to find a common practice.

In addition, the similarities evident between teachers and ECEs in this study suggest a shared belief about important components of inclusive education for young children, such as parent involvement and collaboration. These similarities may provide a foundation for a successful teaching partnership in full-day learning. Bunch et al. (2005) associate collaboration with an inclusive approach to education. They suggest that a collaborative process involves a diverse team of which parents and educators are primary members (Bunch et al., 2005).

Future research

This study explored educators' perceptions of disability, inclusion, and education through interviews. While these insights are valuable, further research might use naturalistic inquiry to explore how educators' perceptions influence their actual behaviours in the classroom.

Additionally, while both groups expressed positive attitudes towards inclusion, these attitudes were expressed differently between the two educator groups. They conveyed contrasting understandings of disability and different interpretations of inclusion. There are likely an infinite number of reasons for their differences that could be explored through many inquiries. Possible influences on the educators' perceptions were recognized during the study that to provide a basis for further research: Professional and education histories, and the political contexts of the school and early childhood settings.

Ruffolo (2009) explains that each context has its own meaning and expectations for children's behaviour: What is welcomed within one educational space may be discouraged in another. The teachers' beliefs about children, disability, and education may be shaped by the context in which they work (Lieber et al., 1998). Edgar, Patton, and Day-Vines (2002) suggest that a focus on high standards and accountability within the education system diminishes the chances for collaboration, teacher empowerment and agency, and creating equitable learning spaces. Further, Rogers (2007) and Terzi (2005b) note that highly academic teaching and learning approaches, standardized testing, and a hierarchical design are part of the school and regular education classroom structure (Rogers, 2007; Terzi, 2005b). Some claim this structure cannot effectively support inclusion (Wilson, 2002; Lloyd, 2008; Saito, 2003; Slee & Allan, 2001; Slee, 2008) because its homogeneous approach to education cannot accommodate a heterogeneous group of children (Rogers, 2007). Thomas and Loxley (2001) suggest that the structure of schools often drives educators to construe deficit out of difference.

The ECEs' perspectives may also be shaped by their working environments. Early childhood programs in Ontario do not adhere to a standardized curriculum. Many programs employ a constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Best Start Expert Panel, 2007), in

which children are considered apprentices who construct knowledge through active engagement with the environment and the people within it (Mallory & New, 1994). The expectation to learn specific skills as dictated through curriculum does not apply within the early childhood setting, although individual educators may have their own set of expectations for children's learning. This allows ECEs the flexibility to create curriculum based on the needs of the children. However, because there is no standardization for curriculum production or delivery, ECEs may enact this differently from program to program.

Hence, research that compares ECEs' and teachers' perceptions of disability and inclusion in relation to the political nature of their work contexts would provide an interesting and valuable contribution to the education sector.

All children have diverse abilities and learning needs and inclusion involves every child regardless of ability. Therefore, how educators view children is also an important focus for future research in addition to investigations that focus specifically on educators' perceptions of children with disabilities.

Recommendations

As previously noted, Zaretsky (2005) insists that educators are often unaware of the theoretical foundations of their perceptions and practices. Common logic suggests that having an understanding of why we have certain beliefs in addition to knowing what those beliefs are will lead to better-informed practices for educators in classrooms and early childhood programs. This may be supported through regular professional development opportunities for educators through which they can explore and reflect on their own belief systems and understandings of certain phenomena, in particular, disability and inclusion in relation to educational theories.

In addition, it is the researcher's belief that the focus of those involved in inclusive education requires shifting from an identity politics, in which a focus is on the child with a disability, to a politics of identity in which greater attention is given to the social, historical, economic, political, and cultural factors that marginalize persons with disabilities (Ruffolo, 2009). As Allan (2005) and Slee (2001) insist, inclusion is the responsibility of every person, both in education and the broader society.

Fullan (2007) insists that successful educational change is multidimensional. Ensuring the success of a new educational program involves three interdependent components: New or revised materials, a change in teaching approaches, and a possible alteration in beliefs (Fullan, 2007). These aspects of educational change exemplify the value in involving a range of experiences, perspectives, and ideas: Teachers and ECEs may draw from each other's strengths as they work through the change process. Therefore, regular collaboration and receptiveness to each other's views will strengthen the possibility of successful teacher-ECE partnerships in full-day learning.

Limitations

In addition to the methodological limitations described earlier, the main limitation in this study is the use of self-reported perceptions as data. Although past studies have linked educators' beliefs with their actual practices, we cannot assume in every situation that stated beliefs will reflect actual behaviour.

The focus of this research was on educators' perceptions of their own practice. Although brief information on participant demographics were collected, this study did not explore potential influences of those perceptions, such as educator training programs or work environments.

Conclusion

The most significant finding in this study was the interplay between the educators' beliefs about disability and their interpretations of inclusion. Understandings of disability as an individual deficit aligned with inclusion being dependent on the focal child. Social explanations of disability contributed to understandings of inclusion as socially mediated.

In addition, the differences between the teachers and ECEs in this study are striking and present dichotomous perspectives about disability consisting of both medical and social orientations as described in Rieser (2006a).

These findings have implications for the inclusion of children with disabilities in full-day learning, in which they may be in a regular classroom under the care of an ECE and elementary teacher. Educators' perspectives of disability and inclusion, although varied, may serve to complement each others' existing practices, providing they can embrace potential conflict, and engage in perspective-taking and critical reflection (Achinstein, 2002). An understanding of both the individual and social conditions of disability will likely highlight the importance of inclusion both in context and content as a combined, interdependent process. The world is characterized by diversity and irregularity (Slee, 2008); therefore, this process is imperative for the education of all children.

Evans and Lunt (2002) insist that inclusion is about the kind of education we value and the kind of society we want to create and live within. Critical theorists such as Giroux believe the purpose of education is social transformation (Achinstein, 2002). If homogeneity is desired that is what we will strive for and inclusion will remain a complex and ambiguous concept. In contrast, understanding inclusion as a systemic, social process will encourage critical thought represented in the following quote:

What if we think of the 'problem' differently? Acknowledge that we can never have full diversity... acknowledge that the practice of including more voices masks the real problem? What if we acknowledge that the 'problem' is not a lack of diversity but a resistance to diversity (and an insistence on maintaining certain categories of privilege)? What if our question was not, *who has yet to be included, but rather, why are certain voices silenced in the first place*? (Kumashiro, 2001, p. 11, original emphasis).

Hello! My name is Colleen Thornton. I am a Graduate student at Ryerson University in Toronto. My program of study is Early Childhood Studies.

As part of the requirements of the program, I will be conducting a major research project involving educators' perceptions of disabilities and inclusion in early childhood learning environments. The title of my research study is:

ECE and Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Disability and Inclusion: A Comparative Analysis.

I am requesting your participation in the study, which if you agree to participate, will involve the following:

- 2 interviews (1 hour each in length), at a time and location of your choice, approximately 1-2 weeks apart
- Completion of 1 questionnaire (approximately 10 minutes) before the start of the first interview

The questionnaire requests information on your current and/or prior teaching experience. The interviews will consist of in-depth questions regarding your perceptions of education, disability, and inclusion.

All the information you provide will be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of this research study. The information will be kept secure within the researcher's home, accessible only to the researcher. The information will be shared with the researcher's supervisor only for the purposes of academic guidance; however, names will not be disclosed.

The researcher does not foresee any risks associated with participating in this study. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to read and sign a detailed consent form explaining all aspects of your participation in the study. If you agree to participate by signing the consent form you hold the right to withdraw your consent at any point during the study and the information you provided will be destroyed and not included in the study.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Colleen Thornton
Graduate Student, Ryerson University
Master of Arts Candidate in Early Childhood Studies
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416-691-3612

Consent Agreement
Major Research Project
Ryerson University
Masters of Early Childhood Studies

You are being asked to participate in a research project exploring inclusive education for children with disabilities. It is important to read the following information before you give your consent.

Title of the Study
ECE and Elementary Teachers' Perceptions of Disability and Inclusion: A Comparative Analysis

Purpose of the Study
This research is an assignment towards the completion of a major research project as part of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree program at Ryerson University. The purpose of this research is to discover how educators' conceptualizations of disability inform their views of inclusion.

Researcher
Colleen Thornton
Graduate Student, Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University

Under the supervision of
Dr. Kathryn Underwood, Assistant Professor
School of Early Childhood Education
Ryerson University
kunderwood@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, ext. 2519

Description of the Study
Your view of disability and inclusive education will be explored through two in-depth one-on-one interviews each approximately one hour in length. The interviews will take place at a time and location most convenient for you. The interviews will involve the following components:
- Knowledge of and experience with children who have disabilities
- Knowledge of and experience with inclusive education
- Description of your professional role in inclusive educational settings

In addition, at the start of the first interview, you will be asked to complete a short questionnaire requesting information on your current professional context (non-specific) and professional and educational background. Please note: the interview will elicit your views only and will not be taken as a representation of your professional agency/centre/school.

What is Experimental in this Study
The interviews are non-experimental in nature. The only experimental aspect of this research is the gathering of information for the purpose of analysis.

Risk or Discomforts
There are minimal risks and discomforts associated with this research study. As many of the questions elicit personal views and experiences, you may experience discomfort in responding to questions. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the interview, you may discontinue your participation.

Benefits of the Study
The research results will benefit educators and administrators working in elementary schools, as they will provide insight on primary teacher and early childhood educator teaching teams in full day learning, an early learning and care strategy initiated by the Ontario Government scheduled to begin September 2010. The interview may also benefit you as it will provide you with the opportunity to engage in self-reflection of your beliefs, views, language and practice of inclusive education. I cannot guarantee, however, that you will receive any benefits from participating in this study.

Confidentiality
The researcher will protect your responses throughout the process of this study. A fictitious name will be used for you and any specific identifiable characteristics will be altered. The researcher will keep your perceptions and opinions strictly confidential. The researcher may use direct quotes from you in the final report but they will not be attributable to you or reveal your identity.

Incentives to Participants
You will be given a coffee card with a $5 value for participating in the study.

Costs and Compensation for Participants
There are no costs or compensation for your participation in this study.

Data Storage
Transcriptions and written notes based on audio data will be kept in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher. All consent forms will be stored separately from the data. The researcher will provide you with the audio file on CD of the interview if requested. All data will be destroyed within two years of completion of the study.

Voluntary nature of Participation
Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether you would like to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Education, the agency where you are employed, or the researcher. If you choose to participate you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty.

Location of the Study
The interview(s) will be located in an environment of your choice that provides you with visual and aural privacy. Some examples include: your home, a quiet neighbourhood park, or a private office space within a library.

Questions about the Study

The data in this study will be used for the researcher's major research project in completion of her degree. The data may also be used for future publications or presentations. If you have any questions about the study you may ask them now. If you have any questions later you may contact:

Researcher
Colleen Thornton
Graduate Student, Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies
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Assistant Professor, School of Early Childhood Education
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If you have any questions or concerns regarding ethical aspects of the study, you may contact:

Ryerson Ethics Board
Alex Karabanow
Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation
Ryerson University
alex.karabanow@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, ext. 7112

Agreement

Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read the information in this consent agreement.
- You would like to participate in the study.
- You are aware that you can withdraw this consent at any time during the study without penalty by contacting the researcher.
- You have been given a copy of this consent form with all contact information.
- You have been informed that by signing this consent form you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   Date

Audiotape Recording Agreement

Your signature below indicates that you are aware that this interview will be audiotape recorded and verbatim transcriptions will be later made from the audiotapes. It also indicates that at any time during the interview you may withdraw your consent. If this occurs the interview will be discontinued and your information will not be used in the final analysis and report.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____   _____

Signature of Researcher   Date

Current Context and Background Information of Participants involved in the research

This questionnaire is intended to gather information about your current work environment and your professional background for the purposes of the stated research (refer to the consent form). If you do not understand a question, please ask the researcher for clarification.

A) CURRENT CONTEXT

QUESTION	RESPONSE
1. What area of the city do you work in?	
2. How many children are in your class/program?	
3. How many teachers are in your program/class?	
4. What are the ages of the children you work with?	
5. How many of the children you work with have special education needs?	
6. What are the ages of the children who have special education needs?	
7. What are the special education needs of the children in your class/program?	
8. Have the child(ren) been formally identified as have special education needs?	

B) PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND

QUESTION	RESPONSE
1. How many years teaching experience do you have?	
2. How many years experience do you have teaching children with disabilities?	
3. What is your educational background?	
4. What is your professional development (PD) experience? **Please indicate if it is general or specialized, mandated or voluntary PD.**	
5. Why did you become an educator?	

1. What do you think the purpose of education is? Why?

2. What is a typical day like for you as a teacher/ECE?

3. Tell me about how your classroom/program is inclusive.

4. Here is a definition of disability. What do think of it?

An individual's inability to fully function in a particular aspect of life because of a mental, social, emotional and/or physical impairment.

A state of being an individual with an impairment experiences as a result of inadequate social and environmental provisions to accommodate the individual so that (s)he may experience the same life quality as an individual without an impairment.

5. Here is a definition of inclusion. What do you like/dislike about it? Why?
"...values, policies, and practices that support the right of every (child) and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society". The defining features are: access, participation, and supports (DEC, 2009, p. 52).

6. Tell me about a child with a disability in your program/classroom with whom you have been successful.
       Probe: What made the experience successful?

7. Tell me about some of the challenges you have experienced in providing inclusive education.
       Probe: What, if any, barriers did you encounter?

8. What is your opinion on segregated special education? Why?

9. On a personal level, how do you feel about inclusion?
       Probes: What are the benefits?
                     What are the drawbacks?
                     If you were given the choice, would you include children with disabilities in your classroom/program?

10. What is your personal experience with disability?
       Probe: Is there anyone in your personal life who has a disability?

I am going to read a short vignette of a child with a disability in full day learning and ask you some questions regarding your role as an educator in this scenario.

Vignette:
It is the start of the school year and the commencement of Full Day Learning (interviewer will provide a description). You have a child in your classroom who has been identified as having Autism. The child's family plans to use the "full-day" option, meaning the child will be under the supervision of the school from 8 am until 5 pm each weekday. You are team teaching with a(n) (ECE/teacher) whom you have just become acquainted with and who also has experience with Autism. The child has an occupational therapist who plans to visit once per week. Because the child's parents both work full time, little time will be available in which to communicate with them. The child often has difficulty interacting socially with other children; she prefers to work and play independently. During large group times and high volume activities, the child often displays frustration, speaks loudly and forcefully, and requires physical space.

What is your role in this child's education? What are your concerns? What supports would you need to be successful?

1. Give individual examples. Ask for reflection/confirmation of interpretation.

2. What general expectations do you have for the children in your classroom?
    a. What expectations do you have for the child with disabilities/special needs?
    b. What factors have influenced your expectations?

3. Can you provide any examples of when the children in your class have been exposed to disability? Tell me about this.

4. What do you think is fair to expect of teachers? What do you think expectations of teachers should be?

5. I feel that every teacher has unique qualities and strengths. What do you believe is unique about your teaching?

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