

LC
4019.2
F74
2010

**THE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM:
PERSPECTIVES OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER**

by

Brenda Frey

Bachelor of Applied Arts, Early Childhood Education, Ryerson University, 1982

A Major Research Paper

presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the Program of

Early Childhood Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2010

© Brenda Frey 2010

PROPERTY OF
RYERSON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this major research paper.

I authorize Ryerson University to lend this paper to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Signature

I further authorize Ryerson University to reproduce this paper by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research

<

Signature

THE INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM: THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER

© Brenda Frey, 2010

Master of Arts
Early Childhood Studies
Ryerson University

ABSTRACT

This study explored through naturalistic inquiry three early childhood teacher's perceptions of inclusion and in-class practices in the inclusive preschool classroom. Interviews and in-class observations were used for the purpose of data collection. A social constructivist lens was used to analyze the data. Drawing from a social model of inclusion and theory of attribution framework, the results revealed that inclusion is multifaceted. An understanding and commitment to the ideology of inclusion must occur in conjunction with inclusive in-class strategies and techniques to create successful inclusive programs. This study suggests recommendations for change must be made at the government level, the post-secondary education level and at the community level. These reforms need to be made collaboratively to ensure that all stakeholders have a common understanding and vision for inclusion.

Key words:

inclusion, early childhood teachers, perceptions, in-class practices, naturalistic inquiry.

Acknowledgements

To Elaine Frankel: Thank you for all your time, support, patience and expertise.

To Robert Rinkoff: Thank you for all your support and confidence. You are a great listener and a friend. Your expertise on all topics and your fabulous sense of humour are always an appreciated distraction.

To Rachel Langford: Thank you for always finding the time to listen.

To my parents and my family, thank you for being so supportive, I couldn't have done it without you.

To my sister Andrea, you are amazing and I love you dearly.

To my friends in Ottawa, thank you for your visits, your patience and all your great advice.

To Colleen Thornton: We are such an amazing team! I will miss you. Thank you for your friendship, it was a fantastic year.

To Marie Hodgson: Thank you for your friendship, your support and your sense of humour. We did it!

To the CIHR Emerging Team: HELPS Inc.: Thank you for starting me on this journey. The research teams' collective knowledge and ideas were an integral part of this research.

To the participants: Thank you for your time and your thoughts. This research could not have happened without you.

Dedication

To my wonderful daughters,

Emily and Katie

Table of Contents

CHAPTER I

Introduction.....	1
Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.....	5
Literature Review.....	6
Teachers' Experiences	9
Teacher Qualifications.....	11
Resource Supports	12

CHAPTER II

Methods.....	16
Operational Definitions.....	16
Scope.....	16
Approach.....	17
Setting and Participants.....	17
Data Collection	19
Role of the Researcher	20
Reliability.....	20
Data Analysis	21

CHAPTER III

Findings.....	23
Personal Efficacy	23
Inclusive Program	32
Role of the Educator	39
Challenges to Inclusion.....	46

CHAPTER IV

Discussion.....	48
Limitations	57
Future Research	58
Recommendations.....	59
Conclusion	59
Appendix A- Letter of Information.....	62
Appendix B – Early Childhood Teacher’s Consent Form	63
Appendix C – Parent Consent Form	66
Appendix D- Initial Interview.....	69
Appendix E – Guideline for Inclusive Teaching Practices	70
Appendix F – Post-Observation Interview	75
References.....	76

CHAPTER I

Introduction

Inclusion is a philosophy that respects and values the diversity of all individuals. According to the Division for Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009),

Early childhood inclusion embodies the values, policies and practices that support the right of every infant and young 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 desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports. (p.52)

In the 1980's with the increased concern for 'human rights' a move was made towards inclusion, an opportunity for children with disabilities to be integrated into regular classrooms (UNESCO, 2005). Over the past 30 years the shift towards inclusion has been met with obstacles, barriers and challenges. To ensure full inclusion collaboration between all the stakeholders must be a part of the transformation process (Bunch, Finnegan, Humphries, Dore & Dore, 2005). Early childhood teachers must feel that they are contributing to the re-conceptualization of learning environments that reflect diversity and inclusion. One group whose voices have not been strongly heard in the process are early childhood teachers. Many frontline early childhood teachers already practicing in the field have not had the opportunity to discuss their fears and concerns about inclusion and whether they have the skills and knowledge to implement an inclusive program. Qualitative research into early childhood teacher's perceptions of inclusion and their in-class practices are limited, especially in Canada. Frankel (2004) posits that lack of government funding, inconsistencies in post secondary course content

and teacher attitude towards the value of inclusion create barriers in attaining full inclusion in the preschool classroom.

Childcare in Canada has struggled for more than 40 years to survive the changes in the political, economic and social climate. Disparities in political agendas, changes in workforce demographics and economic downturns have left childcare as a fragmented and underfunded system. Reliant on user fees and the marketplace, childcare struggles to sustain quality programs, not to mention reflect full inclusion. According to Friendly and Prentice (2009), “In 2008 the Canadian childcare system ranked at the bottom when compared to the programs of other developed countries. In a country of close to five million children of 0-12 years of age, Canada now has fewer than 900,000 regulated childcare spaces” (p. 1). Currently in Ontario, the underfunded, fragmented childcare system poses challenges for most families as they struggle to secure limited childcare spaces. For families with children with disabilities the challenge is greater as they are often turned away because the centre cannot meet the needs of the child (Killoran, Tymon & Frempong, 2007).

According to the Ontario Human Rights Code, Part I, Section 1- every person has the right to equal treatment when accessing services and facilities, without discrimination based on disability. In the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) Article 23 states, “a mentally or physically disabled child should enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child’s active participation in the community” (p.11).

In Ontario, the Day Nurseries Act (DNA) is the regulatory legislation for all licensed childcare facilities (Ontario Government, 1990). The DNA’s standards, regulations and policies are designed to ensure a certain standard of care for children between the ages of 0 and 12.

Currently the DNA reflects policies and regulations that are integration specific however the choice to include children with disabilities is still up to individual centres (Ontario Government, 1990). The rights of children with disabilities are often denied because many childcare centres are not prepared to offer an inclusive program.

Teachers are a key component in an inclusive classroom. Their attitudes, experiences, beliefs and perceptions regarding children with disabilities inform their practices and the success of the inclusive program (Leatherman, 2007; Niemeier & Proctor, 2002; Smith & Smith, 2000).

Richardson (1996) suggests that attitudes and beliefs are “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” (p. 102). Richardson (1996) goes on to define beliefs as “psychologically held understandings, premises, or propositions about the world that are felt to be true” (p. 103). Jordan and Stanovich (2004) contend that differences in teaching practices are connected to disparities in teacher beliefs and attitudes. They suggest teachers’ beliefs on the nature of learning and disabilities must be altered before there can be changes in teaching practices.

Some of the challenges for teachers in the field of early childhood education have been linked to a misunderstanding of the terminology, surrounding programs that are designed for children with disabilities (Lieber, Capell, Sandall, Wolfberg, Horn & Beckman, 1998). The implementation of inclusive programs into existing preschools that are designed to meet the developmental stages of typical children has become problematic. Inclusion is about designing a program where the child is a participant, engaging in activities that have been modified to address his/her needs. Inclusive practice requires qualified staff with a pluralistic approach so that adjustments can be made to both the activities and method of instruction (Filler & Xu, 2006). Teacher interventions and modifications to the inclusive classroom are essential in order

to ensure positive social interactions between children with disabilities and their peers. (Arceneaux Rheams & Bains, 2005).

Teacher interventions that embed child focused instructions in the daily activities and routines are critical when teaching skills to children with disabilities (Devore & Russell, 2007). According to McLeskey and Waldron (2007) inclusive classrooms are successful when children's disabilities are perceived in such a manner that the adaptations and modifications become a natural part of the regular classroom: An environment where differences become the usual and or the ordinary.

When inclusive programs are successful the benefits are numerous for all the stakeholders. (Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi & Shelton, 2004). Diamond and Carpenter (2000) found that typical children in the inclusive classroom benefitted from developing helping strategies, being more aware of differences and being open to inclusion. Odom (2000) describes children with disabilities as performing better and developing more positive social interactions with their peers when they are included as active members in the inclusive early childhood environment. However the research that explores the application of the teachers' perception of inclusion in the classroom is limited (Ostrosky, Laumann & Hsieh, 2006). The purpose of this study was to explore through naturalistic inquiry, early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and to examine through interviews and observations their inclusive preschool practices. Much of the current research discusses teachers' perceptions of inclusion by utilizing surveys and questionnaires however there is limited qualitative research that explores both the teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their in-class practices.

The following research questions guided this study as it explores teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their teaching strategies and practices in the inclusive program: What does

inclusion mean to the early childhood teacher? What does an inclusive preschool program look like to the early childhood teacher? How are the early childhood teachers' teaching strategies in an inclusive classroom different from the regular classroom? How competent does the early childhood teacher feel working with children with disabilities?

The teacher is pivotal in the success of the program therefore, his/her voice must be heard to ensure positive outcomes for all children.

Theoretical and Contextual Frameworks

Through a naturalistic inquiry research design, this study explored the participants' experiences and perceptions of the inclusive preschool classroom. Using a social constructivist approach to analyze the data, the social and historical context of the individuals' subjective perceptions of inclusion can be examined. Truth comes from the individual's interpretation of the event. The subjective meaning or the participant's perception is created through social interactions that are influenced by historical and cultural norms (Creswell, 2009).

According to Foucault (as cited in Graham, 2006) the goal in understanding a concept is not to find blame or the one truth, but rather to question long standing practices and generalized assumptions. It is through the social constructivist lens that the rich descriptive data can be analyzed and meaning can be extracted to better understand the constructs that are present in the inclusive preschool programs. The social constructivist develops a theory or a pattern of meaning through understanding the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2009).

To further the analysis of inclusion in the preschool classroom, the social model of inclusion aids in illuminating early childhood teachers' perceptions and practices. Grenier (2010) states:

The social model centers on the concept of accommodation and the need to restructure mainstream schooling practices to ensure that all learners belong to an

educational community. While the model does not deny the existence of impairments and /or physiological differences, judgments are not necessarily imbued with the same sense of good and bad displayed by the medical model (p. 389).

Rieser (2006) examines 'inclusion' within the context of the social model. " It is a continuing process involving a major change in the school ethos and is about building a school community that accepts and values difference....it is about a change in course content not just a change in course delivery" (p.168).

The theory of attribution intersects with the social model of inclusion when examining teacher's perceptions and practices in the inclusive classroom. Theory of attribution claims that behaviours that occur in the future are partially controlled by past experiences. Derived from Social Learning theory, theory of attribution examines locus of control. A teacher who attributes the behaviour to the environment perceives the cause to be unstable, dynamic and external to the child (Weiner, Nierenberg & Goldstein, 1976). Therefore, ensuring a social model of inclusion where the program and curriculum delivery meets different learning styles involves teachers' attributing children's behaviours to external factors.

Using a social constructivist perspective and drawing from a social model of inclusion and theory of attribution framework this study explored both the teachers' perceptions of and practices in, the inclusive preschool classroom.

Literature Review

The quality and success of inclusive programs is contingent on many factors including administrative support, resources, training, (Leatherman, 2007), collaboration with professionals (Smith & Smith, 2000; Varlier & Vuran, 2006), teacher attitudes and family partnerships (Odom, 2000; Seery, 2004).

According to Lieber et al. (1998) early childhood teachers believe in the concept of inclusion, however how they define inclusion is not so definitive. In addition, they may have a common understanding of the value of inclusion as a precursor for all children to develop positive social interactions, cognitive and physical skills but they may not agree on how to facilitate the development of these domains.

Lieber et al. (1998) studied 29 early childhood teachers from inclusive classrooms. Through observations and interviews they examined ways in which teachers' perspectives are presented in the classroom. It appeared from the results that the majority of the teachers were not up to date on the current knowledge and application of inclusive practices found in the literature. These teachers practiced a universal approach to teaching, in which group instruction consisted of a set lesson plan. The teachers, who understood inclusion to mean diversity in teaching, saw the students as individuals and were able to adapt activities so children with different learning styles and abilities could participate.

Teaching practices are an integral component when exploring teachers' perceptions of the challenges and concerns in implementing inclusive programs. Lieber et al. (1998) suggests that past practice and ideologies which were adopted and embedded in their teaching styles are difficult to change, and therefore still prevalent in the classroom.

To further examine this phenomenon, teachers' perceptions must be explored. The expectations of the child in the classroom are subject to the teachers experience, qualifications, training and interpretation. Developing and implementing a set of skills that are considered essential for a child with disabilities to enter the school system are subject to a teachers' understanding of inclusion and inclusive practices. Kemp and Carter (2005) found there was a discrepancy between the trained observer and the teacher when interpreting the acquisition of

expected functional skills in the inclusive kindergarten classroom. A child sitting quietly in group time but not engaged in the lesson would be rated high for attending by the kindergarten teacher but would receive a low rating from the trained observer for on task behaviour. The kindergarten teacher focuses on the child's compliance, which is considered nondisruptive. The trained observer focuses on the child's lack of engagement in the activity and sees this as not attending.

A teacher's view of the child is filtered through preconceptions which culminate from past practice and experience. The theory of attribution can be examined in the context of the learning environment. How teachers perceive learning difficulties in children and whether they attribute the difficulty to the child or to the environment impacts on how the teacher behaves in relation to that particular child. Christenson, Ysseldyke, Wang and Algozzine's (1983) study examined elementary school teachers' attributions for problems and how that translates in making referrals for special education. The study showed that elementary school teachers attributed a higher percentage of referrals to problems in the home or to the child's disability than they did to classroom deficits or deficiencies. The research postulates that elementary school teachers who attribute their students' lack of motivation to the class content or teaching techniques are more inclined to initiate interventions. Dobbs & Arnold's (2009) study found that preschool teachers gave more commands to children whom they perceived as having greater behavioural problems. The behaviour of the teacher is connected to the teacher's perception therefore a teacher who views a child as lazy could conclude that a completely different and perhaps more punitive teacher behaviour or reaction is warranted than if he/she viewed the child as shy.

Teachers' experiences.

Positive experiences with inclusion assist teachers to develop positive attitudes which in turn play a significant role in promoting successful inclusive programs (Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Niemeyer & Proctor, 2002; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Cross et al. (2004) investigated centres where children were already participating in successful inclusive programs. Their research explored the practices and procedures that were essential in promoting full inclusion. In addition to strong positive leadership, parent-teacher partnerships, collaboration between therapists and teachers, positive attitudes toward the child and the concept of inclusion were essential for success. Positive attitudes expressed by all of the adults in the child's life were critical. The findings revealed that in order for the continued support for inclusive programs teachers need positive attitudes, experiences and observations that reflect the child's ongoing success.

Leatherman (2007) expands on the concept of positive experiences by studying eight preschool teachers who held a positive attitude on inclusion and believed that they had successful classrooms. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors which were integral to success rather than the barriers. The teachers in this study regarded inclusion as a positive for both the children and the teachers. They viewed their classrooms as dynamic learning environments where all children had an opportunity to grow. The participants in this study believed positive previous experiences will affect in-class attitudes. In addition factors such as specialized training and a reliable support system will promote success in the inclusive classroom. Devore and Russell (2007) discovered that positive attitudes, effective team building and problem-solving in a rural community were instrumental in implementing an inclusive program.

Brady and Woolfson (2008) examined the influence of teaching experience, qualifications, teaching efficacy and teachers' attributions about children with disabilities. Through questionnaires they found that mainstream teachers with more than 15 years of experience in the general education classroom looked at disabilities as internally attributable – the child owns the problem. Recently trained teachers saw the disability or learning difficulty as a reaction to the external learning environment and or the teacher. However, if the general education classroom teacher had experience working with children with disabilities they were more likely to adapt their teaching styles and learning environments to meet the needs of the child.

Niemeyer and Proctor (2002) looked at preschool teacher experiences and competencies as they relate to children with disabilities. Their research stemmed from the idea that the development of positive beliefs is an evolution, a process whereby attitudes can be formed before the inclusive experience and or after the experience. Their study involved six pre-service teachers; all of them were placed in inclusive classrooms, 3 had no experience while the remaining three had 2-4 years experience. The results found that any personal or professional experiences the teachers had in regards to inclusion tailored their beliefs about children with disabilities. They appreciated the importance of the pre-service course curriculum but it was the application of theory that made it valuable. Self efficacy and competency were achieved through positive experiences embedded in the pre-service student placements in successful inclusive programs

Leatherman and Niemeyer (2005) explored the differences in class practices between in-service and pre-service preschool teachers. It was the intent of the study to sample participants from the same University program. The results from the study suggest that teachers who receive an education with practical application through placements have a more positive attitude

regarding inclusive practices. These findings support the existing research that positive experiences influence successful inclusive practices

Experiences that are challenging may alter the perceptions of the teachers creating barriers and limits to creating fully inclusive programs. Seery's (2000) research examined the participants' year long challenge with an emerging inclusive program in an existing preschool setting. The teachers were interviewed at the beginning and end of the year. The results indicated the initial reactions of positive attitudes and optimism were altered by the year-long experience. Through the course of the study the teachers became aware of certain limitations and constraints such as concerns around teacher-child ratios, training and support.

Teacher qualifications.

The qualifications an early childhood teacher brings to the inclusive program will affect both his/her perception of inclusion and practice. Bruns, and Mogharreban (2007) investigated 120 early childhood teachers' perspectives on effective inclusive practices. The results revealed that although over 70% had knowledge of IEP goals and objectives, fewer than 65% believed they had the ability to implement them in their classes. These findings may suggest the perceived ability is a barrier when implementing best practices in the inclusive programs. It may also suggest that there is a gap between the knowledge and the practical application.

Clough and Nutbrown (2004) found similar results. Out of 94 participants who responded to questions regarding views on inclusion, 66 believed they had adequate professional development yet out of the 94, 60 of them believed that there could be limitations to inclusion based on the child's disability.

Seery's research (2004) involved 22 teaching professionals who worked in the same preschool program. Out of the 22, 16 had their master's degree, three had their bachelor's

degree, one had an associate degree and one had a high school diploma. The results, based on two interviews, one at the beginning and one at the end of the year indicated that the teachers' concerns about successful inclusion increased as the year progressed. The teachers questioned whether their professional qualifications were adequate enough to meet the needs of children with complex disabilities. The results of the study suggested that in-service training and pre-service programs at an undergraduate and graduate level that target specific competencies for inclusive programs would help in increasing the comfort levels of the teachers.

Smith and Smith's (2000) results are similar to the rest of the literature. Two groups of three participants were selected based on whether they saw themselves as successful or unsuccessful in the inclusive classroom. It was revealed through the interview process that a bachelor's degree was not considered helpful, however a master's degree was seen to be more beneficial.

Lieber et al.'s study (1998) used both interviews and observations to collect data on teachers' perspectives and in class practices. The results revealed there was not a clear relationship between the teachers' qualifications and their ability to create an inclusive classroom that was designed to meet the learning needs of all the children in the class.

Resource supports.

Specialized training, professional development and a reliable support system were indicators of successful classrooms. Teachers perceive in-service training as a support that relates directly to designing program plans that meet the needs of children with disabilities (Baker-Ericzen, Mueggenborg & Shea, 2000; Mulvihill, Shearer & Van Horn, 2002).

Bruns and Mogharreban (2007) discovered that although the preschool teachers felt they had knowledge they did not feel they had the skills to implement that knowledge at a practical level. The teachers also felt they needed to acquire specialized skills such as behavioural strategies and

positioning techniques in order to address the individual needs in the classroom. In cases where these teachers were expected to perform these skills there was a high percentage who felt that strategies and adaptations were difficult to prepare.

These findings were supported by Clough and Nutbrown (2004) whose research took place in the UK. A survey was used to uncover the issues for early childhood teachers who are presently working in inclusive classrooms. Key structures were generated from the data. Professional development was seen as a cornerstone in effective inclusive programs. The teachers felt that there either wasn't enough opportunity for professional development or that the training was inadequate. There was also a demand for professional development at a higher advanced educational level.

Baker-Ericzen et al.'s research (2009) examined training and how it impacted on teachers' perceptions of competence towards inclusion. A modularized inclusive training program (KIT) was used. The research was conducted on a diverse sample of early childhood teachers. Questionnaires were administered before and after the training. The training consisted of four sections and participants were able to attend as many sections as they wished. After the training the overall results showed a shift in the teachers' perceptions. The teachers felt more competent and they had a more positive attitude towards inclusion. The results suggest the more training the more significant the gains. Unlike the studies that discussed teacher qualifications and their impact on practices the results from this study suggest that specialized education has an effect. Whether there is a difference in teachers obtaining it within their degree or diploma program or during in-service training may be of some significance.

Seery (2000) notes there is a need to first identify the specific competencies in inclusive classrooms and then to highlight them in both pre-service undergraduate, diploma programs and in-service training.

Mulvihill et al. (2002) used quantitative research to investigate the relationship between specialized training and experience and preschool teachers' perceptions of inclusion. The teachers who responded to the survey were working in inclusive settings. The results indicated that the need for funding, equipment and training ranked high for the participants. Teachers who had specialized training perceived fewer needs and barriers. It was also noted through data analyses that teachers who had a positive attitude towards inclusion were more likely to attend specialized training which in turn enables more children with disabilities to be enrolled in inclusive classrooms

A well-defined and consistent support system is essential for a successful inclusive preschool program. The collaboration among teachers, consultants, parents and administrators is vital in ensuring the integrity of the program (Seery, 2004; Varlier & Vuran 2006). The teachers' perceptions of a successful inclusive classroom can be affected by the quality and availability of this support system. In Leatherman's (2007) research, success was equated with outside support. Teachers who were positive about inclusion believed a reliable support system was an important element in the inclusive classroom. Frankel's (2006) research states that the leadership styles and interpersonal skills of the consultant are as important as the expertise they bring to the inclusive program. Smith & Smith (2002) support this view by examining what works in the classroom and what gets in the way. Their research which studied teachers who perceived themselves as either successful or unsuccessful, revealed training, class load,

administrative support, time and collaborative planning with special education consultants were all important.

In conclusion most of the research that has been conducted in this area has focused on early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion as they relate to external factors such as pre-service/in-service training, resources and supports. Although these external factors play a significant role in the teacher's perceptions of inclusion, it is the teacher's beliefs, their personal knowledge that determines their spirit as a teacher (Kagan, 1992). The research that explores early childhood teachers' attitudes and behaviours towards children with disabilities is limited. It is the theory of attributions that aids in understanding assumptions, experiences and beliefs surrounding children's behaviours, abilities and disabilities. To have a clearer insight into the early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion in-class observations must be conducted in conjunction with the interview process.

CHAPTER II

Method

Through a process of interviews and observations the following research questions guided this investigation of early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their inclusive preschool practices: What does inclusion mean to the early childhood teacher? What does an inclusive preschool classroom look like to the teacher? How are the early childhood teachers' teaching strategies in the inclusive classroom different from the regular classroom? How competent does the early childhood teacher feel working with children with disabilities?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study the term 'teacher' will be used to describe early childhood personnel who work in preschool programs. The term 'inclusive preschool classroom' will be used to describe a program for 2- 4 year olds in a regulated licensed childcare facility which has at least one child with an identified developmental disability.

For this study the operational definition of a child with special needs/disability will be as follows:

Children whose disabilities/disorders/health impairment meet your province's eligibility criteria for additional support or funding in early childhood settings.....Children with obvious special needs/disabilities on waiting lists for formal assessments, who have been identified by centre staff as well as at least one outside professional, are considered to have "presumptive diagnoses" and are to be included in your count of children with special needs (Irwin, 2009).

Scope

This qualitative study was conducted in an urban area and involved three childcare centres. The focus was on the teachers working in inclusive preschool programs. The results of this study cannot be generalized to the broader population of early childhood teachers. However, the

results will be used to extend the existing body of knowledge on teachers' perceptions of inclusion.

Approach

A qualitative naturalistic inquiry was used to explore the inclusive preschool classroom. Naturalistic inquiry requires the researcher to conduct the study in the natural setting. Real life situations are studied as they naturally happen instead of conducting studies in laboratory settings where outcomes can be controlled (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study examined early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their in-class practices. By using naturalistic inquiry I was able to study the teachers' perceptions of inclusion through open ended semi-structured interviews which allowed the participant enough scope to explain his/her perspective on the issue of inclusion. The research design involved 3 stages: initial individual interview, in-class observations and a 2nd individual interview which involved the data from the observations. I was able to observe the teachers' in-class practices in the natural setting of the childcare. My presence was that of a non-participatory observer. The familiar setting allowed me to observe the teacher within her/his usual teaching environment.

This research design involved 3 stages: 1. Exploring the participants' perspectives, experiences, attitudes and beliefs on inclusion. 3. Observing teaching practices and behaviours. 3. Further examination of the participants' in-class teaching strategies and techniques.

Setting and Participants

Purposeful sampling was used in order to ensure that the settings and participants involved delivered an inclusive preschool program. The recruitment process occurred in the community that I have worked in for the past thirty years. Three teachers were recruited from three different childcare centres. The recruitment process involved telephone conversations and visits to

childcare centres in the community. After the initial telephone contact to ensure that the centre met the requirements for the study, I visited each of the centres and spoke to the Directors. A letter was presented to them (Appendix A), which outlined the purpose of the study and the protocol for collecting data. The Directors approached the staff in the inclusive classrooms, showed them the letter and offered them my contact number.

I received four phone calls regarding interest however one teacher had a conflict with a room switch and was unable to participate. Each of the inclusive classrooms had one child identified with a developmental disability. All three inclusive preschool classrooms were receiving ongoing support from an agency in the community that developed resources and supports for children with disabilities.

After a brief discussion over the phone appointments were set up to sign the consent form (Appendix B) and to discuss the parents' participation in the study. The parents of the focal children were approached by the teachers. The parents consent (Appendix C) was necessary as the observations focused on the teacher's interactions with the focal child (child with a developmental disability). All of the children and the participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identity.

Jennifer, the first participant, has worked in the childcare sector for eight years. She has a two year diploma in early childhood education which she received from a community college in the city. She has been in Canada for 10 years and English is her second language. Jennifer works in the preschool program at a community based licensed childcare centre. The second participant, Tanya has worked in the childcare sector for 20 years. She has a high school diploma. Tanya works in the toddler program at a community based licensed childcare centre. Daniel, the third participant has worked in the childcare sector for 30 years. He has a two year

early childhood education diploma from a community college in the city. He is presently working with toddlers at the same community college's laboratory (teaching) childcare centre.

Data Collection

The research design involved a naturalistic inquiry of the inclusive preschool which explored early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their inclusive preschool teaching practices. The teachers were interviewed twice individually. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

The initial interview consisted of a set of guiding questions (see Appendix D) that examined the participant's background and views on inclusion. The second interview followed two, two hour in-class observations which were recorded by pencil and paper. The observations were conducted using a running record which involves objective statements and field notes which are the researchers' subjective interpretations. The focus of the observations was to examine the teachers' inclusive teaching practices and the focal child's participation in the classroom. A guideline for inclusive teaching practices (Appendix E) extrapolated from SpecialLink (2009) and the Division for Early Childhood (Hemmeter, Joseph, Smith & Sandall, 2001) was used as a tool for guiding the observations. The second interview involved open-ended questions based on the in-class observations (see Appendix F). It allowed the participant to reflect on and explore the observations that were made during the observation period.

Both interviews were face-to-face and were set up at a time and place that was convenient for the participant. Each interview took approximately 45 minutes. The observations were conducted at a time that was convenient for the director, the teacher and the parent. They consisted of two, two hour sessions, one in the morning and one at noon.

There are inherent limitations involved in both face to face interviews and complete observer observations. During the interview the teacher will be out of the context of her familiar teaching environment, he/she may have difficulties articulating her perceptions, and his/her comments will be interpreted through the biases of the researcher. The limitations of the observations will be contingent on the research's observational skills, biases and intrusive presence.

Role of the Researcher

Using a qualitative method of inquiry the role of the researcher was important to consider. I, the researcher have been involved in developing the interview questions and the observational guidelines. The face-to-face interviews and the in-class observations have been influenced by my opinions and biases. In addition, the data analysis and interpretations have been influenced by my perceptions and prejudices. I have been a frontline early childhood teacher for 30 years. It is my professional background in the field of early childhood education and my experiences with inclusion that has prompted this exploration.

Reliability

In order to ensure reliability there has been accurate documentation of all the steps and procedures in this research inquiry. The transcripts were checked to ensure that no errors occurred in the transcription. Both the interview protocol and the observational protocol were included in the research design (Creswell, 2009).

By implementing member checking (to determine the accuracy of the researcher's interpretations) the authenticity or validity of this study has been strengthened (Creswell, 2009). In qualitative research there is no one truth, so the validity must be captured in the accuracy of the participants' perceptions and beliefs (Neuman, 2006). The accuracy of the participants' perceptions was validated by presenting the participant with a short synopsis of their initial

interview. For example, terms such as ‘crazy’ and ‘integration’ were verified to ensure the accuracy of the participants’ perceptions and beliefs. In addition the participants were emailed a draft of my initial interpretations of their interview transcripts. The participants were asked to respond if they felt that their comments were misinterpreted.

Data Analysis

Each participant’s data was transcribed and analyzed on an ongoing basis. The data were organized in a variety of ways: a matrix of categories, data displays (webs, maps, flow charts) and meaningful sequences (Yin, 1989). By using a strategy of theoretical proposition the data were analyzed based on the original objectives and research questions guiding the study. By continuously referring back to the guiding questions and objectives, I was able to address any changes in the direction of the study. Comments, expressions, interpretations, commonalities, reflections and meanings were extracted and analyzed throughout the data collection process.

Through the process of collecting and transcribing all of the data a thorough understanding of the teacher’s perception of the inclusive classroom started to emerge. Each participant’s data was explored and analyzed by drawing out meanings and themes from both the interviews and the observations. Through the process of open and focused coding, categories, themes and patterns surfaced revealing commonalities and differences in the participants’ perceptions (Esterberg, 2002). Open coding involved a process of analyzing each of the participant’s interview and observational transcripts line by line and developing a list of codes. The open coding process generated approximately 30 codes for each of the participants’ interviews and observations. In addition the observations were analyzed using the guideline for inclusive teaching practices (Appendix E). The codes were then examined to determine if they could be collapsed or combined to create a set of categories which are relevant to the study. Codes such

as continuity, negative behaviour, negative impact on program and attitudes merged to become 'challenges'. The process of consolidating codes resulted in generating approximately 10-13 categories for each participant. Focused coding was then applied by going back over the data line by line focusing on the categories identified during open coding. This process created a list of quotes that were identified for each of the categories. A series of 'so what' questions were then applied to the categories: What are the key issues? What is important to the participant? What language are they using to describe what is important? What are they trying to accomplish? In addition, the categories were examined in relation to the guiding questions of the study. Through this analysis themes and patterns started to emerge out of the categories. The merging of categories into themes resulted in four over arching themes with a number of sub-themes: Personal efficacy (pre-service training, in-service training and availability of support), inclusive program (view of the child and focus of the program), role of the educator (beliefs and strategies) and challenges to inclusion. A thorough analysis and examination of the emerging themes from both the interviews and the in-class observations generated interesting insights that could potentially offer some clarity to the complexities of implementing inclusive preschool programs (Creswell, 2009).

CHAPTER III

Findings

Through the analysis of the rich descriptive text of the participants and the observations within the inclusive preschool classroom, four main themes were revealed: personal efficacy, inclusive program, role of the educator and challenges to inclusion. Personal efficacy and challenges to inclusion are presented using quotes from the interviews. These themes reveal conceptual perceptions of inclusion that can only be explored through the participant's self reports. The inclusive program and the role of the educator findings are presented using both quotes from the interviews and in-class observations. This format serves to demonstrate the similarities and differences in teacher perceptions of inclusion and in-class inclusive practices.

“Help us fix it”: Personal Efficacy

According to Jordan (2007),

personal efficacy, or the extent to which teachers are confident in their ability to make a difference in the learning of their students, has frequently been linked to good teaching practices. Teacher efficacy is a related effect; it is the beliefs teachers hold about the influence that their teaching can have, despite the influence of student, family, and community characteristics (p.30).

The participants' personal efficacy is revealed when examining the following sub-themes: Pre-service training, in-service training and the availability of supports. Pre-service and in-service training are essential for acquiring the skills and knowledge to work effectively with the children in the program. The teachers' personal efficacy in working with children with disabilities is reflected in the value they place on these acquisitions. In addition, all three participants believe that the availability of supports contribute to their personal efficacy and comfort level within the inclusive classroom.

Pre-service training.

Jennifer and Daniel both received their ECE (early childhood education) diploma from the local community college. Jennifer was a full time student and completed the program in two years. She has been working in the field for eight years. Daniel was already working as an early childhood teacher so he completed his ECE diploma as a part time student over the course of a number of years. He has 30 years of experience working in the field. In addition, Daniel has previous experience working at an inclusive camp with children with disabilities. Tanya had no formal training in ECE. She has her high school diploma and has worked in the field for 20 years.

Jennifer believes that her pre-service training did not prepare her for working with children with disabilities. Jennifer suggests that her pre-service training focuses on ages and stages of development and curricula to reflect age-specific developmental outcomes.

We didn't really have the experience working with children with disabilities that you can have by going to different workshops....basically we learned how to do the curriculum for the different age groups.....it was really stressful on the staff because we are not trained for the special needs kids. We have our ECE, to help kids learn and we do need special training for the special needs kids (interview, 2010, p.2).

Daniel's comment, "basically it's just my ECE training... so when I am in a situation where I have to provide extra coaching or care....I rely on the professionals to come in...other groups or individuals that have been trained. I don't feel very competent....." (interview, 2010, p.2), suggests that his pre-service training was not adequate enough to program for children with disabilities. However, Daniel does feel competent in his ability to access support and believes that there are numerous individuals available to support his efforts.

I don't feel I am an expert but I know what questions to ask or based on my previous experience what I can foresee being able to offer this child. I also feel

confident that there are other people out there, that I'm not by myself ...that I can use to help me. I'm not afraid. It wouldn't stop me from accepting a child, not that it's really my choice anyway (interview, 2010, p.2).

Tanya's lack of post secondary education in the field of ECE has not deterred her from working with children with disabilities.

I feel good. You know I certainly feel that there is a whole lot more to it, that I don't completely understand, and each one (child) is different, even the three (children) we had in the program in the last year. There were ones (children) where it was easier for me to figure out where they were coming from and other ones (children) where I still haven't figured them out (interview, 2010, p.2).

Both Daniel and Tanya reflect on their ability to assess the needs of the child. Tanya's comment "...figure out where they were coming from" (interview, 2010, p.3), and Daniel's statement, "...based on my previous experience what I can foresee being able to offer this child" (interview, 2010, p. 1), suggests a personal efficacy derived from past experiences and/or pre-service training. In contrast, Jennifer feels her pre-service training experiences did little to prepare her for working in an inclusive program. "When I was in school we had to do field placements but I never learned very much.....you don't really have a chance to practice...I really only learned those skills when I was working in the field."

In-service training.

All three participants have attended in-service training. All of the training that they have participated in has been provided by the local support agency for children with special needs and a speech and language screening initiative funded by the provincial government. In addition to offering workshops for professional development, these two organizations are involved in the identification process for children with special needs.

All three participants state that in-service training in their centres is voluntary. However, at Daniel's centre there have been exceptions: "it's usually always voluntary, but if you are in charge of a particular child..... it's recommended by managementand it makes perfect sense" (interview, 2010, p.2).

Jennifer stresses the importance of in-service training as a method of learning new knowledge that can be applied in the classroom, "you have to go to different workshops with different types of learning.....It has helped the program a lot because they give you the criteria on how to set up a program...not just for one particular child but for the whole group" (interview, 2010, p. 2).

Jennifer acknowledges the significance of professional development for assessing and altering curricula to address the needs of all the children in the program. Daniel acknowledges the value of in-service training when he discusses the importance of educators being up to date by continuously replenishing their skills.

Maybe as far as the educators go, if there was more mandatory education on various aspects....if people sort of stayed on top of like techniques and strategies and so on. Even though they might be focused on a specific disability, some things are translated to other things 'oh yah I learned about making ramps for children that can't walk but can crawl, that would be great to use in the infant program (interview, 2010, p.13).

Over the course of Tanya's teaching career she has attended three workshops and has found them to be extremely beneficial.

That is why I can say now, in hindsight, I knew there was something up with these children in the past, being actually able to see clearer signs has really helped me...it would be lovely to have more (training)....it was an eye opener for me (interview, 2010, p.2).

The participants' descriptions of their in-service training workshops suggest that the acquisition and application of specific knowledge and skills increased their levels of competency and personal efficacy.

Availability of support.

The participants perceive supports as an essential component of the inclusive preschool classroom. The supports that assist the teachers in developing teacher efficacy are identified by the participants as visual aids and integration advisors (IA). Supports can only be accessed after the identification process is completed. The availability of supports is contingent on the identified child's needs within the classroom.

The identification process, which is crucial for accessing support for the inclusive classroom is seen by Jennifer and Tanya as long and arduous. Jennifer states:

If the problem is there then we will try to find somebody to come to the program and help us fix it....we do ABC-you observe the kids, you document what happens with the child...set up the meeting, you will talk to the parents.....call the Support Agency...ask the parents to fill out the form....have the parents agree to be contacted..... and to take the child to their doctor to refer them to a specialist... (interview, 2010, p 4).

Tanya explains,

...my biggest thing is quite often these children are flagged too late...by the time they come into the toddlers we have got to give them an adjustment period and build a relationship of trust with the parents. So all that is a time thing and then getting them to go into the systemwishing that part could be speeded up...usually these children are already upstairs (moved to the next program) once we get everything into place and I feel all that lost opportunity down here, that's my first frustration in the whole process (interview, 2010, p.1).

For Jennifer, the process of accessing supports combined with uncertainty and doubt on how to handle children's behaviours creates difficulties when working with children with disabilities.

You don't really know if the child is special needs or not when the child comes into the program.....you see a huge difference when the child doesn't participate even in simple routines or be normal with the kids.... So it's a bit difficult when you come into the field and you start facing different types of issues with difficult children. And that's why we actually observe the kids, and then we ask for help... You know to call the Support Agency and have them be extra help for the program (interview, 2010, p.4).

Tanya struggles with her own perceived ability or competency when she encourages parents to seek out the professional advice of a doctor.

....we would meet with parents, identify that we are not professionals, all we are telling you is this is what we see, maybe take your child to your family doctor and go from there.....we actually had a doctor call us one time and ask us what we thought we were seeing (interview, 2010, p.1).

Tanya appears surprised that a doctor would confer with her as a professional before referring the child or making further recommendations.

Both Tanya and Jennifer commented on the gap of information between their childcare centres and the assessment process and available supports. Tanya reflects, “we always operated under the idea that there really wasn’t much out there for these kids. And then Sarah (from the Support Agency) came and talked to us and opened up this whole avenue of this is what is out there for these kids” (interview, 2010, p. 9). Jennifer recalls, “I called the Support Agency....and that is how I learned to observe the kids and ask for help and have all the supports” (interview, 2010, p.2). Both of these participants encounter difficulties in accessing information regarding the identification process. Neither of their centres have policies or guidelines to direct them through the procedure. Tanya and Jennifer rely on their own initiative to guide them through the system.

In comparison, the focal child in Daniel’s program was enrolled as a child with special needs. She had been assessed and identified with a developmental disability prior to admission into the daycare. As a consequence accessing support from the Support Agency was quick and easy. This phenomenon was also experienced by Tanya when she recalls a child from the past that was identified before she came into the program “....the little girl who came in from the baby room, she was so severe, she came with all her supports” (interview, 2010, p.2).

All three participants spoke of using visual aids in their inclusive programs. Jennifer found the visual aids to be invaluable.

And the visuals....I think they are the best resource that I learned about...the most powerful....helpful way for kids to learn.....they are not only for one particular kid but for all kids....it's really hard for our centre to really buy a machine to make all those pictures (interview, 2010, p.6).

Jennifer emphasizes the importance of the visual aids for the whole program but feels restricted in her ability to access the resource because of the centre's lack of funds. Data collected through the observation process reveals that visual aids are visible in three different areas of Jennifer's centre. The visual aids posted on the double doors that joined the two preschool classrooms are at the children's eye level. The pictures illustrate the different learning centres, transitions and routines. The visuals for outdoor dressing located on a wall in the cubby area are situated approximately five feet up from the floor, and not at the children's eye level. The visuals that depict the bathroom routine are found in one of the three bathrooms and are placed at the children's eye level (observation, 2010, p.1)

Daniel perceives visual supports as 'luxuries':

Recommendations from the Support Agency was the pictures (visuals)....this is where we are going, pictures of her cubby.....'okay we're going to the cubbies, here you can hold the card', a laminated card....it might be a picture of a hat, coat and boots.....Yah, those are good things to have.....the word that popped in my head was luxuries (interview, 2010, p.9).

Daniel perceives the aids as complementary to his teaching ability. Daniel does not rely on supports in order to work with children with disabilities. However, he appreciates how outside expertise aids him in meeting the needs of the child. "Those are really nice to have cause I can do the job by myself but to have an expert coach me, as well as try some things.....it's just good to have that extra information" (interview, 2010, p. 9).

Tanya obtained information on visual strategies through in-service training. “The visual strategies were two and a half days, so I guess a little more than a full day. It was an eye opener for me, obviously I was going into these workshops with particular children in mind” (interview, 2010, p. 2). Tanya regards these aids as options, choices or strategies to consider when developing goals for children. “....When I did my training I was like, okay I’ve got this all figured out and it did help...he (past child) responded well to visuals” (interview, 2010, p. 3).

Integration advisors (IA) are specialized consultants who are employed by the Support Agency. After the child has been identified through the identification process an IA is then responsible for observing, documenting, and making recommendations for that child in the childcare centre. The IA works in consultation with both the childcare staff and the parents. These consultations allow the participants an opportunity to understand the child and the knowledge to develop programs that meet the child’s needs.

Jennifer recalls one of the children in her program who met the criteria for the ‘positive outcomes program’. “The IA actually came and observed the child and also the program and gave us feedback of how we are going to change the environment and also our curriculum.....his behaviour changed a lot” (interview, 2010, p. 9). However, over time Jennifer found that his behaviours started to regress. “If the IA could be here with the child for more than once a week that would be helpful, unfortunately we don’t get enough of that support” (interview, 2010, p.9). Although Jennifer receives feedback on changes to the program and the physical environment she believes that on-going, one-on-one support from the consultant is the only way to meet this child’s needs. The child is eventually discharged from the centre.

Presently, there is an IA for the focal child in Jennifer’s program.

The IA comes maybe twice a month. At first the IA came as much as the child needed. But for the child I have now the IA only comes maybe twice a month.

She will write down in the child's binder....she will tell me, and other staff what she wrote in the binder.....she has given us lots of resources (interview, 2010, p. 6).

Jennifer suggests that the outside resources provided by the IA have increased her level of competence when working with children with special needs.

I feel comfortable working with special needs kids.....and I actually found it is easier working with the special needs kids rather than the regular children because the special needs kids don't like to change their routines, they like to be consistent, they like to see the same faces, and they like to be told what is going to happen next, they like to stick to the rules, it is easy for them to just follow. So I actually find that the special needs kids I work with easier to deal with (interview, 2010, p. 2).

In this excerpt, Jennifer seems to believe children with special needs require consistent routines and rules. Jennifer finds children with special needs easier to deal with than typically developing children.

Daniel's experiences have included the IA, the speech pathologist and the occupational therapist.

"Sarah (pseudonym) comes in, she is the IA, and there was a speech pathologist who came in too.....an occupational therapist came in and recommended some strategies and some ways of setting up the yard to encourage (the focal child)....she (focal child) used to like to turn and run and there'd be a toy there and she wouldn't see it, and she'd fall down a lot. She'd climb on the ramps and what not and again fall a lot, but it didn't deter her....so it's good to have that input so while I'm busy doing this they are thinking about it and writing stuff up so it's a resource for our program as well as the child (interview, 2010, p.9).

Daniel reflects on the benefits of receiving input from professionals who have specific areas of expertise. Daniel believes the information benefits the program and focal child. Daniel's use of words such as 'a resource for our program' suggests that new knowledge could potentially benefit other children in the program. This idea of acquiring knowledge and expertise aids Daniel in raising his competency level in working with children with disabilities.

Tanya discusses the impact the IA has had on the program and on her ability to work with the child in the classroom.

His IA has been tremendously supportive...really helped us find stuff that we weren't seeing in him and how we can use that to work with him, to teach him further.....she (IA) was telling me how when he (focal child) is in audio or visual mode he can't make that automatic shift that we do.....so a prime example is when he's made a mess of the puzzles and one of the staff is calling him to come and tidy it up, so I said he's in visual mode so she (other staff) just took the puzzle piece and put in front of him and he went like 'oh' and put all the puzzle pieces away...so it's that everybody is all on board, and we are all in the teaching mode (interview, 2010, p. 7).

Information is passed on by the IA, which Tanya retains and retrieves when instructing other staff in the use of effective teaching techniques.

“What’s good for one is good for the group”: The Inclusive Program

All three participants have different perceptions of the inclusive program. However, a common thread for all three of the participants is the view of the child and the focus of the program. The view of the child is linked to the participants' perceptions of the child's abilities. For example, Daniel's comment, “the more we let her do, the more capable she will become” and Jennifer's statement, “....he doesn't meet the recommended developmental level” offer two different perspectives of the child within the inclusive classroom. The focus of the program refers to the expectations, schedules, routines and curricula within the inclusive classroom.

View of the child.

Jennifer views the child in relation to the program. If the child is exhibiting behaviours that are not in-line with the program there would be a concern. “If the child...is three years old, and is coming into the program without enough language, or you know is starting to bite which was in the toddler age, that would be a concern....(interview, 2010, p.9). In addition, Jennifer believes that that some children would not be appropriate for the program.

I think it depends on what kind of needs that special needs child has. Autistic, I think those kids can be included into the day care and I think it works pretty well....we had one once before...and it was always a problem, but you just have help come in and solve the problem.....our daycare is not built for wheelchairs....if there is a behaviour problem I would think the child might need to be separated (interview, 2010, p. 14-15).

Jennifer believes that the program could accommodate children with developmental delays but not children with physical disabilities, “we don’t have enough support, this disability would not be appropriate for our centre” (interview, 2010, p. 15).

Daniel views the child as an individual, distinct and separate from the program.

I’ve only been looking after this child for about three or four months. In that time she has progressed quite a lot.....become quite capable in most areas now. I didn’t spotlight her or give preferential treatment because I think as far as socializing.....everyone has bad days or tired days or days that they excel, it’d just be tuned into that with her or other children with disabilities (interview, 2010, p. 1).

In addition, Daniel views all children as having needs.

....in the back of my mind, especially toddlers, every toddler has special needs, and the more time you have to plan and investigate and document each child, the more you learn about them. When you do have a special needs child there is more of that which benefits everybody in that whole circle, the child included. No spotlight following that child around, it’s just, they are doing things to the best of their ability, and we’re pushing them to go to the next step, as we are with any other child in the program (interview, 2010, p. 4).

Tanya views the child as capable and believes that children with disabilities are often underestimated.

I don’t like to underestimate his ability.....what we have to offer children with disabilities is the opportunities to prove themselves....he is so clever and even though he doesn’t talk, my big thing, with me is, that he’s not going to be understood. And I’ve had people say to me he doesn’t understand, he doesn’t know what you want of him.....yes he does, and then they are amazed at how well he does understand...we’re talking to him not at him...he probably has a whole vocabulary going on in his head that should be coming out (interview, 2010, p.10).

Jennifer's view of the child focuses on the child's ability to assimilate into the existing program. Daniel perceives the child as an individual with his/her own unique abilities and Tanya believes in advocating for the child to ensure that his disability does not define him.

Focus of the inclusive program.

The focus of each of the inclusive programs vary from participant to participant.

Jennifer states that routines are the most important part of the program.

In our curriculum we all have our routines...everybody in the daycare, all the kids, will have to follow our rules. For the program I think the routine is most important thing because the kids have to learn what they have to do every day when they come into the program (interview, 2010, p. 3).

In the following excerpt, Jennifer discusses the rules that the children are required to follow in the classroom as well as the consequences of not meeting those expected behaviours.

They are free to play but when the lights are turned off they know that it's time to stop and listen and look at what they have to do next. And we build up all those routines for the children to follow so every day they come in and they know what line up means, what stop means. It is a life learning experience for them... (focal child) at that time the child was ready to move into the preschool room, but the preschool room didn't want to accept the child because the child wasn't fully matured enough to be in the program....so the child was delayed moving up (interview, 2010, p. 3 & 9).

In Jennifer's preschool classroom, there is a daily schedule posted and a weekly program plan that lists the various toys that are available for the children to play with. There is also a poster displayed at teacher level entitled "Preventive Strategies" which includes the following strategies: Use positive reinforcement, model play skills, use empathetic 'I' statements and state what you want the child to do. It was observed that an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for the focal child was not posted (observation, July 12, 2010, 9:30 a.m.).

Jennifer explains that their childcare policy does not allow them to post the child's program plan because it consists of confidential messages from the IA and is therefore only available to the permanent staff.

There are a few goals...using a short fat pencil, and the rubber piece so the child would be more stable for fine motor.....the IA would write it down and that would be the goal for the child to work on... it would be placed in the cupboard in a file for the permanent staff....some of the messages are confidential...if you come to supply teach for the day, you don't really have to focus on this.... it would be the permanent staffs job to focus on it....we don't really have an IPP it was always just suggestions written on paper(interview, 2010, p.11).

Although Jennifer talks about one of Derek's goals for fine motor skills, there is no attempt to implement the strategies to ensure that goal during the following observation period.

Six children are at the art table. Derek (focal child) sits between two children. Jennifer hands him a marker and paper. Jennifer says "Derek can you try and write your name." Derek takes the marker with his right hand, and holds it in his fist. Derek says "Jennifer look" makes a wiggly line on the paper. Derek colours and rubs the maker on his paper with his hand (observation, July 12, 2010, 10:05 a.m.).

Daniel discusses his view of the inclusive program,

....a basic philosophy that every child needs or deserves to have as many opportunities as possible, as many opportunities as other children, so with that in mind, the doors would be open for them to come in and yes, it will be a bit more difficult for the educators, and it might cost a bit more for the organization to make some changes to the physical environment to make it easier for that child....my main goal is for this particular child but it has ramificationsthings that we're learning our selves or learning from professionals can be passed on to parents too, so it might impact positively for the child in their home environment...I just know we're keen to support special needs children so we go out of our way to encourage the parent to be comfortable here and we explain what we can do and the resources available to us (interview, 2010, p.3).

Daniel believes that the child with a disability should blend into the inclusive program. "It looks like just another child in the program. They are in a wheelchair, they're with crutches, and they're holding somebody's hand, whatever it is, they are in the program, just another child there (interview, 2010, p.4).

Daniel explains different components of the program and how learning is embedded in the activity.

Our program, which is kind of a centre philosophy makes sure that there is some kind of music component and that learning through play is the overall umbrella so that things are fun....so that children are able to focus on different topics in different ways whether it's just casually outside or whether that interest or thing we discovered outside we can bring it in and look at it at circle time so it's in a small group and it's more focused, and tomorrow we can revisit it again. We can explore these colours using a kaleidoscope and paint, in different ways so that they can develop familiarity with the materials or the subject matter, and then again see it in different lights, indoors, outdoors, different mediums....(interview, 2010, p. 2).

The following observations are illustrations of the flexibility of the program's schedule and routines. Flexibility within schedules and routines reflects respect for each child's individual needs. It is 9:15 a.m. and the teachers are in the process of moving from indoor play to outdoor play.

Teacher 1: "Terry almost time for that diaper change. Teacher 2: "Let's pack up the snack table so we can take it outside." Teacher 2 takes 2 children and moves out of the room to collect the snack. Teacher 1: "pom poms, let's check them out, wow, look in here, wow, a yellow one, a blue one.....Nearly time for that diaper change we talked about Terry" Diapers are changed and children move in small groups of 5 to the backdoor to exit out into the yard. Children are all engaged in a variety of outdoor play activities. Sandy (focal child) walks back and forth on the ramps and balance beams that are set up throughout the playground space. It is 10:30 a.m. Teacher 2: "Are you guys ready for snack? Nobody wanted it before. Let's get snack. Who is ready for snack? Come and sit on the bench" (observation, July 26, 2010, p. 3).

Inside the classroom is a program plan and a copy of the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) framework posted on the bulletin board. High on the shelf are small blue binders, one for each child. On the cupboard door there is an IPP posted, with no name attached.

Eight months ago we got the ELECT document and we were asked to generate a program sheet based on it....we start using the terminology and referring to the numbering system and then presenting it to parents. So when you see that on our curriculum you can look in the child's info summary or their portfolio, and you can tie it back, so if you need a little information on that little anecdotal I wrote up

on the board, there's an explanation...it's just clearer what you observe and what you're doing...common framework (interview, 2010, p. 14).

Daniel discusses the IPP and the transition process from one program to another. In the process of describing the process Daniel reflects on his own practices. In addition, his account illustrates how collaboration amongst all of the stakeholders is seen as a normal part of the process.

Part of the IPP is posted on the cupboard and her name is not on it. The staff, supply teachers and students can read it....goals are more finely tuned for that particular child maybe for being told what to look for or what had been recommended for that child....usually more note taking and documentation involved because it is being looked at by the professionals or parentsmore so than other children that the parents aren't so concerned about, um, maybe that shouldn't be....three months ago we sat down with a few educators and the manager and the parents and the IA....we looked at the previous goals and re-adjusted those and about three weeks ago I was asked to look at that and re-write it, to re-write what I saw as my goals for her....so that was done up and then sent to the IA and she looked at it, the speech therapist looked at it and when they were okay with it, it got sent to the parents, the parents signed off on it. They (parents) also came up with goals..... (p. 9 & 10) I seem to remember some talk about moving her up (preschool room) before, maybe six months ago....she was older but there were other children close in age..it was based on her abilities...she was still progressing in all the different areas we were working on so there did not seem to be any point to bumping her up...We've got a month, (presently she is moving up to the preschool room)there's some informal dialogue with the staff, 'so and so is moving up, here is what you might need to know' but with Sandy, the parents will probably want a meeting so they can sit down with the preschool staff and the toddler staff and maybe even the IA (interview, 2010, p. 12). Presently Sandy is having short visits in the preschool room.

For Tanya the focus of the inclusive program is on the premise that if "we all do it, we all do it together."

I like to see them as part of a group. We had one child in the program that was quite severely disabled and delayed and whenever I asked where she was, she was in doing physiotherapy....for me I like the collective setting for them. I love them to see all the other kids, and it's amazing how in this age group they include them in play...we have quite a few that like to help our little boy (focal child) right now, and he loves it and they love it. It's that buddy-ing up system. For Martin (focal child) he'll do that thing where someone is taking his hand to go to the locker room and all of a sudden he stops and he looks at them, whereas before he

didn't look at the children....he puts his arms out, hugs them, and then pushes them....My definition of inclusion would have them do what everybody else is doing all the time....they need to be given the opportunity to do what everybody else is doing so that whatever is programmed out there is set up for everyone (interview, 2010, p. 3).

Tanya recalls a child in the program where modifications were made so that the child was able to participate.

One child did not walk, as a four year old in the program. So we had modified the water play as she was on a 'horse'. So we attached a tray to it so she could do water play cause she couldn't stand at the table. A modified chair for the lunch table, that was done for her. Any of the programming that we really wanted her to participate in, that we felt would be beneficial for her, everything was done either attached to the 'horse' or set up that her chair was at this specific table so that we could change what we wanted her to be able to do (interview, 2010, p.4).

Tanya expands on this topic when she explains the relationship between the program and the child.

We have had children in the past where there has been modified programming for them. This last group that's moved through there's not been so much, there hasn't been a modified program. We modify how we bring that child through the program, so the program itself wasn't, it was the child; it was trying to get the child to move through the program (interview, 2010, p.4).

There is a weekly program plan and a daily schedule posted in the classroom. There is no evidence of an IPP posted in the program. Tanya talks about the upcoming IPP meeting with the parents and the IA.

....the meeting will be on Monday....there is so much that he manages quite well, I mean he does socialize....yes we will post it...but I have to tell you I'm a huge verbal communicator....for me having it up is perfect because they(parents & staff) can come in and have a look at it (interview, 2010, p.10).

Each of the participants describes a different focus to their inclusive program. Jennifer describes her program as focused on routines. The focus of Daniel's program is on creating a learning environment that respects individual differences. Tanya's program focuses on being

inclusive through modifications. However, both Daniel and Tanya have a similar view of the program when discussing problems and searching for solutions. Daniel states,

you might find a solution to it and so it's not a problem anymore. So we've had that with physically moving the room around making it more physically conducive to the movement of the children and so on or isolating areas to make it more private so there's no distractions, little things you can do that at first it's a problem but they are easy to solve (interview, 2010, p.7).

Tanya believes, "you need to look to your program, if he pushes when he's on the stairs don't put him at the back of the line, put him at the front of the line, you know problem solving..." (interview, 2010, p. 12).

"At various times of the day you are taking on different roles": Role of the Educator

The role of the educator is comprised of two sub-themes: Beliefs and strategies. Beliefs pertain to the participant's personal philosophy of education and to their teaching role in the inclusive classroom. The strategies are the techniques or practices that the teachers implement to ensure that the children in the inclusive classroom participate in and benefit from the program.

Beliefs.

Jennifer believes that guiding the children and teaching them to communicate and socialize through play is very important. Jennifer also believes that children need to feel comfortable with other children.

I think the most important thing is we are learning from each other and we kind of guide them to be socialized with the others or how to be creative. How to use their imagination and how early learning for the young is the best way for them to actually explore how they can learn through play and doing different activities. I'm here for them to help them. I think the most difficult part is their social skills because they cannot really communicate with others....we set up the dramatic area...set up the doctor set....every kid will have the chance to learn how to play. And for special needs kids that would be the best way for them to communicate to their friends, that I am the doctor and you are the patient....they actually learn through the play....Circle time is the most important thing, I think, it's the way you build relationships with the children. The kids feel comfortable, they know their friends names and how they can interact with each other and I think that it is

very important to make sure that the kids feel comfortable with each other (interview, 2010, p.3).

Daniel reflects on his own childhood when considering his role as an educator.

I practiced early childhood education before I got my formal training and I think I'm basically the same person and whether that comes from beliefs that I developed about my childhood, and things that I found beneficial about my childhood that is different from some other children or peers. I see those as benefits that I would like to expose to children that I work with (interview, 2010, p.2).

Daniel's love for the outdoors is incorporated into the program.

I would like to expose children to my love of outdoors and how much you can do outdoors in an educational play based format. And I like bringing outdoor things indoors as well so that children are exploring and learning about different things whether it's care for creatures or care for plants. The process of doing that in a group setting is that they are learning care for each other, that is one aspect I think is important and has long term ramifications (interview, 2010, p.2).

Daniel believes his role as an educator is multifaceted.

At various times of the day you're taking on different roles, whether it's just a facilitator or a schedule guide, could be a nurse, could be, like almost a surrogate parent...a lot of comforting. Other times we're trying to do some documentation, we're photographing children's play, we're trying to be creative with the materials, with the budget that we have to create things for the program or help children be creative so we reflect things back to them and you know try and get them to verbalize a bit more or try and get them to think out, problem solve and those kinds of things...physically moving a lot...supervising....planning and thinking all the time about the curriculum, particular observations about children...staff meetings...communication (interview, 2010, p. 5 & 6).

Tanya highlights the importance of offering children opportunities and allowing them the time to make connections and to be involved in their own learning.

For me I see that it's my job to give them those opportunities to learn those things that may not present themselves in a home environment....allowing them to go that little bit beyond....opportunity for having expectations of children. I think quite often that we don't appreciate their intelligence so there isn't an expectation of them and it's amazing how much they grow under that....what we have to offer children with disabilities is the opportunities to prove themselves....it's giving them the opportunity to experience things that perhaps would not be expected of them...always presenting the opportunity for it to take place, helping it take place

as well. Certainly again at this age, the teaching moment is always there and it's so easy for us to impose it as oppose to taking the time to make it take place (interview, 2010, p.2 & 3).

Strategies.

Strategies or techniques that are incorporated into each of the participant's teaching practices are an important component of the inclusive classroom. Teaching practices or strategies allow the teacher to capitalize on learning opportunities which are designed to meet the goals of both the program and the individual child.

Jennifer uses a number of strategies within the inclusive classroom. Cues and warnings are techniques that help her to guide Derek through the routines and transitions in the program.

He has been improving a lot...just repeat the same thing to the child and warn him five minutes ahead. Just say, five minutes we are going to tidy up, five more minutes and we are going to the bathroom. Instead of just turning off the lights and say tidy up, we warn the kids first....the same transition was getting better and better...(visuals) it is kind of a routine for the kids to see what comes next and next and next....most of the time he (focal child) goes to the bathroom with the pictures (interview, 2010, p. 3).

The technique of using hand over hand helps Jennifer to demonstrate how to use a water spout at the sprinkler pad.

Derek watches the children. He picks up the water spout and pushes it against the ground and pumps it. Teacher 1 takes it and shows him how to use it. Derek reaches and takes it back. Derek pushes the handle in and out. Another Teacher approaches takes it and shows him how to fill up the spout. She hands it back to Derek. He again pushes the handle in and out. Jennifer says "Derek this is a water spout. I will show you." Jennifer leans over Derek and places her hands over his hands. By guiding him Jennifer shows him the up and down action needed to fill up the spout. Jennifer lets go. Derek pushes the handle and the water sprays out. Derek laughs and continues to fill up the water spout (observation, July 12, 2010, p.2).

In the following play interaction Jennifer takes on the role as an observer. She does not apply any modeling strategies to promote social interactions.

Jennifer is standing and watching Derek. Derek spreads out a towel and lies down. A child walks over and lies down beside Derek. Jennifer covers them with a towel and then walks away. Two more children walk over and one of them lies down on the other side of Derek. Derek stands up and throws off the towel (observation, July 12, 2010, p.4).

Jennifer discusses observing and modeling play are strategies that are used in the program.

My role in being there is to step back to observe the kids when they play....we don't have the time to write it down...we would just watch the kids play....when they need help I will step in and show them....when they feel comfortable, I will step out again and I will observe how they actually play (interview, 2010, p.6).

Jennifer uses behaviour management strategies and conflict resolution techniques in the program to prevent conflict and to teach children how to resolve differences with their peers.

My role for the child is to prevent something from happening, so you stand close to that child but not right beside....when you see something happen you would step in to stop the issue before the problem is going to happen. And then you step out and re-guide the child in the right direction. If they were fighting for a puzzle then you stop and say 'what happened', and they would tell me...they will try to say 'it's my puzzle, I'm using it', and then you try to tell the kids to use their words. ...to tell the other child it's my turn...you can have a turn after when I'm finished (interview, 2010, p. 6).

The following observation illustrates how Jennifer applies this strategy in the classroom.

There are 10 children playing in the room. Two children are playing with cognitive toys at a table. There are three children playing at the sand table and four children at the water table. Derek is working on a large floor puzzle by himself. Jennifer is the only teacher in the room. Two of the children at the sand table started pulling on the same sand pail. Both of them are saying 'it's mine', their voices get louder and as they pull on the pail they move away from the sand table. Jennifer drops the mop that she is using to dry the floor and moves towards them. She holds on to the pail and she looks at one of the children and says 'excuse me, you tell her it's mine'. The child repeats the sentence, the other child releases the pail and they both move back to the sand table. Jennifer moves back to the water table (observation, July 13, 2010, p.9).

In the following excerpt Jennifer describes an incident where she prompts a social interaction between Derek and his friends. Through modeling and encouragement Jennifer is able to foster a positive relationship between the children.

He was playing in the sand box all by himself pouring the sand and making a castle, I walked over and asked him what are you doing, when he answered I encouraged him to play with the other children, so I asked the children that he feels comfortable with, that he usually stands with to come over and play with him, they actually made a birthday cake all together and they all sing happy birthday and then they made a pie (interview, 2010, p.11).

The following is an observation of Daniel with the children on the playground

A sensory table is set up and filled with large plastic tubes of different length. Daniel picks up a tube and howls into it. "Look" Daniel points to the ball way up in the tree. "I need a ladder or a big wind." A child brings Daniel some tubes, and together they start to put them together. Two other children join in and Daniel steps back as the children start connecting the tubes. "Turn it around" Daniel suggests as they struggle to connect the tube. Eventually, (10minutes) the children construct a long pole from the tubes. Together they start to lift it and with the help of Daniel they push it up towards the ball in the tree. "Push the pole" says Daniel, "where's that ball? There it is, let's try again". The pole hits the ball. The ball falls. "Great work" (observation, July 27, 2010, p.3).

When asked about the interactions that occurred on the playground Daniel discusses some of the strategies he uses in his classroom and on the playground to encourage the children in their interactions with the environment and their peers.

To have fun with children, sort of step into their play or be invited into their play and then fade out and let them continue on. I find that's a good way to let children be involved in their play is to teach them some skills and leave them and see if they carry on with those skills (interview, 2010, p.3).

Daniel reflects on strategies that were used when Sandy first started in the program.

At lunch time she would have to be strapped into a wooden chair...she would not stay in her chair...she had a hard time focusing. And then, 'I've eaten three carrots, I don't want any more' and then she'd knock it off the table. So that bit of table etiquette was being worked on and then strategies to help her stay focused. Various toys attached to the chair so that she has to wait for her turn with the pouring, you know hand over hand in those days. She could have a fidget toy to keep her occupied while she waited her turn.....so just steady improvement in various areas...'Okay, now we can concentrate on the cup' so she can have her own cup with no top on it....now let's work on hand over hand with the spoon ...incrementally so she doesn't get overwhelmed. Transitioning, focusing on the goal, lots of repetition (interview, 2010, p.10).

During outdoor play Sandy is observed climbing up one side of the climber and then attempting to climb down the other. Daniel's ECE student who is close by picks her up and puts her on the ground. Sandy repeats the same sequence with the same response from the student. When Daniel is questioned about the ECE student's response, he replies,

If you didn't know her (Sandy) capability, you would maybe have a hand close by and verbally coach, if she wasn't getting the thing about turn around, start on your hands and knees and put your leg down kind of thing, if the verbal coaching wasn't working you might do a simple movement like here's your leg there's the first rung...can you feel that and then sort of back off....I mean I did that for years, I was helping too much, I thought I was doing my job even better until I realized that I was not enabling children to work on those self help skills (interview, 2010, p. 11).

In the following observation, Sandy is observed transitioning for lunch. On this particular day she has been visiting the preschool program.

The children are in the playground. Sandy returns from the preschool playground. Daniel's ECE student calls 'time to go in for lunch, come to the gate.' Sandy is holding a car. Daniel says 'put the toy down and go to the gate', he then touches her shoulder. Sandy throws the car down and starts to cry. Daniel then instructs his ECE student as to how to transition the children, 'keep going, open the gate, if you wait you will lose them all.' They move into the building and Sandy sits on the floor and tries to take off her shoes.....ECE teacher encourages her to move on, Daniel asks the ECE student to pick her up. She is picked up and moved to the cubby to take off her hat. Sandy starts to cry harder in the cubby area..... (observation, 2010, p.11 & 12).

When asked about this interaction Daniel responded by focusing on her personality. There is no mention of her visit to the preschool program.

She can be strong willed...she's been away for a week and a half so what we noticed yesterday, at first I thought, oh maybe she's just forgotten, but I'm thinking today, no she knows, she just decided not to. Same with the crying or stubbornness to come in and just to do a simple thing like pop her hat into her cubby....different people handle it different ways, some people are a lot softer, like my student, I thought it's taking a bit long, you can't do that, you're not one on one with this child. I had to ask her to pick her up and move her along. It's

not her first day at the centre....she knows what she should do.....if you don't do it yourself I will help you (interview, 2010, p. 11).

Tanya discusses techniques she would use to ensure that Martin is participating and interacting in the program. Tanya is concerned about Martin's lack of verbal skills and she finds herself reflecting on her hesitancy to incorporate visuals into the classroom.

I would love to hear him talk....we always give him the words , we've even given him sign language, he initially pulls away...he does love the deep hug, so we do the sign and he tries to link his fingers into our fingers for a hug....I find it better than me doing the hand over hand....he responds quickly to contact...if I touch his feet and say 'feet on floor' he instantly responds to it.....so the visuals I'd have to say have slipped even though I really want to implement them and again they help other children in the program as well...but he responds so well to physical touch (interview, 2010, p.13).

During the observation Martin often engaged in solitary play. Whenever he was asked to 'come' or 'line up' he did not respond and the teachers were continuously going to him, taking his hand, and leading him back to the group. At the park he ran in the opposite direction and a teacher had to bring him back only to find that he was gone again. Tanya found that if she put in a request in advance they could have a personal assistant (PA) for their field trips. Although helpful on field trips, Tanya finds PAs frustrating in the program.

....PAs frustrate me in the sense that they want to micro-manage their (the child's) behaviour....it's very common, the woman who was in today felt like she needed to sit beside Martin, but he's fine....he's managing (interview, 2010, p. 10).

In the following observation the PA is attempting to engage Martin in an activity.

Martin is standing by the fence, facing into the playground. He leans on the fence. The PA walks over and takes his hand and leads him to the sandbox. Martin does not step into the sandbox. He moves back to the fence. The PA takes his arm and takes him back to the sandbox and tries to get him to step in. Martin pulls away and moves to a table and sits down (observation, 2010, p. 4).

This account between the PA and Martin is relayed to Tanya. She is then asked how she would encourage Martin to engage in social activities with other children.

For me personally, Martin has a light thing, so a lot of light off the fence is attracting, I don't see that as isolating. If that's all he did I would be a little concerned but it's certainly not....If you're having the solitary player and that's all they're doing, and certainly when we have a child who will only play with cars, we don't program cars that day, that use to be Mark's thing, everything was cars so we got where we didn't program it...If I saw it as isolation, obviously I'd sit with him at a table, let's stack the blocks, that sort of thing (interview, 2010, p.11).

Tanya describes a situation that occurred in the sleep room where Martin initiated contact with another child, which Tanya reinforced.

It was yesterday afternoon when he got up from nap, and it was one of the other toddlers who was sort of walking by him when he went to reach out to hug the other toddler and the toddler wasn't aware and kept walking, so we re-introduced the moment so that the hug could take place, which they were both very happy with....when I know Martin is trying to enter into a situation they're receptive to it. But if there's that sort of help needed to be done then we are certainly going to help him into that group to play (interview, 2010, p.10).

“It's hard, but I would certainly never consider asking a family to leave”: Challenges to Inclusion.

According to the participants the challenges in implementing an inclusive preschool program are numerous. Funding issues, lack of continuity, negative impact on the program, negative attitudes from co-workers, lack of training and lack of support are some of the challenges and barriers.

Jennifer finds the lack of continuity within the program very frustrating. “The most challenging for me is when you have the supply teachers...the routine is totally changed.....the most important thing for me is having the same team of co-workersto all be working on the same page....” (interview, 2010,p. 7).

Daniel reflects on how to make other educators more accepting of inclusion.

I'm trying to think how to make all educators sort of open to it and not afraid to take on these challenges, to be open, to be willing, to have the attitude, to put in the effort to help children. You hear people say 'yah it's a good idea' and maybe they really believe it but 'oh I don't want to do it, but it's a good idea' (interview, 2010, p. 6).

Tanya struggles with her co-workers attitudes.

I do know that there are staff, and rightfully so, who struggle with having children coming into the centre who have problems because, by and large there is generally lack of help, or lack of education, but then that's up to them, there are opportunities to go out. But it's that thing with any sort of training, you have to be there to be actually hearing it, and when I say be there I don't mean physically be there, I mean being there where you're open to what's being said. Cause I went for training with one of the preschool staff and she spent her time on a personal level arguing the points, so okay, if you're not here to listen to what's being said then you're kind of wasting your time (interview, 2010, p.4).

Both Daniel and Tanya voice concern for the families with children with disabilities. Daniel's comment, "I wonder how many children aren't offered spots in centres" speaks to the availability of inclusive spaces in childcare centres. Tanya expresses concern over families being discharged, "we were dealing with a situation upstairs and they were having problems with a couple of their children.....they were trying to ask these families to leave the centre. I was on the Board at the time and fighting tooth and nail that no, we don't do that."

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

This study investigated early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and in-class inclusive practices. Four themes emerged from the findings as integral components in formulating teacher attitude and beliefs about inclusion: personal efficacy, the inclusive program, the role of the educator and challenges to inclusion.

Personal Efficacy

Personal efficacy refers to the teacher's perception of how competent he/she feels working in the inclusive classroom. For inclusion to occur within the classroom the teacher must be open to change and to taking on new responsibilities that may require additional support and training (Ostrosky et al., 2006). Therefore, a teacher's personal efficacy and the belief that he/she is capable and competent in working with children with disabilities will be affected by the teacher's perceived ability to impact the child's education (Jordan, 2007). Richardson (1996) suggests that teachers' beliefs and attitudes are a culmination of teaching experiences, personal experiences and theoretical pre-service knowledge.

The findings from this study suggest that pre-service education, in-service training and experience play a role in the teacher's personal efficacy. Daniel and Jennifer perceived their ECE pre-service training as inadequate when working in the inclusive classroom. According to Jennifer, her ECE background only prepared her for designing programs to meet the developmental levels of typical children. The personal efficacy of both Daniel and Jennifer was mired by the belief that they had not acquired the additional specialized knowledge needed to work with children with disabilities.

The literature suggests that the relevancy of knowledge and skills for the inclusive classroom can depend on the level of pre-service training. Burns and Mogaharreban (2007) found there is a gap between knowledge and the teacher's ability to implement goals and objectives in the inclusive program. Lieber et al. (1998) did not find a definitive relationship between pre-service training and the ability to create an inclusive program. However, Smith and Smith's (2000) research found that knowledge acquired at the Master's level is considered more valuable in the inclusive classroom than knowledge attained at an undergraduate level. In support of the literature the results from the present study suggest that a two year diploma in ECE does not offer the teacher an adequate sense of personal efficacy to create an inclusive program.

The research conducted by Purdue, Gordon-Burns, Gunn, Madden and Surtees (2009), suggest that ECE students require courses that promote critical thinking. Through course content that reflects ethics and social justice, ECE students have an opportunity to reflect on their own beliefs and to investigate concepts such as diversity and inclusion. Mitchell and Hegde (2007), support these findings by recommending a blend of general and specialized courses to prepare teachers for their role in the inclusive program. The acquisition of knowledge that promotes an inclusive ideology would create a common understanding and belief of inclusion in the childcare community.

According to Kagan (1992), the core or the spirit of teaching originates from teachers' beliefs, their personal knowledge. Therefore, if new ideas are to have an effect, conceptual changes must occur at the core. However, Kagan (1992) also discusses the difficulty in changing teachers' core beliefs. Compulsory courses during teachers' pre-service years that promote diversity and social justice could potentially alter preconceived notions of disability and difference.

In the present study the acquisition of knowledge and skills through in-service training increased the participants' personal efficacy. In addition, the participants perceived on-going professional development as an integral part of the inclusive classroom, with the understanding that knowledge and strategies are transferable and can benefit the collective. These findings are supported by the literature which proposes that professional development is a cornerstone in effective inclusive programs (Baker-Ericzen, Mueggenborg & Shea, 2000; Clough & Nutbrown, 2004; Leatherman, 2007). Therefore, one way to bridge the gap between knowledge and practical application is by offering in-service training to assist teachers in upgrading and replenishing their skills as well as enhancing their personal efficacy in working in inclusive classrooms.

For the participants in the present study positive pre-service experiences and in-service teaching with children with disabilities were perceived as more valuable and beneficial than the knowledge attained through pre-service training. Daniel and Tanya relied on the knowledge from past experiences to guide them in discerning how to meet the needs of the child. Tanya, who had no pre-service training in ECE felt confident in her ability to problem solve and to determine what would benefit that particular child. These findings are supported by the research conducted by Leatherman (2007), who found that positive experiences promoted successful inclusion. Therefore, in order to promote personal efficacy and positive attitudes toward inclusion, pre-service practicums in successful inclusive programs are essential for ensuring that ECE students have positive experiences (Niemeyer & Proctor, 2002).

Although the availability of supports was perceived as essential for the inclusive classroom participants' perspectives of factors that affected their personal efficacy were different. The findings suggest that Jennifer focused on accessing support as a way of fixing the problem,

which was integrating the child into the program. Tanya focused on accessing support as a means to assist the child's development. Tanya perceived the long process of accessing support as detrimental to the child's development. Both Tanya and Jennifer's personal efficacy was impacted by their inability to access immediate support. For Jennifer, the lengthy process delayed the support that the program needed, whereas for Tanya, it delayed the support that the child needed.

According to Leatherman (2007), Smith and Smith (2002) and Seery (2004), a successful inclusive classroom is contingent on an effective, reliable support system. The findings from the present study suggest that early childhood teachers rely on the identification process to secure supports. Often the identification process can take up to a year. In the meantime the teachers' personal efficacy is challenged by their ability or inability to create a learning environment that promotes positive outcomes for the child. For Jennifer and Tanya navigating the identification process and lack of support within their respective centres were challenges that impinged on their personal efficacy. According to Irwin, Lero and Brophy's (2004) research, centre directors are contributors to inclusion. "Directors who are not inclusion leaders are likely to include only one or two children with special needs in their centres, and they do not necessarily do so continuously" (p. 9-10). In addition, "staff, in turn, are most likely to be successful in their work with children with special needs when they have:... A director who is a leader and learner about inclusion and who is responsive to their needs for support" (p. 10).

Neither Jennifer nor Tanya's centres had a policy on inclusion. Both Jennifer and Tanya relied on their own initiative to seek out and access support. In contrast, Daniel, although unsure as to whether his centre had a policy on inclusion, felt supported by his co-workers and manager. Positive and supportive director leadership and sound policy are essential to ensuring that

teachers working in inclusive classrooms are accessing available resources, receiving training, having scheduled non-contract time for planning and are working in collaboration with professionals and families (Irwin, Lero & Brophy, 2004).

Inclusive Program

Inclusion within the context of the social model is seen as dynamic and constantly changing to reflect a value system that recognizes and accepts difference. At a practical level inclusion involves a change in both the program content and delivery. In comparison, integration requires the child to fit into the existing program (Rieser, 2006).

The findings from the present study propose that Jennifer believes in a program that is fixed, with certain rules, expectations and routines for all the children to follow. Jennifer believes the child's disability must be considered before the child can participate in the program. For Jennifer, the child needs to be at the "recommended developmental level." The findings suggest Jennifer's program would not be appropriate for children who have behavioural problems or physical disabilities. Although Jennifer's program is accepting of children with certain disabilities, according to Rieser's (2006) definition it is not fully inclusive. The program remains static and the implementation of individual goals is not apparent.

Jennifer spoke of goals that the IA set for Derek. The role of the early childhood resource consultant (also referred to as the IA) is discussed in Frankel's (2006) research which suggests "the knowledge, skills and personal qualities that resource consultants possess are factors in getting people on board, creating an environment for change, and reducing resistance to inclusion" (p.55). Due to centre policy the goals for Derek were kept confidential in a file in the cupboard. Derek was to use a short fat pencil or marker with a rubber end to help him in developing his fine motor skills. Although Jennifer spoke of valuing the support from the IA the

absence of implementing the goal during a colouring activity suggests that she may not regularly follow the IA's recommendations. Further, Jennifer placing visuals on the wall five feet up from the floor suggests that Jennifer is uncertain of the purpose behind the strategy. Team planning and consultation which involves the teachers and the IA are essential to ensure understanding and continuity in the delivery of the IPP and the daily activities. As suggested by Frankel (2006) the relationship between the teacher and the IA is critical when developing and implementing goals and objectives. This concept of collaboration is captured in Jennifer's frustration over the lack of continuity within the inclusive program. Jennifer stresses the importance of having a team of co-workers that are "all working on the same page." Collaborative planning between co-workers and outside professionals is essential for successful inclusion. Inconsistencies that occur in the delivery of the program can lead to a decrease in the teacher's personal efficacy. The difficulty in securing time to collaborate within the centre and the broader community is acknowledged in the research conducted by Smith and Smith (2000) and Frankel (2006).

Daniel, on the other hand viewed all children as having special needs. He focused on observations and documentation as a way of investigating and understanding all of the children. In contrast to Jennifer, Daniel's beliefs are parallel with the social model of inclusion in which inclusion is both a dynamic process and a value system that promotes and respects diversity (Rieser, 2006).

Daniel views the inclusive classroom as blended, where the child with disabilities participates in activities and engages in social interactions. Further, Daniel believes the inclusive program should be child-focused, flexible and respectful. These qualities of inclusion are supported by the Division for Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009).

In addition, Daniel believes the inclusive program should include the parents, manager, IA, professionals, and teachers working in collaboration to develop goals for the focal child. These findings are supported by Cross, Traub, Hutter-Pishgahi and Shelton's (2004), research which revealed positive communication, flexibility of team members, strong partnerships between teachers and parents and a supportive administration as key components of a successful inclusive program. Further, the findings from the present study suggest personal efficacy is enhanced by the involvement and collaboration with the IA. Although Daniel viewed aids as "luxuries" he valued the IA's expertise when offering suggestions and recommendations for the inclusive program. Frankel's (2006) research found that when consultants acknowledged the teachers' competencies the teachers' personal efficacy increased and thus aided the development of effective and respectful working relationships.

When viewing the child within the inclusive classroom the findings suggest that Daniel and Tanya attribute the child's behaviour to the environment (Weiner, Nierenberg & Goldstein, 1976). Tanya talks about moving a child, who is prone to pushing other children, from the back of the line to the front of the line. For Tanya altering the position of the child in the environment addresses the problem of pushing. Both teachers believed that changes to the physical space and/or changes to routines and transitions could create positive outcomes for the child. Therefore, to create inclusion assessing children's behaviours and abilities in the context of the program would enable teachers to make appropriate accommodations. Modifications to programs and a variety of interventions and teaching practices are critical in a diverse learning environment (Division of Early Childhood and National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

Role of the Educator

How the teacher perceives the inclusive classroom will determine the strategies and interventions he/she uses in the program. Beliefs and practices may not necessarily align in the classroom. There may be discrepancies between what the teacher believes and the teaching practices that occur in the program (McMullan et al. 2006).

The findings suggest that Jennifer's practices were not always congruent with her stated beliefs. In the findings Jennifer discussed how she observed the children in their play, stepped in to further their skills, and then stepped back to continue her observations. In the guidelines for observing inclusive preschool programs (Appendix E), Hemmeter et al. (2001) discusses relationships and children's behaviour. In the inclusive classroom teachers are encouraged to model positive interactions by responding to the child's positive behaviours as well as using play scripts, modeling and prompts to encourage the child in his play. In one observation, when Derek is engaged in a potential play interaction with two other children at the sprinkler pad, Jennifer takes on the role of a passive observer. In this situation there is an opportunity for Jennifer to extend the play by fostering positive relationships between Derek and his peers. Further, Jennifer could have expanded on the play by modelling and using play scripts in order to promote communication skills. The findings suggest that Jennifer may have a general understanding of how to support children's interactions but she may not have the skills to execute the practice. Lieber et al. (1998), proposes that some teachers believe the ability to socialize is inherent in the child and the child is responsible for initiating social interactions. For Derek, teacher intervention was required to promote social inclusion.

Inconsistencies were also found in Jennifer's approach to conflict resolution within the classroom. She discussed conflict resolution as a teaching opportunity in which she could

ascertain through collaboration with the children, what happened and a possible solution.

However, in the in-class observation, Jennifer responded to a disagreement between two children by taking control and restricting the dialogue between the children. Her approach indicated a need for urgency in solving the problem. These findings are supported by Almog and Shechtman's (2007) study which found a gap between teacher's beliefs and their in-class practices. Their study revealed that teachers who believed in exercising a helpful approach in their teaching practices actually used a restrictive approach in the classroom. The teachers' responses were often driven by a need to "put out the fire."

Although the findings suggest that Jennifer was limited in her ability to promote positive social interactions in the classroom, she was successful at using strategies to teach new skills. In one observation Derek was trying to fill the water spout with water, Jennifer used a hand over hand strategy to teach him how to operate the water spout. Through verbal coaching and repetition Derek was able to learn the new skill. Attempts by other teachers which involved taking the spout from him, proved to be ineffective. These findings suggest that Jennifer has acquired strategies that support Derek in his development and aid him in acquiring new skills.

Daniel believed his role as an educator was multifaceted. It encompassed the roles of facilitator, surrogate parent, nurse, photographer and planner. For Daniel, exposing children to a variety of experiences, especially the outdoors was important. The findings suggest that Daniel offers children opportunities to create, cooperate and problem solve using outdoor materials. During one particular observation the children were connecting tubes. Their objective was to produce a long pole so they could knock the ball that was stuck in the tree. When asked about this particular activity Daniel responded, "to have fun with the children, sort of step into their play....fade out.....to teach them some skills and leave them and see if they carry on..." is part of

his role. These findings are supported by Odom's (2000) research which suggests that naturalistic interventions can be embedded into routines and activities. The knowledge or skill is incorporated into the activity. As the child engages in the activity the outcomes provide positive reinforcement and support the child's successes. Daniel used many strategies in his inclusive program and each strategy was attached to a specific goal. The findings suggest that Daniel's inclusive program was guided by thoughtful purpose. Each of the goals was implemented and monitored carefully so that Sandy was not overwhelmed. Small increments led to the acquisition of new skills.

Tanya believed in offering children opportunities to be a part of their own learning. Tanya was hesitant about introducing a teaching strategy (visuals) that would aid Martin in understanding and anticipating the routines and transitions of the program. Tanya was relying on a 'touch' technique that she believed to be effective. However, when observing Martin, teachers repeatedly called his name, took his hand and guided him back to the group. Although Tanya believed that Martin responded to contact, his behaviour did not indicate acquisition or generalization of the skill (following cues). As previously stated, Rieser (2006) discusses inclusion and inclusionary practices as dynamic. The Division of Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) emphasize the importance of offering a wide range of activities and learning environments. In short, Tanya's use of one technique with Martin may not be the best approach for this child. Perhaps through a process of implementing a variety of techniques and assessing the outcomes, an effective strategy could be put into practice.

Tanya believes in inclusion from a social justice perspective and a social model of inclusion framework. Tanya values in-service training and support from the IA. For Martin, the process

of putting an IPP in place has just started, therefore strategies and techniques passed on from the IA to Tanya are in the early stages. Tanya has good insight into the modifications that are needed to enable a child to participate in the program. However, the findings suggest Tanya did not demonstrate the ability to promote positive social interactions through interventions. After observing the PA's attempts to engage Martin in a sand play activity I questioned Tanya about how she would facilitate social play. Tanya did not express concern about Martin's solitary play. She believed that Martin enjoyed the reflection of the light off the fence and that is why he chose to stand there. Tanya stated that if she was concerned she would guide him to a toy and engage him in an activity. The findings suggest that Tanya's teaching practices for promoting inclusion are limited. Therefore in order to promote a fully inclusive classroom teachers must acquire the strategies, techniques and interventions to complement their inclusive ideologies.

Challenges to Inclusion

Unlike Jennifer, who spoke of challenges as specific to her inclusive classroom, Daniel and Tanya perceived challenges as more universal. Attitudes of co-workers and the larger ECE community were a concern for both of these participants. Daniel pondered on how he could encourage more educators to be open to the philosophy of inclusion. Tanya too, spoke to the idea of openness, to listening and to hearing new ideas, instead of being resistant and defensive. Together Daniel and Tanya shared a common concern that many children with disabilities cannot access childcare. According to Killoran et al.(2007) 79% of the centre directors in their study identified training, ratios, funding and the physical environment as the main barriers for implementing inclusive programs. Further, the comments made by some directors involved in their study were considered "resistant and discriminatory" (p.91). These comments are in-line with Tanya's comment about "fighting tooth and nail" to keep families of children with

disabilities from being discharged. Tanya and Daniel both practice within a social model of inclusion framework where according to Rieser (2006), the focus is on the child's strength and the right to belong and to be valued.

Limitations

This study is limited by the number of participants in the study. Preschool classrooms are taught by a team of educators. The ratio of teachers to children varies depending on the size of the group and the ages of the children. Therefore, the observations did not always include the participant with the focal child. As a consequence the in-class observations of this study were restricted.

Further Research

Further research is needed to extend the exploration of teachers' perceptions of inclusion and to ensure that the in-class observations are conducted over an extended time period. A qualitative method offers a deep insight into attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The combination of observations and interviews enables the researcher to explore relationships between beliefs and teaching practices. A longitudinal study or a case study of the inclusive preschool classroom would extend the existing knowledge about the relationship between teachers' perceptions and practice of inclusive education; an important consideration for enhancing the inclusion for children with disabilities.

Recommendations

The findings suggest numerous issues and concerns regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities. Lack of understanding and information appear to be a contributing factor to these concerns. The childcare sector is an underfunded, fragmented system that struggles to sustain quality, regulated care for children. In order for inclusion to be successful political and

educational reforms should occur. Government funding and changes to the DNA to reflect inclusion, changes to post secondary education ECE curriculum that allow students to see connections between theory and practice and collaboration with the childcare community can assist in ensuring a collective understanding. Implementing inclusive programs within the existing system will falter without a foundation based on policy, adequate funding and a shared inclusive philosophy.

Conclusion

The results of this study are derived from the perceptions of three early childhood teachers working in three different inclusive preschool programs. According to the findings of this research inclusion is multifaceted. For fully inclusive programs to be successful in the childcare community there must be a common understanding and commitment to the idea and philosophy of inclusion. Further, the techniques, strategies, interventions and modifications necessary for social inclusion to occur must be incorporated into the teachers' pre-service training and experience. The gaps which are evident not only in the process of identifying children with disabilities but also in post secondary education and on-going professional development undermine the early childhood teacher's personal efficacy in the inclusive classroom. Early childhood teachers' personal efficacy will only be enhanced if teachers believe they have the ability to program for all children.

The teachers who participated in this study appeared to have the best intentions for the children in their care. However, in implementing programs and practices based on their own version and or perception of the term "inclusion" important components of inclusion were lost.

Results from previous research and the present study demonstrate that there is not a common understanding or practice of inclusion. Bunch et al. (2005) emphasized that collaboration is

critical amongst all the stakeholders if inclusion is to be successful. The results of this study suggest that centres that practice a more inclusive philosophy are also connected to the larger ECE community. For example, Daniel's centre which is the community college's laboratory school encompasses more elements of the inclusive philosophy than Jennifer's centre.

According to the Division of Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) the elements and/or defining features which are considered essential for quality, inclusive programs are, "access, participation and supports" (p.52).

Frankel's (2004) findings are still prevalent today: 1. Lack of government funding in the childcare sector and in the area of children with disabilities continues to create problems with quality of care, access and support. 2. Inconsistencies in post secondary course content create barriers in teachers' common understanding and practice of inclusion. 3. Teachers' attitudes and personal efficacy can create incongruence in teachers' beliefs and practices in inclusive programs.

Inclusion is not a technique or a strategy or a tool. It is not a method of teaching that can be captured in a manual. It is not there as an aid to help teachers fix the problem and it is not about fitting a child with disabilities into an existing program. Inclusion is a philosophy that respects and values the diversity of all individuals. In short, if inclusion is going to be successful, all stakeholders must share a common understanding and belief in both its philosophy and practical implementation.

Appendix A

Ryerson University
350 Victoria Street
Toronto, Ontario
M5B 2K3

Date

To whom it may concern,

My name is Brenda Frey and I am a graduate student of the Early Childhood Studies program at Ryerson University. As part of the requirements of the Master of Arts program at Ryerson University I am to conduct a research project and submit a final research paper. The research I will be conducting will be exploring early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and inclusive preschool practices.

Through a naturalistic inquiry design I will be studying the early childhood teacher working in the inclusive preschool classroom. Two interviews and two in- class observations will be conducted to explore how early childhood teachers view and practice inclusion in the preschool classroom. Some of the questions being explored are: What is the teacher's concerns regarding inclusive programs? What is the teacher's hope for the program? What will make it successful? What are the barriers? Exploring this topic through the perspective of the front line teacher is the best way of assessing the day to day benefits and challenges in an inclusive childcare centre.

In- class observations will be conducted at the convenience of the staff and the director. Taking on the role as a non participant observer my aim is to be as un-obtrusive as possible. I will be using a variety of observational techniques as well as a guideline for exploring inclusive programs. All observational data collection will be made using pencil and paper. Interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to the participant.

The name of the participant and the agency will be kept confidential and pseudonyms will be used to protect all identities. All data will be destroyed at the end of the study.

Thank you very much for your participation and cooperation. If you have any concerns or questions please contact me at bfrey@ryerson.ca

General Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University
Dr. Sharon Wong, Acting Chair of the Ryerson Ethics Board Ryerson University
416-979-5000 ext.6931 at rebchair@ryerson.ca

Sincerely

Brenda Frey

Appendix B

Ryerson University Masters of Early Childhood Studies Research Study Early Childhood Teacher Consent Form

You are being asked to participate in a case study research project that explores early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and in class practices. It is important to read the following information before you give consent.

Purpose of the Case Study: This Major Research Paper is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree program at Ryerson University. The purpose is to explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and to observe teaching practices within the inclusive preschool program.

Investigator: Brenda Frey
Under the supervision of:
Dr. Elaine Frankel, Professor
School of Early Childhood Education
Ryerson University
efrankel@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, x7651

Description of the Study:

To better understand early childhood teachers' views and perceptions of inclusion you will be interviewed using an in-depth individual interview. There will be two interviews which will consist of open-ended questions and will take approximately an hour. All responses will be audio-taped and transcribed; if you do not consent to audio taping then transcription will occur through note taking. A series of observations will be conducted in order to explore the different teaching practices that occur in an inclusive setting. These will be set up and conducted at your convenience.

Confidentiality:

Your responses will be protected throughout the process of the study. A fictitious name will be used for your organization and any specific identifiable characteristics will be altered. Your perceptions and opinions will be kept strictly confidential by the researcher. Direct quotes from you may be used in the final report but they will not be attributable to you or reveal your identity.

Data Storage:

The audiotapes and transcriptions will be kept in locked files accessible only to the researcher. All consent forms will be stored separately from the data.

Clearance:

This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics and Ryerson University's policies.

Minimizing Risks:

I do not foresee risks in your participation in this research. There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. Your choice of whether you would like to participate, or not, will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Education, or the agency where you are employed. You are not obliged to answer any questions you find objectionable and you are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of your data. You can withdraw by contacting the investigator (Brenda Frey bfrey@ryerson.ca).

Protecting your Identity:

This research may result in publications of various types. Your name will not be attached to any form of the data that you provide, neither will your agency. A pseudonym will replace your name on all data that you provide to protect your identity. If the data are made available to other faculty or researchers for secondary analysis, your identity will never be disclosed. Any audio recordings made will be transcribed and then the tape will be destroyed

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the study you may ask them now. If you have any questions later you may contact:

Investigator: Brenda Frey, bfrey@ryerson.ca

Faculty: Dr. Elaine Frankel, efankel@ryerson.ca 416-979-5000, x7651

General Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University

Dr. Sharon Wong, Acting Chair of the Ryerson Ethics Board Ryerson University
rebchair@ryerson.ca 416-979-5000 x 6931

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 investigator.
- 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

I agree to audio-taping _____

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix C

Ryerson University
Masters of Early Childhood Studies
Research Study
Parent Consent Form

Your child is being asked to participate in a case study research project that explores early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and in-class practices. It is important to read the following information before you give consent.

Purpose of the Case Study: This Major Research Paper is in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Arts in Early Childhood Studies degree program at Ryerson University. The purpose is to explore early childhood teachers' perceptions of inclusion and teaching practices within the inclusive preschool program.

Investigator: Brenda Frey
Under the supervision of:
Dr. Elaine Frankel, Professor
School of Early Childhood Education
Ryerson University
efrankel@ryerson.ca
416-979-5000, x7651

Description of the Study:

To investigate early childhood teachers' views and perceptions of inclusion and in-class practices I will be conducting two observations. Each observation will last 2 hours. They will occur at a time that is convenient for the director, the teacher and your child. I will be conducting the research as a non participatory observer, using paper and pencil for the purpose of collecting data. The focus of my observations is the interactions between the teachers and the children as they participate in the classroom activities. There will be no videos, audiotapes or still photographs.

Confidentiality:

Your child will be protected throughout the process of the study. A fictitious name will be used for your child and your child's childcare centre and any specific identifiable characteristics that would identify your child will be altered. Although confidentiality will be requested of other parents and children confidentiality cannot be guaranteed on behalf of other participating children or their parents.

Data Storage:

The transcriptions will be kept in locked files accessible only to the researcher. All consent forms will be stored separately from the data. The data will be securely stored for no more than 5 years.

Clearance: This study has been granted clearance according to the recommended principles of Canadian ethics and Ryerson University's policies.

Minimizing Risks:

I do not foresee risks in your child participating in this research. There are no direct benefits for your child in participating in this study and your child's participation is entirely voluntary. Your choice of whether you would like your child to participate, or not, will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University, the School of Early Childhood Education, or the childcare centre where your child is enrolled. You are free to withdraw from the study without reasons at any point, and you may request removal of your data. You can withdraw by contacting the investigator (Brenda Frey bfrey@ryerson.ca).

Protecting your Identity:

This research may result in publications of various types. Your child's name will not be attached to any form of the data; neither will your childcare centre. A pseudonym will replace your child's name on all data that you provide to protect your child's identity. If the data are made available to other faculty or researchers for secondary analysis, your child's identity will never be disclosed.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Questions about the Study:

If you have any questions about the study you may ask them now. If you have any questions later you may contact:

Investigator: Brenda Frey, bfrey@ryerson.ca

Faculty: Dr. Elaine Frankel, efankel@ryerson.ca 416-979-5000, x7651

General Research Ethics Board at Ryerson University,

Dr. Sharon Wong, Acting Chair of the Ryerson Ethics Board rebchair@ryerson.ca 416-979-5000 x 6931

Agreement:

Your signature below indicates that:

- You have read the information in this consent agreement.
- You would like your child 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 investigator.
- 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 Parent

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Questions for Initial Interview

Background Information:

1. Years of experience teaching/ years of experience teaching children with disabilities.
2. Teaching qualifications.
3. What age group do you work with? How many children are in your group? Are there children with disabilities in your group? Tell me about them?
4. Previous professional experience working with children with disabilities.
5. How much in-service training or professional development have you received? How much in-service training in relation to children with disabilities? Was it adequate? Was it voluntary? How competent do you feel working with children with disabilities?
6. What is your personal philosophy of early childhood education? How does it include children with disabilities? **Probes:** How do you implement your philosophy in the classroom? How is it implemented with children with disabilities?
7. What is your definition of disability?
8. What does inclusion look like to you?
9. What is your childcare facilities' philosophy and or mission statement? How does it allow for inclusion?
10. What is your typical day in the classroom? **Probes:** Describe your role in the learning environment? Describe your role in the inclusive environment?
11. What are the greatest strengths of your program? What the challenges? Success Story?

Appendix E

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVING INCLUSIVE PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

Inclusion Practices (SpeciaLink, 2009)

Principles:

Zero Reject
Natural proportions
Same hours/days available for all children
Full participation
Parents involved to maximum of their degree of comfort
Leadership – proactive and strong advocates

Training and Support:

Staff has access to training and support
Consultations from therapies (OT, PT, SLP, Behaviour) available
Reduced ratios as needed
One on one staffing as needed

Individual Program Planning:

IPPs for each child
IPPs developed with parents
IPPs completed through: pull out, small group, regular routines
IPPs regularly reviewed
IPPs known to all staff

Child-Focused Practices and Examples Guidelines (Hemmeter et al., 2001)

Physical Space: and materials are structured and adapted to promote engagement, play, interaction and learning by attending to children's preferences and interests.

- toys are accessible.
- activities and toys are selected based on children's interests.
- classroom has well defined learning centres.
- a toy and book rotation plan is in effect to increase novelty.
- when learning centres are not choices they are visually closed.
- prop boxes are used in the dramatic play area.

Peer Models: social dimensions of the environment is structured and adapted to promote engagement, interaction, communication and learning by providing peer models, peer proximity, responsive adults, and initiative adults; and by expanding children's play and behaviour.

- small groups are arranged so that children have access to peer models at their table.
- peers are systematically taught to be communicative partners of children using augmentative or adaptive communication (AAC) systems.
- toys that promote social interactions versus isolated play (wagons, puppets).
- adults imitate children's speech and play and expand upon them by adding additional words and movement.

Routines and Transitions: are structured to promote interaction, communication, and learning by being responsive to child behaviour, and using naturalistic time delay, transition based teaching and visual cues.

- clear visual cues (including gestures, photos, written labels).
- time delay strategies are used to increase children's spontaneity and decrease their dependence on adult prompts.
- transitions times are kept minimal and are made as beneficial as possible by embedding interesting and instructional activities within them.

Play Routines: dramatic play, prompting engagement, prompting group friendship activities and using specialized props.

- adults use play scripts to teach children new multistep play sequences.
- adults use child preferences to increase engagement and to prompt interactions with peers (dramatic play area becomes a train station).
- adults provide individual picture schedules (photos of activities) for targeted children to provide support and structure during free choice time.
- adults select toys at high social value (balls, dress up clothes, puppets).

Physical and Emotional: safety and security of the children

- adequate supervision is always provided throughout the day. Staff 'count heads' throughout the day, and are frequently scanning to make sure all children are present and safe.
- adults respond empathetically to children who are hurt or in distress.
- adults provide predictable routines and transitions for children, and are reliable so that the children can depend on them.

Child Initiated Learning: teachers facilitate children's engagement with their environment to encourage learning that is not dependent on the adult's active involvement. Child participation with materials or activities does not always depend on teacher directions or instruction. Materials and activities allow for choices and provide feedback.

- adults provide interesting toys, materials, and activities that encourage children to make choices independently and to persist at playing.
- adults plan fun and interesting activities for children that provide contingent feedback.
- adults modify and adapt the curriculum and the environment to increase the child's meaningful participation with materials and people (structure the physical, social, and temporal environment; adapt the materials; simplify the activity encourage peers to help support the child; use specialized equipment; use child preferences).

Relationships: environments are provided that foster positive relationships

- adults model positive interactions by commenting on the child's positive behaviour, sharing, helping, and listening.
- adults use greeting and departure routines that acknowledge all of the children in the group.
- professionals communicate the accomplishments of children often to parents, formally and informally.

Practices Are Individualized: for each child based on:

- the child's current behaviours and abilities across relevant domains instead of the child's diagnostic classification.
- the family's views of what the child needs to learn.
- interventionist and specialist views of what the child needs to learn.
- the demands, expectations, and requirements of the child's current environments; the practices as well as the goal individualized.

This Practice Means:

- observations of children in their settings are an important part of assessment for planning instructional programs.
- families are interviewed to find out what they want their child to learn.
- families have a chance to describe difficult situations and routines in their day with their child.
- therapists, educators, and families discuss what is important for the child to learn.

Practices Target Meaningful Outcomes: for the child that builds upon the child's current skills and behaviour and promotes membership with others. They go beyond learning rote skills and include those that lead to independence, problem solving, and membership. Meaningful outcomes are identified by analyzing the child's functioning within his or her unique environment.

- adults identify the child's preferences and current skills during assessment.
- professionals and family members collaboratively identify functional goals and objectives during the IPP.
- functional skills are those skills that if children cannot do for themselves someone else will have to do for them. Functional skills are targets for intervention.

Data-Based Decisions: are used to make modifications in the practices (using different prompting strategies, different learning activities and different materials). Child's performance is monitored and data are collected.

Recommended Practices: are used to teach/promote whatever skills are necessary for children to function more completely, competently, adaptively and independently in the environment.

- maximize participation and membership.
- being actively engaged with materials, objects, activities, and other people.
- being an initiator.
- being responsive to the initiations and behaviours of others.
- reading the cues of the environment and responding appropriately based on those cues without being directed by adults.

- having social interactions and relationships with others.
- communicating with others including peers.

Children's Behaviour: is recognized, interpreted in context and responded to contingently
 -opportunities are provided for expansion of child's behaviour by imitating, modeling and prompting.

Promote: and accelerate learning.

- acquisition: learning how to do the skill.
- fluency- learning to do the skill smoothly and at natural rates.
- maintenance – learning to do the skill after instruction has stopped.
- generalization- learning to apply the skill whenever and wherever it is needed.

Consequences for Children's Behaviour: are structured to increase the complexity and duration of children's play, engagement and learning.

- staff and parents comment of the child's appropriate behaviour as frequently as possible.
- natural reinforcers are used (reinforcers that are part of the activity or routine).
- reinforcement is used to increase the number of conversational turns, numbers of different words used, and the length of interactive play episodes.

Systematic Naturalist Teaching: procedures such as models, expansions, incidental teaching, hand-model procedure, and naturalistic time delay are used to promote acquisition and use of communication and social skills.

- at snack, adults display the snack items and wait for the children to request them.
- when playing with interlocking blocks, adults model the colour names and ask children to imitate their verbal models.

Peer –Mediated Strategies: are used to promote social and communicative behaviour.

Effective use of peer mediated strategies requires the teacher to provide instruction, support, and feedback to the peers.

- adults involve peers in promoting children's social interactions. The teacher teaches a peer certain social skills. The peer and the target child play with one another and the teacher reinforces the peer's use of the social skills.
- the teacher uses peer tutoring to promote communication skills (establishes eye contact, obtains joint attention, requests clarification, and redirects play). The peer is reinforced for these behaviours.
- teacher uses peer modeling to increase a child's imitative play (peer performs the desired skill for the target child and draws the target child's attention to the behaviour).

Prompting and Prompt Fading: are used to ensure acquisition and use of communicative, self-care, cognitive, motor, and social skills.

- adults use prompts that result in the correct response. If a prompting procedure does not result in correct responses, a more intensive prompt is used.
- adults fade prompts gradually until the child is using target skills independently across activities.

-teachers plan and provide many opportunities to learn and practice targeted skills during typically occurring routines and activities.

Problem Behaviours: teacher assesses the behaviour in context to identify its function, and then devises interventions that are comprehensive in that they make the behaviour irrelevant, inefficient, and ineffective. Challenging behaviours serve some function for the child. To effectively deal with the behaviour the teacher must identify the function the behaviour serves for the child and teach the child a more appropriate behaviour that serves the same function.

Appendix F

Questions for Post Observation Interview

1. Tell me about child A's transition into the program.

Probes: What resources and supports are available at this centre for children with developmental disabilities? If I was moving into this geographical area and I had a child with identified needs, what kinds of resources and supports would be available?

2. Can you describe a typical activity that your class does every day? And then describe what child A does at that time. Probes: What do you do to ensure that child A participates in the social life of the classroom (friendships, interactions with peers and adults)? How do you ensure that child A learns in the classroom? What kinds of accommodations do you make socially? In the curriculum? When I was observing child A, I noticed.....Can you tell me about.....

3. Tell me what changes were needed to support your efforts to include child A? Probes: Were changes made to accommodate all the children in your group? Do you find the physical space works well with the children who are presently in your group? Which learning centres are the most challenging? Which leaning centres are the most successful? When I was observing group time, I noticed.....Can you tell me about.....
When I was observing transition time, I noticed....Can you tell me about(routines, activities)?

4. As an educator in an ideal world, what additional resources would you like to see available to help support inclusion? (Funding, support staff, training)

References

- Almog, O. & Shechtman, Z. (2007). Teachers' democratic and efficacy beliefs and styles of coping with behavioural problems of pupils with special needs. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 22(2), 115-129.
- Arceneaux Rheams T. & Bains, S. (2005). Social interaction interventions in an inclusive era: Attitudes of teachers in early childhood self contained and inclusive settings. *Psychology in the Schools*, 42 (1).
- Baker-Ericzén, M. J., Mueggenborg, M. G., & Shea, M. M. (2009). Impact of trainings on child care providers' attitudes and perceived competence toward inclusion what factors are associated with change? *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 28(4), 196-208.
- Brady, K., & Woolfson, L. (2008). What teacher factors influence their attributions for children's difficulties in learning? *The British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 78(4), 527-544.
- Bricker, D. (2000). Inclusion: How the scene has changed. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 20(1), 14.
- Bruns, D. A., & Mogharreban, C. C. (2007). The gap between beliefs and practices: Early childhood practitioners' perceptions about inclusion. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 21(3), 229.
- Bunch, G., Finnegan, K., Humphries, C., Dore, R., & Dore, L. (2005) Finding a way through the maze: Crucial terms used in education provision for Canadians with disabilities. Crucial

terms final report. Toronto, ON: The Marsha Forest Centre. Retrieved from
<http://www.marshaforest.com/crucialterms.pdf>

Christenson, S., Ysseldyke, J. E., Jing, J. W., & Algozzine, B. (1983). Teachers' attributions for problems that result in referral for psychoeducational evaluation. *Journal of Educational Research, 76*(3)

Clough, P., & Nutbrown, C. (2004). Special educational needs and inclusion: Multiple perspectives of preschool educators in the UK. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 2*(2), 191-211.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Sage Publications, Inc.

Cross, A. F., Traub, E. K., Hutter-Pishgahi, L., & Shelton, G. (2004). Elements of successful inclusion for children with significant disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 24*(3), 169-183.

Devore, S., & Russell, K. (2007). Early childhood education and care for children with disabilities: Facilitating inclusive practice*. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 35*(2), 189-198.

Division for Early Childhood & National Association for the Education of Young Children, (2009). Early childhood inclusion: a summary. *Young Exceptional Children, 13* (1), 52-53

Diamond, K. E., & Carpenter, E. S. (2000). Participation in inclusive preschool programs and sensitivity to the needs of others. *Journal of Early Intervention, 23*(2), 81-91.

- Dobbs, J., & Arnold, D. H. (2009). Relationship between preschool teachers' reports of children's behavior and their behavior toward those children. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 24(2), 95-105.
- Esterberg, K. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. McGraw-Hill, USA.
- Filler, J., & Xu, Y. (2006). Including children with disabilities in early childhood education programs. *Childhood Education*, 83(2), 92-98.
- Frankel, E. (2006). The knowledge skills and personal qualities of early childhood resource consultants as agents of change. *Exceptionality Education Canada*, 16(2), 35-58.
- Frankel, E. (2004). Supporting the inclusive care and education for young children with special needs and their families: An international perspective. *Childhood Education*, 80(6), 310-316.
- Friendly, M. & Prentice, S. (2009). *About Canada. Childcare*. Fernwood Publishing, Nova Scotia, Canada.
- Graham, L. (2006). Caught in the net: A foucaultian interrogation of the incidental effects of limited notions of inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 10(1), 3-25.
- Grenier, M. (2010). Moving to inclusion: A socio-cultural analysis of practice. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 14(4), 387-400.

- Hemmeter, M., Joseph, G., Smith, S. & Sandall, S.(Eds.) (2001). *DEC recommended practices program assessment: improving practices for young children with special needs and their families*. Missoula, MT: Division for Early Childhood.
- Irwin, S. (2009). *SpeciaLink early childhood inclusion quality scale*. Wreck Cove, Nova Scotia, Breton Books.
- Irwin, S., Lero, D. & Brophy, K. (2004). Highlights from inclusion: The next generation in child care in Canada. Retrieved from www.specialinkcanada.org
- Jordan, A. (2007). *Introduction to Inclusive Education*. Mississauga, Ontario: John Wiley and Sons Canada, Ltd.
- Jordan, A., & Stanovich, P. (2004). Teachers' personal epistemological beliefs about students with disabilities as indicators of effective teaching practices. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 3 (1) Retrieved on March 4, 2010, from <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/cgi-bin/fulltext/a20188051/main>.
- Kagan, D. (1992). Implication s of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist*. 27 (1), 65-90.
- Kemp, C., & Carter, M. (2005). Identifying skills for promoting successful inclusion in kindergarten. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability*, 30(1), 31-44.
- Killoran, I., Tymon, D., & Frempong, G. (2007). Disabilities and inclusive practices within Toronto preschools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 11(1), 81-95.

- Leatherman, J. M. (2007). "I just see all children as children": Teachers' perceptions about inclusion. *Qualitative Report, 12*(4), 594-611.
- Leatherman, J. M., & Niemeyer, J. A. (2005). Teachers' attitudes toward inclusion: Factors influencing classroom practice. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education, 26*(1), 23-36.
- Lieber, J., Capell, K., Sandall, S., Wolfberg, P., Horn, E., & Beckman, P. (1998). Inclusive preschool programs: Teachers' beliefs and practices. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 13*(1), 87-105.
- Lincoln, Y. & Guba, E. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry*. Newbury Park. CA: Sage Publications.
- McLeskey, J. & Waldron N. (2007). Making differences ordinary in inclusive classrooms. *Intervention in School and clinic, 42* (3), 162-168.
- McMullen, M., Elicker, J., Goetze, G., Huang, H., Mathers, C., Yang, H., Lee, S., Wen, X.(2006). Using collaborative assessment to examine the relationship between self reported beliefs and the documentable practices of preschool teachers. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 34* (1), 81-91.
- Mitchell, L. & Hegde, A. (2007). Beliefs and practices of in-service preschool teachers in inclusive settings: Implications for personnel preparation. *Journal of Early Childhood and Teacher Education, 28* (4), 353-366.
- Mulvihill, B. A., Shearer, D., & Van Horn, M. L. (2002). Training, experience, and child care providers' perceptions of inclusion. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 17*(2), 197-215.

- Neuman, L. (2006). *Social research methods*. 6th Ed., Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Niemeyer, J., & Proctor, R. (2002). The influence of experience on student teachers' beliefs about inclusion. *Journal of Early childhood Teacher Education*, 23 (1), 49-57.
- Odom, S. L. (2000). Preschool inclusion: What we know and where we go from here. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education*, 20(1), 20.
- Ontario Government. (1990). Day Nurseries Act. R.R.O. 1990, Regulation 262, General. Retrieved from http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_902d02_e.htm
- Ontario Government. (1990). Human Rights Code. R.S.O. 1990, Chapter H.19. Retrieved from http://www.e-laws.gov.on.ca/html/statutes/english/elaws_statutes_90h19_e.htm
- Ostrosky, M., Laumann, B., & Hsieh, W. (2006). Early childhood teachers' beliefs and attitudes about inclusion: What does the research tell us? In B. Spodek & Saracho (Eds.). *Handbook of research on the education of young children* (pp. 441-422). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Purdue, K., Gordon-Burns, D., Gunn, A., Madden, B., & Surtees, N. (2009). Supporting inclusion in early childhood settings: Some possibilities and problems for teacher education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 13 (8), 805-815.
- Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J. Sikula (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 102-119). New York: Macmillan.

- Rieser, R. (2006). Inclusive education or special educational needs. Meeting the challenge of disability discrimination in schools. In M. Cole (Ed.), *Education, equality and human Rights: Issues of gender , 'race' , sexuality, disability and social class* (pp. 157-179). Florence, KY, USA: Routledge.
- Scruggs, T. E., & Mastropieri, M. A. (1996). Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion, 1958-1995: A research synthesis. *Exceptional Children*, 63(1), 59.
- Seery, E. M. (2000). Seeing eye-to-eye. *Remedial & Special Education*, 21(5), 268.
- Smith, M. K., & Smith, K. (2000). "I believe in inclusion, but...": Regular education early childhood teachers' perceptions of successful inclusion. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 14(2), 161-180.
- SpeciaLink The National Centre for child Care Inclusion (2009). *SpeciaLink early childhood inclusion quality scale*. Retrieved on February 7, 2010, from <http://www.specialinkcanada.org/about/rating%20scales.html>
- UNESCO (2005). Guidelines for inclusion: ensuring access to education for all. Retrieved March 21, 2010, from www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001402/140224e.pdf.
- United Nations (1989). *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Human Rights Program. Department of Canadian Heritage.
- Varlier, G., & Vuran, S. (2006). The views of pre-school teachers about integration. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice*, 6(2), 578-585.

Weiner, B., Nierenberg, R., & Goldstein, M. (1976). Social learning (locus of control) versus attributional (casual stability) interpretations of expectancy of success. *Journal of Personality*, 44(1), 52-68.

Yin, R. (1989). *Case study research design and method*. Sage Publication.