Inclusive Education:
Exploring Teachers’ Perspectives

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

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Abstract

This study explores 5 teachers’ perspectives on inclusive education. The literature reviewed gives a historical background of special education as well as discusses a number of current methods and techniques that have been implemented as a means to include exceptional students in regular classroom settings.

This is a qualitative study that collected and interpreted data in narrative form. Common themes emerged from the accounts that were shared by the participants. This study found that the understanding of multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction might assist a teacher to better meet the needs of exceptional students within inclusive classrooms.

Based on this study, it is determined that a range of considerations needs to be weighed when choosing an educational placement for a student with an exceptionality. Each decision needs to be based on the individual student and the options open to him/her. When a decision about class placement is to be made, not only are the student’s strengths and needs to be considered, but also the school and community, the teacher, and the parents’ desire for their child must be taken into account. More work still needs to be done around inclusive education that is at the practical level, so that the needs of both the student and the teacher can be met.

Inclusive education did not mean the same thing to each person. It was individualized, just as each student is an individual and what works best for him/her is individual. In learning about inclusive education, settings and strategies need to be considered to allow for each individual student to achieve his/her personal best.
Acknowledgements

I want to thank my thesis supervisor Dr. Anne Elliott and my committee members Dr. Sandra Bosacki and Dr. Susan Drake for all of their suggestions that have helped me develop this thesis. My participants have been partners in my search for better educational practices for all students. Thank you for sharing from your hearts and working with me to research inclusive education. Thanks to my husband Carl and children, Nicole and Kyle, who encouraged and supported me throughout my studies. Thanks to my mom and dad who supported me as I grew up and provided the opportunity for me to follow my educational dreams. My mom was instrumental in encouraging me throughout my school days to do “my best.” She continues today to encourage me to be all that God has created me to be. Thank you! Finally, I thank God, my Lord and Savior, who continues to bless me and fill me with the passion to support the students I work with and design instruction so that each child may develop to the best of his/her capability.
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CHAPTER ONE: THE PROBLEM

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body.

1 Corinthians 12:12

Belonging is important to us all. We all want to be part of a family, community, club, organization, or country. Being part of such units means that we are included as part of the whole. In a school, children benefit from belonging, as they learn to develop empathy and love, make real life decisions, and gain educationally. Children who learn and play together can also learn to live together. In the context of school, they need to be taught throughout the curriculum to understand, accept, and value human differences. This is better accomplished though experience than through a book or discussion. I believe that instead of saying that we cannot accommodate a child in the regular classroom, we need to ask how we can do it.

The purpose of this study is to explore inclusive education through the eyes of 5 teachers. Inclusive education in this study will refer to the placement of children, some of whom may have special learning needs that differ from most of their peers in regular classrooms. These children will be referred to as exceptional students. Exceptionalities may include many different identifications such as having autism, having a learning disability, being gifted, or having a physical challenge. Although the topic of special education is not new, educators continue to struggle with how best to service students with special needs within their classrooms. This study explores 5 teachers’ perceptions and experiences of inclusive education in elementary education.
Rother (1997) writes that,

it is important to remember that inclusion is not a program. It is not an educational strategy that works for some children and not for others. Inclusion is a value that reflects what we want for all children, with and without disabilities (p. 20).

All students need skills to interact with each other and get along in a community. These social skills are established through interactions and relationships (Falvey, Coots, Bishop, & Grenot-Scheyer, 1989; Sapon-Shevin, 2003). The development of social skills requires children to grow up in an inclusive setting.

**Personal Background**

The topic of inclusion is one that is personal and meaningful and thus very important to me. It is my experience that draws me to questions regarding inclusive education. I have experienced education as a student with learning difficulties as well as a teacher of students who have learning difficulties.

My story about inclusive education began when I was a very young girl entering the educational system.

**School Beginnings**

I remember when my mom first took me to kindergarten. The school was an old two-story building. There were grand steps that took you up to what looked to me as a 4-year-old like massive front doors that led into a hallway of dark wood flooring. To me, the most intriguing thing about this school was the long, red tube slide that ran from the second story to the grassy schoolyard. Apparently, this was to be used as a fire escape when necessary. At times, I would look at that long slide and think about how exciting it would be to escape.
School wasn't something I dreaded in my daily attendance, but I did find it frustrating when the work I did was deemed not to be quite good enough. I thought most of my teachers found my slowness to grasp concepts somewhat frustrating. For grades 1 through 8, I attended a different school, which had no red fire escape from which to slide out.

I did make progress through my elementary years, but I continued to lag behind the other students each year. For the most part, I felt that I belonged with those other students in my class and yet, at other times, I felt that I was not really good enough to be there. At times, I was asked to leave the classroom and join a parent volunteer who would help me with my reading. I remember trying, really trying, and it was as if the lights in my brain were slowly going on. This feeling was the strongest when my reading group was called to the carpet to read from our chosen reader. It was not that I was alone, but it was the smallest group, and the books that were chosen for us were much smaller and less interesting looking than those of the other groups, especially those of the highest reading group. It was quite obvious to me and my classmates, by these groupings, where we were all slated in the classroom order of ability or disability. Since I didn't really have any strength in sports or other significant areas, my social order was reflective of my academic ability.

*Grade 5*

Grade 5 was one of the worst years of my life. My teacher was in the midst of completing his doctoral thesis. He had a high regard for those who achieved academically. The class was a grade 5/6, split and so my sister was in the class with me that year. She was strong academically and, to this day, when I meet up with this
teacher, he asks me how my sister is doing. This kind of comment has made me feel insignificant. I am reminded of how I perceived this teacher and my classmates to view me as rather slow and unable to achieve grade level expectations.

One of the policies that my grade 5 teacher instituted was that all work needed to be correct, and if it wasn’t, then it needed to be corrected. Therefore he created the “House Mice” and “Field Mice” concept. If your work was completed and correct, you were deemed a “Field Mouse” and could go out and play for the recess break. If your work was not completed or if there was work to be corrected, you were a “House Mouse” and you stayed in to work. In my case that meant many spelling corrections, which were to be written out 10 times each. So I became a “House Mouse” on many occasions because I could not spell correctly and writing these words out multiple times was supposed to solve my spelling difficulties.

I remember one particular sunny spring day that I once again had my name written on the chalkboard at the front of the classroom under the heading “House Mice.” It was there for all to see that once again my work was not up to the standard of the class and so I would need to stay inside and do my work over until it was right. The sun shone brightly through the windows, and I could not only see but also hear my friends playing the skipping game on the sidewalk outside the window. The air was warm, and I longed to be outside. I had worked hard throughout the morning, and I too longed for a break and some freedom to just play and talk to my friends. Rather, I sat in the stuffy classroom and completed my corrections and repeated each one of them 10 times. At this point there was no reward for being able to do the work correctly; rather I was paying the price for not completing my work correctly the first time. I deemed
being labelled a "House Mouse" a cruel punishment. By the time I had completed this task, it was almost time for the others to come in from recess. I remained in the classroom straightening out piles of scrap paper or finding other menial jobs to do that would give me some relief from the work that took so much of my time and effort.

In my present position as a teacher, I recall those days of being a "House Mouse" and as a result I never keep students inside as a punishment for their own personal struggles. Whether they struggle academically or even behaviourally, I know what it is like to struggle and not see the desired success. As adults, many of us know the value of taking a time out to revitalize oneself when we have been pushed to the limit.

The highlight of my grade 5 year involved a chess game with my teacher. Each lunch he would challenge a student to come and play a game of chess with him. He always won, except for once. It was the first game that I had with him, and without too many moves having been made I was able to claim the victory. He was not too pleased with the results of this game, and so a rematch was held the very next day. To his obvious pleasure and reassurance, he once again reigned as champion in the class. I too was pleased with my performance which gave me a sense that I was a capable student.

Perhaps the worst experience in grade 5 was when our teacher decided to figure out how we all rated against each other in academic standings. We were each to come up to the front of the room where our teacher sat at his desk and would then whisper into our ears the number that represented the standing we held in our class. Having 27 students in the class that year, my number was 26. Not that I was about to brag about my number, but at least I knew that I was not the absolute lowest achieving student in my class. Whatever comfort I received from this, I do not think it had a significant
impact in improving the self-esteem of this "House Mouse." What I never expected was that I would be forced to disclose and insist to my classmates that I actually was number 26. What had happened was that students did start sharing their given numbers and the student with the 27th position decided that he could claim the 26th number and leave me with 27; it was his word against mine.

Students already knew each other's abilities. One of the so-called "fun" activities we were engaged in from time to time was the spelling bee. The class would be divided into halves, and sometimes our teacher would even choose captains for each team. The captains could then take turns choosing students to stand on their side of the class and be part of the team.

I recall a particular time when once again some of the better spellers were chosen to be captains of the two spelling teams. Perhaps my teacher felt that being a good speller also meant being a good captain, for this was a job that I do not recall ever have been given. I sat at my desk within the rows of emptying desks, hoping that someone would choose me for their team before having to experience being left to the end again. We all knew that the last few remaining students were chosen not because they were needed but rather because everyone in the class needed to be on a team. I knew that I could not spell well, and yet each and every time I had to experience this embarrassment. Each time I hoped for a miracle. Whether I was chosen last or even second last, the humiliation did not stop here. This was a position which made me feel very uncomfortable. I tried to look as small as possible in my desk and, when I was finally picked, I rushed over to the side of the room where I stood in a line for the competition to begin. Since I was the last to arrive on the team, I ended up at the end of
the line as usual. My teacher chose the person at the front of the line to begin the spelling bee. This was somewhat comforting for me because I could stay in the game until everyone had been given at least one word. The anxiety that I felt when I was asked to spell my first word was phenomenal. If only I could get at least this one word correct, then I might have reason to maintain some self-esteem. I think that my teacher tried to give me a word with which he knew I could succeed, because I was often able to correctly spell the first word, given to me. This particular time, I was not able to spell the first word and so it was with great embarrassment that I took my seat in the expanse of empty desks. I remember how my face got hot as my classmates continued with what I considered a cruel game. I just didn’t feel I had been given the tools needed to compete. This experience did not help me to become a better speller as it was intended to do. It taught me, however, to be sensitive to the difficulties that others struggle with in their lives.

Today I never allow my students to choose teams. I especially detest games that do not allow every student to compete in what is a healthy and positive experience. That is where the competition allows each person to leave, whether they win or lose, with a positive self-esteem and with the satisfaction of having been able to be part of a competition. I see myself in students who know the outcome of an educational or athletic competition before the event occurs: that it will bring more pain than gain. Even as adults, we do not choose activities where we know we will fail because of our lack of experience or skills. Certainly we shouldn’t expect our children to be exposed to such demeaning activities. I believe that it is my job as a teacher to empower my students to be able to succeed or at least to give their best efforts.
Another Difficult Year

Grade 6 was the absolute worst year of my life! It was at this point that my social status within the classroom joined my academic status. My classroom teacher that year was a kind man, but he had very little control when it came to class management. That fact, I think, contributed to my miserable life that year. Some students were very mean. I became unaffectionately known as "Fairy." I do not believe that my teacher was even aware of any of this going on.

When our teacher took us out to play baseball, two captains were chosen, who would then begin the process of choosing fair teams. One captain would start by choosing the best player to join their team. The second captain would choose the next best player and so on until there were but a few of us left. With only a few students left and not yet having been chosen while the rest of the class looked on, the whole process became almost unbearable. The only comfort I could get from being chosen second or perhaps third last rather than last was that I had been chosen rather than not being chosen at all.

In the outfield, I hopefully could do little damage, but it was there that the damage was done. My teacher had gone back into the school to finish up some work while my class and I continued with our baseball game. A couple of classmates joined me in the outfield only to taunt me both verbally and then physically by kicking me over and over again. At the end of it all, the whole class seemed to be chanting, "Fairy, fairy, fairy..." My escape to the washroom was no escape at all, as I was again confronted with the fact of how I could possibly be so pathetic, and once again the teacher was unaware of what was happening.
A Sparkling Event

As I look back, my fifth grade teacher was anything but encouraging, and my sixth grade teacher never seemed to possess control of the class. In looking back over the years, perhaps it was my fifth grade teacher who led the way to an academic low in my life. Even in my reports, he commented on my lack of effort, unlike comments from any of my other teachers prior to him or since. The grade 6 teacher allowed for abuse to occur both to himself and to students in the class, thus contributing to the socially and possibly emotional low of my life.

Something changed, however, in the year that followed. Surprisingly, my ambitions to become a nurse changed to becoming a doctor in grade 7, and my determination to achieve seemed to strengthen rather than waiver over these difficult years. The support I received at home from my Mom continued to encourage and motivate me. Whenever I came home with a test, assignment, or report card, my Mom’s words to me would be, “As long as you do your best, it is good.” I began to read on a regular basis for enjoyment rather than only for school tasks. My life seemed to make a turn towards a goal that continues to inspire me.

Where I Like to Be

In looking back at the places in my life that allowed me to flourish, I compare my home life with my grade 7 experience. Home continued to be a wonderful haven for me, and grade 7 took on some similarities, as it became a positive place within my school career.

Grade 7 was a year where I was able to gain ground both academically and socially. My teacher was encouraging and in control of the class. I had seemed to learn
how to compensate with visual cues for what I believe was an unidentified learning
disability.

Both home and grade 7 were places that allowed for encouragement and
guidance. They were places where I felt that people valued me and accepted me as I
was. Opportunities in these settings affirmed my ability to learn and share. These were
places where I felt a sense of control and safety, and thus I was motivated to strive to be
all that I could be.

There were some differences that did separate these two settings. Home was
always a place of unconditional love, and grade 7 came with peer pressure of varying
degrees. While I was self-confident at home, I felt more self-conscious at school.
School, of course, was product oriented, as where my home allowed for more play and
relaxation. Although different in these ways, my home and grade 7 classroom were
places I liked to be. Although not free of demands, they were places where I could make
progress in my learning.

*The Elementary Years Come to an End*

Eventually, the academic understanding did start happening for me. By the time I
was in grade 8, I felt that I could achieve at the same level as most of the other students
in my class. I felt a sense of achievement and finally success. In my mind, I hoped to be
recognized for the achievements that I made with the “Most Improved Student Award”
at my grade 8 graduation. Instead it was given to a fellow student who was a main
participant in my verbal and physical abuse, who had always attained high levels of
achievement in all academic areas. I was very disappointed. What got me through those
tough years was having a home with parents who loved me and supported me. They
hired a tutor who was a teacher herself and who was now a stay-at-home mom. She patiently practised language skills with me, and I learned. I learned to decode words more accurately and improve my reading comprehension.

**High School**

It was more important to me that my mother gave me the confidence that I could achieve whatever it was that I desired if I continued to “do my best.” Rather than signing me up for general level classes in high school as recommended by my grade 8 teacher, she encouraged me to take advanced level classes so that I could more readily meet my goal of going to university. I had decided around this time to become a Special Education Teacher. Throughout my high school years, I struggled but continued to make improvements in my academic achievements. It was my mom’s advice that proved to be right. My mom continues to be that undoubting support system in my life as I continue to strive for and reach goals that I set out many years ago.

**Being a Teacher**

My experience as a teacher has always included work with students who were challenged in one form or another. Whether a student was developmentally delayed or had a learning disability, my interest was always, and continues to be, in helping each student to accomplish his or her personal best. I felt the need to pursue this study, as I wanted to find if other teachers had positive experiences with inclusive education.

From these stories, a clearer picture of inclusive education from the perspective of 5 teachers was gained as the result of their extensive experience. Such stories may benefit all teachers who work towards an inclusive classroom where all students can learn and meet their personal best.
Background of the Problem

How to educate people who learn differently from most others has been an issue in education since the 1800s. Children who found learning difficult were first educated in residential schools as a way to keep them separate from society. After World War II, parent groups organized schools for children with learning exceptionalities in their local communities.

In the 1970s, students who had learning difficulties were placed in special classes within regular schools. Regular schools were those that were set up to teach all children within their community. This trend was referred to as mainstreaming. Mainstreaming was a philosophy of education that assumed the position that a regular classroom placement should be the goal for all students including those with special needs. Mainstreaming “streamed” or placed students with special needs into regular classrooms. This was done without changing the regular environment, support systems, or methodology of special education. Mainstreaming differed from inclusive education in that it did not focus on accommodating and modifying programs within the regular classroom according to each student’s readiness level, interests, strengths, and needs (Tomlinson, 1999). If full-time placement in a regular class was not possible for a student, then the best next option would be for him or her to be in the regular class as much as possible. Some withdrawal for special education support would be given, but this would be limited to as little as possible. Mainstreaming continues to provide educational placement options that step away from the regular class setting. The Cascade Model, as discussed below, is an example of mainstreaming placement options.
The Cascade Model (see Figure 1), developed in the 1970s, promoted a range of placement options for exceptional students. It has also been referred to as the Reynolds' Model after C.R. Reynolds who developed it. The Cascade Model is a philosophical model of education that was designed to help educators explain which educational environment students with special needs would find least restrictive and most enabling. The arrow on the left pointing down, represents the philosophical belief that one would choose an educational setting only as far down as necessary. The arrow on the right pointing up represents the belief that placement should be made as close to the top as possible (Weber, 1988).

The Cascade Model is based on the placement of students in the setting most beneficial to their needs. Referring to the Cascade Model, Meisgeier (1976) wrote, “Special education historically has had little meaningful interaction with the mainstream, and the barriers which have been erected between regular and special education had become almost impenetrable---until recently” (p. 257).

The Cascade Model is a philosophical model and not a legislative model. That is, it is a model created on the basis of a logical breakdown of the principles underlying the behaviours, beliefs, knowledge, and nature of education rather than being legislative, which means that which has been made law by the government. Therefore, school boards would implement the Cascade Model according to their own interpretation of it.

The Cascade Model promotes the view that all exceptional students should have access to a continuum of services outside the regular classroom (Rother, Pike, Kappel, & Jory, 1997). Within Ontario schools, the allocation of money to support special
The Cascade Model

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Figure 1. Cascade model. (Weber, 1988, p. 8)
programs was greatest in segregated classrooms, although there was little
documentation that supported the idea that students' needs would be better met in
segregated classrooms (Hymer, 2002; Rother et al., 1997). Regular classroom teachers
were not trained to teach exceptional students within their classrooms. Rother et al.
believed that resources and supports should be brought to the regular classroom and
serve all students in that setting. Tomlinson (1999) agreed; however, she found that in
order for this placement to be beneficial for all students, a one-size-fits-all model within
the regular classroom could not be used. The Cascade Model attempted to meet all the
needs of exceptional students. However, it focused on placements for students and not
on the learning needs of the child. Placement referred to the educational setting in
which a student was assigned to receive his or her education. Although learning and
placement are related, they are not the same. Meeting a student’s learning needs takes
into consideration his/her readiness level, interests, and learning profile (Tomlinson). A
class placement may or may not take these into account, which directly affects a
student’s learning. When teachers used this model to consider the placement of children
with special needs, they needed to look at regular classroom education. The regular
classroom is still set up with a curriculum for regular students. It does not include a
curriculum for students with special needs unless the classroom teacher is specific about
modifying or differentiating instruction in response to each student’s varied readiness
level, interest, and learning profile (Tomlinson, 1997).

Integration was also introduced in the 1970s. It was a philosophy that attempted to
mesh the work done within the regular class and in special education settings. The
programs within each setting were to support one another. Students were given the
opportunity to work within the regular classroom part time and in the special class part time (Winzer, 1993).

Ontario legislation passed Bill 82 (The Education Amendment Act), which for the first time set out in law specific principles, polices, and procedures with regard to the education of exceptional students. Prior to Bill 82, school boards were not required by legislation to offer special education. Bill 82 required every school board to provide special education programs and services to its exceptional students by September 1, 1985.

Today the Education Act defines an exceptional pupil as “a pupil whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he or she is considered to need placement in a special education program.” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). The Ontario Ministry of Education has set up categories and definitions of exceptionalities by which students can be identified. These are as follows:

**BEHAVIOUR**

A learning disorder characterized by specific behaviour problems over such a period of time, and to such a marked degree, and of such a nature, as to adversely affect educational performance, and that may be accompanied by one or more of the following:

a) An inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships;

b) Excessive fears or anxieties;

c) A tendency to compulsive reaction; or
d) An inability to learn that cannot be traced to intellectual, sensory, or other health factors, or any combination thereof.

COMMUNICATION

Autism

A severe learning disorder that is characterized by:

- Disturbances in:
  - Rate of educational development;
  - Ability to relate to the environment;
  - Mobility;
  - Perception, speech, and language.

b) Lack of the representational symbolic behaviour that precedes language.

Deaf and Hard of Hearing

An impairment characterized by deficits in language and speech development because of a diminished or non-existent auditory response to sound.

Language Impairment

A learning disorder characterized by an impairment in comprehension and/or use of verbal communication or the written or other symbol system of communication, which may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors, and which may:

a) Involve one or more of the form, content, and function of language in communication; and

b) Include one or more of the following:

- Language delay;
- Dysfluency;
- Voice and articulation development, which may or may not be organically or functionally based.

**Speech Impairment**

A disorder in language formulation that may be associated with neurological, psychological, physical, or sensory factors; that involves perceptual motor aspects of transmitting oral messages; and that may be characterized by impairment in articulation, rhythm, and stress.

**Learning Disability**

A learning disorder evident in both academic and social situations that involves one or more of the processes necessary for the proper use of spoken language or the symbols of communication, and that is characterized by a condition that:

a) Is not primarily the result of:

- Impairment of vision;
- Impairment of hearing;
- Physical disability;
- Developmental disability;
- Primary emotional disturbance;
- Cultural difference; and

b) Results in a significant discrepancy between academic achievement and assessed intellectual ability, with deficits in one or more of the following:

- Receptive language (listening, reading);
- Language processing (thinking, conceptualizing, integrating);
- Expressive language (talking, spelling, writing);
- Mathematical computations;

c) May be associated with one or more conditions diagnosed as:
- A perceptual handicap;
- A brain injury;
- Minimal brain dysfunction;
- Dyslexia;
- Developmental aphasia.

INTELLECTUAL Giftedness

An unusually advanced degree of general intellectual ability that requires differentiated learning experiences of a depth and breadth beyond those normally provided in the regular school program to satisfy the level of educational potential indicated.

Mild Intellectual Disability

A learning disorder characterized by:

a) An ability to profit educationally within a regular class with the aid of considerable curriculum modification and supportive service;

b) An inability to profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development;

c) A potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

Developmental Disability
A severe learning disorder characterized by:

a) An inability to profit from a special education program for students with mild intellectual disability because of slow intellectual development;

b) An ability to profit from a special education program that is designed to accommodate slow intellectual development;

c) A limited potential for academic learning, independent social adjustment, and economic self-support.

PHYSICAL

Physical Disability

A condition of such severe physical limitation or deficiency as to require special assistance in learning situations to provide the opportunity for educational achievement equivalent to that of pupils without exceptionalities who are of the same age or developmental level.

Blind and Low Vision

A condition of partial or total impairment of sight or vision that even with correction affects educational performance adversely.

MULTIPLE

Multiple Exceptionalities

A combination of learning or other disorders, impairments, or physical disabilities, that is of such nature as to require, for educational achievement, the services of one or more teachers holding qualifications in special education and the provision of support services appropriate for such disorders, impairments, or disabilities. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000, Appendix D)
Ideally, with the amendment of this act, special education could now fully embrace a much more inclusive model where many exceptional students could be educated in the school that is located within their neighbourhood and within a regular classroom setting. This study explored the phenomenon of inclusion as it pertains to classroom experiences with inclusion. This study questioned where the line between inclusive education and segregated classes lies. It also explored teachers’ perceptions about when inclusive education is the best setting and at what point a segregated classroom is the best setting for a student with special needs.

In pursuing a career in teaching, I went to university and completed a Bachelor of Arts in Special Education (Mental Impairments). Since that time, I have worked for over 16 years in a variety of classroom settings. These have varied to include regular classes, remedial programs, programming for students with learning disabilities, segregated special education classes, and teaching as a learning resource teacher to support exceptional students both in and out of the regular class. I have continued to pursue professional development in special education over the years and have taken part in numerous workshops and courses. Within that time, I have completed the Ontario Ministry of Education’s Teacher’s Qualification course for Special Education with electives taken in learning disabilities, behaviour, slow learners, and giftedness. I have been told that as a Special Education Teacher, I need patience. How true it is that our interests develop as a result of our experiences. According to Dewey (1929), “education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing” (p. 21). My own learning struggles as a child developing literacy skills allowed me to understand better those students who
struggle in some way in my own classroom. An important component, I believe, of my teaching is my own experience of struggling as a student who needed understanding and empathy. As a result, I have a strong desire to teach special needs students in an inclusive environment so that, despite their differences, they can feel that they are important and certainly have a place and purpose within the regular classroom.

In reflecting more about my experiences as a student, I have tried to decide what has influenced me to continue to work at learning when it was so hard initially. Why is it that I have become passionate about education when it brought me so much distress as a child? Perhaps my first response to that question is that there is a huge sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when I am able to meet goals that are achieved when I put forth my best effort. That sense of achievement is something that continues to give me a wonderful sense of contentment in my life. It makes me feel that I too can be an important contributor in this world. I belong. I have gifts that matter. I have found a purpose. Parry and Doan (1997) share that “purpose and meaning exist when one sees himself or herself as an actor in some larger story” (p. 46). My story includes a God whom I believe has created me with gifts for a special purpose. I look back on my struggles as a child and see within these experiences an opportunity to learn from them. I have gained the insight and perspective of a child with learning difficulties. Nothing in a textbook could teach me what I have been able to learn through experience. Freire (1994) suggests that we are made from our experiences when he wrote, “If I was the same that I was 40 years ago, I would be profoundly disappointed. But at the same time, if I was nothing of what I was 40 years ago, I would be profoundly sad.”
Wiersbe (1980) writes of a little boy who was leading his sister up a mountain path that was not easy to climb. “Why, this isn’t a path at all,” the little girl complained. “It’s all rocky and bumpy.” Her brother replied, “Sure, the bumps are what you climb on.” We all have bumps in our lives and a choice in what we will do with those bumps that occur in the path of our life. As a Christian, I claim God’s promise found in Psalm 91:11, 12. “For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone” (The NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 884). God doesn’t promise to remove the stones from my path, but he does promise to make them stepping-stones and not stumbling blocks. He promises to help me climb higher as I face difficulties in life. As learning was difficult for me as a child, I learned strategies that helped me organize and study my work. Without the learning struggles that I had, I do not believe that I would be as determined and driven to achieve in these areas as I am today.

**Statement of the Problem Situation**

The problem was that physical separation created a situation whereby students were being socially rejected and given a stigma (Winzer, 1993). In the beginning of the twentieth century, the focus of special education moved from isolated institutional settings to segregated classrooms within regular schools (Scherer, 2003; Tomlinson, 1999; Winzer). It was compulsory school attendance laws that encouraged boards to create segregated classes. Students who did not perform well were given a label and then grouped together to form a segregated class (Schiller & O’Reilly, 2003; Winzer). Students with disabilities, while not experiencing the isolation of an institution, discovered that being a part of a segregated class became another form of isolation.
Segregated classes being held in regular public schools were found in places such as basements, down dark hallways, in the back of the main school building, and in former closets (Winzer). These children, although they belonged to classes in the same building as their peers, were totally segregated, since they were made to enter and leave the school at different times as well as be separate during recess times (Winzer).

"Inclusion" is a term that has been used to describe the incorporation of exceptional students into the regular education classroom. It means most students with special needs attend the school in their neighbourhood with classmates of the same age. Individualized and relevant learning objectives, with the necessary support of small-group or individualized instruction, are provided for these students. Inclusion, however, does not mean that all students who have a disability must receive all of their instruction within a regular classroom (King-Sears, 1997). There needs to be room for individual instruction and even withdrawal at times. We need to begin with the student's needs and employ appropriate instruction and strategies. The following is a true story.

John, a quiet 12-year-old 6th grader at your local middle school, goes through the cafeteria lunch line at noon. After he pays for his food and drink, he starts to put his tray on a table already occupied by other students. One of the boys at the table says, "Go way." John leaves the table and approaches the students at another table. There he is told, "Get out of here." John walks away and puts his tray down at a third table, realizes he's forgotten his straw, and goes back to the lunch line to get one. When he returns to the table where he left his lunch, he finds his tray gone. (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, p. 25)
Sapon-Shevin tells us, “John is a student with a wonderful sense of humour, a love of mystery books, an impressive golf swing, and also, by the way, he has Down syndrome” (p. 25). John’s story is one that emphasizes the imperfections in our schools today. It also shows us that inclusion is not just about school but about social justice as well. We need to consider what kind of world we want to create by teaching our students about understanding and love that they will need to successfully work, play, and interact with the broad variety of people they will encounter in their lives (Sapon-Shevin).

In May 1991, Marion Boyd, then Ontario Minister of Education, announced “that the integration of exceptional pupils into local community classrooms should be the norm in Ontario, wherever possible, when such a placement meets the pupil’s needs, and when it is according to parental choice” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1991). The Ministry of Education states the three most important reasons for proposing integration as the norm as follows:

1. The integration of exceptional pupils benefits both society and the pupils. Integration enables all pupils to understand disabilities and to develop respect for others. For some exceptional pupils, integration into a regular class is an important first step towards integration into society.

2. Pupils derive benefits from being educated in local community schools where they can participate with their peers in community activities. An integrated placement provides increased opportunities for socialization. Such a placement also enables many exceptional pupils to develop greater self-esteem and a better sense of belonging.
3. Integration is the norm for non-exceptional pupils in Ontario. As a matter of equity, therefore, exceptional pupils should have access to integration as a placement option, if it meets their needs. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1991, p. 4)

Many special education classes have come out of dark closet spaces that existed prior to the 1960s, and educators have attempted to meet the majority of students' academic and social needs within the regular classroom. Educators today are more informed or have access to information about learning difficulties that some of their students possess (Scherer, 2003). Psychology and the science of the brain have given us some light on these matters while other insights have come from continuing observation in classrooms (Tomlinson, 1999). Due to the movement of exceptional students into regular classrooms, teachers need to be trained to work in classes with students who have varied abilities. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) were created to specify strengths and needs of exceptional students and specify needed accommodations and modifications.

A large part of the Ontario government's educational funding has been allotted to outcome-based learning in the late 1990s, where specific curriculum expectations are laid out for students at a particular grade level. For students within regular classrooms who are unable to meet grade level expectations, IEPs are written and then implemented. These IEPs are based on the needs of the child and what the classroom teacher, working with the government curriculum expectations, is capable of accomplishing.
Curriculum taught in our elementary schools needs to be expanded to allow for curriculum modifications to be made more easily. This requires adequate support being available for teachers to be able to effectively implement an inclusive curriculum for both low- and high-achieving children in regular classes. This may mean more preparation time for the teacher or perhaps the help of an Educational Assistant (EA). Combining the strengths of regular education and special education can be beneficial to meet this need (Lerner, 1988). The regular classroom teacher brings knowledge of class grade level expectations in terms of curriculum expectations. The special educator brings knowledge of disabilities as well as teaching and learning strategies for implementation. These teachers should have time together to develop and regularly update students’ IEPs.

It has been noted (Moore, 1998) that students within segregated special education classes do not receive a greater concentration of special education resources than those students who are in integrated settings. Findings showed that exceptional students within regular classes met more academic objectives on their IEPs, had greater social interaction, and spent less time alone than those students within special education classes (Moore). These findings encourage educators to pursue the issue of inclusive education. In the early 1900s Dewey wrote, “Intelligence is developed through the individual’s interaction with the social environment, particularly through solving problems” (Hansen, 1995, p. 40). I believe that this is an important key to inclusive education today, as it focuses on teaching students how to deal with social issues that will occur throughout their lives.
An independent school, located in southwestern Ontario uses the following points in their policy on inclusive education to focus themselves towards providing inclusive education:

1. Body of Christ–The Bible teaches that adults and children are all members of the one body of Christ. The image of the body is sketched with great clarity (I Corinthians 12:21-26, The NIV Study Bible, 1985). The Christian School is one place where members of the body of Christ learn how to live together for God. The Christian school offers a unique opportunity for a group of God’s children with varying abilities and backgrounds to learn to need each other and to work together. With Christian teachers, parents, and administrators working together to build an educational community, students will grow up with greater awareness of how to live as the body of Christ in their communities.

2. Unique Gifts–Each person is God’s unique creation, reflecting the glory of God in his or her own way. The school’s task is to educate each student, enabling him/her to develop and exercise the unique gifts and abilities God has entrusted to each.

3. Love Your Neighbour–In the Old Testament the second great commandment is to love our neighbour as ourselves. In the New Testament the standard for such love is Christ’s love for us. “Love each other as I have loved you” (John 15:12, The NIV Study Bible, 1985). Love is the mark of the Christian community (Spratt, 1992). (1994)

Some schools seek to address the wide range of gifts, talents, and challenges found among the children in its community. Within this vision, adequate resources and
support for teachers need to be made available to the extent that would make inclusive education successful. When exceptional students are recommended placement in segregated classrooms, we need to look at the reasons why these students’ needs are not being met in the regular classroom.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the research was to explore 5 teachers’ perspectives of inclusive education. Inclusive education is that in which exceptional students are educated within a regular classroom. There are exceptional students in many regular classrooms who are not able to meet grade level expectations independently. I explored 5 teachers’ perceptions around how accommodations and modifications have influenced students within a regular classroom. I include myself as one of the 5 participants as it was important for me to see if my own beliefs about inclusive education connected with others in my study.

This study asked teachers who have been involved with the implementation of inclusive education practices within an elementary school (grades junior kindergarten through grade 8) to tell about their experiences. Questions listed in Appendix A were used to help teachers formulate their accounts and were used to stimulate further clarification when teachers told of their experiences.

It is from the personal accounts that 5 teachers shared that inclusive education was explored. Such accounts may assist all teachers who are striving to create an inclusive classroom where all students can learn and meet their personal best.
Objectives

Some researchers have suggested that differentiated curriculum for different types of students should not be used. Rather, a broadened curriculum that is designed to work with students who have a wide range of abilities should be employed (Ferguson & Jeanchild, 1992; Jorgensen, 1997; Lang & Berberich, 1995; Moore, 1998; Udvari-Solner, Villa, & Thousand, 2002). Merely including exceptional students in regular classes does not guarantee that learning will take place (Stainback, 2000). Other research suggests that an inclusive classroom requires collaboration among the regular classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and instructional assistants (Rother, et al., 1997). This study explored the perceptions and experiences of 5 different teachers with elementary aged students in inclusive education settings in order to gain insight into these issues.

Rationale

It is important for education to continue to improve and for the government and educators to use resources wisely so that the curriculum within every classroom is the best for all students.

I believe that John Dewey (1929) might have been an advocate for inclusion within the classroom because he believed that each child needed to be seen as an individual and that “education is a process of living and not a preparation for future living” (p. 18). Dewey wrote,

I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor
from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child's capacities, interests, and habits. (p. 18)

It is through our acceptance of children with differences within the classroom that we will move towards developing into an inclusive society that values all people (Moore, 1998; Rother et al., 1997).

**Importance of the Study**

In my role as a Learning Resource Teacher, I set up Individual Education Plans (IEPs) for exceptional students. These IEPs include accommodations and modifications for the regular classroom teacher to implement in order to allow a successful educational experience for children with special needs. I run a resource program to teach some of these students the strategies that they need and can use in the classroom. I also provide in-class support to classroom teachers via the use of an educational assistant for limited periods of time to help with the implementation of IEP expectations. I believe that much can be learned from exploring the experiences of 5 teachers, which includes me, who have been involved with inclusive education.

This study looks at the history of special education and explores experiences of 5 teachers who have employed, to some extent, in inclusive education. It is meant to be of value to educators who struggle with effectively teaching all students within their classroom and for those who have struggled with meeting the needs of a child with special needs. It also attempts to better define the boundaries of inclusive education.
Assumptions and Limitations

Experiences of 5 teachers within southern Ontario were explored, including my own experiences. This process does not provide a complete picture of inclusive education. This study provides a snapshot of what inclusive education has meant for a few and cannot be generalized beyond those few.

The study assumed that exceptional students are being included in regular classes. It is also assumed that teachers, boards, and the Ministry of Education want what is best for all students in that students would learn according to their own ability.

My bias is that I myself successfully learned within a regular classroom despite the fact that I had learning difficulties as a child. As a teacher with 17 years of experience of teaching students with special needs, I support and encourage the success of inclusive education. This may affect how I interpret the teachers’ stories and therefore be a limitation in the study, as I am one of the participants. Those are the eyes I bring to data analysis.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

Chapter Two reviews literature that is related to this study.

Chapter Three explains the research design. Procedures are included so that it will be clear who the participants in this study are. Interview questions are presented, and then clarification made on how data collection and recording took place in this study.

Chapter Four of this study includes the narratives of those 5 teachers who have had experiences with inclusive education.

Chapter Five, the final chapter of this study, summarizes the key findings of the research as well as includes some discussion and conclusions. Some recommendations
are made as I continue to interpret and discuss findings in context of recent literature.

Recommendations for further study of inclusive education classrooms are made.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Be completely humble and gentle;
be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:2

Organization of the Present Chapter

This chapter has been organized so that the reader will see how special education began in the past and how it has grown to become what it is today. I take my reader from past to present and begin to anticipate what the future holds for students with special needs.

This chapter is organized into two main parts. The first part of the chapter begins with a historical description of education for students with learning problems. Main features of educational growth are described within three phases of history related to this topic. These three phases include the foundation phase, the transition phase, and the integration phase. Following a description of each phase, inclusive education, as it is today, is summarized.

Curriculum and inclusion are discussed in the second half of this chapter as literature is reviewed regarding the issues of curriculum and inclusive education for students with special needs.

Historical Background

Although the education of students with learning difficulties continues to be studied and developed today, professionals have been concerned with this issue since at least the early 1800s. Three phases have been used to describe the growth of education for individuals with special needs: (a) the foundation phase, (b) the transition phase, and
(c) the integration phase. Medical professionals were responsible for the growth of the field during the foundation phase, psychologists during the transition phase, while educators held major responsibilities for the rapid expansion during the integration phase. Each profession continues to be represented in the field of education today.

**Foundations Phase (circa 1800-1930): Brain and Behavioural Research**

During the early 1800s, basic scientific research was conducted on the brain and its disorders. A number of the early brain researchers were doctors who studied patients whose brains had been damaged by stroke, accident, or disease. Franz Joseph Gall was one such physician from Vienna who began work in this area when he published his work in 1802. Gall endeavoured to affiliate specific qualities of mental activities with particular parts of the brain (Wiederholt, 1974). Researchers at that time gathered information by studying behaviour of people who had lost some function, such as the ability to speak or read. If the patient died, they would use the autopsy as an opportunity to see what part of the brain had been damaged to cause the loss of these abilities. This information was to be used to help better understand how learning was accomplished (Wiederholt).

In the 1880s, schooling and compulsory school attendance for the handicapped or disadvantaged children were the leading subjects of theoretical discussion (Wiederholt, 1974). By 1918, the United States of America had established compulsory education laws in each of its states. As compulsory education was mandated, states and local districts classified criteria for exclusion on the basis that some students would not benefit from the education that was available (Wiederholt). In Ontario, mandatory special education was not in place until 1985 (Wiederholt).
The movement of disabled students from institutionalization to public school, from isolation to segregation, may be dated from about 1910-1930 with the formation of permanent segregated classes in the public schools. Segregated classes were meant to provide remedial instruction to improve students’ skills (Wiederholt, 1974). With these improved skills, some children were meant to return to the regular classroom, although this rarely happened (Wiederholt).

Of the many reasons that contributed to the founding of special classes, compulsory attendance laws in the United States were the most important. Once these laws were established, schools could no longer ignore exceptional students and were challenged to find solutions to their problems within the system. Teachers were generally unwilling to handle these children in regular classes, and officials, seeking to place order, discipline, and high standards in the schools, were unwilling to place them in regular classrooms. Segregated classes were a way to meet the requirements of the law while simultaneously meeting the needs of the schools (Winzer, 1993). A large number of students who were unruly, disabled, low functioning, and immigrants began to receive labels and were assigned to segregated classes (Winzer). Labels were meant to remove stigmas connected to the traditional labelling system. For instance, idiot became feebleminded, and by about 1920 the terms mentally defective or mentally retarded became standard labels (Winzer).

The cause of specific learning disorders was investigated, classified, and categorized into three different types of disorders: (a) disorders of spoken language, (b) disorders of written language, and (c) disorders of perceptual and motor processes. These three types of disorders were kept fairly separate until 1963 (Wiederholt, 1974).
The foundation phase was a time when medical professionals established theories regarding the nature and causes of specific learning disorders. Much of the information regarding disorders of written language and disorders of spoken language was based on the study of brain-damaged adults (Winzer, 1993). Instead of using empirical or statistical research procedures, the tendency during this time was to perform in-depth clinical studies with patients. The findings of these studies were then generalized to a larger population (Wiederholt, 1974).

In 1917, James Hinshelwood, a medical doctor from France, published his work on a condition he described as “word blindness.” This was the first true professional writing on the unique problems of children we now refer to as learning disabled (Wiederholt, 1974; Winzer, 1993). In the early 1920s, Samuel T. Orton, an American psychiatrist, proposed a theory that rested on the bilateral symmetry of the brain when he suggested that the failure of one hemisphere of the brain to become dominant causes learning and reading disorders (Winzer). Hinshelwood and Orton attempted to locate the reasons why some children struggled with disabilities in reading, writing, spelling, and arithmetic and suggested some general remedial principles that would later be developed during the transition phase (Wiederholt, 1974; Winzer, 1993).

Transition Phase (circa 1930-1960): Clinical Study of Children

After the activity and growth of special education in the 1920s, the 1930s witnessed a sharp decline. The Depression slowed momentum in the growth of services. During the Depression children stayed in school longer, the use of work permits declined, and the need for special education increased (Winzer, 1993). The American Committee on Special Classes estimated a total of 10 million students who required
special education were to be present in the schools, but only 1 million were receiving additional aid beyond the of regular classroom placement (Winzer).

By 1934, special educators were still maintaining that nine tenths of exceptional children in the United States and Canada were failing in regular classrooms and that inappropriate curricula were being taught because their problems had not been identified (Winzer, 1993). Many other potential students were out of school; many were simply excluded or expelled; others dropped out or were considered unteachable.

Some reasons for this decline in special education included the Depression, poorly trained teachers, poorly designed curricula, and low success rates for disabled students. Therefore, there was much pessimism about the progress and future of special education (Winzer, 1993).

Students with disabilities, while not experiencing the isolation of institutional settings, found that segregated classes led to a different type of isolation (Winzer, 1993). School classes for these students were being held in basements, down dark hallways, in former closets, or somewhere in the back of the main school building. Children were totally segregated, although they were now in the same building. Winzer writes that they were required to enter and leave school at different times and were kept apart at recess from those in regular classes.

World War I and World War II, both directly and indirectly, had important effects on the education of exceptional children. The war affected the attitudes of the culture toward disability (Winzer, 1993). Since these wars caused a high degree of maiming rather than killing, physical differences became customary. A greater acceptance of physical disabilities was unconsciously extended to both physically handicapped
children as well as to veterans who had become disabled. Gradually this acceptance was applied to people with all types of exceptionality, including those with mental as well as physical challenges (Cruickshank, 1958; Winzer).

The 1940s and 1950s were again a time of growth in the field of special education (Winzer, 1993). Public awareness of the ability of individuals with disabilities to pursue employment had risen steadily since the days following World War I, when thousands of physically disabled American veterans required assistance in returning to the work force (Winzer).

*Approaches to remediation.* The transition phase was characterized by the effort of both psychologists and educators to use the theories developed during the foundation phase to create remedial teaching strategies (Wiederholt, 1974). The approaches to remediation of spoken language disorders developed during the transition phase of the Learning Disabilities (LD) field, discussed by Wiederholt, were based on theories developed by Orton in 1937 as well as on the methodologies practised by Grace Fernald and Helen Keller in 1921. Orton emphasized kinesthetic components in the remediation strategies that he developed to use with students who had written language disabilities. Wiederholt writes that Fernald and Keller had designed the visual-auditory-kinesthetic-tactile (VAKT) approach to learning to read. They believed that while most children could learn to read using visual approaches, some children with learning disabilities needed to learn to read with the use of a multisensory approach. The most notable characteristic of these programs and that of others developed at the time was their similar emphasis on multisensory approaches in teaching (Wiederholt). These multisensory approaches would have students use visual, auditory, and tactile senses to learn. When
learning to spell, for example, a student may see a word, say the letters used to spell it, and trace the letters of the word on a course surface such as sandpaper.

During the transition phase, the continuing work of physicians was supplemented by the contributions of psychologists and educators. These latter professionals attempted to translate the theoretical hypothesis of spoken and written disorders and perceptual-motor dysfunctions into remedial programs (Wiederholt, 1974). In each type of disorder area, the professionals were concerned with a subset of specific skills that were viewed as necessary for overcoming learning deficits (e.g., phonemic sound discrimination and spoken language, sound-symbol association and written language, eye-hand co-ordination and perception; Wiederholt). As they strove for a more specific diagnosis of what difficulties a child was having in learning, teaching and learning tools began to be developed (Wiederholt).

Such teaching and learning tools helped expand the learning disabilities field during the 1960s and 1970s. The theories developed during both the foundation and transition phases, while helpful in an educational environment, were not as pertinent as structured programs in assisting teachers and others to identify and treat a population of children. These programs, although for the most part invalidated, were assumed to be particularly useful, since they were based on the theories and clinical experience of professionals (Wiederholt, 1974). They needed to be accompanied by structured programs that reflected the application of theories.

**Integration Phase (circa 1960-1980): Rapid Expansion of School Programs**

During the late 1950s and the 1960s, educators, parents, and professionals began to seriously question society's stereotypes about exceptional persons as well as the
value of segregated classes. Much of the growth that occurred during this period was due to parent advocacy. Such advocacy searched for better educational alternatives for their children with special needs (Safford & Safford, 1996). New labels were created such as, dyslexic, brain damaged, and learning disabled to group students who did not perform well and for when there where not clear causes for their learning difficulties (Winzer, 1993).

It was on April 6, 1963, that Dr. Samuel A. Kirk gave a speech at a conference sponsored by the Fund for Perceptually Handicapped Children, Inc. In this speech, he first used the term “learning disabilities,” which has now become a standard term used for children of normal intelligence who have learning problems. The effect of this speech was quite significant, as it stimulated further interest in the field of special education and it identified a specific group of students with learning difficulties. From that time, these students were labelled as learning disabled (LD). The new term was well received by parents, as it suggested an educational problem rather than a medical one (Wiederholt, 1974).

In 1968, “The First Annual Report of the National Advisory Committee on Handicapped Children” was published in the United States. It calculated that, although there were roughly 1 to 2 million children who could be defined as LD, only a small number of these students were receiving an education with special help (Wiederholt, 1974). This report was significant, as it led the government to develop laws that would guarantee that these students would receive the special education they needed.

**Public Law 94-142.** In 1975, the United States implemented a public law to be known as the “Education for All Handicapped Children” or P.L. 94-142. It stated that
there would be zero exclusion for children aged 3 through 21 to be educated. As such, all children with disabilities must be provided a “Free Appropriate Public Education,” based on an Individualized Education Program (IEP), in what was to be termed the “least restrictive environment.” Each state needed to have a plan on how to incorporate this law (Lerner, 1988). “This law changed the face of special education forever. It guaranteed education for handicapped people; it gave huge impetus to the idea of mainstreaming, and it put special education and exceptional people in the limelight in a way that was never done before” (Weber, 1988, p. 7).

In Canada, education laws are the responsibility of the provinces. Provinces in Canada also began to include exceptional students in various provincial education laws (Winzer, 1993).

**Ontario’s Bill 82.** It wasn’t until 1980 that Ontario passed Bill 82 that set out Ontario regulations and policies for Special Education. “Prior to Bill 82, school boards were not required by legislation to offer special education” (Weber, 1988, p. 19).

Sections of Bill 82 read as follows:

> Every board shall, before the 1st day of September, 1985, provide or enter into an Agreement with another board to provide, special education programs and special Education services for its exceptional pupils.

Bill 82 defined an “exceptional pupil” as one

> whose behavioural, communicational, intellectual, physical or multiple exceptionalities are such that he is considered to need placement in a special education program. (Weber, p. 19)

“Special education program” was defined as one that is
based on and modified by the results of continuous assessment and evaluation and that includes a plan containing specific objectives and an outline of educational services that meets the needs of the exceptional pupil. (Weber, p. 19)

It described "special education services" as facilities and resources, including support personnel and equipment, necessary for developing and implementing a special education program. (Weber, p. 19)

Since that time, more reports and task forces have been arranged. Organizations and development of LD classes within the schools have been supported and grown. In fact, LD is now one of the most researched and developed areas within special education (Wiederholt, 1974).

The Contemporary Phase (circa 1980-1990)

The contemporary phase was characterized by a number of different features. First, there was the acceptance of a greater spread of different aged children who could be identified as LD. In the early 1960s, when programs first began for students with LD, only those who were of elementary school age were serviced (Lerner, 1988). In the late 1980s, interest in children with LD extended to the early childhood years, as LD specialists were concerned about preschool children who were at risk (Lerner). Services for students with LD also became available in most American high schools and some postsecondary institutions (Lerner).

Another characteristic of this phase was the acceptance of degrees to which a child was affected by his or her disability. Since children with mild learning disabilities and severe learning disabilities vary in their needs of educational services, schools
began to differentiate students to fit into a category of mild, moderate, or severe LD (Lerner, 1988).

The cross-categorical concept meant that students were placed together in a special class if they fell under the label of visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically handicapped, speech impaired, learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, or mentally challenged (Lerner, 1988). The cross-categorical system was used as an alternative to segregated classes for a number of reasons. It was felt that many of these students shared similar needs and were being taught with the same teaching methods. In a number of class action lawsuits, special classes were judged to be discriminatory, especially those classes for what was then termed mental retardation. (Lerner, 1988).

It was also within this phase that learning disabilities and regular education were seen as compatible. Special Education teachers and the regular classroom teacher worked together to create a working learning environment for the student within the regular classroom.

The use of computers began during this phase. Computers were used for programs of drill and practice, teaching new skills, word processing, and for simulations and creative problem solving (Lerner, 1988).

Inclusive Education Today (circa 1990 - present)

A look at the history of special education indicates that a major argument was about where students who had learning difficulties attended school and in which class (Mazurek & Winzer, 2000). This argument continues today (Mazurek & Winzer). Inclusion has become known as a broad interpretation of social justice that was evident as an expression of concern for protecting the rights of all students (Mazurek &
Winzer). Today's ongoing discussion regarding inclusive education is a chief issue within special education, but it also mirrors a main movement toward inclusive practices right through the whole education system. It also indicates a change in society's perceptions about educational rights and the rights of individuals (Mazurek & Winzer, 2000). It also reflects the current phase of education that I would like to research more in this study. I have shown from where we have come, but the question remains, "Where are we going?"

In recent years, attention has been given to the idea of how all students can be learning members within a regular education classroom (Stainback, 2000; Tomlinson, 1995; Udvari-Solner et al., 2002). Some believe that education within schools should include teaching children how to socialize and be active members of community life (Stainback). Each student's learning is to assume its own outcomes (Stainback). What is learned in school should be applicable to their lives outside of school, both now and for the future (Stainback).

In January 2000, the Ontario Minister of Education announced new plans for improving the quality of special education programs and services in Ontario. This plan set up standards for the school boards to follow as a way to ensure more accountability to the government as well as to students, parents, and taxpayers, when they develop special education plans. This was to be part of the government's goal in guaranteeing the best quality education for all students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000).

Each school board was to set up a Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). The committee members consisted of voluntary representatives from local associations, community representatives, and trustees, all appointed by the board. Its
purpose was to keep the Ministry of Education informed about the school board’s special education operations. It was also responsible to provide the public with information regarding special education services to which they were entitled. This was to be done through public meetings, which were to be continued throughout the year (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000). Through feedback received at these meetings, the school board’s SEAC could fulfill a number of responsibilities. One of its responsibilities was to make recommendations to the board with respect to any matter affecting the establishment. They were to develop and deliver special education programs and services for exceptional students within the board. The school board’s SEAC would participate at the board’s annual review of its special education plan and in the development of the board’s annual budget for special education. It was the responsibility of SEAC to review the financial statements of the board as they relate to special education (Ontario Ministry of Education).

It is the school board’s responsibility to provide the ministry and the public with details of the range of placements provided by the board. They need to inform the public that placement of a student in a regular class is the first option considered by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC). The board’s special education plan must:

- describe the ways in which the board’s SEAC is involved in providing advice on determining the range of placements offered;
- acknowledge that placement of a student in a regular class is the first option considered by an IPRC;
• outline ways in which a student can be integrated into the regular classroom when the placement meets the student’s needs and is in accordance with the parents’ preferences;
• outline specific information about each type of placement provided at the elementary and secondary levels;
• list for each category of exceptionality the range of placement options available, along with the criteria for admission, the admission process, and the criteria for determining the level of support provided in each placement, including the board’s criteria for assigning intensive support for students who are in need of a great deal of assistance;
• state the maximum class size for each type of special education class;
• list the criteria used for determining the need to change a student’s placement;
• describe the alternatives that are provided when the needs of a student cannot be met within the board’s range of placements and the ways in which the options are communicated to parents. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2000)

Curriculum and Inclusion of Exceptional Students

John Dewey (1929) believed that schools were places were students could learn to be of value within society. He believed that schools should reflect community life, with students studying about their home and community, an attitude similar to many current practices in both special and regular education. He believed in “learning by doing” and that it was the active student who learned more. Dewey maintained that the learning style of curriculum within a school should be similar to the style of learning children do
outside of school within the community (cited in Grenot-Scheyer, Abernathy, Williamson, Jubala, & Coots, 1995). In many ways, Dewey was describing what we refer to today as inclusive education.

Educational inclusion is defined as “the process of allowing all children, regardless of disability, race, or any other difference the opportunity to remain a member of the regular classroom” (Encarta Encyclopedia, 1998). “Inclusion applies to cultural, social, linguistic, racial, gender, mental, and physical differences. Advocates contend that all children with learning problems, whether they be ‘special education’ students, ‘at-risk’ students, or otherwise regarded as disadvantaged in schooling, belong in regular classroom environments” (Winzer, 2000, p. 8).

A problem with the term “inclusion” is that it is often interpreted as always moving students from special schools and classes into the regular education classroom. Inclusion implies that the regular education classroom is most desirable and that any other place is second best. Farrell (2000) suggests the use of the term “educational inclusion” because it gives equal value to different places provided that students are appropriately placed according to their individual needs.

Servicing students in different school environments came about when some children were not successful in regular classes. Placing students into special education classes was not the result of any research demonstrating that segregated classes were the best placement for these students, but rather as an alternative to the lack of success they had in regular classes (King-Sears, 1997). Research shows that most students with learning needs benefit from a placement within a regular classroom rather than in a special education class setting (Bunch, 1999; Forness, Kavale, Blum, & Lloyd, 1997;
This does not imply that all special supports and service should be withdrawn, however. It is merely the isolation of special education classes which is questioned. "For children with special needs, segregation highlights their disabilities, disrupts their education, and teaches them to be dependent" (Winzer, 2000, p. 12). "If a child never learns any math, history, or other subject, it is still critical that he or she be included so that all students can learn about mutual respect, caring, and support in an integrated society" (Stainback et al., p. 67) Individual and intensive support continues to be necessary for students with special needs within the regular classroom (King-Sears).

Curriculum has generally been perceived as and implemented from the perspective that regular education classes have a standardized set of curriculum requirements that every student must achieve to successfully complete the "grade." This assumes that there are determinable bodies of knowledge or information that, when achieved in sequence, result in a successful adult life (Stainback et al., 1992). Students who in the past could not learn the specific curriculum expectations outlined for their grade level failed or were excluded from regular education classes.

There is a growing recognition that formal education does not contain a single body of knowledge and information required for students to lead a successful life of being happy and productive in society (Merritt, 2001; Mungai & Thornburg, 2002; Stainback et al., 1992). It is important to teach students how to learn and discern (Stainback et al.). It is also important for all children to know themselves in terms of both strengths and needs. Many years earlier, Bobbitt (1918) had come to this
conclusion when he wrote that education was to help children develop a type of wisdom that could grow only with the participation of everyday living in contrast to mere memorization of facts.

A standardized curriculum does not accommodate the different backgrounds and experiences, learning styles, speeds of learning, or the diverse interests among students (Stainback et al.). It does not account for those students who have been given a label such as learning disability, gifted or mild intellectual disability (Stainback et al., 1992). The definitions of these exceptionalities are given by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2000) and written in Chapter One of this study.

The new curriculum developed and implemented by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1998 focuses on reading, writing, spelling, math, science, and technology. It also updated programs in the arts, physical education, and other subjects. Within this curriculum, the province set standards that are very specific about what students should learn and when they should learn it (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998).

Standards are beneficial to teaching and learning when educators have curriculum, instruction, and assessment align with both standards and students’ learning needs (Drake, 2001; Kluth & Straut, 2001; Strong, Silver, & Perini, 2001). The standards outlined in curriculum will have little meaning if they cannot accommodate the needs of all students (Kluth & Straut). In order that standards are developed to allow curriculum, instruction, and assessment that are relevant to learning differences, Kluth and Straut outline five conditions that they believe must be present for this to occur.

The first condition was that standards needed to be developmental and flexible. Standards should not assume that one is appropriate for all. Standards that are
developmental and flexible provided opportunities for different students in the same classroom to work at a range of skills and concepts according to their needs, abilities, and interests (Kluth & Straut, 2001).

The second condition stated that standards needed to include a range of assessment tools. These assessment tools could include portfolios, interviews, observation, anecdotal records, self-evaluation, questionnaires, journals, and learning logs (Kluth & Straut, 2001).

The third condition was that standards needed to include access to meaningful content. Educators needed to connect the standards to the lives of the students so that their concerns and futures within the community are taken into account (Strong et al., 2001). The following example illustrates this point.

Reese, a student with significant disabilities, works in an inclusive general education 4th grade classroom. While the general education students work in small groups to investigate fossils, Reese sits in the corner of the classroom and completes a counting worksheet with a paraprofessional. Had Reese been expected to participate in a standards-based curriculum, he could be meeting his individual goals of “interacting appropriately with peers and classifying objects by at least three different characteristics.” At the same time, he would have the opportunity to use interesting materials, work with peers, and learn about geography and history. Sorting fossils into categories or building a model dinosaur with a cooperative group would be both more meaningful and more content-based than filling in a worksheet that taught no science and did
nothing to include Reese in the classroom community. (Kluth & Straut, 2001, p. 44)

The fourth condition required the community as it needed to implement standards. It was not just a classroom teacher’s responsibility to teach to the standards, but it was the responsibility of both families and communities (Kluth & Straut, 2001). Regular classroom teachers benefit from collaborating with each other and the special education teachers. Students benefit from varied teaching approaches, instructional styles, and the perspectives that could be given by more than just the regular classroom teacher working within the classroom (Drake, 2001; Kluth & Straut, 2001).

The fifth condition stated that standards are a catalyst for other reforms. Kluth and Straut (2001) believed that standards should motivate political leaders to work for smaller class sizes, better staff development opportunities, increased teacher planning time, and more social supports. They believed that “the standards movement can provide teachers with a compass for crafting a rich curriculum and appropriate instruction, offering new opportunities and setting high expectations for all students in the multicultural, heterogeneous, dynamic classrooms of the 21st century” (Kluth & Straut, p. 46).

Schools need standards that keep education focused on achievement but that leave them the time and flexibility they need to pay attention to the individuals in their classrooms. (Strong et al., 2001, p. 57)

Drake and Burns (2004) see integrated curriculum as a way to cover the requirements set out by the standards in an effective way. Standards are interconnected and allow teachers to choose a variety of teaching strategies that are hands on, applied
to real-life context, and promote critical thinking (Drake & Burns). Integrated curriculum enables students to understand the topic’s relevance within the curriculum that they are being taught (Drake & Burns). Drake (2001) found that a teacher who integrated curriculum around a Middle Ages unit was able to cover a greater number of Ontario curriculum standards because specific standards were included in some of the broader ones taught. The students’ knowledge increased as they dealt with concepts such as heritage, citizenship, and systems. They were able to incorporate design and construction; research and inquiry; and both oral and written presentations. This integrated unit was centered on collaboration, responsibility, and respect. These teaching strategies that were used engaged the students in learning.

One of the focuses of inclusive education is where instruction takes place. Another focus is on the type of teaching practice used to teach students. Distinct features of exemplary inclusive education include a supportive teacher and quality instruction that has shown positive results to students. However, opportunities for quality instruction for some students are just not available in all schools (King-Sears, 1997). Not all teachers, administrators, or school boards believe that students with special needs should be in the regular classroom (Clousing, 1994; Farrell, 2000; Saint-Laurent, 2001). If the teacher in the regular classroom does not support exceptional students, then I question whether these students would be better served in a segregated class. Support by both teachers and classmates are crucial to inclusive education.

Jorgensen (1997) suggests ways to achieve high standards in inclusive classrooms. Differentiated curriculum for different types of students should not be used, but rather a broadened curriculum that is designed to work with a wide range of
students is most appropriate. A broadened curriculum would include expectations that range in difficulty from simpler to more complex for each concept taught in class. Implementation of a successful curriculum may need to see the merging of regular and special education practices. This type of broadened curriculum accounts for enrichment and simplification for students when necessary.

The studies also consider the effects of inclusion on students without disabilities. No negative impact is evident on these students (King- Sears, 1997; Moore, 1998). In fact, research (King- Sears; Moore) shows that there are positive effects on all students. They are generally accepting, tolerant, and understanding of one another’s needs and differences. In my experience, I have found this to be true in most cases.

According to the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning, successful inclusive classrooms have teachers who:

- are philosophically committed to meeting the needs of all students, including those with mild disabilities, in the general education classroom;
- have sufficient time to think about and plan for the diverse needs of students in their class(es);
- incorporate teaching practices that enable them to better meet the needs of all students in their class(es);
- collaboratively work with special education teachers to assess, teach, and monitor student progress;
- have the option for their students to receive short-term, intensive instructional support from a special education teacher; and
• have the option for their students to receive *sustained* instruction in basic skills or learning strategies that could not be provided in the general education classroom. (Deshler, 1997, p. 1)

Research suggests that inclusive education may help to maximize individual growth and build a sense of community (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1995; Moore, 1998; Stainback et al., 1992; Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995). Inclusion studies that showed negative results occurred in situations where the exceptional students were put into classrooms without proper supports or they were not properly being programmed for through an IEP (McLeskey & Waldon, 2000; Moore). It is inappropriate to place exceptional students within classrooms where teachers are unprepared and lack the resources needed to support the special needs of the student (Merritt, 2001; Timmermans, 1994). In order for inclusion to occur successfully, the regular classroom needs to be a place where students with a range of abilities, are supported and accepted (McLeskey & Waldon, 2000; Moore).

**Collaboration between Regular and Special Education**

Warger and Pugach (1996) suggest four phases are required to merge regular and special education. Phase one is the “orientation,” where teachers establish rapport and set expectations for their collaboration. Phase two is “problem identification,” where the goal is to predict potential areas of difficulty that students may have with the curriculum. Phase three is “intervention,” where teachers come up with ideas to expand, modify, or enhance the curriculum. The final phase is entitled “closure.” Here the teachers establish a plan for evaluating students against the curriculum, how they
responded to new instructional strategies, and the success of the approach used to assess the evaluation of their learning.

The collaboration of regular and special educators needs to move from conferring about individual student problems to how to make the curriculum accessible to a diverse group of students including those with special needs (Jorgensen, 1997).

**Collaborative Methods**

Van Dyke et al. (1995) suggest that an inclusive classroom requires the general educator, the special educator, and any instructional assistants to collaborate. For successful collaboration to occur, the following assets are important.

- **Communication.** Teachers must be honest with one another about their concerns and feelings.
- **Flexibility.** Teachers must be able to do things differently if necessary and be able to deal with the changes within their classes.
- **Shared ownership.** The student with an Individual Education Program (IEP) is a student of the regular classroom teacher. The special education teacher needs to support the classroom teacher to allow the accommodations and modifications to be implemented within the regular class.
- **Recognition of differing needs.** All students can meet the goals set out when there is appropriate support to address their personal needs.
- **Need-based instruction.** Educators must be willing to plan instruction based on learners’ needs and not on time lines set out by others.
- **Willingness to be a team player.** Each member of the education team must be willing to work with others on all issues in order that the implementation of curricula will be successful.

- **Dependability.** Each team member must be prepared for his or her part of the curriculum responsibilities.

- **Co-operative grading.** The general and special education teacher must work together to assess and report on the progress of the students with IEPs.

- **IEP responsibility.** Both the general and special education teacher should be the authors of the IEP. They should have equal parts in carrying the IEP out, although it is usually the special education teacher who monitors progress.

- **Sense of humour.** It is important that teachers support and encourage one another and when necessary laugh together (Van Dyke et al., 1995).

  "The push for inclusive schools has moved away from excluding students who don’t fit the mold to one of creating learning environments where all students can succeed" (Warger & Pugach, 1996, p. 65). Curriculum and instruction need to be broadly based, that which ranges from concepts that are simple to those that are more complex, to provide effective education to a diversity of learners.

  For this to become practised by teachers, professional development is required to assist them to find solutions that maximize the learning experiences of all students.

  To develop and implement curriculum and instruction based on best practises, along with appropriate instructional adaptations - adaptations that some students will still need - all teachers need grounding in curriculum and instruction for individual differences, as well as an understanding of the interconnectedness
between the two. With this understanding, teachers will be able to develop supports for students who need them, rooted in, and clearly related to - rather than fragmented from - the classroom curriculum. (Winn & Blanton, 1997, pp. 5-6)

Teachers need to provide students with curriculum to advance the diverse abilities of students in inclusive classrooms.

The teacher can be seen as a facilitator of students who are actively involved in their learning. Students enhance each other’s learning by working together as they share experiences. They come together with different strengths and needs and through these mutual experiences develop skills of collaboration and co-operation (Ferguson & Jeanchild, 1992). “Creative teaching allows students with and without disabilities to be taught according to the same standards, while bringing different perspectives to the classroom discussion.” (Jorgensen, 1997, p. 4) Curriculum variations that accommodate diverse student abilities can be accomplished by adapting learning objectives and activities.

**Modifying Curricula and Instruction**

There have been a number of strategies that have been published to assist teachers in modifying curricula and instruction to meet the needs within an inclusive classroom (Drake, 2001; Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1995; Hymer, 2002; King-Sears, 1997; Kluth & Straut, 2001; Lang & Berberich, 1995; Strong, et al., 2001; Tomlinson, 2001, 1999; VanDyke et al., 1995). Many variables can be manipulated to individualize curriculum and instruction. Some of these include:

- **Materials for study:** As well as choosing materials at different levels of difficulty,
materials such as art, music, newspapers, journals, and magazines can be chosen rather than the standard textbook.

- **Method of study:** This refers to instructional strategies such as thematic instruction and co-operative learning that tend to be effective among diverse learners. Teachers may feel the need to modify the presentation of material for some students.

- **Different levels of expectation:** Expectations may differ from one student to the next in terms of student responses, amount of work load, and performance expectations.

- **Pace of study:** Some students may need to work at a different pace than other students in order to accommodate the range of ability levels within the classroom.

- **Sequence of study:** Students should be able to choose and become proficient at important portions of the curriculum rather then be overwhelmed by the idea of mastering the entire unit.

- **Learning focus:** The focus should be on shared values, attitudes, and problem-solving processes that are most pertinent to all students.

- **Place of learning:** Students should be given the opportunity to learn skills not only in school but also in the community.

- **Evaluation of learning:** Self-evaluation opportunities should be given in order that learning become more relevant to the students (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1995).

**Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy**

Reeves and Stein (1999) were the first authors to coin the term Developmentally Appropriate Pedagogy (DAP), which focuses on how a teacher can modify curriculum by making accommodations for any student in class who is having problems or difficulties. The goal of DAP is to give instruction that is individualized such that
acceptance by peers is encouraged (Reeves & Stein). DAP takes the view that, when a child is having problems, a teacher needs to take a step back and assess the root of the problem. Skill sequences are broken down into small steps from easiest to most difficult. It is this developmental progression that ensures success for individuals. The teaching style used with DAP is interactive and varies depending on the goals of a given activity and individual needs of the student. Matching each child’s skills and interest level to the activity strengthens the successfulness of individualized instruction (Reeves & Stein).

**Integrated Curriculum**

Integrated curriculum is yet another effort to make curriculum comprehensive and applicable to all students. The main focus in integrated curriculum is what is happening in the present. It allows students to attach personal meaning to the curriculum. This approach to curriculum tries to teach students about the world in which they live. Drake (1998) writes that “the more connections we can make to previous knowledge and to our experience, the more we learn and can apply our learning. This has tremendous implications for how we teach because it leads directly to connecting what we learn” (p. 15). Integrated curriculum helps students develop the skills necessary to interact in society both in the present and in the future. Integrated curriculum “is a model for developing and managing curricula that is meaningful and useful to the learner and takes into account the multiple learning styles and abilities” (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1995, p. 327). The seven characteristics of integrated curriculum are as follows:
1. It is based upon the fundamental value that the purpose of public education is to create an enlightened and caring citizenry capable of participating in and maintaining a democracy.

2. Students learn best when they are actively engaged in real-life situations and activities.

3. Students learn in different ways and at different paces.

4. Curricula should centre on the acquisition of concepts. Basic skills, such as reading, writing, and mathematics, should be infused into and support a curriculum that focuses primarily on shared values and attitudes.

5. Students should continually be provided with choices to allow for variability in learning style and positive reinforcement.

6. Lectures should be limited. Opportunities for exploration, discovery, and application of concepts to the real world should be extended.

7. Meaningful, “reality-based” assessment practices should be used (Grenot-Scheyer et al., 1995, p. 327).

Classrooms that are implementing integrated curriculum use co-operative learning as a primary instructional strategy. Responsibility is on all students to co-operate and collaborate. Students rely on one another for information. Students demonstrate understanding when they make choices about how and what they will learn (Grenot-Scheyer, 1995).

Gardner's (1983) work on multiple intelligences suggests that we all have at least eight intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. From these
eight, only two, the verbal-linguistic and mathematical-logical intelligences, have been focused on in most schools. If our teaching also includes the other six intelligences, students will be able to learn more fully (Drake, 1998). Integrated curriculum is one application of accommodating for multiple intelligences.

*Instructional Techniques*

Dewey (1929) and King-Sears (1997) would agree that the best teaching practices for inclusion are instructional techniques that help students achieve, gain independence, as well as work successfully with others in a classroom that accommodates a broad range of learners (King-Sears, 1997, p. 18). Dewey (1929) writes,

I believe that the individual who is to be educated is a social individual, and that society is an organic union of individuals. If we eliminate the social factor from the child, we are left only with an abstraction; if we eliminate the individual factor from society, we are left only with an inert and lifeless mass. Education, therefore, must begin with a psychological insight into the child’s capacities, interests, and habits.... They must be translated into terms of their social equivalents—into terms of what they are capable of in the way of social service. (p. 292)

Learning environments where all students can succeed must be created. Educators must work together to produce curricula that are attainable to a diverse group of students, including those with special needs. “The task becomes one of integrating knowledge about how learners with diverse characteristics will interact with the content” (Warger & Pugach, 1996, p. 62). The dilemma has become a need to change curriculum to meet the needs of all students.
Diverse Classes

School populations have changed dramatically in both Canada and the United States during the past 20 years (Mazurek & Winzer, 2000). A mix of students who have different languages, ethnic backgrounds, nationalities, and religions as well as many different physical and learning characteristics have created very diverse classroom groupings (Mazurek & Winzer). “Inclusion will help all students receive a better education, and the diversity among class members will enhance learning opportunities for everyone” (Stainback et al., 1992, p. 82). This is no easy task. Inclusive education is but a step along the historical road of education. “The issue is not that schools can include all students in spite of their different abilities or disabilities, but that schools can enhance the learning of each student because of their differences” (Ferguson and Jeanchild, 1992, p. 172). How exciting to think that the students in inclusive classes today will be the teachers in the inclusive classes of the future. The acceptance and achievement of children with a wide range of abilities will be promoted within an inclusive education setting, and the strategies that we use today will be refined to work for each student within regular education classrooms and community (King-Sears, 1997).

Universal Design

“Universal design is a concept that refers to the creation and design of products and environments in such a way that they can be used without the need for modifications or specialized designs for particular circumstances” (Fortini & Fitzpatrick, 2000, p. 581). When this concept is applied to curriculum, it would be designed so that it could be accessed without the need for specialized modifications and
accommodations for individual students (Udvari-Solner et al., 2002). While curriculum was being written, the wide range of students’ learning needs would be considered such that materials, methods, and assessment alternatives would be included in the initial curriculum document (Udvari-Solner et al.). Within each classroom there would be books on tape as well as high-interest reading materials at a variety of levels (Udvari-Solner et al., 2002). Teachers would be taught to use the best teaching practices, instructional technologies, and access use of peers for mutual support (Udvari-Solner et al.). Teachers would regularly use co-operative learning, integrated thematic lessons, hands-on learning experiences, and partner learning (Udvari-Solner et al.). Teachers would use the community to teach in the classroom as well as bring students into the community to learn. Internet access and other forms of technology would be used to enhance learning (Udvari-Solner et al.). Assessments would vary and include things such as portfolios, curriculum-based assessment, student samples, demonstrations, and individual learning contracts (Udvari-Solner et al.). Udvari-Solner et al. (2002) give the following five characteristics of universal design:

1. **Pro-active:** It is assumed that students have different needs. Educators provide students with multiple means of representation, engagement, and expression.

2. **More qualitative than quantitative:** It is more than giving some students additional work to do and some students less to do. Differentiated instruction involves changing the nature of the assignment.

3. **Provides multiple approaches to content, process, and product/assessment:** By adjusting each of these teaching elements, teachers design different approaches to what students learn, how students learn, how they...
integrate and apply what they have learned, and how they demonstrate proficiency.

4. **Student centred and student led:** Learning experiences are most effective when they are engaging, relevant, and interesting to the learner.

5. **Blend of whole-class, small group, and individualized instruction:**

Differentiated instruction utilizes a variety of instructional groupings depending on the desired outcomes. (p. 88)

**Professional Development**

The incorporation of inclusive strategies requires professional development efforts that address the initial needs of the school to implement special needs students into general education classes as well as ongoing support (King-Sears, 1997). McGregor, Halvorsen, Fisher, Pumpian, Bhaerman, & Salisbury (1998) have referred to inclusion as a “work in progress.” Certainly time is required for educators and communities to accept and embrace the inclusion of a greater range of learners in general education classrooms to effectively implement strategies. Teachers need to personally embrace the idea of inclusion, since the successful implementation of inclusive education will be challenging. For some, this may mean a totally new way of implementing curriculum. Concentrated efforts need to be made to prepare teachers for the work of change within schools.

**Summary of Literature Reviewed**

The present philosophy prevalent in special education supports the idea that persons with special learning needs are not meant to merely be contained within a classroom or to help them deal with their differences. Instead, education today stresses
ways in which learning can be meaningful and allow each individual to achieve his or her personal best. This takes into consideration the educational environment best suited to meet both academic and social needs.

There is no one answer as to how a regular class can best serve students who have special needs. Many of the suggestions for inclusive education in the literature review are meant to work in conjunction with one another. There needs to be collaboration between educators. Holistic curriculum, modifying curricula and instruction, developmentally appropriate pedagogy, integrated thematic instruction, instructional techniques, diverse classes and universal design overlap and complement each other. There are those who feel that the regular class is the best placement for a student regardless of most other factors. They feel that a placement in a regular classroom displaces the social stigma that has been known to be associated with placement in special classes. This however is not a view shared by all.

This Present Study

Based on the above-mentioned literature and observed facts concerning inclusive education, this study explored the experience that 5 teachers have had with inclusive education. In particular, this study describes their stories of their experiences. I am included as one of these 5 teachers, and I share my experiences as both a student and a teacher.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another.

Hebrews 10:24-25

Overview

Winzer (1993) writes, “In many ways special education is still an experiment, a social and educational undertaking in which philosophical, legal, and humanistic principles are being worked out” (p. 384). The purpose of this study was to explore 5 teachers’ perceptions of inclusive education as a means of providing education for exceptional students. There are exceptional students who independently are not able to meet grade level expectations in regular classrooms. In this study, I explored the goals that are set and met for these students in 5 classrooms with five teachers who are involved with the implementation of their IEPs. The implementation of accommodations and modifications were identified in classrooms, as well as how teachers perceive their effectiveness in regard to a student’s educational success. To this end, 4 teachers were interviewed about their stories and experiences with inclusive education. My story as both teacher and student is also told in regard to inclusive education.

Research Methodology

Packwood and Sikes (1996) write, “am using my experience as a starting point rather than as an end in itself...making sense of my own experiences...is the essence of my story within the research story”(p. 342).
In this study, I look at my experiences again with new eyes, for I have grown and learned and, as I grow older, I can learn from my experiences again and again. This study is an opportunity to partner with other people when trying to see anew. Some of my best learning is spurred on by my conversations with others. Conversation allows me to verbalize the thoughts that continue to form in my head. Sometimes it is not until I verbalize ideas that I realize that they existed in my mind.

The tone of research is twofold. On the one hand, there is quantitative research that is positivistic and looks at the scores of testing on issues that may apply to many. We can measure things through numbers with this methodology. There is also qualitative method of research that is interpretative as one looks at qualities and, through conversation, comes to some kind of negotiated meaning. There are multiple ways to look, and each way gives us a new perspective and thus a greater understanding. Richardson (1994) sums these two forms of research up well when she writes, “Qualitative research has to be read, not scanned; its meaning is in the reading. Unlike quantitative work, which carries its meaning in its tables and summaries, qualitative work depends upon people’s reading of it” (p. 517).

Qualitative research sets out to inform, not prove. One idea or way of doing something may not be for everyone in his or her own situation. We all have individual strengths and needs from which to draw and work towards. Perhaps this is how Tierney (1995) felt when he wrote, “we no longer hesitate to write from inside the research situation rather than outside” (p. 382).

What provokes my thoughts and reactions to research is learning about people. This information I not only find interesting and informative but also valuable, as both a
person and professional, as it allows me to grow in my knowledge. Wolcott (1994) writes “that ‘using data’ rather than ‘getting data’ is the more critical and more difficult task in qualitative research” (p. 397).

Writing narrative stories has brought back memories for me that have been buried for many years. What has been most fascinating is how I can now make connections with the way I have applied these experiences to who I am as a person as well as to my professional practice. Clandinin and Connelly (1994) wrote that the methods for the study of personal experience are simultaneously focused in four directions: inward and outward, backward and forward. By inward [they] mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions, and so on. By outward [they] mean existential conditions, that is, the environment....By backward and forward [they] are referring to temporality, past, present, and future. (p. 417)

Another wonderful realization that I have come across in my course of study on research is the diverse methodology it includes. Just as I believe in the individualism of participants in research, so too I appreciate the individualism of the researchers themselves. It makes so much sense to tap into our strengths to research. It is when we use our strengths that we get the best results. The surveys, samplings, and statistical analysis of quantitative research are valid forms of research, but so too are qualitative methods such as interviews, case study, observation, and narrative. Jago (1996) writes, “Storytelling is fundamental to human experience. Through narration, we make meaning out of experience and live within the stories we create” (p. 495). I find it exciting to have this broader view of research. Research is something I feel that I can
not only do but also thoroughly enjoy. To me research is part of growing more aware. It is part of becoming who I am.

Anderson (1998) compares qualitative research to a lake and fisherman. To know what forms of marine life exist at varying depths in the lake, we must search below the surface of the water. To succeed in catching different types of fish, we must fish from different locations, at different times of the day, using different types of bait and varied fishing methods. Similarly, to get the underlying meaning of social phenomena, qualitative researchers must look beyond the obvious, hear what is not actually stated, interpret behaviours within their natural context, and try to understand what people tell us from their perspective, through their lens. Only then, after quiet periods of incubation, reflection and synthesis, can we write a rich, descriptive account of the research experience, share the discoveries, the lessons learned and identify new places on the lake for the next researcher to place a boat, select equipment and look beneath the surface. (pp. 134-135)

Several lists have been used over the years to describe the characteristics of qualitative inquiry (e.g., Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Eisner, 1991; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). I would like to share those presented by Rossman and Rallis (1998), built on by Creswell (2003) in *Research Design*. Characteristics of qualitative inquiry include:

- **Natural Setting**—The qualitative researcher often goes to the participant’s home or place of work. This allows the researcher to gain more detail about the individual and his/her space as well as to be more involved in the experiences of the participant.
• Multiple Methods of Data Collection—Multiple methods of data collection are employed in qualitative research. They often involve active participation on the part of the participant and thus strive to build rapport with individuals. Methods of data collection may include open-ended observations, interviews, and documents as well as e-mails, scrapbooks, and more.

• Emergent—Qualitative research is emergent rather than prefigured. Questions asked by the researcher may change as he/she learns better what should be asked and to whom it should be asked. Data collection may change in the midst of the study as the researcher learns more about the data. These characteristics of a developing research model make it hard to predict qualitative research exactly at the proposal or early stage of research.

• Interpretation of the Researcher—Qualitative research is based on the interpretations of the researcher. This includes developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked. (Creswell, p. 182)

• Holistic View—The researcher views qualitative research holistically. Therefore many qualitative research studies tend to be broad in nature. Creswell (2003) writes that “the more complex, interactive, and encompassing the narrative, the better the qualitative study” (p. 182).

• Reflective—The researcher of qualitative inquiry reflects on who he or she is in an orderly fashion during the research and makes the readers aware of his or her personal
biases, values, and interests that are typical in qualitative research today (Creswell).

“The personal-self becomes inseparable from the researcher-self. It also represents honesty and openness to research, acknowledging that all inquiry is laden with values.” (Creswell, p. 182)

- Uses both Inductive and Deductive Reasoning Processes—The qualitative researcher uses both inductive and deductive reasoning processes, although inductive reasoning tends to be dominant. “The thinking process is also iterative, with a cycling back and forth from data collection and analysis to problem reformulation and back” (Creswell, p. 183). Along with this, the researcher simultaneously collects, analyzes, and writes up data.

- Strategy of Inquiry—The qualitative researcher chooses and uses one or more strategies of inquiry (i.e., the study of individuals [narrative, phenomenology], the exploration of process, activities and events [case study, grounded theory], or the examination of broad culture-sharing behaviour of individuals or groups [ethnography]; Creswell).

**Research Design**

Narrative inquiry provides a research method that allows me to get a picture of teaching in an inclusive classroom (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). It does so as it decreases the tendency for teachers to say what they think I may want to hear about their profession (Silverman, 1997). Narrative inquiry therefore provides a method that helps to reduce the influence of investigator expectations by listening to the accounts of the participants. Instead of requesting a direct response to a question about what it means to be a teacher, it allows the researcher to analyze teachers’ stories (Connelly & Clandinin,
Even though the descriptions of biographical events may be exclusive to one person, they are structured according to socially shared experiences (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). I chose this approach to research as it is meaningful to me and well suited to my questions (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

This research investigated teachers’ perspectives of inclusive education. I explored 5 teachers’ perceptions about what had made inclusive education successful or unsuccessful, effective or ineffective, within their classrooms using the research method of narrative inquiry.

In-depth, audio taped interviews took place with 4 teachers who had provided an inclusive environment for one or more students with special needs within a regular classroom. These teachers were given questions as listed in Appendix A to think about prior to the interview. All conversations with the participants were audio taped and transcribed. I also told my story as teacher and student in regard to inclusive education.

When beginning the interview, I asked each participant to tell me about her experiences with inclusive education. In doing so, I hoped that each story answered the questions listed in Appendix A in a natural fashion in the course of the conversation. Questions that had not been answered through the participants’ stories were at times asked individually to clarify their experiences of inclusive education further.

I wrote field notes following each of the four interviews to capture my initial feelings and observations. The tapes of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. I used these transcriptions to write narratives from the information discussed. These narratives were returned to the participants and I negotiated with the participants for meaning.
My own narrative was written as a reflection of my experiences as student and teacher. My input to this study was shared in first person.

Data Collection and Recording

Participants

Participants were 5 teachers from either a school board or an independent school. I was included as 1 of these participants. Each participant had played a part in providing inclusive education for one or more exceptional students. These participants I found through word of mouth from contacts that I have made over the years in the schools and boards in which I have worked. Based on my own criteria, I chose participants who had experience and were interested in inclusive education. Grace was recommended to me as a participant by a special education program advisor in Ontario. Jane was a teacher that I met in one of my Master of Education classes. Liz was a teacher who wrote a guide about individual education plans that I read and was interested in discussing with her. Meghan was a teacher that I worked with who asked if she could be one of the participants in my study. As such, this study used what can be called a “convenience sample.”

Grace. My first participant was a 60-year-old woman with 29 years of teaching experience. I will call her Grace. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology as well as additional qualifications in Special Education (Parts I and II). Her experience began in 1964 as a regular classroom teacher. For 6 years she taught various junior grades that ranged from grade 3 to grade 6. After this time, she stayed at home to care for her own children. After 10 years, she returned to teaching in the junior grades. She taught an additional 7 years in the regular classroom of students in the junior level of grade 3 to
grade 6. Her interest in special education led her to take a position as a resource teacher. She has worked as a resource teacher for the past 16 years.

Jane. My second participant was a 45-year-old woman, whom I will call Jane, who has taught for the past 20 years. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Bachelor of Education, and a specialist certification in Special Education. She has taken various courses in regards to gifted education and is currently pursuing a Master of Education in Curriculum Studies. She began her teaching career as an elementary classroom teacher and taught a variety of grade levels (grade 1 - grade 8) for 15 years. At that point she took on a position as "enrichment specialist" and worked as a part of a "special needs team." Following this experience, Jane went back into the regular classroom for a year and at present is working as a vice-principal. Jane’s interest in inclusive education stems back to her experiences as a student teacher and has developed in both her role as educator over the past 20 years and in her Master of Education studies.

Liz. My third participant was a 58-year-old woman who has taught for 32 years over the past 39 years. I will call her Liz. She has an Ontario Teacher’s Certificate and a Bachelor of Arts in General Psychology and has obtained a specialist in Special Education through the Ontario Ministry of Education. She began her teaching career as a primary grade classroom teacher. Liz did this for 6 years and then stayed home with her children for a couple of years. When she returned to teaching, she taught English as a Second Language (ESL) on a part-time basis. After 4 years, Liz took a couple more years off to care for her children. When she returned again, she worked as a special education resource teacher in the elementary grades for 2 years and then in high school
for 6 years. For the past 14 years, Liz has been working as a Special Education Resource Teacher in an elementary school as well as taken on the responsibility of vice-principal over the past 5 years.

_Meghan._ My fourth participant was a 45-year-old woman with 23 years of teaching experience, whom I will call Meghan. She began her career after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Science and Physical Education. Her first teaching assignment included teaching a grade 1/2 class as well as acting as the school’s athletic co-ordinator and setting up its initial athletic program. This she did for 3 years and then spent some time teaching grade 5 and then later grade 4. After having children of her own, Meghan spent a number of years supply teaching in various schools and classes. For the past 5 years, Meghan has been teaching both physical education and science to classes of all elementary grade levels in a school located in southern Ontario. During her first 2 years at this school, she was a grade 7 homeroom teacher, and for the last 3 years she has taught strictly rotary classes. For the past year, she has taken on the shared responsibility of curriculum co-ordinator. She is currently pursuing a Master of Education in curriculum studies and has a strong interest in curriculum development.

_My Participation._ I also included myself as one of the 5 participants as I have experiences as both a student with special needs and a special education teacher. My experiences as a student have affected my perspective as a special education teacher. I believe that it is important for the reader to hear my story as a student to better understand my perspective as a teacher. I also felt that it was important that my story be told since it is my experiences as both a student and a teacher that have led me to be passionate about inclusive education. My story is told without the use of an interview,
although I considered the questions that I had created for the interviews when I composed my story. I write about myself in first person and refer to myself as “I.”

**Interviews**

An interview, according to van Manen (1990), serves one of two very specific purposes:

1. It may be used as a means for exploring and gathering experiential narrative material that may serve as a resource for developing a richer and deeper understanding of a human phenomenon.

2. The interview may be used as a vehicle to develop a conversational relation with a partner (interviewee) about the meaning of an experience. (p.66)

Through the use of interview, I gained a richer and deeper understanding of inclusive education from this study.

The purpose of this study was to explore 5 teachers’ experiences of inclusive education. Specifically, this study shared the questions listed in Appendix A with 5 teachers who have been involved with the implementation of inclusive education practices.

The location of the interview was chosen for each participant’s convenience and allowed for a quiet and undisturbed time frame in which the interview took place. The interview was audio taped and later transcribed. It was made clear at the beginning that these transcriptions and written interpretations would be made available to the participants. The questions used for these interviews were sent to the participants prior to the interviews to help them develop their story. I clarified questions and probed the participants for answers to the questions in order to provide the most comprehensive
information for this study. I looked for nonverbal cues, including facial expressions and tones of voice. When the interview took place within the participant’s classroom, I took cues from the surroundings and entered them in the field notes.

**Field Notes**

Field notes were made immediately following each interview. Detailed and descriptive records were made of the research experience, including observations of how the participant felt about inclusive education, personal reflections, a reconstruction of dialogue, and decisions made that would alter or direct my research process (Anderson, 1998). I value field notes as they immediately helped capture thematic ideas and questions that have occurred to me during or immediately after the interview.

**Essays and E-mails**

Three of the 5 participants had written essays around the topic of inclusion for required papers in their Master of Education studies. These papers where included to strengthen the participants’ personal accounts. Two of the participants were able to clarify parts of their experiences through e-mails after initial written accounts were sent to them. At times I asked for specific clarification on specific sections.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a process that uses multiple data sources and data collection methods to validate research findings. Triangulation helps eliminate bias, as the researcher uses different types of data in order to see its true position (Anderson, 1998). In this study, interviews, field notes, essays, and e-mails were used to assume validation. This helped eliminate bias, as clarification was made as a result of the multiple sources of information.
Establishing Personal Credibility

I am presently working as a Learning Resource teacher and have had experience in the field of both special and regular education for the past 17 years. My experience ranges from work as a Remedial Teacher, Regular Classroom Teacher, Special Programs Teacher, Communications Teacher, and Special Education Resource Teacher. I have worked in seven different schools during this time.

As a student, I struggled in school, and at times I received assistance from a class mother on a withdrawal basis. I have worked with a tutor to help me improve reading skills. What I believe to be a learning disability has never been formally diagnosed. I struggled and ultimately succeeded in regular classes.

Ethical Consideration

Participants and any students they have discussed have been kept anonymous throughout this study. Participants were free to withdraw from this study at any time. Schools were not identified and pseudonyms were used in all narratives. Audiotapes from interview sessions and pages from transcripts have been stored in a locked drawer in my home. Confidential paper records will be shredded after 2 years following the completion of this study. Audio recordings will be erased after 2 years following the completion of this study. I do not intend to allow the study and data to be reanalyzed by colleagues, students, or other researchers.

Recruitment Process

I used the telephone script as written in Appendix B to recruit participants for my study. I called teachers whom I know or have heard about in my professional practice that met the criteria of being seasoned teachers with experiences in inclusive education.
The research objectives were reviewed verbally as well as in writing at the beginning of each interview so that they were clearly understood by the participant.

**Letter of Information**

After verbal approval was given by the participant to take part in this study, a letter of information was sent to them (see Appendix C). It formally invited them to participate in the study and outlined for them its purpose, process, and ethics.

**Letter of Consent**

Participants were asked to sign a letter of informed consent (see Appendix D) prior to the interview. It reviewed the purpose, study procedures, confidentiality/anonymity, contact information, and explained the reason for needed consent.

**Feedback to Participants**

Verbatim transcriptions and written interpretations were made available to each participant for their own records. Each written interpretation of the interview was negotiated for meaning with the participant prior to its final form being included in this study. This ensured that the story of their experiences was accurate. Final copies of each participant’s account of inclusive education and the interpretation that was made were sent to them for approval and then included in this study. A draft copy of the feedback letter I used when my study was completed is attached in Appendix E.

**Limitations**

This research study was affected by a number of limitations. One was that the sample used in this study was small in size. There are so many experiences that different teachers have had and yet I wrote about only five accounts in this study. The
participants and the students who were referred to in this study all came from the same geographical region of southwestern Ontario. Limitations also included the range of special needs that students had as well as the resources each school had to provide for students who had special needs. Within this region of southern Ontario, a limited number of students with special needs have been a part of the inclusive education incentive, as it has not been fully adopted by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Although placement of a student in a regular class is the first option considered by an Identification, Placement, and Review Committee (IPRC), segregated special education classes are still used for some students.

As I conducted interviews in locations that were convenient to the participant, these locations may have influenced the responses that I received. For example, when we met in a school or classroom the participant may have given me feedback that was stated in a professional manner as they felt that within their classroom they still wore their “teacher hat.” When we met together at a coffee shop, the participant may have spoken more freely about their feelings and emotions as they were not in their professional setting and wearing their “teacher’s hat.”

Another limitation may be that of social desirability. Participants may have told me what they think I wanted to hear or what they wanted others to perceive their classes to be like. A participant may not have wanted to share negative experiences, as they may have felt that it would reflect on them as not being an effective teacher. This limitation would influence my study, as I would not be gathering all experiences that may have made inclusive education difficult.
This research study included the range of needs students have. Some students with special needs required more accommodations and/or modifications within a classroom than others.

There were differences among the participants in terms of the amount of resources available to them. Some schools had more manipulative materials, space, and manpower to work with than other schools did. Also, attitudes differed in different school cultures.

As there are only a few participants, this study is limited to their experiences. Any insights will be limited to my analysis of their stories. Further, my beliefs and experiences, both personal and professional, will affect what I see in the data and be communicated in this study.

All of the teachers who participated in this study had a different amount of training to assist them in understanding and servicing their students and including those who had special needs. Their overall communicative competencies may have influenced the results of this study as they attempted to share their experiences with me.

Due to previous experiences of working in regular classrooms, segregated special education classrooms, and as a learning resource teacher supporting students with special needs, I brought certain biases to this study. Even though every effort was made to secure impartiality, these biases shaped my outlook and understanding of the data I collected as well as the way I interpreted my experiences. I began this study with the perspective that there was a place for inclusive education as well as segregated special education classes. I questioned when each of these placements was most appropriate
and beneficial to all students concerned. I limited the results of this study as researcher in my perception of the stories that are told.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis continued throughout the study as it involved continuous reflection about the data, asking analytic questions, and writing notes. It was not separate from the data collection or composing research questions (Creswell, 2003). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) write,

We do not simply “collect” data; we fashion them out of our transactions with other men and women. Likewise, we do not merely report what we find; we create accounts of social life, and in doing so we construct versions of the social worlds and the social actors that we observe. It is, therefore, inescapable that analysis implies representation. (p. 108)

When transcriptions were returned to participants, discussions around emergent themes occurred and meaning was negotiated.

The analysis of data was based on the perception of the researcher. The information shared with me by the participants during the interviews affected the outcome of the narratives and the message within. Themes were drawn from and developed from the narratives written (van Manen, 1990). I began identifying themes during my interviews, as parts of the participants’ stories would often be based on one theme. When I looked over the transcriptions, I found more themes within the stories told. As I read each transcription I would label each new idea with a theme. I wrote down each of the themes and then counted how many times it occurred within the accounts of my participants. Some theme headings were collapsed together when they
shared the same meaning. Themes that were not shared by more than two participants were eliminated. The remaining themes were put in order according to how often they occurred in the participants’ transcripts (See Appendix F). These themes drawn out of the stories were used in my discussions on inclusive education.

Narrative research works at rewriting the participants’ stories using basic structure such as plot, setting, activities, climax, and resolution (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I looked for recurring themes and patterns in each person’s story. Then I wrote a narrative based on the accounts that they told. Each narrative was shared and meaning negotiated with the participant. I then looked across the 5 narratives for patterns or themes that occurred in all the stories. I read through the stories for main ideas that could be identified. Most of the main ideas that appeared in more than one story were used as themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 2003).

Restatement of the Problem

Inclusion looks at both social and learning outcomes for students in regular classrooms. As I continue to research this topic of inclusive education, I explored teachers’ perspectives about their experiences teaching in this setting.

Chapter Summary

The research conducted by this study will inform readers of experiences that both teachers and students have had with inclusive education. Moore (1998), in her summary of research on the education of students with disabilities in regular classroom settings, found that “instruction, not setting, is the key to achievement of success as measured by student outcomes” (p. 2). Further, she reports that case-by-case approaches are the best
way to make decisions about student instruction and placement. Moore (1998) writes, "'inclusion' looks different in each case" (p. 2).

My experiences to learn from others stories reflect the beliefs of Franklin Bobbitt. In 1918, in his article "Scientific Method in Curriculum-Making," he wrote that, education is now to develop a type of wisdom that can grow only out of participation in the living experiences of men, and never out of mere memorization of verbal statements of facts. It must, therefore, train thought and judgement in connection with actual life-situations. (p. 9)

Therefore through the experiences of individual teachers and students, I hope to learn more and find themes related to inclusive education.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH RESULTS

Let us run with perseverance
the race marked out for us.

Hebrews 12:1c

Preamble

This research explored the accounts of 5 teachers in southwestern Ontario and their experiences as teachers of inclusive education. Each had their own account to tell that stemmed from personal experiences. I found that there were themes that repeated from one account to the next. It is from these accounts and themes that I want to find a better understanding of inclusive education.

Demographics

The participants of this study were from southwestern Ontario. Their teaching experience was within independent schools of this same area with the exception of myself since I have taught in both independent and public schools. Each school incorporated inclusive education with their school vision in mind. Adequate resources and support for teachers needed to be made available to the extent that would make inclusive education successful.

A summary of the participants who were used in this study is provided in Table 1.

Results

Grace's Story

Grace began teaching in 1964. In those days, students who did not meet grade level expectations were thought of as being of low intelligence or lazy. These students would try to keep up with the demands of the class, but if they could not they would fail
Table 1

*Description Summary of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of experience</th>
<th>Work environments</th>
<th>Teaching positions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grace</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Independent schools</td>
<td>Elementary classroom teacher and resource teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jane</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Independent schools</td>
<td>Elementary classroom teacher, Enrichment Specialist, and Vice-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Independent schools</td>
<td>Elementary classroom teacher, ESL teacher, Resource Teacher and Vice-Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghan</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Independent schools</td>
<td>Elementary classroom teacher, Athletic co-ordinator and Curriculum co-ordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myself</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Independent and public schools</td>
<td>Elementary classroom teacher and resource teacher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
the year. Grace shares that “a common thing would be that if you would fail a student once or twice what generally would happen is that they would drop out” (Interview, January 2004). After 6 years of teaching, Grace took some time off to stay home and care for her own children.

**Teaching a Regular Class.** Grace returned to teaching in 1981. It was around this time that Grace found herself the teacher of a grade 6 class where one of her students had Down syndrome. With no experience in teaching children with Down syndrome, no special professional training for a student with this exceptionality, and no resource teacher or assistant to call on for help, she found this experience difficult. In those days, she had not yet heard of the use of accommodations and modifications for an exceptional student. As well as she could, she provided for this student’s needs by including him in all class activities and by giving him independent work at his level whenever possible. She, however, was not satisfied with the experience that this child had in her class that year. Although all the other students socially accepted him, his academic progress was limited.

I really wasn’t equipped to do all that much, except I loved him and he knew that.

I did what I could with him, but I’m sure it wasn’t a good experience for him in that he didn’t really learn all that much because he was kept in the classroom.

Socially and emotionally, however, it was a very good experience for him.

(Interview, January 2004)

Shortly after this disappointing experience, the school that Grace was working in began a resource program. This was a program that took students who were struggling to meet grade level expectations out of their classroom. The resource teacher would
work with these students on a one-to-one or small group basis. They would usually be taught basic language or mathematics skills. The teacher who filled this position had training in working with students who had special needs. Grace shares, “It was through talking with a resource teacher [that gave me] new ideas of how to handle students, and that really piqued my interest” (Interview, January 2004). This resource support seemed to help make working with struggling students more successful. The resource room was a safe environment that provided a quiet environment and less distractibility for those who found it difficult to attend in the regular classroom. Within the resource room, there were no timed limits and students were more likely to ask questions or ask for help here. Games were used to make learning fun, and computer programs which incorporated learning were of high interest to students. Resource support allowed for individual direct instruction on a one-to-one or small group basis. Students worked at their own level and “only moved on when prior learning was well establish” (E-mail, May 2004). At times, this meant that a student’s program would be modified and “accommodations such as grids and mnemonics to aid memory [were planned]” (E-mail, May 2004).

**A Resource Teacher.** After 7 years, Grace found herself in a resource teacher position. She was interested in this relatively new teaching position, and she took more courses to learn strategies to better teach students with special needs. “These included in-service training, Ministry of Education courses in Special Education (Part I and II), upgrading university courses for primary and junior division teaching, and an audited university course about gifted education within the stream of Special Education” (E-mail, May 2004).
As a resource teacher, Grace worked with the staff at her school to implement strategies that met students’ learning needs. She believed that it was important for her to be an advocate for the exceptional students so that classroom teachers could better understand the needs of these students. She developed Individual Education Plans (IEPs) that identified students’ strengths and needs. Grace looked at students as individuals to see where they were unique. She believed that although each child may not have been gifted to achieve academically, each child did have a God-given gift to share.

When you are trying to meet the needs of students, I would find that you start to look at students a little differently, not just from the academic side, because each child has a very unique gift. I think even though they have to deal with the entire curriculum, you want to zero in one that one gift because it is often untapped. There are many ways it can be done even though their gift might not zero around an academic subject. (Interview, January 2004)

In 1991 a student with Williams syndrome became part of the regular grade 3 class at Grace’s school. Williams syndrome is a rare genetic condition which causes medical and developmental problems which include cognitive, behavioural, and motor areas. It was a challenge to develop an IEP for him. Grace was unfamiliar with this syndrome, and it required a lot of extra reading and attending of workshops at Sick Children’s Hospital in Toronto.

In general, it was a slow process in trying to determine what he was capable of and in which way I could best meet his needs and yet challenge him to progress.
Finding appropriate materials, especially for the spatial and abstract areas, which gave him the most difficulty, were hard to find. (E-mail, May 2004)

However, an IEP was developed for him. During third and fourth grades, he was able to receive most of his education in the classroom with his peers. Beginning in grade 5, he spent more time in the resource room receiving individual instruction, and by grade 6 he spent most mornings there. This boy was sociable and attracted people to himself. His class was supportive of him, and his performance at a school talent show was outstanding. With the help of Grace and his classroom teachers, he was able to meet individualized goals and be included with his peers at grade 8 graduation.

As the years went by, Grace was able to access the support of professionals such as the occupational therapist, physiotherapist, and speech language pathologist. She had parents become directly involved in their child’s education and parents volunteer to help students both in the resource room and in the classrooms. Her job as resource teacher was to be a part of a team. “Things did change, since I had many sounding boards and access to additional information from those who had prior knowledge and experience. An IEP made everyone accountable/responsible for doing their utmost to meet the recommendations” (E-mail, May 2004).

Currently, Grace is working with a high needs student. This student arrived at the beginning of her grade 2 year. This child was a selective mute, was identified with a nonverbal learning disability, and did not yet read. Grace became an advocate for this child so that her teachers could better understand her needs.

I got literature on selective mutism, which I shared with the teacher and the parent, which clearly showed that the problem was not one of stubbornness on the
child’s part but rather a severe phobia/anxiety, which is well documented and researched. The parents, classroom teacher, and I attended a five-part session entitled, “COPEing with Selective Mutism” at Chedoke-McMaster Hospital with Dr. Chuck Cunningham. (E-mail, May 2004)

She incorporated the skills and resources of paraprofessionals, the parents of this child, and, together as a team, she has worked with the teachers to make this child’s educational experience a success. “I worked one-to-one in the resource room, with the mother present, where the child slowly opened up and was willing to speak openly with me, although very softly at first. Learning to read was a real satisfying experience and boosted her self image” (E-mail, May 2004). The children have accepted this girl as she is.

The students speak on her behalf in the classroom (i.e., needing to go to the washroom, etc.) since she would not speak to her classroom teacher. They kept speaking to her even when at first she would not reply. The other students would always say hello and show kindness in the way they spoke to her. Occasionally she was invited to birthday parties. It was amazing to see the level of compassion from her classmates. (E-mail, May 2004)

They include her in their class and in their play. “They include her in their games at recess time. They included her as part of skits although she was given parts that did not require speech” (Interview, January 2004). “Love opens up so many things,” says Grace (Interview, January 2004). This child is now speaking to particular people at school on a one-to-one basis. She has learned to read and continues to make gains both academically and socially. Grace shares what has made a difference for this child,
“acceptance from peers and teachers, a warm learning environment, help in the resource room, consistent routines, positive reinforcement, and lots of patience” (E-mail, May 2004).

Professional Development. Grace believes that part of her job as resource teacher includes educating herself. When referring to her own education Grace listed the following experiences: “reading, reading, and more reading of appropriate articles found in magazines, books, on the internet, in workshops and at conferences on learning disabilities, contact with other resource teachers, and through Psychoeducational assessments completed by professionals” (E-mail, May 2004). Another aspect of her job includes educating the other teachers in her school about exceptional students and how best to meet their needs and those of their classmates. She does this through giving them literature to read, showing videos about students’ exceptionalities and how best to teach them, through team conferencing where they hear information from different angles. She has found the support of her administrator essential in implementing this support to staff.

Exceptional Students. Grace notes that students with special needs continue to face challenges in the regular class. “I have noticed that some children are very afraid to speak out because they are afraid to be wrong or that they will be laughed at.” Many students are afraid to speak out because they think that others will be laugh at them because they don’t know answers to the questions that the teacher asks. Grace knows that it is difficult but these students need to learn to be self-advocates. She encourages these students and helps them find the words and opportunities to practise self-advocacy. Another important skill includes organization. Grace helps students use
homework books to keep up to date with daily work and assignments. “Don’t accept inferior work from students,” says Grace (Interview, January 2004). She sets out expectations that students can meet. When they put forth a minimal effort, she holds them accountable and they face consequences, as do all students. She adds, “You can talk till you are blue in the face about them being great or worthwhile, et cetera, but until they see evidence of their ability in successfully completing work of which they can be proud, it will never seem real to them” (Interview, January 2004).

Grace allows herself to become more vulnerable when she tries to meet the needs of students. Teaching, she finds, goes beyond just academic skills.

When I think of just the fact that a lot of work in school is written work, and yet when you go out into the job market very few of the jobs out there have to deal with being able to write well, but you have to speak well. So I think you try to emphasize pulling students out and having them talk about themselves or how they feel or what they think they might be doing. They can develop within themselves some real self-respect and self-esteem of who they are. (Interview, January 2004)

**Inclusive Education.** Grace supports inclusive education. She believes that no one should be denied access into the classroom. Grace shares, “I think anyone who wants to come to the school regardless must be included. Being inclusive means we are all members of one body, the body of Christ. When you exclude a child you have denied God and hurt the body of Christ. It [inclusive education] can be done” (Interview, January 2004). She feels that it is important that these children have a place in which they belong, for when they belong they learn. A large part of her job as
resource teacher is to support the classroom in that she attempts to make connections from the academics to the interests students may have outside of school.

If I can connect what is being learned with a child’s interest, it can aid a child in understanding a concept and can also pique his/her interest. If the students can see that what they are learning has an impact for the future (i.e., a specific occupation) it may prove to be a catalyst. Knowing that many famous people struggled in school is at times helpful for them to not give up. Choosing trade books for reading material that intrigues them [and] using their strengths to build up their weaknesses [are also good ways to help students make connections]. (E-mail, May 2004)

Inclusion to Grace does not necessarily mean that a student needs to be in the regular classroom all day. If necessary, withdrawal should happen to meet the specific needs of a student. She quotes, “Sometimes equality means treating people the same despite their differences, and sometimes it means treating them as equals by accommodating their differences” (Interview, January 2004). Grace is there to help with the academic goals, but much more important, to support the whole child as the unique, gifted individual that God created him or her to be.

**Jane’s Story**

Jane’s interest in inclusive education began as a student teacher. As she began working in the classroom, it became apparent to her that there were students at both ends of a continuum that required special assistance beyond what the teacher taught to the class as a whole. “Instruction confined to whole group presentation of material with little differentiation of tasks and methodologies, cannot effectively meet the varied
needs of the inclusive classroom as it exists today” (Essay, November 2000). Jane remembers beginning teaching in 1983 in an independent school that lacked government funding and thus sufficient resources to adequately meet the needs of exceptional learners. When the needs could not be met, some parents of students with special needs would take their children from the independent school and place them in a public school where they felt that their child’s needs would be better met. However, during the late 1980s, some parents began insisting that their exceptional students with identifications such as learning disabled and gifted have their needs met in the school of their choice.

Meeting Students’ Needs. Jane had a keen awareness of students’ learning needs. She saw the need for the curriculum to be flexible in order to work with all students and yet felt challenged by the amount of curriculum to be covered within time constraints set out by the Ontario government. “The inclusion of students with identified learning needs in the regular classroom,” Jane comments, “necessitates models of curriculum adaptation that will enable teachers to effectively address the expectations of curriculum document, and provide learning experiences that are accessible and stimulating for all students” (Essay, November 2000). Over the years, Jane believes she has developed a better understanding of students. She has gained special education qualifications through the Ontario Ministry of Education where she learned to extend good teaching strategies to all students. From both experience and professional development, Jane has come to believe that inclusive education is best for most students. She shares, “I find that most students like to feel a part of the class and that with appropriate support most student needs in my setting can be adequately accommodated. However, without the
appropriate support, student needs are not necessarily being adequately met” (Interview, February 2004).

Within the regular classroom, Jane was able to bring in enrichment activities. For mathematics, as an example, students who completed grade level assignments were challenged with more critical thinking activities. She laterally extended the math curriculum with work that was both independent and allowed for self-checking. Students moved in and out of these extension activities depending on their readiness level within a particular unit.

Groupings of students were heterogeneous in Jane’s class. It was important to her that the bright and gifted students not be used as instructors. The task that she assigned needed to be broad enough for different roles. She explains,

Broad enough that students could build on [their] strengths to allow them to participate. For example, learning disabled students may have difficulty being the writer/recorder for the group, but might have artistic talents that could shine in creating the drawings for the project. The learning disabled student could also dictate his/her ideas and another student could scribe them. A narrow task might not allow for the flexibility and breadth of activity that would enable full participation from all group members. (Interview, February 2004)

With this in place, it was possible for all learners to develop a variety of roles such as listener or leader, but it was important to her that they not play the role of teacher. Despite their brightness, it was important that they remain students and learn from their experiences in the classroom.
After 15 years of teaching in the regular classroom, Jane took on a new role. She was given the title “enrichment specialist.” This was a role that she was given to create. The responsibilities were twofold. On the one hand, she worked as a consultant to teachers. She worked on a one-to-one basis with classroom teachers to adapt curriculum for gifted students in their classrooms. Jane defines gifted students as “students who were either identified as intellectually gifted or who were performing at an exceptionally high level” (Interview, February 2004). Together they planned lateral extensions for these students. On the other hand, she worked with the students in the classroom. Her approach was inclusive, as she taught both whole class lessons and then extension lessons for those who were interested or ready to move on from the grade level expectations. She would then leave material in the classroom for students to complete independently. “When all students are engaged in level and interest appropriate experiences, teachers are better able to meet individual learning needs. However, these approaches for meeting the needs of gifted children in the regular classroom place significant demands on teachers” (Essay, November 2000).

Jane felt that it was important to work with students directly and not just through consultation with their teachers. She felt that, if the students worked with her, they would more readily learn from her. Unfortunately, her occasional visit to the classrooms was not enough. She felt that students’ enrichment needs required ongoing curriculum adaptation by the classroom teacher in order to be more fully met in the regular classroom.

To adapt to the range of student needs and abilities in inclusive classrooms, teachers must integrate new curriculum models into their teaching styles. These
models acknowledge the rapid pace at which gifted students learn new material, their passion for pursuing topics of interest, their talents and strengths in particular area, their abilities to use higher order thinking skills, and the teacher’s corresponding need to provide relevant, stimulating, and challenging learning experiences for these children, while meeting the varied needs of the rest of the class. (Essay, November 2000)

**Teaching in a Regular Classroom.** After 4 years of working as an “enrichment specialist,” Jane returned to the regular classroom. She shares, “I went back to the regular classroom only because I had been commuting a very long distance to work and needed to find work closer to home. I was very sad to leave the job. I loved it” (Interview, February 2004). She taught a small grade 3 class, within which there were significant behaviour and academic issues. Fortunately, Jane received strong support from the school administration and the resource teacher.

Through consultant guidance and the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues, teachers can receive the support needed to effectively adapt curriculum. Administrators can further the adoption of new approaches by their teachers by providing opportunities for participation in in-service programs and contact with gifted education consultants, encouraging team teaching and collaboration, and funding additional resources and materials. (Essay, November 2000)

This was critical for the learning needs within the class to be appropriately addressed even though they had not been formally identified. Jane found that she was constantly fine-tuning the class program. For example, she had three levels in mathematics with extensions that were made available to all the students. Some students knew that they
null
were expected to complete the extensions. Although the students were aware of what others were doing, all changes in programming were discussed in private with individual students.

The Role of Vice-Principal. Jane currently works as a vice-principal. In this role, she is aware of the difficulties and struggles of students in their classes. She tries to be supportive and listen as well as promote that expectations need to be appropriate. In terms of testing, Jane commented, “We don’t do EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office—provincial testing for grades 3, 6, and 10 in Ontario). We do achievement testing every 2 years. Some students are assessed and receive Psychoeducational assessments” (Interview, February 2004). She is part of team meetings, and in her role she facilitates changes that need to be made, although change, she says, falls directly into the hands of both the classroom and resource teachers. “Clearly a call for greater support for the classroom teacher through in-service, consultants, contact with colleagues, and administration is warranted by the demands of curriculum adaptation” (Essay, November 2000). Jane deals with logistical problems such as scheduling and timetabling and tries to facilitate communication among team members. Jane shares, “I try to facilitate communication. I am sure that I am not always successful” (Interview, February 2004) In her school, resource support is available to help deal with learning and behaviour issues that arise in the class. She wishes that there was more support to help accommodate the needs of the gifted and bright learners as well.

Jane fields calls from concerned parents. She has found that parents who have children that are having difficulties in school tend to be more vocal. “Whatever the
difficulty is, those parents, in my experience, have tended to be more vocal, and they have expected that their child’s need be at least addressed if not fully met” (Interview, February 2004). Many parents do not want their child to be segregated out of the regular class. She has found that if a parent does choose a segregated class, such as a gifted class, they are looking for a place where their child can be with more socially similar peers.

Many parents with children with various issues want an inclusive approach. They don’t want their children segregated out. Now there are parents who will pull their child out and say, “I am moving my child to the public school because I hope that he or she will make it into the gifted program.” They want their child in a segregated gifted class. Part of that is hoping that the child’s social needs will be better met. The child will not feel out of sync. (Interview, February 2004)

Inclusive Education. Jane feels that average students benefit from being in a class where some students have special needs. This teaches understanding and respect for the differences of others. Jane believes that an inclusive classroom is somewhat similar to the way the world works. She believes that we all have differences and we need to learn to work together.

I think the average student can really gain an understanding of others. Understanding of individual differences, of tolerance for differences, and respect for differences, and hopefully gain an understanding of seeing someone for who they really are, not how smart they appear or how highly they achieve. Hopefully some ability to relate more to a child who is intellectually sometimes on another
plane, and that can be very different, difficult. I think that is potentially what the average child has to gain. (Interview, February 2004)

Liz’s Story

Liz’s interest in special education began when she herself was a student in a three-room school. One of her best friends had difficulty with mathematics and, in order to receive help, often raised her hand to ask the teacher. He was not pleased with the fact that after he had taught the math lesson, this student could not work independently. He expressed his displeasure in front of the whole class to the great humiliation of Liz’s friend. It was here that Liz began to feel compassion for slower learners, to understand that people learn differently, and that they need different levels of support.

Beginning to Teach. Times changed, and so did teachers. Liz began her teaching career in 1963. In her first class, on her first day of teaching, Liz found that one of her grade 2 students could not answer basic math questions. When investigating why this was the case, the other students in the class supported their peer and explained that he was just not able to do such tasks. She then learned that this child had a mild intellectual delay. The year moved on, and in the end he did learn a little math, he liked to draw, and he loved tractors and anything related to farms. This provided her with a starting point for experience stories she wrote for him. He would orally share a story that was meaningful to him, and then Liz would write it out for him. This provided for a piece of written work in which he had ownership and was used to help him learn to read. His peers accepted him for who he was, and Liz began her career in inclusive education.

Liz successfully taught primary grades for 6 years. During this time she had a student who, unlike her others, did not learn to read well. As a teacher, she was puzzled
by this and struggled with why, after so many successes in teaching children to read, this one was not succeeding. It was around this time that Liz first heard of the term "learning disability" which had just recently been introduced as a term used for children of normal intelligence who had learning problems.

Teaching ESL. In 1970, Liz stayed home to care for her children. During this time she took some courses to further study how and why students learn differently. By completing her specialist certificate in special education, she was able to learn more about learning differences.

When Liz returned to teaching, she took on a part-time job as an English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) teacher. Her role was to withdraw the ESL students as well as to provide support to the classroom teacher in modifying and accommodating the programs of these students. Liz found that she was able to apply some of the skills that she learned in her special education courses. For instance, she shared, "I was able to detect difficulties that stemmed from learning difficulties in addition to not knowing the English language well" (Interview, February 2004). She noticed that most students learned to read and write English reasonably well within 2 years in immersion classes, but others seemed to take much longer. They also appeared to be making errors that were related less to ESL issues but more to learning difficulties. She began seeing patterns in some of these students that led her to believe that they had what she had learned to identify as learning disabilities in addition to ESL difficulties. This was a time of professional growth and consolidation for Liz. She found that she was able to apply many of the skills that she learned in her special education courses. For example, her course entitled "Informal Diagnostic Assessment" allowed her to better identify
areas of strength and need for students. A course, "Individualized Programming for Students," gave her concrete teaching strategies and taught her to better write an IEP. Through collaboration with other professionals, Liz continued to develop her skills in special education.

After 4 years as an ESL resource teacher, Liz spent more time at home with her children and later took positions as a special education resource teacher in an elementary school and later in high school. She was much more drawn to her experiences in the elementary school, as she felt that this age group of students allowed for a more diagnostic program and design. She had seen the benefits of early intervention for children with learning difficulties, and she believed that she could be more influential at this level.

**Experiences as a Special Education Resource Teacher.** Presently Liz is working as a Special Education Resource Teacher in an elementary school (grades SK-8). She develops individual education programs for the students who have exceptional learning needs. She has used various models of support over the years to meet the needs of these students. For a student with Down syndrome, parent volunteers were originally used to give tutorial support for the student for one hour each morning. The remainder of his day was spent in the classroom with his peers, which Liz observed was not an effective model. As the volunteers did not have the proper training to work with this student, he became manipulative. The classroom teacher was also frustrated by the lack of support and training that she received to deal with this student. The following year, another student with multiple needs joined the school and was enrolled in a class one grade lower. Liz arranged for these two students to work together with an Educational
Assistant (EA) for most of the morning. They were "adopted" by a grade 1 class in the afternoon. They remained part of their junior grade homerooms as well, participating in opening devotions and exercises, music, art, physical education, assemblies, etc. A decision was made 2 years later to have the student with Down syndrome repeat grade 6. He would then be in the same grade 6 class as the other student, and this seemed beneficial for structuring the individualized education programs that they both required. Unfortunately, this boy was not as accepted within this new homeroom class as he had been by his previous peers. These new students had not grown up with him and had not made a bond with him, nor learned to look out for him. Instead, they would encourage him to make some poor choices and therefore he would get into trouble more often. This was a problem that Liz had not anticipated. Despite this downfall, this model worked fairly well and was continued for a further 3 years. These two students followed the primary class that they had joined in the afternoon, primarily for science and social studies classes, to grade 2 the following year and grade 3 the year after and so on.

Another experience that Liz shared was of a student who had Pervasive Developmental Disorder (PDD), and in particular, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). I will call her Beth in this story. Beth is nonverbal, not toilet trained, and very challenging to handle. She worked directly with a Personal Support Worker (PSW) in the grade 1 classroom. Although Beth did not participate very much in class activities, she did similar activities as her classmates. For example, when her class was involved with an art assignment, she worked on an independent art assignment that allowed her to work at her own level of ability.
Liz shared that Beth worked with two different PSWs on alternate days. When Beth became distressed, her behaviour became disruptive, with outbursts marked by piercing screams. Last year, one PSW remained calm in these circumstances and perceived that the students in class had learned to carry on when Beth had these outbursts. The second PSW, however, was inconsistent in her routines with Beth. When Beth was with her, she became distressed more often. This PSW found these outbursts to be very disturbing for the rest of the students in class. Liz has shared that the inconsistency between these two PSWs was not good for Beth. She also felt that the children had become used to Beth and other students with special needs who act differently than most of the students in school. This year a new PSW had been hired to work with Beth. There was now more consistency between the PSWs, and considerable progress had been evident. Liz, however, is still struggling with the safety issues, for Beth as well as for staff, around Beth’s occasional outbursts. Through input from a behaviour specialist, the special education team continues to work through these issues.

In order for Beth’s PSWs to have a break in their day, Liz has implemented what she has called a “Special Friends Club.” Liz explains,

Every September some of the more senior students in school are invited to join this club. Club members take turns supervising Beth’s recess play. This allows the support worker to enjoy a coffee break or to network with other staff. Club members receive training and support for this role. In the training session, their tasks and Beth’s needs are described and role-play is used to teach the volunteers effective strategies. They are taught about potential problems and what they might do to anticipate and prevent the problem from occurring. Special Friends Club
members always serve in pairs, so that one can run and fetch the PSW or teacher should a problem develop. Further support and training is provided to the members on an incidental or need basis. This occurs most commonly when the members on duty escort Beth back to the PSW at the end of recess and debrief with the PSW. The program is working well. Most students faithfully report when it is their turn, and they care for Beth in a responsible and loving manner. (Interview, February 2004)

Liz feels that the Special Friends Club is a vital component of Beth’s inclusive education.

Another component of making inclusive education work in Liz’s school has been the creation of a time and place for some of the exceptional students to interact with each other. Every afternoon, Beth joined two other special needs students in the primary resource room. This met some of the program needs of these students and allowed for the PSWs to support each other in the individual programs that they supported.

This small group participates, to the extent they are able, in several gross motor, fine motor, and language development activities. These activities meet some of the program needs of these students. One common problem for paraeducators who are assigned to an individual child is isolation from the mainstream and/or from each other. While Beth’s PSW interacts on a daily basis with the classroom teacher, and less frequently with Liz, this afternoon program provides an opportunity for the PSWs to collaborate and support each other, thus reducing their relative isolation as paraeducators. (Interview, February 2004)
**Inclusive Education.** Liz firmly believes that inclusion is not a place, but a way of delivering services so that each child has a sense of belonging to a class and to a school.

I’ve heard of it [inclusion] as being called not a place but a concept, and I think that is how we work here. They [students with special needs] belong to a school and they belong to a class even if they spend some time out elsewhere. There is a new sense of belonging in the other realm [when withdrawn from the classroom], they belong to that group as well, so you know there is quite a fluid definition as to where they belong, but the sense of belonging, that is really important to me.

(Interview, February 2004)

She believes that, at this time, Beth is truly accepted in the school and that enough supports are in place to make her inclusive education work.

She has seen wonderful things happen in classrooms that are inclusive.

Beth’s classmates have adjusted well to having a special needs student in their class, but they have also grown to love and to care for Beth. At times, when Beth is having a difficult day, their teacher will explain that Beth is upset and cannot explain the problem because she does not have words to do so. The teacher has observed her students to be extra attentive and caring for Beth on such days. The practice of inclusive education has given the students an opportunity to become more understanding and compassionate towards children with major learning differences. Beth has been a blessing to us as a school as much as the school has been a blessing for her. (Interview, February 2004)
Meghan's Story

It was in Meghan's years of teaching preservice that she first became aware of the diverse abilities among students. When she began teaching a grade 1/2 class over 20 years ago, she dealt with this diversity by setting up learning groups. These groups were based on ability levels, and although there were difficulties with management this was a method that Meghan valued. It made sense in a split classroom environment.

Along with the role of primary teacher, Meghan took on the responsibility of the school's physical education co-ordinator. Within physical education, the diverse abilities did not seem to be an issue, as each student was able to grow from where they were and each worked towards their personal best. The curriculum accommodated for diversity in body type, gender, and innate skill level.

Frustrations. When Meghan returned to teach in the classroom full time, she became frustrated.

My teaching experience of special needs students in an inclusive setting has never left me satisfied because I feel incompetent most of the time. I am happy to see special needs students busy at tasks that bear little or no relevant learning because they appear to be engaged and are not disruptive to the flow of the lesson, which may or may not be relevant to them either. (Essay, October 2002) She felt that she could not be everything to everybody. "My own experience," she says, "is that regular classroom teachers do not feel that they are considered or consulted prior to having special needs children placed in their classroom for the purpose of inclusion" (Essay, October 2002). The teaching trend to group students according to
their ability levels fell away, and curriculum standards were set up as expectations for all to achieve. She questions,

Do all classroom teachers have a heart for developing modifications of the curriculum and strategies for special needs children? The diversity of the talents brought to the profession is infinite and the perspectives span a wide continuum. Commitment to the broad spectrum of issues and ideas in the educational process depend on teachers pursuing their interests and concerns beyond the classroom. Inclusion is only one such area and there are many teachers not only special educators who are committed to the ideology of inclusion for special needs children. (Essay, October 2002)

Within some of Meghan’s classes were students who received resource support to help implement needed accommodations and modifications. She recalled two types of experiences with resource teachers.

The first type was that of a resource teacher who would take on the responsibility of the homeroom teacher to meet the needs of these students. This resource teacher would make students look successful by doing things such as copying notes for them and keeping these organized. The students were kept busy and occupied however, in the end these students did not always take ownership of their work and therefore, Meghan did not believe that they were always learning. The success was that of the resource teacher who made the students look organized, not of the students themselves.

The second type was that of a resource teacher who helped strategize with the homeroom teacher to set up these students for success within the classroom. On the whole, students’ experience with inclusion was different depending on one of many
factors. One of these factors may include an individual student’s personality, motivation, and/or abilities. For example, if students are motivated and are sensitive to their own needs, they may be more successful in working towards implementing strategies that help them cope with their needs/weaknesses. However, some students do not seem to acknowledge their needs/weaknesses and therefore do not cope well with teacher expectations or personal expectations. Some students accept their weak areas and learn strategies to cope with them as well as advocate for themselves when necessary. Others, however, will not accept their own needs/weaknesses and therefore refuse support or the option to complete an alternative task. Another factor is whether a student has individualized support from an EA and whether the EA has the ability to connect with and be able to academically support the student. It is Meghan’s belief that the teacher was not necessarily the factor upon which success depended. She believes that a student needs to take ownership of his or her learning. The teacher may or may not influence how a student approaches his or her learning. Meghan is glad for the role of the resource teacher, as it reassures her that she is not alone in her pursuit to teach all students. “You need time to collaborate, for it is important and beneficial for students,” she shares. “When you are in a partnership you become accountable to one another and tend to get better results” (Interview, February 2004). Meghan appreciated the support and accountability that took place when more than one person was involved in meeting the needs of all students.

Meghan recalled the experiences she had with one of her students, whom I will call Tim. Tim had a special need that for the most part was social inappropriateness. Her first experience in teaching him was in his primary physical education class. At this
time and in this setting, other students were accepting of him. However, in her next encounter with him in grade 5, when she taught him science, social studies, and physical education, the other students were not so accepting. Tim was disruptive in class, and there seemed to be a huge gap between what was deemed to be the normal range and Tim’s intellectual ability.

In my own experience, there is greater difficulty to include and modify as students become older. Primary aged children seem to embrace children who are different and teachers seem to have less difficulty including these children because there is greater learning dependency at this level. (Essay, October 2002)

The following year, Tim had an EA work with him, and when Meghan taught him the next year, she was pleased at the progress he was making with the support of his E.A. Tim was making progress, he was maturing, and he was achieving his personal best. Meghan gives much of the credit for this success to Tim’s EA, who pursues his teachers for instructions and gives her own input to make for a stronger team effort that helps Tim be successful. His EA accepts and pushes him to be the best he can be.

Another student that Meghan has taught is a student with Down syndrome. In physical education, his participation was limited, although Meghan was able to find what he could do and have him learn from where his abilities lay. The class’s social community was affected by his presence. In physical education, for instance, group activity is common and requires students to co-operate, achieve goals, and interact together. This became more and more difficult as the student with special needs became older because it prohibited the progress of other students. She recalls, “His learning was not at the same rate as the rest of the students, and I think that one of the issues came to
be that when you are working as a team or you are working in groups it becomes frustrating for kids because they know he can’t do it” (Interview, February 2004).

Some special needs students that I have followed into high school have experienced great curricular and social difficulty and have subsequently dropped out of school and are largely dependent upon their parents or caregivers. It appears that they lack motivation and initiative and therefore find it difficult to find meaningful purpose to their lives. With caution I would suggest that the principle of educational inclusion does not effectively transfer to social inclusion in later years. (Essay, October 2002)

Meghan shares her experiences of teaching another exceptional student, whom I will call Mark. Mark tends to be unpredictable. He wants to succeed, and yet it seems that he feels like he is doomed for failure. Mark will not try what he does not think he can do. At times, Mark makes progress and wants to be part of his peer group. At other times, he needs to be withdrawn from the class when he chooses to be destructive and sabotage the class lesson or the activity. Mark’s presence in his class creates tension. He engages his peers in disruptive behaviour, and this seems to give him a sense of affirmation.

In this context, inclusion is destructive for the teacher, the class and ultimately for the student. What he gets from inclusion is negative. I would like to suggest that even though the principle of exclusion exists, it does not mean that it is always in opposition with inclusion. Exclusion can exist purposively in our society alongside inclusion and I do believe that special needs students can experience
inclusion within their community and that this ideology can be put into practice.

Reconstruction of educational inclusion is necessary. (Essay, October 2002)

One of Mark's classmates is also an exceptional student. I will call her Kristen. She is accepted as one of her peers since she is not disruptive to her class and she takes more ownership for her learning. What Meghan has noticed, however, is that because she is quiet, in that she does not speak up in class, she is sometimes forgotten. By this she means that teachers do not remember to follow up with Kristen to ensure that she has understood lessons and instructions. Kristen needs more time to understand concepts presented in class and would benefit from more one-to-one time with the teacher. Since she does not desire personal attention, the teacher-student relationship is weakened and, therefore, her educational progress is directly affected.

Both Mark and Kristen are students who have special needs in the classroom. Their character differences result in different responses from their teachers. Both are falling through the cracks by not receiving the support that they need to be fully successful in the regular classroom.

**Inclusive Education.** Meghan values inclusive education. She believes that it is the right thing to do. As humans, she feels that we have communal responsibilities and as Christians we need to work together as one body. However, she finds the educational framework within which we find inclusive education causes problems. Education is about moving forward; it is not enough to simply be present. She works in a classroom of 25 or more students who are expected to work independently as well as appropriately in groups. The overall goal for these students is to make tangible progress as well as meet grade level expectations. The diversity of students makes all of these elements
difficult to accomplish. The philosophy of inclusion she believes is right, but the practicality of it and social dynamics make it difficult to accomplish.

I would argue that the ideology of inclusion is much more complex than simply stating that it is the “right” thing to do. If inclusion is a highly valued and sought sociological principle, why is educational inclusion at the centre of debate in today’s schools? Inclusion, as we see it in our schools may not be effectively implemented because our understanding of inclusion may be short sighted. (Essay, October 2004)

Another problem for Meghan is the nature of teaching itself. She sees it as a performance, and because of time restraints it often becomes improvisational. The lack of time for preparation impacts the diversity of her students.

Viewing the teacher’s role as “agents of curriculum” rather than “agents of learning” (Valeo & Bunch, 1998) leads to a belief that all students must function at or nearly at the curricular level, so that regular classroom teachers view their special needs students as having to “catch up” to curriculum expectations. This goal may be difficult or impossible to attain, leaving the teacher feeling dissatisfied or incompetent. (Essay, October 2002)

In addition, she finds that professional development is limited and teachers tend to teach the way that they were taught and do not have sufficient time to practise new strategies.

Meghan struggles with how the classroom setting needs to change in order for it to be an effective inclusive environment. She wonders if it would mean having fewer students in the class or having more flexibility in how they move around. Curriculum development may be what is needed for teachers to be able to teach inclusively, and yet
Meghan feels that all teachers would need to take part in curriculum design for it to work in their classrooms. Curriculum expectations should be viewed as a guide, a tool, an idea, or framework that informs the teacher’s practice. It should not become the practice.

Additional money and resources are always a necessity in service institutions. Collaboration and support are also necessary. From the perspective of the classroom teacher, I suggest that a key puzzle piece that is missing is a curricular one. Inclusion must be included in the curriculum framework. (Essay, October 2002)

In Meghan’s early years of teaching, she felt successful to some degree and yet, at times, unsuccessful. Activities that were fast and efficient worked well for individual learning, but long-term attempts at inclusive education were more difficult to manage. Philosophically she wants it to work, and yet she does not have all the answers for how it will work. She knows when it works, but it is not always predictable.

The IEP works as a resource for Meghan. It makes accommodations and modifications more specific for the teacher to implement in the classroom. She finds modifications and accommodations difficult to synthesize based on a larger framework of curriculum standards. However, when a student’s mark does not show competency, she feels that the onus falls on her as the teacher.

Curriculum policy makers and writers must step away from a political technical perspective and recognize that in order to provide an inclusive pedagogy it must be included in curriculum policy and writing. For educational inclusion to be effective in the regular classroom, the classroom teacher must feel competent and
supported with these resources. This alone would enable the classroom teacher to more fully embrace the special needs student. (Essay, October 2002)

Meghan believes that as a teacher we need to be everything that we can be to each student. We shouldn’t even see differences between students. She says, “We have to be what we can to each student and, in reality, I think that we shouldn’t even see difference. I think difference should be the same. Everyone is different, and I think maybe that we should just understand that everyone is different” (Interview, February 2004). She would like to see support in the classroom to help teachers deal with special needs. “I think that it might be nice to have support in the classroom, that the support recognizes where the needs are when they arise. Special needs may not always be permanent; it could be short term or in a specific area” (Interview, February 2004). She believes that true inclusive education considers all students in the classroom to be the best that they can be and that this can be facilitated when required.

Sometimes we only see the real needy ones. If we recognize that everyone is different, has different needs, different strategies that affect them, like multi-intelligences and so on, then we would be more, considering every child in the classroom, and then no one would have special needs really. (Interview, February 2004)

The present framework she feels does not lend itself to that kind of education most of the time.

As progress is made, the voices of classroom teachers must continue to be heard and respected. The role of the classroom teacher and the support staff must be clearly defined in relationship to the special needs student. Finally, let us not
make assumptions about what it means to be included, let us listen to the voices of our students to ensure that they are in fact experiencing inclusion. (Essay, October 2002)

My Story

As a student, I struggled with my schoolwork. Learning did not come easily to me, and I struggled to keep up with grade level expectations. As a primary grade student, I experienced challenges in learning to read. A volunteer parent would take me out of the class from time to time and I read to her. My spelling was poor and, thus, participating in class spelling bees was simply embarrassing. As time progressed, I learned strategies that allowed me to keep up with class expectations. For instance, in grade 5 I began to read independently. It was as if the lights that had been going on in my brain came on faster and faster. I began by reading the first book in a series of books by Laura Ingalls Wilder and then just kept on reading through the series and then beyond to more novels. My spelling improved as I memorized and understood spelling patterns. I worked hard and long on my assignments, so that I finished elementary school successfully and went into secondary school with great confidence and the determination to succeed.

How true it is that interest develops because of our own experiences. Dewey (1929) wrote that "education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing" (p. 21). Although I don't like many of my school day memories, I do believe that they are part of who I am. I feel great compassion for students who struggle, and although I cannot take away their struggles, I want to help them work through them. I have a
strong opinion on what is fair or unfair and find myself advocating for those who need it and helping them learn to advocate for themselves. I am told that as a Special Education Teacher I must have a lot of patience. What I believe I have gained is the experience of a student who struggled and needed understanding and empathy. I have a strong desire to teach special needs students in an inclusive environment so that, despite their differences, they can feel that they are significant and certainly have a place and purpose within the regular classroom.

When I went to university I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I also knew that I wanted to be a special education teacher. I believe that my experiences as a child were God’s way of preparing me for the teacher that I was to become. I found a Christian liberal arts college in the United States that had an outstanding education department with a program in Special Education. I completed this program and excelled as a student as never before. Perhaps my reading and writing skills had further developed, and I was able to more fully apply myself to courses that I chose. The experience was excellent, and I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Special Education (Mental Impairments).

My first job began in 1987 in a school in Toronto, Ontario. I was hired to teach a grade 3 class for 50% of my time and work as a remedial teacher for the other 50%. I was fortunate to have teachers working with me in both the regular class and in the remedial program that were experienced and could help me in my new role as teacher. There were two things that I liked most about this position. One was the time I spent with the grade 3 students and the bond that grew from our time together. The other part of this job that I enjoyed the most was working one-to-one or in small groups with the
students who struggled to meet grade level expectations. It was such a thrill to teach them from where they were academically and see them make gains. I spent 2 years in this school teaching both regular and special education.

In 1989 I began my second teaching position in a special education class. The class was called “Special Programs–Junior.” It was a self-contained class for students who were identified as “slow learners.” This term is no longer used, but rather these students are identified as having a “mild intellectual delay.” These students had Intellectual Quotients (IQ) that were below the average range. It was felt that they would not profit educationally within a regular class because of slow intellectual development. My 3 years working in this class were the most challenging and stressful years of my teaching career. There was a great range in the students’ needs and academic levels. There was no specific curriculum set out to teach these students. Although there was a great wealth of resources it was up to me as their teacher, to set up individual education programs and whole class units. Although these students were placed in this special programs class because of their low IQ, some of these students had emotional and behaviour problems that exceeded their desire and need to learn academic skills.

In 1992 I took a position as a “Communications Teacher.” I received special training of learning strategies that I could teach to learning disabled students. I withdrew students who were identified as learning disabled and taught them strategies to improve their academic skills. As such, there was little or no direct support for the classroom. I felt that this program was of great benefit to these students and appreciated the fact that, although their academic program was somewhat different than that of their
classmates, they benefited from the small-group assistance as well as from belonging to a class that included their peers.

In November 1992, my daughter was born and I took 6 months of maternity leave. Although I returned in May of 1993 to complete the school year, I began to work part time in the following September. I have worked part time ever since. It has given me balance between my family and professional career. In August 1994, my son was born and I took another 6 months of maternity leave. Due to my request to be part time, I tended to be transferred between schools from year to year. I appreciated the fact that I could work part time and be home with my young children. I also was exposed to a great variety of communities and grade levels.

In 1996, my position changed from “Communications Teacher” to that of a “Special Education Resource Teacher” (SERT). I became responsible for servicing students with a wider range of special needs such as gifted, hearing impaired, and behavioural. I set up and ensured the implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEPs), a withdrawal program, informal assessments, and work sessions in classrooms with homeroom teachers. I loved this job! The variety and the opportunity to make educational decisions based on students’ individual needs were invigorating. The board and school that I worked for were not yet clear on what my role was, so I had an opportunity to help develop protocol. I found this exciting to be able to look at students’ strengths and needs and develop their programs accordingly. I found myself much more connected to what was being taught in the homeroom classes and helping students participate and be more successful in their classrooms. I believe a large part of the role...
of resource teacher is to support classrooms. I continue my role as SERT today, although I changed schools in 2001.

It has been through this path of experiences that I find myself drawn to inclusive education. I believe that exceptional students benefit from assistance that may be out of the classroom from time to time, although they belong as part of their class with their peers. Some of my coworkers have challenged my belief that inclusive education is the most beneficial for the exceptional student in terms of their academic growth. They feel that because these students cannot keep up with all grade level expectations, a placement in a segregated special education class would allow them greater success. I believe that these exceptional students will continue to struggle and lag behind their peers in terms of grade level expectations no matter what placement they receive. However, I see the benefit of students working in the regular class with their peers. Students shouldn’t be seen as failures in their class if they are working at their full potential. It is with their peers that they make connections and deal with the fact that they learn differently than others. Children can accept other people who are different “and” learn from them. I see my role as resource teacher to not only continue to educate myself about how best to meet the needs of a learner but also to advocate for students and teach other teachers. It is so important for all teachers to understand their students’ needs and what helps each student meet his or her full potential.

Themes

A number of themes emerged from the stories told by the teachers above who experienced inclusive education.
Acceptance

The most common theme that was found in each teacher's story was that of acceptance. When exceptional students were included in regular classroom, both teachers and students required acceptance. Grace shared what made a difference for one student: “acceptance from peers and teachers, a warm learning environment, help in the resource room, consistent routines, positive reinforcement, and lots of patience” (Interview, January 2004).

It was noticed that within the primary grades, students and teachers were quick to accept one another’s differences. Meghan shared, “In my own experience, there is greater difficulty to include and modify as students become older. Primary aged children seem to embrace children who are different and teachers seem to have less difficulty including these children because there is greater learning dependency at this level” (Essay, October 2002) As students became older, acceptance was more selective. Students who were different from others were most likely to be accepted by peers who grew up with them. Liz tells of a student who was held back in grade 6 to help accommodate necessary modifications for his program.

The class that he had grown up with since that second year in kindergarten really looked out for him. They were wonderful with him. They were another set of parental eyes or teacher eyes. They would help him, but they would also keep him out of trouble and they would just really mind his well-being; they were just so good for him. Then when he got to the next class who had not grown up with him, they thought he was cool, in fact they figured out how to set him up to misbehave and get the teacher upset. He became their little pest to upset. So they just got this
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little boy in trouble. So his behavioural issues became a problem that year, and I think it was directly related to the fact that this class did not know how to be an inclusive class for him. (Interview, February 2004)

In my own experience as a student with learning difficulties, I felt a lack of acceptance from my teacher when he labelled me as a “House Mouse” and kept me in during recess to correct spelling words. I would have felt better to have taken the extra work home and spent the recesses with my classmates where I belonged.

However, at times a student’s negative behaviour would be tolerated but not truly accepted. Meghan told about her student, Mark. At times, Mark made progress and wanted to be part of his peer group. At other times, he needed to be withdrawn from the class when he chose to be destructive and sabotage the class lesson or activity. Mark’s presence in his class created tension. He engaged his peers in disruptive behaviour, and this seemed to give him a sense of affirmation. “In this context,” Meghan recounted, “inclusion is destructive for the teacher, the class, and ultimately for the student. What he gets from inclusion is negative” (Interview, February 2004). Jane adds that “we are not always going to be in a situation where everyone is working at the same level we are and doing what we are doing. To learn to work together despite our differences is what the whole world needs” (Interview, February 2004).

**Belonging**

Another theme that arose from the stories told was “belonging.” All of the teachers believed that the exceptional students who worked in their classes belonged to the class along with their peers. Grace explained, “Even though I know we are here for the academics, there is so much more of the person that you have to address, their
null
emotional needs, and so many other things" (Interview, February 2004). Belonging was seen as a professional goal which showed that teachers were capable of teaching all students. Grace shared, “You belong first, then you learn, and then you have this self-respect. Exclusion at any level in any setting, whether it be school or church or unemployment, whatever, I think is a terrible sin” (Interview, February 2004).

For those teachers who are Christians, it was clear that they felt God’s instruction to see the value in each member as we all work together as one body. Meghan believes that

as humans we look out for each other and we need to find a way to make us all part of each other. I think that is also a Christian perspective, that we all need to live in community, and that we all need to support each other. It’s like the body image; we are all part of that body, and if there is part of the body that is not functioning well, then we are not healthy. I think it has to be a goal that we have. (Interview, February 2004)

Belonging was also seen as a humanitarian goal, that we all need to look out for one another. In regards to belonging Jane made the following comments.

I think the average student can really gain an understanding of others. Understanding of individual differences, of tolerance for differences, and respect for differences, and hopefully gain an understanding of seeing someone for who they really are, not how smart they appear or how highly they achieve. Sometimes some children present as being mean. It’s very hard to get through the outer shell of that meanness. [These students may] ostracize the child that doesn’t really fit in or who is different. So there is potential there for the average child to gain in
sensitivity, and that will help them later in life. We’re not always going to be in a situation where everyone is working at the same level we are and doing what we’re doing. So the class can be looked at as a little microcosm of reality, and so I think it is a much more realistic learning environment. (Interview, February 2004)

Belonging, however, did not mean that a student never left the classroom. There were a number of occasions where teachers shared the benefits of a one-to-one or small-group setting. Grace shared comments of two boys who come out of the regular classroom to receive math lessons in the resource room.

They just love coming out for math, even now that they are in grade 8. I would have thought that maybe they would prefer to stay in the classroom, but he said in grade 6, “I don’t want to stay in grade 6 for math. I don’t want to look stupid.” And he’s not stupid at all by any means, but he’s just challenged in math concepts, and when he is in a one-on-one or actually a two-on-one, they cope and they pass it, you know, and so they can ask questions which they wouldn’t do in class. (Interview, February 2004)

My teaching experience has found that students all want to belong. They are motivated to work with their peers even though the work may not be the same for all within the classroom. Liz also noted that at times belonging meant being with the homeroom class and yet working at one’s own ability level within the same curriculum content. Liz adds,

They belong to a school and they belong to a class, even if they spend some time out elsewhere. But again, there is a new sense of belonging in the other realm, they belong, to that group as well, so you know there is quite a fluid definition as
to where they belong but the sense of belonging, that’s really important to me.

(Interview, February 2004)

**Flexibility**

Flexibility was a theme found throughout the stories. It included the need for the teacher to make changes in class routines and within the class program. Jane noted that teachers needed to be flexible with the curriculum they taught. “I needed to keep them [students with learning or behavioural issues] as part of the group. I had to adapt my program, my teaching style, and the physical layout of my room. Whatever I could change to make it work for them and for me” (Interview, February 2004).

A successful inclusive classroom, Liz noted, needed to be flexible enough to allow for the accommodations and modifications that were necessary to meet the needs of exceptional students since children learn differently from one another. Liz tells of an experience she had as a child.

I was 11 years old in small school, a 3-room school with a very busy, overworked teacher. I had no difficulties learning in school, but one of my friends did, one of my best friends. She just found math extremely difficult and generally had difficulties learning, and the teacher would just get very sarcastic with her whenever she raised her hand. I got quite disturbed about that. I thought, “Why is he doing this to her? She can’t help this.” I guess even at that time I wished I could have helped her, but the style of schooling didn’t permit anyone to help another person. So I had to sit there and suffer with her as she was being treated badly by the teacher. (Interview, February 2004)
Meghan found that inclusion worked in her physical education class when it was flexible. “You just allowed the kids to do what they could, and if you saw that certain kids had special needs, well, you worked with that one on one, or you encouraged them to make progress. You sort of watched their progress throughout the year” (Interview, February 2004).

Flexibility means taking into account students’ strengths and needs. Grace recalls an experience that required flexibility.

I think of a young boy I had here who had Williams syndrome and was able to express himself quite well in many things, was always was very curious, had a lot of questions, things like that. He learned to read exceptionally well but could not do math. You see certain things and you think, he has such a gift in this area. It was just a total learning experience, and it really made me as a teacher stretch myself. (Interview, February 2004)

I appreciated the flexibility of my own teachers who found books at my reading level, although I longed for others. They knew that in order for me to make progress in my reading ability, I would need to work from where I was. At times, I even received one-to-one assistance from a parent volunteer to help me improve my language skills.

As a teacher, I continually work at helping classroom teachers incorporate accommodations that help students to be successful. At times there need to be modifications made to the curriculum expectations that allow a student to work at his/her independent readiness level. “Equality does not mean the same treatment for all; it means equitable treatment despite individual differences and treatment that takes such differences into account.” (Winzer, 2000, p. 12) I often compare accommodations to
eyeglasses. Some teachers, students, and parents question whether it is fair to give time extensions, allow notes to be photocopied, or tests to be scribed for students who have a specific learning disability, since the other students are not given accommodations. I challenge them by asking them if it is fair for some of the students to be wearing eyeglasses in class since not all the students have them. Just as some students need the accommodation of eyeglasses to help them see clearly, so others need accommodations to help them learn.

**Teacher Training**

Teacher training was seen as important to all the participants in my study. This was specified for the classroom teacher as well as the resource teacher. Collaboration brought these professionals together to support one another and make each other accountable for what was being done to include all students. Grace shared, “A lot of my work is educating myself and then other classroom teachers” (Interview, January 2004). My participants themselves gave credit to their learning through various forms of teacher training. A lack of time and money was mentioned as a deterrent to the extent of teacher training that would be optimal. Meghan commented,

Teachers are not given time for professional development. I think most teachers are very improvisational; it is whatever you intuitively think and know, [that] is what you do. And if you think of a theatrical presentation, that is where most of the time is spent is preparing, yet teachers are not given that time to do that or for professional development, to really think about these things. Its like you just sort of jump into the job and you just go. Often teachers teach the way that they were taught. (Interview, February 2004)
Meghan went on to suggest that teachers needed to learn how to design the curriculum itself as another step towards meeting students’ needs. “I believe very strongly that teachers somehow in curriculum design need to be the designers themselves. I don’t think it would solve the ultimate problem of how to actually include the diversity of needs that we encounter” (Interview, February 2004).

I am thankful for the training that I have received through courses that I have taken as well as through workshops and informal sharing from other teachers. There is always more to learn as each student brings forth new challenges in finding the best way to teach him or her.

Collaboration

Collaboration was regarded as important to the success of the inclusive classroom. Teachers needed support to help with programming and logistics such as working out timetables to accommodate needed support. In her administrative role, Jane still sees how her input is important to inclusive education.

In an administrative role, I really have to facilitate the whole thing happening for that child. Now I have a different role in meetings, how to problem solve, looking at the scheduling of the day, what could be changed, do we make a shift in the actual timetable or how do we work around a difficulty with the timetable, communication with parents, a lot of phone calls from parents with concerns. And that’s a really big thing. Being a support for the teacher when it is difficult, and it is often difficult when you have a full class to make the changes to make the program work. Particularly the more significant the learning issue or the more gifted a child presents him or herself to be. (Interview, February 2004)
With students who were deemed gifted or bright Jane said:

Most of the kids who are on the high end tend to not be part of the resource program. The classroom teachers seem to be able to adapt the program enough for them at the present time. I keep making it known that I’ve got this background in gifted education and anybody who needs suggestions and ideas please come and see me. (Interview, February 2004)

Teachers benefited from collaborating with one another to better plan. Grace shared,

There has to be much more collaboration between classroom teacher and resource, not that I have all the answers, because they will show me another angle, so I can’t just base my opinion on what I see here in a one-on-one, or a two-on-one situation. You want to get as much of a view of the child as you can. (Interview, January 2004)

A partnership between the regular classroom teacher and the resource teacher is formed where affirmation and reassurance play a part in decision making. Meghan commented about the importance of her relationship as a classroom teacher with the resource teacher.

There is a sense of affirmation and reassurance that there is somebody there that will support you. I do think it is a partnership and that any time you are in a partnership, when there is collaborative work, you are going to get better results. Again, you need time to collaborate, and I think if people recognize the strength and power of collaboration that special needs students would benefit from that too. (Interview, February 2004)
My own experience has been that when teachers work as a team, better ideas are developed, and the support we give one another allows us to offer stronger programs to our students.

**Advocacy**

Advocacy was deemed essential as the resource teacher advocated on behalf of the exceptional students. Students were taught and encouraged to take control of their own learning by being self-advocates. They needed to understand their own strengths and needs as well as how they could best learn. This information they would need to be able to share with their teachers, who could allow for the needed accommodations and/or modifications. Meghan comments on how students take ownership of their own learning. “I think that they have to empower themselves to do that” (Interview, February 2004). This was a skill that they needed to develop to use within the classroom as well as without. Grace shared, “It is difficult to self-advocate for themselves. It depends again on the difficulty that the child has” (Interview, January 2004). At times a student had difficulty with organizational skills, and this impeded the awareness of what was needed. Sometimes students were extremely shy and found it frightening to talk with their teacher.

I find that when students have an understanding of their own needs, they can help their teachers by reminding them of what works best for them when it comes to learning. This, however, is a process whereby students need support and assistance in understanding the way they learn as well as in helping them become good communicators with their teachers. They need to know what to ask for as well as how and when to ask.
More to Learn

There is so much to learn from those who have experienced inclusive education. From the stories told, teachers themselves and the parameters they set for themselves and their students define inclusive education. Inclusive education does not mean the same thing to each person. It is individualized, just as each student is an individual and what works best for him/her is individual. In learning about inclusive education we need to look towards settings and strategies that allow for each individual to shine.

Summary of Chapter Four

Chapter Four shared the accounts of 5 teachers who had experienced inclusive education. Each participant told of her professional experiences as a teacher. Themes arose among these accounts, which included acceptance, belonging, flexibility, teacher training, collaboration, and advocacy. I took these themes and brought the ideas of each participant together under each heading. I concluded that although there were common themes around each of the participants, inclusive education did not mean the same for all. More research is necessary to give us a clearer picture of inclusive education.
The text is not visible in the image.
Carry each other's burdens, 
and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 

Galatians 6:2 

Summary 
Five teachers gave their perspectives on inclusive education through the telling of their experiences. Several themes emerged from these stories including acceptance, belonging, flexibility, teacher training, collaboration, and advocacy. Belonging was a concept that began Chapter One of this study as I struggled with how this would happen in inclusive classrooms. Chapter Two took the reader through a history of how this challenge was addressed. These themes are further discussed in relation to literature in the following section. “Themes not only represent features of the concept of teaching, but also what is valued in teaching. This is important because the concept of teaching cannot be dissociated from what is worthwhile in teaching” (Nelson, 1993, p. 164). 

Discussion 
Having worked as a special education teacher for the past 17 years and having experienced the struggles of being a student with learning difficulties, the inclusive classroom is one that I believe we should be striving to create. Inclusive education may be a better form of education than that of segregated special education, as research shows that most exceptional students benefit from a placement within a regular classroom rather than in a special education class setting (Bunch, 1999; Forness et al., 1997; King-Sears, 1997; Moore, 1998; Rother et al., 1997; Stainback et al., 1992; Wade, & Zone 2000; Winzer, 2000). For effective inclusion, the regular classroom needs to be
a place where students with a range of abilities, are supported and accepted (McLeskey, J. & Waldon, N., 2000; Moore, 1998).

**Acceptance and Belonging**

Inclusion is a goal that many school boards have been working towards, as they believe being part of an inclusive classroom may be beneficial to all students. Teachers in this study support inclusive education. Acceptance and belonging are themes that were strong throughout all my participants’ stories. Grace found that children could accept other people who are different and learn from them. Jane used mixed ability groupings in the classroom and found it important for all students to learn with each other despite the differences amongst them. Liz experienced that peers make connections and create support systems amongst themselves when including students who have special needs. Meghan found that although classmates accepted some students, not all were accepted. My own story tells of struggles and successes. I believe that it is important that belonging and acceptance be a part of every classroom.

We need to look towards the future in creating better learning environments for students who have special needs. Stainback et al. (1992) wrote that although a student may not learn academic skills, it is still essential that all students learn about respecting one another and caring for each other in an inclusive society. I think that for all my participants, acceptance and belonging were concepts that were important in their own life and it also was important to them in their job. Grace shared this about her students: “If they feel that you love them they respond so much more. That is what the great commandment is about. Love God, your neighbour as yourself, and love opens up so many things” (Interview, February 2004).
References were made by some of my participants to the body and each person being a part of the body. I think that it is a good illustration of how students belong and need to be accepted as they are.

Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. (I Corinthians 12:14-26, The NIV Study Bible, 1985, p. 1751)

Grace referred to this body by saying, “I think any one who wants to come to the school regardless must be included, and being inclusive means we are all members of one body, the body of Christ. And the minute you exclude, you have in a sense damaged the integrity of the whole body” (Interview, January 2004).

Meghan comments on the body image as follows: “We all need to live in community, and we all need to support each other. It is like the body image, we are all part of that body, and if there is part of the body that is not functioning, well, then we are not healthy, and so I think it has to be a goal that we have” (Interview, February 2004).
Since students all have different gifts and are at different levels in their learning, teachers and students need to accept the fact that each one of them may not be doing the same activity at the same time. Meghan explained, “All these children are in this room, and the goal is to make progress. It is to go ahead. We are all different. We are all at different points, and with one [teacher] we have to make progress and learn something” (Interview, February 2004).

Belonging and acceptance did not mean that a student never left the classroom. All of my participants appreciated the opportunity an exceptional student had through accommodations within the class, modifications of the curriculum, and support on a withdrawal basis. My participants and I did not feel that differences of exceptional students create a sense of segregation but rather the flexibility needed by a student with special needs. This flexibility was also considered to be important by some researchers of inclusive education (Kings-Sears, 1997; Stainback et al, 1992; Winzer, 2000), while other researchers felt that students with special needs should not necessarily be in the regular classroom (Clousing, 1994; Farrell, 2000; Saint-Laurent, 2001).

All of my participants experienced times when exceptional students were disruptive to the learning in the classroom. Grace shared her experience of disruptive students.

If the child is very high needs, then sometimes I can see where quote “normal” students might not get as much attention as they should get. Whether that upsets them, I don’t know. Some children can be very disruptive, and I think in some ways that we’ve had a couple of children here that were very disruptive in class. If they have a lot of behavioural difficulties, it makes it very hard for other children
to keep on task if they need to work in a quite area. For a teacher, it all depends again on what they do with their class management. If you have a teacher that is not that skilled at that, I can see where it would be quite difficult for certain students. (Interview, January 2004)

Liz told me about her experiences with one of her students who is autistic.

Sarah [not her real name] is quite manipulative in her own way, and she knows what she wants. In fact, this year [the issue] was the elevator. She saw the elevator, and she wanted to go up and down the elevator. One PSW would let her in, and one would not let her in. So on the days that she was not allowed to go in and ride up and down the elevator, she would stand there screaming by the elevator door. So trying to identify what triggered her outbursts and her tantrums has been a huge concern and has been hard. She is so nonverbal that it is hard to know with an autistic child what is distressing them. But you learn, and we have some really good PSWs now who are getting better and better at figuring it out.

(Interview, February 2004)

Even with the disruptive factor included in each of my participants’ experiences, they all work at helping exceptional students belong and become accepted. The question of safety does arise, however, of both students and staff. I question when the concern for safety needs to place a student outside of a school or classroom that is not equipped to meet his or her needs.

My participants all shared the attitude of caring and compassion. These teachers, like many others I believe, work in schools today and care for the welfare of children that they teach. Noddings (1992) suggests that “caring is the very bedrock of all
successful education” (p. 27). However, not all teachers share these same feelings to this degree. Acceptance and the sense of belonging that is felt in the classroom will be affected by the degree to which the teacher feels these factors are important. “[Caring] recognizes these gifts and limitations with which we are all born, and it draws our attention to appreciative forms of acceptance.” (Noddings, 1992, p. 48) I recall my experience in grade 5 shared in Chapter Four, and feel that my teacher and his protocols stemmed probably from a lack of understanding of learning difficulties rather than a lack of caring. Perhaps Liz’s experience as a child as she took compassion on her friend who struggled in math also may be attributed to the teacher’s lack of understanding of learning differences. This takes us to the need for teacher training, which will be discussed as a separate theme.

Clousing (1994) gives some insight into why some parents who have children with special needs will choose a separate educational setting for their child. She explains that some people want to be with others who are cognitively similar as it often goes hand in hand with values, interests, and goals. She believes that when a principle, such as inclusive education, is too rigorously and exclusively applied, it will be weakened by pressure from its differing belief. I would agree with Clousing that it is important to respect the choice of segregated classroom settings when students and their parents prefer it. Jane experienced parents choosing a segregated gifted class as they felt that such an environment would better suit their children’s social needs.

Farrell (2000) discusses that the term “mainstream inclusion” is interpreted as the movement of a student from a special school or class placement to that of a regular classroom. He argues that placement within a regular classroom may not be the best
placement for a student, although many believe that special education settings are second best. Farrell suggests that “educational inclusion” is a term that should be used to give equal values to different educational settings and that students should be provided with the placement that best suits their needs. I would agree with Farrell that “educational inclusion” is an important option for students and their parents as they consider the needs of their child.

**Flexibility**

In many schools, teachers feel great pressure to ensure that students meet curriculum expectations set out for their students (Tomlinson, 1999). Meghan shares,

> We have these goals and we have these demands on us as teachers, that for kids that are outside of that normal range, of being able to make that progress, it has become very difficult. To say that they learned something, then we can say that we’ve been successful, but that’s not the way the institution is set up. The whole system is set up so that they are doing independent work, and they are striving to reach a particular standard that the institution has set. To say that, that standard says that you’re successful or you’re not successful. So that whole mentality [referring to the Ontario curriculum expectations] presents problems. I think just to say all these children are in this room and our goal is to make progress. It’s to go ahead. We’re all different, and we’re all at different points. Somehow or other we have to get them to make progress; like, to learn something. (Interview, February 2004)

Curriculum standards should be used as a means to make certain that students learn more logically, more intensely, more broadly, and more permanently (Tomlinson,
1999). “Unfortunately, when teachers feel pressure to ‘cover’ standards in isolation, and when the standards are presented in the form of fragmented and sterile lists, genuine learning is hobbled, not enriched” (Tomlinson, p. 40).

To teach students from their academic readiness level, flexibility is necessary within the classroom. This may materialize as a modification within the curriculum or as an accommodation that allows a student to complete an assignment in a different format. Kluth and Straut (2001) include flexibility as a requirement when implementing curriculum standards. I found that the participants in this study used standards in these ways in order for them to be effective. They noted that flexibility was essential when implementing standards with their students. One curriculum standard was not necessarily appropriate for all students. When a curriculum standard was flexible and developed, it allowed for students to work within a range of skills and concepts according to their needs, abilities, and interests. “Equality does not mean the same treatment for all; it means equitable treatment despite individual differences and treatment that takes such differences into account” (Winzer, 2000, p. 12). When this was not the case, there was tension and frustration. For example, Meghan shares how she feels her physical education class has been flexible, and therefore exceptional students have met with success there. However, when they returned to the classroom, tension built and frustration was real.

For some reason, in physical education it doesn’t seem to be a big issue, because kids really come in and they do what they can and what you want to see is for them to progress. They are not evaluated in the same sense as in a written sort of sit-down, seat kind of educational experience. So it is sort of like, almost like that
sense of lifting. That responsibility was lifted because you just allowed the kids to do what they could, and if you saw that certain kids had special needs, well, you worked with that one on one, or you encouraged them to make progress, you sort of watched their progress throughout the year. Maybe they couldn’t really do as much as other people, but it didn’t really matter so much. Then when I came back as full time and started working in the classroom again, it was then that again I felt that tension of how I can be responsible to every child’s need in the classroom, and with that tension also comes frustration. Frustration really is about feeling irresponsible most of the time because you can’t just do it. You can’t do it. You can’t do everything and be everything to everybody. It’s almost like when you are a teacher you have this tension of very personal compassion for an individual versus in order to stay sane you have to be distant and more cool, if that makes sense to you. You know, it’s that sense. (Interview, February 2004)

“So special education is not special at all; it is not more than good education, and all teachers must be prepared to teach all children effectively” (Winzer, 2000, p. 19).

**Teacher Training and Collaboration**

Teacher training and collaboration united teachers together to support one another and make each other accountable for what was being done to include all students. Perhaps in the future there will be no distinction between special and regular education teachers, but rather we will all be teachers of students who are each unique and individual. “Teachers need to be prepared for the diversity of learners that sit before them” (Sanders, 2002, p. 20). McLeskey and Waldon (2000) give two reasons why schools must change:
First, change must address the needs of *all* students, not just those with disabilities. Second, “inclusion” is transformed to become “school improvement,” because the changes relate to improving general education classrooms so that teachers are better equipped to meet the needs of all students. Thus, inclusion is no longer about “special” education for a “special” group of students, but it is about improving the education of ALL students. (p. 16)

For the most part, teachers have positive attitudes when inclusion within their classroom is accompanied by training, special education support, help in the classroom, and a smaller class (Deshler, 1997). Grace comments, “I started taking courses in special education, and then I really saw a whole different way of being able to help students.”

Van Dyke et al. (1995) suggest that an inclusive classroom requires the regular classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and any educational assistants to collaborate. They list the following assets, as described in Chapter Two, as essential for successful collaboration to occur: communication, flexibility, shared ownership, recognition of differing needs, need-based instruction, willingness to be a team player, dependability, co-operative grading, IEP responsibility, and a sense of humour. What I also saw in my participants was the ability to be proactive. Each of these teachers took the time to better understand their students and look for ways that would allow them to be successful in the classroom. They pursued teacher training and often would try to anticipate problems in advance and move towards alleviating them. Jane, for example, would leave work for gifted and bright students when she knew that they were competent in certain math units that were being covered.
Collaboration with school personnel and resources was one way in which my participants solved problems for their students, although collaboration was used to quite a high degree. They tried to solve their classroom problems with inclusion in a variety of ways. For example, Grace told of workshops and courses she attended to better understand Williams syndrome. Both Jane and I drew from some of our own personal experiences as we recalled what it was like to be a student in the class with special learning needs. I struggled as a student while Jane excelled, and yet we still felt a special need as students.

Advocacy

Teachers need to teach students to be proactive and to advocate for themselves. At first, the teacher will need to be a student’s advocate in the school to inform other teachers of the needed accommodations and/or modifications that are necessary to allow for a successful program. Teachers must model and specifically teach students to be self-advocates so that, as the student gets older, he/she will be more independent in pursuing the best learning situation. In order to help prepare students to take more responsibility for themselves, students with learning disabilities, who have a tendency to be passive, inactive, and reluctant learners, need to be more involved and attentive participants in the learning process and learn specific assertiveness and self-advocacy skills that can help them end this leaning toward passivity and dependence (Yuan, 1994). Modeling communication for the student, practising specific requests to be asked, and informing classroom teachers that students will be approaching them to discuss needs of accommodations and/or modifications can help do this. Winzer (2000) writes, “Equality does not mean the same treatment for all; it means equitable treatment
despite individual differences and treatment that takes such differences into account” (p. 12).

I appreciated the fact that each of my participants did not want just to cope with having exceptional students within their classes, but they wanted to see these students meet their full potential. Getting by was not good enough. Jane shares from her story an experience, as a classroom teacher with many exceptional students.

Something that I always found with myself in the role of a classroom teacher, I always found it my responsibility to make it work for everyone. So, to make my program work for gifted students, make it work for kids with learning issues or behavioural issues. I needed to keep them as part of the group. I had to adapt my program, my teaching style, and the physical layout of my room. Whatever I could change to make it work for them and for me. For me to be able to successfully get through my role through the year, I had to do that. (Interview, February 2004)

By working as students’ advocates, I believe that teachers can help students make gains in their learning, both academically and personally. Telling a student about his or her learning disability has the potential to enhance self-esteem and increase the probability of good teacher-student interactions (Yuan, 1994).

Work in Progress

I question where to draw the line between inclusive education and special education classes. I believe the line needs to be determined more clearly in terms of when inclusive education is advantageous and when it is that a special education class better suits the needs of a child. Jane suggested that some parents felt that their child’s
needs as a gifted learner would be better met socially in a gifted class. Meghan refers to exclusion in relation to inclusion in the essay she shared with me.

I would like to suggest that even though the principle of exclusion exists, it does not mean that it is always in opposition with inclusion. Exclusion can exist purposively in our society along side inclusion and I do believe that special needs students can experience inclusion within their community and that this ideology can be put into practice. Reconstruction of educational inclusion is necessary.

(Essay, October 2002)

I believe that inclusive education needs to consider the many factors that affect each classroom. The themes that have been discussed in this chapter need to be considered. Another factor that requires consideration is that of the skills/knowledge of a teacher. Some teachers are more capable of running an inclusive classroom due to their skills and/or personality. Teacher training is an asset for all teachers, but some teachers seem to have a more natural ability to teach within an inclusive classroom.

Another factor that I feel is vital to the success of inclusive education is that of the school. Some schools have an administration and community that support differences, while others prefer segregated education for exceptional students. Inclusive education is not effective when it hinders the education of the exceptional student or the class they are in. Each individual child must also be considered when considering inclusive education. Each has their own personality, which affects what type of educational setting they will better thrive in. The desire of the parents for their child also needs to be considered in whether inclusive education should be implemented. Some parents want their child to be with their peers while others want their child to be in a specialized
setting to meet his/her needs. These factors individually and collectively are important in deciding whether inclusive education is the right decision for a student.

“A general perception has been created by the literature and, perhaps, by the media, that inclusion is a fully accepted movement in special education. This is not true; debate still abounds” (Winzer, 2000, p. 7). There are different views about inclusive education that lie along a continuum (Winzer). On the one end are those who feel that all students should stay within the regular classroom for the full day. If support services are needed, they should be brought into the classroom rather than removing the student. Others believe that in order for full inclusion to occur, special education needs to be abolished (Winzer). Further along this continuum are those who believe in partial inclusion, where only the students who can meet certain standards should be included in a class for full inclusion (Winzer). They say that the regular classroom may not be the most appropriate placement for all students to be managed and taught effectively (Winzer).

Since the 1990s to today, inclusive education has been promoted and implemented (Winzer, 2000). The question still remains, however, whether inclusion really works.

We do not really know. Current research provides only a crude pointer to the success or appropriateness of inclusion, and it cannot tell whether inclusion is good or bad, effective or ineffective--particularly for students with high incidence conditions such as learning disabilities. (Winzer, 2000, p. xi)
Recommendations

Based on this study, a range of considerations needs to be considered when choosing an educational placement. Each decision needs to be based on the individual student and the options open to him/her. Not only are the student’s strengths and needs to be considered, but also the school and community, the teacher, and the parents’ desire for their child. To make a decision about placement without considering all these factors would not be wise.

Implications for Practice

“More recent research and practice substantiate the position that educational inclusion can be done successfully” (Stainback, 2000, p. 29). Based on the above themes of my participants, I find that the understanding of multiple intelligences and differentiated instruction may be ways a teacher can use to better meet the needs of exceptional students within inclusive classrooms.

Multiple Intelligences. Research over the past century suggests that intelligence is multifaceted (Gardner, 1997; Sternberg, 1997). Howard Gardner advocates that humans have eight intelligences: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic. With this in mind, he believes that the leading error in teaching over the past centuries has been to deal with all students as if they were variants of the same individual. Therefore, he felt that teaching the same subject in the same way to all students was not adequate. Robert Sternberg suggests that there are three types of intelligences: analytical, practical, and creative. While different research suggests different types of intelligences, they do agree that “we think, learn and create in different ways and that the
development of our potential is affected by the match between what we learn and how we learn with our particular intelligences" (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 18).

Grace appreciates the multiple intelligences of her students and realizes that the classroom does not always allow for students to shine according to their gifts. "You start to look at students a little differently, not just from the academic side, because each child has a very unique gift. I think even though they have to deal with all of the curriculum, you want to zero in on that one gift, because it is often untapped."

Consistent with Gardner, I recommend that the concept of multiple intelligences be considered and applied in the classroom. I would like to see teachers look for the untapped gifts of students, as so much of our focus in the classroom over the years has been on only the verbal-linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences, by teaching and allowing students to use the gifts they have in their learning. To look beyond these would allow us to better allow for students to develop gifts that they have in the other areas of intelligence.

**Differentiated Instruction.** Tomlinson (2001) uses the illustration of students wearing different clothes to explain differentiated instruction. Children wear different clothing based on their size, style, and preference. We understand this since certain clothes make students more comfortable and allow them to express their budding personalities. When in school, modifying or differentiating instruction for students who are at different levels of readiness and who have different interests is also more comfortable, engaging, and appealing. "One-size-fits-all instruction will inevitably sag or pinch, exactly as single-size clothing would" (Tomlinson, p.viii). Trying to make clothing fit that is too small or too large is probably less effective than getting clothes
that are the right fit at a given time (Tomlinson). This metaphor applies to the classroom as well. Having students receive an educational program that meets their needs is far more affective then having one that is too simplistic or too difficult. This does not, however, mean that a teacher must teach each student on a one-to-one basis but rather they must consider each student’s strengths and weaknesses as well as their readiness levels and learning styles when teaching students and in the work they do in response to concepts taught. Jane comments:

Curriculum planning must include pre-tests that reflect the main skills and content of a given unit, plans for teaching and evaluating grade level curriculum objectives, and a range of project and extension activities that provide enrichment experiences for high ability students. Modification of daily lessons in any subject area across the curriculum can also provide stimulation and challenge for gifted students in the regular classroom. (Interview, February 2004)

When a teacher aims to teach something to a whole class at the same time, it is likely that one third of the students already know what it is that the teacher is teaching; one third will learn what the teacher is teaching; and the remaining third will not learn what the teacher is teaching. So at the end of the lesson, two thirds of the students are wasting their time (Willis, 1993).

Tomlinson (2001) writes that it is the things that we share in common that make us human, and it is the way that we differ from one another that makes us individuals. In some classrooms it is the similarities that students share that become the focal point for the instruction that takes place. Differentiated instruction, however, takes into account that students have things in common with one another as well as differences.
Both these similarities and differences are taken into account when teaching and learning (Tomlinson). Teachers need to account for the fact that some students need days to learn a particular concept while other students will take 10 minutes to learn the same concept (Willis, 1993). Liz tells a story of how a severely autistic girl is helped to be part of a class. In the early years she did not show any interest in being part of the group. She got very distressed frequently and did a lot of screeching. [Now] she tends to be off on the side, and when they [her classmates] do art, she’ll do art because the Personal Support Worker (PSW) will have her do that. (Interview, February 2004)

In an interview, Howard Gardner (1994) was quoted: “The biggest mistake of past centuries in teaching has been to treat all children as if they were variants of the same individual and thus to feel justified in teaching them all the same subjects in the same way” (cited in Siegel & Shaughnessy, 1994, p. 564). Standardized curriculum and tests around grade level expectations suggest a lack of success around expectations by many exceptional students. Individual education plans have been a way for teachers to allow students with exceptionalities to work at their own level and make learning gains at their own pace.

Simply put, differentiating instructions means providing several alternatives for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn so that each student can learn effectively. It would be an incorrect assumption that differentiated instruction means only giving some students more work to do and others less. To adjust the quantity of an assignment is less effective than modifying the nature of an assignment to complement students’ needs (Tomlinson, 2001). Jane suggests that
the questions teachers pose, the balance of lower and higher level thinking skills in student tasks and assignments, and the development of multithematic units are some ways that this can be accomplished. She says, “By posing open-ended questions, teachers promote critical and creative thinking and have the opportunity to guide students in exploring possibilities they are intellectually ready to pursue” (Interview, February 2004).

Differentiated instruction requires the teacher to work at different times with the whole class, with small groups, and with individuals (Tomlinson, 2001). Liz tells of a couple of students who are withdrawn from their classes for a time each afternoon. A special needs group is this new one that we are doing where we are really trying to get them [two primary students with special needs] involved and interact with each other a little bit. These two children in grade 1 needed some down time and support because they were having real problems with the grade 1 program. It hasn’t quite worked the way we had hoped and, you know, we keep modifying as we go. (Interview, February 2004)

Meghan tells of when one student in her class becomes disruptive and needs to spend time working alone in the resource centre. “[When] he becomes disruptive and sabotaging...I have sort of appreciated the situation that if he became like that he could be sent out to the learning centre” (Interview, February 2004).

In the classroom, when teachers work with curriculum, they take into consideration at least three elements. The first is the content that students are expected to learn. Second, they consider the process and how students will make sense of the information and the ideas given. Third, they look at product or how the students have
demonstrated what they have learned. When a teacher differentiates these three elements, they present alternative approaches to what students learn, how they learn it, and how they demonstrate what they've learned. These three approaches share the fact that they each encourage significant growth in each and every student (Tomlinson, 2001). Jane shares that “in selecting specific trigger words and end products, teachers are better able to address special talents of students in the group and to reflect an awareness of Gardner’s (1993) Multiple Intelligences theory” (Essay, November 2000).

In a differentiated classroom, the teacher does not endeavour to differentiate everything for everyone every day. That is unattainable, and it would ruin the sense of wholeness that is so important to the class (Tomlinson, 2001).

Some educators define good education as one in which certain information is learned and all students master certain basic competencies. Others feel that good education can be defined as one that helps each student achieve his or her personal best. Since the latter definition of good education strives to continually test and raise each student’s upper limit, it would be the better of the two definitions as it better serves the needs of all learners (Tomlinson, 2001). I recall my own experience as a struggling learner and my mom encouraging me to “just do my best.” This encouragement helped me to keep moving forward in my learning, as in doing my best I did not fail but rather took another step up my path of learning. The best learning happens when the learning experience moves the learner forward a little ahead of his or her independence level. When a student works on understanding concepts and skills that have already been mastered, then very little or no new learning takes place. On the other hand, if tasks are too far beyond a student’s present point of mastery, the student will become frustrated
and will not learn (Howard, 1994). Meghan recalls her student Mark, who will give up or become a behaviour problem when expectations seem too difficult to him.

Now, I have him only in physical education right now, which is much easier than having him in a classroom where there is writing and reading and so on. At least in a physical sense he can do a lot of the things, but as soon as it comes to things that he doesn’t feel that successful in, he just doesn’t even try. I think that is true probably in everything that he does. As soon as he has that perception of “I can’t do this. I’m not even going to bother because it makes me look stupid when I try anyway [he gives up].” (Interview, February 2004)

The teacher in this situation accepts students as they are and expects them to be all they can be according to the abilities and gifts that they have (Tomlinson, 1999). Meghan tells of one of her students who has special needs: “I think that even though he will never be the same as everybody else, he is doing the best that he can now” (Interview, February 2004).

Assessment and instruction are inseparable in the differentiated classroom. It is used to understand how to modify instruction for students and therefore is ongoing and diagnostic (Tomlinson, 1999). Jane recalls her experience as an enrichment specialist when she comments on assessment and instruction:

Curriculum compacting exempts students from studying material they have previously mastered and provides opportunities for them to participate in experiences that further extend their skills and knowledge in that subject or topic area. Pretests are given by teachers to determine student knowledge prior to commencing a new unit of study. Students who achieve a predetermined level on
pretest are given the opportunity to develop their strengths even further through extension activities and special interest projects. (Interview, February 2004)

“A great coach never achieves greatness for himself or his team by working to make all his players alike. To be great, and to make his players great, he must make each player the best that he or she possibly can be” (Tomlinson, 1999, p. 13).

**Implications for Further Research**

As inclusive education continues to be implemented, it may be time consuming and costly. Teachers require training and curriculum needs to be reassessed. A teacher might find inclusive education easier to implement if curriculum were written with inclusion in mind. Curriculum then would accommodate the broad range of abilities and learning styles within a classroom. A greater number of activities could be suggested to help students consolidate information at their own level of learning. Further research could look at how much preparation time is necessary for teachers to provide the inclusive opportunities within the classroom. This could be studied by going to individual teachers and finding out how much time they actually do have for professional development. As more exceptional students spend time in the regular classroom, hearing the experiences of these teachers would be beneficial to others. It would help educators find what works and what does not, with multiple factors being considered.

On the other hand, one must look at the outcomes of the student. Is the student truly more successful in an inclusive classroom, both socially and educationally? It would be interesting to see if there is a difference in an exceptional student’s happiness and contentment in an inclusive classroom versus a segregated classroom. The question
of academic growth continues to linger as teachers often find growth slow in both inclusive and segregated classrooms of students who struggle with learning.

There continue to be many questions and few concrete answers. Much of the debate around inclusion has been at the philosophical level rather than at the practical level (Winzer, 2000). So much more work needs to be done at the practical level that fills the needs of both the student and the teacher.
References


Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation.


http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/AKIncusion.html


Appendix A

Questions Used as Prompts

The following list of questions was sent ahead to each participant prior to meeting with them to help them prepare for a dialogue with me. My opening comment when meeting with each of the participants was, “Tell me about your experiences with inclusive education.” The questions were used during my meeting with each participant when they found themselves at a standstill in sharing about their experiences.

1. What has been your experience with inclusive education?
2. What have you learned by teaching in an inclusive setting?
3. How would you define an exceptional student?
4. How would you define inclusive education?
5. What experiences have you had with exceptional students?
6. What impact has an Individual Education Plan made to the teaching and learning of an exceptional student?
7. What have been the most effective strategies you have used to make inclusive education successful?
8. What has been the most challenging for you as a teacher in your role with inclusive education?
9. What do you feel has been most challenging for an exceptional student within an inclusive setting?
10. What do you feel has been most rewarding/beneficial for an exceptional student within an inclusive setting?
11. If you were an exceptional student, what would you suggest to your teacher to make learning fun?

12. What do you feel has been most challenging for the class as a whole in an inclusive setting?

13. What do you feel has been most rewarding/beneficial for the class as a whole in being inclusive?

14. How have you been a facilitator for all students to be actively involved in the process of learning information?

15. How have you helped students to take ownership of their own learning?

16. How do you take into account the experiences, interests, and abilities of a student with special needs when teaching?

17. What do you think the role of the Learning Resource Teacher should be in relationship to inclusive education?

18. What amount of collaboration is there among the regular classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and instructional assistants?
Appendix B

Telephone Script

Hello, may I please speak to ______________?

Hi, this is Edith van der Boom calling. I received your name from ______________ who said that you were involved in helping one of your students with special needs become successful in the regular classroom.

I am doing some research on inclusive education for my thesis at Brock University and I was wondering if you would be interested in being a participant in my study? I have come up with some questions about how you have experienced inclusive education as a teacher.

I would be willing to meet you at your school sometime to have you speak about your experiences with inclusive education.

I would like to record our conversation so that I could transcribe it and use the information to write a narrative report on your experiences. I would send you a copy of this narrative and then call you to review its content. We could chat over the phone to make sure what I have written is what you meant when speaking with me. Since I would be publishing these stories, I would keep your name, school, and all students anonymous. If there were something that I wrote that you would not like to see published I would remove it from the document. I would continue to edit the narrative until we were both happy with it. If you decide at any time during this process that you would like to withdraw you can do so at any time.

If you would like, I can give you some time to think about this and then call you back next week sometime.

Thank you for your time, and have a good day.
Appendix C

Letter of Information to Subjects

Dear ____________________,

I am writing this letter to formally invite you to participate in a research study that I am conducting. The results of this research will be submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education that I am pursuing at Brock University. My study is entitled, “Inclusive Education: Exploring Teachers’ Perspectives.” Prior to your involvement in my study I would like to give you a little more information about it.

This project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics Board (File # 02-190, van der Boom).

I, Edith van der Boom (edithvanderboom@hotmail.com), am conducting this study under the supervision of Professor Anne E. Elliott of Brock University (aelliott@ed.brocku.ca).

The purpose of this study is to investigate inclusive education practices. There are students in many regular classrooms with special needs, who are not able to independently meet grade level expectations. I would like to find out what goals are set and met for these students. I would like to find out how accommodations and modifications have been implemented and how these have related to a student’s success. Specifically this study will ask the following questions of five teachers who have been involved with the implementation of inclusive education practices:

1. What has been your experience with inclusive education?
2. What have you learned by teaching in an inclusive setting?
3. How would you define an exceptional student?
4. How would you define inclusive education?
5. What experiences have you had with exceptional students?
6. What impact has an Individual Education Plan made to the teaching and learning of an exceptional student?
7. What have been the most effective strategies you have used to make inclusive education successful?
8. What has been the most challenging for you as a teacher in your role with inclusive education?

9. What do you feel has been most challenging for an exceptional student within an inclusive setting?

10. What do you feel has been most rewarding/beneficial for an exceptional student within an inclusive setting?

11. If you were an exceptional student, what would you suggest to your teacher to make learning fun?

12. What do you feel has been most challenging for the class as a whole in an inclusive setting?

13. What do you feel has been most rewarding/beneficial for the class as a whole in being inclusive?

14. How have you been a facilitator for all students to be actively involved in the process of learning information?

15. How have you helped students to take ownership of their own learning?

16. How do you take into account the experiences, interests, and abilities of a student with special needs when teaching?

17. What do you think the role of the Learning Resource Teacher should be in relationship to inclusive education?

18. What amount of collaboration is there among the regular classroom teacher, the special education teacher, and instructional assistants?

I believe that the answers to questions such as these will be of benefit to all teachers who work with exceptional students.

Participation in this study is expected to take one to two hours of your time. If you decide to volunteer, I will ask you to spend some time to tell me about your experiences with inclusive education.

All information collected from you in this study will be aggregated. Thus, your name will not appear in any report, publication, or presentation resulting from this study. The data, with identifying information removed, will be securely stored in a locked drawer in my home and then destroyed after two years. You may withdraw from the study at any time by advising me of this decision.
My plan is to conduct in-depth interviews of five teachers who have been a part in providing an inclusive environment for one or more exceptional students within a regular classroom. When being asked questions, at any time you may leave unanswered any question you prefer not to answer. I will write field notes following the interview. After having written a transcription of the interviews, I will write a narrative from the information discussed. I will share this narrative with you. Together we will negotiate meaning. You will make the final decision about what form the narrative takes.

In the event you have any question or concerns about your participation in this study, please contact the Research Ethics Officer at 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035.

I will call you shortly to discuss your involvement in this study.

Sincerely,

Edith H. van der Boom
Appendix D

Letter of Consent

Informed Consent

Title of Study: “Inclusive Education: Exploring Teachers’ Perspectives”

Researcher: Edith H. van der Boom, Faculty of Education, Graduate Student

Name of Participant: _______________________________________________________

Purpose: I know that there are students in many regular classrooms with special needs who are not able to independently meet grade level expectations. I understand that the purpose of the following research is to investigate how inclusive education can be an effective means of providing education for an exceptional student. I understand that the purpose of this study is to explore what goals are set and met for these students and how accommodations and modifications have been implemented. Finally, I understand that how these accommodations and modifications have contributed to a student’s success will also be explored.

Study Procedures: I have been informed about the project by the researcher. I have seen samples of the types of questions that will be asked. I have agreed to participate by being interviewed by the researcher. I will receive a narrative of this interview and will then be contacted by telephone to negotiate the meaning of this document. Time requirements for my participation will be limited to the initial interview (1-2 hours) and then follow-up phone calls until I am satisfied with the final draft of the narrative.

Confidentiality/Anonymity: I understand that all personal data will be kept strictly confidential and that a pseudonym will be used in all writings.

Contact: If I have any questions or concerns about my participation in the study, I may contact Edith van der Boom at (905) 844-5527 or Dr. Anne Elliott, Supervising Professor at Brock University at (905) 688-5550, ext.3934.

Consent: I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time and for any reason without penalty. There will be no payment for my participation. I understand that there is no obligation to answer any question or participate in any aspect of this project that I consider invasive, offensive, or inappropriate.
I have read and understood the above information. I reserve the right to ask questions about the project at any time. By signing this document, I am indicating free consent to research participation.

Participant Signature __________________________ Date __________________________

A copy of the final written narrative will be provided for you.

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Brock Research Ethics Board. (File # 02-190, van der Boom)

* * *

I have fully explained the procedures of this study to the above participant.

Researcher __________________________ Date __________________________
Appendix E

Feedback to Participants

Dear ________________,

I want to thank you once again for taking the time to participate in my study on inclusive education. I appreciated your input of your practices and the feedback you were able to give me to the narratives I wrote.

You have been a great help to me in my search for answers about how to make inclusive education an effective and successful experience for exceptional students. I have found that although inclusive education is great in theory, it certainly takes time and planning to make it work.

As we continue to make inclusive education all that it can be, I'd love to hear from you on a more informal basis to share more of your experiences with inclusive education.

Thank you once again for your participation!

Sincerely,

Edith H. van der Boom
Appendix F

Data Analysis Sample

Themes noted in Jane’s transcript:
Flexibility, Acceptance – need to be flexible when working with curriculum
Belong to class – for most students inclusive education is best
Curriculum – gifted/high achieving students need extensions to the curriculum
Acceptance, Flexibility – use of mixed groupings in classroom
Teacher Support – teachers need support to help with programming and logistics (i.e., timetable)
Advocate, Acceptance- important to learning for teacher to have relationships with students
Acceptance – important for all students to learn with each other despite differences amongst them

Themes noted in Cathy’s transcript:
Belonging to class, Flexibility – inclusion works in physical education
Support from resource – role of resource teacher to collaborate with
Support from resource – EA support essential
Acceptance – some students accepted by classmates while other are not (social community effected)
Belong to class – inclusive education the right thing to do
Teacher training – professional development limited (not enough preparation time)
Teacher training, Different curriculum – teachers need to design curriculum themselves for it to work
Self-Advocacy – student needs to take ownership

Belong to class – consider all students in inclusive education

**Themes Identified:**

Themes written on the same line were collapsed together. The number in parenthesis behind each theme indicates how often it occurred within the participants' transcripts. Themes that were found in only one transcript were not further discussed in this study.

Acceptance (11)

Belong to class (8)

Flexibility (5), Different curriculum (4)

Teacher training (5)

Collaboration (2), Class support from resource (2), Teacher support (1)

Self-advocacy (3), Advocate for students (2)

Peer support (1)

Love (1)