Inclusive Education and Pedagogical Change: Experiences from the Front Lines

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Abstract: Many educators hold beliefs that including students, at least to some degree, has academic and social benefits, however, they struggle with fundamental pedagogy. With a global shift from a segregated lens to that of an inclusive lens, special education teachers who once held positive beliefs towards segregated special education are now faced with a new reality of teaching students with disabilities in inclusive classroom settings. This paper highlights the experiences of ten educators who transitioned from teaching in a self-contained class to an inclusive class. Focus group and interview themes indicated that all had experienced a shift in their pedagogy- their overall beliefs and teaching methods- after they taught students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms. Despite their special education training, these educators were challenged by their own beliefs and expectations, the attitudes of others, and systematic barriers within the education system. Highlights of their change process include the positive performance of students with disabilities, the growth and development of the other students, and their overall pedagogical self-reflection. As a result, a framework, the Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change, was developed to highlight the change process and connect this research to the literature on inclusion and teacher change. This diagram can provide teacher educators a framework for discussing pedagogical change. Implications for professional development and teacher training for inclusive practice, as well as maximizing the educator skills in Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and mentorship opportunities will be highlighted.

Keywords: *Inclusion, teacher change, pedagogy.*

Introduction

Historically in most parts of the world, children with disabilities were not permitted access to educational opportunities, in particular those offered by traditional schooling. A predominant orientation to providing services for children with disabilities, was that there was no point in providing an education to someone who would not contribute economically to society, and so these children were placed in institutions to be cared for by medical staff (Scruggs, & Mastropieri, 1996; Winzer, 1993). Over the last half of a century, great progress has been made to provide necessary services and educational opportunities for individuals with disabilities with a shifting view that all children should have a chance to learn. Initially, in order to provide educational experiences for children with disabilities, special programs were established in schools which were taught by teachers with specific training. The belief was held that students would have a chance to learn necessary and basic skills and when deemed appropriate have opportunities to interact with the other children in the school who did not have disabilities. Over that past few decades, with the support of various United Nations Conventions (UNESCO, 1994; CRPD, 2007), education systems have adopted a model of inclusive education where all children have a right to attend their neighborhood school and attend class and engage with curriculum with their same age peers, in their age appropriate grade (Porter & Towell, 2017). It is on this premise that inclusive education is based, but not without its challenges; including, how to best support students, how to best support teachers, how to successfully implement programming, and what embedded beliefs and practices need to change.

Research on teacher change indicates that educators will experience changes in attitudes and beliefs towards including students with disabilities when they have training and expertise combined with authentic opportunities to participate in inclusive practice (Evans, 1996; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). When provided with training and experiences with inclusive practices, educators will adjust their teaching practice, the overall strategies they use, and the climate they establish in

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their classrooms (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Mukhopadhyay, 2014). Inclusive classrooms can provide educators the opportunity to see students with disabilities demonstrate academic and/or social success in their classroom, and be able to adjust their pedagogy accordingly. When students are fully included, they have the opportunity to contribute to class discussions, access the curriculum and interact with their peers on a daily basis.

Many educators who work in special education have specific training and expertise to work with students with disabilities. However, their opportunity for experiencing successful inclusive practice is limited when they work mainly in segregated, special education classrooms.

This research investigated the process of change that occurred in special educator attitudes and teaching practice at the end of the second year of a board-wide implementation aimed at increasing inclusive practice. These teachers had the experience of moving within the last five years, from teaching a self-contained class, where students with disabilities attend class separately with limited access or interaction with other students in the school, to an inclusive class, where students with disabilities would access curriculum and social opportunities with peers without disabilities. Utilizing a survey, a focus group, and interviews, these educators were asked about their experiences of change. Specifically, participants were asked about their views on inclusion, as well as, the challenges they faced and the successes they participated in throughout their careers as special education teachers and now as inclusive education teachers. This paper highlights key findings as displayed in a graphic that explains the process of change identified by these educators. In order to understand the deeply embedded factors that contribute to this process, an outline of relevant literature precedes the discussion of the findings.

Literature Review

Many individuals and educators may hold charity-based beliefs, where all children should have access (to education) because of their belief that it is a fundamentally good thing to do, however, over the past few decades a growing interest in an extension to the charity model has emerged (Harpur, 2012; Rioux & Valentine, 2006). The human rights approach, or rights-based model, identifies that for individuals with disabilities, the problems that exist are a result of the structures and systems that society has put in place (Harpur, 2012). When an individual with a disability cannot access a service, it is due to a system that is exclusive, which must change in order to allow access for all people regardless of a disability (CRPD, 2007; Harpur, 2012). Minow (1991) offers a 'social-relations' explanation to this dilemma, where individuals are only different when they are compared to one another. Society is governed by a set of rules which decide what is 'normal' or different from 'normal'. Therefore, a human rights perspective on disability challenges the language and policies that create and uphold the barriers to access for people with disabilities. This perspective also suggests that changes in attitudes and practice are essential for equitable experience for individuals with disabilities.

With continued changes in school dynamics over the past few decades, school boards, administrators, and teachers have recognized that creating truly inclusive schools requires change in traditional and common practices (Sharma et al., 2012). Many classroom teachers understand that in order to address the diversity of abilities in the classroom, they must adjust teaching styles including how they program for, plan, and execute curriculum in order to implement fully inclusive practices (Forlin, 2001; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). One of the precursors to educators' ability to successfully meet the needs of diverse learners is favorable attitudes towards inclusive education, followed by adequate knowledge, thorough training and specific skills (Berry, 2011; Ivey & Reinke, 2002; Male, 2011). In a phenomenological study investigating teachers' views of issues in special education (Bolat, 2019) teacher training and support were also identified as challenges for special education. Teachers' attitudes and willingness to include students with diverse abilities, combined with their perceived confidence or sense of efficacy in being able to work with these students, are factors in determining the success of inclusion (Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Richardson, 1998).

Of the few studies that focus on special education teachers' attitudes, findings indicate that they tend to hold favorable attitudes about the abilities of student with disabilities and towards inclusion, however; these studies focus on special education teachers who are working as a support to classroom teachers rather than teaching in their own inclusive classrooms (Bean et al., 1994; Woolfson et al., 2007). Studies focusing specifically on teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusion teaching in a contained or an inclusive class are limited. Current studies consider special education teachers to be teachers who either support all students with disabilities within a school or who teach in a self-contained special education class. In a recent international study of special education teachers' and classroom teachers' beliefs about inclusion, Bekirogullari et al., (2011) found that contradictions existed among the responses given by special education teachers. Regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities, some special education teachers argued that students with disabilities should only be included during the subjects that promote play skills, while others said they believed children with disabilities are capable of achieving by observing the behavior of children without disabilities (Bekirogullari et al., 2011). Overall, Bekirogullari et al. (2011) found that among special educators from the United States and Cyprus, they have little knowledge about the methods and content of inclusive education.

Changing pedagogy encompasses a vast body of literature which concludes that educators require opportunities to not only collaborate with each other but also to have authentic positive experiences with that which is to change (Evans,

1996; Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2010; Richardson, 1998; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995). When considering changing from a segregated to a fully inclusive pedagogy, positive experiences including students with disabilities, where students experience real opportunities for social and academic success directly related to teaching practice, paired with collaboration, prove to be successful. Generally speaking, educators perceive inclusion to have benefits for students with disabilities, including the development of independence and socialization skills (Sermier et al., 2012; Somma, 2018; Wlodarczyk et al., 2015). Most educators also indicate having positive views of inclusive practice, yet do not feel competent to initiate inclusive practice for students with disabilities in their classrooms and held negative attitudes toward including students with disabilities in their own classrooms (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; Boer et al., 2011; MacFarlane & Woolfson, 2013; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996).

Change as a Process

Research on teacher change suggests that despite the many external factors (including teaching experiences, training, prior life experiences and administrative support), in order to challenge and change their beliefs, teachers need the opportunity to actively engage and experience success in using inclusive practices in their classrooms and only then will they experience a positive change in attitude and perception about inclusion (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009; Forlin et al., 2009; Maskit, 2011; Sharma, et al., 2012; Somma, 2018). Successful inclusion can range from an experience where a teacher witnesses first hand a child with disabilities surpass their expectations, to an awareness of the positive impact had on all students due to the teacher's change in practice to include a student. Richardson (1998) discussed a view described by Gallagher et al., (1988) termed "mutual adaptation," where teachers systematically and thoughtfully approached their own change process. It was suggested that mutual adaptation might be the best methodology when attempting to evoke dramatic change (such as shifts in orientations and beliefs) regarding inclusion of students with disabilities (Richardson, 1998). It is also important for educators to be given opportunities to engage in a change process, with guidance from colleagues, support from administration and specialists in Communities of Practice or Professional Learning Communities within their school or school board, as they work through questions that arise from their personal reflection. As active change agents, educators develop a holistic and functional perception of the change they are participating in and can then identify what changes should occur (Pyhalto et al., 2012).

Methodology

Research Goal

A phenomenological case study was conducted using qualitative data collected from personal interviews, a focus group, and a short participant questionnaire (Creswell, 2013; Giorgi, 2009) to answer the following questions; (1) What are the change experiences of teachers moving from teaching self-contained special education classes to inclusive classes? (2) What has been the impact of this change in classroom placement on teachers' attitudes and perceptions about students with disabilities and inclusive practices?

Sample and Data Collection

Based on the criteria of phenomenological case study, this research gathered several forms of data that were collected over two or more occasions in order to capture rich and robust information. Case study data collection requires triangulation which in this study was the three different data collection methods, focus group, questionnaire and interview (Yin, 2009). According to Seidman (2013), phenomenological interviews consist of three different interviews; background and context, structure of experience and details, and reflection. The questionnaire and focus group in the current study were designed to establish and gather background information about participants general perceptions of inclusion and to set a context for their experiences. The personal interview gathered more in-depth details related to their classroom experiences and allowed for some personal reflection of their place within the change, namely the "turning point".

Participants met two specific criteria. Firstly, the participant must have been a special education teacher in a self-contained class prior to the study and secondly, each participant must also have moved to teach in an inclusive classroom within the past five years. As in case study research, there was a small n = 10 participants for the survey and focus group and five of which agreed to participate further in the interview. Of the 10 participants, nine were female and one was male, with a range in years of overall teaching experience from 10-20 years and self-contained class experience of three to 10 years. At the time of the data collection, five were teaching in primary/junior divisions (K-6) and five were teaching in intermediate/ senior divisions (7-12). All participants were from the same school board undergoing a shift in service delivery for students with exceptionalities from a self-contained special education model to an inclusive model.

Participants were invited by the researcher via email to voluntarily attend a workshop day involving the opportunity to participate in the research study. A 27-item rating scale developed by the larger research team was administered to gather information on current perceptions of and experiences with inclusion. The questions consisted of background information including years teaching in both self-contained classes and inclusive classes, their views on the impact of

inclusion on students, and their personal view of their role in teaching an inclusive class. Participants were asked to rate how much they agreed with the statements by indicating "no, not at all", "somewhat", or "yes, very much". Sample questions include; "Q1 In an inclusive class, I anticipated that dealing with students with special needs would be challenging."; "Q8 Students with exceptionalities in my class have shown academic growth." and; "Q11 Support from administration is an essential part of successful inclusive practice."

Following the questionnaire, a one-hour, audio recorded focus group took place. This was designed to be a space to begin a discussion about their individual change experience by addressing background topics about their teaching experience in general, their perception of teacher change, in general, and their overall perceptions about the inclusion of students with exceptionalities. The questions were purposefully asked in order to elicit a conversation and provide an opportunity for the teachers to think about their own personal change experience by discussing teacher change in general. Questions included, "Describe a salient experience including students with exceptionalities in your classroom."; and, "In your experience as a professional, how do people change or shift their thinking when it comes to teaching practice?". Finally, participants were invited to complete an interview at a later, convenient time.

During the individual interview, the five consenting participants were asked questions which encouraged them to reflect and describe implications of their experience, as in phenomenological case study (Flaton, 2006). According to Englander (2012) research questions should focus on discovering the meaning of a phenomenon and follow an interview format beginning with asking participants to describe their experience within the phenomenon, in this case inclusion. Participants were first asked to describe their experience with inclusion in their teaching practice, subsequent interview questions focused on the participants' interpretations of their experience. The general open-ended nature of the interview questions, for example, "Please describe your experiences of including students with exceptionalities.", allowed participants to identify what they believe their experience to be (Broome, 2011).

In order to ensure reliability, the main interview questions for each participant were identical and followed the same format, and probing questions were used minimally; usually to ask, "can you tell me more about that?". The option to select interview or writing was provided in order to recognize the time constraints of teachers. To eliminate the weakness of inaccurate recall and response bias (Yin, 2009), the opportunity to write responses to interview questions allowed teachers the opportunity to complete them at their leisure and also have time to think about the answers they provided. In order to provide several formats to meet the individual needs and preferences of the participants, interviews took place via Skype or over the telephone and written responses were completed electronically. Following data collection, the five interview participants were contacted one final time in order to member check their interview account and further contribute or omit any information. These various data were collected over a period of three to four months.

Analyzing of Data

The survey was used to collect background information and gage the overall perceptions of the educators regarding inclusion at this point in their change process. This paper will report on the qualitative data collected from the focus group and the interviews.

The focus group and interview transcripts were analyzed using the 'constant comparison method' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) to code the data and group the codes into categories and themes (Lichtman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 2002). NVivo software was used to obtain information and assist in developing codes and as a tool to organize data; however, the raw data was sorted by the researchers, each participant individually, in order to ensure accuracy that the intended meaning of the participant actually related to each category used for coding. As in open coding procedure, codes were assigned to relevant ideas to reduce the data and to aid comparison of similarities and differences in overall experiences of the teachers. Codes were then grouped into categories (Lichtman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 2002).

The next component in analyzing the data was to examine the five educator interviews using Giorgi's (2009), descriptive phenomenological method. Phenomenological analysis, termed phenomenological reduction, according to Giorgi (2012) was used to develop each educator's description by pulling out key information of each personal account and creating a description of that account. Once the descriptions were developed, the researchers reread each description looking for key moments in order to group parts of each description based on the common themes established in the initial analysis. Giorgi (2012) explains that creating meaning units, as described previously, simply aids in the analysis and are based solely on the attitudes of the researcher. The third step involved the transformation of the data into expressions to make explicit what the participant has said in relation to the phenomenon being studied. Once the most direct and more sensitive expressions related to the phenomenon were reviewed, the description was written. Finally, the remaining description is then used to help clarify and interpret the raw data of the research including the data collected from the focus group and the survey.

Findings / Results

Five overall themes were identified through the analysis of the focus group and interview data: (1) support and training, (2) attitudes and perceptions, (3) inclusive practice, (4) growth and change, and (5) teaching practice. These themes resonated within the focus group and the interview descriptions and contributed to shaping a visual representation of the teacher change process. (see figure 1)

As the educators learned and developed their inclusive pedagogy, they appeared to move through five stages. Stage 1 can be defined as "Inclusion is embedded practice" where educators hold charity-based beliefs about inclusion. They identify that inclusion in a broader sense is good teaching practice and identify their own desire to include students in their classrooms. For example, one teacher discussed the basic life skills needs of certain students such as toileting as being the responsibility of the school system;

> "Because some of the needs we need to prepare them for are life skills based needs like proper toileting. If you ignore those needs, you are doing that student a grave disservice because these are skills they need to survive and be helpful citizens in the general public." (focus group 4).

Another example of a charity-based view involves the notion of parallel programing where students are working on the same subject areas but not as part of the whole class;

> "This young lady was with part of our classroom, they were with her in the gym, I mean she was included in all things, like when I was doing language novel studies with the kids, she was doing a primary C book, still in the language program but not doing activities with the other kids." (interview 2).

In Stage 2, "Inclusion as a theory", educators begin to understand inclusion from a theoretical perspective of human rights. It is at this stage where educators recognize that students with disabilities should be in regular classrooms and it is their job as an educator to facilitate inclusion in their own classrooms. Educators expressed their beliefs about resources and opportunities for students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

"Sometimes, I think, it's that feeling of, I don't know if I have enough resources…" (focus group 3). When teachers start to recognize the increase in opportunities for students with disabilities, they recognize inclusion to be more about having access and less about what seems like the right thing to do. The following example highlights the teacher's recognition of the social gains afforded by inclusion; "I can now see the broader opportunities that a regular classroom provides. More access to language, even if it's just talking or listening to other students their age… more access to curriculum. The social opportunities are the most important." (interview 5).

When an educator moves into Stage 3, "I create Inclusion", their focus is on how their teaching practice and strategies create inclusion for the students in their classroom. They recognize their responsibility to adjust their teaching and implement practices of Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning as essential to the inclusion of all students in their classrooms. Teachers identified best practices and ownership of the creative ways in which inclusion plays out in all aspects of their classrooms; "The trick is to blend recommendations from professional reports with the regular curriculum for example how to structure a gym class so that everyone stretches but the student who requires physio does their stretches to meet their physio goals." (focus group 7).

"I always found a way that those kids were at the forefront of my planning, when I planned my lessons." (interview 3).

"I never whipped out a single lesson I did before with that class because I had to adjust everything for the group I had sitting in front of me." (interview 1).

It is in Stage 4, "My class is Inclusion" where educators understand the importance of creating a classroom environment that promotes inclusion. They see inclusion extending beyond their lessons and encompassing the attitudes and beliefs of all students in the class and in the school. Educators at Stage 4 recognize the genuine, natural relationships and reactions that occur on a daily basis. Through opportunity and engagement, all students have a collective and essential role in promoting inclusion. The way in which the teacher builds the classroom culture into a community is essential to promote student involvement. The following examples from various participants, highlight the role other students play in inclusive classrooms:

"I didn't have to pick that responsible kid to sit with her, they were going up to her, they wanted to be with her, which was so great to see." (interview 2).

"students in the regular class can be advocates for children with disabilities." (focus group 3).

"she had true friendships in the classroom, they [other students] were not just there to help her out but she would go and stay at their houses- and those things wouldn't happen if she was in a special class." (focus group 2).

"everyone in that classroom feels a responsibility for every other person, not just the students who have any special needs." (interview 3).

"that was just business as usual for those students because they just understood that you just do that as a good class member, you just look out for each other." (focus group 9).

"inclusion is more of a feel…like when you walk into a class and you get a sense that all the kids are one- productive but also enjoying their place." (focus group 6).

For educators who reach Stage 5, "I can't un-see it", they will express not being able to imagine education being any other way but inclusive. They identify barriers to inclusion in their daily lives outside of the school, in the larger community and society. It is at this point where inclusion becomes a part of who they are as a person and a part of their belief system. The way in which they think about inclusion and segregation relies on a rights-based premise that flows throughout their veins. Comments made by educators at this stage include:

"I think it has to do with being able to work with someone [a colleague] to think outside the box, because there isn't necessarily one right answer or one simple solution but it's more trial and error." (focus group 4).

"By segregating students, we are creating a culture of exclusion that emphasizes difference."

"I started thinking that if all children in a school and outside of school have that understanding, what an amazing society we would live in" (interview 5).

"I feel like now, everywhere I go I see things as inclusive or as not inclusive- you can't un-see it" (focus group, 1).

"now I am starting to think longer term, in terms of kids getting employment and kids leading a meaningful life." (interview 2).

"You are constantly thinking about it. Like when you are out at the mall- oh that's a barrier, why is that there?, or, why would they say that?" (interview 3)

The ability to critically think about inclusion and segregation in our world is crucial to Stage 5. Teachers identified thinking outside the box and thinking about inclusion everywhere, which helped them to really understand the complex nature of inclusion in our world. As teachers worked through the concept of implementing inclusion in their classroom, they considered, critiqued and reconsidered many aspects related to their own embedded belief systems, those belief systems of others, their own pedagogy and their own teaching goals.
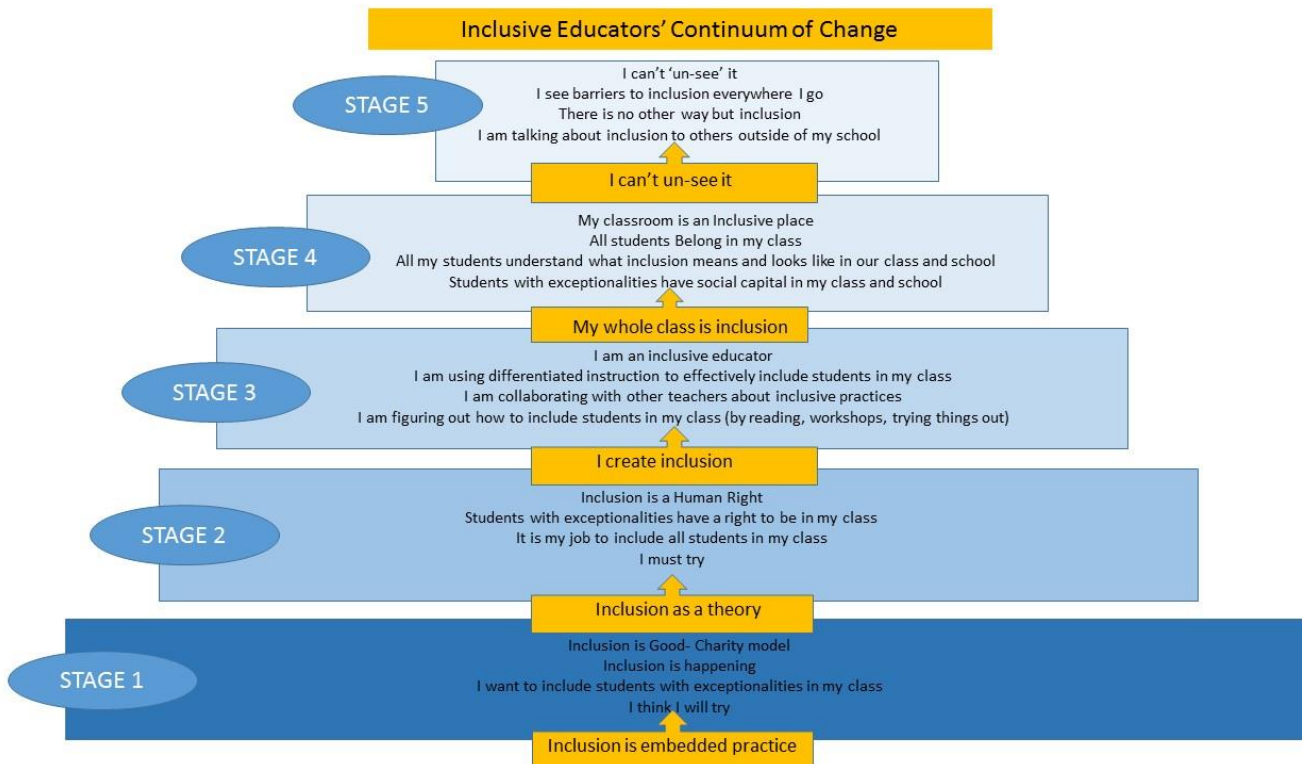

Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change

STAGE 5
I can't 'un-see' it
I see barriers to inclusion everywhere I go
There is no other way but inclusion
I am talking about inclusion to others outside of my school

I can't un-see it

STAGE 4
My classroom is an Inclusive place
All students Belong in my class
All my students understand what inclusion means and looks like in our class and school
Students with exceptionalities have social capital in my class and school

My whole class is inclusion

STAGE 3
I am an inclusive educator
I am using differentiated instruction to effectively include students in my class
I am collaborating with other teachers about inclusive practices
I am figuring out how to include students in my class (by reading, workshops, trying things out)

I create inclusion

STAGE 2
Inclusion is a Human Right
Students with exceptionalities have a right to be in my class
It is my job to include all students in my class
I must try

Inclusion as a theory

STAGE 1
Inclusion is Good- Charity model
Inclusion is happening
I want to include students with exceptionalities in my class
I think I will try

Inclusion is embedded practice

Figure 1: Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change

Discussion

This study examined a group of educators that have been under-represented in the literature. Research has only briefly examined the attitudes and beliefs about inclusion of special education teachers working in self-contained classes and it is not known for sure whether or not special education teachers hold positive beliefs about inclusion (Bekirogullari et al., 2011; Boer et al. 2011; Cook et al., 1999, MacFarlane & Wolfson, 2013). However, studies involving teacher change in general indicate that positive experiences, such as a student with an exceptionality achieving a concept far greater than the teacher imagined or developing friendships with their classmates, can alter beliefs about teaching students with exceptionalities in inclusive classes (Evans, 1996; Grierson & Gallagher, 2009).

The educators in the current study, all identified in their anecdotes, moments where their thoughts about segregating students with exceptionalities shifted from that of a positive environment to questioning that there must be a better alternative. As they answered specific questions about their teaching practice and personal beliefs and described various experiences over the course of their teaching careers, their change process became evident.

The analysis of the change experienced by these educators led to the development of a visual representation supported both by previous research in the field and the current findings. The literature on teacher change (Evans, 1996; Giangreco et al., 1994; Gibbs 2007; Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Pyhalto et al., 2012) and through examining the experiences of the educators in this study has helped to shape the *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* (Figure 1). The representation combines the manner in which the educators in this study identified their own change process in relation to the way they describe their perceptions, the attitudes of others and their experiences with the students in their classes.

Giangreco et al. (1994) discussed a model where inclusive classrooms should demonstrate five characteristics including: heterogeneous grouping, a sense of belonging, shared activities with individualized outcomes, use of environments frequented by all people and a balanced educational experience. The underlying concepts of this model are consistent with what more recent literature discusses in a less systematic way (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012; Sharma et al., 2012). The data collected in the current study naturally sorted into a continuum of change specifically related to these inclusive educators' experiences that can be related to Giangreco et al.'s (1994) model. As the educators discussed their experiences, the five elements: environments, heterogeneous grouping, balanced educational experience, shared experiences with individual outcomes, and belonging, addressed by Giangreco et al. (1994) arose at different times throughout their careers.

The teachers in this study discussed use of environments early on in their attempts to have students with disabilities integrated into mainstream classes. Heterogeneous grouping, where students are with their age appropriate peers with diverse levels of ability, and a balanced educational experience were desires that these teachers had for their students in self-contained classes. They strove to access these opportunities only to be confronted with numerous challenges and obstacles entrenched in the segregated system within which they worked. It was not until they began to develop inclusive classroom environments as mainstream teachers that they were able to fully differentiate and create shared experiences with individual outcomes. This is further supported by Grierson and Gallagher (2009) who insist that positive experiences with inclusion are key to shifting attitudes.

Finally, a sense of belonging for all students remains the most desirable outcome. Educators in the current study identified a complete understanding of the big picture of including individuals based on fundamental human rights through a critical lens where the barriers created by systems are challenged and replaced with structures that are not exclusionary as identified by Horkheimer, (1972) and Rioux and Valentine, (2006). The results of the current study take into account, critical theory, Giangreco et al.'s (1994) model, as well as the findings of others (Reiser & Secretariat, 2012; Sharma et al., 2012), in the representation of the results. Professional readiness and teaching practices as well as the opportunity to access authentic experiences including students with disabilities, are also integrated in this discussion. The *Inclusive Educator's Continuum of Change* elaborates on and provides a representation of how one moves through the educator's change process while developing inclusive classrooms. This visual representation describes the experience of the ten educator participants that begins when an educator decides to conceptualize, value and adopt an inclusive pedagogy. Whenever initiatives, such as inclusion, comes to the forefront of programming and planning in schools, a process of change is evident and expected. This change is deeply rooted in the educators' beliefs and practice. In order to progress through this change experience to inclusive pedagogy, an individual must make a concerted decision to try inclusive practice in their classroom along with the appropriate climate and support from the school leader (Savas et al., 2015).

Since change has been found to occur at different rates over time, the findings in this research support this notion of change as a process (Maskit, 2011; Phyhalto, 2012). All ten educators involved in this research, identified a shift in the way they think about educating and including students with exceptionalities to some degree, occurring over the course of their teaching careers, initially in self-contained special education classes and currently in inclusive classes. Although many of the educators identified their "turning point" as occurring before they transitioned to an inclusive classroom, it is also possible their views and perceptions about inclusion were influenced by their involvement in the board-wide transition to inclusive practice. At the time of the data collection, the culture of their schools were shifting based on the

direction from their school board in the overall attitude towards educating and including students with exceptionalities.

Suggestions

In examining *The Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* (Figure 1), from stage one to stage five, connections can be made to critical disability theory. According to a charity-based model of inclusion, educators express a moral obligation to help students with disabilities be a part of their classes. The focus is on the difference or the need and programming surrounds fixing or helping the student to fit in with the current program (Burghart, 2011; Quinn, 2009). Using the framework based on the experiences shared by the educators in this study, suggestions follow as to what the process might be like for someone having a similar experience. Educators at stage one of the continuum can be characterized as holding charity-based beliefs about including students with disabilities. They recognize that inclusion is happening in their schools and they express a desire to include students in their classes. If they are supported, reflect on their current programs, think about how they will include students with disabilities in their classes, and have positive experiences including students, their perceptions may be altered and they may move to stage two. Most teachers beginning to engage in inclusive practice recognize that their current practice and programming needs to change in order to meet the needs of diverse learners (Forlin, 2001; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). If educators are not supported and continue to hold 'pathognomonic' beliefs, the belief that they need to change the child with disabilities in order for inclusion to be successful, they will remain at stage one (Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

Educators at stage two and three of the continuum hold beliefs about disability that are aligned with rights-based ideologies. While at stage two, educators would come to think more critically about their role in creating inclusive classrooms. They develop an understanding that systemic barriers exist that prevent students with disabilities from accessing education (Harpur, 2012). By adjusting their teaching practices, they would provide more accessible learning opportunities for students with disabilities. Educators move from stage two to stage three when they would begin to adjust their instructional methods and the ways in which they interacted with students, with the learning needs of the students with disabilities in mind. Their focus would be on what *they* are doing to make their classrooms inclusive. Educators at this stage would engage in professional development, professional reading and collaborating with other teachers and professionals about creating inclusive classrooms in order to improve their practice (Forlin, 2001; Porter, 2010; Vaughn & Schrumm, 1995).

When an educator moves to stage four, they would experience the greatest shift. At this stage, they would begin to recognize the pieces that are key to inclusive practice; students developing a sense of belonging and social capital (Bennett, 2009; Porter, 2010; Reiser & Secretariat, 2012). It is at this stage where educators would recognize that their change process is more about what is happening to the students in their classes and less about what they themselves are doing. Educators may now balance their autonomy and community and become active change agents within their schools (Pyhalto et al., 2012).

At stage five educators hold a very critical lens with regards to individuals with disabilities within and outside of their school buildings. They would often engage in critical conversations with others about rights and inclusion of people with disabilities. These educators would be leaders (as teachers or administrators) in educational transformation to inclusive practices within their schools and communities. As in critical theory, they would have developed a critical reflective knowledge where they recognize what is wrong, who can change it and what kind of change is needed (Horkheimer, 1972).

The *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change* provides a framework for examining how theory contributes to the development and overall change of educators working to develop inclusive classroom environments for their students. As educators move through the five stages and consider a charity-based model and a rights-based model of inclusion embedded in critical disability theory, their perceptions and pedagogy shift to a point of transformation. This continuum can provide support for educators with a similar experience to aid them in engaging in reflective practice around inclusive education. It can also identify support necessary to assist educators at various stages on the continuum, what they might need as far as support, professional development, etc. when schools and school boards are engaging in inclusive practices for students with disabilities.

Conclusion

To move toward more fully inclusive classrooms and schools, the deeply embedded beliefs held by educators must be considered. When these beliefs do not align with the proponents of inclusive education then they must move in a direction of change, otherwise inclusion will fail (Pyhalto et al., 2012). Providing educators with the opportunity to examine their embedded belief system, can help them to recognize and better understand societal factors that influence their beliefs (Minow, 1991). The figure presented in this paper highlights that when teachers have authentic experiences, where students with disabilities have positive academic and social gains, and engage in the process of reflective practice, their perceptions about inclusive practice can be altered positively. Authentic experience, such as the opportunity to see and practice inclusion where students with disabilities experience success, enables educators to

discover the challenges and successes of having a student with disabilities in an inclusive classroom. These changes do not happen overnight, but a process occurs that is both intentional and unintentional.

Limitations

There are several methodological limitations to be considered. Firstly, the educators may have felt obligated to participate since this research project was supported by the school board in which they were employed. Secondly, research topics related to personal beliefs and experiences can be sensitive and may have led the educators to feeling as though they were being judged. There are also several factors that impact the reliability of this research including the constriction of teacher time in relation to response rate and quality of responses. Those educators who were invested in the topic would be more likely to give more time responding and participating. The small, unique sample size can also be considered a factor in the generalizability of the results and so one must be cautious when applying these findings to other groups of educators with similar experiences.

Finally, because our experiences shape our perceptions, each individual will engage in this data on a slightly different level. Although Giorgi (2009) discusses this issue in relation to being a benefit to descriptive phenomenological analysis, it is also noted as a limitation in this study. Even though the transcripts were read by a neutral researcher for confirmability of selected themes (Shenton, 2004), and transcripts were member checked by the participants, the researchers' experiences as educators will have influenced their perception of the data as it has been presented. Although an attempt to bracket bias was present, when there is interpretation of data by any researcher, especially in phenomenological description, it is unrealistic to conclude that the researchers' schema as educators themselves did not influence the interpretation of data.

We must also consider the linear presentation of the framework presented. In the case of this study, the educators did not identify regressing in their belief system changes due to the mostly positive experiences they had with inclusion. However, if educators have negative experiences, it is possible, despite any pedagogical changes they have made for inclusions that they may regress based on the framework presented in the *Inclusive Educators' Continuum of Change.* This would be an area for further investigation.

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