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What Are Schools Looking for in New, Inclusive Teachers?
Que recherchent les écoles chez les nouveaux enseignants dans un contexte d'inclusion?

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Résumé de l'article

Des enseignants travaillant dans un contexte d'inclusion au sein de quatre divisions scolaires du centre du Canada ont participé à des groupes de discussion afin de déterminer s'ils étaient capables d'identifier les connaissances, les compétences et les attitudes que devraient posséder les enseignants oeuvrant dans un tel milieu. Les participants n'ont pas réussi à identifier les connaissances fondamentales essentielles aux enseignants en milieu d'apprentissage inclusif. En fait, les résultats indiquent que le développement de compétences et d'attitudes semblait plus important, particulièrement les compétences liées à la flexibilité, l'interdépendance et la communication. De plus, l'ouverture des nouveaux enseignants face aux opportunités d'apprentissage et à l'aide des autres membres de l'équipe-école était aussi considérée comme un atout.

WHAT ARE SCHOOLS LOOKING FOR IN NEW, INCLUSIVE TEACHERS?

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ABSTRACT. Focus groups were conducted in four school divisions in central Canada in order to determine whether inclusive educators in schools could identify the knowledge base, skills set, and attitudes desirable in new inclusive teachers. Participants failed to identify an essential knowledge base for inclusive educators. Findings indicated that a focus on skills and attitudes was viewed as desirable, specifically skills related to flexibility, inter-dependence, communication. Participants also valued attitudes related to willingness on the part of new teachers to seek learning opportunities and accept help from other team members.

QUE RECHERCHENT LES ÉCOLES CHEZ LES NOUVEAUX ENSEIGNANTS DANS UN CONTEXTE D'INCLUSION?

RÉSUMÉ. Des enseignants travaillant dans un contexte d'inclusion au sein de quatre divisions scolaires du centre du Canada ont participé à des groupes de discussion afin de déterminer s'ils étaient capables d'identifier les connaissances, les compétences et les attitudes que devraient posséder les enseignants œuvrant dans un tel milieu. Les participants n'ont pas réussi à identifier les connaissances fondamentales essentielles aux enseignants en milieu d'apprentissage inclusif. En fait, les résultats indiquent que le développement de compétences et d'attitudes semblait plus important, particulièrement les compétences liées à la flexibilité, l'interdépendance et la communication. De plus, l'ouverture des nouveaux enseignants face aux opportunités d'apprentissage et à l'aide des autres membres de l'équipe-école était aussi considérée comme un atout.

In 1994, UNESCO made a recommendation to the international educational community that teacher preparation programs include mandatory content about inclusion (UNESCO, 1994). Based on the notion of social justice (Ballard, 2003), inclusion contends that all citizens should have access to equal

educational opportunities, regardless of whether those citizens have disabilities or not (Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, & Earle, 2006). According to UNECSO (2009), inclusive education is

> an ongoing process aimed at offering quality education for all while respecting diversity and the different needs and abilities, characteristics, and learning expectations of the students and communities, eliminating all forms of discrimination. (p. 3)

Like many other jurisdictions world-wide, provinces in Canada have begun to adopt an inclusive philosophy in their teacher education programs and in their programming for children in schools. Manitoba, a province in central Canada, is no exception. The Manitoba government defines inclusion as it relates to students with disabilities as,

> a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe. An inclusive community *consciously evolves* to meet the changing needs of its members. Through recognition and support, an inclusive community provides meaningful involvement and equal access to the benefits of citizenship. (Manitoba Education, Training, and Youth, 2006, p. 1)

The purpose of the study was to determine various educational stakeholders' viewpoints on the essential skills sets, attitudes, and beliefs they desire in the newly hired inclusive educators.

CONTEXT

Mandatory teacher preparation

Although the government's definition of inclusion specifies that an evolution must occur and that recognition and support must be provided, it does not mandate the processes by which these practices will take place. While support documents are released on an ongoing basis by the Manitoba government, many of the procedures outlined in those documents are not *policies* mandated within school divisions in Manitoba. School divisions are geographic areas in Manitoba that are controlled by locally elected school boards. In effect, school divisions are provided with the information as well as the flexibility to determine how, and if, the procedures will be incorporated into their practices.

Watkins and D'Alessio (2009) pointed out that it is important to note that policy makers and practitioners are not always in agreement regarding inclusive education practices. Central to the evolution that allows recognition and support for all learners is the role of the classroom teacher. Beginning in the 1970s, Manitoba schools, like other schools in North America, began to move away from segregated schooling for students with special educational needs (SENs) and began to integrate students into classrooms with their age-matched peers. However, it was not until almost forty years later, in 2008 —14 years after the UNESCO recommendation — that pre-service teacher education programs

in Manitoba were required to include sixty-six contact hours of mandatory "Special Education" classes in their curricula. Thus, the classroom teachers who became responsible in the 1970s for teaching students with SENs in integrated settings have done so for forty years with no required pre-service education on this topic.

While providing the course content related to inclusion has the capacity to better equip new Manitoban teachers for successful teaching in inclusive classrooms, it is an enormous responsibility for teachers to program for children with a wide variety of needs armed with only one required full-year course in inclusive education. The selection of the content and processes taught in the mandated inclusive education course therefore becomes paramount, not only to the success of children in inclusive classrooms, but also to the success of inclusion as a philosophy in practice. Cardona (2009) went so far as to suggest that newly trained teachers who have experienced education regarding inclusion could act as change agents and "would seem to provide the best means to create a new generation of teachers who will insure the successful implementation of inclusive policies and practices" (p. 35). Indeed, for inclusion to be successful in both philosophy and practice, classroom teachers need to be an integral part of "the conscious evolution."

Specific skills sets and content knowledge

The research literature provides an excellent starting point in determining the most effective inclusive education course content. Given that many students graduate from their teacher preparation programs feeling unprepared to teach children with diverse needs (Edmunds, 1998; Pearman, Huang, & Mellblom, 1997), the evidence regarding necessary skills sets (what teachers need to know how to do) and content knowledge (what information teachers need to know) required for successfully teaching in inclusive classrooms requires examination.

In 2010, LePage and colleagues produced a document based on three books published by the American Committee on Teacher Education. The article outlined the essential skills (items 2, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11) and knowledge (items 1, 4, 5, 7, 8) of all teachers who graduate from pre-service education programs, including Inclusive Education programs. These include: 1) an understanding that all children learn along a vast continuum and that strategic instruction will help all children develop their strengths; 2) observation and record-keeping skills; 3) analytic skills; 4) awareness of typical development; 5) awareness of the types and severity of specific conditions; 6) access to strategies and adaptations to help students learn more effectively, including differentiated instructional strategies; 7) awareness of the eligibility and placement processes available; 8) an understanding of assessment procedures; 9) the capacity to find additional supports and resources; 10) a willingness and capacity to work and communicate effectively with parents and others involved with the student's programming;

11) the capacity to contribute to the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process and implementation. This list seems like a logical starting point when designing learning goals for pre-service teaching courses on Inclusive Education.

Despite the knowledge base and skills set described by LePage et al. (2010), and the desires expressed by new graduates regarding better preparation for inclusive classrooms, other researchers (Alexander, 2004; Davis & Florian; 2004; Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009) contended that the skill set and content knowledge required to teach students with SENs are not significantly different from those needed to teach children with more typical development. Lewis and Norwich (2005) suggested that teaching students with special learning needs is simply an *intensification* of the best practices in teaching that apply to all children. Furthermore, Daniels and Porter (2007) showed that practices that are sometimes proposed for use mainly for students with SENs can be very effective with other children without disabilities. Indeed, an examination of the list of desired knowledge and skills sets proposed by LePage et al. (2010) reveals that few of the skills and knowledge sets on this list are exclusive to inclusive educators. Specifically, it could be argued that only awareness of eligibility and placement options and the capacity to plan and implement an IEP are specific to teachers of students with SENs. Alternatively, it could also be argued that these skills are simply *intensified* components of differentiated instruction (Lewis & Norwich, 2005).

Attitudinal factors

With little agreement on whether or not a distinct knowledge base and skills set of inclusive educators exist, professors of courses in inclusive education are left asking what should form the required content of their courses. Silverman (2007) and Cook (2002) suggested that teacher attitudes need to be considered, and Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) proposed that teacher attitudes are the *main* determinant of success in inclusive classrooms. These scholars believe that teachers' attitudes affect their behaviours, in turn influencing the classroom climate and students' opportunities for success. Teachers who perceive children with disabilities as needing to be fixed are likely to be ineffective teachers in inclusive classrooms (Ainscow, 2007). Moreover, teachers who complete their teacher education programs feeling ill-equipped to teach children with special learning needs may demonstrate a reluctance to teach in inclusive settings (Jordan, Schwartz, & McGhie-Richmond, 2009) and may hamper progress in schools as it relates to inclusive education (Atkinson, 2004; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earle, 2009). Given that the attitudes of in-service teachers are dependent on local culture and considering that changing the attitudes of these teachers is a complex political endeavor (Symeonidou & Phtiaka, 2009), Forlin and Hopewell (2006) and Andrews (2002) suggested that teacher preparation programs have a role to play in fostering attitudes that support inclusion. Furthermore, White (2007) showed that very little

change in teacher attitudes toward inclusion occurs within their first five years of teaching, suggesting teacher education programs might be best places to develop these desired attitudes.

So, what are the teacher attitudes associated with successful teaching in inclusive settings? Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009) suggested two specific mindsets come into play. First, teachers who view diversity as normal and perceive that all children can learn tend to be more effective. These teachers reject the stance that SENs are in need of fixing and instead continuously look for ways to assist the children in learning. This stance exemplifies the "all children can learn" attitude. Second, effective teachers accept that all the children in their classes are their own responsibility and try to break down barriers to their students' success by modifying their instructional practices. Rather than looking for others to take responsibility for the children's success or failure (e.g. parents, resource teachers), these teachers view it as their job to teach all children.

But is attitudinal change possible within pre-service teacher programs, and, if so, how is it fostered? Some researchers showed that when students were exposed to courses in inclusive education during their teacher education programs, they tended to develop more positive attitudes toward inclusion (Ching, Forlin & Mei Lan, 2007; Kyriakou, Avramidis, Hoie, Stephens, & Hultgren, 2007; Lancaster & Bain, 2007), and some researchers showed that pre-service teachers with course work in inclusive education have more positive attitudes toward inclusion than those pre-service teachers with no coursework (Forlin, Loreman, Sharma & Earl, 2009).

Forlin, Loreman, Sharma and Earl (2009) showed that students who begin their courses with more positive attitudes toward inclusion have greater positive gains in their attitudes, while those who began with negative attitudes were less influenced by their course work. Moreover, other researchers suggested that courses, on their own, are insufficient in addressing negative attitudes (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003; Forlin, Tait, Carroll & Jobling, 1999), and that certain assignments or a practicum in addition to coursework are more effective than others in changing attitudes. Boling (2007) and Johnson and Howell (2009) suggested that the use of case studies during coursework is influential in positive attitudinal change. Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly (2003) showed that when students had greater knowledge about one disability through project work, they developed more positive attitudes about inclusion in general.

Loreman, Forlin and Sharma (2007) and Forlin, Loreman, Sharma and Earl (2009), however, suggested that direct contact with students with disabilities is necessary for true attitudinal adjustment, and Yellin et al. (2003) suggested that only those high quality experiences of this type are effective. Sharma, Forlin, and Loreman (2008) showed that the length and intensity of the experiences

were also significant. Implicit in all these scenarios is not only exposure to experiences that challenge pre-existing attitudes, but also the support required for students to examine and reflect on those attitudes.

Given the inconclusive nature of the research literature related to the essential components of a pre-service teacher education program and given that policy makers and those in the field are not always in agreement about inclusive practices (Watkins & D'Alessio, 2009), the current project's research design was constructed to invite the voices of those providing inclusive education within the local school culture into the debate rather than privileging an academic, literature-based perspective. Furthermore, the research was designed to honor these voices as sources of course objectives in the preparation of new, inclusive teachers. While a variety of research studies have looked at the views of specific groups, such as new teachers, principals, parents, and teachers, few have used a mixed focus group methodology to explore this question.

The current project

Little research has been done about the essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes of Canadian teachers in inclusive classrooms. Sharma, Forlin, Loreman, and Earle (2006) posited that this research is sorely needed, given that many pre-service teachers graduate feeling unprepared to address the needs of diverse learners (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The delivery structures in Manitoba pre-service education programs (stand-alone classes within a common inclusive education program for all pre-service teachers) are supported in the literature as being effective not only in promoting an inclusive philosophy but also in fostering a greater sense in competency in its graduates (Florian & Rouse 2009; Kurz & Pauls, 2005; Sharma, Forlin, & Loreman, 2008; Young; 2008). Manitoba is therefore positioned well organizationally to meet the needs of its teachers and students. Manitoba now should determine essential knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to take advantage of the organizational structures in place and to develop the most effective programs for fostering excellence in inclusive education.

Although Manitoba Education has outlined clearly the mandate of inclusive education models in its schools, it also allows flexibility in the ways the mandate is met. As a result, various divisions across the province organize service delivery by a variety of models. In the current study, school divisions are surveyed through focus groups to determine 1) which skills set, knowledge base, and attitudes are essential for successful first year teaching in inclusive classrooms in their division, and 2) which, if any of these knowledge bases, skills sets, and attitudes are viewed as essential across diverse divisions.

METHOD

The superintendents of four school divisions were contacted by letter and invited to participate. The four divisions were purposely chosen: 1) an inner-city school division that addresses the needs of many children living in poverty and many newcomers to Canada; 2) a suburban school division that is restructuring its delivery model for services to children with special needs; 3) a rural division that can speak to special challenges in meeting the needs of children in remote communities; 4) a suburban school division whose delivery model is unique in the city. Given that there are over 30 school divisions in Manitoba, only six of which are within the main city, a cross section of rural and urban divisions was selected in order to ensure that diverse perspectives were maximized.

Once permission was received from the superintendents' offices, the Directors of Student Services in each division arranged a two-hour focus group at the divisional site. All participants were provided with a list of the focus group questions prior to meeting with the researcher (see Appendix 1). They were told that the researcher was interested in understanding the inclusive practices within their school division as well as their perspectives on the knowledge base, skills, and attitudes that should be fostered within a required inclusive education course for pre-service teachers. Each audio-recorded focus group included the Director/Co-ordinator of Student Services, and representatives of special education administrators, resource teachers, special education teachers, clinicians, school psychologists, classroom teachers, and instructional assistants. The four focus groups ranged in size from six to twelve participants (7, 12, 6, and 9 participants respectively), and the durations ranged from 91 minutes to 118 minutes.

All the participants were self-nominated and were experienced in their roles. In total, four administrators, three principals, eight student services co-ordinators, eight classroom teachers, four clinicians, three educational assistants, and four resource teachers participated in this study. By coincidence, two of the classroom teachers and one of the educational assistants were parents of children with special educational needs.

Each session began with questions intended to reveal internal processes and situations within the particular division, and continued with an exploration of the participants' views on the essential knowledge base, skills sets, and attitudes of successful inclusive educators.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The transcripts were read to get an overall sense of their content. Then, the data were imported into NVivo8. The divisions were given pseudonyms. An imbedded within-division analysis (Yin, 2002), and a within-division analysis

of themes (Stake, 1995) were generated prior to conducting across-division analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In that analysis, free and tree nodes were used to compare similarities between the divisions. Free nodes are general, emergent codes that are generated by analyzing single or multiple data sources. Tree nodes are the analytic structures that emerge from relationships between or within the free nodes.

Although the intension of the focus groups was to garner information about the knowledge, skill base, and attitudes that are required for successful first-year inclusive educators, in all groups the main discussion topics revolved around required skills and attitudes. Many participants believed that a distinct knowledge base for inclusive educators did not exist, or that it could be learned from others on the student services team once in the field. In fact, when they were specifically asked for the knowledge base required of new inclusive educators, all groups instead listed and discussed skills and attitudes. As such, four central and inter-related themes were identified—three that reflected desired skills and one that reflected a desired attitude: (1) context-specific flexibility; (2) inter-dependence with other team members; (3) effective communication; (4) a growth-oriented attitude.

Skill: Flexibility in process

Participants reported on a lack of consistency in processes for intake and IEP documentation across school divisions, within school divisions, and even from classroom to classroom. A range of reasons for the lack of consistency in processes related to inclusion were offered in the focus groups. Differences were attributed to skill level and / or the absence of teamwork, situational factors such as whether there was prior notice of the child's enrollment at school, variability in adhering to procedures, and variation in the needs of the families. Although there was little agreement about the causes of inconsistencies across and within divisions, the participants agreed that these inconsistencies existed. Many participants suggested that the lack of consistency was not problematic, but rather was necessary to address the specificity required to meet the needs of each child and his or her family. Excerpts supporting these findings follow.

> Administrator (regarding intake meetings): Through this whole process, we have to consider what works for the parent. Sometimes those gigantic meetings don't work for them. And sometimes that might mean that we meet separately or with a few people and have multiple meetings. I think that overall schools are just trying to make it work and just do the best that they can.

> Principal: In the division, schools tend to do what works for them for the benefit of the student.

> Student Services Co-ordinator: It's going to be a long process to figure out what works. And in school to school, it's going to be different because our kids are different. But, I think everyone, in the end, everybody is still asking the same question "What does this child need? What can we provide for them and how can we do it?"

The participants spoke openly about the lack of consistency within and across the divisions, particularly in terms of intake procedures and documentation. They were overt in stating that the procedures must be flexible so that they can meet the needs of specific children and families, rather than privileging consistency over utility. Pre-service teachers must therefore be prepared to accept some ambiguity in terms of process. Rather than being taught course content about specific processes within each division, which may or may not be followed consistently, teachers should be socialized to adapt to the processes that are effective within the planning and implementation of programming specific to each child. Developing flexibility in using procedures that are effective within a context rather than consistent across contexts is important for new teachers within inclusive settings.

Skill: Inter-dependence

A key skill identified in all focus groups was the need to be able to function effectively as part of a team of various experts, each with complementary skill sets. In some school divisions, clinical services are offered through a central office called the Child Assistance Centre (CAC). In other divisions, clinical services are site-based within the schools, or clinicians are hired by the division to work between several schools. Regardless of the structure, the participants voiced their views that the system demands collaboration among those who provide services to students with exceptional needs.

> Teacher: Our school division has an FASD (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder) team, and they help with that. We are lucky to have lots of professions available to us to help co-ordinate that and guide us through that. They help us glean the important information, because there is a lot of grey information with that.

> Clinician: When you have parent input, student input, admin input, CAC input, that's when you are going to get that ideal, living document that you can continually assess and adapt, where the goals and objectives are attainable.

When the structures were in place to support inter-dependence, the participants voiced satisfaction with their roles and with the overall processes within their divisions. They spoke of the important relationships between people on the team and their effects on efficient and effective services for children.

> Administrator: Another different practice was a process for writing funding applications. It was noted that the average funding application takes 30 hours per child when completed by a resource person. In one division, the clinicians and resource people got together and wrote them together-- these were trained people who were able to help each other. They now have it down to three hours each.

> Teacher: I feel very well supported. As a classroom teacher, it is really the SERTS (Special Education Resource Teachers) that are the best day-to-day support for me. It is not formal meetings, it is day to day as I walk by their doors and see them open. So we can share information or talk about things.

> We have that sort of connection. And THEY have the connections outside the school such as CAC, OT (Occupational therapy), PT (Physiotherapy) and then they pass this information to us. So, they are more accesible and they pass the information back to us, making it so that classroom teachers don't have to be in so many meetings.

All but one focus group brought up the importance of the relationship between classroom teachers and Educational Assistants (EAs). Given that EAs and classroom teachers work alongside one another throughout the school year, the relationship between these two roles was deemed to be of special importance within the three focus groups.

> Principal: If a new teacher has never had an educational assistant, how do they work and collaborate and negotiate roles? There has to be a trust and a value and a respect.

> Educational Assistant: The EA is always included at our school when it comes to the IEP meeting because you are the one who is going to deliver this program. When I first began, I was not a part of that planning process, and for the student, it was hit and miss. As the EA, I didn't know what to expect or what the outcomes would be. But when you are a part of the planning process, you have a clearer idea whether it is diagnosed, undiagnosed. It is really important, because everyone is on the same page.

Thus, the participants percieved the need to socialize new teachers to become inter-dependent members of multi-discilinary teams including administrators, clinicians, parents, EAs, and others. This inter-dependence, termed co-operative teaching, has been recognized by the European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education (2005) as one of the core competencies of inclusive educators.

Skill: Communication

One of the key aspects of effective inter-dependence is clear communication. In order for communication to be effective, those on the team must have access to the information about a specific child and must be able to understand and use the information as it is presented. While the importance of clear communication and the resulting positive relationships were stressed in all the focus groups, so too were the systemic and role-specific barriers to them. The absent student files, for example, was a challenge consistently mentioned. Although schools are required to forward each child's cumulative files when that child transfers schools or divisions, this requirement was not always observed:

> Administrator: The whole pupil file must be sent, but it isn't always. So, sometimes those guidelines aren't followed. They should be, they're supposed to be, but that doesn't always happen.

In addition to absent files, participants reported the challenge of decifering files that are written in terms unaccessbile to the person who needs the information, usually the classroom teacher. This concern speaks to the specificity

of each of the roles as well as the "professional language" that is exclusive to each role. While using very specific clinical terms is effective communication between clinicians, it is not always accessible to classroom teachers:

> Teacher: Reading the files, part of the issue is that the information in the files is not user friendly. The information in the CAC files is very valuable, but if you are not there at the meeting when the information is transferred – I am SURE I am there for all those meetings – without the meetings, I don't have a clue about what all that information means. The IEP documents, I understand those because I am involved in those meetings. But if you look at the adaptive activity plans, literally the activities are not as valuable. It is not that people don't want to read the information, its that the information is not as helpful as it could be.

> Classroom teacher: I was dealing with a psychologist this year, and she came and said "Ok!" and presented all this information wonderfully. And I had to ask, "What does that mean? What is that part?" And it would have saved a lot more time – her time, my time – everybody's time would have been used in another way if I had known what those things were. Because I don't have to deal with them that often. It would have been nice to have that terminology. And I think it just makes for easier conversations with people with whom you're going to work.

> Clinician: What I think is also helpful for them [teachers] is to kind of take some perspectives in the day in the life of a speech and language person, a psychologist, a physiotherapist, an occupational therapist, so that they can get used to some of the language. They can look at some of the common strategies that these people implement, so when, you know, those specialists are attached to their classroom team, they've got some context.

It is interesting that teachers, EAs, and clinicians value effective communication and that representatives of all groups agree that terminology specific to the clinical role can create barriers to effective team work. While the teachers believed that the solution was to have discussions where the clinical terms could be explained, the clinicians believed that is was incumbent on the teachers to learn the common terminology of the clinical role.

In addition to communicating effectively with other professionals, participants also valued the skills necessary to communicate effectively with parents, and advocated that new teachers develop skills in this area:

> Administrator: This is really hard for lots of teachers. Its important for all parents, but especially parents with special needs, that ongoing regular communication. And hearing what they have to say. I mean, really, they may not always come out with what you're expecting to hear, but they do have their child's best interest at heart. If they're part of that team, that's really what they want to feel.

> Resource teacher: It is important that we share information with parents, but also it's very important that we do that well. It's important the way that we say it, not just what we say. It's important for clinicians and resource teachers, not only to name the need, but also to name the supports.

> Educational Assistant: ...lots of times with special needs students, their parents are the last ones you see in the classroom or volunteering on field trips — and what is that and why? To include them, to invite them in would, I think, would be huge. And I think a lot of that is because parents are intimidated. They're looking and they're intimidated, whether it's the language that intimidates them, or the dress...

Participants acknowledged that the communication between these team members presented challenges at times, yet acknowledged that clear communication was required in order to function effectively in inclusive settings. New teachers would be well advised to develop their professional vocabulary and communication skills as well as their confidence in asking for clarification of confusing terminology. Furthermore, teacher education programs should help pre-service teachers develop respectful, inviting communication styles that will foster positive relationships with parents.

Thus, three inter-dependent skills sets for inclusive educators' successful teaching emerged from the focus groups: flexibility, inter-dependence, communication.

Attitude: A growth-seeking attitude

Experienced educators in each group voiced their beliefs that teachers often begin their careers thinking that they must meet all children's needs on their own. As they grew into their professional roles, however, the participants recognized that they did not need to work in isolation.

> Teacher: ...having pre-service teachers knowing that you're not going to do it all — I think everyone who goes into this business really wants to do it all.

> Teacher: My job is to teach every child, but I do not have to do it alone. I have a team of support to help me. That's key, I think that they (new teachers) need to know they don't do this alone.

> Teacher: And its ok not to know everything.

The participants in all groups stressed that new teachers need to feel comfortable asking for help, rather than working in isolation trying to hide the information gaps common in novice teachers. The participants questioned whether new teachers were socialized to accept their need for growth without feeling inadequate. Consistently across all focus groups, the need to socialize new teachers into a growth mindset was deemed an important aspect of pre-service teacher education programs.

> Student Services Administrator: Promoting that is important, that teachers know that when you come into the classroom it is not the expectation that you close your door, that you keep the children all to yourself. That you know we are going to support you, but that requires you to entrust them to us a little, and share them, but sometimes thats not always easy for people to do.

> Resource Teacher: And, there's all kinds of strengths, and I think a large part of what they need to know is that how important it is to go to other people for help, and that, that's key.

> Psychologist: The culture in education, you know, is shut your classroom door and you had better know how to manage a classroom. And teachers wouldn't come out of supervision the way a psychologist would. We're expected to just throw out our most complex things which make us feel like we can't do our job. A teacher, you know, would never feel like they can do that, otherwise they're a bad teacher. [Pre-service teacher socialization needs] to solve that fear of isolation and the fact that you close the door and can't ask anyone for help. I think that's so important.

> Principal: And they're nervous about that because they don't want to go ask other teachers ... so they're kind of this island by themselves. [New teachers] think right away, "Oh, if I ask all these questions.... I'm gonna look like I don't know what I'm doing."

Some participants believed that a greater number of recent graduates are demonstrating greater capacity to seek help and to continue to learn from their peers. These participants believed that viewing oneself as a learner as well as a teacher was essential to this mindset and the solution to the isolation perceived by some new teachers.

> Teacher: A key is seeing myself as a learner. When I can see that I have things to learn, I can adapt and individualize for students. I can grow alongside the student. The new graduates need to be willing to learn and to continue the journey.

> Educational Assistant: I think there's lots of that feeling of isolation, but I've seen that over the last 10 years, [there is] more collaborations and understanding and just working together in teams. Working together as a larger school community, supporting one another — I'm seeing that changing. And I know its just on the cusp, but I think it is there.

Thus, the participants believed that one of the keys to novice teachers becoming successful teachers could be found in their attitudes. They valued new teachers' willingness to seek opportunities for growth rather than hiding their knowledge or skill gaps. They encouraged new teachers to look to others for support and guidance, and to view this situation as optimal rather than an indication of deficits within new teachers themselves. The European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education (2005) suggested that the use of co-operative teaching practices addresses the isolation sometimes perceived by new teachers, allows them to learn from other team members, and values new teachers' eagerness to continue learning within their teaching contexts. In this way, a growth-seeking attitude can be fostered.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

As a professor interested in preparing competent, confident inclusive classroom teachers, I found the comments of the participants to be invaluable. Although

the focus of the discussions was intended to be perspectives on the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes of new inclusive classroom teachers, the focus groups generated insights at a level far more in depth than anticipated. Perhaps the themes were provoked by the initial questions related to describing the standard processes and recent changes in each division's practices. In cueing these schema, the subsequent conversation was impassioned and personal and focused on challenges and possibilities within the divisions both at a procedural level as well as at a philosophical level.

The themes identified by the participants are valuable in informing the course content in an inclusive education course. Rather than generating a knowledge base of outcomes that new teachers should know, the participants identified essential skills and attitudes, therefore supporting the research findings of Davis and Florian (2004), Alexander (2004), Jordan, Schwartz, and McGhie-Richmond (2009), Lewis and Norwich (2005) and Daniels and Porter (2007). These authors posit that good inclusive teaching is simply good teaching intensified and that a specific knowledge base exclusive to inclusive teaching is non-existent. So then, what do the focus group participants offer as the basis of successful teacher preparation for inclusive teaching?

The three skill sets and one attitude identified by the majority of participants in this study are important considerations in the professional development of new teachers and teachers in training. First, flexibility in many teaching contexts is a trait that was stressed during the focus groups, in such areas as responding to variation in intake procedures, developing and using forms, and adapting strategies for student success. Teachers should be socialized to adapt to the processes that are effective within the planning and implementation of programming specific to each child. Developing skills in finding and using procedures that are effective within a context, rather than consistent across contexts, is important to new teachers within inclusive settings. Practica in diverse settings and practicum experiences with diverse learners would support development of this skill.

Another essential insight for new teachers is that they are parts of interdependent teams where various team members contribute complementary skills. Developing skills within this co-operative teaching framework was identified by the participants as well as by the **European Agency for Development of Special Needs Education (2005)** as a core teacher competence. Teacher education programs are well advised to provide opportunities for co-operative activities and assignments as part of their programs, in order that pre-service teachers develop these skills within an inter-dependent framework prior to their in-service teaching careers.

A third skills set identified by the participants was communication. This means that new teachers need to be confident in ensuring they understand the terminology used by other experts and that they are effective in their rela-

tionships and communications with parents, EAs, and other team members. Pre-service experiences such as practica with teachers who teach children with SENs as well as participation in meetings with other team members such as clinicians would provide pre-service teachers with an opportunity to develop these skills. Course work that examines and makes meaning of reports from various team members who tend to use distinct terminology may also foster development of these skills. Participation in parent-teacher meetings and IEP planning meetings during practicum would also assist students in becoming more familiar and comfortable in their communications with all team members, including parents.

The participants identified a fourth theme, and that is that new teachers must bring a growth-seeking attitude to their new careers. Our profession as well as our teacher education programs need to do a better job of socializing new teachers to seek help and to create resiliency mechanisms (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) through strong relationships with other team members as a way to develop their own, as well as their students, success. An essential component of this approach is fostering the attitude that teachers should be life-long learners and that seeking growth is an expected part of professional development rather than a deficit within novice teachers. Dweck (2008) discussed the importance of a "growth mindset" and its effects on learner behaviours. Rather than viewing capabilities as "fixed" and perceiving that ability is either present or not, a growth mindset is associated with five specific outcomes: 1) effort is seen as the pathway to mastery; 2) challenges are embraced as a means of growth; 3) criticism is valued as guidance for improvement; 4) obstacles are seen as means by which to develop perseverance; 5) the success of others is viewed as a model from which to learn.

By addressing the themes identified by the participants (flexibility, interdependence, communication, and a growth seeking attitude), teacher education programs can enhance the skills and attitudes of their new graduates. Administrators in school divisions have indicated that they value and support the Manitoba Education, Training, and Youth's (2006) "conscious evolution" of inclusive education in Manitoba. While inclusive education continues to find its way in improving services to all children, we can expect that new teachers will not only face challenges, but that they will also contribute to the conscious evolution. Future research that purposely includes the perspectives of parents and students would further enhance our understanding and contributions toward this evolution. In identifying the key skills and attitudes required by new inclusive teachers, it becomes more likely that these teachers will be up to the task.

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APPENDIX 1. FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Please provide your name and your role within the school division.

2. If a new child with exceptional learning needs joined your school, please describe usual procedures in terms of the divisional intake procedures; e.g., development and utilization of forms such as intake forms, student profiles, funding applications and IEPs.

3. Please discuss the adequacy and types of internal and external supports available to inclusive classroom teachers as well as the impetus, direction, and satisfaction with any recent changes in processes within the divisional inclusive practices.

4. Now, I am going to ask you a series of questions related to the essential knowledge base, the skills set, and attitudes that the division expects its novice teachers to have for success as an inclusive classroom teacher. First, can you please describe the essential knowledge base that the division desires in its novice inclusive classroom teachers?

5. What are the essential skills the division expects its novice teachers to have for success as inclusive classroom teachers?

6. What attitudes does the division desire in its novice teachers in inclusive classrooms?

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