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To Teach as Jesus Would: Inclusive Education in one Catholic Elementary School

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To Teach as Jesus Would:

Inclusive Education in one Catholic Elementary School

by

Michelle Powell Wechsler

A dissertation presented to the Faculty of the School of Education,

Loyola Marymount University,

in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Education

2013

To Teach as Jesus Would:

Inclusive Education in one Catholic Elementary School
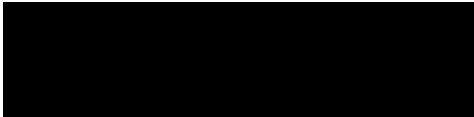
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July 5, 2012
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work and dissertation to my mother, Lorraine St. Jean Powell, my three children, Adam, Miranda, and Jacob, and in the loving memory of my father, Michael Patrick Powell. In so many ways, my mother, my father, and my small children constantly inspire me to love, learn, and do what is right, despite what people may think or say.

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ABSTRACT

To Teach as Jesus Would:

Inclusive Education in one Catholic Elementary School

by

Michelle Powell Wechsler

Throughout the history of Catholic schools in Los Angeles, the mission of Catholic schools and the Archdiocese governing its schools has been clear: Catholic schools must strive to serve children with varied learning needs. However, despite calls for inclusion from the Vatican, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and efforts from trained administrators and professionals to help facilitate inclusion in schools, Catholic inclusive programs are not able to include all learners.

Using qualitative research with semi-structured interviews, focus group, and document review, this study uses the framework of ableism and disability studies to research and analyze the two questions regarding inclusive practices in one Catholic elementary school that has had a program running for five years. The research questions are as follows: 1) What are St. Mary teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education? 2) What do St. Mary teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

Despite the fact that Catholic educators recognize that Catholic schools, as a matter of social justice, should be teaching all children, it is challenging and frustrating for them. Due to a lack of resources and support, limited exposure and experience of people with disabilities, and technical special education training, even the most dedicated, talented, and sympathetic Catholic

educators wanting to serve children with special needs have difficulty doing so. Reasons relating to inconsistent teacher training, beliefs and experiences that students with special needs are "trouble," limited resources, and teachers' perceptions of fairness, time, and equity, all contribute to teachers' frustration and limitations when including learners with special needs in their classrooms.

The significance of this research study lies in documenting a Catholic school's experience of developing, evolving, and establishing a working model of an inclusion program in one Los Angeles Catholic elementary school. To this end, this study provides larger contextual data to those in similar Catholic school settings across America about Catholic teacher training and the implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic schools. Also, this study hopes to further the discussion in the field of Catholic education about the right(s) of all Catholic children, regardless of ability, to a Catholic education, since, according to the Vatican, that it is a matter of human dignity that they receive a spiritual and emotional education as well as one that is appropriately academic.

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF STUDY

As a Catholic school administrator, inclusion director, and teacher in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, I am keenly aware of the need to include all students in the Catholic school curriculum. I have witnessed and believe in the power of the educational mission of the Catholic Church, which has a history of effectively instructing those students who suffer from a variety of social injustices, such as poverty, segregation, and racism (Bryk, A. S., Lee, V. E., & Holland, P. B., 1993). Yet I also believe that inherent in this mission is a call to Catholic educators to design curriculum specifically for children of varying ranges of ability that has largely gone unheeded.

I know both as a teacher and Catholic school administrator that inclusion in Catholic schools can and should work. So the question is: Why are we not including all students on a regular and consistent basis in Catholic schools? The answer may lie in a variety of places, including teachers' experiences and beliefs regarding disability in Catholic schools.

I grew up during the 1970s just west of Toronto, Canada, where I attended Saint Francis of Assisi Elementary School, an all-inclusive, Catholic parish school. For nine years at Saint Francis of Assisi, I witnessed what I perceived as inclusive education at its best, in a school that housed approximately 500 junior kindergarten through eighth-grade students.

As a young student, I participated in an educational model that mainstreamed a diverse group of learners, co-educating students ranging from general education learners to students with visual impairment, processing problems, and even more severe special needs such as Down's Syndrome. As part of a larger policy that makes special education possible in Canadian Catholic schools, students with a variety of learning challenges were welcomed in their local parish

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school and mainstreamed whenever practicable in regular classrooms with differentiated learning environments.

Today, I am the principal of Holy Name Catholic School[1] in Los Angeles, which serves 170 students in Kindergarten through eighth grade. For the previous nine years, I taught junior high math and music, and eighth-grade algebra at St. Mary's Catholic Elementary School in California. For four of those years at St. Mary's, I was also the school's Assistant Principal and Inclusive Education Director. St. Mary's School is a parish school that currently instructs 240 students, and represents culturally and socially diverse families with students in junior kindergarten through eighth grade.

I helped St. Mary's principal, Dr. Johnson, lead the school in creating an all-inclusive learning environment much like the one I experienced as a child. Over the course of two months, Dr. Johnson and I, along with St. Mary's faculty and staff, discussed how we could best identify and design enriched programs for struggling students and accommodate students who already had public school Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) or private learning assessments, but had chosen to remain in St. Mary's private school setting. Although my experience in special education was limited to the field of music education in Canadian schools, I had recently enrolled at Franciscan University in a Catholic Inclusion master's program. Dr. Johnson and I were both passionate about instilling the idea of creating a more egalitarian academic experience for all children.

But the impetus for this change was neither solely rooted in my experience or the call to service by Catholic leaders; it came from within St. Mary's School itself. Jane, a quiet

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[1] The names of schools, locations, and participants are fictitious and have been changed to protect the confidentiality of those involved in this research study.

kindergarten student, entered St. Mary's School in 2002 at the age of five. Small for her age, Jane made friends easily, despite her many absences from school due to illness. Jane's parents, active members of the St. Mary's Parish, noticed that their daughter was often sick, and they started consulting pediatric specialists about her health. Sadly, within weeks, Jane was diagnosed with a rare, terminal form of Neimann-Pick's disease.

Although doctors and school administrators urged Jane's parents to pull her from school, they refused. Jane's mother Lisa had attended St. Mary's School as a child, and Jane's experience there, however short, was important to the family. In January 2002, in a closed meeting with school faculty, Lisa advocated for her child, asking the school to make special arrangements for Jane. She said that, "every child deserves the chance to go to school with a backpack with their friends…to learn and laugh…the power of these things can't be taken for granted. It inspires your soul and compels you to take action, right?" From that point onward, St. Mary's School faculty and staff decided to help Jane for as long as they could.

Since Neimann-Pick Type C disease is a rare neurological disorder that eventually deprives its sufferers of the ability to walk, talk, and even swallow, we knew that Jane would never receive her eighth-grade diploma. Yet the challenge was to find a way for her to participate for as long as possible. Aside from the logistical difficulty in accommodating Jane and meeting her needs, her situation also revealed an anachronistic version of justice at work within the institution. How could St. Mary's School turn away this sick child when she so needed a loving educational environment in which to thrive? This question, fueled by recent talk about inclusive practices in Catholic schools, caused the St. Mary's School community to look to its core mission and philosophy for answers.

As stated in *St. Mary's Faculty, Staff, and Parent Handbook* (2009), the school aims to provide its students with a Catholic education in a Christ-centered and child-centered environment, where Christ is the reason for its existence, the model of its faculty and the inspiration of its students. According to St. Mary's School's mission and philosophy statement, the purpose of St. Mary's School is to focus on the basic truth that the aim of Catholic education is the education of the whole child. The St. Mary's School community believes that God endows each child with special talents and gifts and that it is the duty of each educator to help the child discover and develop these gifts. It is also recognized that "parents must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children" (Second Vatican Council, 1965). St. Mary's School, therefore, works in partnership with parents in the pursuit of the school's goal.

Inspired by a newfound awareness of students' needs at St. Mary's, the school's principal, faculty, and staff held a series of six two-hour staff meetings for the purpose of reformulating the school's mission statement to place inclusive education at the forefront of St. Mary's School philosophy. It now reads:

> All children have the right and need to benefit and learn from each other's special gifts and qualities, acknowledging that every student is a child of God and is deserving of an opportunity for a Catholic education, St. Mary's School strives to accept all students for whom an appropriate program can be designed and implemented. (St. Mary's School, 2006, p. 17)

Due to budget constraints, the depth and breadth of inclusive education at St. Mary's was contingent upon the school's ability to employ teachers with special education training and experience. However, because of St. Mary's private school status, there was also a moderate

amount of consultative support available from the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), under the 2004 Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This consultative model provided St. Mary's with a special education consultant on a monthly basis at no cost to the school, in addition to faculty training, and provided one-on-one consultation in the area of classroom and curriculum intervention strategies. Together, this service helped all teachers meet all children developmentally where they needed to be met.

On the surface, St. Mary's faculty and staff have adjusted well to the institutional and philosophical change inclusivity has created. Since the idea of embracing a more inclusive culture was always presented to St. Mary's stakeholders as something that would positively sustain the school in the future and help all of St. Mary's students, many teachers, staff, and parents were, at least initially, quick to support the program. While mission statements and philosophies are not enough to create long-term change or to influence a change of practice in a school (Owens & Valesky, 2007; Wenger, 2008) the entire faculty and staff enthusiastically took an active part in the creation of the school's new mission statement that had more of an upfront, socially just edict for all students. After all, as many of the stakeholders said in those first days of discussion, the core of a Catholic education is supposed to be socially just, and that means teaching all students who want to learn, not just the ones who receive top grades or learn lessons easily.

Initially in the planning stages of creating an all-school inclusive philosophy, St. Mary's faculty and staff collectively agreed that given the directives of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) and Catholic Social Teaching to educate all children whose parents wanted them to experience a Catholic education, the mission statement and philosophy should be

rewritten. Although the suggestion to rewrite the school's mission to be more inclusive caused a great deal of debate and concern at first, everyone believed it was something that the school needed to do. The three main concerns surrounding the creation of a school-wide inclusive plan were as follows: 1) that a change in the school's philosophy was a true break in the school's traditional model and might upset current parents; 2) that teachers would feel they did not have the expertise to accommodate students with learning challenges in their classrooms; and 3) that there were only two examples of inclusion programs in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, so there was no support or program model available for the school. When it was made clear that the types of curriculum adjustments teachers would have to make would be minor and that there would be an inclusion director as well as Dr. Drew from the public school system available to help teachers specifically design academic programs for students, teachers rallied in support of inclusive education.

Over the next fourteen months, the inclusive mission and philosophy was fully integrated into all school materials as well as communicated to parents and the Los Angeles community through school advertisements and news articles in local papers. By fall 2007, new students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or educational assessments started purposefully enrolling at the school. These new students all required minor academic adjustments in order to succeed in a mainstream classroom.

Although none of the faculty had formal special education training, they all had either a master's degree or more than twenty years teaching experience. In order to support teachers with their struggling learners in the classrooms, the staff was given constant support and training in Catholic inclusive practices. This support was offered in the following forms: annual in-services

about inclusive classroom techniques and Response To Intervention (RTI) techniques; opportunities to attend special education workshops hosted by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); monthly consultations with LAUSD Private School Educational Consultant, Dr. Drew; monthly grade-level inclusion meetings to discuss individual students' needs, student progress, and effectiveness of academic accommodations; and daily classroom support from the on-site inclusion director.

While these in-house support services did not solve all of the challenges encountered during the day-to-day operations of building an inclusive curriculum, they helped to provide the internal framework of support needed to align and focus teaching efforts (Wenger, 2008). That is, in order for inclusion to be successful at St. Mary's, the administration created a tailor-made, varied system of support for its teachers so that they felt invested in and inspired to work effectively with struggling learners. To this end, whenever possible, teachers were given the creative control and professional development training necessary to design academic accommodations specific to their students' needs.

The Challenges of Creating Inclusive Education

The change to embrace an inclusive curriculum at St. Mary's School has been a lengthy developmental process. Since the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' renewed public commitment to inclusive Catholic education was issued (USCCB, 1998), the Archdiocese of Los Angeles School District has encouraged inclusive education at its parish school sites. In 2009, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles added a detailed Support Team Education Plan (STEP) and Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) policy to their Administrative Handbook, which is a guide for Catholic school administrators and teachers for accommodating inclusion students in the

classrooms. The policy also states that whenever possible, "[Catholic] schools strive to serve children with varied learning needs" (Administrative Handbook, 2009, pp. xiv-3). However, while the updated Administrators' Guide for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles outlines the mission, procedures, and process for including all children in the class, it simultaneously dissuades parents from bringing children with acute special needs into the Catholic school environment. The inclusion policy for the Archdiocese states:

> Through the mission of the Archdiocese [of Los Angeles], schools strive to serve children with varied learning needs. All educators in Archdiocesan schools follow *Directions for the Inclusion Process in Catholic Schools: Support Team Education Plan Process (STEP) and Minor Adjustment Plan Process (MAP)*. Parents or guardians who feel that their student may need a *minor* adjustment to enable him or her to participate in the general education curriculum of the school should consult the student's teacher and principal to determine how best to meet the student's needs. (pp. xiv-3)

While the above acknowledges that some Catholic school students can receive academic accommodations, the language of the statement seems to limit the severity of the disability. This is one of the reasons that inclusive education initiatives have met with much contention and confusion, given that there is a vast difference between minor academic adjustments and the academic accommodation and modifications that are necessary to include all learners, specifically those with cognitive difficulties, in any school curriculum.

Given that each Catholic school is governed locally by its pastor and administrated by its principal, St. Mary's School created its own inclusive philosophy based on the value system of

Catholic Church teachings, consultation with professionals in the field, and the special education experience of its administrators and St. Mary's School members.

St. Mary's teachers began to more consciously serve students in need of inclusive strategies in January 2004, which totaled approximately 8% of its student population (St. Mary's School, 2008). The students benefiting from inclusion required various types of academic and behavioral accommodations while remaining in age-appropriate general education classrooms.

Although the efficacy of inclusive education in its current stage of development is relatively unknown, the spirit and the substance of the inclusive mission are increasingly apparent within the school: Success of inclusive teaching methods is essential for St. Mary's School, since each academic year brings with it more students who need academic and behavioral accommodations in order to succeed. In fact, over the last four academic years, St. Mary's School has admitted on average three new students per year with documented need for accommodation (IEPs and/or independent educational evaluations), and from August 2005 until June 2008, identified on average 3.4 students already enrolled at the school with mild learning challenges (St. Mary's School, 2009).

It is important to note, however, that higher enrollment of students with special needs at St. Mary's does not necessarily mean inclusive education is successful or works well. It could merely be a sign that since other Catholic programs are virtually nonexistent, parents gravitate to St. Mary's as a last stop before enrolling their children in a public school that are mandated by law to provide support services for all learners. Nevertheless, St. Mary's inclusive philosophy and continues to be an important mission for the school, striving to design academic programs for all children based on his or her individual need (St. Mary's School, 2010).

Problem Statement: Reason for the Study

The road to making inclusion successful at St Mary's Catholic School and integrating all its learners in the general education classrooms has been slow. Regardless of the amount of training, in-servicing, in-class teaching support, and communication with teachers, their acceptance remained questionable. Although school personnel guiding the inclusive initiative worked constantly to make sure that all of the philosophical, practical, and functional aspects of the program were working, the idea of the including all types of learners, disabled and not, have been met with resistance from teachers.

Teachers still resist designing accommodations specifically for students with documented learning challenges, stating that accommodations for struggling learners are not fair to "regular" students; struggling students are lazy and do not work hard enough; learning challenged students belong in special education classes with other students like themselves; teaching inclusion children is too much work; and it is too hard to teach inclusion students because their learning disabilities can not be fixed. The above statements and/or attitudes, which I have heard repeatedly over the last five years of working with both teachers and/or parents at St. Mary's School, seem to indicate that something else is at the root of the resistance to the inclusion program and its participants.

Teachers' reactions to inclusion have been difficult to define, especially in light of their commitment to provide a socially just curriculum informed by Catholic social teaching. Despite recommitting to St. Mary's inclusive philosophy at the start of every academic year before students arrived, negative discussions about inclusive education occurred routinely, beginning typically three weeks after students began class. This fact was constantly perplexing to St.

Mary's administrators, especially since St. Mary's faculty were all practicing Catholics who admittedly recognized inclusive education to be the intention behind the USCCB's socially just message to Catholic schools. Therefore, in order to understand and cultivate the program for the future, there is a need to examine the community's experience of the program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study was to examine teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusion at St. Mary's School and their beliefs about disability. This case study investigated and analyzed teachers' and administrators' experiences of inclusive education in one Los Angeles Catholic school in an attempt to shed light on how the program works and was developed, and what, if any, changes are necessary to have the program further embraced. This research also provided data that will prove helpful in the growth and development of inclusion at St. Mary's in future years, as well as providing a more general insight into the teacher training necessary for successful Catholic school inclusion.

Additionally, this research aimed to shed light on the vision and concept that inclusive education in Catholic schools is not only beneficial to all Catholic school community members, but that its practice reflects an authentic understanding of Catholic identity within Catholic learning communities.

Research Questions

The research questions for this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature on ableism in schools and were developed naturally based on what issues were important and how issues about disability and inclusive education at St. Mary's could be

examined (Berg, 2004). Two separate questions were used in this case study to investigate the experiences of inclusive practices in the St. Mary's School community:

1. What are St. Mary's School teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education?

2. What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

Theoretical Framework

Creating Social Justice in Catholic Schools and Catholic Social Teaching

In 1965, The Vatican Council II, in its *Declaration on Christian Education,* called for inclusive education in Catholic institutions, stating that all children, who are entitled as human beings to dignity, have a categorical right to the type of education that respects their individual ability, life goals, their sex, culture, and promotes social fraternity, unity, and harmony (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

In January 2009, Pope Benedict XVI's message for the World Day of Peace reaffirmed the Catholic Church's commitment to social cohesion, stating that "all persons, by reason of their lofty dignity" (Pope Benedict XVI, 2009, p. 1) are included in the mission of the Catholic Church. This pronouncement, together with the ongoing message of the United States Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) that the core mission of Catholic education is "to teach as Jesus did" (National Conference of Catholic Bishops [NCCB], 1973, p. 3), clarifies and refocuses the purpose of Catholic education. Today's Catholic school education should be all-inclusive, serving all children regardless of their ability, race, gender, sexual orientation, or social status.

There are many reasons why inclusive teaching practices fit perfectly with the mission of

Catholic schools and why Catholic schools, by their nature, should include all children. Since Catholic schools are institutions of the Church that are called to faithfully respond to the Church's mission (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993), Catholic social teaching informs all aspects of their governance and operation (NCCB, 1973). The USCCB (1973) state that because of the intimate connection between the Catholic Church and their schools in the United States, their mission is one, meaning that Catholic schools are called to be socially just places in which all people achieve their human potential, especially those who are poor and vulnerable.

Catholic social teaching, an integral part of Catholic education (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993), is doctrine developed by the Catholic Church regarding social justice, social organization, and the state's responsibility to take care of its people. The ideology of Catholic social teaching was formed in Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical entitled *Rerum Novarum*, or *Of New Things*. According to Pope Benedict XVI, its purpose was "to help purify reason and to contribute…to the acknowledgment and attainment of what is just…[The Church] has to play her part through rational argument and she has to reawaken the spiritual energy without which justice…cannot prevail and prosper" (Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, p. 28).

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) states that the seven principles of Catholic social teaching, which shape the purpose of Catholic schools, underscore the urgency of inclusivity in all Catholic organizations, which, "rests on the threefold cornerstones of human dignity, solidarity and subsidiarity" (Pope Leo XIII, 1891, p. 3). These seven principles are: 1) life dignity of the human person; 2) call to family; 3) community and participation; 4) options for the poor and vulnerable; 5) rights and responsibilities; 6) the dignity of work and workers' rights and solidarity; and 7) the stewardship of God's creation (USCCB,

1998). These tenets represent the core purpose of a practicing Catholic in today's society, governing all Catholic persons equally.

The tenets of Catholic social teaching are a practical guide of how to build just society and citizens in challenging modern times (USCCB, 1998). Catholic social teaching is also a progressive strand of Catholic education that facilitates the inclusion of students with special needs, since it calls for the equal treatment of all people. As stated by the USCCB, "Catholic social teaching is a central and essential element of our faith" (USCCB, 1998, p. 1) and as such, it calls for a socially just education for all of God's children.

Catholic social teaching also states that as educational institutions of the Church, Catholic schools are intended to be "an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church he founded" (NCCB, 1973, p. 3). Catholic schools are called then to be liberating systems in which community is equalized, human dignity is restored, and "mutual respect and acceptance" is nurtured and promoted (Second Vatican Council, 1965, p. 1). In the USCCB's *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (1998), the importance of Catholic social teaching is made clear. "Social teaching of the Church is an essential part of Catholic faith [because it is one of the] true demands of the Gospel" (p. 3). According to the USCCB, Catholic social teaching is the core moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

There are also other influences at work that call for inclusiveness in Catholic schools. Catholic institutions, influenced by the words of Pope John Paul II and by Vatican Council II, have been charged to take care of and teach their students regardless of their ability (Vatican Council II, 1965). For example, in *The Jubilee of the Disabled*, Pope John Paul II (2000) stated that "the Church is committed to making herself more and more a welcoming home [for the

disabled]" (section 4).

In kind, the Catholic Church's recurring pronouncements on the rights of people with disabilities follow the broader trends toward equity and civil rights espoused by the Church, Catholic social teaching, and the Church's consistent teachings on social justice for all (John XXIII, 1961, 1963; Leo XIII, 1891). In 1978, the bishops of the United States stated their firm commitment "to working for a deeper understanding of both the pain and the potential of our neighbors [who] have special learning problems, or who suffer from single or multiple physical disabilities" (USCCB, 1998, p. 1).

Challenges and Possibilities for Inclusive Education in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Despite the calling to Catholic schools to be socially just environments in which all children are educated equally, few Catholic schools in Los Angeles include all learners in their curriculum. More often than not, children with disabilities are refused space in Catholic schools because, it is argued, that Catholic schools are not equipped, both in terms of expertise or resources, to service children with special needs.

In keeping with the mission of Catholic social teaching, the Catholic Education Foundation and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles recognize the educational mission of the Catholic Church to be an integrated ministry embracing three interlocking dimensions: teaching the mission of the church, community, and service. In turn, Catholic schools are similarly called to "strive to be communities of faith in which the Christian message, the experience of community, worship, and social concern are integrated into a total experience for students, their parents, and the members of the school staff" (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2010, pp. I-5).

As Catholic schools are mandated by the Vatican to embrace the mission and philosophy

of educating all children as Jesus intended (NCCB, 1973 and 2000), the need to officially implement inclusive practices in Catholic classrooms is evident. Scanlan (2009c) points out that educators in Catholic schools are held to a different moral standard than if they were teaching in a public school, because as Catholics, they are "morally compelled by Catholic social teaching to foster inclusive service delivery for students who have traditionally been marginalized in schools, including students in poverty, students of color, English language learners, and students with special needs" (p. 1). Also, since Catholic schools have historically proven that they have greater effectiveness than public schools and most private schools in serving "low SES [socioeconomic students] and otherwise disadvantaged students" (Youniss & Convey, 2000, p. 48), it makes sense that with students with disabilities would also thrive in Catholic schools.

Yet, despite this need, and progressive pronouncements by the USCCB to build inclusive educational practices into Archdiocesan schools (1978; 2005), the development and formation of such programs are not mandatory (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2008).

Nevertheless, for a variety of reasons ranging from issues of social justice to the potential of increasing dwindling school enrollment, the local public school district has attempted to promote the benefits of inclusive education to its school principals since 2004.

One of our school district's most notable efforts to promote inclusivity at the school level was the 2004 formation of an advisory inclusion board, which consisted of special education professors, principals, and assistant principals from schools attempting to integrate inclusive practices, parents of children with special needs enrolled in Catholic elementary schools, and special education lawyers. The Catholic Inclusion board was formed for two main reasons: to accentuate the social justice message surrounding inclusive education and deliver it to principals

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and their schools, and to create a think-tank that could debate issues surrounding the challenges that inclusive education could potentially bring to schools. Despite this effort, few school administrators have responded to the message about inclusion in any way that facilitates the full inclusion of all learners in existing Catholic classrooms.

Moreover, the curricular power that Los Angeles's Catholic general education teachers have in their classrooms is remarkable. Although Catholic teachers are situated within a distinct hierarchical system in which they answer to a school's principal, pastor, and ultimately, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, Catholic teachers have a great deal of curricular autonomy and creative control in relation to their classroom students. Released from the pressure of having to ensure that students attain specific standardized scores, such as in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), Catholic teachers, in terms of students' scores need only be concerned with students' Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (ITBS) annual gain scores.

This fact, together with the fact that curriculum control is decentralized and is governed at each school, further increases the individual power Catholic teachers hold. They are the ones who control what is learned in their classroom, grading, mode of instruction, interpreting classroom needs, remediation, and learning goals. Therefore, Catholic school teachers, when supported by their administrators, have the freedom to construct creative, differentiated classrooms that serve all students, disabled and not disabled, in multiple ways.

Since there is little argument regarding the merit of inclusive education in Catholic schools, it stands to reason that something more significant may be preventing the creation of fully inclusive Catholic schools in Los Angeles.

Ableism: Beliefs about Disabilities

Ableism and ableistic practices may be at fault for the slow growth, acceptance of, and resistance to integrating inclusive practices in Los Angeles's Catholic schools. Ableist preferences, which result in the societal belief that there is a hierarchy of ability placing the most able-bodied at the top, assert that it is "preferable for disabled students to do things in the same manner as nondisabled kids" (Hehir, 2008, p. 3) rather than designing the world with the disabled in mind. Moreover, these negative, discriminatory attitudes about disability and about what disabled people are entitled to are imbedded in every aspect of American society, and deeply affect the type of education and treatment disabled students receive in schools (Hehir, 2008; Shapiro, 1994).

Since perspectives about the disabled and the value of human life are formed through all aspects of a culture and come from all directions, it is virtually impossible for even the best-trained teachers to escape the effects of ableism (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 2007). That ableism is a sinister force at work in all schools may shed light upon the fact that while Catholic educators and administrators feel compelled by their faith and dedication to provide a socially just education for all children, they are not immune from the messages that society bombards them with every day. This message leads to both the intentional and unintentional exclusion of students with special needs: that children with disabilities need to be cured, or at least, in order for them to be in mainstream classrooms, the symptoms of their disability need to be "normalized" or erased (Griffin et al.,, 2007; Hehir, 2002; Rousso, 1984).

The existence of ableist preferences and assumptions in Catholic schools may not only contribute to society's "devaluation of disability" (Hehir, 2008, p. 3), but, whether conscious or

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not, interfere with the mission of Catholic schools, delivering to students a watered-down version of Catholic social teaching. This is mainly because the practice of excluding children with learning challenges in Catholic schools, or by agreeing to accommodate only some students with minor special needs, is a form of discrimination, since it says that not all children are capable of a receiving a Catholic education (Rauscher & McClintock, 1996; Smith, 2001).

Including All Learners in Catholic Schools

Despite the fact that no more than fifteen schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles have well-defined inclusion programs and/or inclusive missions, and virtually no Catholic schools in Los Angeles have the on-site ability to educate all students who want a Catholic education (Personal communication, Supervisor, Archdiocese of Los Angeles, July, 2010), Catholic schools have historically advocated for and supported parents' rights to choose a Catholic education for their child. Catholic institutions in the United States have consistently used the legal system to maintain the right to educate Catholic children in parochial schools, independent from the public school system.

The assertion made by Catholic institutions to do so was that Catholic schools have a different, moral educational mission that is tied directly to the core purpose of the Catholic Church. The path of Catholic institutions was changed indefinitely by court decisions in 1925 with cases such as *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary*, 268 U.S. 510, which gave Catholic schools the right to teach all Catholic students separately from public school students simply because, it was argued, that it was a parent's right to give their child a religious education if they saw fit.

The *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary* court case occurred after World War I, when some states concerned about the influence of immigrants and "foreign" values looked to public schools for help. The states individually drafted laws designed to use schools to promote a common American culture. On November 7, 1922, the voters of Oregon passed an initiative amending Oregon Law Section 5259, the Compulsory Education Act. The citizens' initiative was primarily aimed at eliminating parochial schools, including Catholic schools. It is thought that many Protestants felt that religious schools prevented assimilation.

In 1925, the Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary won their case (268 U.S. 510), granting all Catholic parents the right to choose a Catholic school education for their child. The Society's case alleged that the enactment conflicted with the right of parents to choose schools where their children "will receive appropriate mental and religious training," as well as "the right of the child to influence the parents' choice of a school" and "the right of schools and teachers therein to engage in a useful business or profession" (268 U.S. 510, 532). However, it is important to note that while this ruling gave Catholic parents the right to send their child to a Catholic school, no distinctions or provisions were made for Catholic students with or without learning challenges.

Although as private schools, Catholic schools are exempt from California public school laws governing special education, Catholic schools have nevertheless followed the educational trends and laws governing public schools in an attempt to stay competitive with public and charter schools (Buetow, 1985; Youniss & Convey, 2000). In fact, servicing special education students who have limited educational options is seen by many Catholic school leaders as a viable way Catholic schools can increase enrollment and combat financial difficulties, while

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simultaneously remaining congruent with Vatican II and the American Bishops' call to serve those less fortunate (Youniss & Convey, 2000). Indeed, in light of the fact that California's public school system is facing serious budget cut-backs in special and general education, Catholic parents are attempting to turn to Catholic schools, where class sizes are smaller and there is more teacher/student interaction, to provide an education for their children with learning challenges (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Youniss & Convey, 2000).

The fact remains that since private school students are still American citizens, they are governed and protected by the federal and state laws of the country. Due to the introduction of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, and the increasing need to keep Catholic schools competitive with their public- and private-school counterparts, the issue of standards-based educational reform and the education of all children, regardless of ability, has now come to the forefront.

However, despite the Church's inclusive mission, Catholic schools in Los Angeles typically do not offer inclusive programs or services to Catholic students with special needs, since children who are denied access to those institutions are based on whether or not a Catholic school can "provide the accommodations [the student] needs to access the curriculum" (Administrative Handbook, 2009, p. 3). This leaves their parents no choice but to enroll them in a public school. This reality seems, at least at face value, to be contrary to the tenets of Catholic social teaching that inform the reason for Catholic education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997, p. 2). What is really at work that prevents inclusive practices from thriving in Catholic schools?

Research Design and Methodology

This case study sought to document and examine the voices of teachers and administrators at St. Mary's School in Los Angeles. Specifically, this research study focused its investigation on capturing the essence of teachers' thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, and experiences regarding disability, disabled students, and inclusive education at St. Mary's School. Since the inquiry sought to obtain information concerning what currently exists at St. Mary's School in terms of an inclusive education initiative, and sought to explore and understand the conditions of inclusive education at St. Mary's School, a descriptive, not experimental research design was the best investigative method (Hatch, 2002).

The research questions for this study dictated that a case study methodology be used because the research questions were concerned with deriving meaning from participants' stories and words, and not from the school's academic scores, I.Q. tests, and/or other academic statistics. In the case of this study, which investigated one school's experience of a "contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 4), the case study methodology allowed for the most authentic data to rise to the top of the questioning. Indeed, St. Mary's School and its journey to develop and grow into an inclusive teaching environment is its own "life-world" in which there is a necessary focus on "naturally emerging languages and the meanings individuals assign to experience" (Berg, 2004, p. 11). Thus, a case study methodology was a vital means to get to the core of the true "emotions, motivations, symbols and their meanings, empathy, and other subjective aspects associated with naturally evolving lives of individuals and groups" (Berg, 2004, p. 11).

The purpose of this inquiry was to focus upon and document the experiences of individual and groups of teachers in their natural school setting. Hatch (2002) states that qualitative methodology (and a case study is a specific type of qualitative inquiry) should be used in a study when, "the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of study…[and when the] research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (pp. 6-7). Therefore, this study demanded a qualitative, case study method of inquiry since participants' voices needed to be heard and experienced in their natural setting (Berg, 2004; Hatch, 2002).

This research explored how the teachers and administrators at St. Mary's School felt about disability and how they experienced their students who require inclusive strategies in order to participate in and/or gain access to the school's curriculum. This research also explored what teachers and administrators felt were the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education at the school.

This case study research employed semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and analyses of documents to collect the data necessary to answer the two research questions. The research occurred over a four-month period after all of St. Mary's teachers and administrators were formally invited to participate in the study. After participants were chosen, data collection began with a series of seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews (five teachers and two administrators) and one focus group. The focus group consisted of all of the teachers currently working at St. Mary's who wished to participate in this study and who met the purposeful sampling criteria.

Setting

St. Mary's School is a Catholic elementary and junior high school (grades junior kindergarten through 8) located in a middle-class, Los Angeles neighborhood. St. Mary's School is governed by the pastor of St. Mary's Parish, administered by the principal, and is under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. The school's enrollment is approximately 240 students, averaging 26 students per classroom. The majority (68%) of the students come from the local area and are members of St. Mary's Parish.

The St. Mary's parent community represents a wide range of ethnicities (Hispanic, African-American, White, and Mixed-Race), and a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds (including scholarship and non-scholarship families) although the majority is middle class. The ethnic breakdown of St. Mary's population at the time was as follows: 42% Caucasian, 28% Hispanic/Latino, twenty-two percent African-American, five percent Filipino, and 3% Asian. Of the St. Mary's faculty and staff participating, 14 were Caucasian and four were Latina.

The St. Mary's School facilities are approximately 55 years old, and consist of two buildings. The south building houses grades junior kindergarten through 4, the school's business office, a technology lab and library, a learning center/guidance office, and the principal's office. The north building or junior high building houses grades 5 through 8 overtop the school's auditorium. St. Mary's School operates on a traditional academic school calendar, which begins the school year in September after Labor Day and ends the second week in June.

Positionality and Reflexivity

I chose St. Mary's School as the research site because I worked at the school for nine years, was instrumental in designing and implementing inclusive teaching methods, and because

St. Mary's School is one of two schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles with an inclusive mission statement and agenda for accommodating students with learning challenges.

Since I am the former assistant principal and inclusion director at St. Mary's School, I had a unique point of entry into the research site, allowing for me, as a participant observer, to provide both an "inside" and "outside" perspective. Additionally, by becoming the "primary data-gather instrument" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39) my data collection was more accurate, since I was privy to the inner workings of the research site, and I was allowed to read the subtle nuances of participants' varying responses.

Since I gathered all data for this research myself, the research process took a "researcher-as-instrument approach" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7). Since "qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings" (p. 7), my identity as the former inclusion director, assistant principal, and teacher at St. Mary's School, as well as my current position as a principal of another Catholic Elementary School in California was vital. My past and present positions together provided my research with an emic perspective, ensuring not only that all voices of the participants were heard but that proper meaning was derived from the experiences and opinions expressed by the subjects. Lastly, because I was also a teacher in the school, my insight provided a special contextual meaning that otherwise might not have been discovered.

The biases that may have affected my research are not insignificant, however. Inclusion at St. Mary's was not only something that I felt called to create, but also much of my identity as a teacher and administrator at the school was tied to it. I was both the director and co-creator of the program, and with no real model to follow, much of what the program came to be was

designed specifically by me. It was painful for me to realize that even after intense planning,

hours of painstaking organization, research, and promotion of the program that teachers still

struggled with the concept. No matter how hard I tried or how many students benefited from the

program, the idea never really sat well with the St. Mary's community. It is for these reasons

that the research into people's experiences and perceptions of inclusion and students with

disabilities are so vital, since I always knew intuitively that something unknown was impeding

its progress to the next level.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this qualitative case study is found in its effort to document the

experiences of St. Mary's stakeholders, who have witnessed the development and growth of

inclusion at a Catholic Elementary School in California. Although this study was not a formal

evaluation of St. Mary's program, it outlined key actions, goals, and components of the inclusive

education at St. Mary's School. For these reasons, this study sought to recommend elements for

the purpose of replication in similar Catholic school settings. Additionally, this study aimed to:

1. provide a larger contextual data to those at the Archdiocesan level about the

    implementation of inclusion initiatives;

2. provide data on how to best prepare and train teachers for Catholic inclusion initiatives;

3. provide data that other Catholic schools need to know about implementing similar

    inclusive practices at their school sites;

4. further the discussion in the field of Catholic education about Catholic children's right to

    a Catholic education regardless of their ability, since it is a matter of human dignity that

    they receive a spiritual and emotional education as well as an academic one; and

5. provide data from the point of view of private Catholic schools that children with

    disabilities should be afforded more options when it comes to choosing educational

    institutions.

Limitations

This study presents findings gathered while investigating inclusive education at one

Catholic elementary school in a middle-class neighborhood in Los Angeles, and it is possible

that the findings may not be generalized beyond those participants. The sample size that was

used is small, only 18 participants, and is neither ethnically nor socially diverse (14 of the

teachers were white and middle-class). However, the teachers studied do represent various age

groups, as their ages range from 24 to 70. This study was also limited since the teachers and

administrators studied had only dealt with children with mild learning challenges, and therefore

was not representative of all children with identified learning disabilities.

The timing of the research should also be considered in this discussion of limitations.

Although inclusive education at St. Mary's has existed since 2005, at the time of this research

teachers were working with a new principal who has only been at the school since August 2010.

It is possible that while the new principal has kept the inclusive mission intact, its day-to-day

functioning has changed somewhat from the old administration, which created the program.

This may, or may not, affect how teachers currently experience inclusive education at St. Mary's

inclusion program.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this case study are the general limits and boundaries of qualitative

research, which are that qualitative research is designed atypically and occurs within a specific

context and time. During interviews and focus groups, specific attention was paid to how a select group of teachers and administrators expressed their feelings, concerns, experiences, and beliefs regarding students with disabilities and inclusive education in one Catholic Elementary School in California. Although it would be of interest to explore St. Mary's parents' and students' experiences and beliefs in regard to the same research questions, it is beyond the scope of this researcher given the time needed for that type of inquiry.

Definition of Terms

Inclusion students is a term given to describe students with learning challenges who are supported with a challenging, yet needs-based curriculum, by a variety of educators in age-appropriate, general education classes (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001; Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

Inclusive education is a term given to mean that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff. IDEA and its 1997 amendments make it clear that schools have a duty to educate children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Inclusion director is a term given to describe the school administrator in charge of assessing the needs of students with learning challenges so that accommodations can be made for individuals struggling in the classroom. The inclusion director devises individual plans for students, including the need for extra tutoring, extended time on tests, reduced questioning, paraeducational help in the classroom and differentiated instruction. The inclusion director also serves as an advocate for students and parents at Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD)

Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings, and communicates students' needs and progress on a weekly basis to their parents via telephone, email, and meetings.

General education classroom in the context of a Catholic elementary school is a term used to describe a group of students, all of similar age, receiving the same grade-level instruction from a non-special education teacher.

Paraeducator in the context of a Catholic elementary school describes a teacher's aide who supervises and assists students when included in general education classes. The paraeducator works with students who would otherwise require alternative classroom placement to meet behavioral and instructional needs, helping a child with IEP or other academic objectives including core academic subjects and independent skills.

Catholic social teaching is a term used to describe a collection of teachings that are designed to reflect the Church's social mission in response to the challenges of the day. These teachings, rooted in Christian documents and traditions, call every Church member to work to eliminate poverty, to speak out against injustice, and to shape a more caring society and a more peaceful world.

Summary

The purpose of this case study research has been to investigate teachers' and administrators' beliefs about disability and to explore and analyze teachers' experiences of inclusive education in one Catholic Elementary School in California. This study has endeavored to understand how teachers perceive, interact, and respond to children with learning disabilities in a general education setting in a Catholic elementary school, and therefore, documented

teachers' experiences at St. Mary's School in the hopes of shedding light on the successes and challenges teachers face at the school site.

With this aim, this case study has used qualitative methods in the form of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document review to collect data. This study has used inductive analysis to code, synthesize, and generate specific findings. This case study has striven to serve as a contribution to the basic research necessary for understanding how teachers perceive inclusive education in Catholic elementary schools, since little research has been done in the area of inclusion in Catholic schools in Los Angeles. In an effort to document teachers' experiences and reactions to disability and inclusive education in Catholic schools, this case study research has been intended to also provide an understanding of the existing education practices and ideologies at St. Mary's School in Los Angeles.

Chapter One of this case study has provided an understanding of the social justice mission of Catholic schools in the United States, along with the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' message about inclusive education, teaching as Jesus would, and educating all children in Catholic schools. This chapter has also given important contextual information for this research by describing the current inclusive mission and philosophy of St. Mary's School. Lastly, Chapter One has introduced the type of qualitative case study research methodology that was used to capture teachers' beliefs and experiences of students with disabilities and inclusive education.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature related to the two research questions. The review of the literature begins with an examination of topics such as the principals of partial

participation, coeducation and other needs-based classroom support systems. Chapter Two also includes a review of the literature drawing parallels, intersections, and similarities.

Chapter Three details the methodology that was used to conduct this case study research, and how data related to the two research questions will be gathered, documented, and categorized. Chapter Three also describes in detail the meaning of qualitative case study methodology, in addition to outlining the meaning of semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and document reviews, which were used to conduct the inquiry into two research questions specifically designed for this study.

Chapter Four details the results and recounts the main findings from the case study research conducted at St. Mary's School. This chapter also organizes the research data while providing explanations of how the data was analyzed. The results of Chapter Four highlights and organizes key relationships, patterns, trends, expected and unexpected results, and outcomes that were generated by the case study inquiry into St. Mary's teachers' experiences of disability and the school's inclusive approach to education. Chapter Four synthesizes the main points that arose from the data analysis after inquiry into the research questions was concluded.

Chapter Five discusses the findings of Chapter Four for the purpose of a more thorough understanding of the implications of the research for future inquiry. Chapter Five will offer suggestions as to possible generalizations that have been generated by the research, while offering recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Background

Five years ago, my two-year-old daughter suddenly went blind. After racing her to the

hospital, an emergency CAT-scan revealed the awful truth: A large, malignant tumor in her nasal

pharyngeal area was crushing both optic nerves, and was one millimeter away from entering her

brain cavity. My beautiful child, born in perfect health, was now facing, at best, aggressive

chemotherapy and the possibility of permanent blindness and/or visual impairment. We did not

know if the chemotherapy would work, and even so, the side effects of the treatment could

potentially include deafness and renal failure. However, we did not have any choice, and she

was started immediately on VP-16, in concert with beyond-therapeutic doses of prednisone,

vancomycin, and other antibiotics.

Over the next few months, I was introduced to a world I never knew existed, one in

which everything, especially words and daily greetings, held within them an assumption of being

normal. For example, in the first few weeks, while dozens of doctors marched through our

hospital room, I found it strange how they all continued to greet my newly blind daughter by

saying, "It is so nice to see you – don't you look pretty this morning" or, "Do you remember me?

I saw you yesterday." My toddler, who had gone from being able to talk, run, and use the potty,

to not being able to sit up or even say no, could not even respond. However, as her mother, I

was screaming inside, thinking, "Don't these people understand that she can't see?" Day after

day, as one diagnostic test after another was performed, I held my tongue as I became shockingly

aware of how even expert medical personnel had neither the sensitivity training nor verbal tools needed to address my blind daughter, even though it was clear they wanted to.

More than four years have passed, and miraculously, Miranda's course of chemotherapy has been successful so far. Today, Miranda has partial sight, although the tumor left her legally blind in both eyes. As a mother whose little girl learned to talk, walk, and run again, I was elated. With her cancer in remission, I was finally feeling as if the family was back on a "normal" track of preparing my daughter for kindergarten. However, despite all of the obstacles and shocks I endured while battling for my daughter's life, I was not prepared for what I experienced next. My daughter, as perfect as she is in my eyes, has entered into the educational world of the disabled, which very clearly, rather than measuring children in terms of what they are able to do, measures children against their more able-bodied peers, systematically categorizing them by disability type, exposing them to a discriminatory social world.

This realization, together with my years of experience in Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles, has led me on a journey to deconstruct and understand the resistance surrounding inclusive education in Catholic schools. Likewise, my unique experiences in both my personal and professional life have led me to how even the best-intentioned Catholic teachers, leaders, and parents are unknowingly influenced by the forces of ableism. We are all sometimes unaware of ableism at work, and unfortunately, "society's response to disability can have tragic consequences for those who have disabilities" (Hehir, 2008, p. 2). This holds true particularly in the world of education where children have little say in how they should be best educated.

Ableism and Disability Studies

     Ableism, difference, and disability.

Not all people learn in the same way, on the same schedule, or at the same pace. Some prefer to read books to access knowledge, while some learn better when shown pictures, are lectured to, or are given an opportunity to take things apart to see how they work.

On a basic level, it makes sense that every person, as different as they are from one another, learns in a slightly different, unique way. Unfortunately, when a person learns, moves, or performs so differently than others who are considered "normal" that they require differentiated instruction, learning accommodations or more intense curricular modification, they enter into a discriminatory world dominated by a deficit model, which labels them as "less able" than the rest of society. This discrimination against the disabled is called ableism (Hehir, 2002).

Ableism, which idealizes normalcy, is a type of oppression that "assumes that it is better to be as normal as possible rather than be disabled" (Reid & Knight, 2006, p.18). The oppression of disabled people, which finds its roots in eugenics (Reid & Knight, 2006), is powerful because it also perpetuates itself in a less sinister form, in "the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (Young, 1992, p.177). Rather than being overt, the oppression of the disabled, like other marginalized groups such as women, people of color, and lesbians and gays, for example, exists in the "unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchy and market mechanisms, [in] the normal ongoing processes of everyday life" (Young, 1992, p. 179). Nevertheless, whether this oppression, which is ableism, is meant to be sinister or not, it has the effect of disempowering and marginalizing disabled people so that ultimately they

have fewer opportunities and less access to society (McLaren, 1994).

The term ableism begins appearing primarily in disability studies literature in the early 1980s, when there was a considerable amount of activism surrounding the rights of people with disabilities (Albrecht, G., Seelman, K., & Bury, M., 2001). Ableism is defined as discrimination against those who are disabled, which systematically denies a specific group of people from their right to self-expression and equal access to what they need in society (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 2007; Hehir & Gamm, 1999). Ableism, which values those who can "do" over those who appear they can not do, for a variety of complex reasons that are closely tied to the ideas of work and productivity, tends to exist in one form or other in capitalist societies, even in educational institutions (Hehir & Gamm, 1999; Gartner & Lipsky, 1996).

The term disability does not exist separately from its opposite—ability--whose root means *can do*. For this reason the word disability is a negative term; it evokes the idea that a human who is disabled is lacking in some way--is broken, not working properly, or that something is wrong or abnormal. Like racism and other forms of discrimination, "ableism operates on individual, institutional, and cultural levels to privilege temporarily able-bodied people and disadvantage people with disabilities" (Griffin, Peters, & Smith, 2007, p. 335). And yet, even though in the main there is agreement that discrimination against the disabled is illegal, "disabled people continue to be considered defective and are more segregated educationally and socially than any other minority" (Reid & Knight, 2006, p. 19). This fact, and the fact that teachers and the medical profession, for the most part, are left to be in charge of "diagnosing" who is "normal" and "abnormal" reinforces the ideology of normalcy that creates systematic discrimination for disabled people (Longmore, 2003; Reid & Knight, 2006; Youdell, 2003).

The disability rights movement did much to bring to light the systemic oppression of people with disabilities, especially in highlighting how language played into reinforcing negative attitudes towards difference. Words, of course, are powerful tools, and a seemingly simple word such as the word "handicapped" itself, which is used as a general term to describe people with disabilities, has derogatory origins, and clearly labels those who appear less able as being outsiders. Technically meaning *cap in hand*, the word handicapped refers directly to begging for money while holding a hat out. The following is only a sampling of words that, while considered neither socially nor politically correct in 2010, are used to describe the disabled: "crippled", "lame", "midget", "gimp", "pinhead", "mongoloid", "retarded", "moron", "simple-minded", "wheel-chair bound".

The negative connotations associated with the aforementioned words cannot be ignored. In fact, many words used to categorize people with disabilities are routinely used to conjure up negative images or to give insult. These words, as well as more benign labels such as visually-impaired and wheel-chair bound, connect directly to a deficit model of thinking, which originates in and is perpetuated by the medical world, whose aim is to fix people who appear "less than" to the general population (Hehir, 2008). Why this idea, that the closer one is to looking, behaving, and learning like the majority, is so sinister is because it discounts a disabled person's attributes and lays focus on that which they cannot do.

To liken this idea to other forms of discrimination is not difficult. For example, a person with medium-toned skin is more desirable than a person with a dark complexion, but a person who is completely Caucasian has the most status. Compare this idea to the following: a person with glasses and correctable vision is easier to teach than someone who is visually-impaired with

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non-correctable vision, who needs constant technical assistance. But both of these people are

better than being blind.

The concept of ableism is rooted in much of the literature concerning the marginalization

of disabled people in society (Hehir, 2008; Overboe, 1999; Weeber, 1999). It is commonly

described as "a pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have

mental, emotional and physical disabilities [that] is deeply rooted [in] beliefs about health,

productivity, beauty, and the value of human life" (Rauscher & McClintock, 1996, p. 198). The

terms "able" and "disabled" are shaped in many ways in society: art, television and film, spoken

and unspoken language, myths, advertisements, exclusive architecture, physical space, and

metaphors. All of the above work together to form very specific ideas about people with

disabilities, and because their message is constant, it is hard to unlearn even when the unlearning

is purposeful (Danforth & Gabel, 2006).

The more sinister turn that ableism takes, however, is the role that communities, both

small and large, and the media take in perpetuating ableist beliefs and values, so as to "create an

environment that is often hostile" (p. 198) to those who fall outside of the realm of what is

considered to be normal by society at large. In fact, Campbell (2009) states that the ableist

machine of conformity to that which is defined as "normal" is so powerful that it has "produced

a depth of disability negation that reaches into the caverns of collective subjectivity to the extent

that the notion of disability as inherently negative is seen as a 'naturalized' reaction to an

aberration" (p.166). This means that everyone living in society is constantly exposed to ableist

ideals, and that we are taught to constantly compare ourselves to that which appears to be

"normal."

Ableism, therefore, is a form of discrimination in which preference is shown to people who appear either physically, mentally, or socially more able-bodied. An ableist "world" is designed with primarily able-bodied people in mind, rather than considering that all people, such as those who are deaf, blind, handicapped, and learning challenged, deserve access (Hehir, 2008). The term able-bodied is primarily a legal one, referring specifically to a person's physical and mental capacity for gainful employment.

Disability studies.

The discussion of ableism can not be held separately from the field of disability studies since the notion of ableism and the construction of "normalcy" was born out of discussions in the 1960s and early 1970s about disability rights (Hehir, 2008; Reid & Knight, 2006; Smith, Gallagher, Owen, & Skrtic, 2009). These discussions, which formed a new field of study in education called Disability Studies (DS), pushed to the forefront the notion that people with disabilities were just as "other" and marginalized by positivist science as were people of color, homosexuals, and the impoverished (Iggers, 1997; Reid & Knight, 2006).

Disability studies is an interdisciplinary field that was first legitimized in 1993 by the Society for Disability Studies, an international group of leading academicians on the subject of disability (Altman, 2001). The most important tenet held by scholars in the field of disability studies is the notion that since disability or difference is a universal experience, occurring in all world cultures, it is therefore a matter of social justice for all human beings (Crozet et al., 2000; Linton, 1998; Williams, 1996). Although the scope of disability studies varies necessarily from country to country, its core centers around the idea that the prejudice experienced by physically, socially, emotionally, or mentally disabled people is a product of the way the larger society

views and responds to being different or considered "other" (Albrecht et. al., 2001). Attempting to bring the social justice aspect of disability studies to the forefront, the Society of Disability Studies (SDS) offers academicians and institutions the following principles and guidelines for the field. Disability studies should:

1. be interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary, since disability sits at the center of many overlapping disciplines;

2. engage the subject matter from various disciplinary perspectives;

3. challenge the view of disability: that disability should be seen as a cultural trait rather than as a deficit or defect that can be remedied or fixed through medication, intervention, or rehabilitation;

4. explore models and theories that examine the various social, political, cultural, and economic factors that mold definitions of disability;

5. work to de-stigmatize disability by way of critically investigating its relationship with medical practices and models;

6. study all perspectives, policies, literature, culture and history of disability so as to contextualize it, since laws, experiences, science, and cultures are continually in flux;

7. lead by example, promote and participate in universal design models of teaching, and encourage participation by disabled students and others; and

8. promote the inclusion of all people in learning and working environments, creating positions of leadership for disabled people whenever possible. (Society for Disability Studies, 2004).

With the above guidelines in place, the SDS aims to both standardize and legitimize the field, as well as derail and combat the ableist structure that is ever-present in all aspects of American, capitalist culture. The SDS believes that by providing a space within which a discussion can safely occur about the differences that exist in the world, a new vocabulary surrounding disability will emerge, thereby creating a new standard of "normal" in society.

The term *disability studies* is based on the premise that the disadvantage typically experienced by those who are disabled primarily reflects the way society defines and responds to certain types of difference or "perception of other". Within disability studies there is an understanding of the complex relationship between disability and society (i.e. society is as much or more a source of the problems than particular impairments). Disability, therefore, is socially constructed, and that means that disability is as much a result of the social environment as the impairment itself.

The field of disability studies seeks to raise the status of the disabled in the following two ways: 1. by elucidating the prejudice and fear that exists in society in relation to those people who are viewed as different and 2. by shedding light on the fact that disability is a social construct, and is discrimination. According to disability studies scholars, disability resides in the set of social relationships and outcomes of social practices that tend to disadvantage and marginalize people with impairments, perceived impairments, and physical differences. In an opposite, empowerment model, disabled people and their allies assert their rights, and society's ethical responsibility, to recognize each individual's gifts and organize societal policies and practices in ways that encourage the flourishing of these gifts.

Disability studies also asserts that understanding disability from a non-ableist viewpoint

has the potential to be a redefining experience, adding value to individual lives and clarifying what it means to be human. In fact, understanding disability as "difference" rather than "less than" can enrich society, creating new sets of powerful bonds, responsibilities, and opportunities for individuals, families, and society (Albrecht et al., 2001; Crozet et al., 2000). However, in order for this shift in belief to occur, it is necessary to understand what disability is, which begins with how disability is defined.

The problem in defining the word disability is that despite the fact that it is a global experience, there is little or no neutral language that exists to describe it (Altman, 2001; Linton, 1998; Williams, 1996). Compounded by this problem is the fact that while disability is a unique individual experience, it is also, simultaneously, a multidimensional concept. Perhaps this is why, when looking to define disabilities, a clinical approach is often taken, which necessitates the use of medical or other deficit-model terms (Altman, 2001; Slater, S.B., Vukmanovic, P., Macukanic, T., Prvulovic, T. & Cutler, J.L., 1974). Unfortunately, discrimination is inadvertently built into the clinical definition of disability, since rather than focusing on the person or human being first, the focus is on the label or on what is "abnormal" with the individual.

A review of the literature on disability studies reveals the discriminatory practice in place in our ableistic society. Disability can and should be considered a cultural difference rather than a liability or lesser state of being. Nevertheless, much like being marginalized because of one's color, race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, people with disabilities are categorized immediately because of how they compare to the general population.

Ableism in education.

Understanding ableism and how it exists in schools is crucial to understanding how disabled and/or learning challenged students are received and treated by others in society. Since schools and school life do not exist in isolation, and are directly influenced by American society at large (Gale & Densmore, 2000), ableism and its effects are not confined to the adult world, and are intertwined with the ways schools operate. Also, until disability in schools is connected directly to the discussion on diversity, students with challenges will not be able to enjoy equity in educational institutions (Rauscher & McClintock, 1996). Why is this? Mainly because there is "an ingrained prejudice [in American schools] against performing activities in ways that might be more efficient for disabled people but that are different from how the nondisabled perform them" (Hehir, 2008, p. 18).

Take, for example, the shift in the last thirty years in the education of the deaf, blind, and visually impaired in the United States. Although American Sign Language (ASL) and Braille were invented in 1817 and 1829 respectively, and have been proven to raise the literacy rates of both of these groups of learners, they have been systematically phased out in schools in favor of books on tape, computer text-enhancing technology, and teaching lip-reading, (Shapiro, 1994; Hehir, 2008). Despite the fact that ASL and Braille are disability specific, and were created *by* successful men who were deaf and blind and therefore understood those worlds intimately, many schools began phasing these services out in favor of more "normal", conformist types of communication, so that deaf and blind children could be more like hearing and sighted children (Ferguson & Asch, 1989; Hehir, 2008; Johnson, 1996; Shapiro, 1994). The National Federation of the Blind asserts,

There is no substitute for Braille in taking notes, reading a speech, looking up words in a

dictionary, studying a complicated text, or just having the fun of reading for yourself.

Talk of forcing blind children to learn Braille shows the prejudice. Nobody talks of

forcing sighted children to learn print. It is taken for granted as a right, a necessary part

of education; so it should be with Braille and blind children. (NFB of New Jersey, 2013)

It was not until the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of

1997 that communication needs for deaf and blind children were formally addressed so as to

favor the teaching of ASL and Braille (Hehir, 2008).

As it exists in the world of education, particularly in elementary schools, Hehir (2005)

defines ableism as:

[T]he devaluation of disability that results in societal attitudes that uncritically assert that

it is better for a child to walk than roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell

independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as opposed to

other disabled kids. (p. 3)

The fact that ableism exists in today's educational system is certain, based on the way disabled

students are serviced by schools and the educators therein (Hehir, 2008). Rather than meeting

children where they are developmentally, independent of their peers, they are compared *to* them.

This binary model has at its core one discriminatory goal: to overcome or alter disability so that

the disabled student may act and learn in the same manner as the other students (Ferguson &

Asch, 1989; Hehir, 2008; Rousso, 1984). This action would be similar to trying to alter

someone's skin color or negate their cultural difference, simply because it makes them appear

more "normal" or acceptable.

The way ableism marginalizes students with learning challenges is that these students are viewed by teachers, institutions, and other members of the educational community as disabled first, and as human beings who need to learn, second. By labeling or categorizing children by what they can and cannot do, authority figures such as teachers are automatically making assumptions about a child without first getting to know that child and his/her own specific strengths and weaknesses (Rousso, 1984).

Consider how even starting school is different for children with challenges. Instead of discovering a child's needs organically in a school setting, children with disabilities are forced to participate in a series of standardized psychological, medical, academic, developmental, and physical tests in order to qualify for the support services they will need to access the curriculum of their peers (Ferguson & Asch, 1989).

The result of this process of categorizing a young learner culminates in what is called an Individual Educational Plan (IEP), which is meant to provide teachers with a comprehensive list of supports, accommodations and/or modifications to curriculum, and goals a child needs to learn in a general education setting along with his/her peers. However, this formal type of labeling, which is rooted in liberal functionalism (Smith, R., Gallagher, D., Owen, V., & Skrtic, T., 2009), serves to segregate students from others rather than putting them on equal ground with their peers. Hehir (2002) states, "ableist assumptions become dysfunctional when the educational and developmental services provided to disabled children focus inordinately on the characteristics of their disability…when changing disability becomes the overriding focus of service providers" (p. 4).

The notion that disabled individuals are "damaged goods" (Shapiro, 1994, p. 15) that

need to be fixed is at the root of the problem in approaching disability in education, since it presupposes that all children acquire knowledge in the same manner. While it is true that children with special needs must have certain supports in place in order to access general education classrooms, it is also true that most children, whether disabled and not, access knowledge at different times and in various ways (Gardner, 1983).

So, why is it that the same special education model that is meant to create access for disabled students is simultaneously segregating them from the general education population? The answer to this lies in the history of disability rights and in the conceptual framework of special education.

Although the model for special education was born out of the civil rights movement of the 1960s and was meant to empower students with disabilities, many feel it has had the opposite effect (Ford, 1993; Hehir, 2008). Instead, federal law, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1971, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), seem to have greatly contributed *to* the singling-out and/or exclusion of disabled students in able-bodied classrooms, since their emphasis is squarely on fixing a child's disability as much as they can so that they are brought up to the level of other students at the school. Whether this is in the form of giving a child physical, technological, or medical support or accommodations, it is all for the purpose of making him/her as much like the other normal children as possible.

Despite the goal to make classrooms in the United States socially just environments, the mere fact that "many disabled students require different and more resources, different teaching methodologies and different technologies" (Michalko, 2008, p. 402) puts them in direct opposition to the ideology of equality or "sameness ideology of students as students, disabled or

not" (Michalko, 2008, p. 402). And this type of "leveling the playing field" (Villa & Thousand, 2000, p. 27) is precisely what makes onlookers, teachers, parents, and other students uncomfortable: it challenges the whole notion of what is equal and fair in the classroom (Hehir, 2008). They assume disabled students are receiving special preferences, when in reality, what the students are receiving is specialized services based on their individualized needs.

Teacher Perceptions of and Resistance to the Inclusion of All Students

A teacher's educational training and attitude can be a powerful way to combat ableism in the classroom (Danforth & Gabel, 2006). However, it is still hard for teachers, who are human beings living *in* society, to resist the ongoing barrage of negative meaning surrounding disability that is presented to them, "via language, representation, and practices" (Rice, 2006, p. 7). Moreover, as there has been a history of segregating the disabled in schools, the workforce, and in other parts of society, teachers (especially new teachers) have had little contact with the disabled unless one of their family members is disabled (Hamre & Oyler, 2004). This lack of exposure to the disabled, as well as a lack of training in accommodating students with special needs, leads most teachers in the direction of resisting the inclusion of disabled students in general education classrooms (Shippen, M., Houchins, D., Ramsey, M., & Simon, M., 2005).

There is little to no research literature available regarding Catholic teachers' resistance to including disabled children in Catholic school settings, however, there is research about public school teachers' attitudes towards serving disabled students in general education settings, even though the majority tends to be more in the area of preservice teachers and teacher training programs. In thinking about why there is little to no research specifically about the resistance to teaching disabled students in Catholic schools, what comes to mind is that it has only been a very

recent change that certain Catholic schools have even been accepting students with special needs, let alone studying the attitudes of teachers in regard to inclusivity.

Teachers' Perceptions and Attitudes toward Students with Disabilities

The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has seen an increase of over 60% or 2 million students with disabilities in the United States from 1988 to1995 and is constantly growing. Along with this change, teachers have experienced a dramatic increase in the number of students with disabilities who spend a minimum of seventy-nine percent of their time in general education classrooms (Cook, B., Tankersley, M., Cook, L., & Landrum, T., 2000; McCleskey, Henry & Hodges, 1998).

What this means is that students with disabilities are increasingly affected by their general education teachers' perceptions and attitudes toward them. According to Cook, Cook & Landrum, (2000), a disabled student's success is directly related to the positivity or the quality of the inclusive experience they receive from their general education teacher rather than their special services or special education teachers. The reason for this is that with the advent of mainstreaming children with special needs in general education classes, children with special needs now spend more instructional time per day with their general education teacher than with special education teachers.

Successful inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms is defined in various ways including:

1. how well they are able to gain access to a predetermined, ability-appropriate curriculum;

2. how and in which ways a student is being met developmentally where they need to be met academically, socially, and/or physically;

3. how individual talents of these students are nurtured;

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4. how and in which ways students with disabilities are prepared for future opportunities in which they choose to participate.

Regardless of the way it is measured, Cook et al., (2000) note that the quality of inclusive education received by the disabled is "a primary determinant of educational outcomes for a large and rapidly growing group of students with disabilities" (p. 10) Garvar-Pinhas and Schmelkin (1989) comment that in order for students with disabilities to be successfully included in the mainstream classroom, they need to feel accepted and understood by their general education teachers. For this to occur, general educators instructing children with special needs must be properly trained and open to inclusive principles, feel positive about disability while teaching and accommodating students, and deliver inclusive instruction in a way that is received positively by targeted students (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). The fact that teachers' attitudes toward children with disabilities directly affect a child's inclusion experience in a general education setting is unmistakable, especially as the inclusion population grows in mainstream settings (Buell, M., Hallam, Gallam-Mccormick, M., & Sheer, S., 2010; Combs, Elliot & Whipple, 2010; Rizzo & Vispoel, 1992).

Although successful inclusion depends on a variety of factors, such as administrative support, effective implementation practices, quality professional development in the area of special needs learners, and sufficient funding (Villa & Thousand, 2001), teachers' positive attitudes and feelings about inclusion students and practices is a strong predictor of creating successful inclusive learning environments (Gelheiser & Meyers, 1996; Van Laarhoven, T., Munk, D., Lynch, K., Bosma, J., & Rouse, J., 2007). More specifically, research has shown that when teachers have positive attitudes toward inclusive education, they are more flexible, responsive, and accommodating to inclusion students. Although studies suggests that it takes more than teachers' positive feelings about inclusion

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to result in student success such as gain scores or social improvement with peers, Zigmond et. al (1995) note that ultimately teachers' positive feelings about inclusion, together with improved special education training for general education teachers, increases the long-term success and opportunities for inclusion students (Cook et al, 2000; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998; Ochoa & Olivarez, 1995).

The literature on teachers' attitudes and perceptions of students with disabilities by and large highlights that while there is a direct correlation between teachers' positive view of inclusion and inclusion students' academic and social success, teachers' acceptance of the idea of inclusion was not as powerful a predictor of student success as teachers' opinions and beliefs about their actual students. In fact, more teacher resistance and instructional negativity about inclusion students was evidenced when teachers were asked specific questions about real students and true-life experiences than about their personal views, beliefs, and thoughts about the "abstract concept of inclusion" (Cook et al., 2000, p. 11). Nevertheless, studies show that teachers' positive attitudes about mainstreaming inclusion students help students with learning challenges succeed in general education classrooms (Cook et al., 2000; Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, & Elbaum, 1998).

Moreover, Yanito, Quintero, Killoran and Striefel (1987) posit that teachers' positive perceptions of inclusion not only vary depending on the level of the severity of a student's challenge, but also, teachers' positive perceptions of students with disabilities depended strongly on whether or not a student's challenge in the classroom fell in an academic or a behavioral category. Generally, teachers' positive attitudes, understanding, and willingness to accommodate students were stronger if a student had an academic and/or cognitive challenge

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rather than a behavioral one.

As is the case with general education learners, when expectations for a student with disabilities is high, he/she will perform at a much higher level than if the academic bar and expectations are low (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001). However, teachers do not feel they same way about all of their special needs students, and to a large extent, how effectively teachers accommodate and/or modify curriculum for students with disabilities depends a great deal on how certain students can respond, interact, grow, excel, and behave for specific teachers. Good & Brophy (1972) note that students who did not misbehave in class or were easily corrected by teachers were perceived more favorably and positively by a wide range of teachers. Interestingly, students whose teachers rewarded them for high achievement and appropriate behavior without requiring a significant investment of teachers' limited time (Cook et al., 2000; Silberman, 1971) were more likely to experience the following:

1. be called on in class;

2. be redirected and/or corrected one-on-one when they make mistakes; and

3. given extra time to complete classroom tasks and/or take tests and/or hand-in
    homework late.

In general, teachers who did not experience their students to have behavior problems were put into a positive group. Teachers were consistently using more of their instructional resources and "were pushing them to do their best" (Good & Brophy, 1972, p. 621). In their findings regarding what motivates teachers to help certain inclusion students over others, Cook et al. add:

Teachers seemed to feel that their extra investment of instructional resources (e.g. teacher

time) in these students would "pay off" by enabling concern students to be successful in

an environment (i.e. school) where they otherwise would have failed. (2000, p. 11)

Teachers' time can then be utilized with students whose academic progress is a cause of teacher

concern.

Teachers' Resistance to Including All Learners in the Classroom

It is difficult to gauge precisely what causes teachers to resist inclusion. Nevertheless,

studies show that inclusion is resisted by preservice teachers as well as seasoned practitioners,

suggesting that teachers' exposure to disability outside of the classroom plays a part in how they

perceive inclusion students (Hehir, 2008; Jordan, A., Schwartz, E. and McGhie-Richmond, D.,

2009; Shippen et al., 2005). Factors contributing to teacher resistance are related in part to the

historical separation of general and special education services, especially in relation to teacher

training and how "prepared" teachers feel in dealing with disabled children in the classroom

(Engelbrecht et al., 2003; Shippen et al., 2005; Villa & Thousand, 2000). What is meant by this

statement is that until recently, with the advent of mandated inclusive practices in American

schools, people training to be teachers chose very different tracks. People interested in teaching

children with challenges were trained as special education teachers and people interested in

working with general education learners did not take courses in how to deliver curriculum to

special education learners (Hehir, 2002). It follows, therefore, that currently there are many

teachers who are neither qualified nor have received the training necessary to accommodate

special education students in their general education classroom. This is especially true for the

religious (priests and nuns) or lay teachers working in Catholic schools, since it is not necessarily

required to have specific teacher credentials in order to work full-time in a general education

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classroom (Villa & Thousand, 2002; Youniss, 2002).

More specifically, with the authorization and reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1997, general education public school teachers who have little training with and exposure to students with disabilities have increasingly experienced children with disabilities in their mainstream classrooms without having received proper training or even a survey course in special education. What this tends to create in teachers is a feeling of nervousness, fear of, and resistance to the inclusion of students for various reasons. First, these teachers either do not have the aptitude or skills to deliver instruction to special learners, or they feel they do not have the essential resources to meet a child where they need to be met. Second, while teachers might feel an obligation to teach inclusion students, they become frustrated and feel as if they are failing when they try to teach a child with a disability but nothing they do helps the child to grow and succeed (Hehir, 2008; Murawaski & Swanson, 2001; Villa & Thousand, 2001).

Generally, many factors seem to contribute to the issue of teacher resistance in the general education classroom, most of them having to do with: 1. the lack of exposure to the disabled inside and outside of schools, and 2. the lack of proper special education training in general education teacher training programs to adequately understand and serve the specific needs of disabled learners (Hamre & Oyler, 2004). Other elements causing teachers to want inclusion students separated out of general education classrooms are: 1) teachers' inexperience with disabled people, 2) teachers' personal views of equity, 3) normalcy and fear or ignorance of special education "labels" for learners, 4) time constraints/lack of adequate in-classroom support, and 5) concern that disabled students will not meet general educational standards (Hamre &

Oyler, 2004; Jordan et al., 2009; Villa & Thousand, 2001).

Inexperience in dealing with disabled students in the classroom together with teachers' personal beliefs about the disabled seems to cause the most resistance in the classroom (Hamre & Oyler, 2004). However, teachers' beliefs about their roles and responsibilities in working with students with special needs also play a part in how teachers accept disabled students in general education classrooms, especially since teachers who believe students with disabilities are their responsibility are more "effective overall with all of their students" (Jordan et al., 2009, p. 1).

The problem of teacher resistance is not a small one, simply because teachers have so much power in the classroom and since they are the ones who make the day-to-day judgment calls regarding which students get their questions answered quickly, who gets extended time when they need it, and how their needs are being met (Mitchell, 2008).

The problem of the noted resistance that is constantly at odds with successful inclusion is precipitated by both the teaching staff and the school administrators, who do not want to accommodate students because of their notion of what is fair (Villa & Thousand, 2000), even though the notions of fairness and disability are rarely overtly on the same plane. What this means at the school level is that as much as teachers may feel they want to include all learners in the classroom, the point remains that it is difficult to know how to teach inclusion students if teachers do not perceive them as normal.

In a study of preservice teachers' perceptions of inclusion and including students with disabilities in general education classrooms, Oyler (2011) measured future educators on two dichotomous scales 1. hostility toward and receptivity of inclusion and 2. anxiety versus calmness toward inclusion. The purpose of this study was to define more clearly what causes

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resistance toward inclusion as well as discover whether or not increased teacher education in the area of exceptionalities and disabilities affected teachers' perceptions, feelings, and disposition toward serving students with special needs. The results of the study highlighted that there is a direct, positive relationship between teachers' increased exposure to concepts of disability and a decreased level of teachers' anxiety and hostility toward serving students with disabilities in general education settings.

Michalko (2008) states that since disabled students require so much that is different in the classroom (everything from different assessments and methodologies, to assistive technology, accommodations and/or modifications to curriculum, to Responses to Intervention (RTI) techniques), teachers experience their differences in the face of the sameness ideology of "students are students, disabled or not" (Gabriel & Danforth, 2008, p. 402). This means that teachers, even the most compassionate, well-trained, and skilled, still experience students with learning challenges as "trouble" (Casebolt & Hodge, 2010) because "insofar as education is oriented to and by an implicit and sometimes explicit conception of 'normalcy,' is thus oriented to an implicit sense of the trouble of 'abnormality'" (Gabriel & Danforth, 2008, p. 401).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that there are several forms of teacher resistance, disabled students deserve a democratic, free learning environment in which to engage so that they may discover, learn, and construct that which they find is true (Dewey, 1916) the same as women, African-American students, Hispanic students, gays and lesbian students, and so forth. With this in mind, consider the disabled student's struggle to find truth in his/her general education surroundings when it does not physically, academically, emotionally, and/or socially fit or meet their specific needs.

Social justice, then, is the driving philosophy behind constructing democratic educational spaces, in which learning best takes place when all students are supported in their journey to learn and to reflect upon new ideas, ultimately connecting to a larger sense of community (Dewey, 1916). In order for all students to learn, advantaged and disadvantaged, gay or not gay, of one skin color or another, disabled or not, they must be permitted to participate meaningfully in the learning environment that is best suited to them. Since this type of educational philosophy is part of the mission of Catholic schools in the United States, what better place for students of all types than in Catholic schools?

The Mission of Catholic Schools: Social Justice and Catholic Social Teaching

A review of the mission and philosophy of Catholic schools demonstrates that clear communication of the mission and purpose of a school is integral to students' success (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). To "teach as Jesus did" (USCCB, 1998, p. 2), ensuring social justice, and upholding the tenets of Catholic social teaching are the cornerstone of Catholic education, which is "an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church he founded" (NCCB, 1973, p. 3). According to the Second Vatican Council in *Gaudium et Spes* (1965), ensuring human dignity is the essential mission of people in their quest to become one with God. This call for justice, which originated in Pope John XXIII's *Mater et Magistra* (1961) urges that justice is found not in what society or rational thought deems is right, but rather in the teachings of Jesus and a merciful, loving God.

Similarly, Pope John XXIII's *Pacem in Terris* (1963) stresses that all life from the moment of conception is emued with innate dignity, and therefore has inviolable rights to have access to the best quality of care, education, and participation in a productive community. This

means that since all humans have a right to life, Catholic doctrine also calls us to embrace people of all capabilities and expand our schools to accept them.

Ironically, although prolife is a central and key message in the Catholic Church, Catholic schools have yet accommodate students with moderate to severe disabilities, such as Downs Syndrome, making its schools only partially inclusive. Thus, because of the importance of the prolife issue in Catholicism, it seems only just that Catholic schools expand their limited inclusion directives to be fully accepting and accommodating to students with disabilities.

In *Justitia in Mundo* (1971) the Synod of Bishops echoes these social justice statements, stressing that all Catholics must "work for social justice [because] it is a constituent element of preaching the gospel" (p. 1) and also that Catholics are called to remember that God is a liberator of the oppressed and justice is an essential ingredient to the liberation of human beings, not to mention a key expression of Christian love.

Catholic social teaching addresses three realms of existence: personal, societal, and institutional. When considering priorities in moral obligations, promoting and protecting the personal realm takes priority. Societal and institutional choices should be aimed at protecting the personal realm; since many who suffer injustice are voiceless, the church should speak on their behalf. The Church must be a witness for justice—via education, international relations, and especially the way it treats its own members.

As Pope Leo XIII stated in *Rerum Novarum*: "Man precedes the state" (1891, section 7). This affirmation of the dignity of the human person is found throughout the social teaching and is unequivocal: human dignity arises from who humans are, not from what humans have or not have. This transcendent view of human dignity is tied to the scriptural notion that all people are

made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). "We believe that the person is sacred. The clearest reflection of God among us. Dignity affirmative action policies assist those who have been excluded by racial or sexual discrimination in the past." (USCCB, 1986, p. 167).

The United States Council of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) *Economic Justice for all: Pastoral Letter on Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy* (1986) reaffirms this thought, stating that for social justice to occur in the context of Catholic schools and other Catholic communities, people (who according to Paul in the New Testament are made in God's own image) must be allowed to serve and participate with others, and society must allow them to do so. The social justice of Catholic schools, therefore, lies in teaching God's children as Jesus did, and allowing all those who wish to participate in the educational Catholic community to do so in the capacity to which they are able. Inclusion is their right, since exclusion robs them of their ability to contribute to the creation of the common good in society, "for by his innermost nature man is a social being, and unless he relates himself to others he can neither live nor develop his potential" (p. 167).

Catholic social teaching "is a central and essential element of [Catholic] faith" (USCCB, 1998, p. 4) and therefore provides the core meaning and mission of Catholic schools, outlining and calling for what should be the inclusive nature of Catholic education. Catholic social teaching is defined in *Sharing Catholic Social Teaching: Challenges and Directions* (USCCB, 1998) by the following seven principles:

1. the life and inherent dignity of what it means to be a person;

2. the call to family, community, and participation since people are of a social nature and rightfully need to experience society;

3. preferential options for those who are poor and helpless, since "a basic moral test of a society is how the most vulnerable members are faring" (p. 25);

4. human dignity is protected only if the protection of human rights are maintained and responsibilities are met;

5. the dignity of work and the rights of workers is protected;

6. the virtue of solidarity, social justice, and peace, is honored because "we are one human family whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences"; and

7. respect for the Creator is seen "by our stewardship of creation" (p. 2).

To this end, Catholic educators benefit from a clear mission that includes two coexisting goals (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993). First is an emphasis on teaching and learning the body of academic, psychosocial, and physical knowledge determined requisite for future success as a citizen. The second goal stands individually and also permeates the first goal; that is, Catholic education transmits the faith to the next generation. Catholic educators carry out this mission by integrating a coherent educational experience that teaches life knowledge in the context of Catholic faith (Bryk et al., 1993; Convey, 1992). The result provides the most cognitively effective and holistically satisfying Catholic educational experience. As with other Catholic families, parents of children with special needs want this integrated faith learning experience for their children.

Catholic Social Effect on Children with Disabilities

The Catholic social effect, entirely related to Catholic social teaching, notes that Catholic schools are not only beneficial for students with disabilities, but are potential havens of learning for diverse students (Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982). The Catholic school community has a

unique ability to embrace all students, due in part to its core mission of equity, advocacy, and

diversity, and also because of its unique governing system in which each parish/school is given

local control over specific decision making. Essentially, this means that any given Catholic

school, along with its parish, can identify the needs of its individual student community, embrace

the diversity of the group, and design the most effective academic curriculum to address the

needs of its student body. This type of school, supported by strong educational leadership on

every level, could advocate for complete equity and inclusion for all who pass through its doors.

The notion that Catholic schools in the United States were intended only for mainstream,

general education is not correct. Since the 1925 *Pierce v. Society of Sisters of the Holy Names of*

Jesus and Mary decision, Catholic parents were given the right to educate their children in non-

public schools.

Catholic institutions, led by the words of Pope John Paul II, have attempted to accept

those with special needs as in the public school system. Pope John Paul II stated in his homily

for the *Jubilee of the Disabled* (2000) that "the Church is committed to making herself more and

more a welcoming home [for the disabled] and this welcoming needs not only care, but first of

all love, which becomes recognition, respect and integration" (section 4). The Church's recent

pronouncements on the rights of people with disabilities follow the broader trends toward equity

and civil rights espoused by the Church, and the Church's consistent teachings on social justice

for all (John XXIII, 1961, 1963; Leo XIII, 1891).

In 1978, the bishops of the United States stated their firm commitment "to working for a

deeper understanding of both the pain and the potential of our neighbors who are blind, deaf,

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mentally retarded, emotionally impaired, who have special learning problems, or who suffer

from single or multiple physical disabilities" (USCCB, 1993, p. 1).

This statement focused largely on access to the religious life of the Catholic community,

the acceptance of persons with physical, intellectual, and emotional differences, and the defense

of the right to life. It concluded, however, with an exhortation to coordinate educational services

within the dioceses in order to "supplement the provision of direct educational aids" (p. 8). The

bishops were forward thinking in laying the groundwork for the integration "of students with

disabilities into programs for the able-bodied" (p. 8). Religious education personnel were

encouraged to adapt "their curricula to the needs of disabled learners" (p. 8). The bishops further

recommended that Catholic elementary and secondary school teachers be prepared in "how best

to integrate disabled students into programs of regular education" (p. 8). The 1978 pastoral

statement was reaffirmed by the NCCB in 1998.

In June 2005, the full body of U.S. Catholic Bishops published the document *Renewing*

Our Commitment to Catholic Elementary and Secondary Schools in the Third Millennium.

Among its many pronouncements, the Bishops applauded "the increasing number of our

[Catholic] school administrators and teachers who have taken steps to welcome these children

[with disabilities] and others with special needs into our Catholic schools" (USCCB, 2005, p. 7).

Slow Progress Toward Change in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles

Beginning in the late 1960s, the American Catholic bishops worked to clarify and

strengthen the Church's position on social justice issues, specifically addressing disability issues

(NCCB, 1998; USCCB, 1978). Following the broader political trends toward equity in secular

society throughout the Unites States, which began with the creation of the Civil Rights Act of

1964, the Rehabilitation Act of 1974, and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, individuals with special needs and their families have been seeking full participation in Catholic educational institutions and programs.

Arguably, there are several obvious practical barriers, such as funding and lack of personnel, for a comprehensive implementation of inclusion in Catholic schools to take place (Villa & Thousand, 2002; Youniss, 2002). However, there are reasons why the implementation of such philosophies and programs create more benefits for all Catholic students than is commonly thought.

For various reasons, beginning in the late 1990s, the Archdiocese began talking to administrators and other Catholic school educators about the need to include all learners in the Catholic school system. From various discussions, research, and parental pressure a strategic plan about the need to have an inclusive specialist in each school was born. The reasons for beginning to formalize Catholic schools' service to students with disabilities include the following:

1. an inclusive response from Catholic schools in Los Angeles to the NCLB act and the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004;

2. the creation, in 2001, of a Certificate and Master Degree program in Catholic School Inclusion for administrators and teachers at Loyola Marymount University;

3. the noticeable decline in enrollment at Catholic schools, which has been occurring steadily since the slow exit of the religious teaching at Catholic schools began in the 1970s (Youniss & Convey, 2000);

4. increased enrollment costs for parents, and the need to tap new resources (parents of special education students) for Catholic school funding (Scanlan, 2009a; Youniss & Convey, 2000); and

5. a dramatic shift in thinking about who Catholic schools are for (NCEA, 1991), spurred on by the 2003 response to the NCLB act by the United States' Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB, 2013) which coincides with a growing awareness of Disability Studies and a need to teach as Jesus would in American Catholic schools (Crowley & Wall, 2007).

The Archdiocese of Los Angeles has encouraged principals throughout the last two decades to include a wider range of learners in their schools (Youniss, 2002). From 2001 until 2004, in the form of information provided at deanery meetings, newsletters, and the creation of a Catholic Inclusion Advisory Board in the Department of Catholic Education at the Archdiocesan Catholic Center (ACC), the Archdiocese progressively formalized its call to principals to create inclusive school environments at their school sites.

One of the largest pushes to encourage Archdiocesan principals to either incorporate inclusive practices in general education classrooms or create inclusion programs on site was during the 2005-2006 academic year. Beginning on October 4th, 2005, through a Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) Private Schools Program grant provided by *No Child Left Behind* of 2001, the Consultation and Education department of the Frostig Center in Pasadena hosted a five-part principal's symposium on inclusive education for Catholic school principals. The Frostig Center, which is dedicated to helping children with learning difficulties by providing "direct service, professional training, and research" provided a consultative team of

inclusion specialists for archdiocesan principals so that the process of school change in Catholic schools could officially begin.

The symposium, which was developed to instruct both new and seasoned principals in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles School District on the importance of inclusive practices, encouraged the inclusion of disabled students at parish schools throughout Los Angeles. Although at the time the Archdiocese had issued no official guidelines on how to implement and evolve specific programs for children with learning challenges at school sites, it did issue the following statement on October 4, 2005 to begin the series of principal in-services on the meaning of Catholic school inclusion:

> Inclusion means meeting the needs of the diverse learners in our [Catholic] schools. Learners are more diverse: some are English learners, some come from homes where families live in poverty, and some have enough resources to do anything they want. Some come from cultural backgrounds very different from yours, some struggle to accomplish grade level work, while some are way ahead of their grade level. By adopting a culture of inclusion, we mean we are assuming teachers can teach to all of these children, at the same time, in the same classroom (p. 2).

With an eye toward effecting necessary, long-term change at the school level, the instructive series addressed the following topics on inclusive education: 1) What is Inclusive Education? 2)What Makes Inclusion Work? Characteristics of Struggling Learners; 3) Support Systems for Students and Teachers; 4) Supporting Teachers through Observations and Professional Conversations; and 5) Action Plans for Effective Inclusive Schools.

Although the inclusive education series provided information to principals that could be used to increase *all* student learning and engagement, it also provided a list of nine types of adaptations that make inclusion in Catholic schools possible, and planning forms meant to track the progress of exceptional learners in general education classrooms. Despite the fact that the extent to which students with learning challenges *could* be excluded was never clarified, the intent to include students *whenever possible* was made clear (Department of Catholic Schools, PIP, 2005).

As recently as August 2009, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles formalized its acceptance and willingness to serve children with learning challenges in their general education classrooms. The Department of Catholic Schools in Los Angeles states, "[their] schools strive to serve children with varied learning needs" (Administrative Handbook, 2009, pp. xiv-3). However, while the updated Administrators' Guide for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles outlines the mission, procedures, and process for including all children in the class, it simultaneously dissuades parents from bringing children with acute special needs into the Catholic school environment. The inclusion policy for the Archdiocese states:

> Through the mission of the Archdiocese [of Los Angeles], schools strive to serve children
> with varied learning needs. All educators in Archdiocesan schools follow "Directions for
> the Inclusion Process in Catholic Schools: Support Team Education Plan Process (STEP)
> and Minor Adjustment Plan Process (MAP)". Parents or guardians who feel that their
> student may need a *minor* adjustment to enable him or her to participate in the general
> education curriculum of the school should consult the student's teacher and principal to
> determine how best to meet the student's needs (pp. xiv-3).

While the above acknowledges that some Catholic school students can receive academic accommodations, the language of the statement seems to limit the severity of the disability. This is one of the reasons that inclusive education initiatives have met with much contention and confusion, given that there is a vast difference between *minor* academic adjustments and the academic accommodation and modifications that are necessary to include all learners, specifically those with cognitive difficulties, in any school curriculum.

The philosophy and mission of Los Angeles's Catholic Schools as set out by Catholic social teaching, the Council of Catholic Bishops, and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles all seem to settle on one theme: that all families who want their children to receive a Catholic education have the right to an equitable one. In practice, however, the majority of Catholic elementary schools are not, and administrators tend to encourage parents of students with a history of learning disabilities to move on to other schools (Villa & Thousand, 2002). Also, Catholic school administrators tend not to admit learners with existing Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and/or private learning assessments to their schools, arguing Catholic schools are not set up to meet the needs of learners outside the norm (Villa & Thousand, 2002).

The exclusion of students with learning challenges seems to be selective and discriminatory and is contrary to the tenets of Catholic social teaching, which consistently point to inclusive education being at the heart of what Catholic schools should be (Hogan, 2003). Moreover, this discrimination against children with learning disabilities happens regardless of the USCCB's 2002 call to Catholic schools to include all learners in their curricula, so as to model Jesus and teach as He did.

Inclusive Practices in Schools for Students with Learning Challenges

Full inclusion in schools is both a philosophical commitment to social justice and a commitment to excellent educational practices. More and more general education and resource teachers are working together using different forms of teaming. A number of these models have been successfully implemented at building level in school districts across the United States. Three of those models are consultant approach, teaming, and co-teaching (Gartner & Lipsky, 1997).

The consultant model works very well in a building with a low incidence of special needs students and overall low student population. The special education teacher is made available to re-teach a difficult skill or to help the student(s) practice a newly acquired skill. This is a non-intrusive approach that provides the special needs students with at least two teachers to ask for help with curriculum problems. Regularly scheduled meetings are recommended rather than communication on an as-needed basis.

In a teaming model, the special education teacher is assigned to one grade-level team with one planning period per week for the team. The special education teacher provides student information, possible instructional strategies, modification ideas for assignments/tests, and behavior strategies. The team meets on a regular basis, establishing consistent communication among the team members. The team model is presented so teachers are not working independently to achieve success with their students. All team members work together and broaden their knowledge in various areas, whether they are from general education or special education backgrounds. The disadvantages of this model could include possible resistance to implementing the modifications, delayed assistance for students with difficulty, high student-to-

teacher ratio, and limited opportunities for special education teachers to work in the general education classroom.

In the collaborative, co-teaching model, the general education and special education teachers work together to teach students with/without disabilities in a shared classroom. Both are responsible for instruction planning and delivery, student achievement, assessment, and discipline. Students receive age-appropriate academics, support services, and possible modified instruction. This model provides a minimum of scheduling problems, continuous and ongoing communication between educators, and a lower student-to-teacher ratio than the teaming or consultant models (Price, Mayfield, McFadden, & Marsh, 2001; Mitchell, 2008)

To this end, collaborative teaching can be organized in a number of ways; as a one-and-one scenario, as a parallel teaching design scenario, and as a station-teaching scenario. First, a one teacher, one support system scenario works well for teaching a unit where one teacher is more expert than the other. Students still have two teachers to ask questions of and from whom to get help (Mitchell, 2008).

In a parallel teaching design, the teacher divides the class into groups and teaches them simultaneously. The student-to-teacher ratio is low, more time is devoted to learning without students waiting for help, opportunities for re-teaching are immediate, support for the teacher is present, communication is constant, and behavior problems can be minimized.

In a station-teaching scenario, the teaching model is collaborative, and divides up content and students so that teachers or students rotate at the end of a unit. It is ideal for subject matter taught in units with no particular sequence. Benefits include that the opportunities for re-teaching are immediate, the student-to-teacher ratio is low, teachers become experts with their

material, and communication among teachers is constant.

Finally, in an alternative teaching scenario, one teacher leads an enrichment or alternative activity while a second teacher re-teaches small group of students if they are having difficulty with content. Math is compatible with this design, where a lot of re-teaching is done. In this type of team teaching design, teachers work together to deliver the same material to the entire class. Teachers circulate around the class, providing immediate re-teaching and a lower student-to-teach ratio. The above strategy has been the most successful in creating a community of learners with varied needs (Gartner & Lipsky, 1997).

In Magiera & Zigmond's 2005 study, the effects of co-teaching (special education teachers and general education teachers) were examined to measure the additive effect of having a special education teacher "teach" students with disabilities in a general education classroom. This research was done in light of the recent need (United States Department of Education, 2004) to analyze the effectiveness of co-teaching, as it has become a popular strategy for inclusive teaching for a variety of reasons (i.e. reducing student-teacher ratio). The participants were grade 5 to 8 students with disabilities from four suburban and rural New York middle schools. Class sizes ranged from 18 to 27, and students with disabilities ranged from 5 to 15 per class. Additionally, all participating teachers had been paired for two years or less, and eight co-teaching pairs yielded 11 classes to be observed. This was a case study in which data was collected through observing (with field notes being taken) the same students in the co-taught environment and the solo-taught environment. These observations recorded (using a narrative method) the following interactions: on-task work; group work; student participation; content

instruction/delivery to the group; directions to individual students and frequency of student interaction with the class and with the teacher.

As a result of the study, the following was discovered: a significant difference was recorded in 1:1 interactions in co-taught class (targeted students received individual instructions 2.2% of the time compared with less than 1% in solo-taught classes). Also, there was a significant difference related to interactions of students with general education teachers. In solo-taught classes they interacted with the students 62% of the time compared with 45% of the time in co-taught classes. The strength of this study is that it carefully and frequently examined how teachers worked with children with learning disabilities in the classroom alongside general education learners. However, it was discovered late in the study that conditions were not "ideal" (special education teachers were not all credentialed and had little field experience). Nevertheless, the results favored co-teaching over solo-teaching for students with disabilities because they experienced an increased opportunity for in-class participation.

In an ethnographic study by Xu (2006) the inclusive experience in an urban middle school of one, all-black family (father, mother, eight-year-old girl, seventh-grade boy) was examined so as to gauge and document the effects of inclusive teaching on minority students. The researcher completely immersed himself in the study, spending (on each field visit) upwards of three hours a day with the family both at home and with the male student at the school site. For a period of five months, the researcher took field notes, used tape recorders, conducted interviews, and analyzed personal documents. This study yielded valuable information regarding the difference in how this minority family perceived the male-child's learning disability and academic ability. This family believed that the boy was "slow just like his father" and the

problem was due "probably" to heredity, and therefore, intervention was unlikely to help him one way or the other. This study filled an important gap in the inclusive program literature, since there is little data on the minority experience in inclusive education programs despite the rising number of inclusive programs in existence (United States Department of Education, 2004). Nevertheless, this study is limited in its scope, as it is a study of only one family over a short period of time.

Studies of Inclusive Education and Paraeducation in General Education Classrooms

Another study (Idol, 2006) sought to determine the degree of inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classes with an eye toward categorizing the similarities and differences in how special education services were offered, and the ways in which students with disabilities were supported in the least restrictive environment. The participants for this study were a mix of 147 teaching professionals, 10 principals, 87 teachers, 20 administrative personnel, and 30 teaching aides and/or paraeducators. Staff perceptions of special education services were examined through qualitative means, solely by conducting personal interviews with classroom teachers, special education teachers, instructional assistants, and principals in each school.

The results of these interviews included descriptions of how far along each school was with its inclusion philosophy and program, the amount of time inclusion students spent in general education, the roles of the special education teachers, the rates of student referrals for special education consideration, the positive and negative attitudes of all staff toward inclusion and collaboration, and the skills of the teachers related to the inclusion of special education students. Most importantly, this study produced strong results in the area of understanding how

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teachers perceive their ability to deal daily with teaching students with need. Specifically, the study noted that while teachers felt they wanted and needed to include all learners, some students with disability were perceived by teachers as being more troublesome than others depending on how easy and/or difficult the students were to individually accommodate. Unfortunately, the schools in this study did not focus any attention on how specific in-class teaching was conducted or how student success was gauged after teaching had taken place.

Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin (2006) analyzed inclusive education at three different primary schools in the Western Cape Province in South Africa so as to evaluate and develop a South African model to assist in the development of inclusive schools. A mixed-method research design involving three case studies was used to conduct the research, and then a multi-site case study comparison was used to analyze the data. Three primary schools from poor areas in the Western Cape province of South Africa were identified. School One had 652 learners (602 learners of mixed origin and 50 Xhosa-speaking black learners); School Two had 890 learners (740 learners of mixed origin and 150 Xhosa-speaking black learners); and School Three had 644 learners with a very small percentage of Xhosa-speaking black learners. Each case study used the following measures to gather information: surveys (to gauge the school community's perceptions of what inclusion is) and quantitative data from questionnaires (with Likert rating scale). The data revealed that each school lacked the shared inclusive school philosophy required for successful implementation of classroom intervention. Additionally, a lack of adequate teacher training led to ineffective learning support in the classroom (co-teachers). A major weakness of this research study as it relates to the proposed evaluation is that the word "inclusion" referred to any student with learning challenges. No differentiation was

made between students who had "real" learning difficulties (due to learning challenges such as autism) and "perceived" learning challenges (due to lack of access to schools in the past, or an inability to speak the language in which instruction was given). Also, this study was done in South Africa and it is hard to gauge how relatable the educational program is to one in the United States. However, the strength of this study is that classroom instruction, intervention techniques, and student learning difficulties were comparable and that the researchers analyzed three large, diverse elementary school populations. What was important about this study was that given the right tools, training, and administrative support, teachers felt positive about including students with disability in the classroom. In addition, the study yielded important information about the specific inclusive teaching techniques teachers need to learn in order to increase their feelings of success and efficacy when instructing disabled students.

Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend (1989) researched the effectiveness of co-operative teaching models for the purpose of general and special education integration. Their quantitative study, although dated, provided some important information about the social benefits of educating special needs students along with peer general learners. What was interesting about this study is that there was a presupposition going into the research that a socially aware and accepting learning environment would positively affect the academic ability of special needs students. This understanding is in concert with the Los Angeles Department of Catholic Schools philosophy that all children benefit in various ways when they are educated in a loving, accepting environment. When met at a developmentally appropriate level, Bauwens, Hourcade, & Friend (1989) argue that all levels of children can be taught together.

Summary

A review of the literature revealed the following themes and patterns on the subject of inclusive education: there is a direct correlation between increased academic performance and lower student/teacher ratios in classrooms. Additionally, there is a significant increase in academic achievement among special education learners when they receive more attention and teaching time from teachers during regular classroom hours. Finally, a pattern of increased academic success has been recognized throughout these studies in relation to making learning environments accepting of and accommodating for children with learning challenges.

The review of the literature revealed a need for further study and evaluation of Catholic elementary school learning center programs and the issues surrounding the acceptance and accommodation of inclusion students in the general student population. A limited amount of research that directly relates to the specific role of Catholic teachers (to include all students when they direct their lessons) is available. Therefore, there has not been sufficient evidence presented regarding the degree to which specific teaching interventions are successful in Catholic learning school programs. Furthermore, other gaps in the literature exist. The first is with regard to how private Catholic institutions should incorporate children with disabilities so as to educate their own students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) without sending them to their local public schools. The second relates to what the overall academic effects of teaching interventions on students are when they are administered in a large (anywhere from 28 to 39 students per class) general education class.

The next chapter, chapter three, details the methodology that was used to conduct this case study research, and how data related to the two research questions will be gathered,

documented, and categorized. Chapter Three also describes in detail the meaning of qualitative

case study methodology, in addition to outlining the meaning of semi-structured interviews,

focus groups, and document reviews, which were used to conduct the inquiry into two research

questions specifically designed for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter explores how a case study methodology was best suited for investigating the experiences of the research participants. This research study used a case study methodology in an effort to better understand, investigate, and capture participants' experiences, thoughts, and voices as the study answered the following: 1) What are St. Mary's School teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education; and 2) What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

The research questions for this study dictated that a case study methodology be used, mainly because the research questions are concerned with deriving meaning from participants' stories and words, and not from the school's academic scores, I.Q. tests, and/or other academic statistics.

Hatch (2002) states that a case study methodology should be used in a study when "the lived experiences of real people in real settings are the objects of study…[and when the] research seeks to understand the world from the perspectives of those living in it" (pp. 6-7). As the former director of inclusive education at St. Mary's, I conducted this research so as to better gauge its present state of development and thereby determine how it might grow in the future. This is particularly important at this time, since I now have a principal position at another K through 8 Catholic school in Los Angeles, and still wanted to document inclusive education at

my former school-site. I believe that case study research was the most revealing and truthful method of inquiry for this program, since the study of specific participants was being conducted in their natural setting.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to document, explore, and examine the beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of St. Mary's teachers and administrators who have witnessed the development and growth of inclusive education at a Catholic Elementary School in California. This research proved significant because it produced new knowledge that can be used to inform future practices and curriculum development with an eye toward improvement. The strength of this research is that it searched for meaning in a naturalistic setting and provided a snapshot of how teachers perceive and experience students with disabilities at a Catholic Elementary School in California.

By exploring "the lived experiences of real people in real settings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7) and by focusing on participants' perspectives, this study documented what is happening now at St. Mary's School. Additionally, this study aimed to:

1. shed light on the current state of inclusive practices in Catholic elementary schools in Los Angeles;

2. provide important, larger contextual data to those at the Archdiocesan level about the implementation of inclusion initiatives;

3. provide important data that Catholic school administrators need to know about implementing similar inclusive practices at their school sites; and

4. provide insight into the teacher training necessary for successful Catholic school inclusion.

Qualitative Case Study Research: Rationale

A qualitative case study methodology best suited this inquiry because the research questions dictated the need to search for meaning in a naturalistic setting (Berg, 2004). Qualitative research, which case studies can be, is a method of inquiry appropriated in many different academic disciplines, traditionally in the social sciences, but also in market research and other contexts (Hatch, 2002).

Rather than "counting things" in order to make sense of them as in quantitative research, qualitative case study research explores the essence of a thing, and "refers to the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (Berg, 2004, p. 3). Qualitative case study research and researchers aim to gather an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern such behavior. The qualitative method investigates the "why" and "how" of decision making, not just the what, where, and when. Since the ultimate goal of this research was one of social betterment, the qualitative method was the best choice for exploring the proposed research questions at hand.

Since "our ability to learn ethnographically is an extension of what every human must do, that is, learn the meanings, norms, [and] patterns of a way of life" (Hymes, 1982, p. 29) a qualitative case study inquiry best served this investigation and these types of research questions. Using qualitative case study research, which has a goal of "improving the rationality and justice of [a]…social or educational practice" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1987, p. 6) I gauged and

explored the experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of teachers at St. Mary's School, where one of few Catholic inclusive education initiatives is in place.

Case Study Methodology: Rationale

The case study methodology was most effective for this type of inquiry because this study aimed to conduct an in-depth investigation, so as to make meaning of a specific, single-unit, present-day program within a bounded system (Merriam, 2002). The case study methodology was also the most effective and direct way of gathering valid data in this instance because the study of teachers' experiences and beliefs about disability and inclusive education "has a finite quality about it either in terms of time (the evolution or history of a particular program), space….and/or components comprising the case" (Merriam, 2002, p. 178). Yin (2009) describes case studies as the preferred method of discovering truth when the focus of the inquiry is contemporary, existing uniquely in one real-life context, and when "the investigator has little control over events" (p. 2).

Case studies are also the best approach to research when "the richness of the phenomenon and the extensiveness of the real-life context" (Yin, 2009, p. 2) must be intensively studied so as to uncover the most important data and other variables of interest. Since St. Mary's is one of only a few schools practicing inclusive education in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and the school community's experience in developing and growing the program is unique, a case study method was the best way to explore and understand how it exists and what it means to its members.

For this purpose, I used the following methods of inquiry: individual, semi-structured interviews with two administrators and teachers; one focus group of teachers who have all taught inclusion students in their general education classrooms at St. Mary's School; document review of *St. Mary's School Faculty, Staff & Student Handbook* as well as the policies for inclusion in the *2010 Elementary Schools' Administrative Handbook for Archdiocese of Los Angeles.* In conducting this research, I hoped to provide valuable information for St. Mary's School as well as knowledge and expertise for schools with similar programs (Mark, Henry, & Julnes, 2000).

In order to do this, it was necessary to take a "slice-of-life" (Hatch, 2002, p. 3) approach, since the challenges of inclusion work are only palpable and definable in those ephemeral moments when participants reveal, with words and actions, what they believe is true. Indeed, the very challenge of understanding how teachers view their students with disabilities was that it was hard to really know and understand what a person is feeling, especially if the people you are studying have the added burden of being a good Catholic teacher who is called to serve all children.

Restatement of Research Questions

Two questions, both related to the philosophy of inclusive education, were used in this case study to investigate the experiences of teachers practicing inclusion in the St. Mary's School community:

1. What are St. Mary's School teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education?

2. What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

The research questions dictated that qualitative case study research would best serve to aid administrators and teachers in planning an agenda for program development, including implementing improvements and visioning for the future, as more students with learning challenges are welcomed into the school's community. The focus of this study was to understand teachers' beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of inclusive education at St. Mary's School and examine their beliefs about disability. Furthermore, the focus of the research was to understand how to improve teacher development in Catholic schools so as to help facilitate inclusive practices in other schools.

Setting: Saint Mary's Elementary School

After much demand by the local west-side neighborhood to open a Catholic elementary school, Monsignor O'Doul built and opened St. Mary's School in the fall of 1947 and placed it under the direction of the Sisters of Kansas. In the following five years, St. Mary's quickly grew to an enrollment of over 700 students, housing two classes per grade at its pinnacle in 1965. Tuition was considered reasonable, even at that time: Enrolling a family of five children cost parents only $15 per month.

In June 1972, after more than a quarter of a century of dedicated service, the Sisters of Kansas withdrew as the sole faculty members at St. Mary's, and under the leadership of Sister Marie, lay staff took over all instruction. In 1980, St. Mary's experienced another change in leadership and Dr. Susan Johnson was appointed principal of the school. Throughout the following two decades, St. Mary's continued to provide an excellent education for its students, with high standards and positive, measurable results. A commonality throughout all of St. Mary's history has been the dedication of its lay staff. Several employees have served the school

for ten years or more, and there have been numerous former students who have returned to St. Mary's to join its faculty or staff.

Under the leadership of Dr. Johnson, St. Mary's developed into a model Catholic learning institution and pioneered many innovative programs, including reduced class sizes for mathematics with a high school Algebra course (1981); a language department offering Spanish to every grade with the goal of attaining fluency by graduation (1988); an advanced library media center and technology curriculum (1997); a guidance office (1999); and a learning center for inclusion (2004).

In 1988, the school expanded to include kindergarten instruction and an after-school care program. St. Mary's has consistently received the maximum accreditation award from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges and the National Catholic Educational Association.

In 2009, Fr. Kinley was installed as the new pastor when Father Paul retired after ten years of service in the parish. Currently, St. Mary's School is one of 214 diocesan and parish elementary schools in Los Angeles, and is governed by the pastor of St. Mary's Parish. Like the majority of Catholic elementary schools, St. Mary's teaches children who range in age from four and one-half to 14 years old, and teaches kindergarten through eighth grade.

The St. Mary's School mission and philosophy has a focused vision for inclusion. Having evolved over a period of 50 years, its most current form is outlined in the most recent Faculty Handbook (2008). It states that St. Mary's School "realizes that the intellect is a gift of God" (p. 3), and through the academic program, the St. Mary's School endeavors to:

1. bring each student to the realization that he/she must grow in knowledge in order to find his/her place and to sustain himself/herself in the changing world of today;

2. provide a climate wherein each child may grow creatively according to his/her own unique skills; and

3. instill a foundation of academic excellence in such a way that will enable the student to meet with success in secondary education as well as participate in continuing education.

Demographics

St. Mary's School is located in a middle-to upper-middle class, predominantly Caucasian community. In 2011-2012, the school served 168 families, and all but 4% of those families list their primary language as English. The ethnic breakdown of the school is as follows: 42 % Caucasian, 28 % Hispanic/Latino, 22 % African-American, 5 % Filipino, and 3% Asian.

A student's admission to St. Mary's School is approved on an individual basis by the pastor and principal. A student's admission is based on several criteria, including their family's ongoing participation in St. Mary's Parish, as parishioners are given first priority in school placement. When there is space available, families who live outside of the parish and non-Catholic families are invited to join the school community. While there are slight fluctuations from year to year, enrollment is considered stable (St. Mary's School, 2009).

In the 2011-2012 academic year, the average number of males per year was 122 and the average number of females was 118. Therefore, the ratio of boys to girls was slightly higher than 1:1.

Tuition for the school is paid directly to the school by parents and is $4,655.00 per year. Additional curriculum and fundraising fees break down as follows: a $500.00 curriculum fee, a $300.00 fundraising fee, and 25 mandatory volunteer hours at the school or its monetary equivalent, paid at $15.00 per hour ($375.00). Preference for enrollment is given to parishioners

of St. Mary's Church, who agree to pay $300.00 to the church over the academic year. Those not wishing to join the parish are charged the "out-of-parish" rate of $6,100.00 plus the above-mentioned fees (St. Mary's School, 2010).

St. Mary's School is governed by St. Mary's Parish and is under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. St. Mary's School enrollment is approximately 240 students, averaging 24 students per classroom. The majority (68%) of the students come from the local, middle-class neighborhood area, and are members of St. Mary's Parish.

The St. Mary's School facilities are approximately 55 years old, and consist of two buildings. The south building houses grades junior kindergarten through four, the school's business office, a technology lab and library, a learning center/guidance office, and the principal's office. The north building or junior high building houses grades five through eight on top of the school's auditorium. St. Mary's School operates on a traditional academic school calendar, which begins the school year in September after Labor Day and ends the second week in June.

Participants and Selection Criteria

St. Mary's School was chosen as the research site using a convenient and purposeful sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling is used when a densely information-rich case (Patton, 2002) is chosen for in-depth study. Primarily, the reason for choosing St. Mary's School for this case study was the fact that I worked at the school for nine years and was personally instrumental in influencing and starting the program. In addition, for five years I was the inclusion director at the school, and personally taught inclusion students, helped customize their individualized academic learning plans, and participated in the training of new teachers. Secondarily, there are

fewer than five elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles that have had inclusion

programs and/or inclusive missions at their schools that are not in "their infancy…for more than

two years," and so the inquiry and research questions would be most fully explored at this

specific school site.

Hatch (2002) states that other reasons to choose a context for research would be its,

"accessibility, feasibility, and familiarity" (p. 44). Considering the fact that St. Mary's is one of

five elementary Catholic inclusion programs in Los Angeles, that I used to run the school

program, and that I have worked hard at nurturing and maintaining good relationships with both

the new administration and teachers at the school, this made the chosen site one which would

answer the research questions in a truthful, deep, and valid way, in my opinion.

All participants in this study had either interacted with or taught students who had

learning challenges at St. Mary's School. The total number of participants for this study was 18.

Of that number, 11 (all teachers) participated in the focus group and 7 (five teachers and two

administrators) participated in semi-structured interviews. All of these participants were

voluntary and in a position of either knowing or teaching inclusion students in general education

classrooms.

The data collected was limited to the St. Mary's teachers and to the past and present

principals. Of the five teachers participating in the interviews, three were Caucasian and two

Latina, and were middle class. The two principals participating in this study were Caucasian,

one male, and one female, and both were middle class. As children, all participants in this study

attended Catholic elementary schools.

Methods of Data Collection

This study used three qualitative methods of data collection to answer the research questions: in-depth, semi-structured interviews; one focus group; and analysis of documents. This varied approach of data collection served to "validate and clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443), while investigating the academic and social experiences of inclusion participants. The interviews and focus group for this study explored and asked questions related to the following research questions:

1. What are St. Mary's School teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education?

2. What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education at the school?

These questions were designed to understand teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education, as well as shed light on what types of training and professional development is helpful and/or necessary for Catholic teachers in inclusive settings.

After approval was secured from the Institutional Review Board (IRB), an invitation was sent out to all current St. Mary's faculty and administration to gauge interest in this study. The invitation had two parts, asking potential participants if they would like to participate in 1) a one-on-one interview and 2) a focus group. It was made clear in the invitation that recipients could choose to participate in either an interview or focus group. From those who responded that they would like to participate, five teachers were randomly chosen to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Semi-structured interviews.

An interview is a unique type of conversation that is led by a researcher in an attempt to get meaningful, question-based information from a participant. Interviews are a qualitative method of inquiry that help researchers explore participants' experiences of events, helping find answers to questions that would otherwise be hidden from discovery because it is not a part of something that can be understood simply by direct observation (Hatch 2002). Patton (2002) states that the purpose of interviewing is to "allow [the researcher] into the other person's perspective, [assuming] that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 341).

Although the quality of the information obtained during an interview depends on the art and ability of the researcher (Patton, 2002; Rubin and Rubin, 1995), interviews are a highly effective way to "uncover meaning structures that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds" (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). Essentially, there are different types of interviews all used for gathering specific types of data, recording different types of experiences, or for getting at the core meaning of participants' feelings, thoughts, or beliefs (Hatch, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Interviews for qualitative case studies come in several different types and require different procedures. These include, but are not limited to, the following: narrative, focused, structured, semi-structured, and open-ended (Flick, 2002; Hatch, 2002; Silverman, 2010).

Due to the fact that the main purpose of the interviews for this study was to capture the true, sensitive, and at times intimate feelings of what teachers believe about disability and how they perceive their students with disabilities, semi-structured interviews were used. When semi-structured interviewing is used to collect data, it can be used in a range of ways: A small number

of participants can be interviewed a series of times or many participants can be interviewed only once at great length (Hatch, 2002).

This type of method of interviewing seeks to accomplish two goals: 1) to use structure in order to explore specific themes and 2) to allow for the flexibility needed to search for answers while allowing for the exploration of views and feelings not anticipated. I feel it will be important to use the semi-structured format mainly because it will provide participants with a point of entry for talking about a taboo topic while still allowing them freedom of expression.

The choice to use semi-structured questions for the interviews was dictated by the nature of the research questions. The research questions, which deal with experiences, beliefs, and perceptions, are primarily "cultural" (Hatch, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 2005), and require the type of active listening necessary to capture the true meaning of the participants' words and actions. In this same vein, care was taken to allow participants to express themselves freely; especially teachers who may feel judged when they reveal their true feelings related to children with disabilities. Rapid-fire questions, therefore, would not serve to gather the best type of information (Rubin & Rubin, 2005) since the wealth of the information will be found in the direction the participants' answers take this researcher after leading questions are asked. This too is a reason why a semi-structured approach was used, so that the researcher could be "open to following the leads of informants and probing into areas that arise during interview interactions" (Hatch, 2002, p. 94).

Focus groups.

A focus group is a type of interview that is designed to explore questions together in small groups, wherein a researcher can "strive to learn through discussion about conscious,

semiconscious, and unconscious psychological and socio-cultural characteristics and processes among various groups" (Berg, 2004, p. 123). Focus group methodology uses a specifically chosen group of people to informally discuss particular questions or issues, and is led by the researcher who acts both as moderator and data collector, is meant to be more informal than the one-to-one interview (Hatch, 2002; Wilkinson, 2004).

The focus group, then, is particularly useful when there is a need to explore sensitive subject matter, since its structure facilitates the sparking of ideas between people, leading participants in a group in directions they may not have discovered on their own (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The informal focus group atmosphere "is intended to encourage subjects to speak freely and completely about behaviors, attitudes, and opinions they possess" (Berg, 2004, p. 123). The focus group interview structure, in this study, had the potential to peel back the complex layers of hidden feelings that teachers may or may not have had about disability and inclusive education at St. Mary's.

There are many advantages to focus group interviewing, including the fact that it provides a highly flexible, creative, and safe place for participants to reveal their true thoughts and feelings. Focus group interviewing can do this, while simultaneously generating a large amount of authentically produced data at one time (Berg, 2004; Hatch, 2002). This can be very helpful since it not only gives the researcher quick results in a short amount of time, but sometimes "a totally different understanding of a problem emerges from the group discussion" (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 140) that would otherwise remain hidden.

Document analysis.

In a very different way than individual and focus group interviewing, document analysis too offers researchers "insight into participants' lives" (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 117). For this research specifically, it was difficult to answer the research questions for this study without fully understanding and examining documents regarding archdiocesan policy for inclusion in the Los Angeles region, or the St. Mary's Parent/Faculty Handbooks, since these documents directly affect how teachers function with their students.

Data analysis was particularly important in the true investigation of St. Mary's for several reasons, but mainly because it is contemporary research in a highly literate environment in which "documents are written, read, stored, and circulated" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 56). In the case of inclusive education at St. Mary's, many teachers, administrators, and staff not only participated in the writing of the school's inclusive mission and philosophy but also participated in the constant dissemination of written materials about inclusive education to parents in order to help everyone understand what the program was about and what it could and could not offer students. The analysis of these documents therefore provided vital information about how the organization views the teaching of disabled students and provided an understanding of how inclusive education functions daily, as well as how the school "works and how people work with/in them" (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 57).

Using document analysis as well as interviews and focus group interviewing, data can be drawn from different contexts, and I was able to "triangulate the 'true' state of affairs [at St. Mary's School] by examining where the different data intersect" (Silverman, 2010, p. 133).

Positionality and Reflexivity: Role as Principle Researcher

I am originally from Canada and came to the United States in 1996 to attend graduate school. As a child, I attended a fully inclusive Catholic elementary and high school which was situated in a middle-class, Caucasian, bilingual community. I am fluent in French and in English and grew up in a bilingual home. While I did not have any close family members other than one second cousin with special needs, I was deeply influenced by my Catholic, all-inclusive school environment which was dedicated to serving all children regardless of their ability. In Canada, as a matter of federal and provincial law, Catholic schools are given funds for special education.

In my particular school, educating Catholic children with special needs was tied strongly to the right to life issue that is definitely a core belief of the Catholic faith. With these situations in place, as well as the fact that there were only two classes per grade, I was privy to the type of interactions that many mainstream students never experience. During my time in elementary school, I was put in the position of mentoring the following types of children: those with visual impairments and who were deaf; those with cognitive difficulties; and those with physical limitations. It never struck me growing up that this was neither a usual nor a normal way to go to school. On the contrary, it felt very empowering and allowed me, at a very young age, to feel compassion, patience, and to give of myself to others.

For nine years, I worked at St. Mary's School and helped to create an inclusion program as well as train teachers to practice inclusion in a general education setting. This definitely makes me an "insider" to a large extent. During my tenure at St. Mary's, I worked as a teacher and administrator in a collaborative manner with the faculty, staff, parents, and students, as well as was part of the community as a parishioner at St. Mary's Church. In that role, I helped design and implement curriculum changes based not only on my expertise as an inclusive teacher but on

the learning challenges that were brought to me by the parents and students for whom the school functioned.

While I initially participated as an insider in the growth of inclusive education at St. Mary's, I am now an outsider looking in. The decision to leave St. Mary's was a very difficult one to make because it came on the heels of being rejected as the new principal of St. Mary's. While I was given many reasons why I was not chosen, I felt hurt and betrayed by an institution and individuals to whom I had given almost 10 years of my devoted service. Even when I was in the hospital, off payroll, caring for my daughter during chemotherapy, I stayed in constant daily contact with the school to ensure the success of my students and of the programs I created. In the pit of my stomach, I suspected that the presence of disabled students and/or inclusive education bothered a lot of parents of "general education" students, many of whom were on the search committee board for the new principal. Indeed, many of the questions I was asked in regard to my potential leadership of St. Mary's revolved around the cost of maintaining "special programs" such as inclusion.

Naturally, I was devastated when I learned another person had been chosen to lead the school. Although I was urged to stay so that the school would not lose two administrators at once, I felt compelled to find my own school to lead. I found a new position in only three weeks, and I am extremely fulfilled, realizing in retrospect that it was one of the best things that could have happened to me at this point in my career.

Still, I cannot deny that my study of inclusive education at St. Mary's did not bring with it strong emotions on my part since change is always brought with new leadership, and I suspect much has changed since I left. The biases and pre-assumptions that I brought to this study were

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as follows: 1) since there is no longer one teacher who works to coordinate inclusion at the teaching level for the school, I suspected that there was less of a support system in place for teachers with inclusion students in their general education classroom, 2) since there were fewer faculty on staff with training on how to accommodate inclusion students, St. Mary's would either have problems servicing inclusion students and/or stop admitting them, even though their mission statement remains unchanged, 3) since I spent a great deal of my time helping teachers in the classroom with inclusion students, and supporting them in meetings with these students' parents, I expected teachers' views of inclusion students to be affected negatively unless support in these areas was still being given.

Since I had already left St. Mary's School to become the principal of another elementary school in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, I no longer had insider knowledge of the day-to-day operations of inclusion, such as 1) what accommodations and/or modifications teachers were making in the classrooms, 2) how disabled children were initially identified, and 3) what procedures and services were in place for "included" students. While I am still familiar with over 80% of the students participating in current program, I am no longer connected to the community on a daily basis. Still, with the exception of one new teacher, the teachers involved in providing an inclusive education for their students remained the same, since my role at the end of the previous year was key in accepting new students for the next academic school year. By recognizing and acknowledging my position as both an insider and outsider as a researcher, I have been able to strengthen the validity of the study of teachers' beliefs and experiences of inclusion at St. Mary's School.

The challenge of this study was that as co-creator and co-designer of what constitutes inclusive education at St. Mary's School, I was to some degree also the subject of this inquiry. Although technically I was St. Mary's inclusion director until July 31, 2010, official transition of all of my duties occurred on June 18, 2010, and there was no longer an inclusion director for the school's program.

However, since this study was ontological, the complex interplay of relationships that existed in St. Mary's one-classroom-per-grade Catholic elementary school framework could be dealt with expertly, and in this capacity, my involvement could be seen as an asset. By this, I mean that I am one of few people who can both explain how inclusion has worked at St. Mary's and interpret the meaning of what participants say they believe and are experiencing in regards to meeting all learners where they need to be met in their classroom. This fluid relationship with and familiarity to the subject and participants is crucial in qualitative case study research since, epistemologically speaking, what is known and found to be true about inclusion at St. Mary's is being gauged by peoples' words, opinions, and actions, and not by academic gain scores or other quantifiable terms (Hatch, 2002, p. 2).

Nevertheless, although my past positions at St. Mary's were advantageous in some respects, it does not negate the fact that my past relationship brought with it some unique challenges. For example, my relationship with the school did not guarantee that subjects would tell me the truth, and St. Mary's staff and faculty are well aware that a great deal of what is currently happening in terms of inclusive education was of my own personal design. Difficult too could have been the fact that subjects may have felt compelled to tell me what they thought I wanted them to say, since I am now a principal and no longer their peer. Lastly, I had to keep in

mind that since I have had problems in the past with teachers telling me the truth about their real feelings with regard to children with learning disabilities that this could also occur during my research. In fact, I needed to be aware that at any time, subjects may have been either distorting the truth or in fact, I may have been blind to seeing a variety of possible causes/effects of the problem/questions that were being investigated.

Therefore, as the former assistant principal, inclusion director, and teacher at St. Mary's School, I was faced with the reality of my complex role in this study. But, this is another reason why case study research is well suited to this particular situation: Insider knowledge and participation is required since it is "best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation" (Herr & Anderson, 2005, p. 4). While attempting to present the voices of those being studied, I was aware that the ethics of my conduct were of vital importance, and that my research required the informed consent of subjects, as well as approval of the IRB.

Research Study Procedures

All participants in this study were given an introductory letter (see Appendix A) stating:

1. the purpose and duration of research activities;

2. a description of any foreseeable risks;

3. a description of any expected benefits;

4. an explanation of who to contact for answers to pertinent questions about the research;

5. a statement that participation was voluntary, and refusal to participate or withdraw would involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which the subject is otherwise entitled; and

6. that information was anonymous and confidential.

Data Analysis Procedures

Before being analyzed, the narrative data was screened for possible errors involved in the process of its recording and transcribing, and receiving and organizing forms. The procedure included the sorting of date by subject and type, the careful reading and re-reading of data until themes related to the research questions emerged, the coding of data once it was organized, and the formation of matrices that illustrated major themes (Hatch, 2002, p. 179).

Validity and Reliability in Qualitative Case Study Research

Qualitative case study research, by nature, is related to how well an "explanation fits [a] description" (Janesick 2000, p. 393). Hatch (2002) outlines the following three key elements that are necessary to ensure validity in a qualitative study: 1) using multiple sources of evidence from which to extract meaning, 2) establishing a free-flowing chain of evidence, and 3) having informants review drafts of the study or report to verify that what is being reported is true. Similarly, Guba & Lincoln (1989) hold that validity in qualitative research lies in the authenticity and consistency of the perception of reality, and therefore look to the following criteria to secure the validity and reliability in a study: 1) there is credibility, from the perspective of the participant, 2) results are transferable to other, similar contexts, 3) there is dependability, which means that the researcher is wholly responsible to describing the exact circumstances and

changing variables that occur in the study, and 4) procedures must be extremely well-documented throughout the different stages of the study so that confirmability is possible.

Since this was a study of Catholic education, validity was be checked against a shared understanding of the teachings of the Catholic Church that have been outlined, in which the mission and philosophy of Catholic schools is to "teach as Jesus would" and to include all students who wish to experience a Catholic education.

Findings for this case study were analyzed using inductive analysis. Hatch (2002) states that inductive analysis and thinking "proceeds from the specific to the general" (p. 161) and that understanding in this method of inquiry is revealed when specific data leads the researcher to discover important themes and patterns emerging organically from the whole, uncovering meaning within a group of people. Inductive analysis allows the researcher to discover meaning by using large sets of data that are gathered using a broad focus. After gathering data, the researcher looks for meaningful patterns by way of discovering links or connections between specific elements. Hatch identifies the nine different stages of inductive analysis as follows:

1. Read the data and indentify frames of analysis

2. Create domains based on semantic relationships discovered within frames of analysis

3. Identify salient domains, assign them a code, and then put other points aside

4. Reread data, constantly refining salient domains, while keeping a record of where relationships are found in the data

5. Decide if domains are either supported or not supported by the data and search the data for examples that either do not fit with or run counter to the relationships in your domains

6. Complete an analysis within domains

7. Search for themes across domains

8. Create a master outline expressing relationships within and among domains

9. Select data excerpts to support the elements of your outline. (p. 162)

This process of inductive analysis provides an organized and succinct approach to data interpretation that allows for authentic results and findings to be reported.

I synthesized and triangulated data collected from semi-structured interviews, a focus group, and document analysis using peer debriefing to check the validity of the study. Peer review is used to help the researcher gain perspective as well as uncover or discover hidden biases and assumptions that have been taken for granted during the research process. Lincoln & Guba (1985) describe the peer debriefing process as "exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (p. 308). Engaging in peer debriefing will not only help the researcher test emerging themes but also serve to clarify the researcher's positionality with regard to the data being gathered and the analysis that is being formed.

For the purpose of this case study research, authenticity was attained when the voices most indicative and diverse in the group were included, acknowledged, and heard. Through the careful consideration and construction of the research questions, along with the detailed notation and codification of data, I was able to ensure that the most authentic experience is documented and analyzed.

Timeline

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Submission to the Loyola Marymount IRB occurred in July 2011. When IRB approval was secured, I began my research. Since all interviews could be conducted outside of school hours and only occurred once, the majority of interviews were completed in August 2011, and continued over a period of four months. Similarly, the one focus group (St. Mary's School teachers), occurring once, was completed in September 2011 when teachers were back full time at work. I made myself available for clarification from the participants, further insight into the research questions, and follow-ups through November 2011.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the development of this research study, describing its design, procedures, and basic methodology. This case study research, which was ontological in nature and used a lens of grounded theory, aimed to help me to interpret participants' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of inclusive education at St. Mary's School, with a goal of better understanding the resistance that exists. For the purpose of this type of discovery, I used semi-structured interviews, a focus group and document analysis to peel back the layers of meaning that hide the crux of successes and challenges with inclusive education at St. Mary's School.

Chapter Four, the research findings, follows next. Chapter Four details the results and recounts the main findings from the case study research conducted at St. Mary's School. This chapter also organizes the research data while providing explanations of how the data was analyzed. The results of Chapter Four highlights and organizes key relationships, patterns, trends, expected and unexpected results, and outcomes that were generated by the case study inquiry into St. Mary's teachers' experiences of disability and the school's inclusive approach to

education. Chapter Four synthesizes the main points that arose from the data analysis after

inquiry into the research questions was concluded.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Restatement of Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this case study is to ascertain and understand teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of disability and inclusive education in one Catholic Elementary School in California. By conducting research that explored "the lived experiences of real people in real settings" (Hatch, 2002, p. 7), I hope to give Catholic teachers an opportunity to tell their stories about their inclusive education program and express their feelings about disabilities in a way that would otherwise not be possible.

For this qualitative case study, five teachers and two administrators participated in individual interviews. Additionally, one focus group comprised of eleven teachers was convened, and documents were reviewed to investigate and analyze teachers' perceptions and experiences of inclusive education and disability in a Catholic school in Los Angeles. By using ableism/disability studies as a framework, an attempt was made to ascertain how inclusion is received and accepted in one of the few inclusion programs in a Catholic school in Los Angeles, and to document the first-hand experiences of teachers and their feelings of disability within the context of a Catholic school setting. By focusing on participants' perspectives, this study documents what is happening now at St. Mary's School.

Overall, this research hoped to clarify the vision and concept that inclusive education in Catholic schools is not only beneficial to all Catholic school community members, but that its practice reflects an authentic understanding of Catholic identity within Catholic learning

communities. To this end, this chapter is organized into eight sections that together form the findings for this case study that respond to two research questions.

The first section describes the data collection process as well as provides a detailed background description of St. Mary's School, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles's policies for inclusion, and the institutional development of St. Mary's inclusion program. Section two provides details about the teachers and administrators who were the study participants. The third section organizes and reduces the data collected from documents and from participants, beginning the discussion of what was unveiled during the course of conducting this case study.

The following sections explore the themes discovered after the data analysis was complete. Section four reveals the theme of Inclusion and Catholic Faith and discusses what participants revealed about inclusion in relation to their Catholic faith. The fifth section, the theme of Inclusion as "Other" Education, highlights the complex beliefs, perceptions, and relationship teachers and administrators have to students with disabilities in regard to issues of time, fairness, and equity.

Section six, the theme of support and acceptance of inclusion, provides evidence related to what is in place that makes inclusive education work at St. Mary's, and how they believe acceptance of inclusion is fostered in the school community. The seventh section presents data related to theme of quality technical teacher training that highlights the experiential aspect explored through interview and focus group questioning.

The final two sections, section eight and nine, form the conclusion of this chapter, first declaring my predisposed expectations of this research to the reader. I believe this part of the narrative needed to be divulged simply because I have been living for years with the idea of

Catholic inclusion and helped form my identity as both an educator and as a parent. I found it necessary to divulge and share with the reader what I expected to find at St. Mary's School and how I had been enlightened by what I actually did find once the research was completed. Lastly, chapter four culminates with a summary, introducing remaining key discussions points intended for development in chapter five.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research questions for this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature of teachers' perceptions and resistance to teaching disabled students in general education classrooms and ableism in schools. The research questions were also developed based on my own professional experience as a teacher, inclusion director, and administrator of Catholic schools in Los Angeles, and also on the issues I experienced and witnessed at St. Mary's School since the program was created. The research questions were:

1. What are St. Mary's School teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about disability and inclusive education?

2. What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

Organization of Data Analysis

Five main themes emerged after the data was collected, and after key relationships, patterns, and expected and unexpected results were analyzed and explored. They are:

1. inclusion and Catholic faith;

2. time, fairness, and equity;

3. inclusion as "other": Catholic school is only for some students;

4. quality technical teacher training; and

5. support and acceptance of inclusion

These findings are explored in depth following the description of the process of collecting data. Similarly, the story and subsequent data behind these findings are revealed and organized chronologically.

The Process of Collecting Data

St. Mary's School

This case study research was conducted at St. Mary's School that is located in Los Angeles in a middle-class neighborhood. The school is on a traditional 180-day academic calendar. For the last 55 years, it has provided a first through eighth-grade Catholic education to the community and kindergarten since 1993 (St. Mary's School, 2006).

St. Mary's School was chosen as the research site because it provided a unique opportunity to answer the two research questions for this study for two main reasons. First, the school has worked for the past six years at establishing one of the few publicized inclusive education programs in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles as well taken specific steps toward building an inclusive school. For example, it has collectively rewritten the school's mission, bringing inclusion specialists into the school for in-service teacher training, documenting/advertising the inclusion program on St. Mary's website, publishing monthly parent letters, advertising in local newspapers, and making the inclusive mission explicitly known during the interview process for potential new teachers and incoming students.

Second, I had access to the site and school documents since I had previously worked at the school for nine years in the capacity of teacher, assistant principal, and Director of Inclusive

Education. Also, when I realized that I would be leaving St. Mary's School to take a principal position at another school, I took the opportunity at a Transfer of Information meeting at St. Mary's School (May 2010) and a Regional Principals' meeting (August 2010) to acquaint myself with Mr. Brown, the new principal, and to describe in detail the purpose of my research to him. As a result of our discussions, the new principal told me he thought my research was beneficial and that the St. Mary's community would be happy to participate in my research study. The support of the leader of St. Mary's School for my research was crucial since school documents, as well as in-depth interviewing of teachers and the administration, served as the basis for my inquiry into the research questions.

The Process of Conducting Research

After securing formal permission from St. Mary's administration and Loyola Marymount University's Institutional Research Board's approval in August of 2011 to conduct research at St. Mary's School, I wrote an email to all St. Mary's teachers outlining the purpose and scope of my research involving Catholic school teachers and their experiences, beliefs, and perceptions of inclusive education. In the content of the emails, I invited all teachers who were interested to participate in either an individual interview or a focus group. I explained that those participating in the individual interview would be interviewed for 60 to 120 minutes and that an additional, shorter interview may be necessary for follow-up questioning. I also explained that the focus group interview would be approximately two to two and one half hours.

I also took special care in stating in the email that all participants would remain anonymous. Given the nature of the study (investigating teachers' thoughts about inclusive education and students with challenges) I tried to be particularly sensitive to the fact that

Catholic teachers may be wary of revealing their true thoughts for three reasons, 1) I was asking teachers to reveal personal feelings about their current work environment and I did not want them to feel their jobs were threatened, 2) I was asking Catholic teachers to talk about their beliefs about disability, and being Catholic, they may be reticent to say anything that went against the teachings of the Catholic church and 3) teachers may be afraid of future repercussions (from the Archdiocese or school community) if they were connected with any of their personal statements.

As I was conducting both individual and focus group interviews at a school whose faculty body was comprised of 18 teachers, my goal was to have as much participation from the faculty in any capacity as I could to ensure truthful data that could be easily triangulated and to strengthen the reliability and validity of my research (Hatch, 2002).

The response to my email to join the study was slow. This concerned me since I needed to interview as many people as possible within a short time frame. I was unsure whether the lack of response indicated that teachers were busy (my email was sent during the first week of school) or that teachers did not want to share their feelings and experiences about inclusive education given the potentially taboo nature of the subject.

Two weeks after my initial email, I decided to be more aggressive about recruiting participants and emailed teachers individually, starting with the teachers who I had worked with in the past. When I emailed each teacher personally, they responded immediately. What was notable was that the participants all expressed concern over how much time was involved in participating in the study and wanted to know if it would be possible to be interviewed during their prep-periods on campus since they were busy tutoring or coaching teams after school.

In late September, I began selecting five teachers (four female and one male) to be interviewed and scheduled individual times to meet with them on the school campus both during and after school hours. The participants were selected using convenient and purposive sampling using the following criteria: they were voluntary participants; they were currently teaching or had taught inclusion students over the last twelve months in general education classrooms at St. Mary's; they taught inclusion students in their classrooms for 30 or more hours per week.

I also had a great deal of response to participate in the focus group interview, and coordinated a time in late November to conduct that focus group on a Friday afternoon at the school. This was the most convenient time for the teachers who wanted to participate to meet since Friday afternoons at 1:00 p.m. is usually when St. Mary's faculty convene for their weekly meeting. Even though the focus group was scheduled during the regular faculty meeting time, it was not made mandatory for the teachers to attend: only those teachers wanting to participate in the focus group needed to be there. The length of the focus group was two hours and three minutes. During this time participants' voices were audio-taped as they answered prewritten and impromptu questions that were based on their experiences as they related to inclusive education at St. Mary's School.

After all of the semi-structured interviews and focus group were completed, I listened to the recordings twice and began to transcribe them. Simultaneously, I scheduled additional time to re-interview four of the participants since I felt I was still missing data relating to teachers' instruction of inclusion students and fostering acceptance of St. Mary's inclusion program. Due to lack of time, I asked my sister who is an editor, to help me with the transcription process while I finished interviewing participants and listening to and transcribing that new audio data.

Trustworthiness

Using document analysis as well as semi-structured individual interviews and focus group interviewing, I was able to examine what was currently happening at St. Mary's School in their inclusion program. My goal for this case study was to be mindful of the need for my research to be credible by triangulating data to reveal the "true state of affairs [at St. Mary's School] by examining where the different data intersect" (Silverman, 2010, p. 133).

In my efforts to prove transferability and dependability of my findings, I paid particular attention to systematically and meticulously describing in detail not only the phenomenon of what is actually happening in St. Mary's inclusion program today but from the point from which it evolved, and from a procedural point of view of what the Archdiocese of Los Angeles reports should be happening for students participating in inclusive education. I did this for three reasons. The first was because I was conscious of my previous role and involvement with the school and with the Los Angeles Catholic school system and I did not want it to taint my results, and second, I understood that credibility is strongly tied with evidencing the contextual state of the research in every aspect as possible. Third, by providing sufficient and informative detail about the context for this research, other researchers will be able to relate my findings to another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I also took many steps in demonstrating that findings emerged from data and not from my predisposed ideas about what I would find now that I am no longer at St. Mary's School. This was a crucial point for me since halfway through my research and again during the analysis phase I was made aware through peer-debriefing sessions that the ideas of ableism were factoring too heavily into my ideas about what was emerging from the data I had collected. In an

effort to ensure that my final analysis was not biased in this way, I recoded the data in entirety in order for a more truthful and organic reading of the themes to materialize.

Coded Data

I used inductive analysis to code data for the purpose of understanding what was discoverable and true about what I uncovered during the research process. After undergoing a peer review process with my dissertation Chair and with two colleagues, I discovered hidden biases and assumptions in the research and determined that my first efforts at coding the data were too biased and more typographical than inductive. Therefore, I re-read the transcription line by line and segmented the data into meaningful, unrefined units. I re-coded these units using key words as well as color-coded them with a highlighter for easy, visual reference.

Next, I proceeded to relate and combine the above key words into smaller units of meaning or categories. Those categories were: Inclusion and Catholic Faith; Time, Fairness, and Equity; Inclusion as "Other": Catholic School is Only for Some Students; Quality Technical Teacher Training, and Support and Acceptance of Inclusion. Finally, once I began organizing the above categories, they naturally divided themselves down into their final themes that I discuss in detail later in this chapter.

<h3 style="text-align:center">Inclusion and the STEP/MAP Process in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles</h3>

In order to fully understand how inclusive education worked at St. Mary's School, it was important to review archdiocesan documents in an attempt to thoroughly grasp what directives and/or policies are in place to help guide inclusion decisions at the school level. It is important to note that the inclusion program at St. Mary's School began in January, 2006, before the

STEP/MAP system was conceived, hence, St. Mary's inclusion program used other means at determining students' needs, which is discussed in the following section.

The Elementary and Secondary Schools Administrative Handbook for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles (2010), states that the mission for Catholic schools and its educators is to teach as Jesus did. That means that Catholic educators are, "called to celebrate the unique gifts of each child, which are a reflection of God's love" (p. 10). To this end, school administrators and teachers, in partnership with parents, develop a STEP and MAP for students with disabilities who are in need of support to help facilitate participation in the curriculum.

It is made clear in the School Administrative Handbook (2010) that while Catholic schools do not discriminate against students with special needs, they do not always have a full-range of appropriate services for them, and acceptance of students with disabilities is dependent upon whether or not a specific school can meet a child's social, emotional, and physical needs. When a child with special needs is accepted to a Catholic school, there is a definite process through which accommodations are made:

Through the mission of the Archdiocese, schools strive to serve children with varied learning needs. All educators in Archdiocesan schools follow "Directions for the Inclusion Process in Catholic Schools: Support Team Education Plan Process (STEP) and Minor Adjustment Plan Process (MAP)." Parents or guardians who feel that their student may need a minor adjustment to enable him or her to participate in the general education curriculum of the school should consult the student's teacher and principal to determine how best to meet the student's needs. Parents or guardians may request the "Disability Complaint Form" from the principal to address unresolved issues (p. 11).

When a student is first indentified to a Catholic school administrator as having a disability, STEP is begun for a student. In the first stages of a STEP, teachers, educational specialists, parents work together gathering the following information; a student's current performance levels, including class work, standardized test scores, disciplinary actions, attendance records, psycho-educational assessments and any other relevant information meant to inform the creation of a classroom support document for a student's teacher. There are several stages of STEP, which are outlined following an explanation of the MAP process.

A MAP is created when the STEP process has been completed, a child is found to have a disability, and parents believe STEP has not been successful in accommodating their child. The goal of MAP is to provide a student with a minor adjustment to aid them in accessing a school's curriculum. Unlike the forms for STEP, MAP documents are legal documents related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and therefore cannot be changed. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (1973) is a federal, non-discrimination statute that says:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States, shall, solely by reason of his or her disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.

Under Section 504, the definition of a disability relates to a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity such as learning, walking, speaking, and eating for example.

The Department of Catholic Schools provides the following explanation about when a school must use a MAP in lieu of STEP:

If the parent disagrees with the outcome of the STEP process and if the information gathered during the STEP process provides evidence that a student has a disability, the parent may request a Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. [Since] such programs as the Federal lunch program may create a duty under Section 504, the Archdiocese of [Los Angeles] is requiring all schools to comply with [the] MAP process under Section 504. (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2009, p. 12).

The process and resources for Catholic school administrators to develop a STEP/MAP plan for a child with disabilities is clearly laid out and detailed in a STEP/MAP chart (see Appendix B), along with classroom log forms, questionnaires, teacher strategy checklists, and progress logs. Catholic school administrators and teachers developing plans for children with special needs at their school site are directed by the Department of Catholic Schools (DCS) and their policies to follow a sequential STEP/MAP process in lieu of following public school recommendations and/or accommodations and/or modifications which include Individual Education Plans (IEP), Section 504 plans, or Private School Plans (PSP) devised by public school professionals.

The STEP/MAP process begins for a child when either, "parents or guardians who feel that their student may need a minor adjustment to enable him or her to participate in the general education curriculum of the school should consult the student's teacher and principal to determine how best to meet the student's needs" (p. 10) or a teacher identifies an ongoing need in the classroom for a student, and reports that need to the school principal. From that point, teachers are in charge of, "keeping a record of classroom strategies and supports he or she has

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implemented to help the child" (p. 11) until a child no longer needs the support, graduates, or leaves the school.

The STEP/MAP process is meant to serve as a systematic guide for Catholic administrators and school personnel to determine adequate support needed for students with a disability that is affecting their learning on a regular basis. The process is as follows:

1. A teacher or administrator identifies that a student is struggling in the classroom and classroom support for a child is offered to his/her parent. At this time, the teacher begins a classroom log in order to discover what techniques/strategies would work best. A child's teacher records the following when a specific classroom intervention is put into place; date of strategy, classroom environment, daily lessons/instruction, assignments or homework, behavior support, assessments/evaluations, additional supports, results/affect (positive or negative).

2. Team referral occurs if/when classroom support offered in Step 1 does not seem sufficient to help inclusion student. The support team is made up of teachers, administrators, and parents, and is created to determine what would be the best type of support for a specific student with need.

3. Notify, Collect, Compile: Ongoing weekly and quarterly collection of data regarding strategies being implemented in the classroom for a child based on his/her need. Teacher reports progress to principal/parents as needed

4. Notify, Collect, Compile. Process of Step 3 is repeated with different educational strategies and reported to principal/parents after a predetermined amount of time.

5. Support Team Education Meeting. Once all information regarding successful/unsuccessful classroom strategies has been compiled and analyzed, a team meeting is convened. The STEP Team (Parents, Referring Teacher, Administrator and/or Administrative Designee, other persons as needed, and Student when appropriate) meets to determine need for additional support for student with need.

6. Action Plan Progress & (STEP) Review Meeting. After a predetermined time following the initial STEP meeting, a student's progress is reviewed by the STEP team.

7. Public School Assessment (if necessary). If the STEP team determines that a student needs additional outside evaluation, a student is referred out to his/her neighborhood public school to begin an Independent Evaluation Process (IEP).

8. Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP). If a parent disagrees with STEP outcome, and data shows that a student has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, a parent may request a Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) for his/her child.

9. Once a MAP has been requested, a parent must provide the school with proof that a child has a disability, and the principal notifies his/her Regional Supervisor and schedules a MAP meeting with the STEP team and parents.

While the above procedure does not guarantee that children with special needs can be successful in a Catholic school, it does provide a structure within which information about a student can be analyzed, a student's strengths can be determined, and classroom strategies can be created. All of action taken throughout the STEP process is so that a viable action plan can be created with the intent to better serve a student with challenges.

The STEP/MAP process is not a public school Individualized Education Plan, which is mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and is designed to assess students with disabilities specifically so that their educational needs can evaluated and a plan be designed with the intention of meeting their unique individual education goals in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) available (Department of Education, 2010). The STEP/MAP process, which is not a legal document, is an educational action plan that provides Catholic teachers of students with disabilities ideas and strategies on how to accommodate an inclusion student.

The First Inclusion Program at St. Mary's School

In an effort to present a clear, valid, and trustworthy analysis of issues related to St. Mary's current inclusion program, it is necessary to describe in detail how the inclusion program functioned prior to Mr. Brown's leadership. This is essential for two reasons. The first is that the first incarnation of the inclusion program was structured quite differently than St. Mary's current process for inclusion because it was created in 2006, prior to the development of the aforementioned STEP/MAP policies that are presently in place for archdiocesan elementary schools. The second reason is because I was responsible for much of the formation of the first inclusion program at St. Mary's, and by describing it, I add another layer of dependability and confirmability for the reader as well as shed more light on my positionality and role as researcher.

Teacher support in the classroom was a primary concern for St. Mary's first inclusion program since, as Dr. Johnson, the former principal, said, "at [that] time there was no formal structure recommended by the Archdiocese for inclusion [and] teachers need to have support in

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many forms before they feel comfortable…they needed to *want* inclusion to work." In order to support teachers in a general, ongoing way with their struggling learners in the classrooms, the staff was given constant support and training in Catholic inclusive practices. This support was offered in the following forms: annual teacher/professional in-services about inclusive classroom techniques and Response To Intervention (RTI) techniques; opportunities to attend special education workshops hosted by the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD); monthly consultations with LAUSD Private School Educational Consultant, Dr. Drew[4]; monthly grade-level inclusion meetings to discuss individual students' needs, student progress, and effectiveness of academic accommodations; and daily classroom support from the on-site inclusion director.

Dr. Johnson and I, St. Mary's former Inclusion Director and Assistant Principal, also structured an in-house program for the teachers, parents and students with special needs so that there was a standard map of service in place to support inclusion students more effectively and efficiently while simultaneously adding to teachers' feelings that the inclusion program was a legitimate part of St. Mary's curriculum and culture. Procedures for inclusion (incoming and returning students) were called "Steps for Successful Inclusion" and were as follows:

1. Identification of struggling student in the classroom or at intake interview prior to admission. Identification can be relayed to the principal or inclusion director by scheduled or informal meeting or email.

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[2] Dr. Drew is the fictitious name of a Special Education Consultant employed by the Los Angeles Public School System to provide educational support and services to private schools with students who have been identified as having educational needs.

2. Once a child is identified as having a need, the principal or inclusion director contact parents to see if that child has a previous history of needing support. If they do, paperwork from outside professionals (educational therapists, pediatricians, hospitals, and/or IEPs or 504 Plans) are requested to help inform St. Mary's professionals of what would best help a child succeed.

3. If child clearly needs testing in order for St. Mary's to keep the student, St. Mary's offers for the inclusion director to administer the Woodcock Johnson III Test of Ability to the student, or the family is referred to their local public school for testing and offer of Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). If the student qualifies for services and wants to stay at St. Mary's, the inclusion director advises parents to sign a Private School Services Plan (PSP) so that St. Mary's educators can work once a month with a public school special education consultant. If a student has a PSP, Dr. Drew, the public school special education consultant assigned to St. Mary's, visits the school for two hours on a monthly basis to observe the inclusion student in the general education environment. Dr. Drew observes an inclusion student for the purpose of charting a students' growth, checking for increasing or decreasing need for classroom support, and assisting teachers in devising an academic plan for the student.

4. Parents are offered classroom support to a child once they meet with the principal or inclusion director. Simultaneously, a classroom log is created by the teacher in order to discover what teaching techniques/strategies work best. A child's teacher records the following when a specific classroom intervention is put into place; date of strategy, classroom environment, daily lessons/instruction, assignments or homework, behavior

support, assessments/evaluations, additional supports, results/affect (positive or negative).

5. Ongoing collection of data regarding strategies being implemented in the classroom for a child based on his/her need. Teacher reports progress to principal/parents as needed

6. Student Success Team (SST) Meeting. Once all information regarding successful/unsuccessful classroom strategies has been compiled and analyzed, a team meeting is convened. The SST (Parents, Referring Teacher, Inclusion Director, other persons as needed, and Student when appropriate) meets to determine need for additional support for student with need.

7. SST or Parent/Teacher Review Meeting. After a predetermined time following the initial SST meeting, a student's progress is reviewed. This meeting is lead by the inclusion director.

8. If the student needs additional support in the classroom, the inclusion director schedules individual pull-out instruction for the student and a regular scheduled time agreed upon by the teacher and parent. Teachers may also request at the beginning of every quarter for the inclusion director to co-teach a class in an effort to deliver differentiated instruction to a class while giving the homeroom teacher peer and curricular support.

9. Student observations (by inclusion director) may be scheduled at any time for the purpose of refining individual academic plan and/or for ideas relating to intervention.

The inclusion program was designed by Dr. Johnson and myself based on our collective goal of having a clear protocol in place for teaching students with special needs. The inclusion program plan was structured because it was important that parents of inclusion students felt that

they had many options other than public school testing to assess and plan for their child's needs in the classroom. For this reason, St. Mary's accepted all forms of educational and medical evaluations: anything that would help inform the teacher and school how to best serve the student with need.

At the beginning of each academic quarter, I, in my capacity as inclusion director, generated a list of inclusion students for all teachers. This list provided all St. Mary's faculty and staff vital information, both academic and behavioral, on each student. The purpose of this was so that these students could be accommodated and included in all aspects of school life: recess, lunchtime, mass, music class, physical education, and other school related functions.

Files for each inclusion student were housed in the inclusion/guidance office apart from student cumulative files in a locked cabinet due to their confidential medical and other information. These files contained all inclusion paperwork (test scores/ability testing, IEPs or 504 plans, teacher logs/reports, medical information relating to a student's disability, professional(s) evaluations including public school services and recommendations provided by Dr. Drew. Teachers could request these files from the inclusion director at any time and read or update them as needed.

While the prefatory program was fluid, built to change necessarily as expertise grew and students' needs changed or increased as students with more complicated needs were admitted, its reporting structure remained consistent.

St. Mary's School's Inclusion Program Today

I discovered how St. Mary's inclusion program works today from a multi-perspective investigation that included the review of documents, teacher and focus group interviews, and the

current principal's interview. I felt that this type of holistic approach was important because the process by which the inclusion program is run specifically at St. Mary's is not recorded anywhere in school documents, and the second was because the way in which the program works varies slightly with every student, depending on who brings a student's need to a teacher's attention and/or if a child was accepted to the school with a known disability.

According to the current principal, Mr. Brown, St. Mary's School's inclusion program is guided by the STEP/MAP procedures for inclusive education that are recommended by the Department of Catholic Schools (DCS) for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. Mr. Brown says that when a teacher believes a student needs more support, the teacher must do the following:

1. The teacher must first consult the inclusion coordinator and the principal to see if that child already has a STEP/MAP plan.

2. If there already is a STEP/MAP file for that child, then the teacher needs to read the file and implement the recommended educational strategies contained therein to begin.

3. If there is not a STEP/MAP case file for a particular student with need, then the teacher must notify the principal (who notifies the parent) and begin documenting a student's progress using the forms provided by the DCS in its STEP/MAP plan.

4. While documenting a student's progress for several weeks, the inclusion coordinator and/or the principal goes into the classroom to observe the student and offers helpful strategies and/or accommodations to the teacher based on what is observed during class. Also at this time, the principal or inclusion coordinator may ask Dr. Drew for additional ideas that may help the student when Dr. Drew is at St. Mary's observing other inclusion

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students on his Private School Plan observation list. It is then up to the principal or inclusion coordinator to relay this information to the classroom teacher.

5. A student's case is referred for a STEP Team meeting if/when classroom support offered does not seem sufficient to help inclusion student. The support team is made up of teachers, administrators, and parents, and is created to determine what would be the best type of support for a specific student with need.

6. After a plan is devised and implemented, the teacher, inclusion coordinator, and principal inform the parents of a student's progress.

7. In the event that a student is not succeeding after a plan is developed and implemented, one of the following three things happen, 1) a new STEP plan is developed, 2) the student is referred to his/her local school for an IEP evaluation, 3) the parents are told that the school can not meet the student's needs and are asked to find another school.

When Mr. Brown became the principal in August 2010, he said he had to reorganize St. Mary's inclusion program. Instead of using public school (IEP or 504 plans) and/or independent educational evaluations (i.e. doctor or therapy medical and/or anecdotal reports) to guide the school in making classroom accommodations, he aligned St. Mary's program closer to the STEP/MAP process that had recently been outlined and formalized by the DCS.

In order to "get all of the teachers on the same page with inclusion," Mr. Brown hired a consultant, Dr. Jones, in August 2010 to St. Mary's to give a one-day STEP/MAP in-service to the faculty. Dr. Jones is a Catholic school principal, and completed her doctoral work in the area of Leadership and Catholic school inclusion. Simultaneously, he appointed a teacher (Laura) to be the inclusion coordinator. Laura did not have any rigorous special education training but she

had a Master degree in education, had taken a survey course in special education, and had an

avid interest in helping inclusion students.

Mr. Brown recounted that while it took a great deal of time to familiarize the teachers

with the STEP/MAP process and the large amount of paperwork that comes with the

implementation of it, it was worthwhile since it provided the school with a "uniform, systematic

way of helping kids who were having a tough time at St. Mary's." Mr. Brown said:

> We went through that process (of starting the STEP/MAP program) at the beginning
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> (when I became principal) … I identified one person on staff who is kind of the expert, so
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> to speak. Last year it was Laura, and then this year it is me (principal) right now until
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> Christine (new inclusion coordinator) gets back (from maternity leave). But basically, if
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> you have a problem with a student you go to that teacher and then they'll give you, ok try
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> this first, here's the format, here's the paperwork, start documenting and I'll make the file
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> in the STEP box. And then, they kind of walk through that process [STEP] together. I
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> [also] go in and give other strategies to the curriculum instructor. It's having like a
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> clearing house of information on these kids that's only accessible to those who are
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> instructing and if the parents want copies we just make them copies… it's a really good
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> way to keep one location of a whole bunch of strategies that work [and] that don't work,
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> but where the student is in terms of the goals that we created with the parents and the
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> class.

Mr. Brown felt that the STEP/MAP in-service and appointment of an inclusion coordinator

sufficiently familiarized the teachers with the STEP/MAP procedures. The 2010-2011 academic

year opened with the STEP/MAP system available for returning and new inclusion students who needed support in the classroom.

Mr. Brown stated that while STEP/MAP is a formal, document-driven process, he wanted it to be "tailor-made and appropriate" for St. Mary's. Of his role in the inclusion program, he said he too helps teachers in the classroom:

> [My role is] extremely informal, just try this and try that. And that's my role regardless of STEP or not. But when it is someone who is having difficulty reaching a child, I want to give them as many strategies as I know to help reach that child. And if certain things that I give them work, then we document it. If things don't work, we document it [too].

Mr. Brown's collaborative role in the classroom with teacher is different from what is outlined in the STEP/MAP plan, which recommends that the principal be an overseer of the inclusion program as well as the liaison between the parents and school personnel. However, Mr. Brown pointed out that as a leader, he prefers to be more collaborative since it fosters positive feelings of community among the teachers as well as demonstrates his support of their work with struggling students.

The reporting structure of St. Mary's inclusion program is less rigid and defined than is laid out in the STEP/MAP plan. Although two of the new teachers mentioned that they were not aware of how St. Mary's inclusion program is "supposed to work," or that the inclusion coordinator was available to support them in the classroom, they all understood that if they had a concern about a student, they needed to let the principal know. Mr. Brown elaborated:

> More often [teachers] come [to me], or they go to the STEP coordinator…[St. Mary's] does not have an established chain of command, but they would go to the STEP

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coordinator and say hey, I need some paperwork…I don't know what to do with this child. I'm struggling. And [we] say here, start and write down what you've done, and we'll look at that and say well, those haven't worked. So then they look at that and say…are there any trends with the strategies you've tried and why don't they work…the detailed work is basically the teachers' brainstorming and figuring out what is going to work. And that's the hard part. The teachers are really the ones who have to do all of the legwork and spend the time doing [inclusion].

However, many of St. Mary's teachers had a different or slightly different understanding of how the inclusion program worked in the school, and had less familiarity with STEP/MAP procedures. Maria, a veteran St. Mary's teacher, said:

We have a program called STEP, and this program called STEP is where the children are evaluated by the [public] school district, so they go to a certain place where they're tested, and they bring the results back here. And when we know the results of their testing, we know how to accommodate them. We also have Dr. Drew [Private School Consultant from the public school district] coming and helping us from outside. Dr. Drew is from the school or from the Archdiocese.

Despite the fact that there are noticeable inconsistencies in how teachers interpret people's roles in the inclusion process, the teachers reported that they were clear about how to ask for help when students with learning challenges presented themselves in the classroom.

Presentation of Descriptive Characteristics of Participants

The Teachers

This section profiles a purposive sample of five educators who were selected to

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participate in semi-structured interviews. These voluntary participants were chosen because they teach in general education classrooms for thirty or more hours per week at St. Mary's School and currently teach or have taught inclusion students over the last twelve months.

Collectively, three of the educators were Caucasian and two were Latina, they ranged from lower middle-class to middle-class, and they were from 24 to 56 years of age. These teachers also have a wide variety of educational backgrounds: some have a graduate degree and California teaching credential, while others only have an undergraduate degree with no specialized training in education. This is not uncommon since Catholic teachers are not required to have anything more than a Bachelor's degree and do not need a California credential to hold a full-time teaching position in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

All participating teachers are lay-people and practicing Catholics, although not all of them attend weekly mass outside of their commitment to attend weekly 8:00 am mass with their students at St. Mary's Parish. With the exception of one teacher who converted to Catholicism from Presbyterianism, all of St. Mary's faculty were raised Catholic and attended Catholic elementary school.

The teacher participants were interviewed in late September and October 2011 in which they answered protocol and process-generated questions in a semi-structured interview process. The process-generated questions related to participant responses as well as to protocol questions and literature related to the two research questions.

Paul

Paul is a middle-class, Caucasian male of 56 years of age who has been a parishioner at St. Mary's church for his entire life. Before teaching at St. Mary's, Paul taught physical

education at a local Catholic high school and coached lacrosse at a local Jesuit University. Paul has a general Bachelor of Arts degree, which he earned at the Jesuit University, and for a brief time in his early twenties, he attended a Catholic Seminary with the intention of becoming a priest. When Paul was twenty-three-years-old, he decided to leave the Seminary. After leaving the seminary, Paul fell into coaching sports by chance when he reconnected with a former coach and friend.

While coaching and teaching high school sports, Paul saw there was an opening for a full-time teacher at his parish school. Since Paul had been a member of St. Mary's congregation all of his life, he thought it would be a good opportunity. Paul has taught at St. Mary's for the past twenty-eight years and has been the eighth-grade homeroom teacher for his entire tenure.

From 1998 until 2010, Paul served as an assistant principal at the school. In that capacity, he assisted the principal with fundraising, sports events, and accreditation documents. When the new administration came aboard in 2010, Paul was asked to step down from his administrative position, but retained his eighth-grade homeroom classroom.

As a middle-school teacher, Paul is responsible for teaching subjects to sixth, seventh, and eighth-grade students. Currently, Paul teaches religion, history, and science to all three grades, which means he comes into contact and provides accommodations for all middle-school inclusion students.

Maria

Maria is a lower-middle-class Hispanic woman who lives very close to the school. Recently divorced, Maria is the mother of three adult children, one of whom has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD). Maria considers herself a devout Catholic and belongs to one of St.

Mary's prayer groups as well as the church's adult choir. Although Maria was born in Los Angeles, she was sent to a Catholic orphanage in Mexico City at age five when her mother died. The orphanage was run by the American Benedictine order of nuns, who also taught a rigorous general curriculum to all of the children until they graduated at 16 years of age.

One of seven children, Maria recalled that some of her only memories of her parents were when they went to church as a family. She says this fact along with her experience being raised by nuns, motivated her to work in Catholic schools when she immigrated back to the United States.

Maria has worked as a junior kindergarten through eighth grade Spanish teacher at St. Mary's since 1994 and has taught in Mexico and the United States for 36 years. Having received little formal teacher training, she holds the equivalent of a two-year Bachelor of Arts degree from Mexico.

Rosemary

Rosemary was the last individual participant to join the study. Although she was enthusiastic about interviewing, scheduling was difficult. She explained that as a third-grade teacher and young mother with very active children, she was involved in many activities other than working full-time.

Rosemary is a Hispanic woman originally from El Salvador and has lived in the United States for 13 years. Rosemary, a practicing Catholic, is married, in her thirties, and resides in the same middle-class neighborhood as St. Mary's School. She also is a parishioner at St. Mary's Church that she attends weekly with her family on Sundays. Additionally, Rosemary is the

mother of two elementary school children who attend St. Mary's. This fact makes Rosemary unique to this study since she is currently both a teacher and a parent in the school.

Rosemary grew up in an affluent family in a large Salvadorian city. As a child and teen, Rosemary attended Catholic school that she said were considered the best academic schools to attend. Rosemary has worked at St. Mary's for six years as a full-time third and first grade teacher. Previously, she worked for four years as a kindergarten and first grade aide. Before teaching at St. Mary's, Rosemary taught preschool children for eight years at a British preschool in El Salvador.

Rosemary acquired most of her teacher training in El Salvador, where she completed a Bachelor of Arts and a Master's degree. There, Rosemary's main area of study was bilingual education and her thesis focused around English Language Learners. Also during that time, Rosemary did not receive any special education training, however, she did take one survey course on teaching children with special needs while clearing her Multiple Subjects Credential in California.

Carolyn

Carolyn is 62 years of age and has taught computer science in public and Catholic school for 12 years. A practicing Catholic who is active in her local Catholic parish, Carolyn has one grown child and is divorced.

Previous to teaching, Carolyn worked for many years as a coordinator for adult mental health services at St. Jude's hospital in Overly. Unsatisfied with her work, she went back to school at age 45 and graduated at 49 with an undergraduate degree in graphic design. After graduation in the early 1990s, she attempted to open a private design business with a fellow

graduate, but that business failed. When a friend told her that there was a job opening in a local public school district for a computer teacher, she took the opportunity and began teaching.

Carolyn secured a part-time position at St. Joseph Catholic School as the Computer Lab teacher when she was laid off from the public school district due to budget cuts. For the next three years, Carolyn worked at St. Joseph, and then took a similar, full-time position at St. Mary's after St. Joseph eliminated the computer teacher position due to lack of funds.

Carolyn's interview lasted the longest of all of the individual interviews (2 hours, 36 minutes) and unlike the other teachers, she insisted on being interviewed off-hours, at her home. Noticeable was the fact that Carolyn never hesitated to answer questions during the interview. Her demeanor was confident, upbeat and snappy, open, and direct at all times. Indeed, when Carolyn was unsure of a term I was using, she joked candidly and said, "Remember Michelle, I don't do teacher-speak!"

Suzanne

Suzanne, in her mid-50s, was the fourth person to respond to my request to participate in the study and wondered if I wanted to interview her since she had not been at the school long although she was teaching full-time in the first grade. I said yes, particularly since I was interested in her unique perspective: Suzanne was the only St. Mary's teacher in the group who had specific and rigorous training in special education.

In Texas during the 1970s, Suzanne completed two Bachelor degrees in special education. One degree was a concentration on teaching Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and the other concentrated on, what was then referred to Educable Mentally Handicapped, which today is labeled Mild (Intellectual) Disabilities.

Suzanne taught full-time for five years in a Catholic elementary school in the San Fernando Valley previous to working at St. Mary's. She is a practicing Catholic who attends weekly Sunday mass (not at St. Mary's Parish) with three teenage children who all attended Catholic elementary and high school. Suzanne considers herself very dedicated to Catholic education even though she was raised Presbyterian. She converted to Catholicism one year after she married her husband in the late 1980s.

After graduation from university, Suzanne taught Deaf and Hard of Hearing-labeled children in a public preschool and middle school in California for three years. When she gave birth to her first child, she left teaching, and stayed home with her children for nine-and-a-half years.

The Administrators

Although this case study research focuses on teachers' beliefs and experiences of disability and inclusive education, I felt I needed to interview both the current and the former principal of St. Mary's School. In doing this I believed the context in which the teachers operate would not only be better understood but the full extent, intricacies, and the scope of the support system intended to be available for teachers would be revealed.

The two principals who participated in this study are Caucasian and are both life-long, practicing Catholics. The two principals, one male (Mr. Brown) and one female (Dr. Johnson), both attended Catholic schools, although Dr. Johnson attended a public school until the age of twelve. Both principals were influenced to follow the administrative track in Catholic elementary school by their collective experiences working as Catholic elementary teachers.

Mr. Brown

Mr. Brown is in his early 30s, is middle-class, and is the father of two small children. For most of Mr. Brown's life he has been involved in Catholic education. As a child and teenager, Mr. Brown attended a Catholic elementary and high school in the San Fernando Valley area. In his early 20s, he attended a Jesuit University where he earned a Bachelor degree. Mr. Brown began teaching physical education at a Catholic K through 8 school once he completed his Bachelor Degree.

While working as a P.E. and third grade teacher, Mr. Brown's then principal told him she wanted to mentor him to be a principal. With her support, he went back to school and completed a Master Degree in Education and a California Teaching and Administrative credential.

After completing a Master's degree and credential from a public California University, Mr. Brown applied to the Archdiocese to be a principal, and a year later, he became the principal of a struggling Catholic school in a poor Los Angeles neighborhood. He worked as principal at that school for two years before becoming principal of St. Mary's School.

It was during his Master studies that Mr. Brown met Dr. Heye and learned about Catholic school inclusion. Dr. Heye, who works as a Federal and State Programs Consultant for the Archdiocese, was one of Mr. Brown's professors and was the first to make him aware of the Archdiocese's "push" for Catholic inclusion at the school level.
Although Mr. Brown was intrigued by the idea that inclusion could really work in a Catholic school, it was not until Mr. Brown's became a principal that he really began working with inclusion in mind.

Dr. Johnson

Dr. Johnson identifies herself as a Caucasian Catholic female in her 60s and is upper-middle-class. Dr. Johnson is retired and has recently moved from the St. Mary's community to another Los Angeles county to be closer to family. She was the principal at St. Mary's for thirty years following her eight years as an eighth grade teacher at the same school.

Dr. Johnson has an impressive educational background. She has a Bachelor of Arts, two teaching and one administrative credentials, a Master of Arts, a Master of Education degree and a Master of Guidance Counseling, and additionally holds a Doctorate in Education.

Dr. Johnson describes herself as a devoted Catholic and attends weekly mass with her family and grandsons. Although Dr. Johnson attended public school out of state until age twelve, she attended Catholic high school when she moved to California.

Due to distance, I conducted my one and one-half hour interview with Dr. Johnson via telephone and recorded it.

Researcher's Relationship to Mr. Brown

Mr. Brown has been the principal of St. Mary's since 2010. I first met Mr. Brown in May of 2010 at what is referred to as a "Transfer of Information Meeting" (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, 2009, p. 97) at St. Mary's School. The meeting took place in what was then Dr. Johnson's principal office, and I present in the capacity of Assistant Principal and Inclusion Director. The purpose of a Transfer of Information meeting is to systematically (check-list) transfer, record, and discuss vital, detailed information about a school from the outgoing to the incoming principal.

In the Transfer of Information meeting, at which Dr. Johnson, Mr. Brown, Ms. Harding (an Archdiocesan Supervisor) and myself were present, Dr. Johnson and I outlined school procedure, schedules, and programs. Of concern to me was the fact that although I had not yet finished my dissertation proposal, chapter one, two, and three were well underway, and I intended to focus my study about inclusion at St. Mary's School. Since I did not want to switch my research site, I asked Mr. Brown at the end of the meeting if he would be willing to let me come back and continue my research. He said yes, but asked to have some time to settle in first. I told him I needed time also to settle into my new position, so we agreed to speak in six-months, which we did.

Researcher's Relationship to Dr. Johnson

I have known Dr. Johnson for the past thirteen-years and in that time, she was my boss, she mentored me to be a school principal, and encouraged me to follow in her footsteps to pursue a Doctorate in education.

The Focus Group Participants

In September 2011, I sent an email to all St. Mary's teachers inviting them to participate in a focus group about inclusive education. Over a period of three weeks, I received 11 responses saying they would be interested. Due to the number of positive responses, I secured the principal's permission to conduct the focus group interview on site on Friday, November 19th, 2011 at 1:00pm in lieu of St. Mary's weekly Faculty Meeting.

Eleven St. Mary's teachers participated in a two hour, 30-minute focus group interview. Before the meeting started, I treated the teachers to lunch as a token of thanks for participating in the study. During the lunch, I was introduced by name to all of the teachers I did not know,

although I was very familiar with four of the female teachers and one of the male teachers from having worked previously at St. Mary's. All of the teachers attended the lunch except for Michael who joined the focus group one-third of the way into its session due to a last-minute parent meeting.

Of the focus group participants, nine were Caucasian and two were Latina. Significant was the fact that 100% of the teachers defined themselves as practicing Catholic and attended Catholic elementary school for a total of nine grades (kindergarten plus first through eighth grade), and considered themselves either middle-class or from middle to upper-middle class families. The statistics of the teachers who participated in this focus group were as follows:

Table 1

Focus Group Participant Statistics

NO.	Subject	Age (in years)	Ethnicity	Degrees/Training	Years Teaching in Catholic School	Teaching Credential
1	Constance	24	Hispanic	B.A., (M.A. in process)	2	No
2	Lauren	30-35	Caucasian	B.A., M.A.	7	No
3	Millie	56	Caucasian	B.S. (Biology)	8	No
4	Blanca	36	Hispanic	B.A.	10	No
5	Nathalie	45	Caucasian	B.A., M.A.,	13	Yes
6	Caitlin	47	Caucasian	B.A., M.A.	15	No
7	Louise	32	Caucasian	B.A., M.A.	6	Yes
8	Felicity	26	Caucasian	B.A., M.A.	3	In Process
9	Jennifer	28	Caucasian	B.A. (M.A. in progress)	4	In Process
10	Henry	54	Caucasian	B.A.	28	No
11	Michael	31	Caucasian	B.MUS (M.A. in process)	2	No

Although the majority of the faculty possessed a great deal of teaching experience, few of them had completed advanced degrees or teaching credentials. Notable was the fact that all but two of the teachers either had or were in the process of going to school to receive a Master degree and/or California teaching credential, which is more than what is required to teach at a Catholic school. Also, I noted after speaking to the teachers that only two, Felicity and Nathalie, had started their careers with the intent of becoming teachers, which would account for their diversified educational background and late decision (only after working as a teacher in Catholic school) to go back to school to study education.

The focus group questions differed from the questions I asked in the individual interviews because they were crafted with the intent to reveal the groups' collective opinions regarding teachers' beliefs and experiences of disability and inclusive education at St. Mary's, and their ideas about fostering acceptance of inclusion at the school. Notable was how quickly general questions about inclusion became a group discussion about specific children currently in need of inclusive strategies at the school.

In light of the fact that I had already conducted the individual interviews and reviewed St. Mary's documents, I attributed this phenomenon to the following facts. First, I was told the faculty was used to meeting once a week to discuss specific problems with students. Second, the school has only 231 students and a small faculty, and all teachers have extra duties, such as yard duty, that brings them into contact with the entire school population. The third fact is all teachers are informed of who is an inclusion student at regular faculty meeting since inclusion students need extra support and/or experience challenges, both inside and outside the classroom.

Finally, teachers tend to talk about students with challenges when having problems facilitating inclusion and naturally seek advice from their peers (Villa & Thousand, 2001).

The focus group participants represented a broad range of beliefs and experiences of inclusion and disability in St. Mary's School. They spoke openly of both their challenges and successes with inclusion and showed interest when asked direct questions about what they did in the classroom to help promote inclusive practices and meet students' needs.

Organization and Reduction of Data Analysis

The following presents an organization and reduction of the data analysis collected from documents and from both participants' and focus group interviews about their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of disability and inclusive education at St. Mary's School. Whenever possible, themes, and ideas were distilled down to their purest terms, and the clearest examples of these themes are represented by select participants' words.

Overall, there were four significant recurring patterns of equal value that I evidenced while conducting interviews and focus groups with participants. I have listed and described these patterns below then discuss them in detail in relation to the four major themes that revealed themselves once all of the data was synthesized. Those themes were: Inclusion and Catholic Faith; Inclusion as "Other" Education; Support and Acceptance of Inclusion; Quality Technical Teacher Training.

Inclusion and Catholic Faith

To Teach as Jesus Would

Above all, St. Mary's teachers felt and believed that full inclusion "should be able to work" in Catholic school, and that one of the purposes of Catholic education is to reach out to as

many Catholic children as possible. Participants said they believed in Catholic inclusion mainly because they believed that they, as teachers, were "called to teach as Jesus taught." For them inclusiveness is a part of the Catholic faith and a natural extension of that belief is that all children wanting a Catholic education should be entitled to have one. These Catholic teachers wanted to help children succeed and tried various methods to get them to achieve their goals.

Suzanne converted to Catholicism and has been a practicing Catholic for two decades. She said that while she was not "that familiar" with Catholic Social Teaching or its connection to the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' call to move schools toward inclusion, she believes strongly that the Catholic school environment is ripe for inclusive education because Catholic schools "are alive with the feeling that all children [are] God's creation…he created everyone to be equal and meant for us to understand we must treat everyone equally. That kind of thing is what we teach the children."

Maria felt that teaching with all children in mind was inseparable from Jesus' message that all people are made in the image of God. She said, "what are we doing [as Catholic teachers] if we don't work to accept people who are different…do unto others, that's what Jesus taught us."

For Maria, who believed teaching in at a Catholic school was her way, "to give back to God," inclusion meant to, "reach out to everybody…to all of God's children who have a right to the life they want." Maria described the many years she had taught at St. Mary's as a journey that started with her believing that Spanish class was too hard for students with disabilities. Maria remembered thinking, "why, when these kids couldn't do their math or write a sentence…why were we making them learn Spanish?"

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Dr. Johnson refers to teachers' commitment to teaching all children, regardless of ability as "their call to teach in a school where Christ is living [and] that's why they choose to teach in a Catholic school…[they] are drawn to its higher purpose."

Mr. Brown relays teachers' depth of faith that inclusion can work despite the obstacles as a "stick-to-itiveness" that cannot be separated from their Catholic identity. When asked to describe that in detail, he said he, "really thinks it's just the teachers' will to believe…I can do this. Basically they're not the kind of [people] who give up. And some of them are bound and determined to figure out what's going to work."

Paul talked during his interview that he knew "deep inside" that including all children in Catholic schools was the right thing to do, and Catholic teachers should want to do it. Paul said:

Whenever I think I, like, can't hack it, or I'm a frustrated trying to think of

something different I can try with some students, I look at that [points] on my wall [the

sign reads 'Remember to Teach as Jesus Did'] and I know I have to try harder…like, to try

things again, another way, if they don't work. All of these kids have a purpose whether or not

they are fantastic students. Who am I to judge? I was a 'D' student. [It] took me forever on tests.

Imagine if I had the chance for extra time like some of my inclusion students?

Paul's disclosure about his own struggles with school was moving. I have known Paul for ten years, and yet this was the first time he had ever revealed this truth to me.

Dr. Johnson referred to the mission of a Catholic school as being "a call to educate all of God's children regardless of their struggle." Paul spoke animatedly about how, over time, he grew to understand how right inclusion is for Catholic schools:

In a Catholic setting and I didn't believe this before we started but now I do. I think

we're obliged to be more inclusive than we have been. Maybe we always were and I

wasn't aware of it…I was surprised more than anybody…I think we are obligated to be

inclusive, you know, even though we don't have all the resources, the thing kind of I

learned from the whole inclusion program and the STEP program is that we have to do

our best for the kids that come here. More than what we would normally offer to, I guess

you would call it the normal kid, you have to help identify what those kids need.

Despite Paul's somewhat reference that implies children with learning challenges are not

"normal kid[s]," his faith and commitment shine through.

During Maria's interview, she made repeated references to God and how Catholic

schools make a difference in children's lives because they are "Christ-centered." In reference to

teaching inclusion students, Maria paused for awhile and said, "[what] I've learned is to give to

others, whether it is children or adults and this is my way to give something back that I have

learned from God."

Among Suzanne's reasons to teach in Catholic school was the fact that it was easier and

convenient. Suzanne gave details:

I knew with three young children going back to Special Ed is very demanding. It would

be very physically and emotionally, you know, demanding. So, you know, again, I

decided because my children were going to that school, a Catholic school, it was a perfect

opportunity. And we were always, you know, regular mass goers, and I wanted to, I had

heard so many good things about Catholic schools. And we knew we definitely wanted

to send our kids to Catholic school.

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Suzanne's experience teaching special education in public schools made a definite impression upon her and guided her job choice when she decided to go back to work.

Overall, the teachers expressed very positive feelings of wanting to help students anyway they could in the classroom, sharing mostly what they do on a day-to-day basis to assist inclusion students in meeting the same academic expectations as the general education learners. Despite the fact that there were numerous mentions that their biggest concerns regarding inclusion were the amount of time and work it took to meet students needs successfully, teachers still felt that inclusion and Catholic education were a logical fit with one another. Lauren said it best:

> It's about accepting everybody, to the best of your knowledge, because we're a Christ-centered school. I mean, how would Christ react? [Teachers should] not just to turn around and say, well, we can't do anything for yours…we try to have compassion. Because if you mention the word Catholic, that's what comes to my mind. To truly help [students with challenges], to help the ones that need it…one human being to another, with love.

Teachers said very little about their Catholicism except when speaking about inclusion being the "right thing to do." Yet, in the air when teachers' answered questions regarding how they felt about children with more pronounced disability being able to succeed at St. Mary's, there was something awkwardly palpable in the interview room.

After conducting the focus group session however, I got a better sense of what I was being told by teachers' body language, pauses before speaking, or need to joke instead of answering directly: there are certain subjects, such as admitting to thinking students with disabilities do not belong in Catholic school settings that Catholics may or will not overtly say.

How Teachers at St. Mary's School Define Inclusion

I found that there was a general consensus among participants about what they believed was possible for inclusion at St. Mary's. Teachers felt that Catholic schools have fewer restrictions on how they deliver instruction, a more flexible and fluid curriculum with fewer mandatory benchmarks than public school, and greater freedom in deciding how to teach diverse learners.

The range of definition for the meaning of inclusion varied for focus group participants. Henry said that inclusion meant to:

Embrace students [that] we wouldn't normally have in our school [teachers] try to see if we could keep them in our school. [Teachers] learn to accommodate them, to see if we could help them with their special needs and if not, um, you know, try and find outside resources. But the idea was that…a Catholic school shouldn't be turning away anybody because of their particular needs.

For Henry, who spoke openly about his feelings that inclusiveness is a natural part of one's Catholicity, inclusion meant more than teaching children with special needs; inclusion meant including all of God's children, especially "those lacking financial resources…those ethnically diverse." He spoke passionately about St. Mary's mission to educate children "as Jesus would teach" and that as a Catholic school, St. Mary's teachers were asked daily to teach beyond themselves with Christ in mind.

Henry went further and deepened his argument, saying that he believed, "the inclusion program certainly opened [his] eyes to what [the] real mission [of St. Mary's] should be, or a broader understanding of what our mission should be." Finally, Henry recalled that after

teaching inclusively for two years, his opinion about inclusion changed: He went from thinking some students were lazy and not working, to understanding that not all children learned in the same way, and deserved a chance to succeed in a Catholic school environment. He shared with the group:

> I think we are obligated to be inclusive, you know, even though we don't have all the resources, the thing [I] kind of learned from the whole inclusion program and the STEP program is that we have to do our best for the kids that come [to St. Mary's]. More than what we would normally offer to, I guess you would call it the normal kid.

> For Lauren, inclusion "was putting a name to something that [teachers] tried to do all the time anyway. Because [an inclusion student] was somebody that might not necessarily be, you know, on paper an inclusion student." Lauren's definition of inclusion centered more around the idea that inclusion and inclusive education meant that teachers plan not only for differentiated instruction to occur consistently in the classroom but think about curriculum assessment in a broader way. Millie said that inclusion was based on teachers using "alternative ways to assess students, that [teachers] wouldn't grade things the way the majority of [teachers] would." Millie also said that teachers for inclusion would give students, "different chance[s] to show what they've learned" before giving them a failing grade on a standardized test.

> Millie stated that as teachers in Catholic school they could, "provid[e] alternative ways to assess students, that couldn't grasp things the way the majority would. Not just getting them shut down and giving them a poor grade, and giving them a different chance to show what they've learned."

> Although teacher' attitudes about who exactly could be successfully served by St. Mary's

inclusion program varied to a large extent, their ideas about what inclusion looked like at St. Mary's was expressed best by Carolyn, "[Inclusion is] bringing children with learning challenges into a regular classroom setting and, when necessary, adapting to their special needs...it's giving each child what they need, when they need it."

Maria was the first teacher to volunteer for the study and made a point during the interview to mention how much she wanted to participate in my research. She gave two reasons. She felt that, "more people like you [the researcher] need to be doing inclusion and talking about inclusion, especially here [Los Angeles] where even people's language can be a barrier…disabilities too." She added that her twenty-year-old son has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD).

Maria also stated she wished St. Mary's had been an inclusive school "like now" when her son was a St. Mary's student because he would have done much better academically, socially, and emotionally, if accommodations had been made. "I've heard [from other teachers] oh, ADD doesn't exist" Maria said, "when, you know, it does! My son has it, so…I think maybe God put my son to have this so that I could realize better and help other students as well. That's how I see it."

Today, Maria has changed her perspective, both because she says she feels more confident addressing the needs of struggling learners and because her son has Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and she has experienced, "as a parent how a teacher helps to explain things in many ways…to give students who don't learn well their own chance to show what they know. For these reasons, Maria consults Dr. Drew on a consistent basis to learn the skills she needs for inclusion in the classroom. Maria believes that inclusion is "a mind-set" and with patience and

years of teaching experience, it is just a matter of time before you "turn a student around" with easy accommodations:

Like giving them for instance a longer time, or just doing odds and not pairs, you know, things like that. And I think it's great because as soon as you know how each student works…I'll give you a typical example…I have a seventh grader, my goodness, this girl works so hard. She works harder than your regular student. She highlights everything and she goes and she goes and she goes. I tutor her every Monday and Wednesday.

Where beliefs about inclusion at St. Mary's differed largely was in regard to which students with special needs could legitimately and responsibly be serviced. Paul expressed his concern that if the curriculum was "watered-down too much" the school would be robbing a child from his/her right to an excellent education.

Paul said he believed that it was not only his job as a Catholic teacher to prepare students academically for the world, but "socially, and emotionally, and spiritually as well," and that he worried sometimes that if he accommodated a student too much, he would not honestly be doing his best job to prepare that child to be a real, contributing member of society.

After Paul's statement, I asked him whether or not he felt inclusion could have helped him when he was a child. Paul did not answer directly, but he said:

I think of some of the kids I went to school with – there was this one guy, Stuart, um, he was always all over the place, today we'd say ADHD probably, a real class clown too. He had such a great, happy way about him. Everyone liked him…except teachers. [Stuart] was always in trouble…detention, you know? And his grades really sucked, he would dance around sometime with his failed tests. But when he did group work and presentations, he was amazing,

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a real energy! I ran into Stuart two years ago and turns he's really successful, owns his own business. Surf clothes. Anyway, I think, what if we had inclusion then? Stuart could have been an "A" student. But they made him repeat eighth grade.

When Paul spoke about Stuart, his face lit up and he became very animated, as if he vividly recalled Stuart's persona and spirit. Paul finished by saying, "at times [he] is not sure what can be done for students with challenges in the classroom" but believes he could be, "doing more if [he] had more inclusion tools, or the school had more money to hire special ed. teachers."

Growing up, Mr. Brown said he had little experience with students and/or people with disabilities. He told me:

> [O]ne of the things is that growing up where I grew up, it was kind of a sheltered
> environment …K through 8 Catholic schools… and in that part of the San Fernando
> Valley, everyone was kind of very similar. So growing out of that and going to high
> school and having some friends that were just completely, you know, richly different,
> which was a benefit for me.

It was not until Mr. Brown became a teacher at a Catholic school in his early twenties that he was exposed to children with learning challenges. However, he felt that for some students, accommodations were easy to make in the flexible, academic structure of Catholic school. Mr. Brown explained that, "some [students] were on the spectrum with Asperger's, and couple physical disabilities but nothing really that would be too difficult to maintain."

Carolyn was made aware of St. Mary's inclusive culture during her preliminary interview with the former principal, Dr. Johnson, in 2008. During the interview process, Carolyn was told that the computer teacher would necessarily be a part of the school's inclusive mission, and that

she would have students ranging in age from five to fourteen with special needs in her classes. Carolyn remembered:

> [The principal] told me it was an inclusive school…I thought I understood what that meant because of my Overly [Unified school] work, but there they had a pull-out program. This was different. All the kids were together, and I understood that it was my job to make things work for them.

Carolyn said she did not "feel worried" about the idea of inclusive education, even though she had neither formal special education training nor inservicing about inclusion. On the contrary, Carolyn recalled she felt confident that with her age and varied experience, she would "get it and figure it out" as she became more immersed in St. Mary's inclusive culture.

Rosemary told a different story than Carolyn. At the beginning of Rosemary's interview, she was soft-spoken, answering most of my preliminary questions with few words. This did not surprise me since I had known Rosemary from the time that I had worked at St. Mary's, and knew her to say little in faculty meetings. However, as the interview progressed, Rosemary became more open and talkative, especially after, in response to her question about her anonymity, I reassured her that her identity and opinions would be kept confidential. Rosemary looked very relieved, and said, "great cuz [sic] you know how it is right? You know, being it's so Catholic here and everything else." Rosemary wanted to answer my questions honestly, but it was difficult since her job, her children's education, and her faith all centered around St. Mary's community and school. There was a lot at stake for her when it came to stating her true opinions and relaying her past experiences.

When the concept of inclusive education was first introduced to St. Mary's faculty, Rosemary recalls she did not think it would work at the school.

> I was only an aide then…I didn't say anything [about] doing it [inclusion]. Honestly, I
> don't think we're trained to do that. We're not. You know I just learned a little bit when
> I went to school, here in the U.S…we don't have a lot of kids here [St. Mary's] who
> would need like, resources, like autism, we don't have the resources and it wouldn't be
> fair for any of the kids, or the rest of the kids.

Although Rosemary felt that inclusion at St. Mary's worked well when minor accommodations were needed for students, she did not believe that students with major educational needs should be accepted into the school.

Like Rosemary, Suzanne expressed strong feelings when asked to define inclusion. Rather than define her idea of what inclusion means, she answered as she felt it related to inclusion at St. Mary's. Suzanne said:

> What is here is not special education inclusion, it's more fitting all of the learners in
> together [and] working with students so they don't feel that they're different than anyone
> else...customizing curriculum to fit the learner, there are some kids that I used to teach
> that absolutely couldn't make it here. Their need is too great.

Suzanne elaborated, saying that her view of inclusion at St. Mary's "is probably colored by the fact that her training was during the 1970s when children with special needs had their own separate classrooms". Suzanne explained that when she received her teacher training in special education, children with special needs were not intended to be in mainstream classrooms, and perhaps that experience skewed her idea of what was possible in terms of inclusion in

mainstream Catholic classrooms where one teacher teaches an entire class of anywhere from 20 to 38 diverse learners.

<div align="center">**Educating the "Other": Issues of Fairness**</div>

When teachers and administrators spoke about inclusion, their compassion for students' special needs was evident, as was their attempts to help them be successful. Yet often, the teachers referred to inclusion as something that needed to be solved or fixed, or as Henry said, "Inclusion students needed to be inspired…shown how to motivate themselves." Instead of thinking of inclusion students as naturally belonging to St. Mary's student body, teachers spoke mainly about what they needed to do in order to help inclusion students "fit in with the rest of the children."

Time

The concept of time and inclusion taking "more time" from teachers was discussed in interviews and the focus group. Mr. Brown, the principal, said that, "teachers are the ones who are really struggling" with inclusion students, not him, and that they, "really [are] the ones who have to do all of the legwork and spend the time doing [inclusion]. For me [Mr. Brown], I'm just kind of giving advice, that's easy." Um, you know, and we sometimes get to the point where we need to always ask, is this going to be the best environment for this child and for the entire class?

What was most noticeable about Rosemary's interview was that she was very outspoken in regard to whom she felt inclusion would work "successfully" and that for her, the concept of having the time to teach inclusion and "inclusion is more work" were conflated. Among her chief concern was having enough "time to teach challenged students," as well as gaining knowledge and support to help certain students.

Rosemary also spoke strongly about the difference between what should theoretically be possible in Catholic schools and what is actually possible in Catholic schools. Rosemary mentioned several time that the reason inclusion is working now in her classroom is because she, "has a lot of help…I have two parents and two college students who volunteer and read one-on-one with my strugglers." Without additional teaching support in the classroom, Rosemary felt that not all of the children were getting, "the best part of [her]" or the time they deserved to spend on new material. However, Rosemary stressed that she felt frustrated when thinking that not all students could succeed in her classroom, primarily because it was a Catholic school, "where all of the children are taught that God loves all of us."

Many beliefs and feelings that were revealed by teachers in their interviews about not having enough time for inclusion students were also expressed during the focus group. Millie, who was more reserved at the beginning of the focus group than some of her peers, waited until there was a pause in the conversation about peer tutoring and one-to-one help for inclusion students before she joined the conversation. Millie spoke certainly about how for her, inclusive education is more challenging for teachers, especially when it comes to the amount of time it takes to help inclusion students. She said that sometimes, "there just isn't enough of [her] to go around for all of the kids, and having somebody helping… just walking around the classroom" provides the support she needs to deliver effective instruction to all of the students.

Michael also said that "not having enough time" for inclusion students was a big obstacle to feeling like inclusion learners could be fully successful in the classroom. Focus group participants all expressed the need to have more teachers or aides available in the classroom to

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help deliver instruction to inclusion students, particularly when children with behavior challenges where present in the general education classroom.

Fairness

Participants talked about fairness and equity however they also referred to inclusion as being "too much work," "time-consuming," and "unfair to regular students." Caitlin said she, "did not believe in leveling the playing ground for all students so that it was fair…there were certain standards that were absolute in academics," while Maria felt quite opposite:

> They [inclusion students] have the right to an education just like everybody else, just because of the fact that they're inclusion students, if you will, does not mean that they cannot do things…I feel for them…they are discriminated [against], they're taken to one side. I always felt, for my inclusion students it's not fair to give them exactly the same as everybody else, when they're at a different level. You teach to a level that they're at, and they do their best at it.

The majority or 85% of teachers interviewed registered concern that additional instructional time in the classroom and preparing customized curricula was "unfair to the other [typical] learners in the class" because, Louis said, "it took time and energy away from the whole class to teach inclusion students."

Rosemary spoke frankly about her feelings that inclusion can sometimes be unfair for everyone involved. She said, "It's definitely a lot of work for me, because I have to plan different things to do with all the children that need help, and I think it's unfair to them, because they will always be on a disadvantage. So I grab whatever help I can." In Rosemary's case, she mentioned that inclusion gave her an unfair workload as well as being time-consuming.

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Rosemary also mentioned that teaching inclusion students was at times "emotionally, tough…much more of a challenge... because you're always worried if you are doing the right thing so the kids get what you are trying to teach."

Mr. Brown's perspective was slightly different and he discussed that he was, "happy that we're [St. Mary's School] able to help the children because I always felt that these [inclusion] children are at a disadvantage if we teach them only one way, like all the rest… I've always felt that it's not fair for them if we do not accommodate them." Yet, Mr. Brown also expressed concern about weighing "the fairness question" on the side of typical learners who need to be met at a higher developmental level:

> We sometimes get to the point where we need to always ask, is this going to be the best environment for this child and for the entire class. Is it going to be fair for the teacher and for the rest of the class because if the teacher is giving 80% of the time to one child, then you have 30 other kids getting 20% of the teacher's time. Which isn't fair. So, we come to those questions now, making sure we are being equitable and fair to everybody and being able to say we do have limitations at a Catholic school given our resources. And we can meet this need, we cannot meet this need that you have…and being very fair and honest with parents about that.

What teachers revealed to me was that for them, fairness, equality, and "sameness for students" was something that needed to be decided on an ongoing basis when changes in the classroom were being made for inclusion student. In fact, what emerged in the interviews was the idea that at St. Mary's there was an unspoken rule about fairness: that time, teacher resources, effort, and workload needed to somehow be shared by all students in equal measure. Paul spoke openly

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about his struggle to be fair yet at the same time, be inclusive:

> I want to include everyone, I want to be able to do it, but I want when I give a student an
>
> eighth grade diploma that it is equal to everyone else's in the graduation class.

Paul said his concern about fairness and inclusion centered mostly around what he called, "how much is too much accommodation?" which he raised when talking about the struggle to keep academic standards high while still "fulfilling the Catholic inclusion mission" with which all Catholics have been charged. Paul said that by reducing homework questions or giving extended time to students for tests, for example, he felt that at times the expectations for students was potentially unequal and therefore, unfair.

Although this is an example of how teachers are influenced to think and measure things in terms of a deficit, all the participants did it at some point during their interviews. For example, Carolyn's statement about the accomplishments of people with disabilities is a vivid example of this type of thinking. She said, "Look at some of the schools for [the] handicapped. Some of the schools for the blind. Look at the resources that they have available and what accomplishments those people have made." Although meant it as a compliment, Carolyn immediately connected the idea of people with disabilities excelling with their attendance in separate, non-inclusive schools. Moments after talking about Catholic inclusion, Carolyn switched gears and linked a disabled person's success with segregation.

Despite teachers assurance that they wanted to include all learners and did not believe discrimination existed at St. Mary's, teachers often used words such as "other" when describing inclusion students and people with disabilities. In fact, I noticed that many times when teachers spoke about their students with disabilities, they consistently spoke about them in relation to

"regular" or "normal" general education students. Teachers also often unknowingly measured inclusion students against their general education peers when talking about their successes/challenges rather than measuring a student in relation to their own growth over time.

Teachers also said that children with academic challenges were much easier to "have in the classroom" or "fit in" than students with behavior challenges. This is mostly because participants used more negative adjectives when describing behavior challenged rather than academically challenged students, however, Suzanne said

> When students need extra help or reduced questions for tests, that's one thing, but when a kid has a behavior problem [St. Mary's teachers] can't work with that…we don't have enough time or people to handle anything too much out of the norm.

Millie and Henry also mentioned the challenges they have with behavior challenges in the classroom, and how they have both experienced parents of general education students "complaining" about not wanting their children in classes with inclusion students, but when I asked the focus group if this was a typical response, Michael responded, "it doesn't happen often…I think some parents think kids, especially the ones with behavior problems, take away [time] from their own children…but I don't know for sure."

Catholic Inclusion Is Only For Some Students with Disabilities

Dr. Johnson's beliefs about the potential for Catholic inclusion were more idealistic despite her words that she had seen, "many students, who would these days been considered inclusion students, forced to leave Catholic school" due to lack of resources. She felt that regardless of how Catholic schools used to operate, "they are powerful institutions that are capable of growing into the future in a way that is more diverse and embraces all learners."

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Mr. Brown however expressed his thoughts about what he thinks is happening right now at St. Mary's and in almost all Los Angeles Catholic schools:

The problem with Catholic education is that there are significant limitations…just in the way that these schools have been designed and set up. We don't have support programs like public schools do. We don't have someone who is designated as a coach, or as a specialist 100% of the time. Or if someone needs one-on-one, we don't have shadow opportunities…because of the tuition limitations, we can't afford a lot of those programs. And [even] in public school a lot of those programs are being cut or trimmed down…but for students who we can provide access to, I say we do a pretty damn good job. I think it's a disservice when a Catholic school would take a child with a disability when it could be more beneficial somewhere else.

When Mr. Brown's expressed his view about the realities of how much more it costs to run inclusion for what he called, "real Special Ed. students" he was very frank and unapologetic, ending his statement by saying that "at least [St. Mary's] is trying to do the right thing…we are diverse."

All of the teachers at St. Mary's School had limited experience teaching students with disabilities, however, those who did have knowledge of what inclusion looks like in public schools had a different, more negative feeling of how inclusion works or should be working at St. Mary's. Carolyn, who worked briefly in the Overly Unified School District, felt that what was happening at St. Mary's was not really inclusion as it is normally defined in the special education field. Carolyn pointed out:

[St. Mary's doesn't] have special teachers for Special Ed that [take] kids to a special

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room and work with them. At Westfield School, we had a Special Ed teacher in a Special

Ed room. And the Special Ed teacher always sent an aide or came herself with them to

the computer lab, and they had special projects they would do. You know, the lessons

were geared to this.

What Carolyn's point highlighted was that in the case of teachers who had little to no special

education training, St. Mary's inclusion program felt like a giant step toward serving children

with special needs, whereas, in the case of Carolyn or Suzanne who had exposure to special

education students in public school settings, inclusion at St. Mary's was not really geared for

accommodating students with greater than mild disabilities. Suzanne said, "teaching special

education kids is more than giving them extra time in the classroom or letting them do a take-

home test…[it] takes a certain kind of skill to help some students." What Suzanne implied was

that while St. Mary's teachers wanted to teach for inclusion, they needed to do and know more

than simple differentiated learning techniques.

Aside from Carolyn and Suzanne who had experience with students with more than mild

learning challenges, none of the participants had experienced, personally or professionally, or

people they thought "had true disabilities." By "true disabilities," I gathered from interviews that

teachers meant that what they believed was present at St. Mary's was not really a disability.

Michael defined disability to mean, "like being blind or deaf, or in a wheelchair."   Paul said that

after teaching for more than twenty-five years, he was no longer:

So nervous about the learning disability kids anymore…I believe that it is just a matter of

them [students with disabilities] maturing and learning how to cope with their particular

disability. When you have a disability, a learning disability, I think before you start to

really see a success you've got to get to where you're mature emotionally and you

understand, I'm different. I need to cope. I need to learn the coping mechanisms.

Paul candidly admitted that he felt a lot of a students' success depended on his/her attitude and

awareness of his/her learning challenge, as well as on their "work ethic" and dedication to learn.

<div align="center">**Quality Technical Teacher Training**</div>

Lack of Teacher Training or Specialized Credentials

Teachers' training and experience was extremely varied both in terms of level acquired

and background formerly studying education. Several of the participants spoke of becoming

Catholic teachers because they felt it was a meaningful profession.

Paul remembers, "I got the teaching bug while I was coaching…it was by chance, really,

that I became a teacher you know. The [local] high school needed a P.E. teacher and

coach…that's how I decided to pursue a career in education." Paul said he left the Seminary and

chose to teach in a parish school because, " [Paul] believed deeply in [his] Catholic faith [and]

wanted to make a difference…[he] just wasn't cut-out for that [Seminary] life, and, well, realized

[he] wanted a family as well as wanted to make a difference."

Paul has no special education background and has no formal training in designing

inclusive education plans, although he has participated in all of the inclusion in-servicing

opportunities that have taken place at St. Mary's. Paul recalled that when he was first told by Dr.

Johnson (the school's former principal) about the plans to move the school toward a more

inclusive education model, he baulked:

I was having enough trouble trying to get some stubborn students to hand in homework,

so, kids that *really* struggled? How was I going to handle that in the classroom…I didn't

even know what [inclusion] meant...did it mean kids with Down's, kids that can't sit or work the same way as others, I didn't quite get it.

Although Rosemary had not experienced students with moderate to severe cognitive and/or behavioral needs in her general education class, she felt she did have sufficient personal knowledge of disability outside of her position at St. Mary's to assess whether or not full inclusion at the school was possible.

Of her formal special education training, Suzanne said, "at that time (1970s), if you had a Special Ed degree and you wanted to get a second one, [you] just took three classes. And that was it. I didn't have to student-teach." Carolyn never intended to have said at that point, she did not know what to do:

I was going crazy. I told my friend, we can't break into this field, we're losing money and my friend said why don't you go to Overly Unified? So I said, ok, and I went to Overly Unified and this principal, snapped me up for the computer lab because of my technical experience. [At] that time they had these little Apple 2Es with the big five-inch floppy diskettes. And there wasn't really an established program or an established curriculum. So, there came creativity too. I could establish a curriculum. Which was great.

Carolyn had neither formal teacher training nor teaching experience but, at that time, she recalled nobody needed credentials to teach computers to both general and special education K through 5 students in Overly Unified District.

When asked how she ended up teaching at a Catholic school, Carolyn stated that after working for Overly Unified District schools for five years, she left the state and when she

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returned, the job market in the private sector "was rough." She was looking for a change and for stability. Carolyn recounted:

I saw this job for a computer teacher at St. Joseph's school here in Redondo Beach. I'm Catholic, so I thought it would be a good fit. So I went over and interviewed, and had a great interview, loved the principal, and um, that was it. She said you're a teacher.

Mr. Brown fell into teaching in a similar way. He said a principal he knew said, "give me your resume, and then we went to another meeting and she gave it to another principal and I got hired the following week." He said:

I wanted to be able to support a family and still be in Catholic education, which you know, the pay isn't that much more anyway but it was enough. So, then that's how I kind of came into administration. So it's the same environment that I've always known, grew up and comfortable with.

When asked whether or not her Catholic upbringing had anything to do with her choice to teach in a Catholic school, Rosemary answered, "not really." Notably, she mentioned that she ended up at St. Mary's because she did not have her California Teaching Credential when she started teaching, and because she had heard many negative things about public schools in California.

I had heard horror stories, seen movies [about] public schools in L.A. [Public schools] had behavior issues, discipline problems, [and] too much parental involvement or, you know, the lack of it? I didn't want to be dealing with that so that's why I chose to stay in the Catholic school."

Maria said she was very conscious of making a choice to work in Catholic rather than a public school because it was "what she knew." She said:

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If you [sic] grown up in a certain way, as a Catholic, especially a Mexican Catholic, and

with the nuns, you learn to have Christ centered in your life…that's what I love about

teaching in a Catholic school. We teach the kids they need to love one another."

When asked why she decided to become a teacher, she said

My grandmother was a teacher, and my grandmother wrote instructor language books in

the 1930s…I never thought about being anything else but a teacher. [I] didn't want to be

a secretary, and there wasn't much choice for women really.

Aside from her personal experience as a mother of a son with ADD, Maria does not have

a background in special education and does not have a teaching credential. Still, Maria talked

about how important she felt it was to have either special education training, or someone on staff

that had experienced teaching children with special needs.

When asked whether or not she felt she had the tools she needed to teach children with a

range of challenges, she paused and asked for clarification of the word "range." When I

explained that a "range of challenges" meant children who were in the mild to moderate category

of special needs who required accommodations for either academic and/or behavioral challenges,

she paused for several seconds and looked nervous. She finally said:

I think the experience of all these years of teaching has helped me tremendously…[but]

behavior problems are harder in the classroom. But if I can't figure out something to do

[for a student] I ask the principal, or Drew [public   school consultant]. I feel I'm there

to help them. That's the first thing that comes to my mind. Let's see how much we can

get out of them, in a good way, you know, that they can learn at their best. At their best,

with accommodations. Basically, more than really learning Spanish, if they can feel good

about themselves. Trust themselves. They'll be successful. They will if I can give them confidence.

Noticeable during Maria's interview was that many of her answers regarding teacher training and teaching strategies were technically vague. Throughout the interview, Maria was more comfortable talking about the importance of St. Mary's Christ-centered learning environment or her feeling that "God has a reason for everything" instead of detailed accounts of how she handled challenges in the classroom.

Rosemary attributes her choice to become a Catholic teacher as, "all of the really good schools where I grew up were Catholic [and] everyone I knew was Catholic."

Inclusive Techniques and Teacher Frustration When Intervention Does Not Work

All but one participant had formal special education training, and in their discussions about inclusion and children with disabilities, teachers were honest about their lack of training and needing support when it came to delivering instruction to inclusion students.

Teachers reported that they did many things to service and facilitate the success of inclusion students and listed the following as ways they helped meet children's needs and delivering inclusive instruction; extra time on tests, reduced questions on tests and homework, take-home tests instead of in-class tests, encouraging them to try harder, communicating with parents to monitor homework and set-up a homework schedule, having a student tutored afterschool or delivering extra instruction to them after school, and having classroom volunteers such as parents or graduate students retest or re-teach curriculum to students.

Many teachers talked about being frustrated when inclusion students struggled even with accommodations and extra help. Nathalie said many times when she would run out of ideas she

would "make things up when things didn't work" in order to help struggling learners. "My real questions with inclusion, I saved them for Dr. Drew [public school special education consultant], I waited until he would come to see [my] students." When teachers had complex questions or needs regarding their inclusion students, they expressed that they would consult the public school consultant rather than rely on peers or administrative school support for help.

Elizabeth said something similar about the way she handles learning situations when she does not know what to do:

Yeah, I just have to read on my own…I go and get books and I read about it and I try to find techniques of what to do to help them. We do have the program. But still, we have to tell the parents what to do and we have to help them.

Elizabeth went on to say that when she has, "a real, a serious challenge with a student and nothing works, I [Elizabeth] call Dr. Drew, our public school specialist for inclusion kids." Therefore, when some teachers feel they need expert advice, they seek it from outside public school sources.

When Blanca shared her feelings and experiences of inclusion at St. Mary's, she spoke more about how she used peer tutoring, after school tutoring, and extended time for assignments to help her junior high students meet their academic goals. Blanca described how she felt some inclusion students work better relearning specific skills and material from their peers because they have a "special in with them." Blanca explained:

The way they have the tutoring set up, it helps them. It does. Because, at least in my class they all go to the same [eighth grade peer tutor], you know because they all feel

comfortable together. And, I mean, I told the one eighth grader, you're a gift. This kid's

never responded to teachers.

For Blanca, the idea of inclusion and extra time spent teaching were closely associated with one

another. Blanca explained that, "what 90% of inclusion kids need is extra time…time to learn,

time to digest new material." Twice, when her colleagues were speaking about giving inclusion

students extra time to complete tests and assignments, Blanca nodded vigorously and attempted

to join in the conversation.

 Similarly, Millie felt that peer tutoring was an effective way to reach students with

special needs who were in the upper grades. She shared that she believed peer tutoring worked

because:

> The pressure's kind of off…it's not a typical classroom setting. They're on the floor,
>
> they're little groups, and it's whatever works for them and some of them are really
>
> patient…[peers] explain things in a different way [to inclusion students] than [teachers]
>
> would.

Millie also spoke about her feeling that she did not always have the training she needed to

best serve inclusion students in her classroom, "I know this [inclusion] is something I need to

do…I want to be able to do it…I just was never taught *how* to do it [and] some of these kids just

need so much…sometimes I think this is not the right place for them."

Fiona too expressed how her lack of education made her feel inadequate, "sometimes I

feel like I have tried everything and I still can't get [the student] to learn in my class…I wonder

if it is me or if it is their [student's] fault…or maybe they are just lazy…I wish I knew." Michael

remembered that a few of his students, "have made him feel stupid, like he was the one with the

problem." When it came to talking about why certain students were non-responsive to teachers' methods, the teachers without training tended, after many attempted efforts to help struggling students, to assign blame or find fault with the student and not with themselves.

Carolyn recounted what I felt was a very self-assured attitude in terms of her ability to deal with inclusion students in her class. She describes her experience and knowledge:

> Computers is [sic] a little easier because kids are interested in computers, it's fun, and it can be a carrot for them, if you know what I mean. I adjusted according to my students. If one was ADHD, I brought him to sit close to me. And I'd give him a time out, we would go out in the hall together and I'd say, take a run down the hall and come back. Take another run down the hall. And here, here's our signal [she raises her index finger in the air and points to the door]. When you have to get up and run, give me the signal. And he would. So you know, we did those things, I moved them closer, I would shorten the assignment, I would send like, one of my students, we had a deal worked out with the teacher, send him on an errand. And it breaks up that study time. Breaks it up. And those are the things [I] did, the kinds of things.

Above all, Carolyn said that when it came to inclusion, it was most important to keep "their focus" in class, and to be "understanding, sensitive, helpful, and patient" whenever one could.

Maria presented a different perspective when she switched out of her role as a teacher and spoke of her experience as a parent of a child with Attention Deficit Disorder who received no accommodations in his Catholic high school. As to why this happened, Maria said:

> They're [Catholic teachers] not well prepared. Maybe they're missing more subjects on how to accommodate these students with all these problems? And you don't have to get

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deep into it. Your experience helps you. But what you can learn as you're becoming a

teacher…these subjects are extremely important. And I don't know in the past how many

of these teachers had all these subjects that spoke about inclusion.

Maria points to the lack of technical training as a reason why her son struggled in Catholic

school.

<center>**Support and Acceptance of Inclusion**</center>

Structure and Program Support but Few Resources

Dr. Johnson, the former school principal, stated that there were a series of events leading

up to the creation and structuring of the inclusion program at St. Mary's. She said:

In part, I got the idea to start the inclusion program after I finished my dissertation about

the guidance program I started at the school…I wanted to do it for a while. Then we had

a current student who was diagnosed with a terminal illness…I had two teachers with

Special Ed experience, so the time was right. Also, there had been mention over the

years that schools needed to be inclusive, you know how things go in cycles, but as

enrollment [in Catholic schools] started declining…that's when talk, about 2001, really

started. [It was] about other ways we could attract new families. And it fit perfectly with

the mission of Catholic schools.

When asked whether the idea of increasing enrollment factored into the creation of St.

Mary's new mission, Dr. Johnson said "of course it's a factor, it is with every Catholic school

principal…but for us [St. Mary's] the impetus was not that. It was mostly born out of our own

need to serve the children we already had at the school."

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When I asked Dr. Johnson what she thought was the biggest challenge in creating the inclusion program at St. Mary's School, she said that it was the fact that she had several teachers who had been at the school for a long time, and for them, the inclusion program meant there would be a lot of changes. She said:

> It wasn't as if all of a sudden we had a number of students that we were accepting with learning disabilities…[we've] had academically challenged students at [St. Mary's] for as long as there have been students. Teachers do not like change…I experienced their resistance to changes when I started the guidance program here. I think this was the same situation with the introduction of inclusion…[we] were asking teachers to do more than just help students in any way they felt was needed…[we] asked them in a very specific, documented way to recognize a child's challenge and to specifically design an academic plan for them with help from trained individuals.

During Dr. Johnson's interview, the theme of change and people not liking change came up several times. After several decades working in Catholic schools, Dr. Johnson felt certain that since the idea of change was so daunting to teachers because, given their chosen profession, teachers like working within a specific structure and routine of predictability. Therefore, in order for the idea of inclusion and a "new way of thinking about students' needs" would have to be coaxed from teachers' faith: the fact that Catholic teachers are centered and inspired by their Catholic faith would be the most powerful way to "help them adjust to a new way of thinking and teaching."

Dr. Johnson spoke passionately about her role in leading and inspiring the faculty to "teach as Jesus did" and help foster the acceptance of the inclusion program. She said:

Considering the fact that the teachers had experienced working with and knowing Jane [terminally ill kindergarten student] who needed a lot of different instruction in order to access [the curriculum], it was easy to link the idea of inclusion to the community's experience with Jane [and] I felt this was a powerful way to make everyone understand why inclusion was the direction the school needed to move in. [Inclusion] was what being a Christ-centered education was meant to be, in my opinion.

Dr. Johnson's belief in the Catholic mission to teach all children and her Catholic faith was evident and palpable when speaking about the need she felt there was not only in starting an inclusion program at St. Mary's but taking time to develop and cultivate teachers' support of it. Dr. Johnson stated:

Of course, as the boss, a principal can order teachers to do almost anything, but it is a leader's job to nurture understanding, and empower those around you to want to work in certain ways…I wanted the teachers to want inclusion and feel that it was the right thing to do. [I] just open the door for them. That's my job as a servant leader…[to] inspire others to want change, not change things for them.

Mr. Brown changed the procedures for inclusive education at St. Mary's when he first became principal. At that time, the Archdiocesan Support Team Education Plan/Minor Adjustment Plan (STEP/MAP) procedure for including children with disabilities in Los Angeles Catholic schools was not being used however inclusive education strategies were already at work in the classroom. Mr. Brown says he "worked hard to formalize the presence of the STEP/MAP procedure". He said he felt it "was the best way" to service inclusion students, even though there is a lot of "paperwork." He explained:

Basically, if you have a problem with a student you go to that teacher and then they'll give you, ok try this first, here's the format, here's the paperwork, start documenting and I'll make the file in the STEP box. And then, they kind of walk through that process together…I would go in and give other strategies to the curriculum instructor…[the goal is teachers] don't have necessarily to do two strategies, one for this child and one for the rest of the class…but one that encompasses everybody. The idea of inclusion [is] to not have to pull anyone out, and lose curricular time.

Throughout my interview with Mr. Brown, it was evident that he believed the STEP/MAP process was the "best fit for everyone…students and teachers" when it came to successful Catholic school inclusion. Although he recalled spending a great deal of time initially integrating the STEP/MAP program with the existing inclusion procedures on the teacher level at St. Mary's School, he felt it was worth all of the effort. He said, "STEP/MAP creates a list of things for teachers to do…it gives them a roadmap." Mr. Brown, who was emphatic about a principal's role in providing teachers with various classroom support, feels like inclusive education is "natural and right" for Catholic schools.

Rosemary recalled that it was the former principal who connected Catholic Social Teaching and the United States Council of Catholic Bishops' inclusive education message to inclusive practices at St. Mary's. Nevertheless, after several years of teaching for inclusion, Rosemary does not feel that there is much in place to support Catholic teachers in their efforts to include children with special needs in the classroom. Aside from a will to do "what is right," Rosemary feels teachers are left with little support on site. "Yeah…I just have to read on my own, you know, I have to go…I go and get books and I read about it and I try to find techniques

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of what to do to help them. Ultimately, when a student has a challenge, Rosemary said it is up to individual teachers to seek help and research more effective classroom strategies.

Carolyn described her teaching experience at St. Mary's as "hands-off" especially as it related to inclusion students and their academic accommodations. When asked to clarify this statement, Carolyn said, "My classroom at that school, was very hands off in terms of the teachers and the administrators went. A lot of times I didn't know what was going on [with inclusion students], unfortunately." This statement was particularly interesting to me since it was so frank, and because it was different that what I had heard from the other teachers I had interviewed.

Participant educators also expressed that in order for inclusion to be possible, open communication and transparency of the system facilitating inclusion would have to exist. Dr. Johnson expanded on this point:

> Teachers need structure to do their job…it is not enough to create a program or tell people that things need to change. An effective leader inspires people to see what needs to change and then provides the opportunity for change to happen in a predictable, manageable way…it was like that for the inclusion [program]. We could talk about it as much as we wanted but it wouldn't happen until we decided how we would put inclusive education in place…[we] had to formalize the system so we were all on the same page about [how] to solve problems in the classroom.

Mr. Brown was candid and said that based on his experience as a teacher of inclusion students, there "has to be something solid in place that teachers understand …[because] the detailed work is basically the teachers' brainstorming and figuring out what is going to work [for students with

special needs]. And that's the hard part."

Both administrators expressed how important they felt it was to support teachers and to give them a solid framework in which to work. Curiously, while both administrators could name the specifics of how inclusion worked at the school, few teachers could.

Specifically, teachers had different understandings of how to go about getting help for a child once he/she was indentified: Some thought there was an inclusion coordinator, some thought Mr. Brown was in charge of all inclusion matters, and others admitted to going "straight to our public school guy for the answers."

In two cases, teachers only vaguely remembered their inclusion in-service training at St. Mary's, and could not tell me the details of how to refer a child to the STEP/MAP program if he/she thought a child needed help. I was surprised also when Carolyn told me that they never really have any meetings about inclusion students, or that it was hard to know which kids had STEP/MAP plans. Carolyn said that she felt all of the preliminary discussions about STEP/MAP, "were loose discussions, brought up during faculty meetings. But I'm trying to think about how I got that [STEP] paperwork, if those were given…I think those were given out to us at some point. And we had those [STEP files for students] available to us."

Although it was evident throughout her interview that Maria believed in inclusive education at St. Mary's, she said little about how inclusion actually works in the school.   A great deal of work, conscious thought, strong leadership and preparation, and expertise was put into implementing and sustaining inclusive education at St. Mary's. Nevertheless, the issue of limited resources or the inability to admit all children with disabilities is, as Paul states, "not because we don't want to have certain kids here or we are prejudiced, or we hate change…the

problem with Catholic education is that there are significant limitations."

Mr. Brown too mentioned the limitations suffered by Catholic schools, which he outlined specifically as, "lack of funding, which obviously affects St. Mary's ability to hire support staff and faculty with specialized training, is one of the key causes of this. Dr. Johnson expanded this point when she stated, "until [Catholic] schools have access to a surplus of tuition funds or government funding [for special education] it is hard to see where the money to support accepting all children with need at [St. Mary's].

Despite the fact that participants spoke often about inclusion being "the Catholic thing to do," only one teacher and one administrator named or linked Catholic teachings and directives to that thought. Similarly, absent from these interviews were any mention of Catholic Social Teachings, Bishops' directives to be more inclusive, or knowledge of archdiocesan support for schools to be more inclusive.

Although four of the participants mentioned they believed it could be very beneficial for them and the inclusive mission of Catholic school on the whole to have more archdiocesan support for teachers and schools, Mr. Brown expressed that support is lacking. He said:

> I'll be honest with you. [Archdiocesan support for inclusion] is basically one person out there giving me support. And principal [sic] meetings, there's no talk about it. There's nothing out there on the radar from the Archdiocese. But that's fine. Because if I need support I know the one person I can go to.

Still, almost all of the participants agreed that without, "proper support from the top [Archdiocese] and here [St. Mary's]," inclusion would not develop into what it could potentially be for a diverse group of students.

Parental Support for Inclusion

Both administrators and teachers voiced their opinion that parent involvement impacted how successful inclusion was for a student. When asked questions relating to fostering acceptance of inclusion, teachers and administrators spoke about parents being an important part of a teachers' support system in relation to making the day-to-day "work so much better."

Elizabeth explained that teachers can be expertly trained in inclusion, and yet, if the parental support is not there, "everything you've worked on all day with a child is undone at home…and the next day you feel like you have to start all over again to get them on the right learning track again." Paul said:

> Sometimes I get frustrated at students where the parents will not sit down and work with the children at all. So the parents expect that, you do as much as you can, but it has to be a two-way street. It really has to be the parents working with their children, the same way with the teachers, you know, constantly meetings with the teachers so that we're all on the same page. But sometimes we have students here where the parents are not actually involved. And it's very difficult to work that way because we do our part but the other part is not working, so…I'm sure the children would be even more successful if they had the help at home.

From this statement, it is clear that teachers believe that parental support of the teacher/school/inclusion relationship is vital.

More than halfway through the focus group interview when I followed Caitlin's lead and asked a question about parents' role in inclusion, the group collectively engaged more in the conversation. The discussion began revolving around how strongly teachers felt about "the

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parent piece" or parent involvement the inclusion program. Teachers spoke about believing how positive parental support of their inclusive plans played a large part in a child's classroom success in the classroom. Henry said he thought:

> The most important thing [for successful inclusion] has been parents. If parents are on board you see success. If they're not, if they're dragging their feet, you can guarantee the kid's not going to succeed [and] for the most part I think we've had really good parents… when mom *and* dad were on board, there's really neat success when I see that. I've started to see it with Jane this year. I was talking to Dr. Drew about three weeks ago, we had about a two-minute talk in the hall and I go, she finally got a B minus on a test! I mean, you know, never in her wildest dreams did…I don't think anyone thought that she could [do well].

Michael, Jennifer, and Felicity added that without parental support at home to follow-through with homework assignments, inclusion students, "do not fully benefit from all [St. Mary's] has to offer." Michael had one of the strongest point to make about parental involvement and support of the inclusion program:

> I think too in general, the parental support is the biggest variable in the school, the thing that we have the least control over and everything else during the school day, as a teacher you have a significant amount of control. So that is I think your biggest variable and actually here [at St. Mary's] it's quite, you know, easy to have that parental input and support. So we've been very lucky I think.

The teachers' concern and need, both personally and professionally, to help St. Mary's inclusion students was heartfelt and palpable at times as I witnessed how they bounced ideas and

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experiences off of one another. All of this discussion had strong purpose; together, the teachers where trying to decode "what works to make students change." In this slight shift, the focus was on the power that parents have as the primary educators of their children, something the Catholic Church definitely promotes. Henry spoke again about parents' role in successful inclusion:

Dr. Drew talked to me, this year, saying how [an inclusion student's] mom was different. And somehow over the summer, I don't know what happened to her but she had an epiphany, evidently, and she was, instead of demanding so much for her daughter, now she was making accommodations. She was trying to help the daughter. So I think she was like us in some ways, you know, we're used to a certain way, and then someone tries to change your technique or your style and she was a little bit more resistant. But that was kind of a big break for me. I noticed a whole different attitude from the girl.

Expectation of Findings

When I first began my research, I truly believed I had little to no predetermined assumptions. It was not until I conducted the first two interviews that I realized why I felt like I was asking the wrong questions: I was not getting the answers from teachers that I had expected. After completing the literature review, I assumed that what I would find would be related strongly to ableism and a deficit-model Catholic school.

Contrarily, I found that while ableistic tendencies existed at the school, it was not at the core of the resistance I experienced from teachers when I was at St. Mary's. Teaching training specific to special education as well as an inconsistency in delivering information and/or support to teachers was more to blame. Significant also were teachers' lack of teaching strategies and

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knowing what to do when interventions did not work. All of these points contributed to teachers' feelings that inclusion was "too difficult" to achieve at St. Mary's.

Culminating Summary and Introduction of Remaining Key Discussion Points

During the course of this research, four main themes revealed themselves to be the most pronounced and distinct: Inclusion is "Catholic Thing to Do"; Inclusion as "Other" Education; Support and Acceptance of Inclusion; Quality Technical Teacher Training.

I recontextualized this study by describing certain key aspects of St. Mary's and its inclusive setting, explaining how access to the research site was secured, and detailing my relationship with the school and with its new principal. To learn about teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of disability and inclusive education in one Catholic Elementary School in California, I told the inclusion stories of five teachers and two administrators, as well as recounted the collective opinions and experiences of eleven focus group members. In an effort to increase the validity of my research, I included my own relationship with and feelings about participants when telling their stories, as well as described how their initial response to participate in the study affected moving forward with my research.

Using participants' words, I presented each theme sequentially along with its relative sub-theme, giving equal emphasis to each: all themes together speak to answer the research questions. The final section includes a description of what my bias was before conducting my research and how the data collection process brought forth unexpected results.

Chapter Five will provide a synthesis of the findings and will answer the research questions of this study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS

Summary of the Study

Whoever receives one child such as this in my name receives me.

Matthew 18:5

Catholic schools in the United States have a history of being socially-just institutions that powerfully educate those students who suffer from a variety of social injustices, such as poverty, segregation, and racism (Bryk et al., 1993). In his 2008 address to Catholic educators at the Catholic University of America, Pope Benedict XVI said that, "no child should be denied his or her right to an education in faith, which in turn nurtures the soul of a nation." That, together with inclusive directives from the United States Council of Catholic Bishops for Catholic schools to follow Catholic Social Teaching, as well as attention drawn to students with disabilities by federal public school initiatives such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and the reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), led the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to refocus its schools' mission to "Teach as Jesus Would" and be socially-just institutions that teach for inclusion. Inherent in this mission to teach for inclusion is a call to Catholic educators to design curriculum specifically for children with varying ranges of ability that would like to receive a Catholic education in a Christ-centered environment.

The purpose of this case study was to ascertain and understand teachers' beliefs, perceptions, and experiences of disability and inclusive education in one Catholic Elementary School in California that has an inclusive mission, and to uncover what these educators feel are the best ways to foster acceptance of inclusion in the school. This chapter analyzes the case

study research findings as they relate to the research questions proposed at the very beginning of this dissertation.

After restating the research questions, I discuss the significance of my findings and organize my analysis around the four themes that were introduced in chapter four. Next, I report the implications of my findings and conclude this chapter with recommendations for practice and future research.

Restatement of Research Questions

The research questions that guided this case study were based on a review of the related and relevant literature on disability studies and ableism in schools and teachers' perceptions and resistance to teaching disabled students in general education classrooms. In addition, the research questions were informed by my own professional experience as a teacher, inclusion director, and administrator of Catholic schools in Los Angeles.

St. Mary's School is one of the few elementary schools in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles that both promotes their inclusive mission and has had a growing inclusion program since 2006. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are St. Mary's teachers' beliefs, experiences, and perceptions about

disability and inclusive education?

2. What do St. Mary's teachers and administrators think are the best ways to foster

acceptance of inclusive education in the school?

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Significance of Findings

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Although numerous studies have been conducted about inclusive education in public schools, little is known about Catholic teachers' views, beliefs, and experiences of inclusion in

Catholic schools, or what Catholic teachers and administrators believe helps foster the inclusion of students with disabilities in these private school settings. In an attempt to explore what Catholic teachers and administrators are experiencing with inclusion, this case study used the voices of eighteen teachers and two administrators, and school documents to collect data related to views, beliefs, and experiences of teaching inclusion in one Catholic Elementary School.

After all of the data was analyzed, one fact became clear: Although inclusive education in Catholic schools is challenging because of its limited scope, the gap between the Catholic Church's policies about inclusion and how Catholic inclusion is operationalized in its schools is more the core of the issue.

During the course of this research, four main themes emerged after data was collected, and after key relationships, patterns, trends, and expected and unexpected results were analyzed and explored. The four themes that emerged from the data were as follows: 1) Inclusion and Catholic Faith; 2) Inclusion as "Other" Education; 3) Quality Technical Teacher Training; and 4) Support and Acceptance of Inclusion.

Teachers revealed that despite being enthusiastic and embracing inclusion, there were real challenges about having enough time or "hands in the classroom" to work with inclusion students under the current structure of the school. Teachers and administrators did feel that being Catholic held them to a higher standard when it came to accepting and wanting to teach students with learning challenges. However, even though teachers expressed that they felt tied to the Catholic mission of "Teaching as Jesus Would," they spoke about how the realities of how St. Mary's is structured and staffed on a day-to-day basis are a challenge, especially if an inclusion student has more than a mild or minor disability.

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Teachers often mentioned that while inclusion students belonged at St. Mary's, it was "more work" or "created more work" for teachers because of the extra or individualized instruction or behavior modification they needed in order to meet grade-level expectation. In this regard, teachers' resistance to inclusion was overt but it was seen in relation to teachers having little quality special education training.

Teachers self-identified that they were practicing and devoted Catholics and believed they were really helping students with special needs, but, as seen in the many ways they helped inclusion students and talked about what was needed to make them successful in the classroom, they were unaware of what really can be done to help students with special needs.

On the subject of support to make inclusion a successful part of St. Mary's mission, teachers spoke of needing extra support from students, other teachers, administrators, the Archdiocese, and parents. Additionally, teachers spoke of needing more institutional guidelines that set out what to do when they suspect a student needs more support.

Research Question One: What are St. Mary's School Teachers' Beliefs, Experiences, and Perceptions about Disability and Inclusive Education?

While there was no doubt that teachers believed strongly that inclusion fit well with the Catholic mission of the school and Catholic teachings, generally they believed that the full inclusion of some students was challenging and in some cases not possible.

Inclusion and Catholic Faith

Interview and focus group participants reported they felt their faith and being Catholic held them to a higher standard when it came to accepting and wanting to teach students with learning disabilities. Participants and documents both revealed that being inclusive is part of

what it means to be Catholic. Although participants defined inclusion differently as it pertained to learners in the classroom, there was a clear understanding and feeling from participants that all children should be included "whenever possible."

Participants spoke openly about feeling that teaching inclusion students was a part of what being Catholic meant for them as educators. Participants believed in Catholic inclusion for several reasons, but the most outstanding reason stemmed from teachers' belief that they were called to teach as Jesus taught, and that their Catholic faith grounded them in the face of feelings of failure when teaching inclusion students.

Participants also believed that including as many different types of learners in their general education classrooms was a part of their Catholic faith, and a natural extension of that belief is that all children wanting a Catholic education should be able to have one. These Catholic teachers expressed that they wanted to help children succeed and tried various methods to get them to achieve their goals, even though it was challenging and frustrating at times.

Few participants had knowledge of Papal, Catholic Social Teaching, and the United States Catholic Council of Bishops (USCCB) pronouncements to include all learners in their classrooms. Despite this fact, it was evident that the message of inclusion had been funneling down to them through their years of experience attending Catholic schools as students and going to mass. Many participants clearly expressed social justice awareness regarding children with disabilities, and felt that as Catholic teachers, it was their calling to, as Maria said, "reach out to everybody…to all of God's children who have a right to the life they want."

Documents related to Pope Benedict XVI speeches, Catholic Church teachings, and the USCCB revealed that there is a direct line drawn from what the Church teaches and what

Catholic schools should be teaching. Among these teachings there is an overt, ongoing message to Catholic schools to teach as Jesus would teach, inclusively, to all that are willing to learn and follow His way and to be "an expression of the mission entrusted by Jesus to the Church he founded" (NCCB, 1973, p. 3). Catholic schools are called to be liberating systems in which community is equalized, human dignity is restored, and "mutual respect and acceptance" is nurtured and promoted (Second Vatican Council, 1965, p. 1).

While authoritative Catholic Church documents instruct all educators to include all diverse learners, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, and ability (Second Vatican Council, 1965) and that Catholic schools are institutions of the Church that are called to faithfully respond to the Church's mission (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993), documents at a local level were less broad in their definition of inclusion and special education in Catholic schools. Documents from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and St. Mary's School related to inclusive education revealed that while they are called to instruct students inclusively, there is a distinct line drawn defining who can be reasonably accommodated to receive a Catholic education. At the local school level, documents outline that schools strive whenever possible to educate children with varying ability, accepting children who need "minor adjustments" (Archdiocese of Los Angeles, pp. xiv-3) only, or until they can no longer meet a child developmentally where they need to be met. An analysis of historical and authoritative documents from the Catholic Church, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, and St. Mary's Schools' documents on inclusion revealed that inclusion is only meant for some, and that there were definite types of students with special needs who could not be served by Catholic schools.

The definition of inclusion for Catholic students accepted in Catholic elementary

schools—special education students needing only minor adjustments—reveals the extent to which the Archdiocese of Los Angeles and St. Mary's School is operating with a quasi-deficit model in place, often defining students with special needs in relation to typical learners who have standardized, core objectives and benchmarks they need to meet in similar ways in order to graduate (Hehir, 2002). Although this does not negate the socially just intention of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles to move toward more consciously including all learners, it does water it down considerably.

Instead of being a system of schools that routinely, openly, and effectively embraces all learners with special needs, who by right of human dignity are entitled to be educated in Catholic school (Second Vatican Council, 1965), archdiocesan policies limit the type of children with disabilities that they are willing to accept because they decide to admit only those children with minor disabilities who can reasonably be accommodated. While this is definitely a progressive effort to become more inclusive, it does not fully realize the intent of Catholic Social Teaching, and does not go all the way in declaring that Catholic schools will include all learners.

Time, Fairness, and Equality

Participants felt strongly that inclusive education was a matter of social justice because it was their mission to teach for diversity, and that children learn more in diverse settings where children are treated fairly and equally.

Some participants reported that they believed it would not be fair to turn students away from the school just because of their disability, but that it was hard sometimes to find the balance between what was fair and what was equal. Participants responded and recognized that equality in the classroom was an important part of living and demonstrating social justice to the students,

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yet they referred to the time it took to instruct inclusion students as being unfair to students who needed less of their attention, or as Mr. Brown expressed, "[St. Mary's] doesn't have the resources [to teach all children] and it wouldn't be fair for any of the kids, or the rest of the kids."

Associating inclusion students with extra work, or different work, or as needing more time to instruct them rather than seeing differentiated teaching as a benefit to all students, also reveals that there is a binary educational environment active at St. Mary's School (Hehir, 2002).

Participants expressed they perceived some inclusion students as taking too much time away from their general education students. They stated that this perception was influenced negatively by the increased amount of time it took to instruct, test, and prepare special documents for inclusion students, so that they could have full access to the program. Participants also discussed that lack of resources in the form of extra help and expertise in their classrooms further complicated their ability to successful include all learners in the classroom, and took away time from other students.

The issue of inclusion students taking time away from general education students many times coincided with a discussion about fairness and equality. Teachers said they felt it was unfair to general education students and/or created imbalance when teachers had to re-teach concepts or slow down instruction for inclusion students. Again, teachers said they believed unequal instructional time or the repeated redirection of inclusion students contributed to their feelings that inclusion negatively impacted the general education learners in their classrooms.

Michalko (2008) states that mainstream inclusion often presents itself in the classroom as "trouble," because teachers experience inclusion as taking away from other students, even

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though they are committed to trying to teach everyone equally. Stating that inclusion takes too much time and is unfair to general education learners is a way for teachers to justify their ableist beliefs because it does not take into account the fact that students with disabilities require special teaching strategies and should not be taught in comparison to their classmates, but rather alongside with them.

Generally, St. Mary's teachers' positive attitudes, understanding, and willingness to accommodate students were stronger if a student had an academic and/or cognitive challenge rather than a behavioral one. Yanito et al. (1987) posit that teachers' positive perceptions of inclusion not only vary depending on the amount of time teachers need to spend with them, but also, teachers' positive feelings towards inclusion depended strongly on whether or not or the frequency by which a student's challenge in the classroom interrupted or increased the amount of instruction.

Hehir (2005) notes that the problem with mainstream inclusion is that despite teachers feeling empathy for their students with challenges, disability in the classroom is still experienced by teachers as needing students to be the "same" rather than as accepting "different" or "diverse" as the norm.

Participants felt that if they could somehow decode a student's learning challenge they could be more successful with inclusion at St. Mary's School. Teachers influenced by ableistic beliefs often say including disabled students in the classroom disrupts the "normal" pattern for other students, making them feel that if they just "find the right technologies… the problem [disability] w[ould] be solved" (Michalko, 2008, p. 402).

Arnesen, Allen and Simonsen (2009) note that, "inclusion may be understood not just as adding on to existing structures, but as a process of transforming societies, communities and institutions such as schools to become diversity-sensitive" (p. 46). This is the challenge that St. Mary's School faces if the inclusion program will live up to its name.

Inclusion as "Other": Catholic School is Only for Some Students

When I first began asking teachers and administrators questions about inclusion at St. Mary's School, I expected to find ample, overt evidence in their stories that ableism existed. I expected this because over the years of working at St. Mary's and with children with disabilities, I have experienced teachers talking negatively about their inclusion students as well as resisting to learn more about inclusion while continuing to fail students on tests and assignments instead of giving them accommodations. Although on the surface teachers were speaking openly and genuinely in expressing how "inclusion should work" at St. Mary's, many were frustrated about not knowing how to help some students.

A close reading of how participants expressed their frustration when referring to their students revealed that when teachers identified inclusion students by their labels, or as "those students" or "other", they saw them as different, and were unconsciously comparing them to their general education students. When many participants spoke about challenging or frustrating experiences in their classrooms with inclusion students, they referred to them using their disability label rather than by name, such as "the ADD kid".

Black-Hawkins, Florian and Rouse (2007) argue that, at the school level, labeling or categorization of students in terms of their disability tends to happen when the difficulties of the

students exceed the capacity of the school to respond. Such labeling, which sees a child's difficulties as a medical problems, reduces the school's sense of responsibility.

Disability studies (DS) also challenges the idea of normal and able, and Reid & Knight (2006) warn against labeling or "othering" students with challenges since it frames them automatically as outside of the ideal, or not belonging to a group. The Disability Studies' perspective recognizes disability not as difference but as "another interesting way to be alive" (Smith et al., 2009) and sees individual support as the norm for all learners in classrooms rather than as a special accommodation to help inclusion students be more like the majority of students in a class. At St. Mary's School, academic support on an individual basis was not the norm and academic inclusion plans and/or accommodations made for inclusion students strictly followed the general education plans of "normal" students in the class. Rather than constructing unique questions or methods for instructing inclusion students that better suited their ability to access the curriculum, teachers simply reduced the number of questions inclusion students needed to answer for homework, or reduced the number of questions for tests, or gave inclusion students extended time for homework and tests.

Quality Technical Teacher Training

Teachers stated that at times they felt frustrated when their students consistently fell behind academically since they knew they lack specialized training/knowledge of how to help individual students. Participants often discussed their passion to help inclusion students at the school succeed despite their lack of special education training. The essence of participants' feelings in regard to Catholic teacher training and Catholic inclusion is that with inclusion brings an increased need for high quality teachers equipped to meet the needs of all learners. This fact,

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as Dr. Johnson stated, "becomes evident when you want to provide not only equal opportunities for all, but also Catholic education that promotes an inclusive society."

Ballard (2003) says that inclusive education is concerned with issues of social justice, and teachers need to know how to create classrooms that foster respect, fairness, and equity. Often, when a teacher does not have the technical training necessary to tackle the challenge that inclusion brings to the general education classroom, resistance toward inclusion is created. Ballard (2003) also states that in order to facilitate inclusion in schools, teachers need to understand "the historical, socio-cultural and ideological contexts that create discriminatory and oppressive practices in education" (p. 59).

Sanders and Horn (1998) state that the quality of a teacher's education and their experiences contribute more to a child's achievement in the classroom than any other factor, including class size, class composition, or background. Even though participants expressed that they felt tied to the Catholic mission of teaching as Jesus would, they spoke about how the realities or day-to-day logistics are tough to manage and at times impinge upon their believe that full inclusion is possible.

Teachers at St. Mary's School admitted that they felt they had the power and influence necessary to "change a child's experience in the classroom" and yet, few to none of the participants had training specific to either inclusion or special education. Despite feeling the pressure and the desire to include all learners in their general education classroom, teachers reported directly and indirectly that when it came to certain students with disabilities, they did not feel qualified to either judge whether accommodations were working for students, or to

construct and deliver learning challenge-specific methods to meet children where they need to be met.

According to Hamre and Oyler (2004) teachers' resistance toward inclusion and students with disabilities is created when there is a the lack of exposure to the disabled inside and outside of schools, and there is a lack of proper special education training for teachers to adequately understand and serve students' needs in the classroom. Participants reported that often they felt frustrated when dealing with inclusion students in the classroom because they either did not know why their instruction was ineffective or when they felt a student's needs were beyond their expertise.

Teachers play a vital role in delivering appropriate and quality education to students since they are in charge of assessing, guiding, and instructing a child on a daily basis. In fact, the quality of the teacher does more to contribute a child's achievement than class size, technology, and background (Bailleul, P., Bataille, A., Langlois, C., Lanoe, P. and Mazereau, P., 2008; Sanders & Horn, 1998). McKinsey and Company (2007) say, "the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers' education" (p.13) which drives home the notion that without thorough and specific training, teachers are less effective in moving students toward their goals.

Feelings of frustration among teachers of special education learners are noted in literature related to teachers and resistance. Resistance and frustration for a teacher with inclusion students in the classroom is created when technical teacher training is lacking before a teacher experiences challenges on the job (Hamre & Oyler, 2004; Jordan et. al., 2009; Villa & Thousand, 2001).

Underlying the process of inclusion in all schools is the assumption that a general education classroom teacher has certain teaching techniques, knowledge and understanding about the needs of different learners, and curriculum strategies. Florian and Rouse (2009) state, "The task of initial teacher education is to prepare people to enter a profession which accepts individual and collective responsibility for improving the learning and participation of all children" (p. 596).

What I first noticed about the teachers at St. Mary's when reviewing their backgrounds and educational training was that few had personal experiences with people with disabilities and even fewer of them had had exposure or training in special education. In addition, the instructional structure of the school included neither paraeducators in the classroom nor had in place a co-teaching model that is considered customary practice in inclusive education and/or mainstreaming school models (Engelbrecht, Oswald, & Forlin, 2006; Idol, 2006; Villa & Thousand, 2000).

Despite the fact that St. Mary's teachers and administrators had attained a high level of training and experience, they do not have the special education or credentialing background necessary to teach fully inclusive classes.

In general, St. Mary's teachers were open to having students with learning challenges in their classrooms. Many of them referenced their Catholic upbringings and Catholic schooling when answering questions about reasons why they felt inclusion was a "good fit" with St. Mary's School. Participants reported they believed that inclusive education connected strongly with St. Mary's Catholic mission and philosophy to educate the whole child, although some voiced the

opinion, as Henry said, "it would be easier sometimes to not be so inclusive" because, "[teachers] run out of things to think of for [inclusion] students."

Literature related to teacher preparation, resistance, and Disability Studies notes that teacher resistance comes in many forms, some overt and some covert. What I found at St. Mary's was what I consider covert resistance. Teachers' resistance to inclusion was soft or veiled rather than being overt, and it was related to having little technical special education training or exposure to students with disabilities.

In general, participants had different levels of understandings about how inclusion works in the classroom and in the school, and what actually was considered an accommodation for students. Participants reported that they did many things to service inclusion students, and listed the following ways of helping them succeed and delivering inclusive instruction; extra time on tests, reduced questions on tests and homework, take-home tests instead of in-class tests, encouraging them to try harder, communicating with parents to monitor homework and set-up a homework schedule, having a student tutored afterschool or delivering extra instruction to them after school, having classroom volunteers such as parents or graduate students retest or re-teach curriculum to students.

While teachers believed they were really helping students with special needs, they were unaware of what really can be done to help them, such as differentiated instruction for inclusion, response to intervention techniques (RTI), or positive behavior plans, and this appeared to be the root of their soft resistance to inclusion despite their willingness to help inclusion students. Moreover, several of the participants indicated that when they had real questions about inclusion, they asked the private school consultant for help, or told the principal they thought a student

needed to be referred for testing and evaluation at a public school. This also was an indication

that teachers knew that in some instances of inclusion they were not qualified or prepared to deal

with students' challenges.

Research Question Two: What Do St. Mary's Teachers and Administrators Think Are the

Best Ways to Foster Acceptance of Inclusive Education in the School?

Teacher participants believed having more technical and teaching resources available in

the classroom would help facilitate and promote successful inclusion. Administrators felt that in

order to foster acceptance of inclusion the school needed additional resources so as to meet each

child where they needed to be met more successfully.

Although only one teacher expressed the need for greater Archdiocesan involvement and

support for inclusion, both administrators commented that greater technical, financial, and

teacher training support from the Archdiocese was needed in order to foster the acceptance of

Catholic school inclusion on the school level.

Dr. Johnson stated, "full inclusion will never happen [in Catholic schools] until the

Archdiocese moves in the direction of including all learners and not just those who have minor

disabilities…because that limits what the school can provide children" (Interview).

Participants also commented that greater support, compliance with academic plans for

inclusion students, and communication with parents was key in fostering acceptance of inclusion

at the school. Participants noted that when parents complied with homework requests, changed

their thinking about how their child needed to work, and positively supported teachers in their

efforts to make accommodations for inclusion students, it contributed to fostering acceptance of

inclusion at the school and improved student success in the general education classroom.

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Support and Acceptance of Inclusion: Few Resources and Guidelines

St. Mary's participants reported they needed additional positive support and compliance from students, other teachers, administrators, the Archdiocese, and parents to foster acceptance of inclusion and to make inclusion work for all students. Teachers also spoke of needing more communication from administrators and/or institutional (school and the Archdiocese) guidelines setting out what to do when they suspect a student needs more support, or help with identifying students with need in the classroom. Participants also reported a greater need for resources, particularly in the form of additional classroom support (classroom aide or paraeducator), teacher training, and increased funding to make full inclusion a reality.

Many topics, themes and common experiences emerged during the analysis of the data, but one of the clearest points was in the area of parental support for inclusion. Participants said that when parents of inclusion students were made aware of what his/her child's classroom needs were, and the inclusion plan a teacher had devised, the more successful a student became.

Participants stated that they noticed that when parents took specific recommendations for students home and implemented them while their child did homework, students were more consistently more successful in the classroom, on tests, and improved their grades overall. Teachers reported that inclusion students also exhibited newly found classroom confidence when their parents were involved in the inclusion plan and were aware that teachers and parents reported to one another about a child's progress on a consistent basis.

In general, participants described needing support to make inclusion work in terms of physical classroom support. They also believed that help adapting teaching methods for inclusion students factors heavily into the success of acceptance of inclusion from teachers and

other stakeholders. Dr. Johnson said that acceptance and the success of inclusion could not happen without both "open communication with teachers about how to best instruct their students and classroom support…mentor teachers that help teachers in the classroom when it is needed."

Overall, participants reported that inclusive education is definitely apart of the mission and philosophy of St. Mary's School and is evident throughout the school in all mainstream classrooms. While participants are clear about their feelings that the school structure and resources do not support full inclusion and not all children with disabilities can or should be included in the school population, they do feel that inclusion of children who need only minor accommodations are successfully included at the school. While participants believe that full inclusion is what should be possible, in the current school structure there is neither the support nor the training or expertise to do so. Lastly, participants felt and perceived that it was their job to do as much as they can in order that their inclusion students access the curriculum, but there was a definite limit to what they can provide for children with more than minor special needs.

Similarly, participants believed that in order to foster the acceptance of full inclusion at the school, the entire school community needed to be involved and aware of the systematic inclusion process. Participants revealed that when teachers, administrators, parents, and special education experts coordinated their efforts and communicated frequently and succinctly, inclusion students were more academically and socially successful in the Catholic school environment.

Reynolds (2009) says that it is the knowledge, beliefs and values of the teacher that foster the creation of effective learning environment for pupils, making the teacher a critical influence

in education for inclusion and the development of the inclusive school. Conversely, participants felt that parents, the Archdiocese, and school administrators were the strongest and most influential forces when it came to foster acceptance of inclusive education at St. Mary's School.

Summary of Discussion

There is no doubt that St. Mary's participants are compassionate, dedicated educators committed to educating all children accepted into St. Mary's School. In many instances, participants have struggled to make inclusive education work, even when faced with challenges such as little special education training and few resources. Nevertheless, inclusion at St. Mary's School can only be considered inclusion of some students with special needs rather than inclusive Catholic education for all learners wanting to receive a Catholic education. The reasons for this reality lie partially in the fact that ableistic beliefs influence St. Mary's teachers in the classroom, and also because St. Mary's teachers, administrators, and the school lack of special education knowledge and expertise, curricular, and trained personnel required to allow all diverse learners to access the Catholic school curriculum.

Recommendations for Practice

This case study explored Catholic teachers' views, beliefs, and experiences of inclusion in one Catholic elementary school and what Catholic teachers and administrators believe helps foster the inclusion of students with disabilities in one Catholic Elementary School in California.

This study is limited in scope and time and while it does not purport to represent all Catholic teachers' and administrators views on Catholic inclusion, it does present the views of the Catholic teachers at St. Mary's School who are trying to make inclusion work in the spirit of what was intended to be a socially just education for all learners.

Some aspects of what was discovered about teachers' beliefs and experiences of inclusion at St. Mary's can be used limitedly to inform Catholic school policies and/or as a guide for other administrators in similar school settings. Because there is little research in the area of teachers' and administrators' views of inclusion in Catholic schools, this study established data that may be used as a basis for other Catholic inclusion initiatives or understanding of similar programs.

Based on the findings of this case study I offer the following recommendations for practice:

1. Catholic teachers need to be credentialed, and receive at least one year of specialized training in special education. Catholic teacher training needs to be standardized and regulated in order to meet the needs of inclusion and special education students already or incoming to Catholic schools. This is because teachers need to have a range of experience and tools before going into inclusive settings in order to promote their acceptance of inclusion and willingness to continue to teach in Catholic schools.

2. Catholic schools should promote and train their teachers for social justice, diversity because it benefits all children and all learners. Catholic schools need to provide their teachers with exposure to children with disabilities because it will better prepare Catholic teachers for inclusion in their general education classrooms and also help them gain experience in understanding why it is important to teach for diversity. To this end, Catholic schools should foster collaborative and alternative approaches to learning and teaching, while simultaneously promoting and enhancing the school's inclusive mission.

3. Teachers and administrators must be motivated and encouraged to be motivated by the Archdiocese of Los Angeles for further and continuing education on issues related to

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differentiated instruction for diversity. It needs to be part of the learning agenda for all teachers and administrators and cannot be a one-time effort when creating a new program. Inclusion, community discussions about inclusion, and education for inclusion has to be part of a growing curriculum in a school because it needs to be constantly re-embraced and integrated into school life by teachers and school administrators. To achieve this, promotions, salary increases, and other external motivations need to be put into place.

4. Catholic school administrators along with the support of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should require that teachers use differentiated instruction techniques in the classroom since it naturally includes more learners in the curriculum and helps more children gain access to new concepts they need to learn in order to succeed academically. Similarly, the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should provide Catholic schools with specific examples of effective co-teaching models for effective inclusion as well as regularly evaluate inclusion programs to ensure they are effectively educating special education students with the same rigor as general education students.

5. Catholic administrators need to create opportunities for teachers to take ownership of the inclusion programs they develop and work in. To facilitate this, Catholic administrators need to provide ongoing special education in-services and inclusion training for their faculty. In order for Catholic teachers to truly invest in inclusion, there must be more in place than just telling them that inclusion is the mission of Catholic teachings. Teachers need several and ongoing exposure to experiential in-services in order to embrace inclusive education in their hearts as well as integrate it into their practice

6. The Archdiocese of Los Angeles should continue its positive efforts and support in awakening educators who both want and do not want to know about the moral, Catholic call for inclusive schools as schools need to be made aware of their purpose for educating all diverse learners. To do this, the Archdiocese needs to provide ongoing in-services in special education and centralized, expert support and special education resources for schools and their administrators.

7. Administrators of Catholic schools must clarify their vision for a school before becoming all-inclusive. Administrators must understand that full inclusion is a tremendous, full-system change that needs to be embraced for the right reasons and with the right training, not just for the sake of increasing enrollment. The vision for inclusion must be clear and must take into consideration all community members.

8. Catholic schools, in order to meet and comply with the suggestions from the field of Disability Studies, should understand that teacher training for the inclusion of all students is vital in all cases when teaching for diversity, that there is a philosophical and practical component to mainstreaming for purposes social justice.

9. Professors teaching Disability Studies should focus some of their efforts on private and Catholic educators, spreading awareness that disability is the norm, and that "ability" is a relative, unattainable concept considering that human beings are unique by nature

Recommendations Future Research

As a result of this study, the following topics are suggested for further research in the field of inclusive education in Catholic schools:

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1. Since Catholic philosophies figure prominently in all aspects of Catholic school education, studies of learning centers and/or resource centers and/or inclusion programs could be conducted in other private school settings to gauge their overall effectiveness.

2. Since private schools are not mandated by law to credential learning specialists, a pioneer study could be conducted regarding the specific role of inclusive program directors in private school settings.

3. A study could be conducted regarding parent education about inclusion and its impact on how parents interact with teachers and the school when their child is struggling or is in need of inclusive education.

4. A study of ableism in public and private schools could be conducted to assess how it affects teachers' acceptance of children with disabilities.

5. A study of the similarities between public and private teachers' experiences of inclusion could be conducted, focusing on the common ground teachers encounter when teaching children with disabilities.

6. A study could be conducted on current training practices and Catholic school teachers, focusing on how they are training and what training they could receive before teaching, with an aim to discovering how to construct quality training programs and standards which would facilitate successful inclusion in Catholic schools.

Conclusion

Catholic schools are guided by the mission of the Catholic Church to be emancipating institutions that promote and deliver a socially-just education to all children. Because there is a right for all to life, and people with disabilities too are dignified people, made in the image of

God, they deserve to receive everything that they need to succeed and thrive in society (Second Vatican Council, 1965).

In one Catholic school, many attempts have been made to recognize and support diverse learners and include them in the Catholic school environment. While the gap between what the Catholic Church believes should be happening in its schools and how Catholic inclusion is operationalized in its schools is wide, there is no question that teachers and administrators believe that inclusion is the right and just thing to do.

The teachers and administrators studied demonstrated a deep, faith-based commitment to accommodating students in any way that promoted equity and fairness in the classroom, with the intent of providing inclusive education whenever possible. Given participants remarks that their resources and knowledge about teaching children with disabilities was limited, their work and positive attitudes about inclusion was notable.

Although the analysis revealed that Catholic teachers and administrators must gain more expertise and training in special education in order for inclusive education to take hold in more schools or to move toward accepting students with more challenging special needs, teachers and administrators felt that parental involvement in the school was among the most positive ways to foster acceptance of inclusion.

While administrators expressed the need for the Archdiocese to make stronger, more regulated efforts to provide guidance and expert training and materials to all Catholic schools who accept children who require specialized academic plans into their schools, overall, participants felt that with the right tools, aid in the classroom, teacher training for inclusion, and experience, inclusion was beneficial to all learners in the classroom. This study revealed that

despite several obstacles, teachers and administrators felt strongly about helping all of their

students succeed at the school and went to special lengths to meet the challenge of inclusion in a

Catholic school.

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LOYOLA MARYMOUNT UNIVERSITY

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Note: This form is only a template and is invalid without information particular to a proposed research study. It is the responsibility of the Principle Investigator (PI) to complete all blanks prior to submission.

Date of Preparation: July 29, 2011

Loyola Marymount University

(Title in Lay Language)

1) **I hereby authorize Michelle Powell Wechsler, Ed. D. Candidate to include me in the following research study:** To Teach as Jesus Would: Inclusive Education in a Catholic Elementary School in Los Angeles.

2) **I have been asked to participate on a research project which is designed to study teachers' experiences and beliefs regarding inclusive education in Catholic elementary school and which will last for approximately eight months.**

3) **It has been explained to me that the reason for my inclusion in this project is that I am a male or female teacher of inclusion students at St. Mary's school in Los Angeles, and I practice inclusive education in a general education classroom at that school.**

4) **I understand that if I am a subject, I will be interviewed once or twice for this study and/or participate in a focus group.**
   The investigator will interview me for approximately one-to-two hours. These procedures have been explained to me by Michelle Powell Wechsler, Ed. D. Candidate, Loyola Marymount University.

5) **I understand that I will be audiotaped in the process of these research procedures. It has been explained to me that these audiotapes will be used for teaching and/or research purposes only and that my identity will not be disclosed. I have been assured that the audiotapes will be destroyed after their use in this research project is completed. I understand that I have the right to review the audiotapes made as part of the study to determine whether they should be edited or erased in whole or in part.**

6) **I understand that the study described above may involve the following risks and/or discomforts: embarrassment and nervousness related to revealing my true feelings connected to my experiences teaching disabled students.**

7) **I also understand that the possible benefits of the study are 1) providing information/data that is beneficial to the school and its administration regarding what teachers' need in order to be successful in their inclusion efforts, 2) providing data that is potentially helpful in aiding the growth and development of St. Mary's inclusion initiatives in future years, as well as help support current and future teachers with inclusion students and best inclusive practices, and, 3) the data gathered will also potentially provide a**

more general insight into the teacher training necessary for successful Catholic school inclusion which will help to serve other teachers, schools, and administrators in similar educational settings.

8) **I understand that Michelle Powell Wechsler, who can be reached at (310) 980-5433 or email: mwechsle@lion.lmu.edu, will answer any questions I may have at any time concerning details of the procedures performed as part of this study.**
9) **If the study design or the use of the information is to be changed, I will be so informed and my consent reobtained.**
10) **I understand that I have the right to refuse to participate in, or to withdraw from this research at any time without prejudice to (e.g., my future medical care at LMU.)**
11) **I understand that circumstances may arise which might cause the investigator to terminate my participation before the completion of the study.**
12) **I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent except as specifically required by law.**
13) **I understand that I have the right to refuse to answer any question that I may not wish to answer.**

14) **I understand that in the event of research related injury, compensation and medical treatment are not provided by Loyola Marymount University.**
15) **I understand that if I have any further questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may contact David Hardy, Ph.D. Chair, Institutional Review Board, 1 LMU Drive, Suite 3000, Loyola Marymount University, Los Angeles CA 90045-2659 (310) 258-5465, david.hardy@lmu.edu.**
16) **In signing this consent form, I acknowledge receipt of a copy of the form, and a copy of the "Subject's Bill of Rights".**

17) **Subject's Signature _____Date _____**

Witness _____Date _____

APPENDIX B
Department of Catholic Schools
<u>Support Team Education Plan (STEP)</u>
<u>and Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) Flow Chart</u>

Teacher, Parents, and/or Student identifies that Student needs support in the learning environment

Teacher works with Student and Parents (as appropriate) and keeps a log of classroom support for student [STEP– FORM 1]

Teacher notifies Administrator of classroom support

If student shows progress, continue support as needed

If student still experiences difficulty in the learning environment, Teacher submits a request for STEP team referral [STEP-FORM 2], and classroom strategies attempted so far [STEP-FORM 2.1] to the Administrator.

Administrator sets meeting date with Parent [STEP-FORM 3]and gathers data from Parent [STEP-FORM 3.1] and Student [STEP-FORM 4.0, 4.1, 4.2, or 4.3] prior to meeting

The STEP Team (Parents, Referring Teacher, Administrator and/or Administrative Designee, other persons as needed, and Student when appropriate) meets to determine need for additional support for student [STEP – FORMS 5 & 6]

If gathered data indicates a need for additional student support, the Team addresses:
- Meeting agenda [STEP-FORM 5]
  - o Analyze gathered information
  - o Determine student strengths
  - o Prioritize concerns
  - o Create strategies
  - o Finalize action plan
- STEP Action plan [STEP – FORM 6]
  - o Prioritize support strategies
    - ▪ Classroom strategies
    - ▪ School strategies
    - ▪ Home strategies
    - ▪ Outside resources
  - o Identify responsible persons
  - o Develop a timeline
  - o Set date for follow-up meetings
- Follow-up procedure
  - o Complete paperwork
  - o Schedule future evaluation

If Parent disagrees with STEP outcome, and data shows that a student has a mental or physical impairment that substantially limits a major life activity, Parent may request a Minor Adjustment Plan (MAP) for Student. Teacher then refers the Parent to the Principal, who gives Parent Forms A & A.1to complete and return. [MAP– FORM A & A.1]

Principal will notify the Regional Supervisor from the Department of Catholic Schools and then schedule a MAP meeting with the STEP team and parents. [MAP – FORM B]

The STEP Team, Principal, and Parent will meet to evaluate data [MAP-FORM C] and, if student is eligible, create a MAP for student. [MAP-FORM D]

Team reconvenes to review student progress and make adjustments as needed [STEP-FORM 7]

If Parent has a complaint, Parent must submit complaint in writing to Principal and Archdiocesan Compliance Officer within 15 days of the event which is the subject of the complaint. [MAP – FORM E]

Parent may submit a request for assessment of student to the local public school district. [STEP – FORM 8]