INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: IDENTIFYING TEACHERS' STRATEGIES

FOR COPING WITH PERCEIVED STRESSORS IN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

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This research replicates the study conducted by Forlin (2001) in Churchlands, Western Australia. Forlin's Inclusive Education *Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire* was adapted from the original questionnaire to more accurately reflect the language and practice of inclusion in Ontario. The purpose of this portion of the study was to determine teachers' strategies for coping with their levels of stress with respect to teaching students with an identified exceptionality in their inclusive classrooms. Additionally, the study was to inform practice for teachers and policy makers of Ontario and perhaps other regions of Canada. Implications for teachers and recommendations for further research are presented. The population for this study was drawn from teachers in north-eastern Ontario, Canada.

Introduction

In Canada, unlike the United States for example, there is no federal department of

education legislating educational policies for the provinces and three territories. The curriculum,

financing, and delivery of education services, including special education services, are governed

by provincial and territorial legislative assemblies and may differ from jurisdiction to jurisdiction

(Winzer, 1999). Laws pertaining to rights and individual freedoms are governed by federal

legislation and the courts, and the provincial ministries of education must set policies in

accordance with the laws. In each province or territory, the Ministry or Department of Education administers the Education Act and the Minister of Education is an elected member of parliament appointed by the premier. In each jurisdiction there are elected school boards that must adhere to the education acts, regulations, and direction of the Ministry of Education.

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, passed in 1982, entrenches the rights of all citizens to receive equal treatment under the law. This includes non-discrimination against persons with impairments, disabilities, and handicapping conditions. Each Ministry of Education must adhere to the tenets within the Charter and have compulsory education laws that allow the inclusion of students with impairments, disabilities, and handicapping conditions, otherwise known as exceptionalities or special needs, to ensure that all students receive a free and appropriate education.

Across Canada, services in special education share many common features, such as the inclusion of students with special needs in regular classrooms, known as inclusion. In Ontario, beginning in the 1970's, the province began to consider mandatory inclusion of students with exceptionalities into regular classrooms. Amendments to the Education Act (Ontario Education Amendment more commonly referred to as Bill 82; Provincial Government of Ontario, 1980) brought into place mandatory instead of permissive requirements for school boards to offer special education programs and services. Recognizing that some jurisdictions in the province did not require full special education programs, the Ontario government designed this bill to be non-regulatory pertaining to placement of students. This allowed for final placement decisions to be made by the individual school boards and allowed these boards to purchase services from outside agencies and other boards (Weber & Bennett, 1999). A statement by the Ministry of Education was the first official indication that Ontario schools should consider inclusion; 'the integration of

exceptional pupils into local community classrooms should be the norm in Ontario, wherever possible, when such a placement meets the pupil's needs and where it is according to parental choice' (Statement to the Legislature, 28 May 1991; Memorandum to Directors, Superintendents, and Principals, 9 June 1994).

At first, most students with exceptionalities were placed in self-contained classrooms within their local school boards. Students were often grouped according to their specific needs. This tactic was both supported as well as opposed by different advocacy groups. Those in favour of segregated classrooms claimed the individualized attention available in smaller classrooms vital for learning how to get along in society. Those opposed to placement in self-contained classrooms considered integration with age appropriate peers vital for learning how to get along in society. By 1991, integration was considered the preferred placement for any student regardless of their individualized need (Weber & Bennett, 1999). Today, most teachers in Ontario have to accept the fact that there will be students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom. Leithwood & Jantzi (2006) explains the consequences of this significant change to the life of teachers in Ontario:

> Stress is not only an unavoidable by-product of significant change, it is an essential condition leading to constructive change as long as it is in manageable doses. But turbulence and stress have been considerably exaggerated over the past two years in Ontario as a consequence the speed with which policy changes have been introduced, and because of the painful consequences for teachers, administrators, trustees (para. 4).

According to the Ontario College of Teachers, in 2004 there was an attrition rate of 30% during the first five years for all new teachers (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004). In 2004, 9.5% to 10% of the entire full-time teaching profession turned over annually (Ontario College of Teachers, 2004). The most common reason cited for leaving was lack of support to adjust to the demands of the classroom. The Canadian Teachers' Federation June 2001 Workplace

Survey found that 47% of teachers quit before retirement due to stress and frustration. The Transition to Teaching study (2009) sponsored by the Ontario College of Teachers found that 1 in 10 of the 2008-2009 education graduates did not teach in 2008-2009 by choice. Additionally most fifth year teachers in the study viewed teaching as highly challenging (46%) and many reported a high (20%) or somewhat higher (33%) level of stress on the job (Transition to Teaching, 2009). It may be argued that there are many sources of discontent for the teachers during this time. Educational reforms based on market-driven and economic accountability, rather than based on social justice, also impacted the education of students with special needs and their teachers.

Researchers define stress as a physical, mental, or emotional response to events that causes bodily or mental tension. Simply put, stress is any outside force or event that has an effect on our body or mind (Definition of stress, n.d., para.1). Occupational stress is the negative effect on the individual from work (Ford, 2004). Occupational stress is a known cause of attrition in the workplace (Wiesniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Specifically for educators, teacher stress is defined as a response syndrome of negative effects resulting from the teachers' job (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1997, as cited in Hopkins, Hoffman, & Moss, 1997).

Amongst the stressors described by teachers is the practice of inclusion in the education of students with special needs (Brackenreed, 2008). While the teachers in the current study supported the philosophy of inclusion in general, they indicated that the lack of support in the classroom was a source of substantial stress. Three common categories of stressors were identified in the study as administrative, classroom-based, and personal. The most stressful among these were those that were perceived as interfering with a teacher's instruction time, including ever-increasing amounts of paperwork, extracurricular demands, and interpersonal

conflicts. Other stressors identified in the study included workload, time management, lack of general support and locus of control, and insufficient teacher preparation.

Bunch, Lupart, and Brown (1997) examined Canadian educators' attitudes about inclusion of students with exceptionalities. They found that teachers were generally supportive of the philosophy of inclusion as it was directly related to issues of equity and rights; it provided opportunities to reveal learning potential and it possessed general benefits for all students. Conversely, teachers expressed concerns regarding its effects on regular classroom teachers, specifically adequacy of teacher preparation and issues of teacher workload. They also expressed concerns about adequate supports for the inclusive classroom. Among the desirable supports identified in the study were adequate time for planning, support personnel, manageable class sizes and composition, classroom resources, sufficient training, and mentorship and leadership from school administration.

Avramidis and Norwich (2002), in their review of the Canadian literature with respect to teachers' attitudes toward inclusion, concluded that with resources and support, teachers' attitudes could become more positive. Teachers believed that when additional supports to moderate the effect of change were in place, inclusion was feasible. The majority of teachers in the studies reviewed did not believe these supports were in place or imminent and therefore were experiencing unacceptable levels of stress without effective mechanisms for coping with the resultant stress.

Coping Strategies

In general, coping is defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and/or external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the

resources of the person (Lazarus &Folkman, 1984). Coping is a complex construct, which is given different meanings by various theorists. Some focus on behavioral observations, other give attention to thoughts and cognitive structure (Beutler & Moos, 2003; Murray-Harvey, Slee, Lawson, Silins, Banfield& Russell, 2000).

Personal coping strategies are represented by sub-categories (Murray-Harvey, et el., 2000). Cognitive strategies are based on positive thinking. Physical strategies are comprised of such things as physical exercise and other recreational activities. Behavioural strategies are comprised of routines such as housework where little thought is required. Emotional strategies include such things as self-deprecation and Rational / Time Organization are characterized by priorities set for relaxing and work. Professional coping strategies are indicated by knowledge and self-management and preparation and planning for teaching. Social coping consists of contact with family and friends while institutional coping refers to using the organizational structure interacting with others at school.

Students' behavioural problems in general, and behavioural problems of students with special needs in particular, present a great challenge to teachers in inclusive classrooms. Studies of teacher effectiveness indicate that teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs directly influence their decision-making and actual behaviour in the classroom (Pajares, 1992). Miskolciova (2010) identified teachers' inability to cope as one of the major factors contributing to teacher burnout.

According to researchers, stress is an imbalance between the demands being made upon an individual and the resources available to help cope with the demands (Esteve, 2000; Troman & Woods, 2001; Wood & McCarthy, 2002). If personal resources and the external resources an individual can access to meet job demands are perceived to be equal to the task, then the job may

seem simply challenging. But if the demands are perceived to be overwhelming and exceeding an individual's capabilities or the resources available, they become stressors triggering mental and physical stress. Teaching is a stressful occupation. According to Lewis (2006), "teaching has got to be one of the top 5 most stressful careers in the world." In fact, another report on occupational stress in the United Kingdom found that among the groups reporting highest stress teaching ranked first (Smith et al., 2000). Teaching and education in general is a very stressful occupation (Leitwood &Riehl, 2003).

Teaching has the highest degree of career turnover of any profession" (Lewis, 2006). According to the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, one third of all new teachers leave the field within the first three to five years of teaching (Steffy, Wolfe, Pasch, & Enz, 2000).

Purpose of Study

With financial assistance from Nipissing University, the perceptions of teachers in north-eastern Ontario regarding the perceived stressors of the inclusion of students with special needs and coping strategies for dealing with perceived stressors were examined.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The population in this study was teachers in north-eastern Ontario who were teaching students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom. Four English public school boards and four English Catholic school boards from this region were included in the study. From this

population of approximately 4175 elementary and secondary school teachers,[1] a sample of 269 teachers responded to the mailed, self-administered questionnaire. It is not possible to calculate a reliable response rate because the number of teachers who had students with special needs in their classroom is/was unknown. We do know that the percentage of students receiving support for special education needs varied from a low of 9 percent to a high of 23 percent during the time period of the study. Respondents indicated that they held a mean of 13 years of teaching experience.

Measure

This research is a replication of the study conducted by Forlin (2001) in Churchlands, Western Australia. The *Inclusive Education Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire* was adapted from the original questionnaire to more accurately reflect the language and practice of inclusion in Ontario (Brackenreed & Frost, 2008). Specific attention was paid to the foundation of the questionnaire items in the literature and their relationship to the research objectives of this study. Attention was given to the questionnaire format in relation to length, the general design, and clarity of instructions. The *Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire* (TSC) is comprised of four parts. Part A solicits information about students in the classroom who have been identified by an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC), [2] for those who are waiting to be identified by an IPRC, or who are considered to be "at risk". Part B requests information about potential stressors associated with inclusive education. Part C consists of a variety of coping strategies that might be employed by the teacher. Part D is concerned with general information on external variables such as demographic details of the school and personal teaching data. Each

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[1] www.esip.gov.on.ca

[2] In Ontario, the IPRC makes identification and placement decisions for students with special needs.

section offers the respondent an opportunity to offer comments in an open-ended question. This paper describes Part C of the questionnaire, which examined the usefulness of coping strategies employed during inclusive education and its relationship to other parts of the survey.

Evaluation of the reliability of the subscale was calculated using Cronbach's coefficient Alpha. The reliability of the scale was found to be $r = .80$, which attests to the internal consistency of the responses.

Internal reliability was assessed by calculating correlation coefficients between individual items and the mean factor score. All items that produced coefficients below .50 were removed from the analysis. Commonalities in the responses were identified using Principal Component Analysis and a Varimax rotation. Using the analysis, factors were extracted. This was followed with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy, an Oblique rotation to determine whether factor analysis could be performed.

Responses to the open-ended questions were recorded, categorized, and organized according to the findings of the questionnaire. The data generated through the open-ended items were examined to see how they contributed to the understanding of the questionnaire findings. Through this logical process, the responses to the questionnaire are reported with confidence.

The subscale measured coping strategies and consists of 35 items with Likert-type scale responses designed to measure the usefulness of each strategy for teachers. Of the 35 strategies presented, 16 were personal coping strategies, 4 were professional, 2 were social, and 13 were professional in nature.

Analysis of the Data

The Likert-type scale technique presented a set of statements to which respondents were asked to express agreement or disagreement on a 5-point scale. Each degree of agreement was given a numerical value from 1(I do not use), to 5 (a high level of usefulness). Descriptive statistics were used to profile the sample of teachers. These included measures of central tendency and variability as applicable. Data from the returned surveys were listed in a frequency distribution and analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency, mean, and standard deviation of the distribution of scores. [3] Open-ended questions on the questionnaire were analyzed according to themes and related to the quantitative findings as described by the teachers through their responses to the questionnaire.

As the questionnaire contained the use of covert data, the responses varied substantially according to whether the coping strategy applied to the particular respondent. To ensure that a maximum number of responses were employed in the analysis, data were re-coded to combine recorded as *I do not use* with responses coded as *Not useful* so that the scale changed from 1 being low to 5 being high, to 1 being low and 4 being high. Each respondent's factor scores were determined by computing the mean level of coping across all items included in the respective factors. Higher scores are associated with useful coping strategies. Due to the limited number of responses to questions regarding other strategies the category was omitted from further analysis.

The experience of coping with stress is not discrete. People experience different and varying degrees of coping with stress all the time. As such our model proposes that the Likert-style scale employed, accesses interval-type responses which exist as points extracted along a

continuum of our dimension of interest (the usefulness of coping strategies) which are assumed to be effectively equal in degree of change and which can be represented as vectors in space (Beals & Krantz, 1993; Jöreskog & Moustaki, 2001). Thus, this model relies upon the assumption that coping is not ordinal in nature but continuous and our scale reflects this. Each response variable represents individual assessments of the usefulness of coping strategies which through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), can expose the underlying latent factors that contribute to the usefulness of coping strategies. However, given that the response variables are measured using a Likert-style scale, they are undeniably discrete scores and not continuous and hence the EFA is employed here primarily as a means of data description and reduction. Where EFAs are used for these purposes, many of the primary assumptions regarding the data distribution need not be met (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

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Findings of the Study

This paper reports the findings of Part C and its relationship to other parts of the *Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire (TSC)* pertaining to the usefulness of coping strategies for teachers in inclusive classrooms. Response to the study indicated that the teachers held a mean of 13 years of teaching experience. Teachers were asked to respond to the degree to which they perceived different coping strategies as useful. A sum of 35 strategies was presented. Seventeen items fell within the realm of personal coping, 3 professional, 2 social, and 13 institutional coping strategies. The Table displays in descending order, the means and standard deviations for the most and least useful items for teachers in this study.

Most Useful Coping Strategies for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

To obtain a suitable measure for coping, each of the categories is treated as a separate feature that addresses different types of potential coping strategies. The four features identified in this study relate to: personal coping, professional coping, social coping, and institutional coping skills.

Of the top ten strategies identified by teachers as useful, 6 were personal coping strategies, 3 were professional, and 2 were institutional. Maintaining a sense of humour and drawing on past experiences were perceived to be the most useful personal coping strategies. Ninety-four percent of the teachers reported that they feel maintaining a sense of humour is the most useful coping strategy (Mean coping level = 4.17). Ninety-two percent of the teachers in the sample indicated that drawing on past experiences (Mean coping level = 3.91), ninety-three percent making a plan of action and following it (Mean coping level= 3.80), eighty-one percent looking on the bright side (Mean coping level= 3.45), seventy-eight percent developing interests

outside of school (Mean coping level=3.33) and sixty-eight percent indicated that engaging in physical activities (Mean coping level= 3.01) were useful.

Ninety percent (mean=3.04) considered/perceived discussing the situation with colleagues as the most valuable coping strategy and 80% (mean= 3.29) perceived discussing with the principal as the 2 most useful institutional coping strategies. In the open-ended question a teacher responded, "With the support I receive I do not find having this child in my room any more stressful than with any child who struggles with behavior or learning. An excellent teaching assistant and supportive parents have made the difference." Interestingly, discussing the situation with the child's parents was not considered by the sample to be an effective coping mechanism at sixty-four percent (Mean coping level= 1.41).

Of the top ten responses, two were professional coping skills. Ninety-four percent (mean=3.56) indicated that coming up with different solutions and concentrating on what has to be done next (Mean coping level= 3.64) were the two most valuable strategies. In the earlier part of this questionnaire teachers indicated that a lack of appropriate training to meet the exceptional needs of a child was a source of stress. Conversely, the responses in this subscale indicate that two of the professional coping skills listed, indicating a reliance on professional ability, fall into the top ten items considered most valuable.

Table

The Mean and Standard Deviations of Perceived Usefulness of Coping Strategies Employed in Inclusive Classrooms in Descending Order

Questionnaire item	Mean	SD
22. Sense of humour	4.17	.94
32. Draw on past experiences	3.91	1.07
23. Plan of action	3.80	.96
28. Discuss with colleagues	3.66	1.05
13. Concentrate on what has to be done next	3.64	.89
19. Different solutions	3.56	.92
2. Look at bright side	3.45	.97
10. Other interests outside school	3.33	1.38
1. Discuss with principal	3.29	1.14
3. Physical exercise	3.04	1.48
17. Assure yourself things get better	2.94	1.07
5. Seek help other teachers lower grades	2.88	1.32
26. Support of other children	2.84	1.22
4. Discuss with parents of students	2.84	.87
12. Think about how another person would handle it	2.55	1.29
7. Seek help for child	2.54	1.36
21. Discuss with specialist	2.41	1.46
9. Ask relative or friend for advice	2.40	1.37

Table (continued)

The Mean and Standard Deviations of Perceived Usefulness of Coping Strategies Employed in Inclusive Classrooms in Descending Order

Questionnaire item	Mean	SD
20. Don't think about it	2.32	.91
15. Increase support personnel	2.31	.50
31. Religious support	1.95	1.37
16. Child work independently	1.91	.81
25. Share feelings with class	1.76	1.07
24. Get child moved	1.75	1.23
29. Keep feelings to self	1.72	.83
18. Keep from others how bad things are	1.70	.78
33. Hope situation will go away	1.64	.87
8. Seek help for self	1.50	1.12
30. Meditation	1.51	1.06
14. Reduce support personnel	1.41	.70
6. Write down feelings	1.40	.84
27. Use alcohol or medication	1.32	.88
11. Transfer from school	1.23	.60
34. Apply for leave	1.23	.62
35. Resign	1.16	.58

Least Useful Coping Strategies for Teachers in Inclusive Classrooms

Among the least useful coping strategies for teachers are 4 personal, 1 social, and 5 institutional coping strategies. It is interesting to note that three of these coping strategies are related to giving up: seeking a transfer from the school (Mean=1.23), applying for sick or stress leave (Mean=1.23), and resigning from teaching (Mean= 1.16). Although this sample of teachers is experiencing stress they are not abandoning their students. As previously mentioned, teachers believe in the philosophy of inclusion which appears to be giving them the determination and resilience to stay the course.

With respect to teachers' perceptions of support in the classroom, coordination of support personnel (Mean stress level = 2.87) was revealed in Part B as a cause of stress for teachers. Compatible with that is the finding in Part C that discussing the situation with a specialist (Mean coping level=2.41) and increasing the number of support personnel (Mean coping level= 2.31) were not considered to be very useful coping strategies. Conversely, decreasing the number of support personnel was viewed as even less valuable (Mean coping level= 1.51). One respondent wrote,

> … from 1995 to the present, the Ontario provincial government has taken billions of dollars out of education. The result has been that many special needs students are in classrooms and there is inadequate support available to them. The impact of this situation on classroom teachers is profoundly stressful. Teachers are coping with a completely intolerable situation.

The demands of students with special needs were described as "staggering" by many teachers. Despite this, many of the respondents indicated that "most special needs students benefit from mainstream inclusion but more concrete support is necessary." One teacher offered this explanation.

> When I filled out this questionnaire we were having a strike in our board for our EAs. The special needs children were not able to come to school because of a lack

of staff and therefore lack of safety. For 5 weeks I was amazed at how my stress levels decreased. I'm not saying I feel special needs children should not be in our schools at all. I just think we as teachers need more support staff (such as behaviourists), and supportive communication with parents.

The general tone of the comments indicated that teachers felt as if "the powers that can change the situation don't want to listen as it usually boils down to money issues." Teachers indicated that often they would learn just as school was starting in the fall whether or not the funding would be there to pay for EA salaries and materials. If the money was not available, any previous planning based on the availability of supports had to be shelved and the teacher was left to cope alone.

Of the remaining fifteen items that elicited low perceptions of usefulness, four relate to personal coping skills. Eighty-six percent of teachers reported low levels of usefulness for writing things down (Mean coping level= 1.40) keeping others from knowing how bad things really are (Mean stress level = 1.70), 81% practised meditation (Mean coping level= 1.51) and 86% hoping that the situation will go away (Mean coping level= 1.64).

Within the domain of social coping skills, ninety-one percent indicated that using drugs or medication was not a useful strategy for coping with stress (Mean coping level= 1.32).

Discussion of the Results

The teachers in this study identified maintaining a sense of humour, drawing on past experiences, making a plan and following it, concentrating on what has to be done next, and coming up with different solutions for different issues among the top ten most valuable strategies for coping with stress in inclusive classrooms. These methods of coping speak to basic characteristics of the teacher, teacher preparation, and years of teaching experience (Lewis, 2006). Maintaining a sense of humour requires that a person possesses one in the first place and

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drawing upon experiences requires exposure and opportunity. Coming up with a plan and implementing it, and concentrating on next steps requires expertise and experience on the part of the teacher. It seems reasonable to assume that mentors for novice teachers could play a significant role in mediating the coping strategies for novice teachers, alleviating levels of stress and helping to ensure the retention of teachers.

It might be argued that this also relates to the issue of in-service opportunities for teachers. The formalized and controlled Professional Learning Program (PLP) in Ontario unilaterally imposed by the past government was not respectful of teachers and was exceedingly prescriptive. It created a unique professional jeopardy by tying a particular set of courses to the revoking of the licence to teach. Two days out of 194 were designated for professional development, which does not provide enough time to keep up. This is particularly important, recognizing that development is not just acquiring knowledge or teaching skills, but sustaining motivation and innovation as well.

There are strong indications of the need for additional support for teachers. The attrition rate among new teachers is high, with about one-third in the first five years exiting the profession. The strains upon teaching are also manifested in disability leaves, which have doubled since 1991, and depression rates, in particular, which have been identified as one-third higher than in other professions (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004).

With most school boards opting for decentralization of administration, schools are now given the opportunity to select and design their own professional development in an attempt to more closely meet the needs of the school staff. The responsibility for the organization of professional development lies with the school principal. With the teachers in this study demonstrating dissatisfaction with the in-service training they were receiving in regards to

meeting the individual needs of students with special education needs, closer inspection of the opportunities being provided needs to take place.

As the teachers in this study noted, inclusion is not perceived as a significant source of stress when the appropriate supports are in place. The slash in the educational budget by the Harris government in the 1990's in play with the increased demands placed on teachers, such as inclusion and a mandate for greater teacher accountability through standards-based tests based on a new curriculum,,have created a range of abilities in the classroom that many in this study and others have argued are too great for one teacher (Lewis, 2006; Steffy, et. al., 2000; Troman & Woods, 2002). Teachers are struggling to meet the needs of all learners in the regular classroom, and they are voicing their concerns on behalf of their students, as well as themselves. As advocates for supports to inclusive education, teachers tend to view themselves as opponents rather than team members (Bennett, Deluca, & Burns, 1997), creating another source of stress resulting from the perceived lack of support to the educational reform strategy of inclusion.

Teachers support the basic philosophy of inclusion but feel they have been left to their own devices to survive the stresses created by including all students in the regular classroom without appropriate supports. In previous times, students with special education needs were sent to institutions where their education became the responsibility of the people who worked within these environments. Now they are sent to the institution of school where teachers struggle with how to create the least restrictive environment for all students. The sense of belonging and ownership inherent in the philosophy of education has yet to be experienced by many of the teachers in these studies.

With these new educational challenges, there is a growing consensus that the preparation for most Ontario teachers is too brief to be fully effective. About three-quarters of new teachers

have just one year's specific education preparation following their university degree. A first-year teacher induction program to facilitate collaboration between faculties of education and school systems, and mentoring of new teachers by experienced educators have been proposed by the Ministry to address the issue of teacher preparation (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004). In this study educators with over 10 years of teaching practice indicated that they are experiencing stress with respect to meeting the needs of special education students. This concern suggests the need for professional development and that their mentoring of novice teachers in this domain may not be effective.

This study indicates that despite the history and legislation pertaining to inclusion in Ontario, many teachers continue to experience high levels of stress resulting from the inclusion of students with special education needs in regular classrooms. Inadequate preparation in pre-service and in-service programs causing low perceptions of teacher self-competency, understanding and management of student behaviours, insufficient daily support in the classroom, and meeting the expectations of others such as parents, continue to be sources of concern for teachers, contributing to inadequate coping strategies.

Further research to address the issues must be undertaken in order to preserve the integrity of the inclusion movement while supporting the students, families, and teachers for whom the model is designed. Teachers in north-eastern Ontario appear to uphold the basic tenets of the philosophy of inclusion but at the same time are enduring substantial levels of frustration, anxiety, and generalized stress. Teachers are asking for help, demonstrated in part by the relatively escalated attrition rate and through the results of studies such as this one. It is imperative that policy makers take heed to the voices of teachers and put measures in place to address their concerns. A grade 4 classroom teacher in this study summed it up by noting,

> ... in conclusion, I feel classroom teachers experience a great deal of stress in dealing with students with special education needs. However, teachers are dedicated to helping all students learn and I am confident they will continue to meet these challenges provided they are given the much needed support involved.

Recommendations

The working table report, *Special Education Transformation* (2006), commissioned by the Ministry of Education, addresses most of the issues raised by teachers in this study. The document recommends that the Ministry of Education, through the Ontario College of Teachers, establish the completion of a half-course on special education before issuing an Ontario teaching certificate, funding for professional development related to special education based on training gaps as identified through research, standards for educational assistants, and standards for teachers of students with special needs. The document also calls for the development of resources related to special education, curriculum documents and related forms to address the needs of all students, including those with special needs, improved parent collaboration, and the creation of a multi-ministry framework that supports an integrated service delivery and funding model.

To date these recommendations have not been acted upon despite research studies and the working table report that speak for students with special education needs and their families. Further, teachers and support staff should be fully involved in the decision-making, planning and evaluation processes for individual students and school-wide programs. Extensive staff development must be made available as a part of every teacher and paraprofessional's workday. Sufficient licensed practitioners should be employed to address the social, emotional, and cognitive needs of all students. In inclusive settings, reduced class sizes and/or increased numbers of teachers in the classroom are necessary.

Teachers in this study clearly indicate that they are generally supportive of the philosophy of inclusive education but are concerned with the limited supports currently in play. When considering the philosophical approach of inclusive education, one might ask where the money saved from the closure of institutions that previously housed and trained many of our students with complex exceptionalities has been spent, considering the lack of supports available to the people in these inclusive classrooms. The financial picture for school boards lies primarily with the provincial government, which needs to address the need for a financial transformation for students with special education needs. It would appear that teachers are caught in the crossfire as politicians weigh the public support for special education, a social justice construct, against the market-driven, economic accountability movement of the previous Ontario government. In the meantime, our children are suffering as teachers struggle to cope to help them achieve their potential in inclusive classrooms without the supports deemed essential for success.

School leaders must give teachers time to do their jobs well. Since school principals are unable to create more time, it is important to use the allotted time well for teaching and learning new strategies for teaching. Are meetings being held to a limited amount of time and number and are other methods of sharing information being used effectively? E-mail and intranet postings accessible to teachers at work and at home may alleviate the necessity of some meetings.

Principals should ensure that teachers are aware of their physical and mental health benefits. Support in any format such as counselling or medication should be non-stigmatizing. Other means of coping such as walking, yoga, and meditation should be highlighted in staff communications.

Communication with staff and all other stakeholders should be regular and transparent. Misinformation and rumours create contexts where fear and insecurity are harboured. These

communications should address what is known, what is not known, and what is being talked about that is not true. A weekly e-mail, intranet and internet posting, or newsletter can keep people informed. Finally, school leaders should model resilience for their staff and students, helping them to bounce back from disappointment or defeat.

Limitations of the Study

Results of this study should be interpreted with caution, as bias may be present in the sample. Other information to verify and support these data, such as direct observations or interviews was not used. The questionnaire used in the study assumed that teachers might find the inclusion of students with special needs stressful and does not directly address the idea that teachers might find their presence rewarding.

By design the sample was limited to teachers in north-eastern Ontario with students who have special needs in their classroom, creating a relatively small sample size, making it difficult to generalize the findings to a larger population of teachers of students with and without special needs. The population in this study was of teachers in north-eastern Ontario who were teaching students with exceptionalities in the regular classroom. As such, the sample is a fixed group sample, not a random sample. While the statistical procedures employed in this study originally were not designed to be applied to fixed group samples, it was necessary to study the group of persons who had the experience and understanding of inclusion in order for the respondents to answer the items on the questionnaire. This under-representation in the sample, in part induced by the voluntary participation, presents a limitation in the study.

Due to the location of the study, north-eastern Ontario, perceptions and opportunities might differ from findings in other locations of the province or country. For example, the study

did not examine the perceptions of teachers from culturally and linguistically diverse settings

toward stressors associated with inclusion. These teachers may have unique cultural and

experiential backgrounds that might mediate their perspectives and add to our knowledge.

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Appendix
Inclusive Education Teacher Stress and Coping Questionnaire

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION TEACHER STRESS & COPING QUESTIONNAIRE

To be completed by Regular Class Teachers **who have a child who needs support for a**

Special Need

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PART A

INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN IN YOUR CLASS

1.   How many children **currently in your class** have been identified through IPRC   for the following special needs? *(please include each child in only **one** category)*

Number
of children

Autism   _____

Behaviour   _____

Blind/Low Vision   _____

Deaf/Hard of Hearing   _____

Developmental Disabilities   _____

Giftedness   _____

Learning Disabilities   _____

Mild Intellectual Disability   _____

Multiple Exceptionalities   _____

Physical   _____

Speech/Language   _____

Other *(please specify)*   _____

2.   How many children in your class are waiting for IPRC?   _____

      Please specify area(s) of special needs _____

3.   Please list the support personnel (include hours allocated) for children in your class with special
                        needs (those indicated in #1 above).

4. In your opinion, how many children in your class may be educationally
   "at risk" because of other circumstances?   _____

          Please list the types of "at risk" categories represented in your class.

       _____   _____

       _____   _____

PART B

POTENTIAL STRESSORS ASSOCIATED WITH INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The following questions all pertain to the inclusion in your regular classroom of <u>one</u> child who needs support for an identified special need.

In answering the questions below, please think of <u>one</u> child with special needs in your classroom.

1. What type of special need does this child have? _____

2. The severity of this child's special need is (circle one):

                    mild,   moderate,   severe/profound

Please circle ONE of the following points on the continuum that you feel best describes your control over the placement of this child in your classroom.

have to accept the situation				could change the situation
1	2	3	4	5

B1. ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

Please indicate to what extent the following administrative issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.

If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

		does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
1.	Obtaining relevant information about the child	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Record keeping	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Planning the child's IEP	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Adjusting unit plans	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Obtaining funding	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Obtaining physical adaptations e.g. paths, handrails or gate locks	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Taking full responsibility for the child's welfare	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Being held accountable for the child's educational outcomes	1	2	3	4	5

9. Co-ordination of support personnel	1	2	3	4	5
10. Change of routine at short notice e.g. absence of teacher aide	1	2	3	4	5
11. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B2. SUPPORT

Please indicate to what extent the following support issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.
If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
12. Locating age-appropriate educational resources for the child's ability level	1	2	3	4	5
13. Securing suitable resources for the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
14. Accessing occupational therapy	1	2	3	4	5
15. Accessing physiotherapy	1	2	3	4	5
16. Accessing speech therapy	1	2	3	4	5
17. Allocation of resource teacher	1	2	3	4	5
18. Allocation of speech and language	1	2	3	4	5
19. Allocation of teacher aide time	1	2	3	4	5
20. Employing a teacher aide	1	2	3	4	5
21. Obtaining a replacement aide during sick leave	1	2	3	4	5
22. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B3. STUDENT BEHAVIOUR					

Please indicate to what extent the following student behaviours are **stressful** for you in relation
to the special needs child in your class.
If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
23. Has a short attention span	1	2	3	4	5
24. Displays inappropriate social skills	1	2	3	4	5
25. Has limited speech	1	2	3	4	5
26. Has poor communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
27. Is attention seeking	1	2	3	4	5
28. Is hyperactive	1	2	3	4	5
29. Is withdrawn	1	2	3	4	5
30. Dominates classmates	1	2	3	4	5
31. Is manipulative	1	2	3	4	5
32. Is over-loving	1	2	3	4	5
33 Appears unaware of danger	1	2	3	4	5
34 Has poor mobility	1	2	3	4	5
35. Disturbs others	1	2	3	4	5
36. Throws tantrums	1	2	3	4	5
37. Physically attacks others e.g. hits, bites	1	2	3	4	5
38. Is verbally rude to others	1	2	3	4	5
39. Has unpredictable reactions	1	2	3	4	5
40. Runs away	1	2	3	4	5
41. Displays behaviour problems in the playground	1	2	3	4	5
42. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B4. THE CLASSROOM

Please indicate to what extent the following classroom issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.
If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
43. Management of peers' responses to distressing health or hygiene issues	1	2	3	4	5
44. Management of child's interpersonal relationships with other students	1	2	3	4	5
45. Management of sexual behaviour with peers	1	2	3	4	5
46. Time available for other students	1	2	3	4	5
47. Difficulty in monitoring other students when attending to the child	1	2	3	4	5
48. Whole class teaching is disrupted by the child	1	2	3	4	5
49. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B5. PARENTS

Please indicate to what extent the following parental issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.
If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
50. Limited contact with parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
51. Excessive meetings with parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
52. Parent(s) in the classroom	1	2	3	4	5
53. Lack of understanding of the child's capabilities by the parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
54. Lack of understanding of the long term prognosis for the child by the parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
55. Unwillingness of the parent(s) to come to terms with the child's disability	1	2	3	4	5
56. Parent / teacher tension	1	2	3	4	5
57. Socio-economic disadvantage of the family	1	2	3	4	5
58. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B6.   PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCY

Please indicate to what extent the following professional competency issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.

If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
59. Insufficient pre-service education	1	2	3	4	5
60. Inadequate in-service education regarding the child's specific special need	1	2	3	4	5
61. Inadequate in-service education in meeting the educational needs of the child	1	2	3	4	5
62. Sustaining an active learning environment for the child	1	2	3	4	5
63. Determining the child's capabilities	1	2	3	4	5
64. Determining how much to challenge the child	1	2	3	4	5
65. Confusing laziness with child's inability	1	2	3	4	5
66. Reduced ability to teach other students as effectively as you would like	1	2	3	4	5
67. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

B7.   PERSONAL COMPETENCY

Please indicate to what extent the following personal competency issues are **stressful** for you in relation to the special needs child in your class.

If an issue **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 (does not apply)

	does not apply	not stressful	somewhat stressful	quite stressful	extremely stressful
68. Meeting the child's needs	1	2	3	4	5
69. Undertaking tasks associated with the child's condition e.g. toileting	1	2	3	4	5
70. Empathising with parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
71. Responding to the child's personality	1	2	3	4	5
72. Maintaining the child's safety	1	2	3	4	5
73. Maintaining the safety of the other children	1	2	3	4	5
74. Meeting the parent(s) expectations	1	2	3	4	5
75. Other (please specify) _____	1	2	3	4	5

PART C THE USEFULNESS OF COPING STRATEGIES EMPLOYED DURING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Please continue to refer to the special needs child in your class.
Indicate how useful the following strategies are for you in **coping** with the inclusion in your regular classroom of a child who has special needs.
Respond by **circling** the number which best represents your opinion of the listed strategies.
If a strategy **does not apply** to you then please circle 1 *(I do not use)*

	I do not use	not useful	somewhat useful	quite useful	extremely useful
1. Discuss the situation with your principal	1	2	3	4	5
2. Try to look on the bright side of things	1	2	3	4	5
3. Take some form of physical exercise e.g. aerobics or sport	1	2	3	4	5
4. Discuss the situation with the child's parent(s)	1	2	3	4	5
5. Seek help & resources from teachers in lower grades	1	2	3	4	5
6. Write down your feelings	1	2	3	4	5
7. Seek professional help for the child	1	2	3	4	5
8. Seek professional help for yourself	1	2	3	4	5
9. Ask a relative or friend for advice	1	2	3	4	5
10. Develop other interests outside school	1	2	3	4	5
11. Seek a transfer from the school	1	2	3	4	5
12. Think about how a person you know would handle the situation	1	2	3	4	5
13. Concentrate on what has to be done next	1	2	3	4	5
14. Reduce the number of support personnel visiting your class	1	2	3	4	5
15. Increase the number of support personnel visiting your class	1	2	3	4	5
16. Leave the child to work independently for extended periods	1	2	3	4	5
17 Assure yourself that things will get better	1	2	3	4	5

	I do not use	not useful	somewhat useful	quite useful	extremely useful
18. Keep others from knowing how bad things really are	1	2	3	4	5
19 Come up with different solutions for difficult issues	1	2	3	4	5
20 Don't think too much about it	1	2	3	4	5
21. Discuss the situation with specialist personnel e.g. school psychologist	1	2	3	4	5
22. Maintain a sense of humour	1	2	3	4	5
23. Make a plan of action and follow it	1	2	3	4	5
24.Try to get the child moved to a special classroom or school	1	2	3	4	5
25 Share your feelings with the children in your class	1	2	3	4	5
26. Enlist support of the other children	1	2	3	4	5
27. Use alcohol or medication	1	2	3	4	5
28. Discuss the situation with colleagues	1	2	3	4	5
29. Try to keep your feelings to yourself	1	2	3	4	5
30. Practise meditation	1	2	3	4	5
31. Seek spiritual / religious support	1	2	3	4	5
31. Draw on past experiences	1	2	3	4	5
33. Hope that the situation will go away or somehow be over with	1	2	3	4	5
34. Apply for sick or stress leave	1	2	3	4	5
35. Resign from teaching	1	2	3	4	5
36. Other *(please specify)* _____	1	2	3	4	5
37. Other *(please specify)* _____	1	2	3	4	5
38. Other *(please specify)* _____	1	2	3	4	5

PART D

GENERAL INFORMATION

Please respond to each question by **circling** the appropriate response unless otherwise indicated.

1. Your age   _____

2. Your gender   Male   Female

3. Total number of years teaching   _____

4. Your class structure   (a)   Multi-age/grade   _____

   (please specify year levels)   (b)   Single grade   _____

5. Your position   (a)   Classroom teacher

   (b) Teaching principal
   (c) Teaching vice principal
   (d) Department head

                             (e)   Other *(please specify)*   _____

6. What is the highest qualification   (a)   Professional Teaching Certification

   that you hold?   (b)   Graduate Diploma

   (c) B.Ed.
   (d) M.Ed.

                             (e)   Other *(please specify)*   _____

7. Number of children in your class   _____

8. Number of children in the school   _____

9. Number of years you have been involved with the inclusion of children
   who have special needs.

                                                 _____

10. What formal education (if any) have you undertaken for teaching children with special needs?

    _____
    _____
    _____

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD any further COMMENTS regarding any aspect of inclusive education PLEASE USE THE next PAGE TO DO SO.

Email address (optional) to receive an electronic copy of the results of this research:

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

_____

_____

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Thank you very much FOR completing this questionnaire. YOU WILL BE informed of the results as soon as possible.