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Inclusive Elementary Schools and Those Who Lead Them

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examines how principals' leadership qualities influence effective elementary inclusion programs. Guiding questions address principals' perceptions of the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors essential to leadership in an inclusive school. Sites for this study were three fully included elementary schools (no self-contained classes) in southwest Ohio. Data collection methods included semi-structured interviews, observations, shadowing, and document review. The conceptual framework of relational leadership, particularly the attributes of caring, collaboration, courage, vision, and intuition organized the study. Findings illustrated that the principals believe relational leadership is necessary for the success of inclusive learning communities; they make collaborative, proactive leadership by teachers and others a fundamental part of their school renewal efforts.

Introduction

A special education teacher for fourteen years during the 1980s and 1990s, I taught children in four states and five different schools. I witnessed firsthand the degradation my students, many of whom were from poor, working class, or minority families, felt as they ducked quickly into my room, trying not to be noticed by other students who were on their way to the "regular classrooms." I heard the taunts and observed the belittling looks or sympathetic smiles that often followed us whenever we left our self-contained sanctuary to venture out onto the playground or into the community.

Sometimes my students appeared to resent me, as if I was a constant reminder of their "dummy" status. At other times, they clung to me, as if I was the only protection against the harsh world that waited outside our classroom door. I cared about my students and I appreciated their unique talents: Chris, who could recite every score of every baseball game reported in the daily newspaper; Rose, a vivacious and imaginative storyteller; Carrie, who had the kindest heart and most sympathetic ear of anyone I've ever known. Unfortunately, because we were so often excluded from the daily life of the rest of the school, my students' strengths and abilities went unrecognized and unappreciated by the other students and staff.

John Dewey (1916) said schools are primarily responsible for educating children about the habits of democracy:

courtesy, tolerance, respect, a sense of justice, and the ability to engage in dialogue necessary to form public policy. The extent to which schools will be successful in this endeavor will depend on the extent to which those with differences can "share similar values, goals, and interests, as well as by the freedom with which they can interact fruitfully and share their experiences with one another" (cited in Soltis, 1994, p. 1523). By fulfilling the role of "special education teacher" assigned to me, I could, in the end, only fail my students. As representative and protector of the separate educational system, I could never provide my students with what they needed most in order to become productive democratic citizens: a meaningful membership in their own school community. This realization sent me on a search for a more

equitable system of education for students with disabilities, indeed, for all students who deserve an opportunity to learn the habits of democracy of which Dewey spoke. What I found was inclusion.

The Promise of Inclusive Schooling

The term inclusion evokes powerful emotional reactions in many educators. For every staunch supporter of this practice of blending special and general education into one cohesive system of services, there is an opponent who will argue just as adamantly against inclusive education. Interestingly, if one were to survey educators in order to assess their understanding of the concept of inclusion, the number of different responses would surely rival the number of participants. For the purposes of this study, I use the following definition of inclusion:

Providing to all students, including those with significant disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with the needed supplementary aids and support services, in age-appropriate classrooms in their neighborhood schools, in order to prepare students for productive lives as full members of society (Lipsky and Gartner, 1997, p. 99).

It is important to note that inclusive education does not demand that all instruction take place in the general education classroom all the time. There may certainly be times when it is appropriate to provide services in settings other than the classroom. Nevertheless, inclusion does mean that the primary placement is in the general class. It also means that the general education teacher has overall responsibility for every student, whether or not that student has been identified as having a disability (Lipsky and Gartner, 1997).

The primary purpose for educating students together is to provide all children with the opportunity to learn to understand one another through experiences of working and learning in a natural environment (Stainback & Stainback, 1990). The key to success in integrated classrooms is the provision of appropriate educational programs that challenge, yet address the needs of all students, along with the provision of any necessary supports or related services students or teachers may need. Inclusion adheres to a new conceptualization of children and schools: children are more alike than different; therefore, it is not sensible to separate them for learning. Contrary to the traditional, separate system of education, which is based on a deficit model, an inclusionary model of education maintains that students with disabilities are capable of significant achievement and are worthy of respect (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

The Importance of Leadership in Inclusive Schools

For inclusion to become a viable alternative to the dual system of education, it must become a joint venture, embraced by general as well as special educators. Furthermore, inclusion must not be simply a new approach to teaching special education students; it has to be a philosophy of teaching and learning that leads to a complete and systemic transformation of schools.

The development of inclusive school communities requires major systems change (Sage, 1994) and purposeful leadership (Parker & Day, 1997). Systems-level thinking (Senge, 1990) and a change toward a more inclusive learning environments requires opportunities for teachers and other school community members to engage in dialogue about the future of education and their own visions of schooling. Sage (1994) maintains that changes supporting inclusion require leaders who emphasize teamwork and encourage critical inquiry. According to Parker and Day (1997), inclusive schools also require principals

who believe in and assertively support a philosophy of inclusiveness. These principals nourish school communities that believe in success for all students. They understand that all really does mean all, and they "continually encourage and strengthen the culture for inclusion of all members of the learning community" (p. 83).

There is a need to examine more closely the connection between leadership qualities of principals and effective inclusive schools. Traditionally the principal's involvement in the lives of students with disabilities has rested primarily with attention to requirements detailed in federal and state laws. In fact, according to Sage and Burrello (1994, p. 253), "The rules and regulation mentality that has protected special education's narrow interests is a key inhibitor of other social values necessary in the pursuit of educational outcomes for students with disabilities." This type of authority, based on functionalism and bureaucratic professionalism, is inconsistent with the concept of inclusion (Skirtic, 1991). To lead an inclusive school requires a "personal belief that all children can learn and a commitment to providing all children equal access to a rich core curriculum and quality instruction" (Servatius, Fellows & Kelly, 1992, p. 269).

Principals have long been acknowledged as instructional leaders (Parker and Day, 1997). Until recently, however, the extent to which the principal was responsible for the learning of students with disabilities has been less evident. In a dual system of education, it has been acceptable for the principal to defer to the special education administrator in matters involving students with special learning needs. By contrast, in an inclusive school, the principal is responsible for the needs of all students. This realignment of responsibility establishes a fundamental change in the roles for principals (Sage, 1994).

"Just as instruction must be congruent with the goals of inclusion-oriented curriculum, so must leadership approaches be consistent with both inclusion-oriented curriculum and instructional practices" (Giangreco, 1992, p. 249). Thousand and Villa (1992) report that schools that have successfully restructured into inclusive environments identify collaborative teams and the group decision-making process as fundamental to their success. Sage and Burrello (1994) also refer to teaming as they discuss the key elements of leadership in schools that are restructuring for inclusion. The primary task of the leadership team is to provide a model for the individual school, "a way of seeing the patterns, relationships and linkages between one another and between their shared values and purposes" (p. 28).

A Qualitative Study of Leadership in Inclusive Elementary Schools

Much of the research that addresses principals' involvement in inclusive schools, such as that of Villa, Thousand, Meyers and Nevin (1996), appears to rely primarily on surveys. Research that explores the beliefs and behaviors of inclusive school principals from their own perspectives is more rare. As a researcher whose beliefs about inclusion are grounded within an ethical paradigm (Paul & Ward, 1996), I am interested not in the question, "Does inclusion work?" but rather "What needs to be done to make inclusion work?" (p. 6).

In this qualitative, multi-site case study of inclusive elementary schools, my intent was to gain a greater understanding of the perceptions of school principals in regard to how they make inclusion "work" in their school learning communities. I used methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document review, and shadowing to help me in this endeavor. Through sustained interaction with participants (principals, general education teachers, and intervention specialists), I have attempted to provide a vivid description of the contexts within which the principals go about living their

professional lives. I tried to understand how these principals interpret and make sense of their experiences as inclusive educators.

The purpose of this study was to examine how principals' leadership qualities influence elementary school inclusion programs. The study investigated the beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors of principals who promote and sustain successful inclusive learning environments. Four questions guided this study: 1) What is it in the principals' professional and/or personal backgrounds that has encouraged them to support inclusion? 2) How do principals initiate/sustain a school wide commitment to inclusion? 3) What beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors are perceived by principals as essential to leadership in an inclusive school? 4) How do principals relate the concept of inclusion to their personal visions for education?

I used a criterion-based selection process to choose three elementary schools in the southwestern part of Ohio, within close proximity to a middle-sized urban community. Two of the schools were suburban sites, located within 10 miles of one another. One of these sites, River Valley, is a K-6 building whose students are mostly from middle to upper middle class income families. The second suburban site, Woodland Road, houses grades 1-5. Its students are of predominantly Appalachian background; 49% qualify for free or reduced lunch. The third school, Countryview, is a K-4 building and serves a rural community situated some 20 miles to the northeast of the middle-sized city. All of the schools are fully inclusive, to the extent they do not have any self-contained special education classes and all students with disabilities spend the majority of their school day in the general education classroom.

Experts in the field of special education, including special education directors and university professors, recommended principals in the schools. All three principals had over 20 years experience in the field of education and had been at their current site at least five years.

Emergence of Relational Leadership as a Conceptual Framework

Using a constant comparison method to examine and reexamine each set of data, I began to notice how the three principals' expressed beliefs and behaviors were consistent with the philosophy of relational leadership, a leadership style developed from a feminist perspective. Gradually, I began to use this theory of leadership to frame my study. The similarity between the language the principals used to describe their inclusionary learning environments and that used in the writings of female educational leaders who were describing their efforts to transform schools was striking. The ideals, beliefs, and values expressed by the female leaders are closely aligned with those held by the principals in my study as well as with those of other proponents of an ethical paradigm of inclusion. For example, Ferguson (1984) explains that women's identity is consistently formed through contexts of social relationships: Women tend to judge themselves by standards of responsibility and care toward others with whom affiliation is recognized and treasured. Arising out of their experience of connection, women's conception of moral problems is concerned with the inclusion of diverse needs rather than with the balancing of opposing claims (p. 158).

Before the relationship between inclusion and a feminist style of leadership can be more fully illustrated, however, it is necessary to emphasize that describing particular leadership styles, or behaviors in general as, "natural" for a particular sex is inappropriate. The different approaches are not biologically determined, but are influenced by social and cultural factors (Adler, Laney & Packer, 1993). They may be more accurately represented as "feminine" or "masculine," keeping in mind that some

women definitely operate within a masculine tradition of leadership, while some men may be most comfortable with more feminine ways of leadership.

Conventional leadership in schools is stereotypically masculine: based on authority, motivated by competition, and linked to success defined as prevailing over the opposition (Ozga, 1993). Traditionally, educational administrators have made decisions based on bureaucratic management models. They devise strategies and organizational guidelines to help them reach their goals. Unfortunately, the overemphasis on performance standards that reduces students to so much quantitative data, such as scores or a test or figures on attendance records provides little information about the quality of learning and growing that is taking place in schools (Adler, Laney, & Packer, 1993).

Hegelson (1990) contrasts these masculinist traits with values that women typically view as strengths: an attention to process rather than to achieving the bottom line; a willingness to think about how an action will affect other people; a concern for the wider needs of the community; a predisposition to draw on personal, private sphere experience when dealing in the public realm and; an appreciation of diversity. Hegelson does not deny that men can share these values; she does maintain, however, that they are primarily female.

Relational leadership, based on the work of Helen Regan and Gwen Brooks (1996), is based on language associated with maternal and female stereotypes- caring, vision, collaboration, courage, and intuition (p. xi). Relational leadership is created in practice, however, by the union of these feminist attributes with traditional traits typically thought of as masculine, such as an emphasis on individual achievement, competence, and predictable "rules." Regan and Brooks make the point that to advocate for an approach grounded in the female experience is not to negate the need for male-based formulations of leadership. Rather, a synthesis is required that will merge the best of each. They offer a powerful metaphor of the DNA double helix to illustrate the importance of merging feminist and masculinist types of leadership. One strand of the helix is the "either/or" strand, representing the necessity of choice. The other strand is the "both/and" strand, which embodies the necessity of collaboration.

The hydrogen bonds linking the strands together represent the necessary and frequent passage from one mode of life to the other. The strands are intertwined; neither is superior to the other, because neither is always more valuable than the other, and because it is not possible to live a fully human life on one strand alone (Regan & Brooks, 1996, p. 20).

The strength of relational leadership lies in its inclusiveness. Regan and Brooks maintain that the best leaders, female or male, will be those who "move back and forth from the conceptualization of the world primarily associated with their gender to that associated with the other" (p. 21).

Relational leaders understand that there are times when one of the strands must temporarily become dominant. For example, there are situations in which it is necessary for school leaders to focus on compliance with federal or state regulations. Even then, however, relational leaders will use their intuition to maximize opportunities to include others in collaborative decision-making.

I maintain that even as the integration of masculine and feminine traits results in more powerful leadership, the integration of the separate systems of education that still exist in our country's schools will result in a more powerful learning environment for our children. Relational leaders seem well suited to accept the challenge of providing a unified system of education that recognizes and values the

strengths of all students. Those leaders who adhere to a relational form of leadership, which blends both masculine and feminine traits into an integrated, moral leadership, are the most obvious choices to support the development of inclusion in schools.

Voices of Relational Leaders

The principals in my study exemplified the attributes of relational leaders, as described by Regan and Brooks (1996). They were caring, courageous, intuitive, visionary and collaborative. As I continued my analysis, I began to think of them as "tough nurturers." These principals emphasized participatory, shared leadership; yet, they were not afraid to make tough decisions for what they believed was ethical practice. Listening to their voices, one begins to really understand the seamless blending of the both/and strand with the either/or strand of the double helix metaphor.

Caring. Caring is "the development of an affinity for the world and the people in it, translating moral commitment to action on behalf of others" (Regan and Brooks, 1996, p. 27). According to Regan and Brooks, caring is the essence of education. The principals in my study believed this as well, and the caring they felt not only for students but also for the adults in their learning communities was clearly evident, even in the "small" things they did and said.

For example, one of the principals, Lenore, told a story about attending a 5th grade play in which one of the performers was a young man with autism. When this student first came to River Valley he was nonverbal but now he was speaking lines in a play:

He came in and said his part right in front of everybody and I looked over at his mom and she was crying. She just never thought that would happen. It was just such a monumental thing for him to do. It's such a simple thing but it's like one of those things you celebrate because you've moved an inch. Who cares if other people want to move ten inches? Mom cried and I couldn't look at her any more.

Another principal, Joseph, expressed his caring through action: he maintained that inclusion could not work in a school where the principal sat at his desk all day. Joseph does a "walk through" his school twice a day and spends extended time in one classroom each day. He also communicates in tangible ways, such as this morning bulletin excerpt:

As I pass through the classrooms students are engaged in learning; the classrooms are alive, warm, and great places for kids. What a nice environment for our students! Thanks to everyone for making Countryview a wonderful place for our children!

Joseph goes out of his way to get involved, to show his caring in ways that matter.

For example, in another bulletin he placed this ad:

Wanted: Classrooms with kids! Lonely principal to share favorite stories with students. NO CHARGE! Interested? See Mr. G.

The caring and nurturing attitudes of these principals spilled over into the schools themselves. Actions of children and adults alike demonstrated a respect and caring that was visible inside the classroom and out. Simply giving a child a little extra time to formulate an answer, or providing extra assistance in an unobtrusive way are vibrant examples of caring. Teachers in the schools I studied clearly cared for and

accepted responsibility for every one of their students. One teacher stated simply, "I am here to teach and that means I teach anybody that walks into this classroom!"

Vision. Vision is the "ability to formulate and express original ideas, enabling others to consider options in new and different ways" (Regan and Brooks, 1996, p. 36). Joseph's vision for inclusion developed through his own experience with students with disabilities. He sees inclusion, as simply the way things should be:

Inclusion is an integral part of my personal vision for education. We're in a world where there's all kinds of people and we need to learn how to deal with them. Second, we need to learn that everyone has their own unique strengths and we need to appreciate them for those traits. Finally, I believe that segregation just dooms students to a lesser level of academic achievement. I believe that if you expose these kids to higher levels of knowledge, the kinds of things that other kids get exposed to, then the kids who are struggling are going to learn and want to learn more.

Teachers at River Valley give Lenore credit for having a vision that supported inclusion. Lenore's resolve illustrates the strong beliefs that Regan and Brooks talk about. One teacher explained, "Lenore has dug in her heels and said we're not going back; we're going forward and you either get on the train or get off." Lenore illustrated her vision with this example:

When we first started doing inclusion, we realized how far off base these kids were because they've never had to take turns; they've never had to wait in a lunch line. They always went in their little groups of four or five to the cafeteria and they went right through together and they never had to ask for something. An adult was always there to say now Johnny will have and Susie will have-They didn't have to do anything. We disabled them. We did that to them. And a lot of times people will come here and say well, your kids aren't as severe as mine. Well, the heck they aren't; I mean on testing and everything they're just as severe. They just appear more normal because we've made them more normal by living in a normal environment. That's what happens to them.

According to Regan and Brooks (1996), vision is not a product; it is a continuing process, shaped by experiences and understandings of others. The experiences of Joseph, Lenore, and Gwen with their teachers and their students continue to shape their personal visions of inclusion.

Intuition. This attribute is defined as the "ability to give equal weight to experience and abstraction, mind, and heart" (Regan and Brooks, p. 33). Intuition is a critical balance to reason; it is a respecter of feelings. This became evident in one of my conversations with Gwen, when she warned that even with a staff that is actively involved in reform, one must be cautious about the rapidity with which change occurs. Intuitively, Gwen knows that people come to accept change at different times: We continue to change but we can't expect too much too soon. It takes a while to get everybody to the point that they are willing to join in. What's that old philosophy...if you put them in a boat with you there less likely to poke holes in the canoe?

Gwen accepts the presence of conflict in this same intuitive way: I really think any organization has to have somebody who kind of keeps you grounded, who makes you justify what you are doing. They

make you defend. Because if you had all these "yes" people you would never really sit and think it all through.

Intuition stimulates creativity and leads to the successful solution to problems (Regan and Brooks, 1996). It plays an integral part in the success of the inclusion schools in my study.

Courage. This is the "capacity to move ahead into the unknown, testing new ideas in the world of practice" (Regan and Brooks, p. 27-28). Courage requires a willingness to take risks. Gwen exemplifies courage in that she is willing to share leadership with others in the learning community. Gwen listed an acceptance of diversity and empowerment of staff as the two guiding forces of her leadership. She's not afraid to let others be leaders. In fact, one teacher complained that sometimes, "You just want her to tell us what to do, but Gwen usually won't do that." Gwen came to believe in inclusion partly because of the faith she had in her teacher-leaders:

I trust my teachers and I believe in what they tell me. I ask them constantly to educate me, saying I don't know what you're telling me; tell me more. Maybe you've got the answer and I just don't know it yet.

Gwen's courage stems from her willingness to listen to her teachers about what, as she says, "is good for kids." One intervention specialist paved the way for inclusion at Woodland Road School. Gwen related:

I didn't realize we were doing anything wrong with our special education students until one day Laura came to me and said, "Do you realize that the student in special education only come upstairs one day a week and that is to go to the library?" It was true because the LD and DH classes were in the basement, and so were the art, music, and gym classes as well as the cafeteria. Well, then we had to change. The intervention specialist, Laura, described Gwen's actions in these early days as "taking the bull by the horns," which even included moving the teachers' lounge downstairs, something many staff members disliked. According to Laura, "Gwen just said this is right and so we did it."

Collaboration. Regan and Brooks (1996, p. 26) define collaboration as "the ability to work in a group, eliciting and offering support to each other member, creating a synergistic environment for everyone." In describing collaboration, the authors also use the terms inclusive and connectedness, which they say are inherent to the school community. These traits were certainly inherent in all three of the schools I studied. At Countryview, collaboration is operationalized both formally and informally. One teacher gave Joseph the credit for the faculty's ability to work so well together. She said, "Joseph is the big thing. The atmosphere here did a flip-flop when he came. Joseph responded:

People have to be able to trust each other. There have to be structures that consistently throw teacher together—we have planning time, IATs, cadre meetings and family meetings—I've worked to develop the kind of culture where if you have a problem when you're a teacher, you're going to sit down with others and you're going to talk about it.

The collaborative structure at Countryview, particularly the Intervention Assistance Team (IAT), allows teachers and other staff to help children without labeling them. One teacher remarked that only a very few children had been formally tested for special education since they'd begun this process and one of those was at the request of a parent.

Lenore also sees the importance of structured time for collaboration and she schedules common planning time for her teachers. But Lenore also takes pride in her teachers' ability to work together and support one another in an informal way as well:

In the beginning, I was always looking for what works, what would make things easier for everybody. Now we've developed a lot of skill in doing it ourselves and we support each other. One of the teachers came in the lounge the other day and said she was having a problem with a student and didn't know what else to do. Immediately another teacher looped her arm through hers and said, "I'll talk to you about that student because I have some ideas." Out the door they went and I never heard another word about it. I don't have to be the one to have information; to be the one who finds the answer because now a lot of people feel comfortable enough to help.

Relational leaders create opportunities for collaboration and they model collaborative behaviors. They also encourage and support risk-taking. They nurture and they share their visions; they move back and forth easily between the different strands of leadership, using traits such as intuitiveness and decisiveness equally well. The principals in this study embody the characteristics of relational leaders, and through their leadership they have encouraged and supported effective inclusive learning environments.

Findings: Answering the Questions

I have been involved in the field of special education, in one capacity or another, since 1981. During this time I have come to believe that the most ethical way to educate students with disabilities is to support their learning in general education classrooms along with their peers without disabilities. Unfortunately, it has been my experience that teachers and administrators alike, despite mandates and litigation that encourage its implementation, often resist this practice, known as inclusion. Sometimes, educational practices that are labeled "inclusion" have been enacted without the necessary supports and services; both teachers and students have suffered as a result.

My purpose for this study was to look at schools where inclusion is being successfully implemented in order to determine what it is about the principals' leadership that fosters inclusive school environments. I wanted to understand why these principals believe in inclusion and I wanted to learn how they go about the business of promoting it within their school cultures.

Inasmuch as my purpose was to come to a deeper understanding of inclusive school principals' perspectives of leadership, I selected a research design based on interpretive discourse. I used a multi-site case study design and qualitative methods. In this way, I was able to discern the patterns of life and leadership in schools where inclusion had become a primary goal. Certainly, this study is tempered by contextual factors of culture, place, and time; it is only one interpretation of the multiple perspectives that exist at each of the sites. Furthermore, there is no one "right way" to "do inclusion." Each school must find its own way. Nevertheless, answers to the following questions may help other educators address the current and future needs of their own schools and of all the students who belong there, including those with disabilities.

What is it in the principals' professional and/or personal backgrounds that has encouraged them to support inclusion?

The principals in my study were most highly influenced by issues of political and social justice (Berres, 1996), and by their own personal experience. Lenore, Gwen, and Joseph all expressed the opinion that students with disabilities had the "right" to be included. They maintained that segregation of students, in any form, was wrong. The strength of the principals' beliefs was influenced, at least in part, by their own personal experiences. Two of the three were former special education teachers, and had seen for themselves the negative effects of segregated learning environments. While Gwen never taught special education, she did have childhood memories of a classmate with cerebral palsy who simply "disappeared" one day and never returned to her "regular" classroom. For Gwen, however, the most powerful personal experience has been to see the growth that inclusion has wrought in students in her school.

How do principals initiate and sustain a school wide commitment to inclusion?

The principals in my study were able to initiate and sustain a school wide commitment to inclusion because they are relational leaders. As such, they are also moral leaders who lead, not only with their hands, but also with their heads and hearts (Sergiovanni, 1992). They attend to values and personal beliefs as well as intellectual percepts in matters of leadership.

Lenore, Gwen, and Joseph have transformed their schools through their leadership. They accomplished this by modeling relational leadership and by sharing their own firmly held beliefs regarding the intrinsic value of every human being. They sustain a supportive environment for inclusion because they continue to foster a caring and collaborative learning community based on a common vision of doing whatever is best for children. Using courage and intuition, they encourage teachers to accept the challenge of inclusive classrooms, and all that entails. They nurture an environment of trust, where responsible risk taking and innovation are welcomed and rewarded.

These principals are excited; they are excited about promoting the growth of all members of the learning community, including themselves, as well as teachers, other staff, parents, and of course, students. The principals in my study are active participants in the daily pulse of teaching and learning. They are also proactive; they realize that for inclusion to be successful, the necessary supports and services must be available and they do everything they can to make this need a reality. Whether it was scheduling common planning time, arranging for professional development opportunities, or writing a grant, the principals were continuously engaged in the active support of their teachers.

One of the most critical ways in which principals in this study sustain an inclusive environment is their commitment to provide emotional support to their students and staff (Littrell, Billingsley, and Cross, 1994). The principals in my study interact with teachers and students on a continual basis. They are genuinely interested in what others have to say and they make time to listen. They are honest and straightforward in their communication; they solicit others' input in all matters affecting the effectiveness of the school environment but they are not afraid to make tough decisions.

They also expect their teachers to look to one another for help in problem solving. The culture of each of the three schools was one of positive interdependence and collaboration. Cultures such as these make it possible to sustain inclusive practices because they are compatible with the philosophy that acknowledges the talents and worthiness of every individual.

What beliefs, knowledge, and behaviors are perceived by principals as essential to leadership in an inclusive school?

Essential leadership in an inclusive school is founded on the belief that every human being has intrinsic value. The principals in this study believe that every child can learn. They believe all children should be challenged to their fullest potential; high expectations in their schools are the norm. They believe an inclusive learning environment that appreciates diversity is the best way to educate all students. Lenore, Gwen, and Joseph also believe that their teachers, working in collaborative teams, have the ability to provide a quality education for every child in their schools. They think that while "good teaching is good teaching" the craft of teaching is never perfected. They are convinced that good teachers will remain open to new ideas and will seek out ways to continuously improve their own performance while contributing to the overall expertise of the school staff.

All three principals hold themselves to the same standards as their teachers. They display a fundamental curiosity and strive to seek out new knowledge. They keep current regarding educational research that pertains to the goals for their schools and they actively seek out ways to increase their ability to pass this knowledge on to their teachers. Just as importantly, however, the principals understand that their teachers often have a higher degree of expertise in particular areas than they do and they attest to learning from their faculty every day.

The principals in this study understand that for inclusion to work there must be an atmosphere of shared ownership and responsibility. They constantly work to increase the decision making power of their staff in regard to school governance. Whenever possible, they encourage and model teacher leadership, whether it be in the classroom, at faculty meetings, school improvement committee meetings, or in conferences with parents. Finally, they appreciate the unique situations of each of their teachers and maintain an "open door" policy in which teachers are encouraged to come to them in times of trouble as well as celebration.

How do principals relate the concept of inclusion to their personal visions for education?

The visions for education that these principals expressed were so similar as to be almost identical. They envisioned an educational system in which students were valued for who they were instead of for what they could do. They saw classrooms as places where teachers would "just teach and keep on teaching" and where everyone learned to appreciate one another for their strengths while accepting their weaknesses. They had a vision for schools in which being different and learning different things at different rates and different times was the expected and accepted way of learning.

The principals' vision of inclusion is made possible through an environment in which teachers have the time and opportunity to work together for the benefit of students. It is made possible when there are adequate personnel to provide support to students and teachers in inclusive classrooms. Inclusion is made possible when the atmosphere of the school is one of trust, respect, and cooperation; where teachers are not afraid to try something new; where they are not afraid to admit failure or ask for help, from their principal or from one another. Finally, inclusion, as the principals in this study see it, is made

possible when this same atmosphere of trust and respect is extended to include all members of the learning community, especially students.

Implications

Inclusion is a concept whose time has come. Both legislation and litigation support the provision of inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities. As more principals begin to accept responsibility for leading their schools toward the development of inclusive learning communities, they will have to acknowledge the necessity of developing caring, collaborative relationships among all stakeholders in the educational organization.

The consideration of data collected and analyzed from this study of principals' leadership in successful inclusive elementary schools suggests several implications for educators, particularly for school administrators and university personnel who prepare teachers and principals for their roles in public schools. Included in these implications are the following issues:

- 1. Traditional forms of leadership based on bureaucratic power positions and masculinist traits of competition and confrontation alone do not work in inclusive schools.** In order for inclusion to be successful, schools must be led by relational leaders who understand the necessity and usefulness of both masculinist and feminist attributes; decisions are based on caring and are made through the blending of moral and rational/technical considerations. The principals in this study have embraced an ethic of caring and have thereby made possible inclusive learning communities. Other administrators and those who prepare administrators for leadership positions must place an ethic of caring at the center of all they do.
- 2. Schools must be restructured to allow teachers time to collaborate with one another and with other members of the educational community.** For inclusion to be effectively implemented and supported, teachers must have the opportunity to leave their classroom "islands" and begin to interact with other adults on a regular basis. This collaboration must be valued as legitimate teacher work. This issue is one of the most important...and most challenging in regard to making inclusion work.
- 3. Other resources, in addition to time, are critical to successful inclusion. One of the primary roles for principals in inclusive schools is that of resource provider.** Unfortunately, principals are often hindered in their efforts to fulfill this role due to financial constraints and funding policy beyond their control. If federal, state, and local education agencies are interested in furthering inclusive education, they need to make sure that adequate funding is available for essential personnel and other "necessary supports and services."
- 4. Successful inclusion requires ongoing dialogue between general educators and the intervention specialists who provide services and support to teachers and students alike.** While the skills and expertise of both general and special educators are appreciated in inclusive school environments, it is sometimes difficult for them to fully understand one another's perspectives (Lortie, 1978). While the distance between special and general education preparation programs may not be as great as it once was, there remains a tendency for universities to maintain separate courses of study for each group. Educating special and general educators apart from one another "keeps each group from reading the other's literature, from sharing the other's methods and techniques, and, most importantly, from developing an accurate understanding of children" (Fenden and Clabaugh, 1986, p. 184). In inclusive

schools, intervention specialists and other related service personnel often join general classroom teachers in their classes, working in partnership to meet the needs of all students. Universities need to take note of what is happening in practicing inclusive environments and provide similar opportunities for preservice teachers during their preparation programs.

5. Preservice (and inservice) administration programs should likewise infuse knowledge of inclusive practices into their curricula, because, as this study has shown, the principal is primarily responsible for articulating the school's firmly held beliefs and has a tremendous influence on the development of a shared vision. Lenore, Gwen, and Joseph are all principals who have managed to go beyond the "old ways" of educational administration. They have embraced a form of leadership that allows them to modify the skills and viewpoints of the status quo to include new ways of knowing and doing. Preservice administrator programs must go beyond content knowledge and technique (Servatious, Fellows, and Kelly, 1992). One of the major goals of an administration preparation program must be to foster "the development of each candidate's personal values, beliefs, and vision regarding inclusion" (p. 268). Encouraging administrator candidates to be self-reflective, providing opportunities for exploring alternative perspectives, providing appropriate field experiences, and facilitating practice in intragroup communication are some of the ways university administration preparation programs can accomplish this goal. As society and schools continue to become more inclusive, and more complicated, principals will face new demands and challenges. If they are to meet these increasingly arduous challenges, the values that are the "foundation of inclusive schools-respect for diversity, cooperation, and openness to change" (Servatious, Fellows, and Kelly, 1992, p. 268) will need to become those that are stressed in preparation programs as well.

Future Research

This study offers insight into the leadership of principals in inclusive elementary schools. Additional benefits to the field of education may be gained by expanding this study to middle schools, junior high schools and/or high schools. In each of the schools I studied, teachers at the upper grade levels became more frustrated with their ability to successfully include students with disabilities. It appears that teachers of older students need even more support from principals and colleagues if inclusion is going to work as it is intended.

Another possibility for future research is the study of schools that are serving more students with severe disabilities. Although there were a few students identified as having multiple disabilities in the school sites I visited, most of the students in special education had learning disabilities or mild mental retardation. The perceptions of teachers and principals in schools with children with more intense learning needs might be very different from those I studied.

Finally, each of the schools I studied was at approximately the same stage of inclusion development. They had all been involved with inclusion for the last four or five years. It would be interesting to examine leadership in schools that are either newly inclusive or those that have been fully inclusive for a longer period of time.

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