Collaborative Consultation in the Context of Inclusion

Christine M. Churchley, B.A.

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Signed Statement

I declare that the work presented in this Coursework project is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original, except as acknowledged in the text, and that the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at Flinders University or any other University.

Signature: C. Churchley
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the concept of inclusion and the teaching practices that successful teachers use in inclusive classrooms. A literature review was conducted to investigate these topics. Collaborative consultation emerged from the literature review as an effective strategy in inclusion and it was studied in depth. The study examined defining characteristics of collaborative consultation, analyzed a variety of collaborative models, and looked at the conditions under which collaboration could be successful. It was promoted in the literature and in this paper as an effective way to help teachers support all learners in inclusive classrooms.
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Collaborative Consultation in the Context of Inclusion

Chapter 1: Introduction

In the past few decades, the practice of educating students with special needs has begun to move from special schools, through mainstreaming and integration to inclusion. It is logical to assume that such a radical shift in philosophy might necessitate a change in the way that schools educate students.

The Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the literature about inclusion to determine what it means and to explore implications for teaching practice. It is hypothesized that the practice of inclusion has brought a diverse population of students to schools and that this has necessitated a change in how teachers teach all students. Reviewing the literature on topics such as inclusion and strategies that effective teachers in inclusive classrooms employ will be the focus of this paper. One such strategy, collaborative consultation will be studied in depth to determine if it is a viable practice to use in inclusive education.

The Problem Underlying the Study

The trend toward inclusion in schools has created a belief among many that all children should be educated in neighbourhood schools. It’s obvious that this opening of doors to all has broadened the diversity in many classrooms (Martinez, 2004). No longer are students automatically segregated in special schools or bussed to special classes in another school. The first option for all learners is often to be in local schools with their same-aged peers. Brownlie
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and Feniak (1998) paint a clear picture of what this diversity might look like in an average classroom in a large city in British Columbia. They write:

Imagine a combined grades five and six class of twenty-nine students. Of this class, four of the students are level one and two (just beginning) students for whom English is a second language. Five are identified as level three ESL, one has an SBD (Severe Behaviour Disorder) and is on medication to control his behaviour, one appears to have an SBD but has not yet been identified, and one student has a learning disability in the area of expressive output (p.9).

Tomlinson (2002) describes this diversity in another way:

Today’s teachers still contend with the essential challenge of the one-room schoolhouse: how to reach out effectively to students who span the spectrum of learning readiness, personal readiness, and culturally shaped views and experiences of the world (p.21).

When one considers the scope of the inclusion movement and when one realizes that diverse classrooms are far different from the classrooms of the past, one begins to understand the significance of including all learners in regular classrooms. It becomes apparent that factors such as teacher attitudes toward including students with special needs and providing for their education may influence the success of the inclusion process (Jobe, Rust, and Brissie, 1996).

Teacher training, teacher preparedness and teacher understanding of diversity may be topics to consider when thinking of the radical shift toward inclusion. Examining teacher practices, such as instructional and assessment strategies may be beneficial. A model of one-size-fits-all curriculum may have been acceptable in the past, but is it workable in the present climate of inclusion? It may not be enough to declare that a less exclusive approach to education is now law and as a result all children will be welcomed into inclusive schools. It is possible that such things as planning, professional development, visionary leadership and different teaching strategies might need to be available to educators in order for inclusion to be successful.

It is also important to recognize that the autonomous nature of teaching may need to change in this era of inclusion. Is it fair, or even feasible to expect one teacher to understand and
meet the needs of all learners in his or her class when such a wide diversity is represented? Given the medical, psychological, therapeutic, educational, and behavioural specialties in existence, is it realistic to expect that a teacher will have all the knowledge and experience that these entail? It obviously is not realistic, so one might ask how teachers can access the information from these domains when it appears that having that knowledge may be helpful in teaching to diversity.

The ideas presented here, although all legitimate avenues for further inquiry, are too broad for the scope of this paper. The concept of inclusion will be explored, as will the strategies that effective teachers use to support inclusion. Examining whether or not a collaborative approach to diversity is important will be included in this paper and collaborative consultation will be studied in depth to determine whether it is a suitable strategy in effective inclusive education.

Research questions

Several questions emerge from a discussion of the problem underlying the study. They are: 1) What is inclusion? This section of the paper will examine the roots of the inclusion movement and the principles behind it.

2) What do effective teachers do to include all learners in their classrooms? This part of the paper will examine some of the attitudes and attributes of effective teachers working in inclusive classrooms. It will also discuss some of the strategies teachers use in working with a wide diversity of learners.

3) What is collaborative consultation? This question will explore the characteristics of collaboration and examine different models of collaborative consultation.
Research Methods

This study takes the form of an analysis of current literature with particular focus on collaboration and collaborative consultation within the context of inclusive education. Information has been gleaned through journals, books and internet websites using topics such as inclusion, differentiation, teacher attitudes toward inclusion, adaptation, collaboration, consultation, collaborative consultation, and behavioural consultation as search parameters.

Significance of the Study

This paper will discuss the role of collaborative consultation in inclusive education. The significance of the study lies in the fact that this issue is being considered for the first time in School District 73 (Kamloops-Thompson).

Definitions

The key terms used in this coursework project are inclusion, differentiated instruction, consultation, collaboration and collaborative consultation.

Inclusion

There are many definitions of inclusion in the literature, but all of them are based on the values of acceptance and belonging. Inclusion is founded on the premise that all learners have the right to be educated together and that the diversity among learners is normal. It is also a cause for celebration. Inclusion means that an appropriate and differentiated education is to be provided for all.
Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction means that teaching methods are changed to meet the needs of all learners. It recognizes the fact that children have different strengths, needs and learning styles and as a result may need material presented in a variety of ways to address those differences.

Consultation

Consultation describes a relationship that is formed to problem-solve issues that are presented to the consultant by the client. In the school setting, the school psychologist or behavioural consultant often fill the consultant role, while the teacher is often the consultee. It is an indirect model in that the consultant usually works with the teacher and not directly with the client (the student) (Noell, Witt, Lafleur, Mortenson, Ranier and Levell, 2000). For the purposes of this study, the goal of the consultation is to share knowledge and generate strategies that will help the teacher to support the child in the classroom.

Collaboration

Collaboration, very simply is working together. It is based on the premise that all members of a collaborative team have expertise to share and can learn from one another. It embraces the notion that the expertise of all is more effective in meeting the needs of a diverse community than the expertise of only one.

Collaborative Consultation

Collaborative consultation is the amalgamation of both collaboration and consultation. All parties in the collaboration are considered to be experts in their areas and can contribute valuable insight to the discussion. The purpose of collaborative consultation is to problem-solve toward a common goal (Friend and Cook, 2003).
Limitations and Delimitation

This study will be limited to a discussion of collaborative consultation and whether it is effective in inclusive education. As part of this discussion, inclusion and effective teaching strategies within the inclusive classroom will be explored. This paper will not address such things as school reform, administrative leadership, teacher leadership, teacher mentorship or pre-service teacher preparation. These are all factors worthy of discussion that may have an impact on inclusion, but will not be included in this paper.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

This portion of the paper will focus on a review of the literature as it pertains to collaborative consultation within the context of inclusion. Questions related to inclusion and to collaboration will be discussed as well as examining teacher practices that make inclusion effective for all learners.

*What is inclusion?*

Historically, students with special needs have been taught in segregated special education classrooms or special schools (Snyder, 1999). Changes in philosophy over the last few decades in many different countries have led to integration of students into mainstream classes (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002). This means that some learners might be deemed ready to be part of a general education class and may receive all or part of their program with their peers. Pull out programs may be a part of this system and students with special needs may have only some access to the general education curriculum (Salend, 2005). In many places, this philosophy is changing to one of inclusion, which “implies such a restructuring of mainstream schooling that every school can accommodate every child irrespective of disability (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002, p. 131). This means that all students are eligible to receive full access to the general education curriculum and participate in all activities (Salend, 2005). This obviously, is a very significant shift in thinking and in practice, both for the individual and for school systems. Teachers are being asked to welcome all students, regardless of background or experience into their classes and to provide for their physical, social, emotional and academic needs. Schools are expected to be able to accommodate every child instead of sending him/her off to a special class or school in another neighbourhood. According to UNESCO (2001), inclusive education:

“refers to schools, centres of learning and educational systems that are open to ALL children. For this to happen, teachers, schools and systems may need to change so that they can
better accommodate the diversity of needs that pupils have and that they are *included* in all aspects of school life” (p.16).

This trend toward inclusion has its roots in human rights policies and legislation. These laws and policies affirm the rights of all children to be valued, and to be afforded equal opportunities. Two statements which reflect this philosophy were made by participants at United Nations World Conferences in Salamanca (UNESCO, 1994) and Dakar. (UNESCO, 2005). Legislation such as the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in Canada, (Hutchinson, 2002) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (Wood, 2002) are examples of the legal power supporting inclusion in both Canada and the United States.

Obviously, inclusion dramatically changes the nature of the general education classroom and the knowledge base that teachers require. It is natural to wonder about how teachers feel about this shift. When one examines the research, it would appear that the attitudes of teachers toward inclusion appear to be mixed. Cornoldi, Terreni, Scruggs and Mastropieri (1998) surveyed teachers in Italy after inclusion had been enshrined in law for twenty years. They found that the participating teachers “overwhelmingly endorsed the concept of inclusive education” (p. 353). This is similar to the findings of Downing and Williams (1997) who asked participants if their view of inclusion was positive, negative or neutral. The response was “uniformly positive” (p. 137). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) completed a comprehensive literature review on both mainstreaming and inclusion and found “evidence of positive attitudes, but no evidence of acceptance of a total inclusion or zero reject approach to special educational provisions” (p. 129). This, although generally positive doesn’t contain the ringing endorsement of the studies of Cornoldi et al. (1998) or Downing and Williams (1997). Hammond and Ingalls (2003) reported either negative or uncertain attitudes toward inclusion after surveying elementary teachers in rural school districts in the southwestern United States. Possible reasons
for the varying responses are offered by some researchers. Hammond and Ingalls (2003) cite a belief on the part of teachers that they lack adequate training in order to teach students with special needs. This is echoed by Rose (2001) who surveyed teachers to determine their perceptions of their needs in implementing inclusion. She reported that teachers were concerned about their lack of skill and experience when faced with the challenge of teaching all learners. Buell, Hallam, Gamel-McCormick and Scheer (1999) conducted a study of both general and special education teachers. They found that general education teachers felt a lack of confidence in making adaptations to curriculum and to materials and didn’t feel skilled enough in managing problematic behaviour. Another factor that may contribute to negative feelings about inclusions is the extra time involved in working with students with special needs (Soodak, Podell and Lehman, 1998).

Just as there are mixed results in terms of teachers’ feelings about inclusion, there are also conflicting data in the literature about the benefits of inclusion. Salend (2005) reports that “in general, the findings suggest that the academic performance of students with disabilities can be enhanced when they receive appropriate curricular and instructional accommodations within the general education setting” (p.32). This is echoed by Baker, Wang and Walberg (1995) who conducted an analysis of the literature regarding the most effective setting for the education of students with special needs. Their results showed that “the effects of inclusion are positive and worthwhile, but not huge” (p.34). Rea, McLaughlin and Walther-Thomas (2002) reported better marks, better attendance and no increase in acting out behaviour for those with learning disabilities being educated in inclusive classes versus students with learning disabilities in pull-out programs. Manset and Semmel (1997) provide evidence of instances of some students making gains and others not making gains in inclusive programs. Lerner (2003) discusses the
concern that students in inclusive classes don’t receive the intensity of instruction that is necessary to meet the educational needs of students with learning disabilities.

In spite of this conflicting evidence there seems to be a theme that emerges. Some believe that if appropriate instruction is given (Salend 2005) or effective teaching strategies are used, (Baker et al., 1995) then these students can be successful in inclusive classes. Shaywitz (2003) comments that when researched based programs are used in inclusive classrooms, children with learning disabilities make good gains that are maintained over time.

The conclusions of these authors imply that practices that have been the norm for general education teachers are not sufficient for inclusive classrooms. As Baker et al. (1995) write, “educational methods for all students are needed” (p.34). This leads to the obvious question: what are effective inclusionary practices for all learners in inclusive classes? This will be the focus for the next section of this paper.

What do effective teachers do to meet the needs of students in inclusive schools?

There are many articles in the literature that deal with effective inclusionary practices. Some of them relate to leadership, physical attributes of schools and district wide supports such as staffing and resources. Although important to inclusion, and interesting of themselves they are beyond the scope of this paper. This section will examine some of the attitudes and skills that effective teachers demonstrate.

The list of attitudes and skills that facilitate inclusion is probably not a finite one, but there are many recurring ones that are cited in the literature. A very significant one concerns teacher attitudes toward inclusion and the literature is clear that a positive attitude toward inclusion in essential for its success. As Villa and Thousand (2003) write, in order to make
inclusion work, teachers need to be “philosophically committed to student diversity” (p.19). They understand that all children learn differently and that this is a positive thing. Palmer (2005) echoes the sentiment that successful inclusion teachers recognize learning differences and suggest that this recognition encourages greater class participation. Although Palmer’s research was with students with vision impairments, research with students with other impairments appears to support her assertion. Voltz, Sims, Nelson and Bivens (2005) discuss the importance of teachers taking the time to learn about the diverse needs of all of their students. Hardin and Hardin (2002) suggest that all educators need to be prepared to teach students with disabilities, while Martinez (2004) makes the statement that “inclusion can work only when general educators and other school personnel are willing to accommodate students who have disabilities” (p.2). It is clear, then, that one of the attributes of a successful teacher in an inclusive classroom is a positive attitude toward diversity as well as believing that all children belong. This means that these teachers will foster a sense of belonging for all children and try to create within the classroom a culture of acceptance and respect for all. All children are seen as having something worthwhile to contribute to the class as a whole and differences are cause for celebration, not intolerance (Voltz, Brazil and Ford, 2001).

Personal characteristics of the teacher are also cited by Olson and Chalmers (1997) as playing an important role in including all children in their classrooms. Their study asked teachers who were considered by administrators and special educators to be effective inclusionists, to identify some of their own interpersonal traits. Common among participants was the belief that they were tolerant, reflective and flexible. When considering all of the citations mentioned, it is clear that a humanistic approach that appreciates the worth of all individuals is at the heart of inclusive teaching.
If teachers “buy into the concept of full inclusion” (Monahan, Marino and Miller, 1996) they believe that the onus is on school personnel to accommodate all learners in their classrooms. One strategy that effective inclusionists employ to accommodate all students is differentiated instruction. In fact, according to Soodak, Podell and Lehman, (1998) successful inclusion is more likely if differentiated instruction is used. Pettig (2000) suggests that differentiation involves designing instruction based on the needs and interests of all students. Such differentiation may include making adaptations or modifications to materials, to the classroom, or to assessment practices. Voltz, et al. (2005) recommend what they call M2ECCA. This is a framework around which teachers can focus to ensure that critical elements of inclusion are applied to their practice. The M2ECCA framework includes considering

“Methods of instruction

Materials of instruction

Environment of the classroom

Content of instruction

Collaboration

Assessment” (p. 14).

When one looks at the scope of these practices, one can see how far-reaching they are. Making such sweeping changes is a large task for teachers and requires a large knowledge base and a great deal of skill development. Interestingly, Pettig (2000) also suggests it takes courage to make such a significant change to classroom practice.

Obviously, since the M2ECCA framework is the creation of the authors, other writers do not cite this as a strategy for inclusive education. They do, however, discuss the importance of making adaptations and modifications to the classroom, to the curriculum and to assessment
practices (Martinez, 2004). Some of these changes may involve giving extra time for assignments, making copies of notes for students, giving fewer questions on an assignment or providing preferential seating based on the needs of the student.

Focusing on the big ideas is a concept presented by both Kameenui, Carnine and Dixon (1998) and by Voltz et al. (2001). Kameenui et al. (1998) suggest that a focus on the big ideas allows the greatest acquisition of knowledge for the broadest range of learners. Voltz et al. (2001) recommend that the teacher determine the critical elements of the lesson by deciding what they want all students to take away from the lesson. This is reminiscent of the Schumm, Vaughn and Leavell’s (1994) Planning Pyramid which encourages the teacher to identify the concepts in a lesson that all students should learn, those which most, but not all will learn and what some students will learn. This is a way for teachers “to meet the challenge of content coverage in general education classrooms with a broad range of academic needs” (p. 609).

One of the difficulties involved with making adaptations or differentiating instruction is that not all teachers believe it to be a fair practice. Some feel that it is lowering standards, or that it is unfair to those who don’t need extra support (Jayanthi, Epstein, Polloway and Bursuck, 1996). Others feel that students with learning disabilities need to learn to cope in the real world and so making adaptations is unfair (Baker and Zigmond, 1995). Polloway, Epstein and Bursuck (2003) discuss the importance of “selling the need for adaptations” (p.192) and assert that they are essential for the success of students with disabilities.

Another difficulty with differentiating instruction is that some teachers don’t feel that it is practice that is feasible. Some feel that they don’t have an adequate skill base to make the changes necessary, nor do they have the time. Schumm and Vaughn (1995) sought to address this concern by designing professional development that would help teachers gain skills in
teaching all learners, not just ones with special needs. Their studies showed that teachers were far more likely to accommodate students with learning differences if they could make those adaptations for a group of learners or for the class as a whole. This sentiment is embodied in a philosophy of instruction called universal design for learning. It is based on practices in architecture where adaptations are designed to accommodate all people, not just those with diverse needs. The definition of those with diverse needs is not just those with permanent disabilities, but the young, the elderly, or those with temporary disabilities (McGuire, Scott, and Shaw, 2006). A ramp can accommodate a person without a wheelchair as easily as one with a wheelchair, and may be safer for the elderly or very young children who have balance issues. The purpose of universal design for learning is to “work toward designing educational strategies, curricula, and assessment approaches that are as inclusive as possible for a wide range of students” (McGuire, Scott and Shaw, 2006, p 172).

The literature cites other practices that successful inclusion teachers use. They include flexible grouping, activity based instruction (Soodak, Podell and Lehman, 1998) cooperative learning and peer tutoring (Hardin and Hardin 2002). Soodak et al. (1998) suggest that successful inclusion is dependent on incorporating strategies such as these into the general education classroom. Hardin and Hardin (2002) maintain that activities such as peer tutoring and cooperative learning are strategies that don’t require massive changes to classroom structure, yet are effective in accommodating the needs of all learners. This may be a good place for teachers who are uncomfortable in an inclusive environment to start.

Another practice that is used by effective inclusion teachers is collaboration. In the literature it is called a “powerful tool” that teachers can use to provide effective instruction to students with disabilities (Brownell, Adams, Sindelar, Waldron and Vanhover, 2006). Bergin
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(2000) calls collaboration a “key to successful inclusion”. Friend (2000) is even more definitive by suggesting that the diversity in classrooms has made collaboration a necessity. The prevailing theme developed by these authors is that it is unrealistic to expect one person to have enough expertise in enough areas to meet the needs of all learners. Collaboration is viewed as a vehicle to share expertise and to provide the best service to students with and without disabilities. Given its importance to the inclusion movement, it is important to precisely define what is meant by collaboration. In its simplest form, it means to work together. In this context, it is an invitation for teachers to change their practice from one of labouring independently in individual classrooms to that of working as part of a team. It is based on the belief that the sharing of knowledge and skills within the group will result in a plan that is more effective than one individual could have designed independently (Keys et al., 1998). This sharing of knowledge is intended to be egalitarian in practice where all participants are considered equal. Some authors such as Reinhiller (1999) see this as problematic if the collaboration is between a special education and general education teacher. Traditionally, the special education teacher has often been considered the expert if the solution needed concerns a student with special needs. Brownlie and King (2000) counter this by recognizing that the general education teacher is the curriculum expert and therefore has expertise to bring to the table. This view is shared by Hudson and Glomb (1997) who add that the general education teacher also knows instruction and management techniques appropriate for the whole class as opposed to the special educator whose experience tends to be with small groups of students.

Friend and Cook (2003) define collaboration as a style that can be applied to any number of interactions or activities that describes how the interactions take place. They believe that collaboration describes a way of interacting with others and so can be applied to an endless
variety of tasks that may have nothing to do with education or inclusion. Building a house, planning a wedding, planting a tree, raising a child, baking a cake can all be collaborative or solitary pursuits. Collaboration can also take place in a number of disciplines such as law, or medicine, social services or education. (Friend, 2003) Collaboration can take place in a number of educational contexts as well, such as co-teaching teams working in classrooms, (Foley and Lewis, 1999), peer mentoring and coaching (Walther-Thomas, Korinek and McLaughlin, 1999) and consultation (Reinhiller, 1999) to name a few. Although all are topics worthy of study, collaboration within the context of consultation will be considered here.

What is collaborative consultation?

In order to examine collaboration in the light of consultation, it is important to look at consultation to determine what precisely it is. In traditional models of consultation in schools, the consultant (often a psychologist) is considered the expert and delivers services through the teacher to solve issues relating to the classroom. In this model, the consultant discusses issues about the client (the student) with the consultee (the teacher) so that the consultant and clients have no direct relationship. Friend and Cook (2003) define this model as a “process in which one professional assists another to address a problem concerning a third party” (p.151). It is important to emphasize that in this model the expertise of the consultant is acknowledged; in fact the purpose of the consultation is to gain the insight of the consultant. Gradually, however, the traditional model began to change as collaboration started to creep into the consultation process. Gutkin (1999) asserts that this was due to three circumstances. The first was the growing realization on the part of psychologists that they didn’t have all of the answers and that others had insight that could be contributed to the discussion. The second reason was very pragmatic.
It was clear that since the consultant was often responsible for carrying out the recommendations of the psychologist, successful implementation was more likely if the consultant had a voice in the process. The third reason related to where services began to be delivered. As service delivery shifted out of the offices of the psychologists and into the community, it became imperative to cooperate with community agencies rather than dictating to them. Collaboration, therefore, became a part of the consultation process. This represented a significant shift in thinking because the consultant was no longer considered the sole expert in the interaction. In collaborative consultation, all parties are deemed to have expertise in some area and therefore have valuable contributions to make to the problem-solving process.

According to the literature a major thrust of consultation, whether it is collaborative or not, is to find solutions to difficulties that arise. Keys et al. (1998) assert that the purpose of consultation is to problem-solve. Gutkin (1999) agrees that it is a problem-solving process used to deal with any problems or predicaments of the consultee. Salend puts a positive spin on the process, by not discussing problems, but calls it a process to find solutions for all students (2005). In reading the literature on collaborative consultation, one can see, though, that its purpose can be broader than that of problem solving. Bos and Vaughn (2002) see collaborative consultation as a way to make the curriculum more accessible for all students. Martinez (2004) views it as a way that general education teachers can receive professional development on topics such as instructional and behavioural strategies for students with disabilities. The underlying assumption about collaborative consultation is that teachers will learn from the interactions and put what they have learned into practice in the classroom (Brownell et al., 2006).

Collaboration and collaborative consultation require a set of attitudes and skills that often must be taught to participants. Communication skills are important to the process and many of
these skills are cited in the literature. Good listening skills are named by Bergin (2000) as necessary, while Friend and Cooke (2003) add that giving feedback, using effective questioning, and paying attention to non-verbal cues are important as well. Bondy and Brownell (1997) assert that additional skills are encouraging all members to participate in the discussion, being non-judgmental, respecting other points of view and trying to find areas of agreement. The previous qualities are closely related to suggestions in the literature that the quality of relationship between consultant and consultee are important. Fuchs and Fuchs (1996) recommend maintaining relationships that “nurture commitment to the process” (p.388) while Gutkin (1996) states that ignoring relationship variables will often lead to failure of the consultative relationship. Dr. Marilyn Friend also suggests that participants must be committed to the concept of collaboration and have an understanding of its dynamics. (Brownell and Walther-Thomas, 2002)

Some of the attitudes and skills associated with collaboration and collaborative consultation make the process problematic for some participants. Teachers generally have experience in working with children and that skill set is not the same as the one needed to work with adults. Walther-Thomas et al. (1999) laments the fact that pre-service educators do little to prepare new teachers for the realities of collaboration. She states that “traditionally, school professionals are better prepared to work with children and youth than to work with professional colleagues and family members” (p. 12). As Lynne Cook (Spencer, 2005) expressed in an interview, “we aren’t preparing people with the communication skills and the adult/adult interaction skills they need to work together effectively” (p.298).

It is clear in the literature that weak collaboration/communication skills can prevent effective collaboration (Bondy and Brownell, 1997). Other barriers are mentioned as well. One
such barrier that has already been alluded to is the isolated nature of schools and the autonomous culture found therein. (Villa and Thousand, 1996) This culture promotes a belief that the individual teacher must independently handle the wide range of needs within his/her class and if he/she can’t, then the student must be educated elsewhere (Brownell and Walther-Thomas, 2002). Working together to solve the problems that would allow the student to stay in the classroom or school is not a part of this mindset. A significant shift in thinking and practice must occur so that people can move from a philosophy of working independently to one of working cooperatively. Often, the principal is cited as an influential member in this process. Sharpe and Hawes (2003) mention the administrator as a “key factor in the establishment of a collaborative culture” (p. 3). Promoting collaboration, providing collaborative planning time, covering classes so that teachers can collaborate, and encouraging professional development are all ways that principals can help to create more collaborative schools. It is vital that this leader recognize that change is threatening to people, and that it may take a lot of time and perhaps resistance, before collaboration can become a reality. Giving individuals enough time to make the necessary changes and providing opportunities to discuss their feelings about collaboration are essential to the success of the process (Villa and Thousand, 1996).

Weak communication skills and an autonomous school culture are not the only barriers to effective collaboration. Differences in philosophy and experience can be issues in collaboration. When the collaborators are special and general education teachers, an individual versus whole class focus can create roadblocks to the collaboration process. A good example can be found in Schumm and Vaughn (1995). When they were trying to design professional development for general education teacher, one wanted to teach interventions to the teachers based on an individualized approach, while the other felt that general education teachers would only adopt
strategies that could be applied to all students, not just a select few. This disparity in approaches is a common one, and one that must be overcome by the collaborators involved. Bos and Vaughn (2002) cite another example when quoting a special education teacher.

“I am a special education teacher and so the direction of my interest is always with the individual students and how the educational setting can be altered to meet his or her needs. During the last few years I realize that I’ve needed to adjust my perspective if I am to work effectively with classroom teachers. When they think about planning for students, they think about the class as a whole” (p. 484).

Reinhiller (1999) echoes this sentiment in his discussion of the priorities of general and special education teachers. He too cites the difference in approach between these two parties and suggests that this difference could impede the collaborative process. Walther-Thomas et al. (1999) discuss the competing priorities that make collaboration difficult to establish and maintain, and it could be argued that this whole class versus individual focus falls into the category of competing priorities.

A lack of time for collaboration is probably the barrier most often cited in the literature. There is no doubt that collaboration is both labour intensive and time intensive (Walther-Thomas et al., 1999). Relationships must be established, ideas need to be discussed and plans need to be made. Problems need to be brought to the table, and solutions generated. Opportunities to discuss interventions must occur and time to adjust the intervention must be available. Sharpe and Hawes (2003) believe that a long-term commitment to collaboration must be made in recognition of the time and work needed to make the process work. Reinhiller (1999) discusses the very real time pressures teachers experience in a day and how little non-instructional time is available for teachers to work together. Friend and Cook (2003) recognize this issue related to time as does Bos and Vaughn (2002). Both have suggestions for dealing with this issue, such as administrators supervising in classrooms, or providing early dismissal one day a week, (Bos and
Vaughn, 2002), using professional development days for collaboration, and combining classes for a collaborative period (Friend and Cook, 2003). Friend (2000) emphasizes the importance of recognizing when collaboration is important and realizing that collaboration is not necessary on all tasks. She suggests setting priorities that place “student and family needs first followed by systemic growth and change (p.131). Walther-Thomas et al. (1999) also suggests that collaboration is not necessary or desirable in all instances and she recommends making thoughtful decisions about when it is appropriate.

Characteristics that define collaborative consultation are cited in the literature. As previously stated, it is often an indirect service delivery model that involves at least three parties: consultant(s), consultee and client. (Reinhiller, 1999) Other authors subscribe to a less rigid structure where all professionals are consultants in the sense that all have expertise in at least one domain and are together discussing the needs of a child (the client). Friend and Cook (2003) believe in this model which is based on what they call parity where all voices are equal and have valuable input. Walther-Thomas et al. (1999) call it equity, but they are essentially referring to the same thing. Closely tied to this belief about equity and believing in the expertise of all, is that notion that in collaborative consultation all participants will be willing to share what they know and that the contribution that each member makes is valuable. Mutual trust and respect is essential for this to happen (Friend and Cook, 2003). This sharing lends itself to the problem-solving nature of the process (Gutkin, 1999), but also helps to increase the knowledge and skill base of teachers in the inclusion classroom (Reinhiller, 1999). This is especially valuable as many teachers do not feel prepared to deal with the diversity in their classrooms. (Buell et al., 1999)
Another important characteristic of collaborative consultation is confidentiality (Gutkin, 1999). Originally practiced within the consultant/consultee relationship, it has had to be broadened when being considered within the collaborative context. Many more people may be involved in the discussion of a particular student’s program or in the delivery of that program, so confidentiality will need to be maintained, but within wider parameters.

Responsibility, accountability, and leadership in collaborative consultation are discussed by various authors. Friend and Cook (2003) believe that all members should share responsibility to participate in the group and to share responsibility for outcomes. They also believe in shared responsibility for decision making. As a group, decisions are made and, good or bad, owned by the group. When changes need to be made to a plan, the group needs to meet again and share the load for making those changes. This is similar to Villa and Thousand’s beliefs about accountability where all members are to hold each other accountable for commitments made and task completion. Voltz et al. (2001) also espouse the notion of shared responsibility. They suggest that all staff in inclusive schools share the responsibility for all students and work together to ensure that the needs of all are met. Friend and Cook (2003) make it clear that this joint responsibility and accountability does not mean that all members have to do all of the tasks or even that there needs to be an equal division of labour. Depending on such variables as the task at hand, the presenting problems and the expertise of the collaborating participants, there may in fact be inequalities from time to time. What is important is the group’s sense of ownership and sharing in the entire process.

Mutually agreed upon goals are necessary according to Friend and Cook (2003) and Gutkin (1999). Finding common ground can sometimes be problematic; this is why Friend and Cook (2003) insist that finding only one mutual goal is necessary. In order to make the process
less conflictual, they recommend focusing on what is in the best interest of the student. Gutkin (1999) discusses the need for the problem or goal to be clearly defined, so that the participants will know when the goal has been met. A positive outgrowth of collaborative consultation according to Pugach and Johnson (1995) is an enjoyment of the social nature of problem solving within a group. This is closely related to Friend and Cook’s (2003) assertion that a community feel develops from the collaborative process which in turn leads to positive benefits for students.

Friend and Cook (2003) believe very strongly that collaboration should be voluntary. They feel that collaboration is a style that can’t be mandated or forced. Making it voluntary is the only way to guarantee that individuals will truly participate in the process; legislating it cannot guarantee the desired attitude toward working relationships. This is in direct contrast to Villa and Thousand (1996) who believe that collaboration can no longer be a voluntary endeavour. They think that it can no longer be considered an option in education, any more than it is an option for an operating team in a hospital. They contend that some people will embrace it only when forced to do so, but that once embraced, belief in the practice may in fact follow.

Understanding the principals underlying collaboration, although informative, doesn’t give a clear picture of how to practice it. Several models of collaboration will be presented and discussed in the next section of the paper.

One of the models for collaboration that is often mentioned in the literature is based on behavioural consultation. According to Friend and Cook (2003) it is one of the most researched models and has the most clearly defined steps. The steps in behavioural consultation are outlined by Friend and Cook (2003) as are others such as the models of clinical consultation and mental health. The authors are clear, however, in reiterating that collaboration is a style that can be used within any model of consultation; it describes the type of interpersonal interaction that the
participants use. For the purposes of discussion, and comparison with other models, the steps in
behavioural consultation as described by Friend and Cook (2003) will be stated here. They are:
1) Problem identification
2) Problem analysis
3) Design of the intervention
4) Implementation of intervention plan
5) Evaluation of plan

This is very similar to Wilkinson’s (2003) model that is described as behavioural as well.
She also delineates five steps, but some of them appear to be quite different. On closer
examination it will be determined that all of the actions are included on both models; they are
just itemized differently. In order to discuss them further, Wilkinson’s (2003) model will be
described here.

1) Analyze the problem
2) Develop behaviour change strategies
3) Gather data to create a baseline of student behaviour
4) Implement a treatment plan
5) Evaluate the treatment plan in term of whether it changed student behaviour.

In both of these models it is clear that Steps four and five are essentially the same. A
plan to change behaviour is developed and then at some point the plan is evaluated to determine
if in fact the intervention was successful in changing the behaviour of the student. It is
interesting to note that in both models, Step five is not the end of the intervention if in fact the
desired goal was not met. If this is the case, Friend and Cook (2003) and Wilkinson (2003) state
the importance of revisiting the entire process to make changes that will ensure goal attainment.
Steps one, two and three of the models appear, at least at first glance to be quite different. It seems that Wilkinson’s (2003) model does not include goal identification, and that Friend and Cook’s (2003) model doesn’t make any reference to collecting baseline data. When one examines the explanations of each which go along with the steps it is clear that both models call for goal setting/problem identification, analysis of the problem including gathering baseline data, and developing an intervention that is deemed likely to be successful. It might be argued that there is a slight difference in the data that is collected. In Wilkinson’s model, it is exclusively related to the student’s behaviour while Friend and Cook refer to objective data about the problem.

Salend (2005) discusses Wilkinson’s model in his text, but shrinks the number of steps from five to four. They are: 1) Goal/Problem Clarification/Identification

2) Goal/Problem Analysis

3) Plan Implementation

4) Plan Evaluation

The only significant difference between this model and Wilkinson’s (2003) or Friend and Cook’s (2003) model is the information that is gathered before the plan is designed and implemented. Salend suggests gathering data beyond that of the student including curriculum, school policy, peer relationships, classroom environment, teaching and learning styles. One can see that this is not all objective data as in Friend and Cook’s (2003) model nor does it strictly pertain to the student behaviour as in Wilkinson’s. This is a much broader well of information that can inform decision making.

Two other models in the literature involve five-step processes. They are the CLASP model of Voltz et al. (2001) and the counseling model discussed in the context of serving high-
risk youth by Keys et al. (1998). Both models espouse collaboration citing joint partnerships, egalitarianism, and mutual goals. Voltz et al. (2001) uses the mnemonic CLASP to describe the steps.

1. Clarify the problem. This allows all parties to have a common understanding of the issues.
2. Look at influencing factors which may trigger behaviour. This might be the environment, other individuals, or activities that may have an impact on creating the problem.
3. Actively explore intervention options. This step is a brainstorming step where all possibilities are identified. At this point, no evaluation of the options is done. The purpose is to get as many choices on the table so that the most potentially effective ones can later be chosen.
4. Select the best option. Through consensus, the most feasible intervention is chosen.
5. Plan to implement the selected strategy. A plan is created that defines roles and responsibilities and how to assess the effectiveness of the intervention.

Step 3 of this plan, brainstorming, is stressed in this model, but not in the others discussed thus far. The authors of this model believe that this is an important step as it will “increase the quantity and diversity of ideas being generated” (p.29).

The language used in Keys et al. (1998) is very different from those of the other models, but much of the intent of the steps is the same. The five steps are as follows:

1) All stakeholders meet around an issue.
2) A shared vision/goal is articulated.
3) A plan to meet the goal is developed.
4) The plan is implemented.
5) The plan is evaluated and changes are made if they are necessary to meet the goal.
The collaborative nature of this model is emphasized with meeting together identified as the first step in the process. Not only is the joining of individuals emphasized, but the involvement of many parties is referenced. This is assumed in all of the other models, but it is only in this one that it is clearly stated, and it is very different from a more traditional consultant/consultee model where only two parties are involved. The model of Keys et al. (1998) is similar to the models of Friend and Cook (2003), Wilkinson (2003) and Salend (2005) who all discuss the importance of evaluating the implementation and recycling through the steps if the goals of the intervention have not been realized. Voltz et al. (2001) make passing reference to deciding when and how the plan will be assessed in Step five of the model, but make no provision for revising the plan if it’s necessary. This appears to be a significant discrepancy between the models.

One other model which will be examined in the body of this paper is a seven step process by Gutkin (1999). It is a more comprehensive one than the ones previously studied as it appears to incorporate all of the steps discussed thus far into one model. The seven steps are:

1) Define the problem.

2) Analyze the factors that have an impact on the problem.

3) Brainstorm options to determine possibilities for treatment/intervention.

4) Evaluate the options and choose that one that appears to be most appropriate.

5) Assign responsibilities to various members of the group.

6) Implement the plan.

7) Evaluate the effectiveness of the plan and revise/re-implement if necessary.
The only addition to this model that has not been mentioned in the others is the criteria members can use to determine if the selected intervention is the most appropriate. When considering the best options, Gutkin suggests that the best treatments:

(a) should be highly effective in resolving the problem defined in Step 1;
(b) are unlikely to create new unanticipated problems:
(c) are acceptable to the consultee and the client; and
(d) are easy to integrate with the existing natural ecology of the classroom (p.337).

Gutkin also stresses the collaborative nature of the consulting relationship, and recommends that attention be paid to fostering interpersonal relationships. Like Friend and Cook (2003) he also believes in the voluntary nature of the process.

This concludes the literature review section of the paper. The concepts presented in this portion will be analyzed and interpreted in the discussion in the next chapter.
Chapter 3: Analysis, Interpretation, Discussion of the Findings of the Literature.

This paper opens with the statement that education has moved from a model of segregation, through mainstreaming and integration to one of inclusion. This has created a significant shift in the make up of students in schools, and, therefore, the way that schools are operated. Inclusion brings physical changes to schools, to ensure that washroom and hallways are wide enough to accommodate wheelchairs and that ramps are available for the less mobile. It brings diversity to the student body in terms of learning needs and learning styles that didn’t exist in segregated schools. It brings an understanding that the needs of all learners are to be addressed and met. The implications of this reality will be discussed in this section.

The literature cites examples of teachers who feel positively about inclusion, as well as those who have negative attitudes towards inclusion. Hammond and Ingalls (2003) recognize a “critical connection between teacher attitudes and the implementation of inclusion” (p. 25). Since teachers are those who primarily implement inclusion, it would seem that positive attitudes toward inclusion would be a necessary prerequisite for success. As previously stated, the literature in this area is somewhat troubling, however, as teachers appear to have mixed feelings about inclusion. It is not a concept that is heartily endorsed by all. This has serious implications for students in inclusive classrooms. If teachers do not embrace inclusion, they are unlikely to differentiate instruction and may not want to expand their knowledge base about students with special needs. This attitude would not promote a welcoming atmosphere for all learners, and it is doubtful if the learning needs of all would be met.

It would be interesting to examine the research on change in regards to teacher attitudes toward inclusion. Can attitudes really be changed, shaped, or developed in the university setting? Do students need to come to the program with positive attitudes toward inclusion, or can these
attitudes be developed? Knowing whether attitudes can be developed might be critical information to have when selecting suitable candidates for acceptance into teacher training programs.

The literature indicates that one of the reasons the inclusion may not be fully supported is because some teachers feel that they are not adequately prepared to teach all students (Hammond and Ingalls, 2003). They believe that they lack the skills necessary to differentiate instruction and to adapt and modify curriculum. The obvious question to this is how has this happened? Was teacher training at the college or university level adequate? If not, what can be done to rectify the situation? If it was adequate, where do the feelings of inadequacy on the part of teachers come from? If the difficulty with a lack of preparedness is with practicing teachers does the answer lie in the fact that they were trained before inclusion became a reality? If this is the case, how can their skills be enhanced to match present day reality? Some of these questions are the topic of research studies, such as Schumm and Vaughn’s (1995) inquiry into meaningful professional development. These authors were trying to involve teachers in the process, find strategies that they could use with all learners, and create long term professional development opportunities that would create lasting change in the classroom. This approach to professional development is critical. Too many professional development activities seem to be beneficial at the time, but often have no lasting impact on the practices of teachers. Meaningful instruction that can be implemented effectively into classrooms and maintained over time is essential.

A teacher education program is the forum for developing competencies related to teaching and since many teachers feel that they don’t possess adequate skills to meet the needs of all learners, perhaps the way teachers are trained should be the subject of a review. It is possible that longer practicum placements or broader mentoring opportunities may be needed. Developing
more collaborative partnerships between universities and schools may also produce more competent and confident teachers. It is imperative that solutions to this dilemma are found as this situation is not optimal for either students or teachers.

When discussing adaptations to curriculum the concept of fairness sometimes arises. Some teachers believe that making adaptations is unfair to those who don’t need extra support (Jayanthie, et al., 1996) or unfair because this practice doesn’t prepare students for the real world (Baker et al., 1995). It is felt that adaptations or allowances won’t be made for students once they are beyond the safe confines of school, so they shouldn’t be made for them in schools. Those who oppose this view argue that there are laws which make some accommodations in the real world mandatory (Bos and Vaughn, 2002). They also contend that students need the experience of finding success in the classroom before they can find success in the real world. The ideal location for deep and far-ranging discussions about philosophies of inclusion and the fairness of practices inherent in it is the pre-service teacher preparation program. It is here that students can read research, discuss various points of view and articulate a personal philosophy toward inclusion. Having an underlying philosophy toward inclusion is an important part of teaching as it is the driving force that guides practice.

In Chapter 2 of this paper, studies designed to determine whether or not inclusion is in fact beneficial to students were considered. A common thread running throughout these studies is that research-based programs and/or appropriate instructional strategies need to be used to meet the needs of all learners. This, too, points to the need for strong pre-service and in-service training. Teachers need to know what they can do to meet the needs of all learners and there needs to be some way for teachers to be able to keep abreast of the latest research. It is the
author’s personal view that mandatory upgrading should be a condition of employment, but at this point, this is not a reality in British Columbia.

From the discussion thus far, it is obvious that moving toward an inclusive education system dramatically changes the skill set required by the general education teacher. To be effective, he/she must believe in a humanistic approach to teaching which values the contributions of all learners. He/she must believe that all students belong in his/her class and that he/she bears at least some of the responsibility for making the general education curriculum accessible to all. He/she must possess a wide range of effective instructional strategies and a broad knowledge base of the needs of all students. It is very clear that these are complex issues that need to be addressed at the professional development level. Understanding the complexity of these issues and determining how well they are being addressed would be a very interesting direction for further research.

The primary focus of this paper has been to examine collaboration and collaborative consultation to determine its effectiveness as a tool in supporting inclusion. The literature strongly indicates that collaboration and collaborative consultation are powerful tools to make inclusion successful. Collaborative consultation is a way for teachers to get information about specific disabilities and to increase their knowledge base of instructional and assessment strategies for all learners. It is a means to derive support as they make this radical shift in teaching practice. When one considers the M2ECCA (Voltz, et al., 2005) framework for making adaptations, one can see how radical this shift is. Teachers are being asked to learn new ways of teaching in a profession that is already fast-paced and complex with increasingly higher standards of accountability. Collaboration and collaborative consultation can provide support to deal with this new reality. When working well, it can provide teachers an opportunity to reflect
on their own practice, a chance to problem-solve together, and to share the joy and responsibility of teaching all learners. It can also be a vehicle for professional development at the school level. Because of the reality of expertise within the group and the belief that it is incumbent on members to share that expertise, (Friend and Cook, 2003) the collaborative process can be a rich opportunity to learn new knowledge and skills. This means that the skill gaps at the school level that appear to be affecting successful inclusion can be at least partially addressed at the school level. Teachers are not limited to formal coursework or workshops in order to further develop their skill base. They can avail themselves of a wealth of knowledge simply by talking with their partners in collaboration.

Collaboration and collaborative consultation require careful planning to implement. They require skill development in such areas as communication, (Friend and Cook, 2003) problem-solving (Gutkin, 1996) and conflict resolution (Rea et al., 2002). These are very different from the child to teacher interactions taught in education courses; they are skills involved in adult to adult interaction. Collaboration requires a willingness on the part of teachers to share space and share students when co-teaching. (Spencer, 2005) This is very different from the traditional autonomous nature of teaching where adults typically have their own classrooms and sole responsibility for students. Again, it’s obvious that teachers need to be taught the skills to collaborate; an expectation to just go and do it is unrealistic. Resources for collaboration are also essential; the primary resource needed is time. Teachers need to be given the time to work together, to discuss issues, and to reflect on their practice. This is not going to be optimally effective unless quality time to engage in this activity is built into both the school day and the school year. It must be planned for and opportunities created so that teachers participate. Given the time pressures that teachers already face, collaboration is not going to
flourish unless conditions are ripe and the process is nurtured. The research highlights the importance of the administrator being the catalyst to provide and maintain the resources needed to make the process an effective one (Walther-Thomas et al., 1999).

As an employee of School District 73, it’s interesting to see many of the issues cited in the literature are reflected in teaching practice in this district. There are mixed feelings of inclusion, where some teacher advocate strongly for including all students, and will voluntarily take into their classes some of the most challenging and complex students. Others express benevolent feelings about inclusion, but don’t see how these students can fit into the programs they are presently implementing. Suggestions about how the program could be changed so that all learners can access it don’t seem to be reasonable considerations in these instances. There are also teachers who, like those in the study by Jayanthi et al. (1996) feel that making adaptations are unfair and are lowering standards. As one whose job it is to encourage teachers to make accommodations for students with special needs, discovering the universality of these issues is comforting. Knowing that bright minds throughout the world are working to improve the effectiveness of inclusion brings hope to the situation.

Employees of School District 73 are fortunate in that a formal philosophy of collaboration and collaborative consultation already exists. Learning Assistance teachers qualifications include a “demonstrated ability to work effectively and collaboratively with other teachers, parents, support staff, administration and outside agencies” (School District 73 p. 4-2). They are members of school-based teams comprised of themselves, an administrator, classroom teacher, school psychologist, behavioural consultant and speech-language pathologist whose mandate is to collaboratively act “as a problem-solving unit in assisting classroom teachers to develop and implement instructional and/or management strategies and to co-ordinate support
resources for students with special needs within the school” (Government of British Columbia, 2005. p.14) On an as-needed basis, physicians, psychiatrists, autism consultants, or other community agency experts can be called in to assist in the consultative process. This means that opportunities for collaboration are fostered and that information sharing/professional development sessions can occur. It is the author’s view that the existence of these structural supports is laudable, and they can be quite effective in increasing the knowledge base of participants. More needs to be done, however, to ensure that all members of the collaborative team are well-versed and trained in the art and skills of collaboration. There appears to be a need for clarity around the characteristics of collaborative consultation. Participants need to understand that all have expertise to share and it is the joint responsibility of the group to problem-solve, not the mandate of the district staff to provide all of the answers. Improvements in communication, conflict resolutions and goal-setting skills could make for a more effective process. Further training is required in this district as is oft cited in the literature, but School District 73 has accomplished much in the development of the collaborative process to support inclusive education.
Chapter 4 Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine collaboration and collaborative consultation in the context of inclusion. Three questions were posed and answered:

1) What is inclusion?

2) What do effective inclusion teachers do?

3) What is collaborative consultation?

The review of the literature demonstrated that inclusion is a philosophy of education that provides for the inclusion of all students in general education classroom. It is built on the belief that all children belong and that accommodations need to be made in the areas of curriculum and the environment so that all children can learn. Benefits to inclusion, such as enhanced academic performance were included in this section of the paper. Difficulties with inclusion such as teachers’ feelings of inadequacy when faced with the task of teaching to diversity were part of the response to this question. In order to include all students, effective teachers practicing inclusion participate in a number of activities and some of these activities were studied in an attempt to answer the second question. An exhaustive list was not compiled in the literature review, but several were discussed. They included differentiated instruction as well as making changes to instructional materials, assessment practices and the environment of the classroom. Having a positive attitude toward inclusion as well as a willingness to teach all learners was presented as connected to the success of inclusion. Questions about the feasibility of inclusion as well as the fairness of adaptation practices were discussed in this section.

The research on collaboration and collaborative consultation were then presented as a response to question number 3. Collaboration was shown to be the working of individuals together to work toward a common goal. Characteristics such as mutual respect, parity among
members, shared responsibility for tasks, outcomes and decision making were offered for examination. Collaborative consultation was also introduced in this section and defined as an indirect method of problem-solving that can be effectively used to support the inclusion process. Models of collaborative consultation were presented and compared. It was determined that collaborative consultation can be a powerful process in supporting inclusion. When teachers receive appropriate training and there is adequate time and resources for collaboration, the inclusion process is enhanced as a result of the implementation of this process.

An analysis of the literature revealed that more needs to be done in the area of teacher education, both pre-service and in-service to improve the knowledge and skill base of teachers working in inclusion classroom. Some attitudes need to change so that all classrooms become welcoming for all students. Systemic supports at the school and district level need to be put in place or solidified so that resources are available to teachers to implement inclusion and its complementary collaborative practices.

There were several questions posed in Chapter 3 of this paper that may warrant further study. It would be interesting to delve into teacher education programs to look at questions of philosophy, skill development and how attitudes toward inclusion are shaped. It would be interesting to really understand why teachers feel inadequately prepared to teach to diversity, and armed with that knowledge try to determine how to rectify that deficiency. Further research into understanding ways that schools can be changed to encourage collaborative consultation would also be of benefit. Examining studies related to teacher leadership, school reform, administrative leadership and teacher autonomy may provide insight into this matter. Reflecting on those findings in light of School District 73’s policies and practices would be particularly enlightening for the author.
When educators in inclusive settings get overwhelmed by the workload, the number of scheduled meetings, or the time it takes to learn and implement new instructional strategies, it is tempting to declare that inclusion is an unworkable model that needs to be eliminated from schools. Unfortunately, too often, this declaration is made. When this happens, wisdom and discernment are essential. It is imperative to realize that inclusion itself is not the issue; the difficulty lies with the practices that are necessary to support inclusion. When inclusion becomes problematic, factors such as resources and skill sets need to be examined and shortfalls or inadequacies need to be addressed. The calls for enough funding, better training and sufficient resources need to be heard above the cries for the abolishment of inclusion. All children deserve to be included in a kinder, gentler system that recognizes and celebrates the worth of all.
References


