PERCEPTIONS OF AN INCLUSIVE PROGRAM
BY SECONDARY LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS, THEIR TEACHERS AND SUPPORT STAFF
by
Portia Y. Bookhart

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APPROVED:

_________________________________  __________________________________
_________________________________
Harold McGrady, Ph.D                    Leroy Woods, Ed.D

_________________________________
John Burton, Ph.D

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Dr. Thomas Gatewood, Co-chair

Dr. Marilyn Lichtman, Co-chair

(ABSTRACT)

The tension between exclusion and inclusion has been a shaping force in United States society and education. Public schools, in particular, have experienced stages of incorporating a larger number of children with disabilities into classrooms. In the United States, until approximately 1800, the great majority of students considered to be learners with disabilities were not deemed worthy of formal education, even though they were perceived as brothers and sisters who were part of the community (Hawes, 1991; Rothman, 1971).

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of an urban inclusive program by secondary learning disabled students, their teachers, and support staff. Questions that were answered were: 1) What are the similarities and differences of perceptions between a regular education classroom and a special education classroom? 2) What are the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of students who have been diagnosed as learning disabled? 3) What are the perceptions of learning disabled students in regard to family life? The method that was utilized was a case study design.

The findings of this study indicated that in spite of the students being included in regular education classes, they (students) preferred being in special education. The teachers liked the inclusion program, but felt that it lacked the resources necessary to make the program successful.

It can be concluded that inclusion is a worthwhile program; however, the needs of the special education students could not be totally met.
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the special education staff at Cardozo Senior High School, and to all of the teachers who continue to perform miracles despite the obstacles they face.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The tension between exclusion and inclusion has been a shaping force in our society and in our educational system. Public schools, in particular, have experienced stages of incorporating a larger number of students with disabilities into classrooms. In the United States, until approximately 1800, the great majority of students considered to be learners with disabilities were not deemed worthy of formal education, even though they were perceived as brothers and sisters who were part of the community. After independence, the call for separating students who were unable to function satisfactorily without the help of another (Hawes, 1991; Rothman, 1971) affected people with disabilities for many years to come. During the 19th and much of the 20th centuries, there was a lengthy period of institutional segregated education for persons with disabilities. Today, many previously segregated learners have benefited from the social movement toward inclusive education. This movement has been sometimes slow and hesitant, but the overall result has been progress (Karagiannis, Stainback & Stainback, 1996).

Including students with disabilities in general education classrooms heightens the awareness of each interrelated aspect of the school as a community; its boundaries, its benefits to members, its internal relationships, its relationships with the outside environment, and its history (Taylor, 1992). As most
people who had faced the possibility of inclusion knew viscerally, this heightened awareness usually came in the form of fear and defensiveness, expressed in terms that sounded similar from both sides of the boundary separating students on the basis of disability (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). The art of facilitating inclusion involved working creatively with the state of heightened awareness to redirect the energy bound up in fear toward problem solving that promoted reconsideration of boundaries, relationships, structures, and benefits. When this redirection failed, students with disabilities remained on the outside of education, or they drifted with their individualized education programs (IEPs) and their aides (Schnorr, 1990). When this redirection succeeded, the life of a classroom shifted, in surprisingly quiet ways, to make room for new relationships, new structures, and new learning (Logan et al., 1994).

Several studies have shown that inclusion is a viable method of instruction for students with disabilities as well as for students without disabilities. Affleck, Madge, Adams, and Lowenbraun (1988) compared the performance of students without learning disabilities placed in integrated and mainstream education programs and reported no significant differences between the two groups, suggesting that normally achieving students are not adversely affected by being placed with students with LD.

Preliminary data from the Collaborative Education Project by Salisbury, Evans, Palombaro, & Veech, 1990, which employed the full inclusion model, suggested positive social and academic outcomes for students with and without disabilities (Murphy, 1996). In addition, Truesdell (1985) reported that teachers
observed success in a wide range of academic behaviors such as attendance, homework, attention, participation, and scores, in students with learning disabilities, when mainstreamed. Halvorsen and Sailor (1990) reviewed 261 studies that compared special needs students in integrated placements with their peers in segregated placements. They concluded that the students in the integrated programs more often reduced inappropriate behaviors, increased communication skills, exhibited greater independence and engendered higher parental expectations. The Ravenswood Project (Lombardi, Nuzzo, Kennedy, & Forshay, 1994) assessed the perceptions of 36 teachers, 96 parents, and 232 students regarding an integrated high school inclusion program. All groups were supportive of the program. Positive results included a decrease in dropout rates for students with disabilities, fewer classroom disturbances, and reasonable academic gains. Of the 36 students who had been in resource rooms and special classes, all preferred the regular classroom placement over their previous placement. Finally, Frymier and Gansneder (1989), and Lombardi, Odell, and Novotony (1991) state that kinds of support systems needed by “challenged” students are similar to those needed by students without disabilities. Having the benefit of both a special teacher and a regular teacher collaborating in a regular class is morally and educationally sound because such collaboration focuses on children’s needs, not on their labels.

As evident by these various studies, the concept of inclusion enhances the education of students with and without disabling conditions. It promises to streamline the educational system and better allocate its most important resource, teachers. Yet, many
if not most, of the schools have a long way to go before all students can enjoy the full benefits of inclusion. Research by Autin (1992) clearly establishes that integrated models improve the academic and social performance of all students. It also shows that comprehensive inclusion presents the best alternative to segregated special education, or exclusion.

This system of exclusion finds its roots in the 1954 decision, Brown v. Board of Education, (Murphy, 1996) where a separate education was also considered unequal. The African-American students were shortchanged; they were separated from the mainstream and were provided an inferior education that would prove harmful in their lives. That same concept, inequality, is paramount with regard to the inclusion movement. Students who are emotionally disturbed, physically challenged, visually impaired, and learning disabled are often excluded from the total school population. From the standpoint of legal history, the establishment of the basic concept that no child can be denied or excluded from a publicly supported education because of a handicap is expressed under the document Public Law (PL) 94-142, or the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) which mandated appropriate education for all students with disabilities. Public Law 94-142 recognized and supported this need for the education of students with disabilities in regular classroom settings, by creating a “presumption in favor of educating children with handicaps in regular education environments” (Danielson & Bellamy, 1989, p. 448).

This law stipulates that each public agency shall insure:
1) That to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including those in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped,
and 2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (Section 612(5)B of P.L. 94-142).

Although studies indicate that “challenged” students are likely to perform better both academically and socially when included in the regular classroom setting, many schools in the Washington, D.C. area have not implemented effectively the concept of inclusion. Because of this, further research is needed to determine if students classified as “challenged” or “special-needs” benefit from an inclusive program.

BACKGROUND OF THE PROBLEM


Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, defines learning disabilities as a “disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an
imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations (Council for Exceptional Children, 1986).

Students who are learning disabled may exhibit a wide range of traits, including poor reading comprehension, spoken language, writing and reasoning ability. Hyperactivity, inattention, and perceptual coordination problems may also be associated with LD, but are not examples of LD. Other traits that may be present include a variety of symptoms of brain dysfunction, including uneven and unpredictable test performance, perceptual impairments, motor disorders and emotional characteristics such as impulsiveness, low tolerance for frustration and maladjustment.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Many educators agree that schools need to effectively integrate students with learning disabilities into the general education classroom. Students with learning disabilities are often characterized as “inactive learners,” remaining on the periphery of academic and social involvement in elementary and secondary classrooms (Torgeson, 1982). Central to the argument for effective integration of these students is that for a part of each day, most are removed from the general education curricula, and from their peers without disabilities; as a result, students with disabilities must continually reestablish themselves as members of the mainstream (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987).

The problem of separating special education students from regular education students is exacerbated on the high school level. The student often experiences little or no interaction with
his or her non-disabled peers. Consequently, these special students, upon contact, are ostracized by their peers and other adult personnel, which causes further damage to them. To be classified as learning disabled, a student must show weaknesses in the subject area, score below a certain criteria on the Woodcock-Johnson, Bender, and Wechsler Intelligence tests, and have parental consent to be considered (Bender, 1989; Wechsler, 1991; Woodcock & Johnson, 1990).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore perceptions of secondary learning disabled students, their teachers, and support staff regarding the inclusion program located at Cardozo Senior High School. Another purpose of this study was to see the extent of the students’ involvement in the program and how this has affected them academically, socially and from a family standpoint.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the similarities and differences of perceptions between a regular education classroom and a special education classroom?
   a) What are the perceptions of the students in regard to the two settings?
   b) What are the perceptions of the teachers and support staff in regard to the two settings?

2. What are the intrapersonal and interpersonal skills of students who have been diagnosed as learning disabled?

3. What are the perceptions of learning disabled students in regard to family life?
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The information gathered from this study will assist the District of Columbia Public Schools, public school administrators, teachers, counselors, parents, and others in determining whether exposure to an inclusion program benefits the student academically, socially, and from a family standpoint. Secondly, the data gained as a result of this study will be available to individuals and agencies for the purposes of evaluating and planning inclusion programs.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The findings of this study cannot be generalized to other school systems. It is limited to eight learning disabled high school students, and teachers at Cardozo Senior High School in Washington, D.C. This study concentrated on eight students who are currently enrolled in the inclusion program at Cardozo.

ASSUMPTIONS

1. It is assumed that the subjects will understand the questions correctly as posed by the interviewer.
2. It is assumed that the students will answer the questions honestly, and to the best of their ability.

DEFINITIONS

_Individualized Education Program (IEP):_ A written plan that specifies the special education program and services to be provided to meet the unique educational needs of a student with a disability.

_Inclusion:_ An inclusive school or classroom educates all students in the mainstream. This means that all students, including students with learning and physical disabilities, at risk,
homeless, and gifted are included in integrated, general education classes. It also means providing all students in the mainstream appropriate educational experiences that are challenging, yet geared to their capabilities and needs, and any support or assistance they or their teachers require.

Learning Disability (LD): A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, which may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations which adversely affect the student’s educational performance. The term includes such conditions as perceptual handicaps, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. The term does not include students who have learning problems which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural or economic disadvantage.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of students with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactory.

Public Law (PL) 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act: To the maximum extent appropriate, students with disabilities are educated with students who do not have a disability, and that special classes, separate schools or other removal, from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature of
severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactory.

**Regular Education:** Instruction that is content-driven directed by a teacher who concerns him or herself with whole group instruction, record keeping and grades, and doesn’t take into account any individual learning differences.

**Related Services:** Transportation and such developmental, corrective and other supportive services that are required to assist a student with disabilities to benefit from special education and includes speech pathology, audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, including therapeutic recreation, social work services, early identification and assessment of disabilities in students, counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling and medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes. The term also includes school health services, and parent counseling and training.

**Special Education:** Specially designed instruction at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a child with disabilities including, instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings and instruction in physical education (State Educational Agency of the District of Columbia, 1993).

**OVERVIEW OF SUBSEQUENT CHAPTERS**

As mentioned, this study is designed to understand the perceptions of secondary learning disabled students, teachers, and support staff at an urban high school to see to what extent the
students’ involvement in the program has affected them academically, socially and from a family standpoint.

The previous chapter has stated the research questions, and set them in context. Chapter two presents a review of the literature. Chapter three describes the methodology of the study, and chapter four discusses the eight profiles of the core group of students in this study and introduces the other individuals who agreed to be respondents. Chapter five discusses the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter is divided into four sections. 1) The first section gives a brief historical overview of inclusion, 2) the second section describes the District of Columbia’s Public School’s inclusion program, 3) the third section provides studies and examples of inclusion programs, 4) and the fourth section examines the models of inclusive education.

For many years school systems across the country have been restructuring their educational programs to achieve better results for increasingly diverse students with complex learning needs, including those with disabilities. Many of these education reform efforts involved school based strategies such as Chapter One, Title One, and remedial classes to unite special education, other support programs, and general education programs, to better serve students and families.

In light of these strategies, students with learning disabilities continue to grow and the transformation of the schools will include programs that help students who are disabled. The process in transforming schools is to focus on a clear purpose as defined by the community and the state. For many schools the focus is on a single clear purpose (eg. cognitive, affective, and social development) which can be transformed by teachers and principals who know, among other things, how to include students with disabilities into the everyday fabric of the general classroom and general students activities. A specific learning
disability is described as a “disorder” in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding and using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, and do mathematical calculations (National Education Association, 1994).

Today, many schools are now involving their students in inclusion programs that will educate all students. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Special Education Law known as Chapter 766, which became effective in 1974, and The Education for All Handicapped Children Act (P.L. 94-142), which became effective in 1975, are but two of the many laws passed to ensure a fair education for all students, regardless of disability.

The term inclusive schools is often used to describe the changes that are occurring within schools and school districts to better coordinate and unify educational programs and services, as well as to transform schools into places where all students, including those with disabilities, belong and can learn at higher levels. The author Florian (1993) defines inclusive schools as:

A diverse problem-solving organization with a common mission that emphasizes learning for all students. It employs and supports teachers and other staff who are committed to working together to create and maintain a climate conducive to learning. The responsibility for all students is shared. An effective, inclusive school acknowledges that such
a commitment requires administrative leadership, ongoing technical assistance, and long-term professional development. Within inclusive schools, there is a shared responsibility for any problem or any success that we have for students in our schools (p. 42).

In short, an inclusive school has a shared value that promotes a single, coordinated system of education dedicated to ensuring that all students are empowered to become caring, competent, and contributing citizens in an integrated, changing, and diverse society.

A researcher, Weatherly (1979) in a study of special education policy from state to street level, published his research and analysis of Chapter 766. The Massachusetts Comprehensive Special Education Law known as 766, became effective in 1974, a year prior to the implementation of P. L. 94-142. This law was similar to P. L. 94-142 in that it too, attempted to bring handicapped students into the educational mainstream.

Much of the concern about inclusion for students with learning disabilities stems from the educational conditions that existed prior to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (P. L. 94-142). Under these conditions, many students with learning disabilities were provided little or no academic or social support. Although students with learning disabilities were often present in general education classrooms, they were not full participants.

P.L. 94-142 has provided an opportunity for individuals with
disabilities to have full access to educational programs within the public school, along with support services to meet their specific educational needs. Students with special needs were assured a right to education in the regular classroom under the “least restrictive environment” component of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. However, since the inception of that law in 1975, and the Massachusetts state law in 1974, students with special needs have been excluded (Gerrard, 1990).

THE BEGINNING YEARS

For most students in the United States who were poor, from a minority group, or had disabilities, the first hurdle was merely to receive an education. As early as 1779, a plan for the first state-supported school system was proposed to Thomas Jefferson to help provide poor people in Virginia with an education. At that time, the plan was rejected because of “the refusal of well-to-do citizens to pay taxes for the education of the poor” (Rippa, cited in Sigmon, 1983). The situation was similar in most of the other states (Cremin, 1980).

Benjamin Rush, a physician in the late 1700’s, was one of the first Americans to introduce the concept of educating persons with disabilities (Davies, 1930). It was not until 1817 that one of the first special programs of education was established by Thomas Gallaudet at the American Asylum for the Education and Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb in Connecticut. Other programs for educating students with various disabilities were soon established. For example, the New England Asylum for the Education of the Blind was founded in 1829 in Watertown, Massachusetts, and the Experiential School for Teaching and Training Idiotic Children was
founded in 1846 in Barre, Massachusetts. The establishment of these institutions was part of the larger picture of the transformation of colonial society into a national one at the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century.

At the conclusion of the American War of Independence in 1783, affluent groups and private citizens established a number of philanthropic societies whose main concern was to ensure that marginal societal groups would not threaten the republic and the mainstream values of the time. These philanthropic organizations played a leading role in the establishment of public schools and segregated rehabilitative institutions, including training institutions and schools for people with disabilities (Hawes, 1971; Kanner, 1964; Mennel, 1973; Pickett, 1969; Richards, 1935; Rothman, 1971; Schlossman, 1977; Schwartz, 1956). Most of the individuals placed in rehabilitative institutions were judged to be members of a number of overlapping groups: paupers, deviants, persons with visible disabilities, minorities, and many newly arrived immigrants.

The motives of social assistance and control were intermixed in the workings of such institutions. Some leaders of special education at the time, such as Samuel Gridley Howe made remarkable efforts to promote the idea that all children, including those with disabilities, deserved schooling (Schwartz, 1956). However, the fact that training schools for persons with disabilities were organized like asylums, with a militaristic structure, doomed them as places where children were controlled rather than taught. This trend toward segregation, for controlling the “undesirables” would become a focal point during the 20th century.
The Creation of Public Schools

Institutions for individuals with disabilities continued to grow in numbers and size during the late 19th century until the 1950s. Concurrently, another trend was developing: the creation of public “common schools” where most students were educated. Between 1842 and 1918 all states legislated compulsory schooling, and public schools drew enormous amounts of funding for growth (Rury, 1985; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1991).

However, various groups of students were excluded from the mainstream of public schools. African Americans and Native Americans were largely educated in separate school systems. Similarly, students with visible and significant disabilities continued, for the most part, to be segregated. Residential institutions and special schools remained the norm for educating students who were blind or deaf or had physical disabilities. Students with significant developmental disabilities were generally denied educational services of any type and resided primarily in the back worlds of large state institutions. Sigmon (1983) stated, “almost all children who were wheelchair-bound, not toilet trained, or considered ineducable were excluded because of the problems that schooling would entail” (p. 3).

The Menace Scare, Tracking and Special Classes

At the turn of the 20th century, the eugenics movement helped to entrench the dehumanization of persons with disabilities. Between 1900 and 1930, there was widespread public perception that people with disabilities had criminal tendencies and were the most serious menace to civilization because of their genetic makeup.
This perception added to the willingness of many educators and the public to allow segregation and other practices such as sterilization (Davies, 1930; Goddard, 1914, 1915; Gosney, 1929; Laughin, 1926; Worthington, 1925) and encouraged tracking and the expansion of special classes in schools.

Tracking by academic ability was routinely used to relegate poor and disadvantaged children to lower, nonacademic streams (Chapman, 1988). Exceptions to compulsory education, primarily affecting children from the lower socioeconomic groups were made. Special classes at the low end of tracking became one of the defining characteristics of public schools. According to Chaves (1977), special classes “came about, not for humanitarian reasons, but because such children were unwanted in the regular public school classroom” (p. 30).

Teachers in general education classrooms perceived educators working in special education classes as having special preparation and a special capacity for the work. They were a breed apart, and it was seen as inappropriate to expect teachers lacking such preparation and inclination to participate in educating students with learning difficulties. This type of defensive and rejective reasoning led to the creation of what might be termed “little red schoolhouses for students considered exceptional” within regular school buildings. Students with disabilities and special educators were in a regular school, but in many ways were not a part of it. As special classes increased in number, attitudes among general and special educators and evolving administrative models for segregated education ensured that general and special education developed on parallel, rather than converging, lines.
The magnitude of the separation between general and special education was reflected in the increase in the numbers of students identified as having disabilities. Between 1932 and 1969-1970, general elementary and secondary school enrollments increased by 73%, from 26,275,000 to 45,550,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 1990, 1993); in comparison, enrollment in special programs increased by 1,552%, from 162,000 to 2,677,000 students (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1975).

By the 1950s and 1960s, the use of special classes in public schools was the preferred educational delivery system for most students with disabilities. It was during this period, however, that public attitudes about the place of individuals with disabilities in schools and in the community began to change.

**Impact of the Civil Rights Movement**

In 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education*, ruled that separate is not equal, and provided a powerful push away from segregated options for educating minority students. Apart from challenging exclusionary educational policies for African Americans, this ruling also led the way toward increased scrutiny of the segregation of students with disabilities.

During the 1950s and 1960s, parents of students with disabilities founded organizations such as the National Association for Retarded Citizens and initiated advocacy actions for educating their children. A group of special education leaders, including Blatt (1969), Dunn (1968), Dybwad (1964), Goldberg & Cruickshank, (1958), Hobbs (1966), Lilly (1970), Reynolds (1962), and Wolfensberger (1972), began advocating for
the rights of students with disabilities to learn in more normalized school environments with their peers. For the first time, and on a fairly wide basis, the restrictions imposed by segregated institutions, special schools, and special classes were presented as problematic. The wheel of change had been set in motion.

Education in the Least Restrictive Environment

The natural sequel to *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) for students with disabilities followed in the 1970s. Court decisions in Pennsylvania (*Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 1971, 1972,* ) and the District of Columbia (*Mills v. D.C. Board of Education, 1972*) established the right of all children labeled as mentally retarded, emotionally or physically disabled to a free and appropriate education. In 1973, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112), particularly Section 504, and later amendments Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1986 [PL 99-506]; Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 [PL 102-569] guaranteed the rights of individuals with disabilities in employment and in educational institutions that received federal funding. Further pressure by parents, courts, and legislators resulted in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), which was enacted in 1978. This law, reauthorized as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) (PL 101-476), extended the right to a free public education to all children, regardless of disability, in the least restrictive environment possible. However, it was not until the mid 1980s that the current dual systems of general and special education were directly challenged (*Stainback & Stainback, 1984,*).
Inclusion of all Students in the Mainstream of Education

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, many students with disabilities began to be integrated into regular classrooms on at least a part-time basis. Even many students with significant disabilities, who had not been served in the past, started to receive educational services in regular neighborhood school environments (Certo, Haring & York, 1984; Knoblock, 1982; Lusthaus, 1988; Strully & Strully, 1985; Villa & Thousand, 1988).

In 1986, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services issued the Regular Education Initiative (REI) (Will, 1986), which incorporated some of the ideas proposed by Stainback and Stainback (1984) for merging special and general education. The purpose of REI was to develop ways to serve students with disabilities in general classrooms by encouraging special education programs to develop a partnership with general education. Other researchers have been strong supporters of the initiative (Reynolds & Birch, 1988; Wang, Reynolds & Walberg, 1987).

Resistance to Inclusion

Attempts to resist inclusive schooling for all forms is still evident. Some scholars and researchers have argued against the inclusion movement (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Kauffman, 1993; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Lieberman, 1988). A number of states have made teacher certification based on disability categorization more rigid, and some organizations and states have proposed the reinstitution of segregated schools for students with disabilities (see Stainback & Stainback, 1992a). In addition, some interagency collaboration efforts may also work for control and stigmatization.
rather than for successful inclusion of disadvantaged students, including students with disabilities (Karagiannis, 1992).

Perhaps the most revealing indicator of resistance is contained in the statistics concerning students with disabilities. There have been sharp increases in numbers of children identified as having disabilities since 1970, but only minimal overall improvement toward more inclusive placements since the enactment of P.L. 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975).

Momentum for Inclusion

The inclusion movement has gained momentum in the early 1990s. There is a growing international organization (Schools Are For Everyone), with thousands of members throughout the United States and other countries, with the sole purpose of promoting inclusion. The influence of the inclusion movement is now felt outside the field of special education and in the courts and is now part and parcel of general education reform efforts.

The gradual departure from the exclusionary educational practices of the past provides all students an equal opportunity to have their educational needs met within the mainstream of general education. The move away from segregation is facilitated by efforts to unify general and special education in a single system. Despite obstacles, the expansion of the inclusion movement into the wider educational reform effort is a telling signal that schools and society will continue to shift toward increasingly inclusive practices.

Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia

In 1972, a civil action was initiated on behalf of seven
children of school age who were excluded from the District of Columbia Public Schools, and denied a publicly supported education. This suit compelled the system to provide them with immediate and adequate education and educational facilities in the public schools or alternative placement at public expense. This became known as Mills v. D.C. Board of Education.

Although this case was decided in 1972 by District Judge Waddy, nothing appears to have been changed significantly. The plaintiffs were awarded: (1) the right to attend a regular public school; (2) a free and suitable publicly supported education regardless of the degree of the child’s mental, physical or emotional disability or impairment; (3) the right not to be suspended from the public schools for disciplinary reasons for any period in excess of two days without affording him or her a hearing.

The problem of providing special education to “exceptional” children (mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, physically handicapped, hyperactive and other children with learning disabilities) is one of the major proportions in the District of Columbia. The precise number of such children cannot be stated because the District has continuously failed to comply with Section 31-208 of the District of Columbia Code which requires a census of all children aged three to eighteen in the District to be taken (Mills v. Board of Education, 1972). These were the most important rights afforded the students in their quest to be treated like other students.
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL’S
INCLUSION PROGRAM

Out of 80,500 students attending the District of Columbia Public Schools, 4.40% account for specific learning disabilities, which translates into learning disabled students composing the majority in special education (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

The District of Columbia Public School’s statement on inclusion is that all students shall be afforded the opportunity to be educated in school environments which fully include rather than exclude them. School environments include all curricular, co-curricular and extra-curricular programs and activities.

Therefore, the District of Columbia Public Schools believes that all students: are integrated into regular classrooms and activities for both educational and social activities; receive an individualized education program with supports enabling them to learn in the regular classroom; have the opportunity to participate in school social and extra-curricular activities with same age peers without disabilities; and attend schools in their own neighborhoods and do not attend segregated programs anywhere else (District of Columbia Public Schools, 1996).

Although there are other schools in the District of Columbia which have inclusion programs: Janney, Garrison and Tyler, these schools are on the elementary level; however, an inclusion program exists on the secondary level. This program is centered at Cardozo Senior High School, in the Northwest section of town. The inclusion program at Cardozo Senior High School has learning disabled students mainstreamed into regular classes, and their
special education teachers follow them into the classroom to provide additional help. This program has six teachers who have master’s degrees and three of these teachers are dually certified in English, science and math. Additionally, the staff includes a psychologist, two social workers, two speech and language therapists, and one physical therapist.

The students, who are in grades 9-12, follow their written schedule to their various classes, and while in the mainstreamed class, their special education teachers provide support as far as the student understanding the material. The teachers and students are a very close knit community, and the students rely heavily on their teacher’s advice in matters concerning their schoolwork and in personal matters. This program operates Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.; has a student-teacher ratio of 5-8:1; offers flexibility in programming; and seeks to meet the students where they are academically and socially and works on the needed skills to elevate the student.

STUDIES AND EXAMPLES OF INCLUSION PROGRAMS

Figures show that nearly 10% of school-aged students receive special education services (Hardeman, Drew, Egan, & Wolfe, 1990). More than half of these students experience learning disabilities and most are students enrolled in junior or senior high schools (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 1994).

Rogan, Branson, Hameister, Kalicki, Lowery, and Skolnick (1993) have indicated that simply placing students with disabilities in regular classrooms (or keeping them in, if they are already so placed) is counterproductive unless the students (and their teachers) are provided with various forms of support.
Inclusion without support is abandonment. The inclusion “recipe” that Rogan et al. (1993) advocates is based on the assumption that students with learning disabilities should participate in regular education at the highest level possible.

Following are illustrations of schools on the middle school and high school level which support the notion of inclusion.

**Dorseyville Middle School**

Dorseyville Middle School, located in the Fox Chapel area school district in suburban Pittsburgh, has an enrollment of 935, of which approximately 14% are identified as needing educational support. Dorseyville’s inclusion program students are grouped in three to six teams at each grade level. On each team are four regular education teachers and one educational support specialist who share a common space, planning time each day, and the responsibility of providing instruction for all students on the team and their peers.

Instructional methods and groups vary depending on the needs of the students. The team approach has benefited all students on the teams. A variety of instructional strategies are utilized and promoted, including cooperative and mastery learning. In addition, classes are moving toward individualized instruction that allows all students to work on projects at their own pace.

**Kosciuszko Middle School**

Kosciuszko Middle School, located on the south side of Milwaukee, Wisconsin has approximately 750 students, 16% of which are exceptional education students. Kosciuszko’s inclusion program is divided into seven small “families”; each family consists of four core teachers (math, social studies, English, and science),
an exceptional education teacher, a fine arts teacher, and a vocational educational teacher. The family teachers meet three mornings a week to discuss business that will affect students from that family, the planning of interdisciplinary units, the utilization of their block time, and whether to place exceptional students in the family or return them to the resource room (Walther-Thomas & Carter, 1993).

The regular education teachers have noticed that having exceptional education teachers working with them has helped not only the exceptional education students, but also the regular education students. Faculty morale has been given a boost because faculty feel appreciated for the effectiveness of the inclusion program that they have built to improve the education of the students (Fishman & Goss, 1996).

Lincoln Middle School

Lincoln, located in Syracuse, New York, has 637 students attending 6th, 7th, and 8th grades, and 16% of the students are identified as having disabilities. In 1991, Lincoln began planning its first program to fully include students with disabilities. The plan was triggered by the fact that students with disabilities who had been fully included in elementary school were about to graduate to the middle school.

In 1993 Lincoln adopted a three year plan aiming at changing itself from a traditional school focused on separate subjects, facts, and skills taught in isolation to one that aims at integrated, thematic learning using cooperative learning and new assessment methods. Lincoln began with a team structure which allows each team the opportunity to devise its own schedule to
permit such activities as team lunches, regular team meetings, block schedulings and allowing some classes to be larger than others.

**Bloomington High School North**

Bloomington High School North has 1,350 students in 9th through 12th grades, and about 10% of Bloomington North’s students have disabilities. Bloomington excludes no students, regardless of the degree of the disability, and believes that all students should be taught together. It has moved students with mild disabilities into general education classrooms. Special education teachers are paired with classroom teachers to modify and adapt the curriculum and instruction. All students have benefited from the presence of two teachers in class, and students with disabilities have benefited by being exposed to a broader curriculum and higher expectations.

**Capital High School**

Capital High School, in the Olympia School District, located about 60 miles south of Seattle, has 1,388 students, and about 7%, of the students are in the special education program. Capital opened in 1976 with a philosophy that set the stage for a program that incorporates a large diversity of students into the mainstream of school life.

In 1978, a self-contained program for students with developmental disabilities became a part of Capital High School. Through a process of “reverse mainstreaming” peer tutors were instrumental in introducing these students to high school life and activities.

To make inclusion successful, Capital High developed
strategies to prepare and assist all the members of the school community. For special education teachers and regular teachers it provided extra training and more planning time. Meetings were set up between the special education staff and regular teachers, who were enabled to use the services of a “floating substitute” to cover their classes (Chenoweth, 1994).

Seneca Valley School District

Seneca Valley School District, located north of Pittsburgh in Western Pennsylvania serves 6,636 students, in grades 9-12 of which 78 students are classified as learning disabled. The school’s faculty began the program by selecting students with LD who were most likely to benefit from instruction in regular classroom settings. These students were enrolled in limited size classrooms staffed by teachers willing to co-plan and co-teach. The two teachers (one English teacher and one special educator) were trained in the components of Secondary Instructional Support (SIS) and thus were equipped to cooperatively meet the needs of all students in the regular classroom settings. The teachers participated in school wide collaboration and team building, used curriculum based assessment, adapted their instruction, sought to motivate their students, and taught them a series of learning strategies (Rogan et al., 1993).

Inclusive schools do exist worldwide and their success depends on dedicated teachers, paraprofessionals, administrators, and support staff who believe that every child is capable of being successful. Inclusion allows students growth in the academic, and social areas. Students who are included in regular class function better because they are with peers, and they are able to focus on
their studies.

**Academic Gains**

Experts examining the integration of children with disabilities into the general education classroom have found positive gains in educational and social development. Because few schools have achieved full inclusion system-wide, available research focuses upon small-scale integrated programs, i.e., programs integrating only one grade level in one classroom within a school, wherein students with disabling conditions participate in general education for most or part of the school day (Giangreco & Putnam, 1991).

**Social Gains**

Research investigating the social development of children with disabilities clearly establishes that integration into general education stimulates social development, while segregated special education retards it.

A two year study (Cole & Meyer, 1991) of students, who ranged from profoundly mentally retarded to moderately mentally retarded with multiple disabling conditions, found that students integrated into general education with peer supports gained social competence. In contrast, students in segregated special education regressed in their social competence. The authors of the study attributed the dramatic differences in social development to the amount of social interaction between the disabled students and other individuals. Although integrated and segregated students spent the same amount of time with special education teachers, integrated students spent more time with teaching assistants, more time with other students with and without disabling conditions,
and more time in community programs outside of school.

On surveys and interviews, high school students often attributed their reduced fear of people who looked or behaved differently to having had interactions with individuals with disabilities (Peck et al., 1992). In addition to feeling more accepting of others, students said that they came to value the contributions that all individuals make (Biklen et al., 1989; York et al., 1992).

Many non-disabled students have experienced an increase in self-esteem as a result of their relationships with individuals with disabilities (Peck et al., 1992; Peck et al., 1989; Voeltz & Brennan, 1983). Studies have shown that some students perceived that their relationship with a classmate with disabilities had elevated their status in class and in school (Staub et al., in press). Many non-disabled students experience a growth in their commitment to personal moral and ethical principles as a result of their relationship with students with disabilities (Peck et al., 1990).

Kaskinen-Chapman (1992) surveyed parents of children who had been transitioned into mainstreamed classrooms. The parents expressed that they believed social and academic gains made by their children would not have occurred in segregated educational settings. In many cases, the relationships that have emerged between students with and without disabilities have developed into meaningful, long lasting friendships (Amado, 1993; Strully & Strully, 1985; Voeltz & Brennan, 1983).

In creating classroom settings which realistically reflect the world outside the school yard, integrated programs better
prepare all students for life in a diversified society. Through inclusion, schools can provide students with a truly well-rounded education.

**Administrative Gains**

Besides the benefits already discussed, integration promises to affect other constructive changes in educational systems. If schools fully include students with disabling conditions in general education classrooms, they can better utilize resources and programs which they often duplicate in special education and general education classrooms. The merger of general and special education programs will likely result in the following structural changes.

First, general and special education teachers can share their expertise, collaborate on strategy, and design comprehensive learning programs for students with disabilities. Second, special education teachers, paraprofessionals and therapists can spend less time determining classification and eligibility of students for special education programs and more time actually instructing them (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Third, in providing services directly in the general education classroom, special education teachers and paraprofessionals can simultaneously teach students with disabling conditions and students identified by general education teachers as children requiring individualized instruction. Finally, school administrators can distribute funds more efficiently. Specifically, they can consolidate programs and reduce the costs of transportation, remedial services, and instructional materials.
MODELS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Inclusion goes far beyond the mere physical placement of special education students in general education classrooms. In fact, successful inclusion requires nothing less than rethinking methods of service delivery, reorganizing special education resources, including time and staff, and restructuring the curriculum, instructional methods, and assessment procedures of general education to accommodate students with diverse educational needs. To achieve full inclusion, schools must develop innovative special education programs, which provide services in the general education classroom and create a flexible core educational curriculum responsive to individual students’ needs and diversities. The following strategies present administrators, teachers, and parents with practical models for combining special and general education.

The Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM) developed by Margaret Wang of Temple University provides an alternative to pull-out resource rooms. The model utilizes team teaching and special supports in the general education classroom and requires adaptation of the curriculum and pacing to each student’s individual needs. In an adaptive classroom, a general education teacher conducts class while two special education teachers circulate to provide assistance to the teacher or direct services to the students. To accommodate students’ differences, the ALEM relies on a variety of instructional practices and attempts to develop learning experiences which match the learning needs of individual students. The curriculum in the classroom combines prescriptive or teacher directed instruction, effective in
ensuring mastery of basic academic skills, with aspects of open education which generate positive attitudes and processes of inquiry, self-management, responsibility for learning, and social cooperation (Wang, 1990).

Furthermore, research indicates that disabled students fully integrated in the ALEM setting demonstrate more on task behavior and greater capacity for independent work than resource room students. Moreover, the students with special needs in ALEM classrooms rated themselves higher than did their peers in resource room programs in terms of self-esteem, cognitive competence, and social interaction. One study (Wang et al., 1985) also suggested that the ALEM offers schools considerable flexibility. In the study, five different schools successfully implemented the ALEM despite their dissimilar demographics.

The Integrated Classroom Model (ICM) was created by the University of Washington to educate students with mild disabilities. The model offers push in services in integrated classrooms rather than pull out services in resource rooms (Affleck, 1988). One of the most significant advantages of the ICM is its cost effectiveness. In elementary schools, the ICM can yield a cost savings of approximately $50,000 a year (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989).

Evaluations of the ICM indicate that students with learning disabilities receive services in the classroom as effective as those offered in resource rooms. Non disabled students in the ICM performed as well as their peers in non-integrated classrooms (Affleck, 1988).

In this model, Consultant Teaching (CT), professionals
provide services to pupils with disabling conditions who attend full time general education programs, and to their general education teachers. Without exception the teachers agreed that providing special education in general education classes is a good idea for both special education pupils and general education pupils, depending upon the particular needs of the child (Gottlieb & Atler, 1991).

Similar to the consultant teacher model, team teaching requires general and special education teachers to share curriculum and instructional responsibilities in classrooms containing students with and without disabilities. While the model usually pairs a special education teacher and a general education teacher together in a classroom, the model can assign up to seven different instructors to a classroom, including speech therapists, guidance counselors, and health professionals (Thousand & Villa, 1990). Team teaching encourages teachers to draw upon one another’s expertise. General educators, for instance have the skills to teach large groups of students and develop lesson plans. Special educators, on the other hand, can identify problems in the curriculum and devise effective teaching strategies to combat such difficulties. Together, the teachers can provide all students with a curriculum responsive to their individual needs (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

Cooperative learning describes various instructional strategies designed to accommodate a range of educational needs and to encourage social relationships among students of diverse abilities. These strategies supplement or replace students’ independent seat work with small group activities. Individual
success, therefore, depends upon group learning and collaboration between students with and without disabilities.

Cognitive and affective benefits of cooperative learning are numerous. Specific gains include: higher achievement for all students, especially among the lowest achieving; greater use of higher order reasoning skills; more on task behavior; better attitudes toward school, peers, and teachers and increased personal and academic self-esteem (Johnson & Johnson, 1986).

Peer tutoring offers schools a practical, cost-effective means of providing intensive one-on-one teaching, immediate feedback, and additional instructional time to students. In a traditional tutorial arrangement, non-disabled students can tutor students with disabilities. With proper supervision, disabled students can also serve as tutors for younger students as well as their disabled and non-disabled peers (Gartner & Lipsky, 1990).

A comprehensive review (Osguthorpe & Scruggs, 1986) of peer tutoring programs revealed that students with disabilities who served as tutors or acted as tutees acquired social and academic benefits. The tutors, disabled and non-disabled students alike acquired greater self-esteem.

While the Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process represent the traditional models of parent involvement, schools can nevertheless adopt new approaches to encourage parent involvement. Specifically, schools can conduct meetings in the evenings when working parents can attend; supply child care services during meetings; send parents bulletins on school activities; and lend books and educational materials to parents. Through more
comprehensive models, schools can actively promote parent and community involvement in the education of children (Guzman, 1992).

When we educate, we seek to educate all, not just a select few, thereby inclusion is a viable tool to pool together all resources needed to efficiently teach our students, and to have them graduate from school knowing that they received the best.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This chapter is divided into six sections. The first section begins with a discussion of the selection of the participants, followed by a description of the school’s special education program proposed for the study, the interview protocol, the design, the procedure, and the analyzing of the data.

Participants

Participants for this study were selected from a population of 66 level four students (learning disabled), enrolled in Cardozo Senior High School, located in the Northwest quadrant in the District of Columbia. Cardozo was selected because the researcher was a member of the school’s staff and she felt that she would be able to establish a rapport with the students. In addition, Cardozo was the only high school that had incorporated the inclusion process.

A list of all of the learning disabled students (66) at Cardozo Senior High was developed by the social worker and from that list a meeting was scheduled to explain the study. From that meeting, 20 students showed interest. Based on their level of participation, eight of the 20 learning disabled students were selected based on the following criteria: their grade level, and the number of classes that were inclusive.

Once identified, these eight students were given a parent permission slip which indicated their acceptance into the study. A
student is classified as a level four student (learning disabled) because of classroom failure, and test scores which fall below a certain criteria on intelligence assessments.

**Description of Cardozo’s Special Education Program**

Cardozo Senior High School, located in Ward One of the District of Columbia, has a full time level four program for learning disabled students between the ages of 13 and 21 years. A level four program is designed for students with learning disabilities who are eligible to receive the majority of their instruction in the regular education classroom. Level three programs are designed for students with severe disabilities who are eligible to receive the majority of their instruction in the special education classroom. Level two programs are designed for students with moderate disabilities who are eligible to receive part time instruction in the regular education classroom, and level one programs are designed for students with mild disabilities (other than learning disabilities) who are eligible to receive the majority of their instruction in the regular education classroom (Department of Vocational Education, 1995).

The school, which is comprised of a tricultural population, included 50% African-American, 35% Latin-American, and 15% Asian-American students. The population served consisted of lower middle class African-American males and females.

The learning disability program, which was designed to assist severely learning disabled students and help them become responsible students, operates five days a week, six hours a day. Instructional activities are conducted between 8:30 a.m. and 3:30 p.m., Monday through Friday.
Interview Protocol

Three instruments developed by the researcher were used in this study. The first instrument consisted of a 26 item questionnaire, and the second instrument consisted of a 12 item questionnaire, and the third instrument consisted of a four item questionnaire. The interviews were conducted during a four week span. The students were interviewed individually in the social worker’s office, where they were also informed about the study. Each of the faculty members who participated in this study were interviewed in their respective classrooms. The interviews lasted one hour, and were tape recorded for accuracy. The questionnaires and the interviews focused on the students’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding academic, social, and family factors.

The academic section consisted of 13 questions. Examples of questions included in this category were: (1) How do you feel you are treated by your regular education teacher in the classroom? (2) When you are having trouble with an assignment, who do you go to for help? (3) How would you describe your high school experience? (4) What does it mean to be included in a regular education classroom?

The social section consisted of five questions regarding social relationships in and outside of school: (1) Have you been able to make new friends in a regular classroom? Tell me about a special friendship. (2) Do you have more friends now? Why or why not? (3) If there is an adult at school with whom you can confide in when you are experiencing difficulty, what is it about that person that makes you like them? (4) Do some of your old friends treat you differently now that you are in a regular education
classroom? Why do you think this is so? (5) In what extra-curricular activities do you participate? Why do you like these particular activities?

The family section consisted of eight questions regarding family involvement. Examples of questions included in this category were: (1) When you need someone with whom to talk, about school or in general, who listens? (2) When you spend time with your mother, or father or sisters and brothers, what kinds of activities do you enjoy? (3) Do you have an after school job? Describe it. If you don’t, what do you do after school? (4) How often does your parent attend Parent Teacher Association meetings?

The adult interview questions consisted of 12 questions regarding academics, socialization and family. Interviews took place with the psychologist, social worker, speech therapist, and four teachers, who apprised the researcher of the student’s learning capabilities.

The academic section focused on five questions: (1) What does it mean for a learning disabled child to be included in a regular education classroom? (2) How is a regular education classroom different from that of a special education classroom? (3) How are students treated by their regular education teacher in the classroom? (4) When a student is having trouble with an assignment, who does he or she go to for help? (5) Do you lecture most of the time, write everything on the board, or allow the students to move around? How does your style of teaching compare with other teachers?

Two questions regarding socialization included: (1) Do you think it is easier for learning disabled students to be friends
with regular education students? Why or why not? (2) Would you be willing to let a student confide in you when he or she is experiencing difficulty? Why or why not?

Lastly, five questions relating to family included: (1) Who does the student live with and is he or she happy with their living arrangements? Explain. (2) When that student needs someone with whom to talk, who would be available to listen and why? (3) Are there any school activities in which the parents can participate? (4) How often have you seen this parent at Parent Teacher Association meetings? Explain. (5) Other than Parent Teacher Association meetings, has this parent met with you, or any other teachers, at all, this year? Why?

These questions gave the researcher a comprehensive view of each student, and whether inclusion was helpful to the student. The interview also informed the researcher of any problems with the inclusion program and allowed her an opportunity to address these issues.

Design of the Study

A descriptive method design, the case study was utilized in this study. It allowed information to be given, and the interviewee to be free enough to explore his or her feelings on the topic.

In deciding to use the case study method, it allowed an in depth investigation of the student, of the school and classroom, and of the family to be taken. The primary purpose in utilizing this method was to determine the factors (inclusion vs regular education) and relationships among the factors (the feelings of the students, their teachers, and support staff involved in
inclusion) that resulted in the current behavior of the subjects in the study.

In order to adequately execute the study, inclusion from a students’ viewpoint would have to be observed. In addition, inclusion from the teachers’ and support staffs’ viewpoint would have to be viewed in order to get a complete picture. Multiple cases were studied in hopes of discovering that inclusion was worthwhile for the student participating in it, and that it does make school a place of comfort.

Cases were chosen based on preliminary information (age, name, number of inclusive classes, year in school) collected from a large number of students, and the students were screened to determine who was chosen for the study. Data was collected twice, and analyzed (Yin, 1993).

**Procedure**

Data were collected in October and November, 1997. This included a minimum of four monthly one hour recorded interviews with the subject. In depth interviews were conducted with all study participants, and were tape recorded for accuracy, and ease of transcription.

To assist in the data collection phase, a field log was utilized providing a detailed account of ways the researcher’s time was spent when on site, and in the transcription and analysis phase. Details related to the interviews were recorded in a field notebook, and a field diary was kept, which chronicled the researcher’s thinking, feelings, experiences, and perceptions throughout the research process. School records, such as the Individualized Education Program, social history, psychological
and speech and language reports associated with the student, were examined and analyzed. Fieldwork for the data collection process was completed November 1997 and the analysis of the data was completed August 1998.

Data Analysis

Field notes were completed after each interview session and transcribed verbatim onto computer text files. After the data had been gathered, formal analysis utilizing an emergent theme approach was conducted. Initially, interviews were analyzed and placed into appropriate categories regarding theme, and the analysis was written according to the research question topics. Field notes were utilized as background information regarding the participants, and after each interview, the field notebook was used to record the details.
CHAPTER FOUR

PROFILES OF EIGHT STUDENTS, THEIR TEACHERS
AND SUPPORT STAFF

Introduction

The way to get a story together is not to head first and directly to the center of it, but to start somewhere at the edges or margins. So says journalist James Reston in his memoirs (1991). That may be the way to understand schools too, to look to the margins, that is, to those students who have unusual needs and who challenge teachers to the limits of commitments, insights and skills. At the margins of schools, one finds alienation, segregation, rejection and many highly reluctant learners. These students are, for whatever reason, struggling in their academic programs or in their social behavior; they are often at risk in their private lives and live in disordered communities. We also refer to students who are learning and adjusting to school life especially well, but receive far too little help; like other students, they need instruction that is adapted to their strengths (Heller et al., 1982).

The students that are spoken of are learning disabled which means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language spoken or written which may manifest in an imperfect ability to listen, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. These students are placed according to testing and evaluation, in different special education programs at the request of parents, teachers and psychologists. These eight students were recognized as having special needs and were placed in the special education
program in the fourth grade, and are still in the program. They were taken out of the self-contained model, which is a model where students stay in the same classroom all day, and upon entrance to high school (9th grade) they were placed in an inclusive setting.

The students ranged in age from 16 to 19 and the grade level was from 9 to 12. Four of the students live in single parent homes where the parent is a female and the sole provider of resources for the household; three of the students live in two parent homes, inclusive of a mother and father who are the providers of resources for the home; and one student resides in a group home which shelters 10-20 females ages 14-21, and is run by the District of Columbia.

Seven adults were also involved in the study. These adults consisted of the school psychologist, social worker, speech pathologist, and four teachers. Two of the teachers were special education, and two were regular education teachers who worked with the eight students, in their classrooms on a daily basis. Their reading levels ranged from 1.8 to 13.6, and their math levels ranged from 3.4 to 8.6. The students spent from 21 to 29 hours per week in the special education setting and from 2 to 11 hours per week in regular education per their individualized education programs. Three of the eight students were scheduled for speech language twice a week for 30 minutes each session and five were not scheduled. Each of the eight students is working toward a high school diploma.

These students have a difficult time maneuvering their disabilities at school and at home. In this study, most of the students were taking a minimum of three regular education classes,
which are content-driven classes directed by a teacher who concerns him or herself with whole group instruction, record keeping and grades and doesn’t take into account any individual learning differences. One student, a senior, was enrolled in five regular education classes. All of the students are monitored by their special education teachers. As the student successfully completed each year, he or she was placed in an additional regular education class. The goal is to be able to help the child assimilate into the regular education culture with a modicum of failure.

To recreate face to face interactions with the eight Cardozo Senior High School students who volunteered to share their perceptions of self and schooling would be an almost impossible task. The nearest the researcher can come to knowing these young people and their definitions of reality is by “hearing” their words. The purpose of this study was to allow students to share in their own words, their school, and home experiences and their own interpretations of them.

Before the individual meetings, the researcher had prepared 26 questions, which were expected to provide an opening for students to share their perceptions about school, friends and family life. After initially requesting that students describe his or her day at school, the researcher asked if he or she would share his or her thoughts about these questions. Each student discussed his or her schedule with the researcher, and most of the students were recommended because they would be very candid. Before the interviews began the researcher spent time explaining the specifics of the study to the students: their role, the
teacher’s role, and the support staff’s role in the study. The researcher also spoke about herself in regard to the study: her position as a teacher in the school system, her ideas relating to inclusion, and her expectations based on the findings of this study.

Findings

Similarities and differences of perceptions of a regular education classroom and a special education classroom

The classrooms at Cardozo Senior High School are set up based on the needs of the students that will be taught. The following comments represent the students’ feelings regarding their placement in these classrooms.

CG responded:

In regular education we just did a report in Ms. P’s class, so you know I’m getting an “A” in her class anyway. I can do a report like they can do a report, I can write a story like they can write a story, but sometimes you ain’t got that much time, you get the assignment, you get to turn it in on time. In regular education, you have a bunch of people. The teacher can’t get to you that much compared to a special education class teacher can get to you all the time, so it gets frustrating at times.

JM said:

They think I’m slow, that I won’t pick up certain concepts or activities like other students will, but you know sometimes it bothers me, but other times I ignore the fact they think I can’t pick up as quickly as other students can. There’s nothing I can do about me having a learning disability. But I can’t let that put me down about my learning disability. I’m not gonna let it bother me.
WT replied:

Okay, it’s like this. In a special education classroom, it’s a smaller group of people so the teacher has time to attend to everyone in that group, and then if you need something, you need to say, “I need this,” or “Hey, what’s this,” or “Hey, how do I do this.” Because you’re in a special education classroom, they assume you don’t know how to do it, so they’ll be more quicker to give you help than in a regular education classroom, cause then they’re gonna say, well, you have to do it and if you say I don’t know how, they’ll say try it, you know, like that.

AH said:

My first year was kind of dragging, but now it’s exciting and stuff. Because we don’t have the teachers so we understand the work as a regular education student, and some of us know the stuff better than the regular education students, so we teach them, and then we feel happy about ourselves cause we helping them. We are treated like any other student. They don’t treat you special or nothing. You get the same work, expect you to do it at the same time. You just have a teacher there to help you.

JP expressed:

It depends on what class I’m in. If I’m in a class where I know I don’t like the teacher and the teacher don’t like me, I would go....well I would go to a student and if the student don’t know and I really don’t want to go to the teacher, but you know I know I have to do the work in order to pass, so I would go to the teacher and if the teacher act like she don’t want to tell me what to do, I either don’t do it or try to figure it out the best way I can.

The students who were identified special education had been in the program since fourth grade. Most of them were able
to read first grade material such as Dick and Jane through college level The Grapes of Wrath, and their math scores ranged from the third grade, being able to do simple addition and subtraction through the eighth grade level, being able to do fractions and decimal related problems. A special education classroom is one in which there are 10-12 students with one special education teacher who modifies the material for the student in order for him or her to understand it, and moves at a slower pace, whereas in a regular education classroom, there are a great number of students, 15-30, with one regular education teacher who teaches the subject without modification, and who moves at a slightly brisk pace. The special education classes, which were tiny and cramped, (only 10 desks could fit in the room) without any windows, were held in the basement on the right side of the building (13th street side). The halls were narrow, dusty, and littered with pieces of old furniture, and the lighting was poor. The back of the cafeteria, where trash was emptied, and the gym, driver’s education, car repair, and printing classes were located in the basement. A student being placed in this situation would almost have to fail, based on his or her conditions.

The regular education classrooms are located on three levels (1st, 2nd and 3rd floors) consisting of English, math, science, and various other subjects. There are six windows in each classroom, and the classrooms are spacious enough to fit 30 desks. The planetarium is on the third floor. The library is on the second floor as is the home economics suite, and the colors are brighter: yellow, orange and white. There is space
to move easily from class to class, and it is clean. The students felt as if they were in two different schools and that is what education has become: two schools of thought.

DJ

It was fun in regular education. They teach fun and make you understand where they’re coming from.

CG

You can do everything that everybody else does.

JM

The teaching part of it is kind of different. They teach you like high school (young adult students). They help me and before I ask for help, I will try and see can I get the work, but if I don’t, I’ll ask the teacher to help me.

RS

Environment is better, larger class size. You’re mixed in with the rest of the students.

WT

You can be a part of the classroom where everybody in it is regular education.

JP

I’m on my own.

TS

You get more experience, learn better.

AH

You be doing their work, you’re with regular education students.

Students’ feelings in regard to special education were almost the reverse of their feelings for regular education.

DJ

I don’t get enough attention in regular education.

CG

We are helped by our special education students.
Teaching is different, teach you like a little kid. Teach slow.

It’s hard work in regular education, I don’t understand it.

I’m not pampered as much, don’t let you think for yourself.

We do a little bit of work, not a lot like theirs.

These comments suggest that being included in a regular education class for these students was fun, but frustrating. Some were taught as young adults and some were taught as little kids. There is a distinct difference in providing instruction to learning disabled students, and teachers are not always given the proper training to understand the disability, so they teach, for the most part, as they would a regular class, and that student who is disabled gets lost and ultimately fails. The similarities are seen as liberating, the student is just like any other student in the class, and the differences are limiting, the student is not allowed to achieve his or her full potential because of the disability.

They tell me to do an assignment, but I don’t catch on real fast, and they tell me to do the work on my own. Sometimes you feel mad, but I just try to work on my own, then think about it, “you gotta do it.” Raise my hand, ask for help and if they don’t help me, I just ask my fellow friends beside me to to help me.

Most teachers will be like “I want you to do this,” “I want you to do that,” and then they will tell you about how to do it, why to do it, but Mr. P. in U.S. History, he’ll tell you about
a certain situation and then if you don’t hear, you just don’t hear it. I mean it’s like that. But Ms. H., I mentioned her before, she’s in that class so I hardly ever fall behind. She’s like a safety net, you know she’s there. You know you’re going to get it later, so you really don’t worry about it. My other two regular education classes I got to pay attention extra hard cause I know no one is in there with me.

CG

Skills not up to date yet.

JM

Regular education students don’t care about education.

TS

I can tell you why I’m different, like studying habits. Mr. O and Macbeth, I’m still trying to get that. I’m like.....some people get it, some people don’t.

Effectively educating diverse learners requires that educators use a variety of teaching approaches to meet their students’ needs. This frequently necessitates reevaluating the teaching practices with which they are most comfortable in order to assess if these are the best positive methods for facilitating the active learning of desired educational outcomes by all students in the class.

Many teachers become accustomed to using a “one size fits all” approach to teaching. In a study of a number of schools throughout the nation, Goodlad (1984) found little variation in the narrow range of teaching practices used, although other characteristics of the schools varied significantly. The obvious problem with using only a few standard teaching
methods is that students, even those who do not have identified special challenges, naturally have varying strengths, needs, and styles of learning.

Intrapersonal skills of students diagnosed as learning disabled

The eight interviewees showed a sense of understanding self as it related to school and family. They found out that although they were different in certain aspects, they were the same as regular education students. They understood their disability and what limitations were placed on them, and worked out the best way to achieve their maximum potential regarding schoolwork. Although they would be responsible for all work given by the teacher, there were different ways to negotiate their disability.

Being a part of the mainstream kept them on task, and having non-disabled students in their classrooms helped them see that they were all in this class together. They were not afraid to make a mistake, as they noted all students made mistakes and they were anxious to share their knowledge.

The families that these students were a part of were loving, supportive and caring. They would come up to school to inquire about their child or to participate in an extracurricular event, and they shared time at home for conversations regarding schoolwork, or regular parent and child discussions.

For the researcher, as an end note, these students developed intrapersonal skills that would sustain them throughout life.
DJ said:

As I’ve been in regular education classes, I’ve become more comfortable with self. I’m not nervous or afraid when the teacher ask a question, or when I’m asked to go to the board. It makes me happy to know I can do it.

JM replied:

I can relate to others, and others relate to me as a person, the same as they are. They don’t see me as a kid with a disability, but as an equal partner.

WT remarked:

I love myself and even with this learning disability, I don’t feel any different from any other student. We’re the same, although different.

AH responded:

Being a special education student, to me, means you “special.” I’ve learned to accept myself and my disability and that is okay. My family has helped me tremendously in making me realize that I’m an okay person, in spite of my disability.

Interpersonal skills of students diagnosed as learning disabled

Although the respondents expressed positive comments in relation to self, they expressed doubt concerning their activities with others, at school. The researcher’s eight interviewees had the opportunity to work in small groups and large groups and some found it frustrating when they were overlooked by the teacher or the teacher had too many
students. The students either tried to do the work assigned to the best of their abilities or gave up totally. Time was also a very important element as they felt rushed to complete the assignments, and it was difficult to fit in because they had a disability, but they tried.

Time was incredibly important as these students required more of it in order to complete the work given them. Giving them less time complicated their lives and served as a source of frustration for them.

Fitting in also caused distress to the respondents as they wanted to be liked, by their social peers. They felt that having the disability created problems for them, but they tried to overcome, either by overextending themselves or pretending that their disability did not exist. As the students became more comfortable with their surroundings, they were able to adjust and become “one” with the rest of the students.

JM noted:

I just didn’t fit in with the crowd, so during the three years that I was here, it felt alright. I was with the regular education classes. Some of the people that were in my classes, I chat with them. They were my friends and all, so it was okay.

RS said:

I’m not really sure where I belong in relation to the other kids at the school.

DJ replied:

It’s better with a small class, you get your work done, but in a regular education class there are a lot of
kids there who don’t pay attention and you don’t get the information.

WT lamented:

You’re not pampered as much. If you act like you about to do something wrong, they’re right there to help you with it, but in a regular education class, you like out there on your own.

AH responded:

There’s really no difference because last year, we was in regular classes, too, like gym. It be fun to mingle with...just like a regular education class, but you maintain with the other students. You get more help.

Most of the students had given deep, reflective thought to their future goals and most of them expressed an interest in pursuing some type of higher education. The students realized that their disability would require programs suited to their disability, and most had already done research regarding the schools that had these programs. To these students obtaining a college degree was realistic and they were not going to let their learning disability keep them from achieving their goal.

DJ

I plan on being a doctor so I can help little kids.

CG

Actually, I got like three options. Military, training school, college.

JM

After high school, I’ll still be working and I might try to go to Howard because I hear they have good engineering classes because I only have two plans for my life ...going into football and studying
for engineering. I could do both while I’m at Howard, but you know.

RS
Trade school.

WT
Computer Learning Center.
I want to get a job working with computers.

TS
College.

JP
Howard University and Dudley’s Beauty School.

AH
I’m thinking about doing the same thing my mom did. She went to college, but I don’t think I’m going to college. I’m going to community college, then go to college.

The researcher talked about friendships in detail and the researcher received the impression that most, if not all of the respondents had acquired a special friend with whom they felt secure, with whom they could share secrets, and with whom they felt were most like them. Making friends proved relatively easy for the eight respondents. They found it easy to make a friend and to become a friend. These close relationships helped the students to become socially mature and helped them in understanding classwork. They worked well with the other students and managed to give of their abilities when needed.

DJ said:

Anthony Blunt, I know him a little bit, but he’s alright and when I need help I come to him and this other boy. Sometimes they help me out, sometimes
they play. I also have one female friend. We real close like sisters and everything. I don’t need a rack of friends cause they run their mouths too much.

CG replied:

I have made a lot of friends. I know this girl named Emmy. Me and her just talk in class all the time and I copy off of her like she copies off me. We still have that special bond. I spend time with her and we talk about what’s going to happen in class.

RS responded:

I don’t have a relationship, they’re just friends. I’ve always had friends when I was growing up. When I was in junior high school, I started to have more friends because I hung around a lot of people.

WT acknowledged:

In special education classes, these are people that you deal with on a day to day basis and you mostly know them already. You know everything about them. Basically, you’re tired of seeing them. When you get in a regular education classroom, you can meet different people, people that you never knew before and I have one friend, she’s one of my best friends. Her name is Deneisha and it’s fun because you get to interact with different people, and the people in special education are not always on your level, or you might not be on their level, either way. But in there all that’s out your mind. It’s just a friendship. Everybody in school mostly associates. It’s better without friends, that way you don’t have to impress anybody but yourself, and you get into too much trouble. There is always something going on, and as long as you have friends, you gonna always be in something.

AH said:

I have one special friend. I picked that special person because we will sit down and talk, we eat and then talk. Talk about
confidential stuff with each other, won’t tell nobody else. We keep it to ourselves, like a counselor.

JM explained:

Right now, I’m really close with my friend, William, but he’s in special education and me and him really close, we good buddies and all. That’s the only good friend I really can trust and all cause you know, I don’t trust the rest of them, even though they are my friends and all. I don’t trust them cause they might stab me in my back and everybody say they just here for themselves. They play a lot of games with people and I don’t trust them. Don’t get me wrong, I trust people, but sometimes I don’t trust you because you might do something negative to me, that I don’t like. Cause that’s why I’m real close to William because me and him have something in common.

JP commented:

Whether I was in regular education or not, I still make new friends....I’ve known her ever since we were in the fifth grade and now she go here. It’s like she followed me or whatever. I mean....we graduated together, we went to the same class, to the same school. She here now and....I can talk to her about certain stuff. I would talk to her about every thing, but it’s just that some people get in their moods and you don’t want to talk to them or something you already told them, you feel bad about already telling them, cause some people can get into a real nasty way, just tell everything you told them not to tell.

The students felt that the friendships that they had maintained with other students were good, for the most part, and that these friendships helped them in interacting with others.

We talked briefly about the extra-curricular activities that they were part of and a few were involved in “nothing
right now,” sports (football, basketball and baseball), performance (church choir), military (ROTC), and writing (yearbook and newspaper). I found that their involvement in these activities was closely aligned with their future goals of becoming a singer, a football player, writer and doctor. All were pursuing a diploma, and mostly all said they felt like they were treated the same as the regular education students, so they didn’t feel any different from any other student.

Extracurricular activities were the catalyst for these students in preparing them for outside interests and providing them with skills necessary to help them in their future goals. These activities, which touched on self-expression, made the respondents feel good about themselves, which helped them in their daily tasks, regarding schoolwork, family and socializing.

The extra-curricular activities served, in part, a reason that some students came to school daily; they were interested in some sport or other activity which made school bearable for them. Their goals, aligned with their activities would make an easy transition from school to work, and the fact that all were pursuing a diploma made them feel the same as every other student. These students did not see their disability as negative, but as a positive motivating force to succeed.

Perceptions of students in regard to family life

It was important for me to understand the dynamics of their relationships with others, parents and siblings, in regard to leisure activities at home. These students believed
that adults were people whom they could confide and adults would tell them things to help them, not harm them. The relationship with their parents was wonderful: one student lived in a group home, four lived with their mothers and three lived with two parents. What was interesting here was that two of the males who lived with their mother and stepfather found it easier to converse with their stepfather than their mother. A stepfather, to them, was just as a biological father should be, someone who was around and could listen and help solve any problems they faced, so the bond between the two students and their stepfathers was strong. Their living arrangements showed most of the students at a happy medium, however the student in the group home was unhappy, because she did not feel love at the home, nor did she feel care and concern in regard to her. She just felt like a number, not a person.

DJ said:

No, I’m not happy, but I got to deal with it. I don’t like the situation, I want to be with my sister who is in another group home. I’ve been at this group home for five years, and when I need to talk to someone, I talk to Ms. G. or I talk to Ms. J. at my sister’s group home.

Other responses:

CG replied:

Sometimes I am, sometimes I’m not. You get into an argument with your parents, you gotta let it go.

WT orated:

Yes, I’m happy because me and my mother can talk about anything. She’s like my best friend. I confide in my mother because she
usually get the problem solved and she’s down to earth and it’s easy to talk to her.

TS related:

Yeah, I’m happy cause there’s really no problem. I enjoy living with my mother and stepfather, too. I also have two cousins with me now, and they are 16 and 14. They go to P.G. County Schools. We real close.

AH stated:

I’m happy with my living arrangements, it ain’t no different. It’s the way I grew up. We get along.

JM said: I’m happy with my parents, living with my parents. I like the arrangement cause I’m glad that they are still married, and they been married for about 20 years.

Most of the students had pleasant memories of their relationships and living arrangements; they had the support that they needed and they were being prepared to be on their own by their loved ones, when it was time. The one student in the group home was frustrated and needed desperately to be with someone who showed her loved unconditionally, and that person was her sister. Each time she spoke, her sister’s name crept into our conversation, and I just wanted to reach out and hug her.

When the students were asked about the activities they enjoyed, most of them spent time with their family members, only one didn’t really enjoy her time with her brothers because she felt that they weren’t very nice and that they really didn’t care about her. The only person she felt loved by was her sister, and her goal in life was to be with her.
sister.
She said:

> When we spend time together, we go to the movies, but I don’t want to spend time with them because everything you do first, they be cheezing in your face, then they talk behind your back, and that’s not how a family should be. My sister lives in another group home, but it’s different, more advanced and independent. You can do what you want, as long as you ask, and you have a job.

Other responses were:

RS

> Shopping, (answer quickly and pleasantly)
> I like shopping. (laughter) We went on a shopping trip to Potomac Mills.

JM

> I’m the only child. I like going to the movies, shopping or sometimes just going out and getting some fresh air, walking around, doing a little window shopping and all.

TS

> Going out to eat, shopping, and just talking to my cousins. Those are the things I like to do and it’s more fun with them, doing it with them, than by myself.

Two of the students had brothers or sisters that wished to spend time with them, but they couldn’t because their interests weren’t the same. Shopping seemed to be important to the students in that it gave them an outlet for meeting and socializing with friends and family members. It also allowed them exposure to the world and the different cultures and people who were a part.

WT

> We (mother) don’t do any special activities. We talk a lot, we joke a lot, we play a lot. I don’t spend time with my brother (eight years older) because he wants me to like basketball and football, and I don’t like those sports. No one talks to my brother,
but my cousin who I call my sister sometimes. Me and her are two months apart. We go to the same school, live in the same house. I love my brother more, but me and my cousin are closer.

**JP**

My little brother live with me, two of my sisters live with me and I really don’t be around them that much. I be around them, but not actually hang with them. My mother, I be in there with her. We be talking or whatever or we just be doing silly stuff like picking up the phone, talking to each other with the dial tone....staying up real late looking at TV.

Whenever the students had a problem either related to school or at home, overwhelmingly, most of them would rather share it with a relative, and that person was their mother.

**RS**

My mother because she’s able to listen to what I have to say.

**WT**

My mother would listen to me and my cousin would listen to me. My cousin is like my sister cause she’s been with me so long and me and her are much more closer than me and my brother.

**JP**

She know what I was talking about and most of the stuff I talk about include boys, stuff like that or teenage stuff and you know, she was a teenage girl once, so she really understand what I’m saying. She know where I’m coming from or whatever. And she can help me, that’s what make it more easier. If you go and talk to somebody who has no idea or no clue what you’re talking about, it just makes it harder on you and that person. (laugh)

**AH**

My mother and father, whoever’s here at the time. I talk to them. I don’t really feel comfortable talking to my mother, so I talk to my father about most things which
is the way that I am. We the same.
He’s a male. I don’t have nothing
against females, I just feel more
comfortable. I can’t talk to
my mother like I can my stepfather.

Mothers were the number one choice when it came to having somebody there to listen. Boys have a close relationship with their mothers as girls and fathers do, and mothers are very protective over their sons, but they will allow them to make mistakes and try again. The males in this study really doted on their mothers, which appears to be good for future relationships with females.

A few of the students would talk to friends because friends were on their level and could understand them better. As far as their parents participating in school activities, most answered yes, but a few answered no. The students felt if they were not a part of the event, then their parents would have no reason to come.

WT
Well, if I’m in something, my mother will be here definitely.

TS
It has to be something special like my graduation, something special like that. I’m receiving an award. I never asked them. I never seen why they should come.

JP
No, if I’m not in it, she’s not coming.

Dealing with their parents, peers and siblings showed very capable students who would have few problems in relationship to people. They were able to hold conversations, do assignments related to home and school, and understand and learn in their various classes.
Although most would be successful in their daily activities, the student in the group home would experience problems in her life. She was an angry student because the world, she thought was unfair. Her grandmother didn’t want her, her parents were not there, and the one person she loved, her sister, was separated from her. I felt sorrow for this student and I felt her pain, not knowing how I could personally help her. The students’ relationships went a step further in regard to employment. Since work would be a factor in all of their lives, they would have to go out and seek employment and learn how to deal with others. Most of them had never worked, but the ones who had offered these words.

DJ

I work at a nursing home. I talk to them, polish their nails, play games and do a lot of activities.

WT

Yeah, I work at McDonalds. First, I would have to change into my uniform, then I have to count my cash register. After I’ve finished counting my cash register, I would have to get signed in. I’d punch in or whatever, then they’d have to open up the drawer for me. Then my first customer would be a Spanish person that I can’t understand. I have to shout at them until they pick a number, then they usually not satisfied. Then they come back and holler at you for more ketchup, then you give them more ketchup and then there’s always something wrong.

Overall, these students would have to become more sociable and develop a coping mechanism to deal with others with whom they came in contact. Otherwise, the world of work would be difficult for them.
Attending parent meetings is very important for the students in keeping them focused and finding out their weaknesses and strengths. All parents must attend the individualized education program meetings held once a year where it is disclosed the progress made by the student. Parent teacher association meetings are significant because the parent has a chance to meet the teacher on his or her ground, the classroom. Here, the parent is allowed to see grades, work of the students, progress reports and deficiency notices in regard to their student. All but three of the students’ parents or group home attend PTA. The others get home from work too late, or they see it the same as an IEP meeting.

DJ

The group home staff, that’s it. I made honor roll. They gave me a key chain. I think I made honor for this advisory too. Mr. B. said whoever make honor roll, they’ll give you $50 when you graduate.

RS

Once in a while. My mother works in the evenings, and she’s tired. She don’t want to go anywhere.

WT

Yeah, if I feel she should come, she will come. If I ask her to come or if she know about it, she usually intend to come. She don’t always make it, but she try. She hasn’t been to two this year because I’m kinda independent.

TS

My mother would attend, but the only time if she had a ride. She does if she has the truck. She came once before. We rode the bus even though it was dark. She won’t come because she’s afraid, this area, paranoid.
AH

My parents only missed one and that was because of an emergency. That was all. They came to see how I’m doing or if I need any help or any other stuff. If the teachers call, they’ll find out the stuff they need to find out.

In addition, the parents came to school to meet with a few of the teachers because they were summoned or they just wanted to check up on their children.

DJ

They wanted to see how I was doing in school, my attendance and going to classes.

RS

My English teacher and my French teacher because I was going down in grades. He needed to talk to them.

WT

Ms. S. and Mr. S. because they felt I was having problems with my attitude. Ms. S. wanted to talk about my mood swings, too, but Ms. S. is like one of my favorite teachers, and she understands. She works with me a lot. She only talked to her because she was concerned about me. Ms. S. is one of my favorite people period because she is not like normal teachers. (laugh) They usually kinda dorky, can’t relate to the situation, can’t be funny. They just feel that you a student and a paycheck. But Ms. S., she feel like that about some students, I can’t lie, but she don’t feel like that about me. Me and her are cool.

JP

She met with my science teacher because the teacher said that I had an attitude problem. I never come to her class smiling and I always have something smart to say. It’s true because I don’t like her. She will talk and talk and be nice
in front of adults and when the adult leaves, she like a different person. The witch just comes out of her. I just don’t like her. Other people may not see that in her, but I do. She thinks we don’t know it.

AH

Ms. L. the biology teacher. She’ll pop up regardless. It’s fine.

Adult Respondents

Special education is a system separate from regular education as it functions with its own funding, faculty, and with its own requirements for participation. It is part of a total school environment and students served in special education programs do interact with the other members of Cardozo High School community. The attitudes of the other participants in this shared world helped to define inclusion as experienced by students classified as learning disabled at Cardozo High School.

To construct a picture of the school world experienced by students in inclusive classes at Cardozo High School, the researcher wanted to know how other participants in the daily life of Cardozo High School perceived the inclusion program. The researcher asked members of other groups within the school community to respond to one specific issue that guided this study: (1) What are the similarities and differences of perceptions of a regular education classroom setting and a special education classroom setting? The additional respondents had considerable contact with learning disabled students. The interviews with respondents in this study revealed the needs of the students and the teacher and support
staff’s ways of providing comfort for that student.

Special Education Staff Members

There were two teachers on the special education team at Cardozo High School who taught learning disabled students, primarily. They were classroom teachers SS and AL. SS and AL were typical of faculty members in the school district in that each has taught within the school system for over 15 years: SS for 20 years and AL for 24 years. SS was in her fifth year of teaching at Cardozo High School. AL, the newest member of the special education team, was in her third year with the District of Columbia Public Schools. SS and AL had always intended to be special education teachers. After interviewing with the students, the researcher met with SS and AL to ask them about their perceptions of the inclusion program at Cardozo High School.

General Education Faculty Members

Early on in the study, SS, one of the two learning disabled classroom teachers, was asked to give the names of some regular education teachers who had students identified as LD in their classrooms. The researcher wanted to talk to teachers who interact on a regular basis with students who are learning disabled. Two regular education teachers agreed to talk: PW (Spanish) and RM (American History). Before the study, PW had taught at CHS for eight years, and RM was in his first year at the high school level.

Other Staff Members

The social worker, ES, had been with the special education program for 16 years. He was very knowledgeable and quite helpful in choosing the students for the study and allowing the students
to participate. QG, the school psychologist, had been a staff member for 12 years and was knowledgeable in the field of learning disabilities. MP, the last of the interviews for the study, was a speech pathologist, who had worked for 14 years with students who had learning disabilities.

Similarities and differences in perceptions in regard to a regular education classroom and a special education classroom

The special and regular education teachers, and other respondents, for the most part were excited and anxious to try inclusion, as they thought that it would make the students feel better about themselves and their abilities. The special education teacher SS described her perceptions of the inclusion program this way:

With the idea of inclusion now there is no regular education or special education because all of your special education kids have been mainstreamed into the regular classrooms, and that’s what we are doing here. A second teacher or special education teacher is supposed to follow those children. What you find, your special education kids seem to be a little more disciplined, in the educational structure as opposed to regular education kids.

PW said:

There’s no such thing as a special education classroom anymore. I guess you can say we’re all one. No student walks around with a tag or sign on their back, none of that. I mean everybody’s treated differently, yet everyone is the same and they all have something special to bring. Where you have a weak, there’s always a strong. It’s like making a pot of stew. You mix it up and all different kinds of vegetables, and when it’s cooked, you have a dish.
In special education classrooms, teachers move at a slower pace, often repeating several times the lesson until students understand it. The student is allowed the freedom to work slowly through the lesson and is able to comprehend without many problems. Teachers make modifications to their lessons. If they find that the concepts in a lesson are too difficult for the student, then they will change the particulars of the lesson to better suit the needs of the students. For instance, a lesson given on labeling the parts of a plant might be modified to have the learning disabled student draw the parts of a plant, or to bring an actual plant to class and label it.

The special education classroom is smaller in area, as is the number of students, 10-12, which makes it manageable for the teacher and students. In this type of configuration, attention can be focused directly on the students, which affords the teacher and student optimum involvement with each other.

Teaching is individualized, whereas a teacher may cover a lesson, have the students form groups, then go from group to group offering assistance. This assures the student that he or she is important and that learning is taken seriously. The special education classroom experience is designed for the individual student as the number of students makes it easier to administer help when needed; the classroom is smaller so that attention can be focused solely on the student; the teacher doesn’t have to speak loudly, but can speak in even tones to his or her students. The comfort level is high as students are self-composed and able to communicate willingly.

Two of the seven adults interviewed said that there were no
differences between special education and regular education and it was noted that they were mainstreaming and that each student comes with different talents, that are utilized to suit the student’s needs.

Although each of the respondents had similar ideas when describing special education, their descriptions of regular education were different. Overwhelmingly, the respondents echoed that in regular education classrooms there were no modifications made. If a learning disabled student was having difficulty, he or she would have to ask for help or risk being left behind. The teachers move very quickly through information since there is a huge quantity to cover and only a short time to cover it.

In a regular education classroom, the classroom, which is larger, holds 30-40 students, so teaching is not individualized; subjects are taught as a group and the students who don’t do well in a group situation are left to their own devices. They will either drop out of the class, or school. The differences between the two settings emphasize the need to merge, and involve teachers and support staff in an inclusive setting that will better suit the needs of the students that are served.

In addition, the teachers and support staff were asked four questions relating to the students. Each of the seven adults met with the students regarding their levels of expertise: AL had been her students’ homeroom teacher for three years and their reading and study skills teacher for two years; ES’s responsibilities as a social worker included assessing IEP’s, providing individual and group counseling, writing social histories, and clinical assessments for the students; RM and PW
interacted with the students through individualized instruction; QG provided counseling for the student, and MP provided speech therapy sessions for each student who was in need; and SS was the students’ homeroom teacher for two years and the students’ science teacher for one year.

The purposes for each student’s meeting ranged from helping to increase reading skills to developing his or her self-esteem. The outcomes were positive from the adults’ involvement with the students: functioning with minimal support in inclusion classes, achievement of the objectives, the student had a more positive outlook on his or herself, and better speech patterns were developed.

The additional insights regarding the eight students ranged from inclusion support during the first two years assisting the student in being close to self-sufficiency to most students requiring special attention to accomplish different tasks. The responses showed adults who were familiar with their students’ needs, and who sought to accommodate their students so that maximum learning could be achieved and students could possess the feeling of accomplishment.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND
DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

The findings of the study indicate that in spite of students being included in regular education, they (students) prefer being in special education because they felt safe and valued. They felt safe because the special education environment has students who are similar to them in academic ability where the students felt freer to make mistakes and they did not worry about other students belittling them. Also, the students felt that their teachers chose special education to make a difference in the lives of their charges.

Additionally, students felt a sense of worth in these special education classes; they felt that they were important. They felt that who they are and what they do is valued. The program has instilled in each student that he or she is cherished. This contributes to the student’s self-esteem which gives him or her the knowledge and ability to accomplish whatever goals he or she is capable of achieving. Although the time spent in regular education classes was appreciated, the students felt more comfortable in special education and they responded positively to how their special education teachers treated them.

These findings, although different from what the literature has said previously, came about because the researcher was able to observe the students in their classes and gauge their feelings in regard to inclusion. The researcher watched intently their actions in regular education classes and spoke with them. Their behaviors
indicated the feelings of being comfortable; however, special education catered more to their needs. The idea of being able to sit in the regular education classroom and visualize the interaction between the students and the teacher allowed the researcher an opportunity to understand and interpret the actions of the students.

It was also found that although the teachers liked the inclusion model, much work would be required to make the program successful. Adequate staff would have to be hired and trained to serve children with learning disabilities, and supplies pertaining specifically to special education would have to be purchased and shared with the staff. Moreover, parents would have to become more involved with their children, in school and at home, making sure that the child understood their disability, to see how best to manage with it. Finally, outside resources such as The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), The Association for the Severely Handicapped (TASH) could be utilized for inclusion (Wang & Reynolds, 1995).

An area that proved least effective was the special education and regular education departments. These educational departments, although both equally important, did not meet as a cohesive group, but only in terms of specific teachers involved in the inclusion process. Therefore, teachers who were not on the team could not enjoy or benefit from collegial exchanges of strategies and they were not able to develop a clear understanding of the child’s disability. Since inclusion is a school wide effort, everyone needs to meet periodically to become familiarized with the concepts and strategies required in the program.
A significant achievement for the learning disabled students, as well as the parents, involved them graduating with a diploma. This was remarkable in that most of the cases, students work towards a certificate of attainment, which states that all requirements of the Individualized Education Program have been met. Because of the dedication of the teachers and other support personnel, the environment has developed into a sharing, caring community where students appear to enjoy the opportunity to learn and work together. This environment made it possible for learning to take place, among all students.

**Conclusions**

Numerous studies have been conducted detailing the benefits of inclusion; however, the findings of these studies have not suggested that inclusion is the key to making special and regular education equitable for all students. Unfortunately, the results of this study shed little new light on inclusion’s benefits. The findings state that although inclusion is worthwhile for the students participating in it, special education provides a level of comfort for them, and that they would rather remain there. The findings of this study suggest that some progress has been made by the District of Columbia Public Schools in their efforts to merge special and regular education. There still remains much to investigate, discover, establish, develop, and refine regarding the implementation of inclusion programs at the high school level in order to educate, evaluate and provide an atmosphere of love, caring and respect for all students who will be a part of this program.
Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, the researcher recommends that the District of Columbia Public Schools institute a program where special education and regular education teachers are required to meet frequently to discuss the content of the curriculum and to make additional changes that will meet the needs of the students.

The researcher recommends the District of Columbia Public Schools solicit funds necessary to operate effectively the program of special education in regard to having adequate staff, supplies, and other resources necessary for the benefit of the child.

Classes in study skills need to be initiated to strengthen skills taught in other classes, and lessons need to be individualized on a frequent basis as it helps the student understand the concepts better.

In the area of instruction, teachers need to be involved in method workshops which will increase their knowledge of certain concepts and teaching strategies which will benefit all students.

Understanding and support of the inclusion program is an area where improvement is needed. The notion of inclusion needs to be clearly defined for the teachers, parents, students and all involved in the process, and an inclusion office needs to be established that can listen to and advise those who are working in that area.

It is felt that the findings of this study suggest a challenge in a changing special education services system. There are still few inconsistencies in providing a quality education for all students and selecting students for special education
services.

Further research needs to be done in reference to a larger number of schools that could have been studied to gain a wider knowledge of strategies that functioned, so that information could be gathered to modify the program.

In addition, a greater number of students could have been selected to give the researcher a better idea of the needs of each student. As educators set agendas for school reorganization and reform, policies regarding services for special education students should take into account the accumulated findings of studies that examine efforts at various approaches to inclusion. To help all students become successful in a least restrictive environment require more than physical reorganization and staff reallocation; it requires the use of practices that are the most directly linked, through empirical research, to positive student outcomes (Salisbury, 1991).

Discussion

In the preceding chapters, this research has dealt with the issue of perceptions of an inclusive program by secondary learning disabled students, their teachers, and support staff. The research focused on the academic, family, and social aspects of students learning to negotiate their disability in the world. The research took the school and home experiences of the research participants and explored the meaning of inclusion and how conditions and strategies influenced the perceptions of the student.

The findings identified, developed and presented in the model, in the previous chapter, represent the researcher’s efforts
to organize the information provided by the participants to enhance knowledge and understanding about inclusion. What is portrayed in this study is only a small segment of the overall picture of inclusion.

As the current study progressed, it became clear that the students expressed a fondness for regular education, but preferred special education where they are treated “special” and attended to very carefully. Their teachers are the key to promoting success in the classroom. Effectively educating diverse learners requires that educators use a variety of teaching approaches to meet the students’ needs. This frequently necessitates reevaluating the teaching practices with which they are most comfortable in order to assess if these are the best possible methods for facilitating the active learning of desired educational outcomes by all students in the class. Educational reform leaders assert that educating students to be productive citizens of the 21st century requires using teaching strategies that promote active rather than passive learning, cooperation instead of competition, and critical skills in lieu of rote learning (Benjamin, 1989). A dynamic school environment in which adults support each other and work together to create strategies to ensure student success provides non threatening opportunities for teachers to learn about and try varied instructional approaches. Teachers can then incorporate those approaches that they find successful into their teaching repertoires (Schaffner & Buswell, 1991).

The teachers liked the inclusion program, but felt that it needed to be improved in getting trained and adequate staff, supplies, more parental involvement, and more outside resources.
that would help the child upon graduation. In regard to the staff, there were not nearly enough special education teachers to follow students to their various regular education classes. Not having the teachers in place caused the students problems in class. These learning disabled students got “lost” or “caught up” in the school politics. If they were able to understand and deal with the work, they would experience success; however, if they had problems, they were just pushed on or forgotten by the people in charge. Having a special education teacher in the classroom helped the students in notetaking and in asking questions of the teacher that they didn’t understand. Supplies were a problem because not having enough of them or not having them at all caused learning to be stifled. For instance, the speech pathologist did not have the proper office space or time to see her students individually, so she had to group them together, irregardless of the speech problem they had, and see them altogether. Having parental involvement is an integral part of the inclusion process. The more involved the parent, the better the chance for success. Parents play a critical role in dispelling the pessimistic clouds surrounding their children. They need to divest themselves of guilt and fear and invest in their intuition and expertise as parents. They don’t need to “fix” their children; they need, instead, to redefine “winner.” The most effective way parents can accomplish this is to use their own expertise in identifying the outcomes they value most for their children. They should begin with the expectations held for same age children without disabilities as their guide instead of the expectations society has traditionally held for people with disabilities. They then can tailor those “normal”
expectations to their child’s wants and needs; this road map, or goals for the future, becomes the parent’s vision and is the basis for all planning from which all decisions will come (Maryland Coalition, 1991, p.6).

The eight students who were a part of the study will be able to secure diplomas as opposed to a certificate of attainment which will provide them with higher self-esteem and help them in their quest to make it on their own.

The findings in this study reflect possible outcomes of inclusion programs that incorporate manpower, money, and time to the program. Support from other professionals, such as principals enhanced the program described. This study examined some of the aspects of the District of Columbia Public Schools in their efforts to benefit learning disabled students educationally.
REFERENCES


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Company.


Lusthaus, E. (1988). Education integration...Letting our


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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

1. I________________________understand that I have the right to revoke this authorization and stop the interview at any time.

2. I understand that the information discussed in this interview is strictly confidential. Confidentiality will be established and maintained because your name will never be connected with the responses by anyone other than the researcher. As soon as these data are analyzed the list of names of all respondents will be destroyed.

3. I understand that the research will involve an interview which will take place at Cardozo Senior High School. The interview will take place at the beginning of the school year. During the interviews each participant will be asked a series of questions relating to his or her perceptions of the inclusion program at the school. These questions cover academic, family and social aspects of the student’s life, that are likely to frame perceptions.

4. I understand that the information obtained from the interview is for the sole purpose of research and evaluation of the program.

5. I hereby grant the researcher permission to contact me by telephone or confidential letter any time during this research project (not to extend beyond November 1997).

I HEREBY VOLUNTEER TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT CONDUCTED BY PORTIA Y. BOOKHART, VIRGINIA TECH GRADUATE STUDENT, IN COLLABORATION WITH CARDOZO.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE________________________   DATE__________

INTERVIEWER’S SIGNATURE_______________________   DATE__________
APPENDIX B

CORE GROUP RESPONDENTS’ PLACEMENT

HISTORIES AND CURRENT SCHEDULES
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<tr>
<th>Student</th>
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<th>Grade at Time of Classroom Placement</th>
<th>Course Schedule</th>
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APPENDIX C

STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
**Student Interview Questions**

**ACADEMIC**

1. What does it mean to be included in a regular education classroom?

2. What is different about being in a regular education classroom now, as opposed to being in a special education classroom last year? Why?

3. How do you feel you are treated by your regular education teacher in the classroom? Explain.

4. How do you see yourself as being similar, and how do you see yourself as being different compared to your other classmates? Explain.

5. What is your favorite class and why?

6. What is your least favorite class and why?

7. Is it easier to learn when the teacher lets you get out of your seat to do your work, when the teacher writes on the board, or when the teacher just talks? Explain.

8. Does your teacher lecture most of the time, write everything on the board, or allow you to move around, and how does his/her style of teaching compare with your other teachers?

9. When you are having trouble with an assignment, who do you go to for help? Reading teacher, study skills teacher, etc.

10. What grade are you in presently?

11. Are you pursuing a diploma or certificate?

12. What are your plans after high school? (eg. community college, job corps, military etc.)

13. Overall, how would you describe your high school experience?

**SOCIAL**

14. Have you been able to make new friends being in a regular education classroom? Tell me a little about your friends, or a special friendship.
15. Do some of your old friends treat you differently now that you are in a regular education classroom? Why do you think this is so?

16. Do you have more friends now? Why or why not?

17. In what extra-curricular activities do you participate? Why do you like these particular activities?

18. If there is an adult at school, with whom you can confide in when you are experiencing difficulty, what is it about that person that makes you like them?

**FAMILY**


20. Are you happy with your living arrangements? Why or why not?

21. When you need someone with whom to talk, about school or in general, who listens? How come you confide in this person?

22. When you spend time with your mother, father, brothers/sisters etc., what kinds of activities do you enjoy?

23. Are there any other school activities in which your parents, brothers, and/or sisters participate? (Football, basketball games, Talent shows etc.)

24. Do you have an after school job? Describe it. If you don’t have a job, what do you do after school?

25. How often does your parent attend PTA? Explain.

26. Other than PTA, has your parent met with any of your teachers, at all, this year?
APPENDIX D

TEACHER/SUPPORT STAFF QUESTIONS
TEACHER/SUPPORT STAFF QUESTIONS

**Academic**

1. What does it mean for a learning disabled child to be included in a regular education classroom?

2. How is a regular education classroom different from that of a special education classroom?

3. How are students treated by their regular education teacher in the classroom?

4. Do you lecture most of the time, write everything on the board, or allow the students to move around, and how does your style of teaching compare with other teachers?

5. When a student is having trouble with an assignment, who does he/she go to for help?

**Social**

6. Do you think it is easier for learning disabled students to be friends with regular education students? Why or Why not?

7. Would you be willing to let a student confide in you when he/she is experiencing difficulty?

**Family**

8. Who does that student live with, and are they happy with their living arrangements?

9. When that student needs someone with whom to talk, who would be available to listen?

10. Are there any school activities in which the parents can participate?

11. How often have you seen this parent at PTA? Explain.

12. Other than PTA, has this parent met with you, or any other teachers, at all, this year?
APPENDIX E

TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE
TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is a part of my study "Perceptions of an Inclusive Program by Secondary Learning Disabled Students, Their Teachers, and Support Staff." Please answer the questions completely.

1. When and how did you interact with the student?

2. What was the purpose?

3. What was the outcome from your involvement with the student?

4. Any additional insights on the child?
Experience and Skills

Instructor. Instructed incoming freshman in C.L.A.S.S. program in the area of English. Designed curriculum consisting of composition, reading comprehension activities, and critical thinking skills.

Instructor. Instructed adults in Advanced Literature I and II, Composition I and II, Grammar and Usage, and Business Writing. Designed and implemented curriculum focusing on research and writing skills. Served in counselor capacity for incoming freshman. Organized research and study groups.

Instructor. Instructed adults in argumentative, expository, descriptive, and other forms of writing. In addition, utilized English as a Second Language format, for foreign students.

Teacher. Instruct students in grades 9-12 in the areas of Humanities and journalism. Responsible for selecting journalism students for Channel 28 for internships. Designed and implemented a program which focuses on print and broadcast journalism.


Honors, Awards, Memberships, Publications

Dean's List. Achieved status for two semesters.
Cafritz Fellowship. Recipient of a $4000 grant for proposal entitled, "Combating Writing Anxiety Using the Journalistic Approach."
Writer. Contributor to United Way pamphlet,"Your Problem is Our Problem."
Teaching and Learning Scholarship. Recipient of a $2000 award for doctoral research.
Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.
National Council of Teachers of English
Journalism Advisors Network
D. C. Council of Teachers of English
Journalism Education Association
C.H.A.R.T. Program

Relevant Work History

Montgomery College
Rockville, Maryland
Instructor, August 1998-Present

Bowie State University
Bowie, Maryland
Instructor, June 1995-August 1995

University of the District of Columbia
Washington, D. C.

Prince George's Community College
Largo, Maryland

Lado International College
Washington, D. C.

District of Columbia Public Schools
Washington, D. C.
Teacher, September 1987-Present

Neighborhood Talk
Landover, Maryland

The Philadelphia Tribune
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Donnelly Communications
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Public Relations Assistant, September 1981-April 1982

Education and Training

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University
Ed.D., Education, Major: Curriculum and Instruction
June 1999
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and University
Certificate in Advanced Graduate Studies
May 1996

University of the District of Columbia
M.A., Education, Major: Administration and Supervision
May 1991

University of Pittsburgh
B.A., English, Major: Journalism
April 1982

Overbrook Senior High School
Academic Diploma
June 1978

References available upon request.