

**LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE DIFFERENCE:
NARRATIVES OF EXPERIENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION**

by

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(ABSTRACT)

This narrative inquiry examined how a small group of general educators constructed three essential understandings of themselves as teachers within the context of inclusive education: (a) To move past their fear of disabilities and negative perceptions of students with disabilities, they had to learn to see children with disabilities in new ways, identify what it was about their differences that mattered, and respond to them as valued members of their classrooms; (b) To move past feelings of inadequacy and incompetence, they had to figure out how to negotiate those learning differences that mattered the most; and (c) To keep from being overwhelmed with the additional demands inclusion placed on them as teachers, they needed to garner support through a variety of relationships, and work through conflicts that arose from trying on new roles and patterns of interaction. These understandings were constructed through two interrelated processes: Learning through experience, and learning through narrative, specifically, informal talk, structured dialogue, and stories. The representation of this inquiry was a polyvocal text which privileged what the teachers had to say, and which featured their voices in solo and in dialogue with others. This alternative format was used to convey the evolving nature of the teachers' practice, as well as the contradictions and complexities that expand our understanding of teacher learning and development in inclusive educational settings.

DEDICATION

To my mother,
the late Marilyn Altieri,
for giving me the gifts of your laughter
and your way with words

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Preface

This inquiry examines how a small group of general educators constructed understandings of themselves as teachers within the context of inclusive education. It looks at what were the essential understandings for these teachers, how they constructed them, and what were the critical contextual features that related to this construction of understanding. The inquiry brings to light some of the issues that are involved when general educators give serious effort to “making inclusion work.” It reveals the shifting and evolving nature of an inclusive educational landscape where teachers are trying to see children with labels of disability in new ways, trying out a variety of instructional and grouping strategies as a means of negotiating perceived differences in learning ability, and trying on new roles and patterns of interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms.

The inquiry arose from my long-time advocacy of and interest in community and school inclusion. As a former special educator by training who purposefully chose to complete a doctoral program in elementary curriculum and instruction, I wanted to know how we might go about unifying historically separate teacher preparation structures in special education and general education, and creating a more collaborative approach to professional development to support inclusive education. As a new teacher educator working to prepare students for elementary certification, I was especially interested in figuring out what role teacher education could play in helping both experienced and pre-service general educators feel comfortable and capable with *all* of the children who are likely to be found in educational settings today and in the future.

It seemed to me that a good place to begin was talking with educators in the field whose experience with inclusion could give us an informed and experienced perspective. Why not seek out teachers who had reached a certain level of comfort and capacity with children with disabilities in their classrooms, and ask them, “How are you learning to do this?” and “What are you coming to know about yourselves as teachers and about your practice that you think is important for us to know too?”

I began my inquiry with another intent as well, and that was to counteract the commonly held perspective that general educators are largely inadequate and inapt when it comes to supporting children with special needs in the general education classroom. Scores of studies over the past 20 years have documented the negative attitudes of general educators towards children with disabilities, their unwillingness to accommodate learners with special needs in the general education classroom, and their resistance to the concept of inclusive education. Even in recent years there has continued to be research, often well-designed and well-conducted within an empirical framework, that has as its purpose the documentation of the continuing failure of general educators to meet the needs of children seen as falling within the purview of special education (see, for example, Baker & Zigmond, 1995).

Marlene Pugach is a leader in the inclusive schools movement whose contributions to the literature have emphasized collaboration and cooperation strategies with both teachers and students. She considers research of this bent a telling indicator of the field’s failure to see the *capacity* for successful change in general education (Pugach, 1995). In line with Pugach’s recommendations, I wanted to counter those negative images of general educators, and instead convey a sense of their capacity. I wanted to get the word out that there are classroom teachers who have come to know themselves as teachers in new and important ways through their experiences in including children with a range of learning differences in their classrooms.

This text brings together the experiences and insights of four teachers from a nationally recognized elementary school with a commitment to inclusive education and a close working relationship with the division of teaching and learning at a nearby university. I have tried my best to capture what they had learned about themselves as teachers across more than eight years of including children with disabilities in their classrooms, and to convey the range of their perspectives on teaching and learning in inclusive educational settings.

I designed and conducted this inquiry with the deliberate stance of reflexive inquirer learning with and from these teachers. I was privileged to be able to do so during a semester of supervising student teachers in their school and a five-month period of intensive inquiry the following year. There would be no text and no dissertation were it not for the generosity and openness of these teachers. They invited me into their classrooms, introduced me to their students, and gave me opportunities for being a part of the learning and teaching that was going on. They gave freely of their time to talk with me and to meet together as a group. They shared many stories with me; their richness made the receiving of them like gifts.

I want to share these stories with others, stories which capture new images of competence, stories which convey the intensity of effort and the level of commitment that was involved, stories that are a testament to the qualities of moral perception, mindfulness, and fidelity that pervaded these teachers' practice. However, this text is not one of those "Let's hold hands and sway" accounts of inclusion. It is about real teachers with strengths and vulnerabilities of their own, and the genuine and sometimes contradictory ways in which they respond to the demands of teaching in classrooms which include children with significant learning differences and challenges.

To do this, I have tried to create a polyvocal text which privileges what the teachers had to say, and which features their voices in solo and in dialogue with those of their student teachers and their special education partners, as well as my own. The reader will find the traditional sections of text expected of educational researchers: this preface, an introductory chapter with connections to the literature, several chapters which elaborate on contextual features of the study and the key findings, and a final chapter of analysis and conclusion. These sections represent my interpretation of what I learned from these teachers and how I connected those new understandings to the larger inclusive educational landscape they are a part of.

But the reader will also find a series of narratives which interface these traditional sections of text. These narratives fall into one of two formats: either a reconstruction of talk engaged in throughout the period of this inquiry, or a story of experience constructed from field notes and other data collected in the setting. At a simple level, each narrative interface serves to introduce the chapter which follows it and represents the teachers' understandings and the larger issues and dilemmas which I discuss more academically in the chapter. But as an alternative text, each narrative interface compels the reader to re-construct the experiences and understandings of the teachers within the contexts of their own experiences and understandings. The interfaces are meant to be evocative, "to generate insight and invite attention to complexity" (Eisner, 1993, p.9; Ellis, 1997). Setting these stories and conversations apart from the academic discourse creates a space for new dialogue, one in which the voice of the reader can more easily enter the text. Taken as a whole, they illustrate the shifts and transformations occurring in this educational setting, and allow for the transformation of the reader's understanding of teachers in inclusive classrooms.

Clearly, the enactment of this inquiry and the development of the text which represents it did not play the same role in my participants' lives as it did in my own. The four teachers have

been doing the work of teaching and continuing to make their classrooms more successful learning environments for all the children each year who they are responsible for. Their long work days have been devoted to making a difference in their local context - their classrooms, their school, and their school district. They speak on “making inclusion work” at local meetings and university classes, and provide a hands-on model for the many special and general education teacher preparation students, teachers, and principals who visit them from around the state. These teachers have been doing inclusive education for more than 12 years now, and throughout this time they have been involved in court cases, served as the subjects of others’ research, given workshops to those starting or considering inclusion, engaged in public speaking, and been the focus of television and newspaper news features.

I hope this text will bring their stories of success and challenge to an even wider and more diverse audience, and will honor the commitment to educational change that these teachers have made and continue to make. I dedicate this text to them, and to the hundreds of other teachers and principals who are trying to “make it work.”

Narrative Interface One ↗ Jarrell

Jarrell was my very first challenge as a beginning teacher. From Jarrell I learned that difference, just like beauty, really is in the eye of the beholder. His way of being in the world taught me that I needed to approach things differently, needed to see things differently, needed to respond differently.

Looking at him the first time left me with an image which overpowered me with his differences: the drool that hovered at the rim of his pouting bottom lip, the thick pink tongue always thrust out at the world, the withered right arm and leg, the grunting, the blackness of his skin, the too small clothes, his seeming inability to sit down for more than three seconds at a time. That image was the lens through which I first saw and responded to Jarrell, the way you would see and respond to Jarrell, too: lowering our expectations, heightening our fears, and, especially as teachers, triggering our need to bring those differences under control. How did I learn to work with, move past, reconcile those differences?

Was it the magic known as special education that helped me? Hardly. I was nineteen years old, teaching in a day school for those rejected by the school system, taking a Foundations of Education course at night. No, I think it was more like what happens when a child steals their way into your heart. My vision shifted. I saw the quiver in that lip, his vulnerability. I saw the light in his eyes, the brightness and the quickness with which he took it all in. I had to listen carefully to catch what he had to say with his eyes and his gestures and his unarticulated sounds. I began to see his movement as dancing, around the classroom, around me, around the narrow confines of a world that already contained him in a little box at the age of five. I found myself committed to understanding him, seeing the best in him, wanting the best for him. I found myself only too mindful of how others viewed Jarrell solely in terms of his differences.

I dedicated myself to his learning, and to enabling him to “pass” the intelligence test that would allow him to earn his way into a “real” classroom in the public schools. I was way too innocent. Jarrell’s was not the kind of intelligence that could be measured by an IQ test. Jarrell was not the kind of child that a regular classroom could begin to handle, not the kind of child that your typical elementary school teacher would ever want in her classroom.

Was my own shift in perception and creation of a new image of Jarrell triggered by something I consciously worked at? I really don’t think so. Looking back, I see that Jarrell persevered with me. He didn’t give up, but kept at me until I began to pay better attention. Jarrell taught me my first lessons about what it meant to be a teacher, and especially about what it meant to be a teacher of a child who was significantly different from that image of the typical child so cultivated and reinforced in American society.

Across the years those first experiences with Jarrell have continued to teach me lessons about myself, about schools, and about how our culture responds to difference. The learning has worked this way - His story is a touchstone that I return to time and time again to see how my actions now and the actions of others measure up against my dreams for him and my image of what he

could have become. Storying the experience of Jarrell represents how I have defined myself as a teacher. The story in all its retellings captures my need to care and respond to my students with fidelity as the foundation for my actions. It engages the moral perception of my listeners and invites them to celebrate the gifts of Jarrell and others like him and to grieve at the waste, as I have done. It reminds us to be mindful of what happens when difference cannot be negotiated.

Jarrell's is a story that I have kept close to my heart for more than twenty-five years. It has guided my scholarship as well as my teaching, and from it comes the question that formed the foundation for my dissertation:

What would it take for a classroom teacher to come to feel comfortable and capable in teaching a child as different as Jarrell?

Chapter One ↗ Introduction To The Issues

As posed in the introductory narrative interface, the following question served as the foundation for this inquiry: What would it take for a classroom teacher to come to feel comfortable and capable in teaching children who are perceived as having significant learning differences and who in the past would have been excluded from the general classroom for academic instruction because of those perceived differences? At the heart of this question was my career-long advocacy and support of inclusive education, and I openly acknowledge that position and its influence on me as a researcher.

Inclusion is still seen by some as controversial and rife with political and ideological overtones, and those such as myself who are whole-hearted supporters of full inclusion are still viewed as starry-eyed idealists. Given that, I felt it important to delve into the literature, and take a more critical look at the constructs and issues which lay beneath what I initially (and naively) assumed to be a straight-forward inquiry on general educators in inclusive education. By unpacking my research question, I came up with several questions to explore: To what extent are *children who are perceived as having significant learning differences and who in the past would have been excluded from the general classroom for academic instruction because of those perceived differences* now being included and what is providing the impetus for that? Why does our culture consider children with *significant learning differences* to be disabled and in need of special education, and does the move to inclusive education challenge the way we view children who we previously excluded from the general education classroom and curriculum? Why is it that general educators are viewed as incapable of the task of teaching children seen as having significant learning differences?

In this introductory chapter I will share what I learned from using these questions as a frame of study to read widely within the literature on inclusive education, teacher education, and disability studies. The following three chapter sections cover what I call *Learning from the Literature* and they correspond with the three questions posed above. In the first section I will discuss the trend to include children with special needs in the general education classroom, and the challenges it poses for schools. In the second section I will examine two areas related to the social construction of disability and special education needs which pose dilemmas and create contradictions for researchers trying to make sense of inclusive education: (a) The escalating propensity to categorize children with learning differences as disabled and in need of special education, and (b) The devalued constructions of disability in our culture and schools and the ways in which language, research, and special education serve to perpetuate them. In the third section I look at the construction of general educators as “the bad guys” when it comes to meeting the needs of children with special education labels, particularly by the cultural beliefs and educational structures which revolve around the premise that children with learning differences need special education provided by special educators. I will conclude this chapter by presenting the need for new ways of studying and constructing teachers in inclusive educational settings, and providing the reader with an overview of the design of this inquiry and its representational text.

Learning from the Literature: The Trend Toward Inclusion

Countless books and articles have been written on the history of special education and the social, cultural and political factors related to the exclusion and inclusion of students with disabilities in the public schools. What follows is a necessarily brief and simplified chronological overview for readers who may be unaware of this history. It is intended only to provide context for the present trend to educate children with disabilities in general education classroom settings, and should not be considered a bona fide review and summarizing of the literature. I refer my readers to The History of Special Education: From Isolation to Integration (Winzer, 1993) for comprehensive coverage of this subject.

Historically, students with mild disabilities have always been present to some extent in general¹ education classrooms in the United States (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). The move to remove them from the responsibility of the classroom teacher and place them in special classes and segregated public school programs began in the teens and 1920's with the enforcement of compulsory schooling requirements (Sapon-Shevin, 1989; Tropea, 1987). Although classes for certain students with mental retardation, physical handicaps, and other disabilities who were seen as "educable" were established in many larger school districts between 1920 and 1940, children with moderate and severe disabilities were for the most part excluded from public schools well into the second half of the twentieth century (Sapon-Shevin, 1989; Scheerenberger, 1983; Winzer, 1993).

This remained true until the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which was passed in 1975, began in earnest in the late 1970's and early 1980's (Winzer, 1993). Some historians have said that those who wrote this law were actually calling for a radical transformation of the schools and an end to segregated programs for students with disabilities (Sarason & Doris, 1979; Ferguson, 1989). Many saw the passage of the law as an incredible triumph, for access to public school education and the provision of special education was now guaranteed to all children with disabilities. Even before this legislation was passed, however, there were calls to alarm by those who feared that the law might actually increase the exclusion of children with disabilities.

The victory of the principle of zero reject and the right to education for *all* children will be a hollow one if what happens is merely a more sophisticated version of exclusion, this time to a special education program that cannot deliver

¹ I need to clarify the terminology I used for this paper. I will use the term *general* to refer to those classrooms and teachers that are considered non-special; that is, the typical classroom that has been part of our "regular" elementary school structure for years. The term *regular*, which is often found in the literature, is derivative of the phrase "regular education initiative." This term is attributed to Madeline Will, former Assistant Secretary of Education in the late 1980's and parent of a son with Down syndrome, and is used to refer to the reform movement to educate children of all abilities together. It emphasizes a shared commitment from special educators and general educators to learning and working together to best meet the educational needs of children with disabilities (Lilly, 1987). Full inclusion, often used as a term in place of "the regular education initiative," emphasizes a commitment to educate all children with disabilities in the general education classroom with appropriate supports and resources.

effective services and cannot negotiate that child back into the regular program....
(Gallagher, 1972, as cited in Sarason & Doris, 1979, p. 370)

In the twenty years which followed the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, this very scenario was enacted as predicted (Lipsky & Gartner, 1996; Shapiro, Loeb, & Bowermaster, 1993). Requirements for the availability of a continuum of special education services, and loopholes in a clause of the law which required that children with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environment, allowed the establishment of a continuum of increasingly restrictive settings matched to disability severity for the delivery of special education (Gartner & Lipsky, 1987). The continuum of services became tied to place, and the use of separate special education settings as primary placements for students with disabilities became accepted practice (Stainback & Stainback, 1995; Taylor, 1988). This resulted in the large-scale removal of children with disabilities from academic instruction in the general education classroom (Sarason & Doris, 1979; Ferguson, 1989).

Reasons for this are numerous and complex, but they include the influence of those who were actively opposed to the inclusion of children with disabilities, as well as those who were not completely opposed, but who truly believed that separate special education settings best met the educational needs of children with disabilities. Advocates of mainstreaming or integrated education (terms used for inclusion in the 1970s and 1980s) saw entrenched and enduring attitudes, professional practices, and educational structures as significant barriers to be overcome (Biklen, 1989; Blatt, 1977; Sarason & Doris, 1979). Those barriers were very real, and people of influence in organizations of power remained opposed to inclusion well into the 1990's (see, for example, the plea for a moratorium on inclusion by Albert Shanker, head of the American Federation of Teachers, published in the New York Times, 1994; also Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988).

What also endured, however, was consistent support for and interest in integrated educational opportunities for students with disabilities (Stainback & Stainback, 1995). In the 1980's the federal government funded a number of model programs, often university-public school collaborations, with the express purpose of learning, "How can we make it work?" (Stainback & Stainback; Wilcox & Sailor, 1980). Today inclusion is a reality in some way, shape, or form in most school districts across the United States. Data gathered annually by the federal government indicates that more than seventy-five percent of students identified with special needs are considered mildly disabled, and two-thirds of these are placed in the general education classroom for all or most of the school day (Office for Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 1999). Almost half of *all* students with disabilities now spend 80% or more of their school day in the general education setting (Murphy, 1996; OSERS, 1999). While it is true that the majority of individuals who are categorized mentally retarded or other than mildly disabled still spend at least part of the school day in separate special education classrooms, students with a range of differences and needs for supports and assistance are being included in the general education classroom in more varied ways and in greater numbers than ever before (OSERS, 1999; Richardson & Parker, 1993). This includes students in every category of disability with the exception of students who are categorized deaf-blind (OSERS, 1999; Ysseldike, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000).

How Inclusion is Being Defined and Implemented Today

Articles presenting the pros and cons of inclusion, and documenting the various ways that inclusion has and should be implemented, have appeared regularly for the past ten years in the journals of both special and general education. Most national organizations have developed position statements in at least partial support of inclusive education, but they differ widely in their stance on the role of separate special educational settings.² Practice and policy, however, have not waited for academicians to come to agreement, and local school districts have pushed forward with implementing their own interpretations of inclusion.

The basic premise of inclusive education is this: Children with disabilities can and should be included and challenged in the general education classroom if teachers and children are provided with adequate resources and a range of specialized supports (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). Most teachers are in agreement with this premise, at least for those students whose disabilities are not considered severe (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). In a recent survey that investigated teachers' perceptions toward inclusive school programs (McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, & Loveland, 2001), only a small minority of respondents disagreed that "students with mild disabilities have a basic right to receive their education in the general education classroom" (p. 112).

The following definition of inclusion clarifies the relationship between regular education placement and the supports and services to be provided by special education:

Inclusion means that students with disabilities are enrolled in general education classrooms with individually appropriate special education services and supports provided in that environment. Inclusion also means that children attend the same school -and grade level program- that they would attend if they did not have disabilities. (Meyer, 1994, p.18)

In the 1990's when this definition and others like it first began to be published, some considered it to be simply the rhetoric of inclusion radicals (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994). Today, this definition is accepted as appropriate and desirable educational practice. It is important to recognize, however, that this definition of inclusion does not guide *all* practice. Indeed, what is accepted as inclusion and who gets included varies greatly from one school district to another, and depends on the school district's philosophy and the way it chooses to define and implement inclusion (Baker & Zigmond, 1995; Meyer, 1994; Snyder, Garriott, & Aylor, 2001). But there are some generally positive statements that can be made regarding the state of inclusion today. Lipsky and Gartner (1996) reported on a national survey of inclusion programs. Their findings, as summarized, were:

1. Inclusion programs are taking place across the county;
2. Inclusion programs are taking place in a wide range of locations - in urban, suburban, and rural school districts;

² For a compilation of these position statements, see Chapter 3 in Turnbull, Turnbull, Shank, and Leal (1995). Excerpts from other policy and position statements can be found in The ERIC Review (1996).

3. Inclusion programs are being initiated by administrators, teachers, parents, university faculty, state education departments, and as a result of court orders.
4. While programs are occurring at all school levels, there is a concentration in the early grades;
5. Some districts “include” all students with disabilities, while others focus either on those with mild or moderate handicapping conditions and others on those with more severe impairments;
6. The evaluation of programs is taking place, addressing issues of implementation, outcomes, and financing;
7. There is an emerging network of individuals and organizations involved in inclusive education practices; and
8. There is a wide array of materials on inclusive education practices, for teachers, administrators, and parents, including videos, printed materials and training opportunities. (p. 51)

There is also a growing body of literature documenting successful inclusion efforts and the instructional, grouping, and curricular strategies which have facilitated the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom (c.f. Castagnera, Fisher, Rodifer, & Sax, 1998; Choate, 2000; Elbaum, Vaughn, Hughes, & Moody, 1999; Elliott & McKenney, 1998; Falvey, 1995; Ferguson, Meyer, Jeanchild, Juniper & Zingo, 1993; Fisher, Frey, & Sax, 1999; Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997; Janney & Snell, 2000; Mastropieri & Scruggs, 1993; McGregor & Vogelsburg, 1998; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1994; Udvari-Solner & Thousand, 1995; Van Dyke, Stallings, & Colley, 1995; Walther-Thomas, Korinek, McLaughlin, & Williams, 2000).

On the other hand, there have been a number of distinguished, but *traditionalist* (Brantlinger, 1997) leaders in the field of special education who have continued to question the effectiveness of education in the regular classroom for all learners with special needs and who cite inclusion research, particularly for students identified as learning disabled, with mixed or negative results (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994, 1998; Kauffman & Hallahan, 1995; Zigmond, Jenkins, Fuchs, Deno, & Fuchs, 1995). Some researchers of inclusion at the systems level (c.f. Baines & Baines, 1994; Bullough & Baughman, 1995; Houck & Rogers, 1994) have expressed concern for children with disabilities who have been placed without appropriate resources and supports in the regular classroom in the name of inclusion. They fear that these children’s needs will not be met in the general education setting. Others have worried that inclusion is being implemented solely as a cost-saving measure (Baines & Baines, 1994; Smelter, Rasch, & Yudowitz, 1994), and not as an important shift in educational philosophy with concomitant changes in curriculum and personnel.

The Impending Impact of Legal Mandates

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 or IDEA '97 has intensified the call to educate most children with disabilities in the general education classroom. In the United States, 8.1 % of school-aged children are given official labels of disability designating them as in need of special education services, and in our state the average is a little more than 11% (OSERS, 1999).

Labels of disability function as social and academic signifiers - the child is seen as having certain deficits that prevent or hinder their success in the general education classroom and their ability to keep up with grade-level curriculum. (I will explore the functions of labels in greater detail in a later section in this chapter.) In the past, the assignment of such a label meant that the general education teacher was no longer held accountable for that child's success or failure. It also meant that labeled children, identified as significantly different and less capable learners than their peers, received all or part of their "special education" by a person with specialized training in a setting outside of the general education classroom. The more severe the disability was determined to be, or the more discrepant the child's skills and behaviors from their peers, the more restrictive or segregated that setting, and the greater the period of time spent there on a daily basis (Taylor, 1988). This was allowed through the least restrictive environment clause of federal law mentioned earlier in this chapter in the historical overview of inclusion.

Now, twenty-five years after the passage of The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which guaranteed "handicapped children" the right to a free and appropriate public education, albeit "special" and for the most part separate, this removal of students with special needs from the general education classroom for academic instruction will no longer be automatic. The most recent revision of that legislation, IDEA '97, makes clear that the least restrictive environment and most appropriate environment for most children with disabilities is the general education classroom, and a child's removal should be the exception, not the rule. The most significant change is that IDEA authorizes the provision of special services and supports for both the child and the teacher *within* that general education classroom (Etscheidt & Bartlett, 1999). The emphasis will be on identifying the services the child is assessed as needing to be successful with grade level curriculum and within the general education classroom, rather than identifying a separate special education setting and curriculum that might, in an ideal world, meet that child's needs (Gilhool, 1997/1998; Roth, 1999).

The specific language of the regulations is included in the excerpts below:

Sec. 300.550 General LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) requirements.

(a) Each public agency shall ensure –

- (1) That to the maximum extent possible, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
- (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only if 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 satisfactorily.... (20 U.S.C 1412 (a)(5) cited in Roth, 1999, p. 15-16)

Sec. 300.551 Continuum of alternative placements

(e) A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.... (20 U.S.C 1412 (a)(5) cited in Roth, 1999, p. 16)

The Challenge for Schools

It will take at least several years more before these changes in federal law are reflected in state regulations and implemented fully in schools across America. But even the National Education Association, now the largest teacher organization in the country, has warned that the impact will be far-reaching and will require a significant change in the way we educate all children and go about the business of teaching (Holcomb, 2000). *The New IDEA Survival Guide* says that what may be required from many teachers is a “major shift in core beliefs.” Schools will need to consider perspectives and approaches “that fly in the face of the traditional ‘pull-out’ special education programs and self-contained classes that have evolved, in some districts, into isolated programs with their own curriculum, materials, and staff” (Holcomb, 2001, pp. 10-11).

For now though, that shift is yet to occur. The literature continues to document that general educators are still uncomfortable with, and some openly resistant to, including all children with disabilities in their classrooms (Baker, J. & Zigmond, N., 1995; Janney, Snell, Beers, & Raynes, 1995; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996; Vaughn, Schumm, Jallad, Slusher, & Saumell, 1996). Some classroom teachers feel that the return of labeled children to the general education classroom places unfair responsibility on their shoulders (Pierpoint & Forest, 1998). They are especially anxious about having to ensure the academic success of learners with special needs and even those identified as struggling academically below grade level in an age when children’s academic performance, particularly on standardized measures, is being used to evaluate and accredit teachers and schools. Schools in some areas of the country are now required to develop remediation plans for all low achieving students. The mandate for inclusion is but one of a myriad of competing forces shaping and exerting pressure on schools today. O’Brien and O’Brien (1996) suggest that we consider inclusion as a positive force for school renewal.

Learning from the Literature: The Social Construction of Disability

In this section I will examine two areas which pose dilemmas and create contradictions for researchers trying to make sense of inclusive education: The escalating propensity to categorize children with learning differences as disabled and in need of special education, and the devalued constructions of disability in our culture and schools and the ways in which language, research, and special education serve to perpetuate them. I will conclude this section with a consideration of the role inclusive education might play in challenging the status quo.

Our Propensity For Labeling

Let us start from the most basic of statements. There are learning differences amongst any group of people: differences in the rate at which we acquire or process information, differences in the senses or combination of senses we rely on to deal with information and to learn more about the world, differences in the modes through which we are able to demonstrate or express what we know, differences in the meaning we gain from any particular interaction. Popkewitz (1997) tells us that our understanding of difference is based on norms of sameness we have constructed and maintained over time through the social science research enterprise (1997, p. 25).

Within our culture, these learning differences have value attached to them. They get defined as lesser or greater than the norm, and this value is also created and maintained through social science research and theory. Learning difference, as lesser than the norm, has come to be seen as something that is wrong with a child, and something that needs remediation or needs to be “managed.” One of the primary ways we do this in our culture is through special education. Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000) take the position that

...Special education categories are simply terms people use to refer to concepts that they have constructed to confirm a belief that people in this society differ from one another. These categories also are used to explain people’s behavior...The definitions created to describe people with special learning needs fall into two groups: those definitions that have a sensory basis and functional disability associated with them (such as blindness or deafness) and those that have a psychometric basis and assigned disability associated with them (such as learning disabilities or mental retardation). (p. 95)

We seem to have a particular propensity for classifying and labeling children. Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000) note that “each year more than 250 million standardized tests are administered to the 44 million public school students in America’s school. The purpose of much of this testing is identification of students performing below expectations...” (p. 107). In the last ten years, there has been an inordinate increase of 31% in the number of children given labels and determined to be in need of special education (OSERS, 1999). This rate of increase exceeded the rate of growth for the general population and number of children enrolled in school. For children who were given the label *learning disabled*, the increase was 41%. Perhaps most astounding, for children given the label *other health impaired*, the increase was 315%, almost solely the result of increases in children “diagnosed” as ADD or ADHD (OSERS, 1999). In some schools as many as one-fourth of the children in general education classrooms are referred by their teachers to specialists and are seen as having a significant learning difference or special need (B. Collins, personal communication with school principal, April 1995).

William Ayers provided a simple, but articulate explanation of the problems caused by this compulsion to label and categorize children on the basis of their perceived difference from the norm:

...Unhappily, labeling students has become widespread in the intervening years - it has become epidemic in our schools...The categories keep splintering and proliferating, getting nuttier as they go: L.D., B.D., E.H., T.A.G., E.M.H. It’s almost impossible for teachers today not to see before them “gifted and talented” students, “learning disabled” youngsters, and children “at risk...”

The problem is this: in the human-centered act of teaching, all attempts to define categories lower our sights, misdirect our vision, and mislead our intentions. Labels are limiting. They offer a single lens concentrated on a specific deficit when what we need are multiple ways of seeing a child’s ever-changing strengths. All the categories are upside down- they conceal more than they reveal...(1993, pp. 228-29).

The issue is a serious one. Schools and the people who run them are increasingly identifying and labeling children as having learning differences and differing from the norm to such an extent that intervention is needed. Funding mechanisms which provide support and intervention are driven by this process of labeling: a child must be classified as having a disability and responded to as a child with special needs and in need of special education. This propensity for labeling and identifying children as in need of special education and thus as outside the purview of general education juxtaposes oddly with the move to bring previously labeled and identified children back into the general education classroom. To better understand this dilemma, we need to look more closely at the way in which we categorize and construct children seen as having special needs and the function this has served.

Cultural and School-based Constructions of Difference and Disability

Sleeter (1995) asserted that our culture has viewed disability as "...a problem within individuals, one that is treatable through programs that attempt to change the individual to fit the demands of what is assumed to be a rational system of education in a good society" (p. 156). This viewing of disability as a problem is a socially constructed response to difference. Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000) caution us to recognize that "categories of disability do not exist in and of themselves. They are constructs given meaning and life through comparison of performance to criteria...Definition is the cornerstone for the existence of a condition. For all practical purposes, without definitions there are no categories" (p.93). We now have a number of disability groups that did not exist before we defined them and created sophisticated tools of assessment using performance criteria and the norms created by social science to "find [their] members" (Sapon-Shevin, 1989, p. 89).

Sarason (1979) was one of the first to question the way in which we defined and responded to disability as a problem existing within the individual that needed to be fixed or managed. His position was that our culture constructs a person as disabled through arbitrary social constructions that exist in the "minds of the judges" and reflect a particular time, place, and society in which those judgments are made. The labels that are given to these constructions always reflect value judgments and convey great meaning that tells more about the labeler, than the labeled (Potts, 1999; Sarason, 1979). In the case of disability those value judgments have been essentially negative and demeaning (Klobas, 1988; Shapiro, 1993).

Smith (1999) explained: "What disables individuals is not innate characteristics that limit their ability to function in the world, but rather the attitudes of others around them regarding perceptions of difference." Our long history of harsh judgments and negative perceptions of difference across time, places, and societal eras, which has constructed people with disabilities as objects of pity, charity, ridicule, menace and dread (Bogdan, Biklen, Shapiro, & Spelkoman, 1982/1990; Wolfensberger, 1972), still shapes our responses to people with disabilities today (Meekosha & Jacobowicz, 1996). In the next section we will look at how language, special education, and research have served to perpetuate devalued constructions of disability, and examine the ability of inclusive education to challenge this status quo.

Language as a Mechanism for Perpetuating Devalued Constructions of Disability

There is considerable support for the argument that the language we use is the primary cultural tool by which we construct disability (Danforth and Navarro, 1998). One example is the language we use for disability which comes from an “illness paradigm” and which is sanctioned by the auras of medicine and empiricism. These terms serve to equate disability with disease and pathology and the need for “treatment,” as well as to convey images of dependency and neediness (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996). Those who operate from the disabilities studies paradigm such as Woodill (1994), Christensen (1996), and Rizvi and Lingard (1996) implore us to understand the damage done by the medical words and metaphors that lie beneath the professional language used by educators and school psychologists to talk about and label people seen as different. The words “diagnosis” and “treatment” are examples of commonly used terms which are used both to describe how we respond to people who are physically sick and to people who may be physically different. Woodill (1994) quotes Irving Zola and his seminal work on the language of disability to make us aware of the “profound and negative consequences” of equating difference, disability and illness.

Being seen as the object of medical treatment evokes the image of many ascribed traits, such as weakness, helplessness, dependency, regressiveness, abnormality of appearance, and depreciation of every mode of physical and mental functioning (Zola, 1993, quoted in Woodill, 1994, p. 214).

Others have maintained that the names which we give to categories of people with disabilities serve as tools that have constructed social and political realities, and justified our unjust response to that class of people (Stockholder, 1994; Stubbins, 1988). Stockholder (1994) asserted that this is a result of belief systems that are imbedded in those labels and a well-articulated ideology that frames their use. The devalued characteristics we attribute to those we label mentally retarded and the long history, which continues even today, of segregation and mistreatment as a cultural response to people we call retarded, are but one example of this. Many other scholars in the field of disability studies have also asserted that labels and categories of disability are socio-cultural constructions which function in just the way that Stockholder suggests, and that they have far-reaching, negative implications for the people we categorize and call disabled (Allen & Allen, 1995; Biklen & Duchan, 1994; Bogdan & Taylor, 1992; Ferguson, 1987; Reid & Button, 1995; Sleeter, 1986; Smith, 1999).

The labels that we give to our social constructions of disability are expressions of values but they work as euphemisms that serve to mask our biases or negative attitudes about the place of people we see as disabled in the social order (Rains, Kitsuse, Duster, & Friedson, 1975; Stockholder, 1994). Stockholder suggested we attend to attribution theory to understand that “naming preconditions the way an individual or a group will be perceived and treated” (p. 176).

Similarly, Rhodes and Sangor (1975) proposed that our labels of disability have residual historical meanings still imbedded in them: “Alarms about deviancy or alien persons become distilled into public residual labels, collective images which act as common symbols for defense” (p. 104). These labels become fixed and then “function autonomously like alarm systems gone awry” (p. 104). If we ascribe to this theory of Rhodes and Sangor, our seemingly neutral-sounding educational labels of disability are

actually “distilled symbols which stand for a permeating ethos of protective anxiety” (p. 106). These label-symbols “cool and dilute the fear of what they stand for” (p. 106), but they still raise fear and anxiety nonetheless.

Values and images imbedded in our labels may change over time. In the early 1900’s, labels such as “the feeble-minded” directly and openly categorized those considered deviant as harmful to the welfare of society and objects of menace, but these were replaced with “scientific” and educational terms (Raines, Kitsuse, Duster, & Friedson, 1975; Wolfensberger, 1972). Christensen (1996) noted that many of these “scientific” terms used earlier in this century as formal labels of disability, such as *moron* and *idiot*, have now become “the social language of insult and disparagement.”

The functions of educational labels of difference. The purpose of classifying and labeling children in schools is to identify those who are performing below rigid academic expectations based on grade level and age norms. Ysseldyke, Algozzine, and Thurlow (2000) state “every category of special education, except gifted and talented, has poor performance in school as a central or peripheral part” (p. 107). Further, these categories are “based on professional opinions about the nature and characteristics of students who fail to profit from the educational experiences provided in regular education programs” and there is little consistency or agreement across professionals and school districts (p. 110). Ysseldyke et al. reported a surprising statistic gleaned from what they have learned through numerous studies at the Institute for Research on Learning Disabilities: there is a 96% overlap between groups of children categorized as learning disabled and groups of children who do not have formal special education labels but are considered low-achieving (p. 101). Spear-Swerling & Sternberg (1998) reported similar findings.

Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Thurlow (2000) maintain that labels given to children serve as “signals for lowered expectation for parents or teachers” (p. 114). Some feel more strongly, and assert that labels blind those in schools to the learning capacity and potential of the children we construct as disabled (Delpit, 2001; Martin, 1992; Reid & Button, 1995).

We all mouth the mantra, ‘All children can learn.’ I would modify the chant to ‘All children *do* learn.’ It’s just that some children learn that we expect them to be successful, and some learn from us that they are dumb. Whatever we believe, they learn. (Delpit, 2001, p. 164)

Polakow (1993) examined how labels of disability functioned for students with learning differences and the social construction of disability occurred in the traditional classroom setting. What she found was that “children who are different...are constructed as impaired when they disrupt rigid classroom routines that permit neither time nor space for imagination, for transformation of the given,” (p.151). Terms such as “attention deficit disorder,” “emotionally disturbed,” and “learning disabled” functioned as “sanitized, medicalized labels that conceal the power, class, and ethnic differentiation” consigning children to the margins and facing them in the direction of “the exit” (p.153). She too pointed a finger at standardized assessment tools that construct students as deficient or impaired “because the child’s prior knowledge is valued not for what it is but for what it should be” (p.159).

Disability is not the only construct of learning difference that hurts children within our schools. Levels of academic ability, and the bell-shaped norms we construct these from, serve to identify certain categories of children as “inside” the curve and

others as “outside” (Ferguson & Willis, 1994). The construction of ability levels allows those in schools to assign values about the potential of children, and to separate children for certain kinds of instruction based on their value.

Tracking is ineffective. It is harmful to many students. It inhibits development of interracial respect, understanding, and friendship. It undermines democratic values and contributes to a stratified society....(Braddock & Slavin, 1995, pp. 15-16)

Braddock and Slavin (1995) stated that the clearest outcome of ability grouping is that students placed in low-ability groups get lower quality instruction, lower-level content, and less exposure to a range of educational materials than students in middle or high-ability groups, or even low-achieving students in mixed-ability classes. Ability grouping magnifies and widens the gap in achievement levels and “reinforces the differences that students bring with them to school” (Gamoran, Nystrand, Berends, & LePore, 1995, p. 700). Delpit (2001) notes that our practice of categorizing children on the basis of ability functionally separates them out into two groups -the academically worthy and the unworthy - and we respond accordingly. She gives us this viewpoint, which she credits to the historian Asa Hilliard:

...We in the United States believe that people are born into three categories—the low, the average, and the high—and that our job as educators is to reveal the category into which they were born and to keep them in it. (p. 163-164)

This sorting of children into ability levels has been the subject of years of research by Jeannie Oakes and a variety of colleagues. They reported that our predisposition to sorting, and our deeply held beliefs about the innate nature of ability and the relationship between ability and merit, posed almost insurmountable barriers to the detracking efforts at the ten schools they studied (Oakes, Wells, Jones, & Datnow, 1997).

The effects of educational labeling as seen through the eyes of those we label. The assertion that labeling has actually been hurtful to those students who special education was intended to help has been debated and empirically studied by academics for years. Recently, with the greater acceptance of qualitative and narrative research in special education, researchers have been turning to the people who have lived with the experience of being labeled and constructed as disabled, to understand the issue from a more personal perspective. McGrady, Lerner, and Biscardin (2001), for example, went directly to students identified as learning disabled to talk about the effects of being labeled and look at the question, “Is it the label that is stigmatizing or the student’s academic failure that causes the stigma?” (p. 188). From their analysis of the thirteen life stories written by the students in their study, they came to the conclusion that:

[An educational label] “has value only if it allows persons to acquire an accurate understanding of their learning difficulties and to develop effective strategies for meeting the educational, psychological, and social challenges that face them...Simply knowing that they had a learning disability was not enough; they also had to be able to communicate to their teachers and professors how they learned and what they needed to be successful in the classroom” (p. 179).

Aaron Piziali, in his autobiographical essay included in the book, Learning Disabilities and Life Stories (2001), had this to say:

I am a prisoner, a survivor, a target, and a struggler, continuously defending, negating, and recreating myself. My disability? My disability is that I have been disabled, as well as discouraged and discounted by a temporarily able-minded, able-bodied general public. My success and failure have been based on an existing value system created by the dominant majority. Although I am constantly disabling myself through a process of disbelief, exacerbating disabilities already in work, I know that I shouldn't be compared to anyone else. My evolution is the only standard against which to check my progress. That I now struggle as I do for self-acceptance, may, in fact, be my learning disability. Thus, my learning disability is something I must perpetually fight to define and also something I must fight to reject. (p. 31)

Reid and Button (1995) engaged in discussion, writing, and interview with six students identified as learning disabled, and used one student's voice and her narrative of personal experience to convey how it feels to be called learning disabled. The themes about being learning disabled which emerged from a content analysis of their data were: (a) isolation, victimization, and betrayal, (b) being misunderstood and unappreciated, and c) oppression.

When people who have been labeled and responded to as mentally retarded have been given similar opportunities to tell their own stories, they also relate that the classification of mental retardation has been demeaning for them, a "bad thing," and tell us of their desire to not be called retarded (Biklen & Duchan, 1994; Bogdan & Taylor, 1992; Kliever & Biklen, 1996). In an article imploring the educational community to think and talk about people with mental retardation and other disabilities as "people first," Nancy Burns, self-advocate, asked:

Why can't we be thought of as ordinary, regular people? As someone who has a disability, I don't want to be thought of or treated like I'm special, stupid, a freak, different, the village idiot, an alien from outer space, a second class citizen, or invisible...I've been judged, looked down on, not given a thought or a chance, betrayed, laughed at. I've been pitied, mistreated, abused, not respected, called names and stared at.... Someone once told me that having a disability is only a small part of who I am as a person. She's right. I wish people who give labels could know that.... (1998, p. 12)

Special Education As a Mechanism for Perpetuating Devalued Constructions of Disability

Both Delpit (2001) and Pugach and Seidl (1996) make this point: We are a culture that interprets the need for explicit and intensive instruction as a deficit, and children who need such instruction, whether because of socio-cultural or learning differences, are those we give special education labels to and are those we have typically seen as the responsibility of the special educator. Special education plays a significant role in reinforcing and maintaining constructs of disability because of two processes which are tied inextricably together: labeling and the provision of services. The mechanism of

special education as we now know it could not operate without labels of disability to drive eligibility for services, and the deficit model in turn drives labeling.

Christensen asserts that labels of disability have a significant role in maintaining “the legitimacy of school practices which result in an inequitable distribution of school failure” (1996, p. 71). But the legitimacy of special education practice, and the structures that maintain it, *has* begun to be called into question, particularly by those who point out that those practices and structures have been built around erroneous assumptions and beliefs about difference and disability. Peters, Klein, and Shadwick (1998) identified five faulty beliefs that school-constructed disability and special education have been based on:

1. Disability is biologically based.
2. Disabled persons face endless problems that are caused by the impairment.
3. Disabled persons are “victims.”
4. Disability is central to the disabled person’s self-concept and self-definition.
5. Disability is synonymous with a need for help and social support. (p. 100)

There is a growing movement calling for the deconstruction and dismantling of beliefs such as these that are built on devalued social constructions of people with physical, intellectual and emotional differences. This will require us to also take a critical look at assumptions about the nature of disability and “truths” which have been amassed through the huge assessment and research industry tied to special education. Dyson (1998) articulated the following assumptions as particularly erroneous and insidious.

1. Special educational needs are real (i.e. observable and objectively describable) phenomena in the world.
2. The task of research is to describe, analyze, and test interventions in those needs through a scientific process of investigation which is rule-bound, publicly testable and which therefore gives access to some final or provisional truth about special needs.
3. The extent to which the researcher exists as a social actor or research production is a social process is made irrelevant by the reality of the phenomena under investigation and the rule-bound, publicly testable nature of the investigative process. (p. 2)

Skrtic (1991) took a similar angle in looking at school-constructed disability. Instead of seeing disability as pathology residing within the individual, he suggested that school failure is the result of pathology within the organization. Thus, locating the cause of school failure or school difficulty within disability as an inherent characteristic or as something defective within the individual, allows us to ignore the role that the lock-step nature of the curriculum and the narrow band of what is considered normal and acceptable as defined by the school has in creating and perpetuating school failure (Bishop, Foster, & Jubala, 1993; Christensen, 1996; Keary, 1998).

Whereas Christensen (1996), Skrtic (1991), and others have presented an argument of schooling as disabling, McDermott and Varenne (1995) suggested that we can understand schooling as disabling by viewing the larger culture as disabling. They proposed that disability as a social construct can be seen as both evidence of a culture’s weaknesses and a symbol of a culture’s power to disable. McDermott and Varenne’s schema of schooling and culture as disabling helps us to pull together the various school-

based constructions of difference. They offered three major ways of thinking about “the cultural fabrication and elaboration of disability” in schools:

1. Poor academic performance is the result of deprivation. This is a popular explanation, and is used to explain the incredibly strong correlational relationship between poverty and school failure;
2. Poor academic performance is the result of individual failings or falling short of cultural ideals. This rationale is accepted almost without question. Given this predilection, schooling can even be seen as a “political arrangement that keeps people documenting each other as failures.”
3. Poor academic performance is the result of occupying different places in the cultural hierarchy. Placement in the hierarchy and concomitant access (or lack of access) to different experiences creates actual differences in ability of that particular group that may not be related to their overall capability. Widespread acceptance of this explanation would require acknowledgment of the discriminatory practices that pervade our educational system.

In the 1970’s there were proposals to do away with specific labels of disability in special education and shift to the generalized term “student with special needs.” This was an initial attempt to acknowledge discrimination and elicit a more responsive approach to students considered disabled. Christensen (1996) tells the story of how the term “student with special needs” came into use:

Warnock (1978) coined the term “students with special needs” in an effort to engender reforms in England and Wales similar to those mandated by P.L. 94-142 in the U.S. Warnock identified the concept of student disability as a legitimating factor in the inequitable treatment of students in special education. She attempted to transform the systemic conceptualization of special education and disabled students by transferring the locus of the problem from a disability within the child to inflexibility in the system of schooling. By suggesting that some students have ‘special needs’ she was attempting to encourage the notion that the educational system needed to change and become more responsive to certain student characteristics. Thus the term, “student with special educational needs” was attempting to locate the problem within the nature of schooling rather than within the nature of the student. This was a clear attempt to address the social and political aspects of the education of students with disabilities and challenged the role of individual deficit in legitimating the failure of diverse students. (p. 74)

It may be possible that in some settings practicing inclusive education today, labels of disability and special need serve to signify that educational structures and practices must be more responsive to individual needs, a shift that we would see as highly desirable. Christensen (1996) urged us to recognize, however, that the dualism of able and dis-abled, of special and regular education, are still maintained as long as such labels are in place and necessary to drive and fund services.

Clark, Dyson, Millward, and Robson (1999) also make mention of the organizational paradigm maintaining this dualism. The basic assumption underlying this paradigm is that special educational needs are artifacts of the rigid, narrow, bureaucratized practices in schools, and are a direct result of schools failing to respond with flexibility to differences in learners.

Research as a Mechanism for Perpetuating the Social Construction of Disability

We also must consider the role of research in reifying disability. For the large part, research in special education has made subjects of the children seen as having disabilities and being in need of special education, and examined the efficacy of the specialized teaching techniques they are seen as needing. It is also based on the notion that we must remediate and/or cure such children, and prevent disability in children we label as high risk, and seems driven to “prove” that certain methodologies are more effective than others for this purpose. Rioux (1994a) calls this “the pathology approach” to research in disability, and points out that this paradigm is still alive and well and highly funded in the United States and Canada. Much of this research in special education and disabilities depends on empirical approaches to inquiry, and even when using qualitative methodologies seems to operate from a positivist outlook on how the world and truth is viewed (Ferguson, Ferguson, and Taylor, 1992; Brantlinger, 1997). Rioux laments the current paradigm still in place for disability related research:

...the domination of the field by experts, the positivist perspective of the research agenda, and the location of the research question in the individual have not changed significantly.... (1994a, p. 3)

Those of us who have moved outside of the pathology, positivist paradigm may still be guilty of perpetuating the social construction of difference as disability. As long as we continue to use categories to frame those who are the subjects of our research (such as children with special needs), we unintentionally reinforce devalued constructions of difference and automatically limit the scope of our understanding (Dyson, 1998). Potts (1998) claims that research studies based on special education categories “reinforce an enduring ‘otherness’”(p. 17). She even questions and discounts well-intentioned studies of inclusion that use “methodology which assumes that categorical labels are the result of a satisfactory analysis of people’s lives” (p. 19).

The Challenge for Inclusive Education

Clark, Dyson, Millward, & Robson (1999) presented two, intertwined perspectives on the current co-existence of special education and inclusive education. The first of these perspectives was this: Special education continues to be “a mechanism for perpetuating discrimination, disadvantage, and even oppression” (p. 38). In their case studies of four inclusive schools in England, Clark and his colleagues found that “the basic structures and assumptions of special education remained not far beneath the surface” (Clark, et al., p. 164). Keary (1998) agreed with this perspective and argued that the rhetoric of inclusion hides, rather than truly deals with, “the deficit disabling discourse of special education” (p. 226). To ascertain if inclusive educational settings are perpetuating devalued cultural constructions of disability, Clark et al. asserted we must carefully scrutinize inclusion efforts through the lenses of critical analysis and deconstruction.

The second perspective of Clark and colleagues viewed inclusion with a bit more optimism, and in terms of its potential for challenging the status quo (1999). Inclusion can be a mechanism for merging the best of special education and general education, and reconstructing schools to meet the needs of *all* students (Clark, Dyson, et al., 1999;

Pugach & Warger, 1996). Christensen maintained that a truly inclusive form of educational practice could construct difference in ways that were not disabling:

...students are not seen as disabled, defective, or disordered. Rather, all students are seen as different, complex, and whole. All students are seen as reflecting a diversity of cultural, social, racial, physical, and intellectual identities. (1996, p.77)

The reality is that although there isolated schools that are moving to unify special education and general education, we are still trying to implement inclusive education within a dual system (Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000). The special education industry and the discourse about special needs are powerful shapers of the need for services. Smith (1999) suggests that this is an iatrogenic process, or one in which the professional practice and the “treatment” for a particular problem can cause further “illness” and the need for additional treatment. In the most radical view, the way in which we currently identify special educational needs and the system of services we have in place to address those needs can be seen as increasing the number of people who are seen as having special needs and the needs of people who have already been identified (Smith, 1999). Researchers who put themselves in the midst of this process as schools shift to meet the mandates of IDEA '97 may find it very complex to sort out what actually is happening for children.

There is beginning to be a group of researchers studying difference, disability and inclusive education who have made the commitment to a “sensitive and self-conscious research practice” (Clough & Barton, cited in Bines, Swain & Kaye, 1998; Heshesius, 1996). This involves carefully considering how we construct ourselves as researchers, how we construct the subject and the people we study, and how we involve them in meaningful ways in our inquiry. Within such practice is a serious attempt to attend to the language used to describe children. Bines, Swain and Kaye (1998), in describing their research in the United Kingdom, used the following phrase, “young people in mainstream schools who would previously have been educated in special schools” (p. 65) to work around the thorny issue of what to call labeled children. Those involved in inquiry about inclusive education will have to be particularly mindful of the language they use and that others use to talk about the teachers and students in those settings.

Another challenge is that within our current dual system, there is a perceived shortage of special educators, a direct result of the increase in the numbers of children with special education labels. The reality is that there are more people working in the field of special education than ever before. With the coming shift away from separate classrooms staffed by separate staff for labeled students towards support in a restructured general education classroom, we might assume that the need for labeling a child as in need of separate special education will go down. This leads me to question if that shortage will continue to exist in light of proposed reforms.

The need for special educators and other specialists has been driven by our procedures for labeling and determining “special needs” that are seen as outside the purview of general education, but it is also driven by a historical perspective which has constructed the general educator as inadequate and unwilling to meet the needs of children with learning differences in the classroom. I believe we must be as critical of this

social construction of teachers as we are of social constructions of disability if we are to move forward with inclusive education.

Learning from the Literature: General Educators as “The Bad Guys”

During the past fifteen years, I have had the good fortune to work with a handful of general educators who have come to feel both comfortable and capable in their role as teacher of an inclusive classroom, where children with a wide range of abilities and differences learn together. Regrettably, I have repeatedly encountered the view that the positive attitudes and skill levels of these general educators are atypical and non-representative. I have been taken to task by those who believe that most general educators are the bad guys when it comes to children with special needs and who feel there is little we can do to counter the traditional and entrenched contexts in which teacher beliefs and practices are rigidly maintained.

Historically, the key arguments presented in the literature against inclusion have revolved around the inadequacy of general educators in meeting what are seen as the special needs of students with labels of disability. These arguments were based on the following assumptions:

1. Students with disabilities need separate, specialized, different instruction.
2. People trained as regular educators do not have the skills to teach children with disabilities.
3. People trained as regular educators do not accept students with disabilities.
4. People trained as special educators are more capable and better suited to work with students with disabilities (Biklen, 1989; Blatt, 1977; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Houck & Rogers, 1994; Sarason & Doris, 1979; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, & Thurlow, 2000).

These assumptions contributed greatly to the construction of the general educator as “The Bad Guy,” especially during the years when we were building the case for the establishment and expansion of special education and the need for special educators (Connor, 1976; Winzer, 1993). This case was not built out of thin air. The horror stories are a part of the oral tradition around schooling: Children with learning differences who were lucky enough to be allowed to enter school were often relegated to the dunce corner or sent home when the classroom teacher could not deal with them; They were punished and made the butt of cruel jokes; They were ignored and humiliated; They were held back and failed.

Special educators were felt to possess unique skills, capacities, and expertise needed to teach labeled children, and these were catalogued and sanctioned (Connor, 1976; Reynolds, 1990). A mythology arose around the “specialness” of persons who worked with children with special needs, and they were considered “a breed apart” (Stainback & Stainback, 1995, p. 18). How many times have you heard someone say to a special educator, “My, isn’t that wonderful, it takes a very special person to work with ‘those’ children” or “You must have so much patience. I could never do it myself.”

There is evidence to support the assertion that special educators perpetuated this image of themselves as “special,” as somehow having a greater capacity for and certainly greater competency in meeting the needs of children with disabilities (Bateman, 1994). General educators believed this as well. In many schools, a mystique existed (and still does) about special educators. It is almost as if they have been thought to possess some

sort of magic that will solve the educational difficulties this child is experiencing and the difficulties the classroom teacher feels she or he is having in reaching this child (Forest, 1991).

In the past the magic performed was a disappearing act. The child and the problems they were creating for the teacher simply disappeared: placement in a segregated resource or self-contained classroom for part, most, or all of the day was the secret to this trick. Even in settings where the child remained in the general classroom for a good part of the day, the teacher was still relieved of the onus of responsibility for that child. The primary responsibility for seeing that the child's educational needs were being met, and perhaps more importantly, the accountability for the child's plan of education, shifted to the special educator. The special educator became "The Hero" who rescued the struggling child from the perils of the general education classroom, who applied the balm to the harm done by the general educator, who restored the child's damaged self-esteem, and who worked tirelessly to remediate the child's deficits and break learning down into small, accomplishable steps.

This mythic construction of the special educator could only be maintained if the general educator was constructed in opposite ways. General educators were viewed as largely *unwilling* to include all children with disabilities in the general education classroom. They were shown to have distressingly *negative* attitudes toward children with disabilities. They were constructed as either *incapable* of working effectively with children with special needs and accommodating learning differences, or as in need of extensive training to develop skills they did not have.

It is perhaps not surprising that special educators played a role in perpetuating this dismal depiction of general educators (Bateman, 1994). For example, Diebold and Trenthorn (1987) found that special educators consistently underestimated the positiveness of their peers in regular education toward mainstreaming. In Houck and Roger's survey of special and general education personnel in Virginia (1994), over half saw general educators unwilling to provide instructional support for children with learning disabilities, and, of these, special education teachers certified in learning disabilities were the least likely to see regular educators as willing to make accommodations.

The following sections look more closely at the two areas in which we have consistently constructed and studied the general educator as the bad guy, and which are claimed to pose barriers to inclusive education: negative attitudes, and knowledge and skill inadequacies.

Attitudes of General Educators

For the past twenty-five years there have been professional educators and teacher educators who have asserted that the enhancement of positive attitudes towards people with disabilities is a key ingredient in the promotion of inclusion (Altieri, 1998; Barnes, Berrigan & Biklen, 1978; Bricker, 1995; Garver-Pinhas & Schmelkin, 1989). The study of attitude and attitude change is quite murky, however. Researchers in the social science fields have been investigating attitudes toward disability for more than 50 years, and have yet to definitively demonstrate *how* attitude creates barriers to societal inclusion. It is, however, a widely held assumption that it does, and this assumption is supported by hundreds of correlational studies of general attitudes toward disability (Antonak &

Livneh, 1988). Scores of researchers have specifically measured teacher attitudes toward disability and acceptance of educational inclusion or mainstreaming (c.f. Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996). Hannah (1988) summarized the research from the 1970's and much of the 1980's for us. She concluded that:

Teachers are not overwhelmingly positive in their attitudes toward children with disabilities. While there is some variation among conditions, teachers generally have negative beliefs about and feelings toward these children, as well as being somewhat reluctant to enter into teaching relationships with them. In the former area, grade level taught, degree of knowledge and amount of self-confidence all seem to be predictors of attitude. The quality of a person's contact with disabilities also may affect attitude. In terms of school-setting variables, class size, the presence of support personnel, and in-service training about children with disabilities also may affect attitude. (p. 170)

The literature has also been used to support the contention that general educators are typically less than tolerant of *any* significant differences on the part of children that seem to interfere with the teacher's preferred mode of teaching and the prevailing models of classroom and curricular structure (Zeichner, 1996).

A study by York and Tundidor (1995) demonstrated the pervasiveness of these assumptions about the negative attitudes of general educators. They used a large urban community in the Midwest to study how school and community members viewed inclusion and what they perceived as barriers and facilitators of inclusion. A focus group approach was used to elicit ideas and perceptions about the past, present, and future of inclusive education as it related to their own schools. York and Tundidor conducted forty-five discussions with a total of 335 participants. These included educators, administrators, non-teaching staff, parents, and students from settings who represented the range of inclusion and separate special education options in American schools today. Many were people with little actual experience with inclusion. The researchers analyzed discussion transcripts and field notes to list and group responses into categories of facilitators and barriers. Leading the list of perceived facilitators for inclusion was accepting and caring attitudes on the part of the teachers and other staff, and accepting attitudes and active involvement by students with disabilities. Leading the list of perceived barriers was the concern that teachers and students in schools would have negative attitudes.

Problematizing Studies of Attitude.

Regrettably, we continue to rely on the results of older research on attitude and acceptance to maintain the construction of general educators as unaccepting and negative and unwilling to work with children with labels of disability in their classrooms. But there are two significant problems in relying on this research. First of all, these studies of attitude have been merely descriptive. They reported on teachers' responses to test and survey items purported to measure attitude, usually a static measure. The only question they answered was, "How did this person respond to these test items or this survey at this point in time?" (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996). Those researchers that did take two measures across time to assess positive changes in attitude rarely if ever described *how*

those changes came about: they tended to merely correlate changes with the application of a particular strategy.

The second problem was the decontextualization of studies that measured attitude. We learned little to nothing of the quality or quantity of the teachers' prior experiences with disability and difference when they were growing up or their experiences with children with disabilities as teachers. We were given no substantial information about the teachers' experiences with the concepts of mainstreaming, integration, and inclusion across time and place, nor did we have any sense of their other beliefs about teaching and learning, and how they had been enacted in the classroom. In a recent analysis, McLeskey, Waldron, So, Swanson, and Loveland (2001) found that many of the research studies which have reported negative teacher attitudes toward inclusion were actually done with teachers who had little or no direct experience with inclusion, and in their own survey of teachers in six schools, found that what they termed "non-inclusion" teachers had significantly more negative responses to survey items than teachers who were actively involved in an inclusive school program.

Negative teacher attitudes towards inclusion must also be viewed in the context of the larger public perception that students with disabilities do not belong in the general education classroom. In a survey conducted in the mid-1990's by Phi Delta Kappa in conjunction with the Gallup Poll (Elam & Rose, 1995), it was reported that 66% of people surveyed still believed that children with disabilities should be segregated from other students. Specifically, the poll asked: "In your opinion should children with learning problems be put in the same classes with other students, or should they be put in special classes of their own?" The authors of the report summarized those results in this way: "The poll results call into question the extent of public support for inclusion programs. The preference is for placing students with learning problems in special classrooms."

The negative findings of studies on attitudes of general educators became quite predictable. Typically the research "revealed" that which had already been constructed by numerous other studies. What may have influenced studies of attitude were the realities of our dual system of special education/general education and the frame that provided for teachers' perceptions. The system reinforced general educators' view of children with disabilities as deficient, as deviant, as "problems." They preferred the separate structures of special education over inclusion because they had always been able to fall back on special education as the solution to the "problem" of children with disabilities.

Providing Context for Studies of Attitude.

Scruggs and Mastropieri (1996) analyzed 28 research studies from the last half of the twentieth century. Instead of looking at teacher attitudes about disability, they looked at studies which surveyed general educators' attitudes toward inclusion. The majority of the 10,560 teachers involved in the 28 studies supported the idea of inclusion, but many still had serious reservations about implementing it in their own classrooms. Scruggs and Mastropieri felt a serious limitation of this body of research was that conclusions about teacher perceptions were drawn solely from self-reports.

The use of qualitative research models to address the need for context in the study of attitude has become more prevalent in recent years. Janney, Snell, Beers, and Raynes (1995) conducted a study with 53 teachers and administrators that is illustrative of these

models and the kinds of complex information they are able to reveal. Participants were personnel from ten schools in five Virginia school districts involved in a state-supported effort to include all students with moderate and severe disabilities in the regular classroom for all or part of the school day, and were general and special education teachers, principals, and special education directors. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed. General educators consistently said that the most important advice they wanted to give other regular educators was to be open-minded to changing attitudes and beliefs. The most significant finding of the study was:

General education teachers who initially had been hesitant to get involved [twenty-two of the twenty-six who participated in the study] judged that their original fears and expectations were based on inaccurate perceptions about the integrated student's needs and abilities. By getting to know the students with disabilities on an individual basis, they gained both knowledge of the student's unique abilities and a new perspective on disabilities in general. (1995, p. 35)

This landmark study generated important new understandings about how teacher attitudes change in response to the inclusion of students with labels of disability:

1. Resistance is a natural response to change. Initial resistance to inclusion is to be expected from teachers who have never done this before and who must make changes in their way of doing things. Teachers come to accept inclusion when they have positive and successful experiences with students and when they receive support and assistance from administration and special education staff.
2. Anxiety and fears about working with students with disabilities is also natural. Teachers learn to move past this when they develop personal relationships with students, and when they share their experiences with their colleagues.
3. Fears about inadequacy or being overworked are almost always present in the beginning, but dissipate as teachers develop collaborative relationships with special educators.

Other research supports these findings, and has demonstrated that teachers' attitudes toward children with disabilities and their inclusion in the general education classroom change positively in response to professional development which infuses information about successful strategies for working with children with disabilities, and which involves a range of positive personal experiences and successful teaching interactions with children (Altieri, Winzer & Larsson, 2000; Eichinger, Rizzo, & Sirotnik, 1991; Kowalski & Rizzo, 1996; Minke, Bear, Deemer, & Griffin, 1996).

Inadequacies in the Skills of General Educators

Ferguson (1995) proposed the following as one of the important goals for inclusive education: "Each student has the kind of meaningful curriculum, effective teaching, and necessary supports to learn and grow as a future contributing member of the community at large" (p. 286). The construction of general educator as inadequate is so pervasive, however, that even general educators themselves believe they lack the

preparation and professional development that would facilitate such curriculum development and teaching practice (Katsiyannis, Conderman, & Franks, 1995; Schumm, Vaughn, Gordon & Rothlein, 1994).

Some believe that the separateness of teacher education programs has served to perpetuate this image of the general educator as incapable of working with children with labels of special need. Seymour Sarason's contention makes this clear:

School personnel are graduates of our colleges and universities. It is there that they learn that there are at least two types of human beings and if you choose to work with one of them you render yourself legally and conceptually incompetent to work with the other. (cited in Thousand and Villa, 1995, p. 53)

There have been numerous studies and surveys which document that general educators feel they lack the skills or competencies to effectively teach children seen as having special educational needs (cf. Kearney, & Durand, 1992). Research studies have also consistently found that recent graduates and experienced general education teachers feel that they have not been prepared adequately for inclusion (Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Sindelar, 1995; Welch, 1996).

The Need for Remediation

The literature paints the following picture: General educators pose the major barrier to the success of inclusion as an educational model, and as a result children with special needs who are included in regular education classrooms are being short-changed and perhaps even harmed (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1998). Those who ascribe to this viewpoint see the general educator as inadequate and in "need of remediation." The problem then is viewed as residing inside general educator, and approaches to "remediation" include coursework and in-service training strategies to give general educators some of the knowledge of the special educator, that is, to increase their competencies with special education techniques (Heller, Spooner, Spooner, & Algozzine, 1992; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995). Some researchers have even suggested that only teachers with certain personality traits have what it takes to be successful in their role as inclusive educator (Olson, Chalmers, & Hoover, 1997). Such literature serves to reinforce the construction of the general educator as inadequate and incompetent as teachers of children with labels of disabilities in their classrooms.

Instead of documenting and reinforcing this image of the general educator as incapable and inadequate, some researchers have focused on the transformation of beliefs and practice that *does* occur for general educators with inclusive classrooms and have begun to document *how* that transformation occurs (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993; Rankin, Hallick, Ban, Hartley, Bost, & Ugglia, 1993; Van Dyke, Pitonyak, & Gilley, 1997).

The Challenge for Me

When we separate myth and social construction from reality, we are left with the following knowledge about general educators and their willingness and ability to the meet the needs of children with labels of disabilities in their classrooms: General educators initially feel uncomfortable, less than capable which they attribute to

inadequate teacher preparation and professional development, and often resistant when a child labeled as having special educational needs is placed in their classroom for much of the school day. But they have the capacity for transformation, and experience with children with special needs and actual participation in inclusion, and the development of collaborative and supportive relationships with colleagues are key elements in changing teachers' attitudes toward children with disabilities and promoting practices in support of inclusion.

This understanding led me directly to my research question and set the stage, in a sense, for how my inquiry would proceed. But behind the stage were the critical issues and complicating factors that my examination of the literature had made visible and troubling. Even though the main emphasis of my inquiry was teachers who had come to feel comfortable and capable with children with identified disabilities included in their general education classroom, each of my three areas of learning from the literature gave me things to think about as I designed and conducted my inquiry, and analyzed and interpreted my data. I knew I would want to be aware of how the pressure to educate children with disabilities in the general education classroom, to increase standards and accountability, and to engage in school renewal and reform, operated in the school I chose as the setting for my inquiry and for the teachers I would study. I would want to pay attention to who in the inclusive education setting was being labeled and why, how language was being used to construct the children who were the focus of the teachers' professional development and the source of challenge, and how "disability" and difference were being responded to. I needed to ask about teachers' educational background and work experience history given that these two areas are cited so frequently as deficiencies that contribute to teachers feeling uncomfortable and incompetent with "children with special needs." Even though I had no intention of using teacher attitude as a variable of study, I needed to be mindful of qualities related to attitude such as willingness, resistance, and openness.

The Inquiry

I conclude this chapter by presenting my case for a more positive way of constructing general educators and studying them in inclusive educational settings. The final section will provide the reader with an overview of the design of this inquiry and its representational text.

The inquiry you are about to read established a different take from the questions that have been typically investigated by university-based researchers, such as "Does the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education environment *work*?" (e.g. Baines & Baines, 1994; Baker & Zigmond, 1995) or "What specialized skills and knowledge do general educators need to be taught to enable them to effectively teach children with disabilities?" (e.g. King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). In the earlier sections of this chapter, you learned why I began to question the interpretive stance of much of the current research related to teachers and inclusion, in particular the construction of classroom teachers as resistant to inclusion and in need of remediation. I had even more questions when I discovered through my extensive involvement with the literature that university-based *special* educators who see themselves as the experts in inclusive practice have conducted much of that research. I wanted my own inquiry to be one which responded to recommendations for (a) a "sensitive and self-conscious research practice"

in inclusive education and disability studies (Bines, Swain & Kaye, 1998; Heshusius, 1996), and (b) qualitative research that looks at “the bright side” and studies positive examples of practice or policy, rather than a deficit-oriented one which unearths the negative examples to justify the need for change (Bogdan & Taylor, 1990).

Design of the Inquiry

I realized that other than the few studies which were mentioned earlier, scholars have not paid much attention to the growing body of general educators who see themselves as having moved past their earlier resistance and trepidation, and who describe themselves as positively changed or transformed by the experience of welcoming children of all abilities into the life of their classrooms. The literature that has included the voices of general educators has often been anecdotal in nature (Hamre-Nietupski, Sherwood & Abels, 1991; Rankin et al., 1993). This inquiry began with the position that we have much to learn from those general educators who have come to feel both comfortable and capable as teachers of children with labels of disability in inclusive classrooms. I felt there was a need for research that would explore and honor the informed and experienced perspective of such teachers in the midst of developing their practice. I wanted to privilege the voices and experiences of general educators and develop an understanding of how they had come to know teaching and learning and themselves in new ways in the context of inclusive education.

I used narrative inquiry to examine how a small group of general educators at one school constructed understandings of themselves as teachers within the context of inclusive education. Individual interview, group dialogue, and participant-observation were used as methods of study. Research texts and narratives of experience were generated in response to the narrative data that I collected. Various forms of narrative analysis were used to generate new understandings, but writing was the key process I used to make sense of my data. The process of inquiry and methods used for collection and analysis of data are explained in further detail in Chapter 2 and Appendices A through E.

Design and Organization of the Text

The representation of my inquiry has been constructed as a polyvocal text which privileges what the teachers had to say, and which features their voices in solo and in dialogue with those of their student teachers and their special education partners, as well as my own. The text consists of a preface, and six sequences of narrative interfaces and conventional chapters. In the preface I discussed my rationale for using this non-traditional format as a means of conveying not only what I had learned from these teachers, but for allowing the reader to generate their own insights and understandings of teachers in inclusive classrooms. The rationale and process for constructing this alternative text is discussed in detail in Appendix F. I recognize, however, that my readers may need some assistance up front in understanding and following this unfamiliar format, so I conclude this introduction with an organizational outline and a brief description of the content and purpose of each narrative interface and chapter.

Narrative Interface One ↗ Jarrell

This narrative interface is a teacher story re-constructed by the researcher through evocative autoethnographic techniques. Jarrell was one of my students during the first year I taught in special education. The interface: (a) Lets my readers know that story will play an important role in this text; (b) Ties my past to the foundation for this inquiry, (c) Lays out the premise of learning to see difference in new ways, and (d) Introduces the question that guides the inquiry.

Chapter One ↗ Introduction To The Issues

This chapter covers three major areas of learning from the literature: The trend toward inclusion, the social construction of disability and special educational needs, and the construction of general educator as “The Bad Guy.” The intention of this analysis was to uncover the critical issues and dilemmas that complicate the study of inclusive education. I also presented the need for new ways of studying and constructing teachers in inclusive educational settings, and provided readers with an overview of the design of this inquiry and its representational text.

Narrative Interface Two ↗ A Morning in Arlene Daniels’ Fourth Grade Classroom

This narrative interface is a story of experience constructed by the researcher from field notes, research notes, and evocative ethnographic techniques. The interface: (a) Sets the stage for the story of the inquiry; (b) Makes the school and some of the participants “real” for the reader; (c) Provides a snapshot of what inclusion looks like at this school; (d) Gives the first example of how fidelity, moral perception, and mindfulness are a part of the teachers’ practice; (e) Introduces curriculum design as an important tool with which to negotiate difference; (f) Allows a glimpse into the difficult dynamics of general ed/special ed collaboration.

Chapter Two ↗ The Context for the Inquiry

This chapter describes the participants of the study and the school that the study took place in. It also provides important contextual information on the county system within which the school must operate and historical background on how inclusion came to be at this school.

*Narrative Interface Three ↗ “We are looking at these kids as **children.**”*

This narrative interface was constructed by the researcher as a representational dialogue by combining large sections from the transcript from the first group dialogue with sections from other dialogues. The interface: (a) Gives the reader a true sense of what our dialogues were like; (b) Allows the reader to hear for themselves the shifts, changes, and inconsistencies in the language the teachers used to talk about children with disabilities; (c) Lets the reader ascertain for themselves the ways in which these teachers were trying to see such children in more positive ways; (d) Gives the reader the opportunity to hear first-hand how teachers defined the challenges in including children with disabilities in the regular classroom; (e) Provides an introduction to the recurring issue of grouping by ability for instruction.

Chapter Three: ↗ Seeing Children with Disabilities in New Ways

In this chapter I illustrate and discuss the first of the three essential understandings constructed by the teachers: In order to move past their fear of disabilities and their negative perception of students with disabilities, the teachers had to learn to see children with disabilities in new ways, to identify what it was about their differences that mattered, and to respond to those children as students and as valued members of their classrooms.

Narrative Interface Four ↗ “We are still trying to get a grip on what we are doing.”

This interface is composed of three narrative pieces (two stories of experience and a reconstructed dialogue) that were constructed by the researcher through the use of field notes, research notes, and evocative ethnographic techniques. This interface: (a) Provides examples of teachers trying out various curricular and instructional strategies; (b) Hints about other building level strategies – scheduling in planning time and using textbook monies in alternate ways; (c) Gives the reader a sense of how trade books and literature are used as a foundation for the curriculum; (d) Brings to the foreground two of the central issues the teachers were wrestling with – what to do with children who are non-readers or struggling readers, and how to group children for instruction.

Chapter Four ↗ Negotiating Difference

In this chapter I illustrate and discuss the second of the three essential understandings constructed by the teachers: In order to move past feeling inadequate in meeting students’ needs and get past their fears of not being competent or successful as teachers of children with special needs, they had to figure out how “to make it work,” and they had to learn how to negotiate those learning differences that mattered the most.

Narrative Interface Five ↗ “You quickly learn it’s not a one-person show.”

This interface is also composed of three narrative pieces. The first is a teacher story constructed by the researcher from the transcripts of the initial and final interviews with one individual. The second is a story of experience constructed by the researcher from field notes, research notes, and evocative ethnographic techniques. The third is a dialogue re-constructed by the researcher through the use of field notes, research notes, and evocative ethnographic techniques. This interface: (a) Shows the mutual nature of support, assistance, and professional development; (b) Gives examples of the shifting roles and responsibilities of general educators; (c) Provides continued evidence of the teachers’ moral perception, mindfulness, and fidelity; (d) Provides a snapshot of the co-teaching and collaborative problem solving that occurs in this setting; (e) Gives the reader specific examples of how teachers sort out and negotiate differences that matter, and use direct and differentiated instruction and curriculum adaptations in their classrooms.

Chapter Five ↗ Garnering Support

In this chapter I illustrate and discuss the third of the three essential understandings constructed by the teachers: In order to keep from being overwhelmed by their role as teacher of children with significant learning differences and deal constructively with the additional demands inclusion placed on them as teachers, they

needed to garner support for themselves through a variety of formal and informal relationships and school structures. But they also had to work through and learn from the conflicts and difficulties that arose from trying on new roles and patterns of interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms.

Narrative Interface Six ⇨ Poetry of Transformation

This interface is composed of four ethnopoetic narrative pieces. The poems were constructed by the researcher from the transcripts and audio-tapes of the initial and final interviews with the teachers. This interface: (a) Pulls together the three essential understandings constructed by the teachers; (b) Shows how the teachers viewed their efforts as an evolutionary and interdependent process; (c) Demonstrates a representational format which conveys the teachers' thoughts and feelings in their own voices; (d) Illustrates the importance the teachers' placed on the role of experience and talk, especially dialogue, in their development as teachers of children with significant learning differences in the inclusive classroom.

Chapter Six ⇨ Constructing Understandings

In the final chapter, I present two major areas of analyses. I illustrate and discuss how the teachers constructed understandings of themselves through talk and experience, and how they viewed their learning and development as an evolutionary process. This is followed by a discussion of how I, as a researcher, used the new understandings generated by this inquiry to construct understandings of teaching and teachers within the larger educational landscape of inclusive education.

Narrative Interface Two ➤ A Morning in Arlene Daniels' Fourth Grade Classroom

Twenty-two children slowly poured into the classroom, mostly in small groups of twos and threes. They chattered as they hung up their jackets, and stuffed their hats, gloves, book bags, and lunch boxes in their cubbies at the back of the room. Arlene Daniels, classroom teacher, and Betty Mercedes, Arlene's student teacher, greeted each child individually and coaxed them gradually toward the work area of tables in the room. "Let's get settled, kids. Dr. J is here already to help us with writer's workshop, and we need to do our spelling and vocabulary first," Arlene announced to the whole group.

The classroom was arranged in activity areas: double sets of tables facing a white board in a large U-shape for seat work; a reading and relaxing area with a rocking chair, a rug, a number of large pillows, and an old bathtub full of books of all shapes and sizes; a technology station with several computers and a printer; a clean-up area with a sink, shelves for art and craft supplies, a stereo tape deck, and a large hamster cage; and a teacher work table on which stood several blue plastic boxes containing file folders for individual children, and a copy of the book, Teaching Kids with Learning Differences in the Regular Classroom by Susan Winebrenner. On another table at the back of the room lay a large construction paper heart on which was written "I love Wilbur Avenue School because..." and a number of comments printed by children including this one: "No one is ever mean here." Squeezed in near the door was a desk for Arlene piled high with books, papers, and knickknacks made by children, and a small child-sized desk backed up to Arlene's desk for Betty to use.

When almost everyone was seated, Arlene said, "While we're getting ready, Alex has something from Cub Scouts he would like to share with us. Go ahead, Alex."

Alex stood at the front of the class and, with some hesitancy and in a halting lisp, told the story of how his car won first place in the Pinewood Derby. He added "and here are some pictures of my car."

"That's a wonderful accomplishment, Alex," Arlene said with pride in her voice.

"How did you make the car?" Betty asked.

There were number of other boys in the class who must have made Derby cars too, for all of a sudden, they were all talking at once, and interrupting each other. Arlene shushed them with "It's Alex's turn now."

Arlene moved to the front of the classroom. "Let's begin our little words in big words activity, and while we're working, Alex can go around and show his pictures to each one of you that's interested in getting a closer look."

The students were directed to a list of words from their medieval unit that were on the board, including blacksmith, gatekeeper, and at least a dozen others. Arlene asked them to identify any little words they saw in the big words and encouraged everything the children noticed.

"I learned something today!" Arlene smiled at Connie when she told the class that the word li in English means mile in Japanese.

“You’re sharp today, Samantha” Arlene exclaimed when the typically non-participating child called out, “I see the little word keep in the big word gatekeeper.”

Jerri Nichols, the special educator for the fourth grade team, entered the room. She walked around to several of the children, including Alex and Samantha, and quietly told them, “These are your words to do instead of all this.”

In a little while, Arlene told the children it was time to clean up desks. After several minutes, when she observed that only some of the children had done so, she moved them along by encouraging peer assistance, “If your partner at your table hasn’t been able to clean up yet, you can help them.”

“Okay, girls and boys, let’s gather around the rocking chair. Ms. Mercedes is going to introduce us to our writing activity today. As our new student teacher, she wants to learn more about us.”

Betty read the writing starters, I like, I don’t like, I fear, I wish, One thing I would like to learn, You can help me by, and reminded the group that everyone will be writing, including Dr. J and Ms. A, a visitor to the class.

While Betty was talking, Jerri Nichols pulled Alex aside who had been sitting in the midst of a small group of children, and began quietly but insistently reprimanding him for not attending quietly. Alex then moved outside the area in which the activity was taking place, picked up his chair, and moved it toward the back of the room on the other side of all the tables. He sat there with his arms crossed, his lip out, and tearful.

The children were then directed to go back to their tables to write, and they worked in clusters or groups. Several girls sat at a circular table in the corner of the room with Dr. J. Another group sat with Arlene. Two boys joined the visitor at Arlene’s suggestion. Jerri continued to move about the room to give brief instructions to the students she had spoken with earlier about their word lists.

The sound of Mozart’s Romance, A Little Night Music filled the air as Arlene walked over to the stereo and inserted a cassette of classical music selections.

Most of the students were engaged in the writing task. Two boys sat with their pencils in their hands, but were not writing. Alex was at his table now, but still visibly upset. Jerri went over and talked with him again. “You have to learn to show respect when someone else is talking, Alex, that’s all. Now, let’s see you start your work in your Black & White,” and directed him to the composition book in front of him.

Now, finally, everyone in the class was actively engaged in writing, including all the adults, except for Jerri Nichols, who had left the room. After a few moments, Betty said, “Go ahead and finish the sentence you are working on now.” Alex had just begun to write his first sentence. “It’s sharing time. You may share any part of what you have written, but you don’t have to share at all if you don’t want to. You may keep what you have written totally private between me and you if that’s what you want.”

“I wish my family would get back together again,” called out one of the girls who had been working with Dr. J.

*“I like stuffed animals,” one little boy said quietly.
When a child stated that they were afraid of death, several other chimed in with the same fear.*

One child shared that he has been afraid of fire ever since his house burned down.

“I don’t like prejudice.”

“I don’t like hypocrites.”

One child said she wants to learn sign language. Another child looked directly at Betty and said, “You can help me by being my friend.”

Betty asked Arlene to share what she had written. Arlene seemed a little hesitant, but then laughed. “Well, it’s kind of personal but I’ll share it. I believe that all people can learn. I don’t like conflict and criticism,” and turning towards Betty says in a low voice, “I would like to learn more from you.”

After a mid-morning break, which included snack and visits to the restroom, Arlene directed the children to get their family shields out of their cubbies. This project was just a small part of a major unit on medieval times that Arlene had done for several years in a row now. The shields would be on display during the feast scheduled for later that month. Each child had designed and created their own shield based on medieval shields they saw in a book. Arlene asked for volunteers to tell about their shields.

Alex went first and showed his shield to the class. “You worked hard on this,” Arlene told him and compared his effort with his derby car. Alex was both honest and realistic, and said, “But Jay helped me.”

“Well, thank you, Jay, you were a good friend to Alex. You know, Alex, it’s okay to have help on something. You yourself worked very hard on this.”

The shields varied quite a bit in quality, but Arlene had something positive to say to each child and to point out about their shield. “I like that bright green that you used.” “What a great symbol you chose to represent your family.” “I like how your snake divides your shield in half.” She stretched the kids’ imagination if they haven’t thought about what the symbols they used mean, and had them brainstorm on the spot about what they could mean. For example, when she asked a boy, “Louis, why did you use those colors?” and he shrugged, she countered with, “Well, what could the colors stand for?”

One girl called out “Green could be for wisdom.”

“Yes, I like your thinking,” Arlene reinforced.

One boy said he chose to put symbols from the Chinese calendar because he thought they were both beautiful and mysterious. Another child, one of the struggling readers and writers in the class, had painstakingly copied a picture of a unicorn onto her shield and it was stunningly beautiful.

Jay’s looked as if it was done by a professional. “But I had lots of help, too, Ms. Daniels.” His shield was made of wood, painted with plastic gemstones glued in the middle, and decorated with ribbons and leather buckles. His symbol was a paint brush and he shyly said, “Well, you know why that’s there.”

“Yes” said Arlene, “you are an artist, Jay.”

One child had used the shield of his family’s clan and told the class, “I had to trace over it.”

A few students had obviously struggled more than others with this assignment. One of these students was someone who struggled with school in a number of ways. Sharleen's shield was roughly cut from a cardboard box and was only sparsely decorated. When she showed it to the class, she told them immediately, "Me and my mom worked on it. But it's not so good." Arlene tried to smooth over Sharleen's disappointment with how her shield turned out.

Arlene used the neat work of one child to raise expectations for future academic efforts. "See, Bruno, that's why I think you can be neater in your work. When you want to be neat, you can be very neat."

The speech therapist, Lissa Nestor, quietly entered the room, observed the activity for a few minutes, and made an impromptu decision not to pull Samantha out for individual therapy. She joined her and the small group she was sitting with.

When everyone had displayed and talked about their shield, Betty took over. Using a list that Arlene had prepared, they reviewed who had agreed to bring what to the feast and what work tasks were yet to be done. Then the children put their projects away and got ready for lunch.

Chapter Two ↗ The Context for the Inquiry

Context is all-important in narrative inquiry. The following section uses “vivid rendering” (Eisner, 1991) to describe the teachers, the key people they worked with in this setting, and the elements of the context which were germane to the inquiry. It meets the criteria for ideational representation as a function of analysis (Reissman, 1993). Please see the appendices for a step-by-step description of the process of inquiry (Appendix A and B) and procedures for analyses, including a detailed explanation of the research design and well-developed rationale for the use of narrative methodology (Appendix C-E).

As asserted earlier, I felt we had much to learn from those educators whose history with the successful practice of inclusion gave them an informed and experienced perspective. Given the purpose of the study, it made sense to place it in the context of developing practice in inclusive education; that is, a setting where there was a perceived need to prepare general educators to feel comfortable and capable in working with children with diverse abilities in the general education classroom, and a commitment to do so, as well as school personnel who were themselves in the process of transformation. Wilbur Avenue Elementary School represented the kind of educational community committed to professional development, the implementation of best practice, and the establishment of collaborative school-university links that is often recommended by those who believe that professional-development-like schools are desirable places to learn about the development of both teachers and learners.

The People Involved in this Inquiry

Two fourth grade teachers and two fifth grade teachers at Wilbur Avenue Elementary School served as the primary participants in this project. The selection of these teachers was not random; rather, it was built around the professional relationship that had developed the year previously between the author and one of the classroom teachers, Jean-Marie Matthews, who then served as gatekeeper and assisted in getting the other three classroom teachers on board as participants in the study. Jean-Marie and Juanita Russell, fifth grade teachers, and Angela Mays and Arlene Daniels, fourth grade teachers, agreed to participate in this inquiry after being provided with a written explanation of the purpose of the study and a personal conversation with the author. The four classroom teachers were experienced educators who described themselves and were described by others as comfortable and capable in their role as teacher of children with differing abilities. They also saw themselves as continually learning what it means to teach and how to best facilitate children’s learning.

During Spring semester 1997 they served as cooperating teachers for student teachers from Polytech’s K-8 teacher preparation programs. Betty Mercedes, Cathy St. John, and Amy Little, student teachers in the graduate K-8 teacher preparation program, and Jody Jahn, student teacher in the undergraduate K-5 teacher preparation program. These student teachers agreed to play a role in the inquiry and participated fully in the same range of research activities as their teacher counterparts.

One of the supervisors from the graduate model who was the primary support person for three of the student teachers was also actively involved in this research. Rose Fairfax was a first year doctoral student who had prior classroom experience with children identified with learning problems and disabilities, and she was interested in learning more about preparing teachers for inclusion. The special educators working with the fourth and fifth grade teams, Jerri Nichols and

Susan Lane, who worked closely with these cooperating teachers and student teachers, were also invited to participate in the inquiry. Although the study is not about special educators, I sought out their perspectives and asked them to join us in our monthly dialogues because of the frequency with which they interacted with the primary participants, and because collaboration between general educator and key educator is frequently cited as one of the keys to successful inclusive education.

These eleven people, and myself, were involved in this study, and the inquiry was focused on our interactions and dialogue. Narrative theory was used to guide both the development of data sources and the method I used to explore and construct meaning from the various field texts I created (Reissman, 1993). I gathered the narratives of these teachers, student teachers, and the culture they practiced within through interviews, conversations, and observations within their classrooms. I created monthly opportunities for group dialogue, and teachers, student teachers, myself, and others openly wrestled together with my research questions (Clark, Moss, Goering, Herter, Lalar, Leonard, Robbins, Russell, Templin & Wascha, 1996; Wasser & Bressler, 1996). I tried to take as broad a slice as possible and capture the personal experiences of these teachers with a number of different types of research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994): written transcriptions of the tapes of individual interviews and group dialogues; copies of textual artifacts that connected the teachers' experiences with the context and structure of larger contexts such as the school and curriculum (Hodder, 1994); field notes taken during weekly observations in each of the four classrooms; and entries in my research journal. My emphasis was their "narratives of experience," the stories the teachers and student teachers told which represented their practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417). I wanted to identify what were some of the understandings they had constructed of themselves as teachers of children with labels of disability who were included in their classrooms, and how they had constructed those understandings.

The Classroom Teachers

"We are a very interesting group" was the way Jean-Marie Matthews put it. The following descriptions were composed by the author using data collected through interview and specific questions about their background and teaching history, classroom observation, and through personal interaction. The four classrooms teachers involved in the project were highly educated, very opinionated, and not hesitant to speak their minds, with a number of differences in terms of background, personality, approach to their classrooms, and personal histories. They shared a number of things in common, too. All had combined marriage and child rearing with teaching (although not all were still married) and the continuation of their education. All had graduate connections to either one of the two higher education institutions in the region that seemed related to their strong sense of commitment to the locality.

All four had a long interrelated history together as educators. They all were teachers at another school when inclusion was first introduced with students with learning disabilities in the 1989-1990 school year. They were the first to address serving children labeled gifted in the general classroom, which was a new emphasis in the schools that year, too. The year of this research study, 1996-1997 was noted as a milestone, because they were "graduating" their first class of children for whom inclusion had been a part of their school experience since kindergarten, and who would now be going on to middle school. Three of the four teachers, in particular, had shared many of the same children who were part of the inclusion history at the two schools.

Arlene Daniels

Arlene was a fourth grade teacher. She was very talkative and very intense, a dynamo who seemed to have endless energy and enthusiasm. Her eyes often snapped with passion when she talked about teaching. Her speech was frequently punctuated by her laughter. Her tremendous sense of caring about her students was evident. She epitomized the teacher who works hard to see children in terms of their capacities and who creates multiple opportunities for each child to shine. As she often said (and truly seemed to believe) “we all have our special talents.” In the classroom she was very focused and very involved even when her student teacher had primary responsibility for a lesson.

In some ways she was representative of the typical female teacher of her era. She taught for several years after graduating in elementary education in 1969, then “took thirteen years off to have a family.” She returned to teaching via what seemed to be a fairly typical re-entry strategy for women: substitute teaching. She felt that her years spent mothering “prepared her a lot for being a teacher.” Her past teaching experiences included two years in first grade, remedial reading in both public and Catholic school settings, Writing-to-read, and Head Start. At the time of the inquiry, Arlene had a total of 14 years of teaching experience and this was her eighth year teaching fourth grade.

Arlene returned to the university setting twice to continue her education. The first time was to “renew her professional certificate” after her years of child rearing. Then in 1993 she took a year’s leave of absence to return to school full-time and obtain her masters’ degree in elementary curriculum and instruction at Polytech University.

She had her first experience with inclusion in this school district during her initial year of teaching with a child with spina bifida. She has been continuously involved with inclusion since 1989 with the exception of the year she took off for graduate school. She openly admitted to having struggled with inclusion in the early years, and saw it as a product of the clash between her traditional approach to teaching and not receiving the support she believed she needed at that stage. She still saw inclusion as difficult, but was ardently committed to making it work.

Angela Mays

Angela was the other fourth grade teacher involved in the project. In her mid-thirties, she was the youngest of the four teachers. She was physically striking, and her appearance and dress were very polished. There was a reservedness to Angela at first, but once she got to know you, she was very conversational. Angela came across as dynamic, emotional, and judgmental in nature. She appeared very much in control in her classroom, yet children seemed to have a number of choices and learned to work on their own and with others. She exuded an aura of competence, and there was a tremendous sense of energy about her.

As an undergraduate at a southern liberal arts college she had switched from nursing to education, and received her certification in elementary education and developmental reading. At the time of this study, Angela was in her twelfth year of teaching. She had taught more than half that time in K-1 settings. This early primary experience was something she attributed to her well-honed ability to adapt curriculum. She had also taught second and third grade, but the year of the study she was a fourth grade teacher for the first time. During the early 1990's, while teaching and expecting her first child, she completed a masters degree in counseling and human development at Nearby University. She did not see herself going into guidance counseling anytime soon, but felt it was a possibility for the future.

Angela stated that she had had children identified as learning disabled in her classrooms from the very beginning of her teaching. Her first experience with what she called “full inclusion” was with a child with cerebral palsy. This child, Nick, was one of Angela’s touchstone stories, and she talked about teaching him as having been a transforming experience. She was very committed to inclusion and called it “a way of life.” She was also a defender and promoter of ability grouping for instruction in reading and math.

Juanita Russell

Juanita was one of the two fifth grade teachers participating in the inquiry. She was a forthright, no-nonsense kind of woman who appeared very self-directed and determined when it came to her work and her life. She was assertive, and sometimes even blunt, in her interactions with others. She was passionate and easily roused to anger when she felt that an injustice of some kind had occurred for her students, her colleagues, her family members, or herself. She liked to joke and described herself as the kind of teacher that uses humor frequently in the classroom. This was Juanita’s nineteenth year of teaching, and with the exception of one year in fourth grade, all her experience had been teaching fifth grade. She said she loved the age group she worked with, emerging adolescents, but she preferred to work with them within the elementary setting because she liked having the flexibility of working with her class across an entire day.

Juanita was one of the few minority teachers who worked in this school district. As an African-American child, she had experiences with both segregated schooling and the pain of being one of the first children to be integrated in the area of the state in which she grew up. She said that her experiences with racism and discrimination were very much a part of who she was, and she brought those lessons into her teaching.

Juanita went through an upper elementary grade certification program at Nearby University in the mid-1970’s. While teaching full-time, she obtained her master’s degree in educational administration in the mid-1980’s with the goal of becoming a principal someday. Juanita told me, “I’m heading toward that. I’d like to try that...I think I can touch more people that way. I also think that if inclusion is going to grow, then we have to have some principals who believe in it, who can get it started at other schools, and who can show them that it can work. Because I’ve done it. I know it can work.”

Juanita was not always such an avid proponent of inclusive education. She described herself as having fought it tooth and nail in the beginning, and told a story of how she publicly stated that she “flat out refused to accept children with disabilities in her classroom” in the middle of a faculty meeting with Lyn York, the county’s Director of Special Education. She credited her transformation to a little boy who won her heart, and her patient, knowing principal who asked her to help the child.

Jean-Marie Matthews

Jean-Marie was an intensely committed teacher, devoted both to children and to the profession of teaching, but she went about her work in quiet, unassuming ways. She was an unpretentious-looking middle-aged woman, rather matter-of-fact in manner and unflappable in temperament.

That description of her physical appearance as ordinary belies the extra-ordinariness of her inner personal qualities. She had a magnetism that drew people to her, and made her easy to know and talk to.

Jean-Marie was seen, by everyone from the principal on down, as a wonderful confidante, problem solver, and confidence builder, and as a person with a very balanced and fair perspective of what was going on in the school and the district. Teachers in the school sought her out. Drew Peters, the principal, used her as a sounding board. A central office administrator regularly confided in her and relied on her good judgment.

Jean-Marie graduated from a college in the mid-west in the early 1970's with K-8 certification and got her masters degree in reading there as well in 1976. She was the first of the group to have obtained her masters degree, and was now, after 20 years, working on a doctorate in education. At the time of this study, she had 15 years of teaching experience, (plus a number of years substitute teaching) and had taught middle school math and remedial reading, and first, third, and fifth grades. Jean-Marie credited her five years in remedial reading and her experiences with kids considered "at risk" as having an important influence on her beliefs about the capacity of every student. This was her third year in fifth grade.

At the time of the study she was in her eighth year with inclusion. During her first year in 1989, she had three or four students with learning disabilities and three or four students identified as gifted as part of her classroom. Jean-Marie had a very upbeat, positive view of inclusion, and was one of the key spokespersons for inclusion for Patton County. She had played the starring role in a documentary made about inclusion for educational purposes and national distribution. The video depicted the first year of inclusion in Jean-Marie's fifth-grade classroom for Sandy, a young girl with Down syndrome.

The Student Teachers

The impression these young women left with the author and the cooperating teachers was that these were not your ordinary, run-of-the mill student teachers in elementary education. As a group they seemed unusually mature, thoughtful, and articulate. They had tremendous initiative and drive, and would be considered the "cream of the crop" in any teacher preparation program. They were not purposefully selected with those qualities in mind, however. Chance and circumstance were significant contributors. Three of the students were in the Masters Program in elementary curriculum and instruction and one was from the Patton County cohort of the undergraduate program.

Betty Mercedes

Betty was an upbeat, enthusiastic, high energy, twenty-two year old graduate student with many responsibilities. She was involved in service projects as a volunteer and the university's student education association as president. She also worked part-time as an aerobics instructor.

Betty was in her final semester in the masters program in elementary education and was seeking K-8 certification. She received her undergraduate education in child development and psychology at the university as well. She had one course in educating exceptional learners as a sophomore and then as a senior she was the teaching assistant for the professor who taught the course. She saw herself as "always very nurturing" and her experiences with children included baby-sitting from the age of ten, three years as summer recreation director for a beach resort program for children ages five to twelve, two years working as a substitute and an aide at a day care center in a nearby community that has included infants and children with disabilities as part of its program, a semester of field experience with second graders at an inner-city school, involvement in an early reading enrichment program at another Patton County school, and a semester of student teaching with sixth graders at a Patton County middle school.

Betty was looking forward to her student teaching at Wilbur Avenue School. Through her work situations, field placements, and an inquiry project completed the previous semester, she had had a number of experiences with children with disabilities that she saw as strengthening her teacher preparation program. She felt fairly confident of her ability to function in an inclusive educational environment with an experienced teacher to guide her.

For her second semester of student teaching, Betty was placed with Arlene Daniels in fourth grade. Arlene and Betty had a ready-made bond in that Arlene was herself a recent graduate of the same masters program Betty will be graduating from. Betty is also a graduate of Patton County Schools.

Cathy St. John

Cathy was a tall, statuesque, self-assured young woman in her early twenties who described herself as a very sensitive and empathetic person. She was in the graduate teacher preparation program in elementary education and was seeking K-4 certification. As a participant in this research study, Cathy was placed with Angela Mays in the fourth grade. She was from the eastern part of the state.

Her experiences with children included substitute teaching in her home school district on breaks for the past five years, substituting at the day care center where Betty had also worked, baby-sitting as a teen-ager, and serving as a volunteer with the Girl Scouts throughout high school and college. She started off as a business major as an undergraduate, but ended up majoring in child development and psychology.

Cathy said she felt she had little experience with people with disabilities before entering the graduate program and still felt a bit uncomfortable working with children with disabilities. But she had just completed a graduate class in the education of exceptional learners with Dr. B. prior to her placement at Wilbur, and thought it was contributing a lot to her understanding of students with disabilities in the schools and how inclusion could work. During her fall placement in first grade at another elementary school, she had the opportunity to work one-on-one with a student struggling with reading. She also had a number of interactions with a child with autism in an adjacent classroom. She was excited about working at Wilbur and participating in the inquiry, seeing it as a way to learn a lot about helping all the children in the classroom.

Jody Jahn

Jody came across as an intuitive, sharp young woman. She was the youngest of the student teachers and the only one in the undergraduate teacher preparation model. She had worked at her hometown newspaper for a year before making the decision to come to college. In a large group she was quiet and seen as shy, but one-on-one or in a small group after her initial shyness wore off, she was quite outspoken. She was the only one of the student teachers to have been at Wilbur Avenue School the entire school year. Her first semester placement was in third grade in a classroom not categorized as an inclusion classroom although there were several students with mild disabilities as members of this class. Her second semester placement with Juanita Russell in fifth grade had already been arranged before either of them was approached about participating in the project.

Jody grew up in a small city in the central part of the state. Her experiences with children prior to her teacher preparation program included baby-sitting, a number of years working with her mother in a church nursery, teaching tennis to children one summer for the local recreation department, and substitute teaching during breaks in her home school district.

Jody had a number of experiences prior to student teaching with children with disabilities including three family members with labels of ADD/ADHD, working as a volunteer with Special Olympics in high school, tutoring struggling learners in a YMCA after-school program, and substitute teaching in a self-contained special education class for students with learning disabilities. She described her experience with a deaf child in an early childhood field experience as an eye-opener to the disappointing failure of some teachers to do what needs to be done to support and include a child. She took an undergraduate class on educating exceptional learners taught by the same professor that Betty had worked with.

Amy Little

Amy was an older student, more similar in age to the classroom teachers in this inquiry. She was the mother and stepmother of four children ranging in age from five to twenty. She was not hesitant to express her strong and often unique opinions, and when she did so, it was rapid fire in a thick northeastern accent. These and other factors differentiated Amy from your typical student teacher in elementary curriculum and instruction at Polytech University.

Amy was also a graduate student in her final semester in the masters program in elementary education and was seeking K-8 certification. Amy had earned a bachelor's degree in English more than 15 years ago. While doing her undergraduate work and after graduation, she had taught English as a second language with adolescents and young adults. She had also worked with at-risk junior high school students. Her other work experience included operating the switchboard for a police department in the Northeast. Amy credited child rearing with helping her know a lot about teaching and forming her opinions about schools and their response to children with special needs (which she was very critical of). Amy's stepson had experienced great difficulty with school and had received a variety of special services and been in a number of alternative learning environments, for which Amy said she had to fight every step of the way.

Amy's recent experiences with children included working as a lunch aide in an elementary school, a three week stint as a substitute aide in kindergarten with a child who was in the process of being labeled emotionally disturbed, and a unique opportunity working as a substitute for eight weeks for a special educator supporting inclusion at a Patton County school.

The Support People around the Teachers

The Special Educators

At the beginning of the school year in which my inquiry took place, Wilbur Avenue School put a new model of special education service delivery in place. One special educator was assigned as a "resource teacher" to each grade level and worked in a collaborative fashion with the grade level teachers to provide instruction and modifications in the general education classroom to **all** identified children in that grade. This model is described in greater detail later in this chapter.

Jerri Nichols. Jerri was the special educator assigned to the fourth grade team. Her undergraduate experience did not involve education classes at all. She switched from archeology to history and political science as a major in college. Her involvement with special education came about somewhat serendipitously when a roommate worked at a group home and got Jerri to volunteer there. She then went on to get a masters degree in learning and behavior disorders at a large state university in the Northeast in the early 1980's.

This was her twelfth year as a special education teacher. She worked as a resource room teacher at three different schools in a county in another part of the state before coming to Patton County. Jerri had worked with the participating classroom teachers for several years prior as the “L.D.” teacher at Wilbur Avenue School.

Susan Lane. Susan was the special educator assigned to the fifth grade team. This was her first year at Wilbur Avenue School, but she had worked with these teachers several years ago as the “E.D.” teacher at their previous school. This was her seventh year teaching in special education.

Susan obtained her undergraduate degree from one of the most prestigious public universities in the state. Similar to Jerri’s situation, her degree did not include education course work, although she did have a roommate in the special education program. After school, she traveled out west and took one class in exceptional children at a university out there and volunteered in a program for children with physical disabilities sponsored by an Easter Seals affiliate.

She returned to this state in the late 1980's and completed a masters degree program in learning disabilities and emotional disturbance at another well-regarded state university. She spent two years teaching in a self-contained classroom for boys labeled emotionally disturbed and behavior disordered in an urban middle school, before coming to Patton County.

Colleen Christopher. This was Colleen’s twenty-first year of teaching, but her first as a special educator at Wilbur Avenue School. Colleen had a long history with Patton County Schools, both as a teacher and as an administrator, and she had been part of the team from the central office that first began to conceptualize and implement inclusive education ten years ago.

After receiving her special education degree from a large university in an adjoining state, Colleen began her teaching career as a special educator in a self-contained class for students with severe disabilities in Patton County, and did that for nine years. She was a part of the team that set up the parent resource center for Patton County, and worked part-time as its special educator team member. She also consulted in one of the middle schools and helped to develop a model for negotiating accommodations for students with learning disabilities who wanted to be able to function in the general education classroom. She left the county for a year and worked as an educational consultant for the regional technical assistance center for students with severe disabilities.

The next year Colleen was asked to be a program coordinator in the Patton County special education office. She served in that role for several years, before returning to the schools as an inclusion specialist, and then, as that position was phased out, as consulting teacher.

The Principal. Drew Peters is often credited with being the first principal in Patton County to fully embrace inclusive education. He and the Director of Special Education and Colleen Christopher began talking about inclusion more than ten years ago, and Drew was a powerful force both in his district and at the national level in supporting and promoting the full inclusion of students with disabilities. He was also very much a supporter of site-based management, and teachers were heavily involved in every aspect of decision-making at Wilbur Avenue School.

This was Drew Peter’s eleventh year as an elementary school principal in Patton County. Wilbur Avenue School was his third school assignment. He was and still is the school’s first principal.

Drew’s undergraduate preparation was in secondary English education at Polytech, the same institution that Arlene graduated from and the student teachers were enrolled at. He taught

English for seven years at a Patton County high school. He also spent two years working in the central office in an administrative position in supervision and curriculum development. After that, Drew completed a masters degree in curriculum and instruction, also at Polytech, and took an additional series of courses which led to an endorsement in administration. He has served as principal at three elementary schools. At the time of this study, Drew was a doctoral candidate in educational administration at his alma mater.

The Patton County School District

Patton County is a medium to small sized school district in a mountainous and largely rural area in the eastern United States. The closest city, with a population of 100,000, is less than an hour away. Polytech University, the largest of the state's universities, is located in this county and is assumed to have a significant impact on the quality of life and education in the region. The presence of two state universities and medical facilities in the general region contributes to a greater amount of cultural and ethnic diversity than is typical for this area of the country, but it is still primarily populated by people of Caucasian, European-American, Protestant background.

In the school year 1995-1996, the Patton County school district served approximately 9,000 students, and allocated more than \$47 million for instruction and education-related expenditures. At that time the school district was comprised of 13 elementary schools, two middle schools, two middle school/high school combined schools, two high schools, and one alternative school serving secondary students. The academic programs at these schools were supported by a number of services and resources. At the elementary level, these included Chapter 1, Reading Recovery, Writing to Read, Music and Art, Physical Education, Guidance and Counseling, and Media Services. At the secondary level, these included Guidance and Counseling, Media Services, and Vocational Education. The school district also offered a number of what they termed "Special Programs." These included Even Start, Programs for the Gifted, English as a Second Language, Special Education, and Alternative Education.

The image that this school district seemed to be working to convey was one of progress, of moving forward, of an earnest attempt to implement best practice in the field of education. For example, they were engaged in a multi-year effort to develop a strong county-wide curriculum that would provide "a foundation for the future." A curriculum planning council was established that included advisory groups of parents and teachers, and thirteen work groups of teachers and content area supervisors. These work groups or "task forces" attended to a specific field of study (such as technology, science, art) and were "responsible for providing research-based best practice curriculum to teachers, ...for managing the materials adoption process and for recommending quality staff development." Eight general curriculum objectives had been determined for the county through a consensus process with a group of 150 educators, parents, and interested members of the community at large. The two objectives which had the most relevance to this inquiry and were reflective of the county's philosophical commitment to inclusive education were: (a) DIFFERENTIATION: The curriculum will support and challenge each student by recognizing and appreciating individual differences and addressing individual learning needs; and (b) DIVERSITY: The curriculum will value and reflect the breadth of individual differences including cultural, gender, intellectual, physical, racial, religious, social and socio-economic. Curriculum will value students learning to work with people different from themselves and to acquire a knowledge of and respect for different world, local and school cultures.

Special Education in Patton County

During the year of the study, 1996-1997, Patton County provided special education services to more than 1,000 students ages two to twenty-one. One of every nine students in Patton County had a disability label and was seen as a student with special needs who required special education. The school system publicly stated that they had an inclusion philosophy that guided the provision of special education services. They had adopted a model of services that ideally would enable all students with identified disabilities to be educated in their neighborhood schools, within the general education classroom, and with their non-disabled peers.

This philosophy of inclusion was expanded upon even further in the context of public presentation. At a national conference which the author attended just prior to the implementing the study, presenters from Patton County accompanied by university-based researchers, asserted that there was consensus about “what we mean by inclusive schools” in Patton County: every child is educated in their home school; all children with identified special needs are assigned to general education classes; there is general education-special education collaboration for every identified child which means that each child is assigned to at least two teachers; pull-in supports and services are provided to support the child in the general education classroom and provide special education services; and flexibility and individualized decision-making are key.

In their presentation, Patton County personnel stated that the cascade model of special education placements had been replaced by a continuum of service delivery options. In order from least restrictive to most restrictive, these options were presented as:

1. General education instruction with no other supports
2. General education instruction plus consultation with special educator or specialist
3. General education instruction plus consultation with curricular accommodations for the student
4. General education instruction plus consultation and accommodations with support from instructional aide
5. General education instruction plus consultation and accommodations with intensive support from instructional aide and academic instruction provided by specialist
6. General education instruction plus consultation and accommodations with intensive support from instructional aide and academic instruction provided by specialist plus environmental manipulation and targeted training of social skills
7. General education instruction plus consultation and accommodations with intensive support from instructional aide, academic instruction provided by specialist, environmental manipulation, targeted training of social skills, plus adapted curriculum
8. At high school level only, separate resource services provided by the special educator as “study hall” option.
9. Pull-out instruction in academic content areas
10. Community-based instruction and supported work training at high school level
11. Homebound in-school instruction
12. Alternative schedule/reduced day
13. Placement outside of home school including home bound, out of school instruction, and private school placement

Presenters stated that the county provided significant support for inclusion. Each school was served by a site-based consulting teacher. These teachers were described as “highly trained specialists” with significant experience and expertise in the area of severe disabilities. They

provided technical assistance, support, and training for both the special and general educators at the school. They also had the responsibility of overseeing compliance with Federal special education regulations. The presenters asserted that one of the key supports for inclusion had been reducing class size and teacher/student ratios and the fact that the county had been financially backing efforts to do so for the past two years.

At the time of the study, the school district provided one administrator and three support staff to oversee the provision of special education services for the county. Several years before the current arrangement, the decision had been made to do away with area coordinator positions, and to use those people resources to increase the ratio of in-school special education supports, particularly the consulting teacher position. In-service training for school personnel was provided at the county level on such subjects as classroom support for non-readers, administrative scheduling, roles and responsibilities of teachers and aides, collaborative teaching, and classroom support for students with challenging behaviors.

In addition, a parent resource center (typically offered by many school districts in the state) was funded by the school system and staffed by a parent of a child with a disability and a special education teacher. The purpose of this center was to lend out a range of written information and videotapes on disabilities and supporting people with disabilities and their families and teachers, to find outside consultants when needed, to provide information and referral services for parents, and to coordinate annual child find activities.

Given the context specific nature of this inquiry and the focus on a single school, it was impossible to fully capture the complexity of the implementation of inclusion across Patton County. Some may feel that the picture presented above is merely “official” rhetoric and does not truthfully convey the reality of how inclusion is working or not working in the county. It was true that in my personal experience supervising student teachers within eight elementary and middle schools in Patton County, I observed a broad range of practices being used at individual schools to comply with the mandate for inclusion, not all of which would be characterized as best practice in inclusive education.

The school district, however, had received national recognition for its inclusive education efforts. Videotapes have been produced for regional and national dissemination documenting their inclusion efforts and the strategies that support it. They had received awards from various disability organizations. Personnel from both special education and general education have collaboratively written articles for publication on inclusion and have presented at national conferences including the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps and the National Association of Elementary Principals. University-based researchers of national prominence in the field of special education have used this county and many of the staff who are now at Wilbur Avenue School for their inquiries on teachers and inclusive education. General educators, special educators, and administration from the district, and especially those from Wilbur Avenue School, are often called upon to do workshops and presentations on inclusion and educational collaboration at the local, regional and state level.

Unearthing an Historical Layer: Origins of Inclusion in Patton County

Inclusion was implemented as a countywide philosophy about six years before the year of the study. From my interviews with the teachers and my experience with the school district, I knew that inclusion had been in practice in at least some of the schools for several years prior to that. I was able to add to my knowledge of the origins of inclusive education in Patton County

from the individual perspectives and stories that Drew Peters and Colleen Christopher shared with me during their interview.

The impetus for inclusion seemed to come from a small nucleus of special education staff. The key to its evolution was building on the personal and professional relationships that were in place. Colleen Christopher, working at the regional technical assistance center at the time, and Lyn York, the Director of Special Education, knew each other, and began to share with each other ideas they were getting from their reading in the field.

Colleen, a special education teacher and consultant at the time, shared this:

I was someone who tried to read and keep abreast of what was happening in the field. This coupled with my experiences with basically horrible programs for kids with mild disabilities and my classroom experiences with kids with multiple disabilities and our attempts to mainstream those kids socially all played a big role. So all of those things just came together, plus my relationship with Lyn. We were always giving each other stuff to read.

Andrew Peters, who everyone, including his staff, called “Drew,” was one of the earliest school principals to try inclusion at his school, and was also part of this small circle. He described his early involvement in this way:

The very first thing that happened was Lyn York, who was Director of Special Education, came and talked to me when I first became principal at my second school and started giving me these ideas. She said “I just want to talk to you about this little trend that’s out there. People are doing things different in special education and we would like to try some things differently. One thing we would like to do is try to get kids with special needs in regular classrooms as much as possible and not pull them out and make them feel differently and all.” At the same time we were struggling with how to deal with gifted kids. So that was the beginning of where we are today with inclusion.

I think it all began, though, with just talking, and then Lyn shared articles with me. I started reading more articles and it just seemed to make sense, it really clicked with me, and the thought of Shana, a child with special needs from my past who had suffered great indignities at the hands of typical students and regular classroom teachers, kept coming to my mind. ‘How can we get to these kids early and try to deal with their needs in a regular classroom? Maybe that would keep a Shana from occurring again.’ And so that’s when I got interested in it and started talking with teachers about it and quite frankly, as I look back, it’s almost like, I don’t know how it all evolved. It just happened one step after another.

It started out very much as a conversation, and just continuing discussions and talking with teachers. It continued on as a conversation all the way up until the point of implementation. I asked who might be interested in doing this, and both my self-contained and resource special educators were interested and so it began clicking. And I think somehow as it began clicking it just became so natural that it was, ‘How could we go back to doing it any other way?’”

Introduction to Wilbur Avenue School

Wilbur Avenue School was the newest school building in the Patton County district, the year I did my research there being its third year in operation. It was located in the university community and in the town limits. The principal relayed that, of the almost 500 children who

attended Wilbur Avenue School, a large percentage had parents with some kind of ties to the educational community, either the public schools or the two universities in the area.

I remember going to Wilbur Avenue School for the first time. As I left the agricultural countryside and came over that last hill of corn and grain, I could see the roof of the school shining green in the distance like new spring growth. In some ways, I had a sense of the Emerald City before me. Each time I saw it, the brilliant green conveyed promise and expectation, calm and excitement. I was not the only one to be taken by the color of the roof. There was even a series of letters to the editor in the regional newspaper, some in support of and admiring of the color, others criticizing the choice. There was public recognition as well and the school received an architectural award for its design.

Entering the school on foot was like entering the world of the ideal model of a school. For me the sensation of wonder and aesthetic pleasure that surrounded me was palpable for I grew up in a family of educators, and have had many ties to school buildings in one way or another. The sidewalks that led to the school were curved and framed by neatly mulched flowerbeds. The double set of glass entrance doors led to a light and airy vestibule that was flanked by columns painted to look like giant pencils. There was a glass display case on either side, and these were filled with children's work, both artistic creations and learning products. During the semester of the study, these seemed to change frequently. Straight ahead was the office. It was enclosed in glass to allow for quiet, but gave the message of accessibility.

The school was basically a large square, and was filled with natural light. At its center was an open-air courtyard with established flowerbeds, growing areas, and built-in seating. On nice days one of the various animals (such as a rabbit or turtle) that lived in several of the classrooms could be seen out there enjoying freedom of movement and giving the children the opportunity to observe the animal unconfined. Every classroom had a large picture window that either looked into the courtyard or onto the well-manicured school grounds. Only the hallway that bisected the classrooms running the perimeter of the square had fluorescent lighting as its only source of illumination.

Although there were no direct views into the classrooms other than through the windows in the doors and the doorways themselves, the halls were decorated in ways that provided a view into the educational worlds of the children who attended school here and the teachers who shaped those worlds. Outside of each classroom and all around the office, children's work lined the walls, often from floor to ceiling. The large library, which anchored the base of the square, had one wall of windows and facing that a glassed wall that looked across the hallway to the glassed entrance to the courtyard.

The classrooms were large, and I was struck by the fact that not a single one had the expected rows of desks. There were tables and chairs in various groupings and there were open areas in each room which allowed for such activities as reading on the rug, hands-on engagement in projects spread out on the floor, and small-group meetings.

The open, friendly feel of the physical setting was matched by the way this school presented itself in writing to the public. Copies of the school handbook, which were sent home with each child at the beginning of each school year, were out in view and available for the asking in the office. The full handbook was available on-line as a direct link from the school's web site on the Internet (Wilbur Avenue was the only elementary school in the district to have this on-line at the time of the study.)

The print version of the handbook began with a letter to students and parents from the school principal. Mr. Peters stated that they would continue their "well-established tradition of

being a school that cares for each individual.” He reminded people that “Our goal will continue to be to “build a world of learners” and we will all work together as learners to achieve that goal.” He noted that there was a “tremendous sense of unity in our school and community,” and praised, with sincerity and in glowing terms, his teachers and the students and their parents.

The philosophy of Wilbur Avenue School was stated as:

“We believe that learning is a life-long, collaborative process. We are dedicated to meeting the challenge of providing support, cooperation, and inspiration to all the members of our school community. Our child-centered approach encourages each student to understand and enjoy the learning process in a secure environment.”

There were also seven statements listed as comprising the mission of the school.

1. To provide developmentally appropriate learning experiences.
2. To provide a supportive, nurturing, and welcoming environment.
3. To build partnerships between families, school personnel, and other community members.
4. To stimulate creativity and a positive self-concept in all learners.
5. To help each student develop the skills necessary for successful problem-solving and decision-making.
6. To promote good citizenship, particularly the ability to make responsible choices.
7. To respect diversity, recognize commonalities, and celebrate unity. (Wilbur Avenue Elementary School Mission Statement, 1996-1997)

The faculty make-up of this school was unique in that Drew Peters had been given the power to basically “hand-pick” his staff when the new building was created. Each teacher had to make a commitment to the principle of full inclusion and be willing to assume responsibility for children with a range of disabilities as students in his or her classroom. Although the principal and a number of the teachers moved over from another nearby elementary school, selected teachers came from three other schools in the district as well.

Ironically, the school and staff’s reputation placed them in a curious dilemma, for families with “exceptional” children then purposefully began to move into the school’s attendance boundaries. Nineteen percent of the children who attended Wilbur had identified special educational needs, and on top of that, fifteen per cent were identified gifted. This high ratio of children with “special” needs placed significant demands on the general and special education staff at Wilbur school, particularly in the area of compliance with state and federal regulations and local and state policy mandates.

Full inclusion was not only policy; it was established practice at Wilbur Avenue School. But staff described it as a “process of evolution,” and mechanisms by which children with special needs were included in the regular classroom and special education was provided were continually being evaluated and re-shaped. In the year prior to the study, significant discussion and even sometimes heated and emotional debate occurred over the issue of pull-out vs. pull-in services, and the idea of the provision of non-categorical services.

At the beginning of the year of the study a new model for delivery of special education services had been implemented. One special educator was assigned as a “resource teacher” to each grade level and worked in a collaborative fashion with the grade level teachers in the general education classrooms to provide instruction and modifications to all identified children in that grade. There were no longer spaces designated for the direct provision of special education

services. The special educators shared offices in close proximity to the grade level classrooms they work within. Formerly, these special educators functioned as school-wide specialists in the disability areas of learning disabilities, mental retardation, emotional and behavioral disorders, and severe disabilities, and they had a caseload of students whose labels matched their area of specialty and to whom they provided direct special education services to, usually in the resource room. On paper these teachers still oversaw the provision of special education services to children with the disability labels that corresponded with their area of teaching certification. But for most of the special educators, this was the first time they were working directly with children with a full range of labels and handicapping conditions and educational needs.

The person who specialized in severe disabilities worked with kindergarten and first grade, and also served as consulting teacher for the school. Colleen Christopher was in that role the year of the study. She related that this had turned out to be quite a heavy load for her, but part of the rationale had been that there were fewer identified children at those grade levels. The special educator who was formerly responsible for services for children with the label of mental retardation was now the resource person for second and third grade. This had been made workable by assigning a special education instructional aide with five years of experience to do the hands-on provision of services for second-grade. This aide was then provided support and supervision by the certified special educator who checked in at least once weekly with each of the four second grade classrooms. The special educator who had formerly been responsible for all children with learning disabilities, Jerri Nichols, was now the resource teacher for fourth grade. Fifth grade was served by a special educator new to the school that year, Susan Lane, an individual who was certified in the areas of emotional and behavioral disabilities, and mental retardation.

The school maintained a strong relationship with the regional technical assistance center for disabilities. One of the professionals who worked there was the parent of Stevie, a child with Down syndrome who had graduated from Wilbur last year. Another was Prudence Love, the inclusion facilitator (as they were called in an earlier iteration of service provision), who had worked for a number of years with many of the staff and administration at Wilbur Avenue School both in this setting and in their previous school.

Context for the Reader of this Inquiry

In a series of articles Goodson and colleagues (Goodson, 1995; Goodson, 1997; Goodson & Walker, 1994) present their case for the need for robustness in the use of teachers' stories and narratives in educational research. Goodson advocates that we locate and analyze personal narratives of teachers' lives within their social context, and that we approach our analysis in intertextual and intercontextual ways (1995, p. 97). Hopefully, this chapter has given depth to my readers' understanding of the context for these teachers' lives and work.

My purpose was to provide a detailed picture of the teachers I learned from and the context in which they constructed their understandings of themselves as teachers in inclusive education. The inquiry provided a wealth of information on what they had come to know across eight years of teaching in an inclusive education setting, and my analysis enabled me to distill this to three essential understandings. The next three chapters (and their introductory interfaces) illustrate and elaborate the essential understandings constructed by the teachers.

In Narrative Interface Three and Chapter Three the reader will see and hear how the teachers were trying to construct, talk about, and respond to children with labels of disability in new ways, and I will illustrate and discuss the first of the three essential understandings. In Narrative Interface Four and Chapter Four the reader will see and hear the teachers trying out

and talking about a variety of instructional and grouping strategies as a means of negotiating perceived differences in learning ability, and I will illustrate and discuss the second essential understanding. In Narrative Interface Five and Chapter Five the reader will see and hear what support means to the teachers and what happens when they try on new roles and patterns of interaction with others, and the third essential understanding will be presented.

*Narrative Interface Three ↗ “We are looking at these kids as **children**”*

“It’s like Jason has been just...an incredible challenge this year. You think you know something, ‘Oh, this will work,’ and it just bombs after three weeks of trying and ...it’s gone. You know, Daisy’s the same way. I’ve always thought, bless her heart... nothing sticks. It goes in, it comes out, and its gone,” Angela, one of the fourth grade teachers said emphatically as Arlene, another of the fourth grade teachers who has Daisy for math, quietly chuckled.

It was the first scheduled dialogue for the participants of this inquiry. Present were the two fourth grade teachers and their student teachers, Angela Mays, Arlene Daniels, Cathy St. John, and Betty Mercedes, and the two fifth grade teachers and their student teachers, Jean-Marie Matthews, Juanita Russell, Amy Little, and Jody Jahn (who had just started her placement that week). Susan Lane, the special educator on the fifth grade team, would only be able to join us for the first forty-five minutes or so. Jerri Nichols, the special educator on the fourth grade team, was not present but thought she might be able to join us later. Also in attendance were Rose Fairfax, the doctoral student who supervised the student teachers and who was getting credit for a research apprenticeship, and myself. I had asked if we could focus our discussion on what differences in kids posed challenges for them.

“And bless her heart, we do try, and some things do work. But ...well, today’s an example. Her mom came to get her. I think her mother is a very good mother and she tries very hard with her. Well, she came to pick Daisy up early today, something she has never done before. Well, her coat ends up being here, her book bag is here, her books here. It’s because she’s so routined - it is so important to her and that’s how she’s learned because she has to be immersed in it. If you’re going to teach her how to spell that, you better teach her for the next five weeks every day, t-h-a-t, that, t-h-a-t, that, you know it’s the same thing with her knowing what the routine is because she’s done it every day.” Arlene murmured assent as Angela explained Daisy’s need for repetition.

“And now she knows how to do Number of the Day. And she’ll ask ‘Aren’t we going to do Number of the Day?’ And if we don’t do Mad Minute right away, it’s ‘Where’s Mad Minute?’” Arlene laughed and continued, “and she knows Math goes like that.”

“And yet because she doesn’t have a physical disability, you don’t see it. I mean, here’s a child, I don’t even know who you are talking about,” Jean-Marie noted.

Arlene acknowledged Jean-Marie’s observation. “You wouldn’t know that just by seeing her.”

“I know of her, just because I hear so much,” Jean-Marie followed up with.

Arlene, Juanita, Jean-Marie and Angela began to speak simultaneously. Their talk was punctuated by giggles and chuckles.

“I mean you would know her because you scared the dickens out of her,” Angela chided Juanita, which brought a gale of laughter from the entire group. Jean-Marie asked her team member, “How’d you scare her?”

“That day when they were climbing on those trees and I yelled out the window, no, they were breaking branches off to put on that snowman, and I yelled out the window, ‘Get off that tree!’”

“And here’s Daisy!” Angela re-enacted Daisy’s look of astonishment and fright.

Lots of laughing and “aws” of sympathy for Daisy could be heard. Group members talked over each other.

Angela recounted, “And every day after that when we’d go by Juanita’s room, Daisy would be ‘ohhh.’”

“I guess you won’t have her next year,” Jean-Marie commented wryly.

“Oh, now, they made up,” Angela responded back.

Jean-Marie looked at Juanita and said, “Oh, you’ve bonded. I’m so glad.”

When Angela told the group, “I teased her and told her she was actually going to be in Ms. Russell’s room next year,” everyone laughed. “Anyway, Daisy is one of those that...It’s funny, I think people think if you have a disability, it’s physical.”

A chorus of “Yeah, they do” came from the group.

Jean-Marie asked, “How do the children in the classroom respond to her?”

“They love Daisy and it’s because she has a wonderful sense of humor.”

Someone in the group queried, “Really?” at the same time someone else called Angela on this with “seriously.”

“She laughs at the world, she laughs at herself,” Angela declared.

Betty, the student teacher in Arlene’s classroom, chimed in with an example, “Today in math, she was working, she was in her seat, and she was going ‘chicken, chicken, baak, baak, chicken, chicken.’”

“What?” There was incredulous laughter from the group members.

“It’s the program that they are doing in music,” Betty explained.

Angela provided another example. “Do you know Tonya Spatch, the aide who works with Robbie and Jason? Daisy said to her, ‘Miss Spatch, I like your hair, it looks like a poodle.’”

When every one tittered, Angela’s rejoinder was, “You see?... but to look at her you would never know that she has a wonderful sense of humor. In fact, it’s gotten her through the years, and that’s what’s kind of sad. I don’t think Daisy will truly ever learn to read. I think it’s a big...it’s her disability. And I think that we, we’re going to work on it, but we’ll have to turn to vocational at some point to make her functional in society. I mean, even Terry, it’s great, Terry retains, you can tell him a story, and he remembers it, he’ll remember in detail.”

There were murmurs of assent from others in the group.

“But that’s not true for Daisy. We’re just so proud of her because now she can tell us that ‘George Washington didn’t really chop down that cherry tree, but some people say he did.’ When we first started this unit, she told me, yes, he did. So ... you’re happy if something sticks, but she has to be totally immersed in it for days and days and days,” Angela explained.

I asked, “But you do think she can learn it?”

“Yeah, she’s getting better and better. And she’s feeling good about it and everyone is helping,” was Angela’s response to my query.

Cathy, Angela’s student teacher spoke up, “But, I was going to add about the reading. She may not be very successful at it, but she always wants to try. It’s like, ‘Ms. St. John, I’m going to read to you.’”

Arlene acknowledged Cathy’s observation in a discouraged kind of tone, “Yeah, she does that in math too. She doesn’t succeed, but she just doesn’t quit.”

“She can have a book on a kindergarten level for a month, and it still will not be there. Her short term memory is just not there, either,” Angela recounted.

Arlene concurred. “There are days she calls me the wrong name and I’ve spent the year with her!”

Arlene, Angela and Jerri begin to talk about Daisy at the same time.

“Terry still doesn’t know the other kids’ names,” observed Jean-Marie.

Angela saw the same retention problem in her student. “You know Daisy sometimes does and sometimes doesn’t.”

Betty noted, “We forget she has that problem sometimes, and she’ll go “What’s your name?” to one of the kids.”

“But,” Arlene said in support of Daisy, “we’ve had a lot of new kids.”

Susan, the special educator on the fifth grade team, pulled the group back. “I’d like to go back to one of the things that was said earlier that had to do with understanding mental disabilities versus physical disabilities. I don’t know, I haven’t been in school in a while and stuff, but I think one of the problems with a lot of teachers just not understanding, and not necessarily through any fault of their own, maybe it’s because of their teacher training program or whatever, but there are still a lot of teachers who want disabilities fixed... But it doesn’t work that way. Like nobody is going to say to Rena, ‘Rena, get up and run around that field, and you just better work hard on it. Tomorrow, I want you to run around that field.’”

Rena Walker was another special education teacher at the school working with the second and third grades. She had a degenerative physical disability and was a wheelchair user.

“You don’t expect someone with a physical disability to all of a sudden be over it. You have it for life, and I think a lot of times people...don’t get it. Well, like, you know. ‘He’s just not reading. Why isn’t he reading?’ Parents have a hard time with that, too.”

“Or if a child takes Ritalin, people think they are not going to be ADHD anymore. And all that stuff is going to be fixed because they’ve got Ritalin. It doesn’t work that way, they’ve still got that stuff. Ritalin just helps ... a bit,” Juanita chimed in.

Angela made an observation to the group. “It’s really interesting too, ‘cause you can walk into my class and just sit and look, and the child that you think has the disability because they look more disabled is far more intelligent than some of the other children who have a disability that you don’t see as much.”

“It’s like Terry,” Jean-Marie concurred, “he really does kind of sit there, and I’m thinking he’s not as engaged as he needs to be. Now I’ve talked to Liz,

and I feel a little bit better knowing that since last year she's seen some changes in him that we hadn't known about, and that means he's doing a little bit better than we thought. But still there's a whole day that we're asking this kid to participate and everyone else can do it independently, not that everyone can, but a lot of kids can do it independently, even those kids that are struggling with reading. But the ones who don't read at all, no, and then I'm thinking of them in sixth grade, seventh grade, eighth grade. Oh my gosh, these teachers will be standing on their heads."

"I'm not saying that with every non-reader, but for Daisy," Angela qualified, "I'd love to sit here and say to you 'Oh, I think she's going to learn to read, but...'"

"Well, I don't think Jesse is ever going to learn to read," Arlene stated emphatically.

"Right!" Angela seemed thrilled to have someone else beside her admit that she thought this way. "And it's the same thing with Daisy. I think that she will eventually recognize more words through seeing them on a regular day to day basis and I ... think her reading will become functional, but I think at some point you have to veer off and say, 'What can we do to better prepare this person?' You know she's getting up there. We're going to fifth grade next year, then we're going to sixth, and the work is going to get only harder and the adaptations only greater. In third grade they were not getting as much individual help as we have set up for them now in fourth grade. I don't know what you guys are going to do next year. I mean, they need, they will need that math class again."

Arlene agreed with Angela. "And the thing of it is, they are doing really well, but like in the beginning of the year one of the reasons we were so frustrated in math was we had them all together. We had these lower quartile kids, but we had a mixture of other kids in there too that were maybe attention deficit disorder or whatever, but they still stuck out and we wanted a community where they didn't stick out. And now they've formed a nice little group in there, and they come to math, and they really want to know what we're doing.

Angela relayed their experience. "Before we did that, it was cut and paste the whole time, all the way, oh, 'What do we do with this child?" and "We need to move that child," and it was a lot of movement and it still is, I mean..."

Arlene blurted out while Angela is talking, "and we're still fluctuating."

Angela continued. "A lot of movement in and out to place them in a successful setting."

"But isn't that nice that we have the flexibility here at this school to do that, that you're not pigeonholed, you know, this is where you start off day one in school and this is where you're going to be for the rest of your time here," observed Juanita.

"I would be offended if someone looked at us and said you're grouping... I don't see it as grouping," Angela declared. "And I mean that I know that to some people it is."

Jean-Marie countered with a question. "Well, then, what would you call it?"

When Angela retorted with, "I would call it a successful setting," Arlene giggled. "And it is." she added emphatically.

"Well, for math it is," Arlene responded. "It wouldn't be appropriate for language arts."

"For math, you know how math is so cut and dry," Angela maintained. "I mean, I did it last year with high ability and these little, a lot of these ones that you have. It got to the point where there was a distinct cut. I mean Rena came in there every day, she was wonderful, and made many adaptations on the spot. She's wonderful at making adaptations right then when you need them."

Arlene reinforced Angela's point with a nod of her head and "um-hmm."

"You know when you are in first grade, you teach every one how to add and everyone knows their numbers and no one really sticks out," Angela went on. "And in second grade, well, they're adding and subtracting and a little more and still they're hanging in there, but in third grade you start multiplication and that's where the breakdown begins."

I interrupted the general direction of the conversation with a question. "Could you talk some more about this grouping? I found it interesting to hear you say "Well, I would be offended if someone thought it was grouping'"

Angela stammered, "I just would, I don't know, I..."

"Because people do say it's grouping," I noted.

"I know, I know. I guess because all of us have talked at great length about how Math is very black and white. Now the way we break them up for instruction for math, it's not grouping according to reading, which is really funny because they're more different in reading than they are mathematically, so one who can handle a word problem can help this little boy who can't read as well. Toni and I have gone back and forth and said, 'Let's let you have this child for the day because we are going to review, and your class is moving much quicker.' Part of it is not always so much that this child is not learning the concept but that this child needs to be challenged and I can't challenge him in here, so it's both ends of the spectrum. And we worry about that because you might get a parent who says, 'My child can do that already. Why are you reviewing?' And we're reviewing because the other twenty children are not mastering it and that's kind of hard sometimes. I think it's harder for me in math and I think it's harder, I mean in third grade it was hard, but in fourth grade it's extremely hard. I mean I have children who are doing long division like that," Angela snapped her fingers several times, "and then I have some, they don't even know their multiplication facts. Then you take someone like Daisy who don't even know how to add."

"I think the thing that Jerri realized at the beginning of the year was that Angela was adapting, Toni was doing something as well, our other fourth grade team member had CSMP, (the county adopted math curriculum for students identified as gifted and high ability in math.) We were all three doing something that one of us could be doing. We were like tripling the time we were putting in on math, so why not have one teacher do it and do it really well and take that off the workload of the other two? And that gives you," Arlene said to Angela, "and Toni the freedom to challenge those kids who are not quite CSMP material, but need something more."

“Yeah,” Angela agreed and said to Arlene, “And you can give yours more one on one.”

Arlene began with, “we have thirteen...” but Betty, her student teacher, spoke up for the first time.

“And three teachers, and we’re always so busy.” Betty was referring to Arlene, Jerri, the special educator, and herself.

“That’s our hardest hour of the day,” Arlene asserted.

Angela interrupted. “Now, I mean, Jason, my little Jason, is not in that group. He’s with me, and that’s where his biggest disability is, in math.”

I gave Angela a quizzical look. “Really?”

“Oh, he’ll tear you up on history, I mean he will tear you up. He knows his history. But math is more involved. Luckily, right now there are three of us in there, Cathy, and I, and Frank, his aide, does a wonderful job. But it’s taken him a while.”

“I wonder why that is, that math is hard for him?” Arlene queried. “Yet he can remember some of those dates, and ...”

Cathy, Angela’s student teacher interrupted. “We should tell them about what happened today.”

“Yeah,” Angela said. “He had a really hard time. We were all pretty down.”

“Something bad happened?” someone asked from the group.

“We had testing,” Angela shared. “And he was like a computer, he just went down. He couldn’t even tell me what seventeen minus sixteen was.”

“So he just shut down?” Jean-Marie wanted more details.

“I even went to Colleen and told her about it,” Angela said, “and she was like ‘Oh, no.’”

Jean-Marie continued to urge her on. “Because he took, because of the fact he...?”

Angela shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know, that’s what we can’t figure out. And I’m thinking, ‘Are there people in the world who cannot calculate?’”

Juanita thought so. “And there are people who have such bad test anxiety that they can’t even remember their names.”

“Right, maybe he does, in math. But he does real well on his history tests,” Angela went on. “I mean, this is a child, you guys, he loves history, and he can tell you things that you didn’t think he would ever be able to remember. But math is already a bad subject for him. One, it was when his Ritalin was starting to wear off, so that was a factor. We did switch it, so now he takes it before math. But you know, it takes a little while to kick back in so, yeah, that’s a problem. Two, he just doesn’t like math. Bless his heart, he starts to pull his hair. You know like today, we had him on the computer playing Math Blaster. He could tell me what one times two was, and what two times two was, but two times eight, he said, ‘I don’t know.’ We have learned that he is an auditory learner rather than visual. If you ever get the chance to come in and observe him read, he reads this paragraph and then he reads that paragraph and he reads this one and this one and then this sentence, and he can tell you everything he has read in succession.”

Angela laughed lightly as she shared Jason's different approach to reading. "And we have discovered that which is really interesting."

I had an aside to offer with the intent of pulling the group back. "Your description of Jason's difficulties is very straight-forward and based on your observations. I've noticed that you don't use labels much when you're talking about actual kids. You don't say what their disability label is, you tend to say 'this child needs an aide' or 'this child is a non-reader.' I've found this to be one of the interesting things that I've observed while I've been here and in talking with you all. When I've talked to the student teachers, I've asked, 'What do you know about this child?' And I've asked them if they know what their disability label is. Well, it turns out it's not something that people necessarily know, and I just thought that was interesting..."

Juanita responded to me. "I don't think I told my student teacher what my kids' labels were and I didn't even tell her who had an IEP until she asked me. She laughed a little and continued, "Because you don't think that way, they're just in your class."

Jean-Marie turned to the other teachers and asked, "Do you remember being in a meeting, probably a number of years ago now, somewhere in Patton County, and teachers were asked to introduce themselves? I think it must have had something to do with special ed and inclusion. They all got up and said 'I teach fifth grade and I have two of this and one of this' and the rest of us were just like WOW! We were kind of blown away by it. This was their chance to whine, I guess more than anything, but our group was 'I don't know that, I don't even think about that.' Most of those teachers, they knew exactly, they had two kids with learning disabilities and one EMR and they had one of this and you know it was very important to them that they let people know that they had those kids in their classroom."

Juanita backed up Jean-Marie's story. "Um-hmm, I remember."

I said I had given this some thought. "Maybe that's because we used to associate those labels with...Those labels are so, almost alarm systems or signals. People get some kind of image in their head when you talk about a child with mental retardation or whatever, you know, 'this is what they're like and this is what they're going to need,' and especially 'these are the settings that they used to be in' and the regular classroom wasn't one of them. But to go back to the observation I was making before, the thing that struck me was how much I felt my own special ed background and training hit me on. I found myself labeling your kids with special needs right off the bat. What's so fascinating is that you say, 'Here's Jason and here's what's happening with Jason and we're going to figure this out on a one by one basis.' I've heard the student teachers describing things in that way, too."

I turned to the student teachers, "You've said that this is something you feel like you're learning here from these teachers." Then I turned to the teachers. "It seems that you've learned to approach things this way at this point in your life, and you're teaching that to others. I mean, you're all like that, just so you know." And there was laughter from the group.

Cathy responded to me. "I remember you asking me early on what disability Jason had, and I remember saying 'I don't know.' I remember that so I guess, I don't know, I probably picked that up from Mrs. Mays. When I first came into her class, she didn't say 'Well, this one, is so-and-so,' you know, so I guess I picked it up."

"I don't think we think of kids in terms of their disabilities," Arlene asserted. "I think it's important for someone, the LD teacher, to have a real grip on what the need of that kid is. But, I was just thinking this, if I had to sit right now and tell you what's on Samantha's and Alex's and Candy's IEP, I don't know that I could, but I count on that LD teacher to know that. I adapt according to how I think they're doing. I mean having them in class all day long, which the LD teacher does not have, she's not in there with those kids all day long, you almost get to know that kid a little bit better. But someone's gotta have a grip on, well, this is what they need according to their IEP, and who can relate that to you every once in awhile, because sometimes I'm up a wall thinking, 'How can I do this, what's gonna work with him?' but I don't go running to the file." Arlene said this a bit ruefully with a small laugh.

"To look at their IEP?" Juanita asked.

"Yeah," Arlene responded.

Juanita shared a story of her own. "In fact, the other day I think Susan was in my class and we were talking about one of the students and his eligibility is coming up or something. I thought he had this label," Juanita began to laugh. "We were talking about it and I asked 'Isn't he this?' and Susan said, 'Well, no, Juanita, that's not it.' and she even went and looked at his IEP again to make sure. I had no clue. I was wrong."

I asked, "About his disability label?"

"About the label but not about what he needs..." Juanita replied.

Arlene had this to say in response. "I think if you focus too much on them - they can't do this, they can't do this - you'll never expect them to do it."

"But that way of thinking has been modeled for us. See..." Jean-Marie said she wanted everyone to know that "we've had the advantage of working with Prudence for years and we've all been good observers and she taught us from the beginning. We're looking at these kids as children. Just like I have to catch myself to not say 'so-and-so's a learning disabled child.' She's a child with a learning disability."

"Right," Juanita chirped.

"You know it's just those things we don't even think about. But it's been modeled for us," Jean-Marie asserted again. "We've been very fortunate."

"We have been," chimed in Arlene.

Jean-Marie went on. "I think of the schools who haven't had that modeling and that expertise but we have and therefore we've developed..."

Arlene interrupted. "We've had the opportunity to observe really good people at work in our classroom ... and I think a lot of teachers don't have that..."

"No, they don't," Jean-Marie agreed.

Rose spoke up. "Yeah, I know that's true in my experience. I think about the last year or two of my career and how much I needed that encouragement."

You've talked about difficult situations and having that support. But I've found myself in situations where there were tough questions to be dealt with, and that was not encouraged or supported, and what happened was way far away from model. That makes a huge difference."

Betty added in her experience outside of Wilbur Avenue as well. "I was just gonna say, you know talking about having that support system? That's important, and in comparison to my last placement ... well, here it's so different. The system of support that you have here is so important. I had some kids in my last placement with the same problems as kids here and they were just taken out of the room. It didn't work at all. But you come here and it's seen as a minor problem, if at all. Amazing."

Jean-Marie added, "And that was in Patton County, too. I mean we're such a diverse county." And with this statement, a number of people begin talking at the same time.

Angela explained. "I think we talk a lot about how it benefits kids with, ... with, I guess what have been referred to as problems, you know, but it benefits the regular ed students I think sometimes even more."

"Definitely," was Betty's response, and others murmured in agreement.

"I think I struggle with that with my own child starting in another school system," Angela shared. "I think I would really rather her be around a diverse group of students and learn some of those wonderful ... skills that some of our kids learn. I mean when you watch the kids in the classroom with Jason, they gather around him and try to pick him up or pull him over here, it's kind of like 'Hey, Jason.'" Angela laughed as she told this.

"And he just keeps crawling across the floor," Cathy added, also laughing.

"It's 'Oh, excuse me.' They walk over him, they walk under him, they walk around him, he walks around them..." Angela went on.

Amy, Jean-Marie's student teacher, was whispering to Betty. She turned to the group and said, "I was just mentioning to Betty that it's hard for me to teach my son any different. You know, he comes home from school saying, 'This kid is bad, or this kid is a baby.' He'll tell me what's wrong with the kid. His teachers have a whole different attitude about how they relate to the kids than what I see here, and it's spilling over on to the other children. I don't want him to grow up categorizing all these kids in that kind of a way."

Angela responded to Amy. "My daughter is in Sunday school with a little boy who is hyperactive. I was in there one day with him and the Sunday school teacher referred to him as 'bad' and I almost hyperventilated!" At this, there was laughter from Juanita and others. Angela continued. "She comes home from Sunday school with stories. I'll ask 'Who did you play with?' She's so cute and she'll tell me, 'Jamie...Jamie, he gets in trouble sometimes, Mom.' I'll always tell her 'He's really active, isn't he? Some boys and girls are like that.'"

Angela grinned as she began another tale. "But I have to brag on her some more. You guys will like this story. We were sitting outside waiting for my husband in front of the Nearby University Athletic Center and we just sat there and sat there and he was late. And so the girls kept on saying, 'Where's Daddy,

where's Daddy?' So I said 'The next person that comes out will be Daddy.' Well, this large, dark-skinned woman walked out of the athletic center and I said 'There's Daddy' and my daughter says 'That's not Daddy. Daddy had a tie on.'"

The group erupted into raucous laughter. In the midst of the uproar, Juanita wiped her eyes and said, "Thank you."

When things began to quiet down, Angela went on. "I said 'Aw, you're right.'" And we just went on waiting ... She could never have given me any better answer. It wasn't he's a boy and she's a girl, or you know, he's white and he has blond hair, it was ..."

And someone from the group chimed in, "He had a tie on."

Arlene summed it up for the group members, some of whom were still laughing, "That's great."

"That's what I struggle with about sending her to a school that doesn't, from what I've heard, accept inclusion. Or doesn't deal well with it..."

There was a pause in the flow of conversation. Arlene was the first to speak. "Well, back to what you were saying earlier about the benefits for the regular ed students. I know when I, both years, the year I had Stevie and the year I had Bart, the first six weeks I had parents coming in who were very concerned about their child. Drew would say 'You know, someone came to me today with a concern. Is their child safe?' and such. But around February or March, from then on, there were no more concerns from parents. So I think the kids take a lot of the positive home. 'Today Stevie did this and he didn't choke anybody all day, and we got to have a treat.' Arlene laughed as she said this, but followed with, "The beginning of that year was hard, devastating, really. I went to Prudence and said, 'Prudence, these things are really bothering me. Stevie chokes kids and he's spitting and he breaks things.' She said 'Okay, we're going to start with the worst - choking.' I asked, 'What about spitting?' 'We'll do that as soon as he quits choking people,' she said calmly. And I'm beside myself. 'You mean I have to put up with him spitting?'"

As Arlene recounted this, she pantomimed her response and added sound effects. Group members were laughing once again. "Prudence told me, 'Yes, you do have to put up with him spitting because he can only be expected to learn one thing like that at a time.' And you know I had to learn that. I think it was what Susan was trying to tell us. Some disabilities don't go away and you just have to learn to cope with them. You have to help kids to succeed in their environment and not expect them to get over it. It's going to be something that will be with them for the rest of their lives. So anyway, I think that kids are educating their parents just by their attitude and by the positive things that they go home saying.

Juanita shared that it was funny how things changed. "I know one of the students that was really afraid of Stevie in fourth grade worried all summer that she would not be with him in the fifth grade."

Arlene concurred. "Yeah, she wanted to be with him. Her mom even told me about a nightmare she had, that she wasn't going to be with him..."

I shared an insight. "Here's something that has struck me while I have been sitting here and thinking about what you have been saying. As some of you know, I'm teaching exceptional learners this year, the introductory course that

everybody has to take now. That is, if you're going to get a degree in education, it's required for the undergraduate elementary people and it's now being recommended for all students looking at education. I mean I have people in age ed, people in business ed and in math, a lot of different people, taking my class this year. It's a standard course that's taught across the country really. Actually the course is a hundred years old this year. It was first taught in 1896, that basic introduction to exceptional learners. What's so interesting is that the way it's always been taught and the way the textbooks are organized, laid out chapter-by-chapter of disability area. It struck me how you all have been talking about kids and saying that the label is sort of irrelevant to what you all are doing and yet this is the emphasis that we're placing with beginning teachers almost to say 'Pay attention to these labels, they mean something.' That's just something I wanted to think about and talk about a little further because it seems to be very much at odds, that this is what we're doing in teacher education and yet, in your setting anyway, the labels are not, don't seem to be particularly relevant or useful ..."

Jerri, the special educator for the fourth grade team, had joined the group late, but spoke up now. "Well, we certainly have to deal with the children as individuals, and even within a certain label, kids need different things depending on their strengths and weaknesses, and I think that's what we need to focus on, what that child, in particular, needs. But I think that a label as a sort of umbrella term gives you an idea of the parameters of what is to be expected for a child who has for example auditory processing difficulties, and maybe some hand-motor coordination problems. So there's different training that's probably available. If they are doing it to train people and to help them understand how to respond to a child's functioning level, then that's kind of okay, but if they're just focusing on what the label is per say and not following through, then that's not very productive."

Juanita disagreed with some of Jerri's perspective. "But speaking as a classroom teacher, I mean, I had that class eons ago and then I had my regular ed classes, then I began inclusion. Do you think I remember what an EMH kid is supposed to do or what a Down's kid is supposed to do or any of that any other stuff?"

Angela turned to the others. "Do you think you know how to identify someone who has an auditory discrimination problem?"

Juanita shouted her response. "No! No!"

Angela laughed wickedly, and chided, "That's a big word."

Arlene interceded. "But I think that it's important that we do have specialty people who can, who are really in tune to that because, if the classroom teacher is expected to be all things, it's never going to happen. As I was saying earlier, it's really important that someone have a real handle on that and can advise us, 'Don't forget, this is her disability, this is what you need to do.' Because you're overwhelmed with that many kids in the room and having to take care also of those six or seven who have all these special needs. So I think it is important that some people, those special people, really do know what those labels mean and know how to deal with them. But I think if you ask the classroom

teacher to be all things, you, you, you're frustrating people and then you get people who develop a bad attitude toward inclusion."

Jerri looked at Arlene in understanding and said, "Sure."

"You also don't know the label because you don't have the time to go in the room and get the folders out, and read through all that stuff, so sometimes you just figure, "I'm going to find out as I go," added Angela.

The other classroom teachers nodded in agreement.

Jerri explained, "Most of you really do know what the deal is, but you don't necessarily put a label to it. You see a child doing X and you respond appropriately. I see that a lot with teachers, and that's pretty nice to see, so it's not always important to know the word but you could always ask and say 'oh, that's what this is called.'"

Angela added, "Lissa Nestor, the speech person, is good at doing that."

Several people started talking at once, and there was laughter as Arlene mimicked her own response to Lissa, "Oh, is that what that means?"

Angela kept the laughter continuing. "Oh, is that what that is?"

"And then you've got those kids like my Reggie who've got two and three labels." Juanita began to chant loudly, 'You're gifted, you're LD, you've got ADHD', and it turns out, they're all being used to label the same person."

The hour and a half scheduled for our dialogue was almost up. Rose had the final word. "I remember hearing someone say a kid was MMR and thinking, 'Oh, my god, measles, mumps, and rubella.'" This broke everyone up. As the laughter died down, we began to chatter our good-byes.

Chapter Three: ↗ Seeing Children with Disabilities in New Ways

In their individual interviews and within our monthly dialogues, the teachers talked at length about how their original perceptions of students with disabilities and their views of them as children were transformed by the experience of having them in their classrooms. They acknowledged that there was an element of fear and apprehension when a student with a disability was to be included in their classroom, and shared how that changed over time. The teachers expressed that not knowing what to expect or how to deal with those differences was anxiety provoking. Jean-Marie Matthews was perhaps the most up front about this apprehension:

The first year of including learning disability kids in a regular classroom, that would be 1989. That was kind of exciting, but a little scary... We were already trying to decide how we were going to serve the kids with the staff we had. That was very scary to think that you were going to have these three or four identified gifted kids, and 3 or 4 kids with learning disabilities. And asking ourselves, "How are we going to do that?" and we just didn't know.

Angela Mays saw getting past that fear as an important first step toward feeling comfortable with children with disabilities included in her classroom.

They used to intimidate me, I have to be honest. I was intimidated by the disability - the physical aspects of it. I didn't know anything about CP. That scared me, you know, you always hear CP or say, Cystic Fibrosis, and you don't know exactly what to expect.

You know, we have the autistic child here at Wilbur Avenue, actually there have been two of them, and now I'm not as intimidated. When they first came in, I was really kind of like, "Whoa." But now I'm more interested, it's an incredible disorder. You know I learned by watching, observing, just being closer than I had been before. He wasn't in my class, but he was in the class I did a lot with, so I saw that. That was like a study in itself. You know, I came home and told my husband, "My gosh, this is just the most powerful thing, to sit and watch an autistic child communicate." And the intelligence level that people think isn't there. You know, they're as smart as you or I. They just don't, you know, the communication from what I see, that's the biggest thing, is just the communication. The other child I learned a lot about through her aide, because her aide worked in my class in the afternoon, so I talked to her a lot about that just to learn more.

It's worked the same with Down's syndrome, and just watching the kids. You know, I think that sometimes is what's going on with society - they're intimidated. Therefore they cut inclusion down, say it won't work, we don't want 'em.

Essential Understanding One

One of the three essential understandings that the teachers constructed was this: In order to move past their fear of disabilities and their negative perception of students with disabilities, they had to learn to see children with disabilities in new ways, to identify what it was about their differences that mattered, and to respond to those children as

students and as valued members of their classrooms. Their openness to seeing and responding to children with disabilities in new ways appeared to be fundamental to the process of coming to know themselves as inclusive educators. I have chosen to discuss this essential understanding first because it seemed to also underlie the other two areas of essential understanding related to negotiating their practice and interacting in new ways with others in the educational setting. We can look at this essential understanding in terms of three qualities that these teachers personified: moral perception, mindfulness, and fidelity.

Moral Perception

The teachers worked to create new images of children with labels of difference beyond that of students with significant needs and the demands those needs for time, individual attention, and direct instruction placed on them as teachers. They had learned to see children formerly viewed as burdens, and whose disability was cause for fear or anxiety, as children with gifts and talents. They were able to view children with labels of disability in terms of the promise of what they could learn or might be capable of learning. Simpson and Garrison (1995) called this moral perception, and defined it as “the capacity to comprehend the unique needs and aspirations of individual persons, and the best possibilities of equally unique social contexts...Moral perception is about recognizing and responding *thoughtfully* to the needs, interests, beliefs, values, and behavior of others” (p. 252).

The following sections illustrate how moral perception played out in the talk and practice of the teachers.

Seeing All Children As Having Strengths, Talents, And Abilities

Their capacity to see strengths in all children came out time and again in my formal interviews and informal conversations with the teachers. For example, when I asked her about her understanding of disability during my initial interview with her, Juanita shared this:

I believe that everybody has strengths and weaknesses, that everybody has something that they're good at, and something else, an area of growth, I guess I should say. I believe that even the smartest person in the world has some kind of disability. I believe that even the child who looks like they can do nothing can do something. I've come to this through observation. I've come to this through teaching. I've come to this through living life and being part of life within my own family, and just looking at myself, looking at my friends, and looking at the kids that I've taught.

At the beginning of the year, I always give my class this whole big spiel about being a part of the community. I tell my students that everybody has something to add to that community, like somebody could be a great pencil sharpener, and that's all they can do, but man, they can sharpen those pencils really well, and someone else can read really well, but they may not be able to multiply. I try to help the children realize this so that when somebody wants to read out loud, it's okay that maybe they're not a good oral reader, but they're trying. I want them to be comfortable with people's disabilities and I try to model that.

Even when the teachers talked about specific children in terms of their deficits or the ways in which they were different from their grade level peers, they included information that described them in terms of their talents as well. So, for example, in describing Terry, Jean-Marie said:

He can't read, but he can get on the World Wide Web faster than anybody in the classroom and do amazing things.

This capacity to see the strengths of their children with labels of disability was not just a part of the teachers' talk. During my weekly visits to their classrooms, I saw the way teachers built these strengths into their daily routine and interactions with children. Angela's interactions with Jason, a student whose IEP identified him as having cerebral palsy and learning disabilities, were a typical example:

One of the learning activities for the social studies unit on the Revolutionary War was to memorize a part or all of "The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere." This is a traditional activity that has stood the test of time, the difference being that children were given the choice of memorizing what they thought they could accomplish. On one of the mornings I observed, Angela began to talk with the entire class about the poem. Although she had only given the assignment two nights ago, she asked if anyone had memorized a part yet. I learned later that Jason's mother had written in her daily note to Angela that they had been working hard on the poem at home and that Jason whose academic area of strength was social studies was enjoying the challenge.

Angela turned to Jason and asked him if he wanted to do the first part of the poem. She then went over to the table where Jason was seated in his adapted chair, sat next to him to confirm with him that he was ready, and checked in with him on how he wanted to do it. The class waited quietly as the two talked and Angela wheeled his chair to the front of the class. Jason began to very rapidly recite the entire poem, his arms waving wildly as he added emphasis in American Sign Language. Periodically Angela prompted him at the beginning of a line. The other students gave Jason their full attention even though his speech was at times incomprehensible. When he was done, the class spontaneously broke into applause. One child said, "Wow, I haven't even memorized the first part." Angela noted the magnitude of his accomplishment with numerous comments such as "The rest of you have a tough act to follow" and "Great job. We're very proud of you."

Seeing All Children As Able To Learn

Instead of focusing on disability as not being able to learn, the teachers placed emphasis on valuing what students were able to learn. Arlene felt she had to consciously work at that:

I think that the first thing that I needed to learn was to come into a situation and see the beauty of all these different ability levels. And then sit back and creatively plan and think, "How can I work this group of very diverse students into something very positive?" We're getting ready to do a poetry recital, and it's okay that some kids aren't going to memorize their poem, and it's okay that some of

them will memorize both. It's okay that some children are going to be reading a poem that's only four lines long, and some of them are going to be reading poems of several stanzas. And I think that the thing that I try to do as a teacher is to really get in touch with what is the ability of this child, what can this child do and do well, and feel good about . . . and then ask that student to perform on that ability level...

Juanita's ability to see every child as capable of learning came out as she described how important it was for teachers to overcome their ignorance:

Teachers who've never been exposed, they have all these old ideas. I mean, I was the same way, I didn't want to be involved with inclusion when we first started it. But when I was working on my masters, I had an inclusion classroom and I told my cohort, "Please come to my class and visit, you can come any time."

One woman told me about this little girl in one of her segregated classes and she said, "She sits in there and she does nothing all day long except for move her hand or foot" . . . I mean, she shook her head like a "no" back and forth and said, "you know, when they say she's going to color, they put a crayon in her hand and she just does like that". And she said, "Now, you just tell me, what could she get out of being in a classroom?" And I said, "Friends." Her response was "Well, she can't learn anything, what is she learning now?" I said, "But she can learn. You'd be surprised what they can learn."

I told her and the others in my cohort about kids in our classes, in our school, who looked like they were totally out of it, but certain things could happen and smiles would come on their faces, or if they had to be taken out of school, they would cry and show us in other ways that they didn't want to go. So it's ignorance, because they don't know, they haven't had the experience that we have had.

Over and over the teachers expressed their belief that all children can learn, but what was even more significant was their conviction that it was their responsibility as teachers to figure out how. Somehow these teachers seemed to have become people who saw all children in terms of their humanness and who were resistant to stereotypes. Juanita said they had to be in tune to eye-opening experiences that could make you see capacity in a child that you hadn't considered before.

We did dream-catchers, and some of the really bright, top-notch students could not do the knots and the tying and that kind of thing, but some of the lower, slower students could do it like that [And snapped her fingers to illustrate]. I think Jean-Marie was even somewhat surprised by that. But that just shows you how different people have different abilities.

The Role of Assessment in Moral Perception

Moral perception also means the ability to imagine students in terms of "their best possibilities" and what they are "capable of learning" (Simpson & Garrison, 1995, p. 253), even as the context of schools today places pressure on teachers to look at children in constraining terms created by standardized learning and ability tests. Moral perception

enables the teacher to use observation and informal assessment to create a guiding image of a child's possibilities and potential. Jean-Marie described how she went about doing that:

I tend to try to do a lot of assessing from the minute they walk in the door and not necessarily just go in there with what I already know. You know, it's a little shocking to think there are kids who come to you sometimes and you know they are a lot more able or capable than they have been given credit for, maybe because of home, maybe because of not being assessed properly, or not being identified early enough as having weaknesses or abilities or whatever. So that's a very important piece of assessing, asking "What do we know about this kid... what do we know has been their experience with schooling before they came to us?" and not just looking at them as children with a disability, but at their abilities too. You have to know a little bit of their history. But you're not just looking at reading ability; you're also looking at interests, and all these kinds of things.

I really do spend those first few days, and couple weeks, just kind of getting to know the kids. I've done a lot of informal interest inventories. Juanita and I have done other things asking kids what do you like, and why do you like reading, or why do you not like reading, and why do you like math or not like math, and I have used those in portfolios in the past. But this year I just kind of kept them for my own records, and I've referred back to them. You do get to know a lot about the kids that way, too. If you do it early on, they'll be real honest.

It's a tough one, then, to sit and look at your class and say "Okay, these are the personalities I have in my classroom, and these are the different abilities that I need to accommodate for in my classroom." I don't like to do a lot of grouping by ability. I do some... I don't do a lot of that. And I particularly don't like to start the year with that. What I do is start the class with a whole group novel. Because to me that's how you begin setting up your class community. We're all in here as fifth graders. We're not here as a high reader and a low reader. To me that's devastating to start the year off with that. And I try to get a topic that's fun, and a topic that we all will probably be interested in. Usually I use the book Pinballs, but this year I used The War With Grandpa. It's a cute little book about a boy's struggles with his grandpa. His grandpa moves home because grandma died, and the boy has to change his room because grandpa's moving into their house. It's a pretty light story, but it's got some deep things you can have discussions about, and the kids get into some of their grandfather relationships, and their ownership things with their rooms.

So I start with something like that, and then I can start analyzing pretty fast which kids write well, you know writing is a big part of what we do in fifth grade. And that doesn't take too long to figure out. But the reading thing to me is a big one. It's not in my mindset to think that there are kids who will walk in my classroom and not be successful because they're not on the reading level of the typical 5th grader. I feel like that if you get to know that kid well, you can know, you should be able to know, how to support that kid in the classroom.

I have one at the pre-school level this year, a child who doesn't read or write. I didn't really look at him when he walked in at the beginning of the year as "a child who's not going to do what we do in this grade." I looked at it like,

“O.K. we're going to have to go and pull a lot of things which I hadn't had to use before.” It's different from other kids with special needs who need that much assistance, because it's not a physical handicap. It's mainly a severe disability of reading and writing. You know, but what do you do in 5th grade? You read and you write. So it's pulling things that can allow him to be successful and not looking at him as how he's different, but how is he is like other kids in the classroom.

Mindfulness

My use of mindfulness as a frame is built on a theory proposed by Langer and Chanowitz (1988); that is, mindfulness as a variable for understanding how people respond to individuals with disability. Langer and Chanowitz defined mindfulness as the process of actively, consciously constructing categories, and behaving in a positive way in recognition of the distinctions between categories. Mindfulness is differentiated from moral perception in that it requires us to look at individuals with labels of disability in terms of their struggle (as opposed to their strengths or potential) and their difference (as opposed to their sameness).

The teachers I worked with at Wilbur Avenue Elementary were very mindful of the differences in children and the impact of those differences on the children's success in the academic environment. They were also mindful of the children's needs that the teachers perceived as arising from those differences. They considered the challenges and barriers created for a child by our cultural view of learning differences. It was never used against a child nor to abdicate personal or professional responsibility for a child's participation or academic success. Learning difference got talked about as a trigger for curriculum modification and changes in instructional planning, and the search for reading materials that made the curriculum accessible for all.

Arlene's viewpoint was representative of this mindfulness of difference:
I think if children know that you respect them for who they are and what they can do, they don't mind that they're reading out of a different book or they're working on a different level than someone else, because they learn to respect themselves as well as the others in the classroom. So there's a real beauty in coming together and being different, I mean, our whole world is that way. And I think we need to groom students to go out and say, “Being different is okay. How can I do what I'm capable of doing and help somebody else to feel good about what they do?”

One of the ways the teachers viewed learning difference was as important to the make-up of their classrooms, as contributing to the development of a community of learners. Arlene asserted that, “It's important to have the whole spectrum.”

What lay beneath particular children's learning differences was considered carefully, and the teachers were quick to attribute differences in learning style to why children might learn more slowly or need more help than others. Angela explained, “I'll have children who can't get it unless they do it, and I don't think that has to do with ability, I think it has to do with learning styles.”

When the teachers spoke of specific children in their classrooms, they rarely, if ever, used that child's disability label. Even more interestingly, the teachers said that they

were often not sure of the labels. They tended to talk about labeled kids in terms of the functional challenges they were posing for them as teachers. In a discussion about feeling comfortable with children of all abilities during her initial interview, Juanita told me:

I don't really think about kids with disabilities here, the average here, slow learners here, speech kids here. I don't think that way anymore. I just think about my kids, my whole class, and I know that I've gotta do different things for different abilities or different learning styles. You know, whatever is going to keep Chuck sitting down in that seat and keep him occupied. I don't think about labels. I think we're beyond that, you know? We're looking more at the children and what we're going to do. Although people keep trying to push the labels in our faces, and right now it's the gifted parents. They're driving us nuts. I'm really interested in gifted education, but what I have found is that when you have close to thirty percent of the kids in our county identified gifted, then you've got some folks that ain't gifted, trying to be gifted. It's a status thing, you know.

The classroom teachers and the special educators talked openly about what differences were challenging them as teachers. They used a variety of official and unofficial labels to identify those differences and had also learned to talk about kids in terms of needs and not deficits. What came as somewhat of a surprise to me was that they openly categorized, responded to, and grouped children on the basis of perceived academic ability and level of academic functioning.

What Were The Differences That Mattered?

The categories that were most salient for the teachers were a child's instructional needs, how much assistance they as teachers needed with that child, and whether or not they were on grade level. The phrases "low-quartile children" or "low-ability children" and "gifted children," were used in more general ways as categories that were important to be attended to for the purposes of instructional planning.

The "Gap" was an example of a school-constructed difference that the teachers gave a tremendous amount of attention to. This "gap" seems to be very much constructed by the way in which we structure our schools and set expectations for how much and what you will learn at a particular grade level. The "gap" is the difference between what a child knows and can demonstrate that they know about the academic curriculum, and where they "should" be based on our rigid grade-level expectations. The gap was seen as ever-widening, and Angela was the most vocal in articulating its effect on the children she worked with and her concern about whether or not they were doing enough to address it:

I also have a child who's mentally handicapped in my room. You'd never know it if you walked in. If you sat down to talk for a while, you might recognize it, but this is a child who is beginning to need as much as some children with physical disabilities because of the gap. You know, when you go in Kindergarten with a mental disability, you sing and you do everything they do. First grade, you can pretty much do the same thing. You know, you get to third grade and the gap begins to get real - that's when you need those special education teachers to really kick in with the adaptations. The gap is widening. I think we've addressed things very well

with children with physical needs- you gotta have someone there to change them, you gotta have someone there to feed them, you gotta have someone there to provide care. But then there are other kids who, learning-wise that... I don't know... They do receive services, but you wonder if it's enough.

Being academically “low” was another difference that the teachers talked about as really mattering. The fifth grade teachers agonized the most over their students who were “low” in reading. Jean-Marie always used the phrase “kids who struggle with reading” to respectfully refer to these children. On a number of occasions, I heard the teachers refer to “lower quartile kids.” When I asked Arlene about that, she explained that the phrase was used to refer to children who scored low in reading and math on achievement tests, those who were at the 25th percentile or below. The special educator seemed instrumental in maintaining and reinforcing this category of being “low.” Jerri Nichols talked about the children that were her focus in her classroom interactions with the general educators:

I have to do different things for the kids that have low cognitive ability, and low attention spans, and low reading skills, and low writing skills, and then I do other things for the kids who, say, are reading on a low second grade level, and functioning there too in writing and spelling.

The only label that did enter public conversation and dialogue about specific students was “included.” Arlene explained that they used the phrase “included student” to mean a student seen as having special enough needs that they were assigned an instructional aide:

A child that comes in and needs a full-time assistant with them. Someone who's going to be there for them at all times, who's going to take them through everything. They'll probably be doing the same theme, but they will be doing different work on their desk, so they need someone there to help them.

Included students were earmarked in conversation and practice as a category of their own and were differentiated from other “identified” students. Teachers never publicly referred to the “included” student as severely handicapped although that label had to appear on their IEP to drive the intensity of services. I came to understand that “included” students were seen as having a truly significant learning difference which made teachers see them as unlikely to be able to fully participate in the academic program and as needing the support of an instructional assistant for part or all of the school day. For the general educator, having the responsibility for one of these “included” students in your classroom was seen as a challenge, and even on occasion as a burden. Therefore teachers were not assigned an “inclusion” classroom two years in a row unless they volunteered to do so.

When I first began to talk to the teachers about this study, Arlene Daniels told me she would like to participate, but wasn't sure if she qualified. “I don't really have an inclusion classroom this year. Is that okay?” she asked me when I first approached her. Yet at least four of her twenty-two students had official labels and were considered to have learning differences of enough magnitude to require special education services.

How Difference was Constructed as Disability by the Teachers

Even in this setting with these experienced professionals acknowledged as master teachers and inclusive educators, there was a real range in how disability was viewed. One teacher still used the medical model as a frame, as in “autism is an incredible illness.” Reification of the labels of disability was not uncommon. An example of this was when Arlene was talking about Stevie and said, “I was learning what it meant to be Down’s.”

There continued to be the fact that the labels drove obtaining services and supports for both the child and the teacher. Jean-Marie expounded on this in her initial interview:

It’s ridiculous to think that we have to put labels on kids but we do sometimes just to get the support we need, and the money, and I know that. With Sandy, comes money. With some of these kids with certain labels, we get federal assistance, too, I think. I do know that class programs are IEP-driven. So I’ve learned an awful lot about my responsibilities as a regular ed teacher to make sure that we are serving the kids who, because of this label, they deserve da-da-da-da-da, that has been identified. That’s a little scary for a regular ed teacher, because we really haven’t had that before.

Before we just had kids walking in, they didn’t have labels, and you just kinda taught what you thought was appropriate for third grade. Now, it’s my responsibility to go back and look at those goals and objectives for that child, and not only the special ed teacher but me to see if we’re meeting those things. I wish we didn’t even have labels. I think it’s a fact of life, and it may go away, but I don’t know that it will because of the money issue. I think you have to learn the politics of it a little bit and realize that a few things are out of your control.

Even in this inclusive school culture, a child had to be “identified” through a formal process that gave the child the label and verified that they were a child with special educational needs. In fact, the teachers used the term “identified” instead of the label. So for example, in Jean-Marie’s first interview, when she was relaying her personal history with inclusion after her year with Sandy, she said, “It’s varied in terms of kids that I’ve had, but I’ve always had some type of identified kids since then.”

Something Juanita said in her first interview provided insight into other changes in the language used to talk about difference which were occurring: “Then you have the severe LD kids, or you know, the kids who have more hours on their IEPs, we say now.” A couple of the teachers had an emerging awareness of not only using people first language, but questioning why we have to add a label at all when we are talking about children.

The teachers were aware that there were assumptions that they made because of a child’s label that needed to be examined and questioned. Jean-Marie told this story:

Probably one of the scariest after Sandy that I had was a child with severe autism to the point that the year before had been such a difficult year for him, that the year I had him, I only had him for half a day, another teacher the other half of the day, just because he was so exhausting, just so exhausting. And I learned an awful lot that year because he did not verbally communicate at all. I had never

had that. Sandy was not much of a communicator, but I understood her more - or thought I did. All of a sudden I had a child with autism and I knew very little about autism.

So there I learned a lot and I learned not to just go on what appeared to be on the surface, you know what I'm saying? A child walks into your classroom, sits there, doesn't talk, can't write . . . you can make some assumptions very quickly that are wrong. And after learning a lot from a special ed teacher, and the parents saying this is what they do at home, I started saying, "Okay, yeah, he can do some more communicating." We got some help setting up a communication board. He had never really talked with his peers before. The technical assistance center helped us with those kind of things.

So every child with a severe disability has been a little different. And I have to look at different things, and ask for more help, or do a little more research. I've learned. I've learned about different disabilities that I never would have known before.

Admittedly, there was considerable evidence that these teachers still viewed disability as an inherent weakness in the individual, one that has to be accommodated or at the very least addressed.

This is the second year I've had this child in my class. He's identified gifted, but he also has a disability in spelling, and I've had a real hard time, kind of going round and round with that. He definitely has a disability in spelling, and I need to make sure that it's labeled, because I think as he goes on, it will get harder for him. He's trying very hard, but it's a definite disability. And sometimes it takes longer than a year to figure that out, which is unfortunate for some kids, because they switch teachers within that time period. There are definitely different learning abilities, but there's also different physical abilities as you walk around our building. There is a child in my room with a physical disability, yes, he has a learning disability as well, but it's physical too, and he learns as much, and is expected to learn as much as anybody else, even though he has this disability.

What was different perhaps was that it was not just the "identified" kids who were targeted as having weaknesses. Jean-Marie said:

Everyone brings strengths with them, we know that, and everyone brings weaknesses with them. I've had identified gifted kids who were so socially unable that it was scary to think what they were going to do in the future with their abilities because of their disabilities.

Within the teacher's talk and practice, there was evidence of a shift in perception, from a vision of the classroom population in terms of separating out the haves and have nots, to the view that each member of the classroom has certain skills or traits and does not have others. Both Polakow (1993) and Ferguson and Willis (1994) give us an image of classrooms where there is a border with certain kids inside, and others outside completely or hovering around the margins. The teachers who participated with me in

this study seemed to be actively working to dismantle those borders. Jean-Marie said it well:

Teachers not only have an obligation to assess how a child is different so that they can arrange the supports and resources that will make the impact of those differences less drastic and enable that child's success in the classroom, but also to consider how the child is like other kids in the classroom and build on that.

Were these teachers necessarily any more tolerant of differences in ability than teachers who were not supporters or practitioners of inclusion? Whereas in the past that difference signaled referral to special education and removal from the classroom, now it still signaled intervention, but of a more inclusive kind. Was it because the difference served as a signal that the child was at high-risk for failure given the way schools are structured? In the past that perception/label of difference or weakness allowed the teacher to write that child off entirely, it “blinded” the teacher to the child’s strengths and capacity for learning. The label allowed educators to view that child as a failure. Now perhaps the identification of difference or weakness told all involved that they will have to work extra hard with this child to see success...and that if the child fails, it is themselves they have to view as a failure.

Arlene said:

Right now I am a tad bit frustrated dealing with a good number of L.D. students on our language arts class...Jerri, our L.D. teacher, and Betty and I have decided to split them up into our reading groups and each of us adapt a novel to their needs. That seems like a lot of work but it is better than grouping all of these students into one group where there are no role models to learn from. Planning for these students' needs takes a lot of time and collaborating! I said recently to a group of teachers, “We don't have problems, it is the problems that the students face that challenge us.”

Fidelity

The teachers were committed and caring in their responses to children with labels of disability. They saw working with children with disabilities in the general education classroom as a challenge to be taken on. My use of fidelity as a frame is built on a theory of fidelity to persons proposed by Noddings (1986), and revolves around the idea of operating in relation to others we are obligated to out of an ethic of caring. Fidelity in teaching means we consider what effect our practice and our actions will have on individual students, as well as the classroom community (p. 499). It means teachers must work to be faithful, first and foremost, to the individual, and to one’s relationship with the student. It means learning to care for students in ways that confirm their best imagined potential. It is “striving for the best in ourselves and in those with whom we interact” (p. 501). Polakow (1993) also asserted that creating classrooms characterized by equity, where children with differences do more than exist at the margins, requires an ethic of caring- “a change of heart and a change in our ways of seeing” (p.182).

When we allow caring and faithfulness to a child as a person to inspire our actions towards them, our practice is characterized by the following goals:

1. Creating community

2. Creating opportunities for each child to shine
3. Minimizing the devaluing aspect of difference
4. Communicating high expectations for all kids
5. Connecting in a larger way with children's lives and futures

Creating Community

The teachers exemplified fidelity to the children as persons and to creating classroom communities where belonging and acceptance were seen as important and cultivated. Purposeful attention was given to creating a community of learners, and to living the motto- "We learn together." Arlene was most articulate about this:

I think one of the things that I got out of the program at Polytech was the idea of community, and I've learned that part of the beauty in forming a community of learners is teaching all these differences. And there's just as many differences between two very average children as there is between a gifted child and a child that's autistic or whatever. I think the beauty of teaching is to look at that whole community...

Arlene described how she helped create this sense of the community at the beginning of the year.

I try to work real hard on creating a feeling of acceptance and comfort in the classroom and in developing an environment that all my kids feel good in. I usually spend the first week or two just doing some little cooperative learning activities where kids sit in different groups and talk. Then I'll come around and say, "What did you discuss today?" and we'll talk some more. I put them in groups of two, with partners, and ask "What did you learn about each other today?" and have them go back to their seat and write about their buddy, and then have them share with the class what they learned about each other. We do a lot of things about getting to know each other, because you can't work with someone and succeed without feeling comfortable with where each other is at.

Arlene went on to tell a story that illustrated how she talked to her students to encourage and maintain this community.

Just yesterday I talked to the class while a certain student wasn't in the room. We have a child in this classroom that needs to be encouraged to come to school. And the students will sometimes leave a note on Alex's desk and say, "It was great you were here today. Don't forget to come tomorrow, we're going to do such-and-such at recess." Or "I had fun doing Play-Doh with you. Let's do it again tomorrow." Coming from the other kids in the class, it really means a lot rather than the teacher always doing that. But I help groom it into place. We also have students in here who basically need to be read their lessons. And different children sign up as buddies, "I'll read the social studies lesson to so and so today," you know, and they actually get excited about being part of this community.

Creating Opportunities for Each Child to Shine

Even when working with the class as a whole, these teachers created opportunities for individual children to demonstrate what they did know and could do. In her final

interview, Jean-Marie described her excitement about their upcoming unit on the Civil War:

This will be a time when I can call on David. The Civil War is something he is comfortable talking about. He's so excited. That's what he's been looking forward to all year. So I need to make sure that I can let him shine a little bit during this unit.

I observed a representative example of this example of fidelity in Arlene's classroom. I watched as Betty, the student teacher, took Sharlene aside during one of the scheduled work periods and showed her how to find the weather on the Internet. They worked together for 15-20 minutes at the computer until Sharlene was able to do it entirely on her own. Later, in her introduction to her unit on weather, Betty said to the class, "Sharlene is now going to teach us how to find the weather on the Internet" and Sharlene proceeded to capably demonstrate and explain the process to the entire class.

There were a number of other examples of carefully arranged learning activities which gave children the opportunity to function as leaders and valued persons in the school setting. Sometimes these were whole class activities within which children with labels of disability were given a range of support to facilitate their "best." The Kindergarten Buddies program was an example of which the teachers were particularly proud. The principle of the program was that a fourth or fifth grade classroom was paired with a Kindergarten classroom; each older child served as a reading buddy or mentor to a younger child. They visited in each other's classrooms once a week for about 20 minutes. The activity could be as different as making a fruit salad and graphing the fruits in each bowl, but typically, the visit involved the older child reading a book to the younger child. The older child had the opportunity to choose a book that they loved as a younger child or that they thought their buddy would like. Even those identified as struggling readers in fourth or fifth grade were able to be successful at this activity. Jean-Marie and Arlene shared that:

Kids write in their journals that this is their favorite time of the week, and parents love what's happening, and ... the kids have a chance to be a real role model, and teacher...

I observed Cathy St. John preparing Daisy and another student, Bobby, for the Kindergarten buddies activity, using it as a time for direct instruction in reading, and had the opportunity to talk with her about it:

*...Like this morning for example we were working on some books that they are going to read to the Kindergarten class and they get so excited, like they want to read them **now**, but we've got to make it perfect. So Daisy would read to Bobby and I, and then we would switch places, and then we worked on problem words. We would sound them out and try different techniques, look at the picture, words, anything that gets them to say the words correctly. So that was definitely a special time when I got to work with them on their reading because the rest of the class was working on silent reading.*

I also had the opportunity to observe Jean-Marie's class and their buddies on two different occasions. I found myself quite amazed by the wonderful and expressive way in

which Terri, basically a non-reader in fifth grade, “read” his memorized story to his buddy.

Other times, teachers designed activities with the express purpose of elevating the status of a child or children seen as different or disabled. One such example was the food collection activity which Arlene’s math class, a group comprised solely of struggling and labeled learners, was in charge of. The entire school was collecting canned and boxed food for a community food-raising drive. Food items that the children brought in were placed outside the doors of their classrooms; outside of each classroom was a line with inch and foot markings, and the cans and boxes were placed along the line. Each day during the last fifteen minutes of math, Arlene took two students and they engaged in a functional mathematics lesson at each food collection site outside the classrooms. First, they estimated how many items were there based on the measurement, then they counted the total and compared it to their estimate, and finally they compared the day’s count with the count from the day before and calculated the increase. The numbers were recorded on a data sheet. Later the students and teacher used these figures to make simple graphs for comparison. After the week’s collection period, the members of the math class and Mr. Wray, the janitor, boxed up the food and brought it to the front office with the janitor’s dolly. The class’s role and the school’s effort were then featured in the monthly newsletter home to parents. I was struck most of all by one of the participating student’s comment to me during one of my observations: “They counted on us to do this.”

Minimizing The Devaluing Aspect Of Difference

The teachers were very focused on not doing things in the classroom that made the children feel different or inferior. Juanita explained her dilemma about wanting to provide intensive instruction to her students who were not reading on grade level:

I really want to concentrate on the lower level but I don’t want them to feel so different. I just have this thing about that because I know what it’s like to feel different and I don’t want them to feel different. So we’re going to do some pull-out guiding reading with those RITE group books with everybody, but I’m really gonna concentrate on my kids who function on a lower level.

Arlene described how as a teacher she herself had to learn not to view difference in devalued ways:

The children that we have, all children are capable of learning. But you just have to figure out how to teach them. Like with Bart, when he would call out in school last year, it would throw me. I would lose my focus. I had to stop and kind of recompose myself, and I’d tell the children, “We just need a minute to regroup.” And they were okay with it. When I testified in the due process case against his home school district, one of the questions they asked me was, “Was he more disruptive than other children?” In some ways, he was. Vocally, he was, but I deal with disturbances all day long. Kids fighting, kids calling each other bad names. I mean, you just basically have to stop and address the issue and discuss it and resolve it and go on. I think part of the problem at schools that take on inclusion is they’re not used to being confronted with the noise issue, like different modes of transportation in the hallway, you

know. It's a bother until you learn to accept it. You know, anything out of the ordinary may be thought of as wrong or bad, but it isn't necessarily if you go about it the right way.

Communicating High Expectations For All Kids

In individual interviews and in our group dialogues, I heard repeatedly, “We must have high expectations for all our kids.” Angela described how, even for a child that most people would consider very severely disabled, you had to have expectations:

You cannot pity them. Do you remember Robbie who was in my room last year? I never have pitied him. You just love him. You can't help wanting to, you know, give him a kiss or sing the songs with him, or just sit with him. But I think that you have to learn that you don't pity him, you love him like any other child. You can't pity them. Because once you start pitying them, you're not going to bring out the best. And that's with any child. Not just a child with a learning disability, not just a child with a physical disability, not just a child that's gifted - any child. I know that's the way for me. If you expect less, they'll probably give you less. You'll accept “I'm tired, and I don't feel like doing it.” But if you expect the best or more, then they'll say, “I'll try my hardest to do that.”

During one of our group dialogues, I learned that it was unacceptable in the culture of this school to not have high expectations for a child. Juanita was emphatic in her insistence that giving up on kids was unacceptable:

The other thing is too would you even think about giving up on a regular ed kid? Would you? NO. Even though some of their behaviors are as bad, many even worse than a kid's with an IEP, but you don't give up on that child. You continue. That's part of our job. So why give up on this other kid? You know there are days, when everybody makes me pull out my hair at one time or another, but you don't give up on those kids. You go back to square one. Rose has told us how in other schools people do give up on regular ed kids, never mind the special ed kids. I don't think we do here, though. And here's why - there's the community, the culture that we've developed, you don't give up on anybody. I mean right now I've got a kid who's worrying me to death and Susan knows I am bugging people like crazy because I want to do something for this child.

Lastly, teachers thought it was important to stretch kids with disabilities. “You're not doing anybody any favors when you make it too easy for a kid.”

Connecting In A Larger Way With Children's Lives And Futures

The teachers talked about how they had come to understand that their efforts with children with disabilities were making a significant difference in children's lives, how important their being able to see children in terms of success and capacity spills over to other parts of their lives. Jean-Marie described how she had learned to act from her growing awareness of the impact they were having and could have on children's lives:

What we do is important and we are making a difference in these kids' lives. Not just for now, but for the future. We're allowing the Sandy's in the world to be on a

soccer team for the first time, and to become a Girl Scout member, and to go to church. Sandy's mother could never even take her to church where she could sit through the service. And this education part was a piece of that, you know. So then you start looking at it, it's not just school that changes for these kids, it's their very lives. We're a very important, but small piece of that.

Summary

Having this framework of moral perception, mindfulness, and fidelity can change how we respond as teachers. If all children are seen as having the potential for contribution and success as a learner, then the onus is on the teacher to create the kind of environment that enables or nurtures that. This is the essence of fidelity to a child who has been identified as disabled within the context of schools as they continue to be structured.

These teachers at Wilbur Avenue Elementary could be considered to be actively working to break the cycle of "unable." They appeared to be cognizant that even the most positive attitude and perception of a child was not going to cure them of the struggles they had with school, but it could perhaps keep that struggle from killing the child's spirit. By constructing an understanding of the learner as someone who has strengths and weaknesses, who will do some things well and need help with others, they provided an environment of encouragement both for their students and for themselves as teachers.

Narrative Interface Four ↻“We are still trying to get a grip on what we are doing”

In Jean-Marie Matthew’s fifth grade class, Terry sat in the rocker and listened to a book on tape. There were headphones over his ears and he rocked gently as he listened intently, his full attention with the story. Terry, a non-reader despite years of special education and direct instruction, was one of three students in this class who had great difficulty with reading and who were often to be found in this corner of the room during free time. Listening to the same story on tape that the other students in the class were reading gave Terry an avenue for learning about and discussing works of literature he would otherwise not have had access to. On Jean-Marie’s desk lay a text about using literature to link the curriculum by an award-winning and published colleague and educational leader within the district.



Specials, which included library, physical education, music, art, and guidance, occurred at the same time period each day of the week for each grade level, and thus classroom teachers had a regular daily planning period. In addition, one day a week a teacher was provided with one full hour of planning time by the occurrence of two specials scheduled back to back. The teachers and Mr. Peters had come up with this arrangement as a way to build in significant opportunities for collaborative planning and problem-solving within grade level teams of four classroom teachers and one special educator.

It was 10:20 on Wednesday, time for the weekly fifth grade team meeting. Gathered around the worktable at the back of Juanita Russell’s room were the four classroom teachers: Juanita, Jean-Marie Matthews, Dan Barker, and Holly Smith. This was Holly’s first year at Wilbur Avenue and first year with inclusion, and Jean-Marie informally mentored and supported Holly in whatever way she could. Susan Lane, the special educator, was present. She too was new to Wilbur Avenue Elementary this year, although she had worked with some of the faculty at another school in the past. Juanita’s student teacher, a quiet young woman named Jody Jahn who had only recently become full time in her placement, joined the group shortly after the meeting started and sat next to Amy Little, Jean-Marie’s student teacher.

Juanita got things started by passing out an agenda for the meeting and initiating the discussion. She emphasized that their top priority was to make final decisions on how to spend the \$600 they had been allocated for purchase of trade books as alternatives to textbooks. Jean-Marie and Juanita shared the results of their research on what titles had already been ordered and were being considered by the library. Jean-Marie noted that they would be able to order one of the books they really wanted with the additional monies Holly had received for a special project. They all jokingly expressed gratitude for Holly’s “generosity.”

Susan, citing the need for books to be used as resources to complement the social studies curriculum, asked “Well, what about Bud Robertson’s children’s book on the Civil War?”

Jean-Marie acknowledged this book as a good resource, but informed Susan that most classes already had at least one of them. There was some discussion about the need for books for gifted students, but they quickly achieved consensus that there were plenty of those thanks to purchases made for each school by the countywide gifted program.

“What we need is high interest, low reading level materials,” Susan declared emphatically.

“Yes, agreed, but the book titles on the approved list from the county that we have to order from are limited,” Jean-Marie noted.

There was a flurry of discussion about whether or not a set of Rigby readers could be ordered with instructional monies, rather than the limited pot of money for alternatives to textbooks.

Someone asked, “Didn’t we borrow these from first grade? Couldn’t we continue to do that?”

Jean-Marie explained from her viewpoint the limitations of borrowing and the need to have a set of such books readily available. “After all, first grade is going to need them back after a week or two. We’re always going to have children who need that level of books, and there are very few that the David Reed’s of the world can read when we have independent reading.”

Contention arose between Juanita and Susan. Juanita raised her voice, “If you are going to require children to read something by themselves, then it needs to be something that is going to be on their level.” Juanita then used her own son, Reggie, as an example, and told the group how she had made a point of this at his IEP meeting.

“Well, I’m not sure it has to always be that way. There are limitations to controlled readers like the Rigby books. We need an array of resources that range from comfortable to challenging. Wouldn’t it be great to have science fiction selections? I wish there were more of them,” sighed Jean-Marie.

“We need to start writing them ourselves!” Juanita declared.

Susan chimed in. “We need lower level novels too.”

There was more discussion about the Rigby series.

“Does it make sense to buy individual copies or sets?”

“But they are so expensive.”

“Well, let’s list what we have decided to buy so far,” requested Juanita. She kept notes of the titles they wanted to order, the ordering tasks to be accomplished, and who would be responsible as they proceeded with the selection process.

Jean-Marie referred to a piece of paper in her lap and read off the titles from the top of a list she had written down earlier. Dan recited several from a list he seemed to be carrying in his head. He raised his eyebrows when Jean-Marie asked, “I am assuming these are non-fiction?”

The other teachers added their requests to the list, and they went around the table again. At one point Jean-Marie looked puzzled and asked, “What level is that one?”

Dan said fifth. Another title was called out that Jean-Marie was unfamiliar with and she again quizzed Dan on the grade level.

“Well, they’re all new to me. So we can have higher level ones?” asked Holly. A brief side discussion followed about levels of giftedness, which the teachers termed very gifted, questionable gifted, and higher level, and what reading materials they had found to be good for the various levels. There was some question about the availability of a few of these titles, and Jean-Marie asked Jody to go down and check what books were on the shelf in the room off the library where the gifted books and other resources are kept.

“Dan, did you get the books you really wanted?” You could count on Jean-Marie to make sure that everyone had given their input.

Dan discussed his needs for books on the Civil War which prompted Holly to ask, “ Well, when you have children not reading or reading way below grade level, do you just read books like Bud Robertson’s to them?”

Both Jean-Marie and Juanita chimed in “We do that more for their research project. We want them to learn as much as they can about the subject they are studying without having to get bogged down in whether or not everything they are reading is at their comfort level.”

Juanita offered to check on Rigby books and prices and available discounts, and, for the other books, the bookstores that offered 25% off and free delivery. She suggested that they let the store they had been using know what their competitors were doing as a way of getting the most out of the monies they had available.

Another book was added to the list for ordering. Jean-Marie provided a rationale. “Even though this is considered a gifted third grade book, it is perfect for us to use for poetry in the fifth grade.”

The discussion moved on to upcoming statewide testing and how Susan’s schedule might change. Two field trips were planned and a number of upcoming events including a performance by a traveling theater group and the Odyssey of the Mind competition, which had to be planned around, were discussed. Jean-Marie alerted the others that they would need to work in a trip to the middle school for students like Terry, for whom transition planning would be essential.

“We still have not finished deciding on our books. Do we have time? Your classes will be coming back in less than five minutes. You know, we have to do this in the next week or we are going to lose our money,” admonished Jean-Marie. “When can we do this?”

“Are you going to be here on the workday on the 17th?” Juanita asked.

“Not if I can help it. I have got to find some time to finish that paper for my graduate class,” Jean-Marie exclaimed.

After a bit of wrangling, they decided they could meet again on Tuesday morning at 8 a.m., forty-five minutes before the first arrival bell. In order to do this, Susan, the special educator, would have to reschedule her regular time to meet with the aide in Holly’s class. As Dan rose to leave, he apologized for scooting out and said he needed a few minutes to get some things together before his students arrived back in the classroom.

Jean-Marie looked at the list of books to be ordered and asked pointedly, “Will this solve your concerns, Juanita?”

Juanita responded somewhat dejectedly, “Whatever, I don’t care.”

“You do care, you know you do. Talk, Juanita, tell us what you are thinking. It’s about the Rigby books, isn’t it?” Jean-Marie took on the role of conciliator and mediator, and helped smooth out the hurt and angry feelings that hung in the room. “Are you upset because we went back on decisions that were made when we met last time?”

“You know, it’s because I’m just so concerned that we’ve got these children who are going to leave us and still not be reading at a level where they need to be.”

Holly commented, “This is really a major thing, isn’t it, getting reading materials at the low level.”

“Look at the children who need it, our non-readers, and what little access most of them have to things they can read at home,” Jean-Marie noted. There was a brief discussion about what happened when they gave books to children to take home, and how difficult it was to replace books when they were never returned or came back torn or with pages missing or destroyed.

The arrival of Juanita’s students at the classroom door signaled the end of this week’s grade level meeting.



Jerri, Arlene, and Betty wrapped up the discussion they had been having at the back of the room about a particularly “needy” child while the children, working in pairs, finished giving each other their spelling tests. Each student had their own individualized list of words which included both teacher and student choices. Arlene directed them to hand in their tests and help each other put away their work materials.

Jerri moved to the front of the room. “I want my group up here... Jesse, Samantha...”

Joseph asked, “Are we are going to reading groups now?”

As way of reply, Jerri continued with her directives. “Class, Ms. Daniels’ new group will be at the back table.”

“How did our group get split up?” one boy asked. The children did not know it, but groups for this new round of history-based novels had been created by grouping those with similar levels of reading ability, unlike the last novels about Pocahontas in which they had worked within groups which were heterogeneous in composition.

“We decided to mix things up a bit,” Arlene responded with a smile.

Arlene’s group, composed of the top seven readers, had read for homework the first two chapters in a book about King George. Betty’s group of seven students had started a book about Patrick Henry, a simple but engaging text that she had stumbled upon at the university bookstore.

Jerri, at her request, had the identified students and struggling readers. There were eight children in her group, and they were reading photocopied teacher-made pages about King George. Before her on the table, Jerri also had a flip chart recreating these pages with blank words to be filled in.

Betty began her lesson by having her students review what they had read last night and complete factual statements about Patrick Henry using sentence

strips. Two girls from her group sat away from their table and worked on their own.

As her children worked on this task, Betty made an aside to me, "I have the wild bunch."

I looked over at Jerri's table and said, "Well, wouldn't people consider that a wild bunch, too?"

"I don't know," Betty replied. "It's all how you look at it. I do better with the low group. The middle group is the hardest for me."

This arrangement of three teachers with three small groups provided plenty of opportunity for direct instruction and intense engagement in learning. The room seemed filled to the brim with activity and buzzed with the sound of multiple voices.

Jerri shushed the children at her table and requested their undivided attention. She pulled out a book from the box of materials at her side and began to read aloud to her group. This was also a text about King George, but at an early primary reading level. Every paragraph or so, she stopped reading and asked simple questions for the students to respond to. Jerri's questions seemed targeted at helping them make connections with key social studies facts and concepts about the Revolutionary War.

"Did Patrick Henry do this?"

"What does that mean 'he closed the harbor'?"

"What would it mean to the colonists if they couldn't get their ships in and out? Raise your hand when you think you can tell me what would have happened?"

Jerri provided a range of verbal cues to prompt answers from the children.

The seven students in Arlene's group became quickly engaged in a lively discussion about their book. Five of the seven group members were boys, and they seemed much interested in the subject of kings. Arlene spurred their thinking by asking facilitative questions such as, "What kind of character have you seen before that reminds you of King George?" and by making connections for them with other books they had read. They talked about the process of coronation and the meaning of symbols, and discussed vocabulary words like scepter and regalia. "Do you know what an ermine is?" Arlene asked, and was not surprised when Reed began to share with her and the other children his vast store of knowledge on this member of the weasel family and the long history of the use of its fur as a designation for royalty.

Betty challenged her group with a special task. "What does liberty mean? As in 'Give me liberty or give me death,' what Patrick Henry meant when he used the word liberty. We're going to memorize his speech. And it will be very exciting because when we go to Williamsburg next month one of you will have the chance to say the speech in the same spot where Patrick Henry gave it."

"How was this important, having the princess come from another country?" Arlene urged her group to think for a bit before answering.

“For awhile King George had every reason to feel confident. That meant he felt very sure of the actions he was taking against the Colonists,” Jerri explained to her group.

The students in Betty’s group were directed to read several passages from their book in partners, and to take turns reading to each other. Betty also asked them to talk about what they were learning from their reading.

Jerri moved on to a task that she had designed to reinforce new knowledge about Patrick Henry and to improve reading comprehension skills. She had her students move back and forth between the text in front of them and her flip chart, first reading sentence by sentence in the text, then orally filling in the blanks in the sentences as she wrote in their correct answers.

In Arlene’s group they moved on to a discussion about arranged marriages. One student made comparisons between two princesses across historical periods, another talked about his interest in philosophy. Arlene noted, “Dr. J., who comes and works with us during writers workshop, is a philosopher, you know. He likes to think about stuff.”

In Betty’s group, Charlie, who had hunted with his father, explained to other students what the word game meant in the context of their text that talked about a ban on the hunting of game.

Jerri’s students engaged in an oral sentence completion task that required them to recall what happened at each major historical step leading to the Revolutionary War and who did what to whom.

“What body language did George use to make himself seem more kingly”? Arlene’s group was asked to think and write about this question and other actions King George took to make himself appear more powerful as a homework assignment.

Betty gave her group a second book on Patrick Henry. This one had smaller print and seemed to contain more substantial content. This is what they had been reading to each other in pairs and would continue to read from for tonight’s homework.

Jerri asked her group, “What did King George think about this?” Together the children created a sentence that answered the question and she added this to the others on the flip chart. “Was it right or wrong, Samantha? Give me a sentence.” She directed Samantha and the other students to a place in their text and had them re-read the sentence, which contained information she wanted them to use to end their paragraph. Alex started to end the paragraph with a statement about the revolutionary war, but Jerri interrupted him and stopped the completion of his thought by saying, “Wait, we aren’t that far yet.” When they finished the construction of their paragraph, Jerri had her students read the page in unison.

Jerri gave a final directive. “I want to see at least three sentences in three minutes,” and had her students return to their regular seats to write.

Betty gave her children a writing assignment as well. Each student was provided with a photocopied sheet of paper made to look like a scroll, and asked to use their imaginations and their new knowledge to write an edict from the King to the Colonists in America.



One of the student teachers had a question for the teachers. We were in the midst of an intense discussion about making adaptations and who do you do them for during one of our group dialogues.

*“My question is for... those of you who have more experience.” Betty laughed when she said this. “Are there other times that you make the decision **not** to adapt or towards the end of the year maybe not adapting as much? Sometimes I’m concerned about how much we’re adapting. I don’t want to teach them helplessness. What do you think about this?”*

Arlene looked at Juanita as Betty said this. “Ready, Arlene?”

Jean-Marie laughed. “She’s the Queen of Learned Helplessness. She’s been saying that a long time, years.”

“I thought I invented that term,” kidded Juanita.

But Susan began to speak. “Well, let me get up on the soapbox a little, because Jean-Marie and I have been talking about this too. You need to really look at that child and think about why you’re adapting for that child, what the true disability is, you know, and provide the adaptations so that supposedly they’re on their level. I feel like we say, ‘Well, he’s LD in reading and he has an IEP and we have to water it down, water it down, water it down, until they get an A or a B on it.’ I truly feel like if you’ve given them all the opportunities to access the information the way that they learn and then you adapt it so that it puts them on an equal plane with everyone else, then you grade them accordingly, that’s just my opinion.”

Betty asked, “So if you do that, what happens when they get to the sixth grade?”

“Well, they still have an IEP,” commented Juanita.

“Well, I guess I was confused because when I student taught in the sixth grade last semester, I felt for some of those kids because I wasn’t allowed to give them the adaptations I would have wanted to. Some of them were just, just way out there, they were so lost, and it was just getting worse and worse.”

Susan asked, “Were these kids that had IEP’s or were these kids who just...?”

Before Susan had a chance to finish, Betty replied, “Both.”

Susan continued, “Because I think it is more of a problem with the kids without the IEP’s, those ones that fall between the cracks, the at-risk kids ...which we do adapt for here.”

Angela saw this as the controversial issue. “Yeah, and then you start asking yourself hard questions. Do I adapt for this child? There are no IEP goals for him. Am I not expecting from him what I expect from the person who sits next to him? Neither one has a label, neither one has an IEP. Does this child not go home and study because he knows I’m going to give him the adapted material? I mean, I’m sorry, I’m just a little...”

She stopped what she was saying to acknowledge Juanita’s jerking hand. “Do you want to say something? Are you disagreeing?”

Juanita began to shout. “NO, I’M TOTALLY AGREEING. Because nothing makes me madder, than you give em and give em and give em and give em and they go home and they do diddly-squat and they come back, they fail the test and then we say, ‘Oh, poor thing. I’ve got to give them another test. But this time I’m gonna make it easier because they didn’t pass it.’ But what are they doing when they go home? Nothing! What are they doing in class? Nothing!”

Jean-Marie countered, "Yeah, but there are some kids who still won't do well on that second test."

The teachers went on to talk about the importance (and difficulty) of striking a balance so that things aren't so easy that a student can just pass everything without much effort and they're not so hard that the child gets frustrated and gives up.

Angela told this story to illustrate another point about learned helplessness. "You can really get caught too between wanting your kids to be successful and doing too much for them. There's a point where you have to realize... I've got to give them this, but they've got to give this back. It does create learned helplessness if I always help them, and we saw that with some of our kids last year." Angela began to act out a scene. "The special ed teacher would walk in, and Terri would loudly proclaim, 'I'm over here.' They think immediately, 'They're here for me.'"

This got a laugh of recognition from some of the other teachers.

Betty added, "Or they automatically come up to you, 'Okay, will you help me now?' and they don't even try it themselves first without your help."

"Even if it says 'do this' or 'color this' at the top of their paper, they immediately look at me and say 'What do I do?'"

Jody spoke up. "Well, I have a question about adapting tests and stuff. What do you do when they say 'Why does so and so have a different test than I do?'"

Juanita said as an aside, "Well, we've had that discussion before."

Jody continued, "When I gave the health test, I had two kids come up and ask that. I showed the test to both of them, and I said 'I'm going to give everybody the same one.' But the first part was very basic, the second part I had decided to look at certain students and maybe not grade that second part as heavy as I grade the first part, weigh the second part different."

Amy interrupted with a compliment. "That was such a good story."

Juanita agreed. "That was wonderful. It was a story that had incorrect information and they had to go through and find it..."

Susan went on. "But it involved a lot of different skills besides just having the content of the science."

Jody explained to the others. "Yeah, it was on personal health. They had to read it and correct all the errors. I flip-flopped everything. The story involved the kids too, it had all their names in it. And so everyone did it, but not everyone was graded the same on that part."

Arlene told the group a related story. "We stood at the door one day, and Betty handed out one test and I handed out the other test, and we just came in and kids just took the test. But another time I got that question, too, Jody, and I said 'They're both testing your knowledge on the same subject. They have the same questions that you have to answer in different ways,' and nobody seemed to have a problem with that."

There were murmurs of assent from others in the group.

Betty added her own observation. "The only ones that ever say anything are the ones that have the easier test because they want to be challenged so that's good."

I turned to Amy and Jean-Marie and reminded them about a similar interaction I had observed in their classroom with Terry. "This was a while ago now. It was while I was watching you give out your first test, Amy, and you had made different tests and

Terry said, what did he say? 'Are these tests the same?' I think it may have been the color that was different? You gave me the one that was pink."

Amy noted, "Because we had used three different colors."

I continued, "Oh right. So he's watching me observing and catching on that there's something about these tests, so then he looks at his test and says, 'Is my test the same? And you answered him and said... It was good, but I can't remember."

The group had a good laugh as we tried to sort out this remembered story.

Amy and Jean-Marie then said in harmony with other voices in the group, "Everyone is being tested on the same information."

Arlene built onto this story with one of her own. "Sometimes they've asked me, 'How come he has a word bank?' And I say 'Do you think you need one?' 'Well, no,' is almost always their response."

Jean-Marie recalled another way that Arlene had answered that question in the past. "Remember when you said, 'You can have that test if you want it, dearie.'"

Angela told of a strategy she and others had used before. "Sometimes we put a word bank on the test for the kids who have theirs adapted and we put another one on the board, a bigger one, and if the other kids say, 'Where's my word bank?' we just say 'It's on the board.' And usually there are a few more words in that list.

Arlene gave an alternative. "I think you can just say 'I think you can do it without one. I know you know that,' and give them that little edge..."

"That's what I did when I was giving the same test, full range for everybody," Amy told the group how she had come up with something similar to Angela's strategy.

"And I gave them a choice. I gave them all one test and then I said, 'When you feel you're ready and you need a word bank, raise your hand, or just let me know.' And so they worked, and I'll tell you, some of the more gifted students raised their hands right away. Some of the other students just worked as hard as could be until the bitter end when they had five minutes left and just couldn't figure out the last few.

I was particularly taken with this idea, as well as impressed with the others that had been offered. "That's a good strategy," I said to Amy.

Arlene had the final word on the subject under discussion. "Kids like a challenge, I think, if you put it out there for them."

Chapter Four ✎ Negotiating Difference

When the teachers shared that they had been afraid of including children with special needs, they referred back to the initial questions they had about whether or not these children would be seen as successful in the regular classroom and how this reflected on them as teachers. This fear seemed tied to their own fears of failure. Stone (1998) talked about the language of failure that gets internalized by teachers, and thus when teachers encounter and assume responsibility for children whose difference has been equated with school failure or special needs and who are not seen as successful as measured by standardized tests, teachers often see themselves as failures too.

Arlene still identified with this feeling of anxiety and deficiency invoked by teaching students with significant learning differences:

I sympathize with those teachers who don't know what to do because I didn't know what to do. You know you really feel like you're out on a limb. I mean Betty still sees me struggling, and trying to figure out what to do. Like "How am I going to teach this math lesson while I'm cutting and pasting and trying to make it simplified?" And it's hard for me. I'm used to fourth grade curriculum, and how am I going to teach fourth grade curriculum but down at a first grade level where instead of text to read, there's just words and pictures to look at?

The teachers had come to see that their actions and practices played a direct role in a child's academic success or failure. When Jean-Marie shared with me what her first year of inclusion with Sandy meant to her as a teacher, she made this element of responsibility very clear:

Sandy's mother said this to me, "My child will succeed because of you, or will not, because of you. It's your call." And that is the scariest thing that was ever probably said to me. And she was so right. I didn't know how right she was. I had been planning on just going in and doing what I'd always done, which was teach, and had been assuming, somewhat hopefully, that Sandy would be successful. But Sandy's mother knew more than I knew. She knew that I could set that classroom up for success or I could set that classroom up for failure.

What struck me was that even though categories of difference, especially differences in academic ability, were still alive and well (and this had been an unexpected finding, one that surprised me), the teachers treated all children as equally deserving of their time, attention, and skill, and that all children had the right to a curriculum which enabled academic success and learning. Juanita tied this feeling of responsibility to their school philosophy and spoke for all the teachers when she made this observation:

I think that here the children are first and with that, you want your children to succeed. You do whatever you can do make them successful and that's the bottom line, whatever it takes, whether they're kids who are gifted or struggling

Throughout their interviews and our dialogues, the teachers talked about their on-going efforts to develop the curriculum and teach in ways that children felt a sense of "accomplishment."

If something didn't work in the classroom, I stopped it, I didn't continue with it. I went, "Okay, this doesn't work. We're going to change how we're doing this." Even if we were mid-stream, in the middle of a lesson, and something wasn't going well, I'd say to the class, "You know, I think we'll continue this tomorrow, it doesn't seem to be working." You have to be willing to see that there are other ways of approaching a lesson.

As illustrated in the previous chapter, these teachers had learned to see children with disabilities in new ways. With these new images of children, came new visions or images of themselves as teachers and what it meant to be successful. It wasn't just their ways of seeing children that were transforming, it was their practice as well. This process required risk-taking, flexibility, and a willingness to change. The teachers told me that "you have to be willing to take risks and to try some things you haven't done before" as well as "do different ways of teaching." It required the teacher as learner rather than the teacher as expert mind set. Juanita said that when they were first starting with inclusion, they as teachers literally had to "relearn our craft." Arlene talked about how she felt as a teacher in those early years of including children with disabilities in her classroom:

I was feeling very stretched as a teacher and very inadequate in meeting the kids' needs. I did not feel very confident about my own abilities. I had to ask myself, "How can I change to make it work?"

Essential Understanding Two

The second of the three essential understandings that the teachers constructed was this: If they were going to be able to move past feeling inadequate in meeting students' needs and get past their fears of not being competent or successful as teachers of children with special needs, they would have to figure out how "to make it work," to negotiate those learning differences that mattered the most.

For the purposes of this inquiry, I was very interested in understanding the process by which these teachers negotiated those differences. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1989) defines *negotiate* in this way: to "deal with (some matter or affair that requires ability for its successful handling)" and also "to handle through conference, discussion, and compromise." By saying I wanted to learn how these teachers negotiated difference, I meant that I wanted to understand how teachers actively responded to perceived learning differences in children in their classrooms within the confines of the educational structures that often proscribe a particular way of acting or responding. I wanted to see how responding to difference shaped their practice and what was it about the context that facilitated or complicated that response. I wanted to know why, when, where, and with whom that process of negotiation occurred.

The school had a well-articulated philosophy of teaching and learning which guided their curriculum and their practice, but within that framework these teachers were still trying to figure out what "worked" for what kids. Learning differences were identified, not as a means of abdicating responsibility for certain children or relegating certain children to less valued and less desirable learning activities and objectives, but to help them figure out in what ways they needed to vary and diversify learning activities in order to make the curriculum and the goals that they had for that curriculum accessible to all. Students were talked about and responded to in terms of perceived differences in their ability to progress through grade level subject material, with math and reading being the most salient, and curriculum planning revolved around these differences.

But whereas in the past, low academic achievement or ability meant either exclusion or failure, now these differences were seen as part of the normal range of learning differences that a teacher must adapt to in her classroom. These teachers took responsibility for enacting their beliefs - that all children regardless of perceived ability levels deserve to experience academic success and to be meaningfully engaged in learning activities that are a part of the curriculum for their classroom and their grade level - and did so by deliberately varying the way they grouped children for instruction and the materials and activities they used for teaching.

Most significantly, the development of a flexible, creative, meaningful, learner-centered curriculum and the deliberate manipulation of mixed and homogeneous groupings for instruction and cooperative learning was accompanied by reflective consideration of the curriculum's usefulness in creating spaces for success for children with labels of disability or seen as struggling learners. This resulted in an on-going revision of their practice as they weighed its usefulness in contributing to the academic success of all their students. Arlene articulated the relationship between student abilities and needs and their practice as teachers:

The make-up of your class is so important. Who you have as students determines a lot of the way you teach, and every year is different. From year to year... nothing goes the same, because of the make-up of your class. So you do things differently, and there's never such a thing as "Well, I do this every year, and it always goes the same way." I'm teaching so totally different this year than I've ever taught before in my class because of the kids in my class.

Nodding's asserted that approaching the teaching act from a position of fidelity will engender "a drive for competence, more and deeper learning, responsible experimentation with instructional arrangements, considered suggestions for structural changes in the school, and the exercise of imagination in resolving conflicts..." (1986, p. 504). Angela noted that they all were people who had a "yearning to learn more." Juanita brought this out in one of our dialogues:

What I hear others say and I know that we do is that we are always trying, always searching, always doing. No, we don't always know what to do, but we don't just sit 'em in the back of the room. We go, we ask, "Do you have something, do you have any ideas?"

Teachers told many stories that illustrated this always trying, always searching, always doing. They openly confessed that they were still learning to negotiate difference, still learning to create classroom spaces that included and challenged all children, and still learning to teach.

We are all still trying to get a grip on what we are doing, and we're all still trying to learn to do it better.

Negotiating Difference through Curricular and Instructional Strategies

During the time I observed and interacted with the teachers, there were three areas that prompted the most dialogue and which were representative of the way the teachers were figuring out how to negotiate difference: the use of a learner-centered, literature rich, theme-based curriculum; the use of various patterns of grouping for instruction and cooperative learning, and the use of curricular adaptations and modifications.

The Use Of A Learner-Centered, Literature Rich, Theme-Based Curriculum

These were teachers who thought a lot about the curriculum and how to make content challenging and enjoyable for their students and connect meaningfully with their lives. The

themes they used to integrate curriculum, particularly across language arts, social studies and science, varied considerably, from nature topics like owls and the rainforest to history topics like Medieval and colonial times to social issues such as everyday heroes, death and dying, racial discrimination, and homelessness. They believed strongly that these themes and issues were not something that textbooks “covered”; they were best understood by reading meaningful works of literature like Missing May, Bridge to Terabithia, Jacob’s Rescue: A Holocaust Story, The Family Under the Bridge, The Great Gilly Hopkins, Stone Fox, and Call It Courage.

What made this different from other classroom settings I have observed using a literature-rich curriculum was the way the selection and choice of books was used to negotiate differences in reading ability. In her initial interview, Arlene described how she used a variety of books on a theme:

I try to have books of three or four different levels. I'm getting ready to start my medieval unit after Christmas, so we have some at the first or second grade reading level, and we have picture books, with very few words in them, and then we have all they way up to King Arthur. A couple of the books we do whole class and the rest they work in small groups. And they're encouraged to read two or three of those books, even if they read a very low ability book and a gifted one as well. And I have them read and respond in different ways.

Angela described how this worked for the students in her and her teammate’s classrooms: *In language arts, Toni is doing survival as a theme with one group, and I have two groups and I'm doing everyday heroism, and we're focusing on literary techniques and story structure. Then Jerri is doing Stone Fox with a bunch of kids, but they're still centering on heroism. We're all on the same theme, so when we come together we can still talk about the same theme. But they are reading different books. And once they finish the book required for their group, they can read any book in the room they want to, as long as it centers around some type of hero. We all read one book to start called Jacob's Rescue and talked a lot about it. And then we'll all come back together at the end next week to read Call It Courage. And we'll do the same thing again - talk about it, and chart the characters and the plot.*

Jerri and Arlene explained how the children responded to book choices:

All three groups were reading Pocahontas books and we were sharing what we learned from our books and doing whole class discussion and then breaking off and doing our reading. But there was no connection between the book and who was teaching it and what group kids were in. And Jerri's book was the biggest book, and in fact when some kids saw that it had all those pages they said, "Maybe this book isn't for me." But we never said, "You can't read that book." It was, "We'd like you to read this book first and then you can read that book next."

The big issue during the time I observed was figuring out what reading level of books and reading materials should be used to teach what students and what skills in the instructional areas of language arts and social studies. I heard this talked about in team and grade level meetings, and it was the subject of considerable discussion during our dialogues.

Angela was concerned about the relationship between reading difficulty of the text and the content she wanted a child to learn:

I don't see taking a child who struggles with reading and putting them in a book to challenge them more than necessary because all I think it does is breed failure.

This issue of reading difficulty and student success and book choices was a major concern for the teachers as well. Jean-Marie described what her team had been wrestling with:

How do you pick topics that the kids are comfortable with, and how do you pick books that are a good level of reading? Like, for a couple of my kids with learning disabilities, I'm really struggling to find books that they can just pick up and read. And then we've gotten to this issue, Susan and Juanita and myself: When do you make sure it's a book that they can just pick up and read, or when is it really beyond them? Sometimes we read it to them, and you're checking comprehension, but you're not getting the fluency thing that you really need to get down. So, it's just a lot of things that you have to look at, and sometimes you make mistakes.

During our dialogues we often discussed experiences with students that challenged them as teachers, and the subject of students who were below grade level in reading and who struggled with reading comprehension came up on a number of occasions. The crux of the issue was that differences in reading ability really required more than just books at different reading levels. It signaled a need for reading instruction. Jerri shared with the group one of the strategies she and Arlene were trying to address this:

It's pretty common in kids who struggle a lot with written language and trying to decode it, that their comprehension slips. That's why I think it's real important to work on vocabulary development when you're working in a guided reading activity; you take those key words. We're even starting some semantic mapping in Arlene's room with this new unit on the American Revolution. We take the key ideas of Ben Franklin, it's a revolution, and we create categories about it like war, government, people, and so on. Then we develop the word list of war words, the word list of political words, the names of the people in the revolution, and so on, so that we can really work on getting them to conceptualize and understand, "What was going on here?"

The most common response was to group the "low" children together for that reading instruction. Teachers were wrestling with this more than in the past partly as a function of the new model for the delivery of special education services within the general education classroom. The general educators' response to reading instruction was not that different from the way separate special education had functioned for these children in past years. This was best articulated by Jerri, the fourth grade special educator, one of the people who had argued as they had worked through the new model as a school the previous year, that they needed to retain direct instruction by the special educator in a separate resource room.

*Well, you know it's interesting. I am always struggling with this because my kids **need** to be instructed on how to read, most of them, because that's what their difficulty is. Yet we have to deal with the crossing over in the curriculum that we do, social studies is being taught in language arts and so on. So it's a balancing act between saying no, this is something that is part of the curriculum and something they need to be a part of, and now we need to have an alternative book and do some separate instructional stuff.*

The Use Of Various Patterns Of Grouping For Instruction And Cooperative Learning

These were teachers who had done a lot of thinking about purposefully varying how they grouped students for instruction and why. The teachers and student teachers I worked with incorporated a variety of grouping strategies into their practice. It was **not** that they treated children as all the same (although they talked a lot about not wanting a child to be seen as different.) Grouping is a fact of life in schools, and a fact of life at Wilbur Avenue Elementary, but these teachers consciously attended to the categories that they used to group children, not always into the haves and have-nots, but in ways that facilitated interaction and teaching and a sense of belonging and sometimes that were just plain fun.

I think what struck me most was the lack of judgmentalness in their categorizing. So when they categorized children by those who liked a certain subject and those who didn't, and or how talkative they were, it was never articulated that **these** kids were bad and these were good, but rather that these were differences that they had to cope with as teachers as part of their everyday practice. They grouped to make things manageable, to facilitate their students' success, and perhaps even their own success as teachers.

There seemed to be a genuine understanding of the concept of complementarity and the belief that we all have something we can contribute to others. The importance of cooperative learning was stressed in this educational environment:

You have to just watch children work together and learn together. They learn a lot from each other if you set up a situation for them to cooperate and do some collaborative learning. Wonderful things can come from that, but it's risky to start out, and you kind of have to know what you're doing. But you have to set up those opportunities for children to learn in that classroom. They don't just happen. It can't be just a free-for-all, and I saw that with my student teachers when I was going into observe them and they needed a lot of help setting up communities, and figuring out how can you work a lesson so that everybody feels good, no matter what their ability level is.

Betty's response to how she saw teachers shift grouping for instruction was this:
I think the whole question kind of boils down to that you don't want the kids to think they're different. You want so much for them to be successful, for all the kids to be on the same level, that you constantly change the groups. I liked what Angela said about math class at our first meeting, "I would be offended if you said our kids were grouped." Kids need to be in a place where they feel comfortable, where they're going to be successful. So sometimes you have to put them in those ability groups and they are going to be very successful with people that are on their own level, but then you change things again because you don't want them to always feel different.

Instructional Grouping Patterns

What interested me was how consistent the variation of grouping patterns was. I observed so many ways of grouping children in these teachers' classrooms; children rarely seemed to be grouped in the same way more than once or twice. Classroom arrangement and seating strategies were tied to this as well. Tables and chairs provided great flexibility. Students sometimes sat alone or with partners at a single table; other times tables were pushed together so that a group of three or four children could work together. Sometimes the tables were kept closely together in one part of the room to maximize floor space where kids worked on projects or sat in circles for discussions or problem-solving or study sessions.

They used partners to read to each other and problem-solve together, and the teachers gave a lot of thought to who to pair together. Sometimes they paired a “high-ability” child and a “low-ability child” in a tutorial style relationship. Other times they let friends work together or children who had made the same task choice.

They frequently used small groups and they also varied how they did these. The teachers gave careful consideration to group composition and how that grouping would facilitate children’s learning; they were always trying to achieve “balance.” When they grouped, they took into account the personality styles, leadership abilities (or as the teachers put it, balancing out the soldiers and the generals), talkativity, reading level, independence, working styles, interests, and gender of their students.

When I asked how the teachers made decisions about how to group kids, Angela explained that:

A lot of that’s reading level, reading and writing level. Sometimes it’s expectation level. And you really have to get to know your kids...

Arlene’s rationale for grouping was evidenced by Betty’s description of how she had created groups for a Jeopardy-style study session for their social studies test:

Well, I watched Ms. Daniels do it and she didn’t tell me how she did it, but I think what she did was make sure to have each group half boys and half girls. It looked like she put the leaders with the followers, a couple leaders in each group. She made sure not to put all those strong ones in one group. And then there are certain kids that work really well together, that keep each other on track. There were a variety of things I think she did.

Sometimes the purpose of grouping was to work to break up cliques. Angela described why they did this:

You know, we do that as teachers too. If we have to go somewhere, the people from Wilbur all sit together. You know, its safe, comfortable. People tend to sit with the people you know and get along with. So we work to break kids up sometimes. I’ll say, “Sit with someone you don’t know very well or someone you don’t want to,” and they all go “ughhh.” But they do it! Sometimes we do it to get them to mix with people they don’t know or wouldn’t ordinarily hang out with. Sometimes it’s to cut down on the talking!

There were times when I observed and teachers reported using whole class groupings. They had class meetings and peer-planning sessions that were done with the group as a whole. I saw teachers read books to their entire class; these sessions were usually quite informal and community building was part of their purpose. But even when teacher directions and academic instruction was provided to an entire class, teachers frequently followed this up with hands-on work done in pairs or small-groups. So for example, I observed Angela explain how to reduce fractions on the board and put up a set of problems for the class to work on. She told the class, “These are **hard**. We’re going to help each other do these,” and then she instructed the children to work as partners and do the problems with a person sitting at their table.

Grouping by Ability for Instruction

The big issue during the time I observed and which ended up getting discussed at every one of our dialogue sessions was whether ability grouping for certain kinds of instruction was a good thing or not. The practice of ability grouping for instruction became a “hot” issue. Jean-

Marie even asked her colleagues, “Well, how is this different than the old red birds, blue birds, yellow birds groups we used to do when kids were tracked from first grade on?”

One of the biggest sources of pressure to ability group children for reading and math stemmed from county-mandated requirements that children given the label of gifted receive differentiated instruction. There was a special math curriculum called CSMP. Differentiated instruction in language arts required that children read at least three books from the county book list designated as “gifted.” Angela said quite proudly that her students identified as gifted had done five books that year. At least several times a week to daily these “gifted” children were pulled aside for this differentiated instruction. Jean-Marie made this observation about why some of her fellow teachers did so much ability grouping:

They're feeling a little of the pressure that we all feel, meeting the needs of the gifted kids, and then all of a sudden you've got that piece to attend to, too. So they say, 'Well, if I'm going to do this grouping with them, I might as well group all the way down.'

Arlene was able to describe in depth for why she felt using small groups and providing intensive instruction within groups of kids grouped homogeneously by ability was an effective way of negotiating differences in learning ability, and specifically with the intent of bringing the students up to grade level in mathematics.

There are times in the classroom when I do ability grouping and I think that's okay. We level math in fourth grade. And I have just fourteen come to me for my math group. They're the low-quartile children. We take things very slow - we do a lot of hands-on. Last week, just as an example, we were talking about geometry. And we looked at the word (we have vocabulary on the wall), and looked up the word. They learned how to spell the word, and that it meant different types of shapes. We went, “Geo, me, try,” and you really have to try. Now they come in every day and want to spell geometry: geo, me, try. And we went through all the different shapes. We drew them, we used protractors, we worked around tables. We very seldom do whole class instruction.

Kids work in small groups in here, and I think that in order to really help, like in math, I think it's okay to ability group. We have the gifted kids go together and then we have two more heterogeneous groups. And we've moved kids in and out, and that seems to work okay. They're working where they learn best.

In language arts for this unit I have the gifted kids working together and I have a small reading group of kids who are reading an adapted book. But I've also had a lot of success in the classroom pairing children of different abilities, too. And we do pair reading, a good reader with a poor reader, and they help each other. Kids get a good charge out of helping each other. And they like to work together, in small cooperative groups, two or three in a group, or four.

Juanita provided her rationale for why she thought they needed to group different ways for different purposes.

I think that there are times when gifted children need to be with gifted children and lower ability need to be with lower ability because that's the level that they're working on. Then there are other times when we can mix them all up. It's just through working with kids that you figure this out. For example, with the Wagon Trains unit we're doing in social studies. That is not a time to homogeneously group anybody ... When you do it that way, the gifted kids get over the mountains and there in a flash, and everybody else is lagging

behind. I know because we did that the first year. Those gifted kids had all their assignments done, they did all their diary entries, their diary entries were wonderful, they were getting 10 points on all their things and everybody else was struggling. Here we were trying to work with these other two poor little groups who most of them couldn't even read and I said, never again. But when you mix them all up and they see that they're all moving together, then they do their work and there's that positive pressure.

Even with heterogeneous grouping there was still attention to ability level and creating a balance. Jody talked about learning from Juanita that it was important to have kids of high, medium and low ability in each cooperative learning group. Juanita said that the point of the mixed groups was so that "they can learn from each other."

Adapting And Modifying The Curriculum

The challenge then is for me to make the rest of Samantha's day that risk free, so she's as comfortable and open to learning and doing her best as she is in Math. But so much of the fourth grade curriculum is way above her head... you know, we just take little bits and pieces out of every lesson and if she can just capture one little central idea. I mean, the best thing for Samantha has been the Pocahontas unit and the Jamestown stories that Jerri adapted. She's writing a letter now as if she's Pocahontas and her letter is outstanding. And that's because she feels confident about what she knows about it and she was able to understand that. But talking about the Virginia Convention and the first Continental Congress, it's like talking French to her. She just doesn't get it. So we just need to make little stories up and get all this curriculum down on her very limited level.

Adapting the curriculum meant having to modify or lessen their expectations that children would work at the same pace or in the same way as other children or modifying the response mode they expected from children or modifying the text. The impetus for doing this work was to enable kids to interact successfully with the curriculum, to have success as learners. The teachers varied in how much of the adaptations they did on their own and how much they relied on the special educator to come up with those adaptations for them, but they all talked about how they sought out a host of other people as resources.

Arlene saw this as a gift that special educators had, and described how Prudence, the former inclusion specialist, had been such a help to her in teaching children of all abilities.

I'd say, "I'm teaching this lesson on a certain science concept, there are some children who are never going to be able to understand these worksheets" and she would come up with a whole host of alternative things that they could do like cutting pictures out of a catalogues or doing a little play.

Jean-Marie discussed how she and the special educator worked together to adapt and modify the curriculum, but Susan added that it didn't always get implemented as planned:

You know, I'll have a great plan for adapting this for this child, and then I'll find out later from her, she'll be almost apologetic, "Well, we kind of did it a little differently because this was what worked at the moment for this child." But it's great to have teachers like that can think on their feet and think, "This is how I can go about this."

Angela did most of her own adaptations. Her success seemed tied to her experience as first grade teacher, and she often went back to early primary materials she had saved for ideas. She shared with me that she felt her training and experience with developmentally younger children were instrumental in her ability to differentiate her lessons and to see that the same content or subject could be taught at a lower level with simpler materials. But she had not always felt so confident about her abilities:

When I think back about the first four years I taught, I think, "I didn't know anything." Compared to now. I've become more familiar in the last two years with adaptations. And that they need to be made, but they need to be made appropriately. And sometimes that's difficult unless you have someone who really is versed in making adaptations. I've learned how to do it by watching kids fail. And, and . . . knowing that they're not going to get this.

And actually I've learned more from this child who cannot retain information. You know, sometimes she calls me the wrong name or can't remember my name and she's been with me now for over a year and a half. And I thought, "She's not learning." I realized that I needed to really water things down for her, to get her to learn a few things, maybe just one or two things. She can't read, the test has to be read to her, you know, and I feel like I have to stand on my hands or get up on my feet and yell sometimes to excite her, to get her to think, "Well, wouldn't this be right?" But then I've got another child; his disability is that he can't transfer what's in his head (which are excellent ideas) to what's on paper. And then I have another one who does the work but can't spell, who's gifted. So it's like, "Okay, who do I make the adaptations for, and which levels?"

And it almost becomes overwhelming when you start doing the adaptations, because you want it to work for everyone. You have to realize you can't always, it's too much, it's overwhelming, and you don't have enough resources, and you don't have enough time. One of the things I do is pair up kids with writing disabilities on a computer with an aide. That's working pretty successfully right now. The two I have that are severely learning disabled have someone come in to do a lot of their reading with them.

This year I've taken chapters and adapted them myself. I really like doing it; it's just hard to find the time to do it. And it's worked wonderful. I was so proud of one of them - I adapted the whole unit, and broke it into four sections. Daisy copied parts of it to make her Virginia book, and she was able to do it by herself. And that was good for her. But there are so many different abilities; it's hard to adapt everything.

Arlene also talked about how much work was involved in adapting lessons for students with disabilities:

It's a real challenge to adapt. It's a lot of work. And you think "I'm doing this for one child?" But it's true, it's worth it and we do end up using those same lessons and adaptations with other children. And I'm using things we used with Sandy, with Stevie and with Bart, with kids I have now. But there always comes a child that those things don't work for or they have a different kind of disability and so you have to adapt a different way. You have to keep trying and keep asking for help. I know when I went to that workshop last week I was writing down these ideas, and I kept putting kids names down next to some of the ideas. I would think, "Now this would work with Jesse, and Alex could maybe do this." And as you get to know your kids, you find out how you have to make their work different, like how Angela came up with that book for Daisy. You've got

to start somewhere. You don't want to take a fourth grader and put them down in first grade - that's certainly not socially correct, and emotionally, that would be just devastating.

The processing notebook that Angela had devised for Jason was a particularly good example of a significant adaptation that gave a student, who previously would have been seen as unable to complete mathematics work, full access to the curriculum.

For a child who can't write it or retain the information, the adaptations are so necessary. But sometimes what you have to do can be overwhelming. For Jason's processing notebook, you have to write down every step you do with him, like each step for division of fractions with the calculator, like "clear calculator, plug in this formula." We've kept it up to date with the help of Frank, his aide, and it's going to be such a lifesaver for him next year when he walks into fifth grade and hands his teacher this notebook.

A crucial observation for me was that the teachers had developed the ability to stay in-tune with what a child needed to include them in the curriculum. It was an on-going process and much of the time they made on-the-spot decisions. Adaptation required truly understanding your curriculum and the child, and then having the spontaneity and flexibility to let your interactions with a specific child unfold within the context of that activity.

The process of adaptation and modification was most evident when teachers talked about how they assessed children's learning and knowledge of the curriculum. Arlene began her explanation of this with a story:

Well, here's a twist. We have a little boy in our class who came up with his own adaptations. Really, Alex has a word block. He hates to write, it's real hard for him to write. So for the questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, they were supposed to write in the answer next to the question. Instead, he went up to his word bank and put a 1 by the word that went with question 1 and a 2 by the word that went with question 2, and said "That's a way to show you my answers, right?" You know, pretty clever. He wanted to finish the test and said, "If I can get it done this way, will it be okay?" Sometimes he and the other kids will actually ask for the regular test and want to know what do the other kids have to do, and then they'll do it.

But doing the adapted test is like teaching them how to take a test. A test should be a learning experience; it shouldn't be a test of failure. I think that they're learning now that they can do well. I just notice the change in their attitudes when we hand out a test. It's no longer faces and noises, it's "Let me show you what I know, I'm anxious but this is something I can do, it's not going to defeat me," you know. I think we're making learning and testing more enjoyable for them.

Angela talked about one of the reasons she saw for adaptations seeming so hard to come up with in fourth and fifth grade, especially for the more challenged students.

Most kids are doing their work independently and you want them to do it independently. But you have to come up with a gimmick or a way to enable them to feel like they're normal, and if you don't, then they are constantly at your side. I mean it really all started with Terry shouting at me in third grade, "Ms. Mays, I need your help, need your help!" and I'm thinking "I'm sinking here! You know, so does everyone!" But I mean somehow they have to do some things more independently. Whether it's with pictures, like with

Daisy. Heaven forbid, you give her a word for the task, it's gotta be pictures. And they do okay sometimes with that. If I give Daisy a task, I can give Bobby the same task, but then to him I can say, " Now you write the words. Daisy, you go ahead and glue down the pictures, but Bobby, you give me a sentence about it."

Even though the teachers talked about how difficult and time-consuming and overwhelming the process of adapting and modifying the curriculum could be, they were committed to doing so. Arlene said it this way:

And now it's part of teaching and you don't think about it as something special anymore.

Summary

Negotiating difference was something that the teachers were very committed to doing. The crux was that they were also compelled to do so by the way schools are organized and the way they construct and magnify differences in academic ability. Reading level was perhaps the key difference, and it is one that really mattered because of the structures we have imposed on schools, in particular grade levels and textbooks. We expect children in a certain grade to learn certain information about a certain subject such as social studies or science, but we create and privilege textbooks that require that students be able to read at their grade level in order to be able to access that knowledge.

The teachers at Wilbur Avenue tried to get around this to a certain extent by moving away from relying on textbooks to teach children, and using "tradebooks" or novels and children's books, hands-on experience such as the Williamsburg trip, and the computer/World Wide Web to expand the way children could access information and subject area knowledge. They also tried to teach from a theme; this gave the teachers and their students considerable flexibility in what knowledge and frames of knowing could be tapped into. They used a range of modifications and adaptations to successfully engage children with significant learning differences with curriculum which would not have been accessible to them otherwise.

The teachers were still struggling, however, with those students who were not at grade level in reading and mathematics. The teachers found themselves falling into old patterns of justifying grouping practices, the very same arguments which have been used for years to justify separate special education. I came to see that they were trying to strike a balance between their desire to offer a curriculum that was challenging yet engaging for all learners, and their obligation to approach the content areas of reading and math as skill-based and instruction in those subjects as hierarchal in progression.

Narrative Interface Five ➤ “You learn very quickly it’s not a one-person show.”

What was scary about the responsibility of including Sandy was knowing that she would no longer be considered a quote-unquote “special-ed kid.” She would no longer be considered a special-ed kid down the hall. She was now a third grade student, in Mrs. Matthew’s classroom, and it was my responsibility to make sure that she fit into that classroom community. And I wanted that, it was a challenge that I really had never had. I’d never really had a kid walk in with the behavior problems and the severe disabilities that she had.

But I knew that it was my responsibility to go out and ask for help. You know, that’s the other thing, you go in thinking it is going to be handed to you, but it’s not. You’ve got to advocate for yourself, you have to advocate for the child, you’re advocating for the parent. And Sandy’s mother and I have continued our relationship. We still have our support system in place, and when parents call me because they’ve seen that documentary that got made I always say, “I’d like you to talk with the mother because she was the one who started this whole process for Sandy. She was the one who advocated for her to be in a regular classroom before I did.”

Now, I was willing to take on that job... well, job is not a good word... I was willing to take on that responsibility, and that’s what I did, but she kind of had to give me the nudge that it took. So it is scary because you know that, if you want, you can sit Sandy or whomever in the classroom, and let them color pictures all day long. And I’ve had, for example, a couple of kids with autism who were a little lazy. They’d love to sit there and play all day long and if you let them do that, you would have very few behavior problems. But the challenge is going beyond that, because once you’ve got them in the classroom and they’re comfortable and they know you like them and you want them in there, then you have to stretch them, and say, “Okay, what more can you do?”

That’s what we found out with Sandy. I had to get her comfortable socially, I had to get some of her behaviors in place (which didn’t totally succeed), but a lot of those things improved, and then we had to decide what could we do next. So it was a continuous thing. It was something that never could stop. It was like, “Okay, I’ve got this reached, let’s head towards another benchmark.”

But that is scary because it is your responsibility. The special ed teacher will help you, anyone will help you - that’s another thing I found out. You can even get help from staff at the central office; we did that that year with Sandy. Prudence and I got a little frustrated during a period of time when things weren’t going well, and Colleen Christopher, who was one of the inclusion program coordinators then, came in. I’ll never forget it. She came in and spent pretty much the whole day with me and just wrote the whole time. She left me with some nice information about things I could try but also left me thinking I was doing okay. And that was what I needed, too. You need a lot of affirmation. You need to hear if you’re doing the right thing, it’s good to know that. And if you’re not, you need to know that, too.

So you learn very quickly that it's not a one person show. You need everyone's help, and you can't be afraid to ask for it. And you've got to be a risk-taker. You've got to realize that if you do something and it doesn't work, try something else. And I think the schools where I've been it has worked the best. It's where the principal allows you to be a risk-taker, and you're not afraid of someone walking in the door and saying, "Why are you doing that? That's not working." You know, I think that at some schools there is that fear; that if it's not working, someone's going to look at them and say they're not a good teacher . . . "You're not teaching your whole classroom, you're only concentrating on whatever." You know, it's so easy for people to walk in for five minutes and misunderstand what is going on in the classroom. –Jean-Marie Matthews

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"I was going to ask you. I have questions for Harriet the Spy today. Do you have time to type them?" asked Susan, the special educator for the fifth grade team, coming into Juanita's classroom during the mid-morning planning time.

"Sure, no problem, Jody will be teaching the rest of the morning. Do you want to take a few moments and go over what else you are planning to do?" Juanita asked of Susan.

They agreed on their roles. Susan would be the primary instructor for this activity and Juanita would assist her. They discussed how they would help children read and respond to this chapter and to this book. Juanita pulled a text off a shelf in her crammed bookcase. It was Reading Strategies That Work, a Scholastic book for teachers, and Juanita showed Susan the section on assessing and predicting that she had been reading earlier in the day.

Now it was afternoon. Jody, the student teacher, left the room with the gifted students from Juanita and Jean-Marie's classes in tow and ten copies of the book, Twenty-one Balloons in her arms. They would be meeting in the hall in front of the library, just a short distance away.

Juanita began to set several copies of Harriet the Spy out on each table in front of the children. "One thing that I have found in my life is that the book and the movie are rarely exactly the same, and usually the book is better. So please, let's start this new book with an open mind. Ms. Lane will be teaching this book to us. Sit quietly with your book in front of you and listen to what she has to say," she instructed as she continued to pass out the books.

*"Now, we are going to do this the right way if it kills us. I said sit with your book **in front of you**." With that Juanita swiftly took the book Roger was rifling through and put it back on table. "And, William, quit perching on your chair."*

Susan sat on the stool at the front of the classroom and explained that there had been some problems with novel groups in the past. "We want things to work better for you. So you are going to do the reading in class and your writing as homework. Each one of you is to turn today's writing assignment in on Friday, no exceptions, understand?"

"Let's look at the cover of the book. What do you think it is going to be about?"

Roger responded with "She's a spy, and she writes things down in that notebook next to her."

"Yes. How old do you think she is?" Susan asked this and other questions to help them make predictions from the illustration on the cover. "Now turn the book over. Brad, will you read that for us?"

"The whole thing?"

"I'll tell you when to stop."

There were at least half a dozen words Brad struggled with or mispronounced. Susan used simple assisted reading strategies to help him as he read the story summary and excerpt on the back of the book.

"Do you think it's okay to write all those things about someone?" Susan asked of the class, and children called out a number of different opinions.

"I'm going to pass out the vocabulary and questions for Chapter One. That way we can discuss them as we read. But remember, completing this is homework."

As Susan distributed the sheet, she asked, "Why do I give you the page number when I give you the vocabulary word?"

One child offered, "So we can figure it out from what we read?"

"That's right," Susan said. "I want you to learn meaning from context. Why isn't the dictionary useful for this?"

After a long silence, Susan went on. "You can use words around the word to figure out what it means. Also, sometimes there is a different meaning in the dictionary than in the text we are reading or it gives several definitions and we don't know which meaning to use."

As Juanita passed out the sheets for homework, one of the children pointed out a typo and Juanita thanked her and then suggested to all that they make this correction on their sheet.

Susan called on a girl at the back of the class to begin reading. After the student read the first paragraph in the book, Susan asked a question about Manhattan to help students get an idea of the geography of New York City. She selected several students to each read a paragraph.

The sound of loud crying that often could be heard at this time every afternoon emanated from the hall, and Susan asked Brad to close the classroom door. As students took turns reading, other students in the class helped the reader when they stumbled on unfamiliar words.

"What does intently mean here?"

As they listened to a guess offered by one student, Susan reminded the children to keep their pencils down and save their writing for later. A few students persisted, though.

"Chuck, I'm going to take that pencil and break it into a bunch of tiny little pieces." Juanita gave Chuck a look that meant business, but her words were set in a joking tone and she smiled at him.

"What does Mr. Fishbine do?" asked Susan, but the students stared at her with quizzical looks and she had to refer them back to the place in the text where they could find that information.

One girl asked to go to the bathroom and Susan said, “Okay, but hurry back, you need to hear this.”

The students continued their oral reading with Susan interjecting questions to the class as a whole and comments to those not following directions or attending.

“Brad, put that pencil down. My goodness.”

“What does hypnotized mean here?”

“Roger, put that pencil down.”

“How about petrified?” Susan called on Nikki, one of the students she was sure would be able to make a good guess about this, but neither she nor anyone else in the class knew what petrified wood was, and Susan had to explain.

“Oh yeah, now I remember. I think I saw a piece of petrified wood last summer on vacation,” one of the students recalled.

“Are all these things really going on in the town?” Susan asked. William offered a yes in answer.

“Can anybody help him out?” After Nikki’s explanation that this was Harriet’s writing, Susan checked back with him. “Do you get that now, William?”

Susan called on René to read, and asked her to make sure and speak up. Even with this directive, her voice was very soft spoken and hesitant, and it seemed unlikely that most of the students heard her words. While René read, Chuck was making faces at the girl across from him. Juanita glared at him until he caught her eye and stopped.

Susan herself read a section and then asked, “What is a brownstone? You have to really use your context cues to know what it means in this sentence.”

Tweed was the final word Susan asked them about. No one in the class knew what it was and Susan explained. In the middle of this explanation Jody and her group returned.

“I had hoped we could get to the end of Chapter One, but we didn’t. So you need to finish the reading, and do your five vocabulary words and questions. I want you to put this in your lit log. Now, William, when’s this due?” Susan cued him to no avail. “René, when are these due? ... Friday, because we are going to have reading on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.”

When the returning students were seated, Jody asked everyone to do silent reading in their novels for the next 10 minutes until it was time for Ms. Matthew’s class to join them for Science. Susan, Juanita, and Jody took advantage of this small window of opportunity for impromptu planning and made some quick decisions about what they would try to accomplish during Friday’s language arts block.

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Friday mornings at 8:00 a.m. was the time for Jean-Marie, Juanita, Susan and Colleen to get together to discuss “problem” children. But this was the first time in over 4 weeks that they had been able to meet, and they were doing so without Colleen whose mother was in the hospital again. It had been a tough winter. Juanita had taken weeks to get over the flu which she got after her son had it. Susan’s babies had also been sick. Jean-Marie had dealt with the breast cancer of a long-time colleague and friend, and the death of her neighbor. On top

of the usual holidays, there also had been a number of school cancellations and partial days of school due to snow delays and early dismissals. This was actually the first full week of school in almost two months.

After a few moments of casual chat and getting caught up with each other, the meeting began in earnest. The team had graciously invited me to sit in; Jean-Marie had said she knew this was “the stuff I was wanting to learn about.” They had agreed that the focus of the meeting today would be Terry, but this first part of the meeting was used to fine-tune Susan’s schedule for the next week, and resolve some conflicts which had come up.

Susan explained to me that because Dan Barker and Holly Smith, the other fifth grade teachers, had “inclusion classrooms” with two very challenging students, as well as a number of other identified students, she spent the bulk of her time with them in the mornings. If Jean-Marie or Juanita really got stuck during that time, the aide from Holly’s class could be freed up to come over and work with students like Terry or Rene. They could do this if Susan was working with a small group and included Jenny, a medically fragile student with severe mental and physical disabilities, whom the aide was usually assigned to. Susan’s regularly scheduled times to work with Jean-Marie and Juanita were: Jean-Marie’s room from 11:30-12:10, Juanita’s room from 12:30-1:05 and 1:40-2:10, and Jean-Marie’s room for the end of the day from 2:30-3:15.

Jean-Marie began the discussion about Terry with a description of how much individual attention he required. “I’ve never had a student who seemed to need so much of my attention all the time. And I really think we need to wean him from that before we send him on to middle school.” They knew that people in the middle school setting were not likely to be as understanding or as tolerant of children with significant behavioral differences as they were.

Juanita and Susan tried to help Jean-Marie better define the problem. “What behaviors concern you most?”

Jean-Marie did not need to give this more than a second’s thought. “He is always calling out what he thinks are the answers and he is constantly raising his hand, and is absolutely insistent that we attend to him if I try to ignore him.”

She paused and added, “And he’s much worse with Amy.”

Amy had arrived late and was sitting quietly at the end of the table we were meeting at, preparing materials for today’s lessons. “Oh, yeah. He gets mad at me.”

Susan offered a point to consider, “Well, those things are problematic, but the good part is at least he’s engaged.”

“Yeah, but what about when he’s not, when he loses interest and we completely lose his attention. He roams around the room, and sharpens his pencil constantly,” Jean-Marie noted. “And the irony is that Terry is so cute and so likable. I know I should be tougher with him...”

I was trying to just be a listener, but felt compelled to speak up. “But you know, Jean-Marie, compared to last year when I observed him in Toni Camembert’s class, he’s really made great strides. He used to get up and leave the room and get a drink of water at least every ten minutes. Even with one-on-

one, my student teacher could never get him to work more than five minutes on anything.”

Jean-Marie perked up at hearing this. “Well, that’s encouraging. Thank you for sharing that comparison, Liz. That makes me feel a little better about how he’s doing with us.”

Susan interrupted. “You know, I just realized, we are going to have to reschedule the time for me to come in and work with Terry on his social studies test because I never could get it to print last night. Half of it’s gobbledygook, and that’s no good!”

Jean-Marie responded, “Well, Monday, I guess. Or you could just come in today and read it to him instead and have him dictate his answers. What do you want to do?”

Susan looked thoughtful, “How about if that volunteer coming in today from Polytech did that? Terry’s gotten to know her, right?”

Jean-Marie was not overly enthused, but knew this was the easiest solution. “That could work. Can you just hand write the questions for her?”

“Sure,” said Susan. “So what else do you need help on with him?” They took a few minutes to hash out how doing his research report on animals in the arctic was going to work out. They talked about using resources that conveyed a lot of information through pictures like ZooBooks, National Geographic, and early childhood science sites on the Internet. Susan assured Jean-Marie that she would work on that with Terry.

“Well, I’m also worried that his attention will stray during the book Amy is getting ready to read to the class, Frozen Fire.”

Susan asked, “Well, how is he doing with the one you’re reading now?”

Jean-Marie said, “Fine,” but qualified it by adding, “but that’s because we’re doing one of his favorite books.”

“I’ve got an idea,” piped up Juanita. “How about if you created a bunch of pictures and then as he is listening to the story he can put them in order, you know, timeline fashion?”

Everyone agreed that this sounded like a great idea.

“And I can make some pictures from today’s chapter while the kids are in PE,” offered Amy.

“I can do it,” insisted Susan. “Isn’t that my job? Of course, I don’t know the story, and you do.” She laughed. “Well, let me know if I can help you.”

“You know, talking about Terry makes me think about Stevie and how much we had to do last year to get **him** ready for sixth grade,” Juanita remembered. “We were worried about him, too, but look at the changes he made... I thought he was tough, but really, he had better attention than Terry.”

Jean-Marie pondered a possible solution. “Well, you know he probably needs to be on Ritalin... but... I don’t think his mother would go for that.”

This prompted an aside discussion about the abuses of Ritalin. Juanita told the group about a newspaper article she had read, where the parents of some gifted children were found to be giving it to their kids to beef their concentration.

Susan made another comparison. “We will have to face these same issues with the little girl coming up from fourth grade, Daisy, you know, the one we talked about yesterday in our dialogue.”

The conversation turned to William, a child in Juanita’s room. Juanita poured out her frustration and her feeling that she just didn’t know what else to do. “He can’t follow simple instructions even when modeled, and do you know, he still doesn’t know the multiplication tables, even after working on them all this year.”

Before they could get to any in-depth problem solving, the sound of the intercom interrupted their conversation. Susan had forgotten that she had breakfast duty and she was being gently harassed. She took it with good humor. “Boy, you’d think they would give a person with a bad memory a break around here. Gotta go, sorry.”

The brief remainder of the meeting was put to good use. Juanita, Jean-Marie, and Amy went over the plans for next week, and confirmed the times when the two classes would get together, and Amy and Jody would co-teach their science unit on the Earth.

Chapter 5 ✎ Garnering Support

The teachers talked openly about the difficulties of being a teacher in an inclusive classroom. They described the learning and behavioral characteristics of children that challenged them as teachers, and the situations with adults that they had to work through. They shared how sometimes it was so emotionally trying that they ended up breaking down in the principal's office or going home and crying. They told many stories about their successes, but also about their worst moments, and were very honest about feeling angry, frustrated, and exhausted at times. During her initial interview when we were talking about how she had grown to feel more comfortable with children with disabilities, Jean-Marie said:

Yeah, it gets frustrating sometimes, and sometimes it would be easier to do it the old way, you know. So I've had to become more comfortable with the unknown. I've realized that there will be children in my classroom, with or without disabilities, who are going to be different than somebody I've taught before. Initially, I wasn't a risk-taker, but having Sandy was definitely the first main step for me. But then, I'll never forget when Danny walked in my classroom - he and his Mom had come in to meet me early before school started. When he left, I started crying, because he had just run across and around the room, and didn't stop the whole time. You know, it's what Danny's of the world sometimes do, and I said, "I can't do this." And it was the year after I had Sandy, so I knew better. But I said, "I can't do this. It's somebody totally different. I want Sandy back." I wanted my comfort level back. I haven't quite freaked out like that again, but I don't know that I've ever had another Danny.

There was public recognition that **all** teaching has its "trials and tribulations," as Angela said to me during a conversation we were having in her room after school one day. "You have to know that teaching is going to be like that." In a wrap-up lunch and discussion with the teachers, Arlene helped me to understand her perspective about her acceptance of the trials and tribulations that came with teaching in inclusive education and what helped them work through the tough times:

There's no doubt about it that the positive outweighs the negative, and there are some real negatives, there are some really tough days, but I also think we have some real good role models here at the school for problem-solving and a lot of support systems. I think there have also been days when you think, "I don't want any part of this anymore, it's tiring, and it gets upsetting." You do feel like quitting or giving up at times. But with Prudence and Colleen and all these people that are surrounding us, these great role models that tell you right on the spot what to do, you can't miss.

Essential Understanding Three

The third of the three essential understandings that the teachers constructed was this: That if they were going to keep from being overwhelmed by their role as teacher of children with significant learning differences and deal constructively with the additional demands inclusion placed on them as teachers, they needed to garner support for themselves through a variety of formal and informal relationships and school structures. But they also had to work through and learn from the conflicts and difficulties that arose from trying on new roles and patterns of

interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms.

Demands on the Classroom Teachers

Arlene's statement that "We cannot be everything to everyone" captured the intensity of the demands that teachers felt on their time, energy, and expertise. During the period of the inquiry, I learned that there were a number of responsibilities and demands that came with being a teacher of an inclusive classroom.

The teachers said that **everything** having to do with inclusion took more time and required that they use every available minute of every workday (and more) to fulfill their professional responsibilities. Collaborative planning took a tremendous amount of time. Even though they had manipulated the school daily schedule to fit in as much regular planning time as possible, throughout my observations I saw a tremendous amount of impromptu planning as well. On a number of occasions, I saw the teachers making the best of a few spare moments to problem-solve. When I shadowed the teachers during my observations, no matter how early I arrived or how late I left (even following an after-school dialogue), there were always a number of teacher cars in the parking lot. I learned that their workday often started between 7:45 and 8:00 and never ended before 4:30 or 5:00.

The process of adapting the curriculum and modifying activities and instructional materials also took time. Special education teachers would often do the nitty-gritty work of these modifications, but this meant the teacher had to get fairly detailed plans to the special educator at least a day or two in advance. For those who did their own modifications, like Angela, this necessitated considerable time in the evenings to prepare:

I think sometimes that the idea of differentiated planning sounds really good, but the work that it entails...I mean, you have to be honest with yourself. I can't do that sometimes. I don't have the time to do this at home with three kids. It takes me usually an hour or so to plan math for the week, just planning it and writing down everything I need. If I differentiate at three levels, it would take me three hours to plan three different lessons, and three hours to run them all off. And I don't have six hours a week for planning, and I certainly don't have it for just math.

The collaborative effort and communication involved in meeting children's behavioral and academic needs in the classroom involved large amounts of time and emotional energy. There was considerable demand for flexibility, especially with the new grade-level approach. The teachers had to recognize that to meet everyone's needs, they sometimes needed to work around each other's schedules, and that there would be planned and unplanned activities that sometimes required that they do things differently. Angela said:

But we are flexible enough that we've said "Oh, you're doing something special, we can cancel math today." But you always have to take into consideration the other teachers...

Because the emphasis in this school was on shared decision-making and running the business of the school as a community, teachers had numerous non-teaching responsibilities that had to do with being teachers in an inclusive setting with a commitment to collaboration and change. These included child study/case consultation groups, book study groups, and issues study groups, meetings as grade level teams, meetings with special educators and others for support around inclusion, and a twice-monthly school-wide faculty meeting and issue discussion.

In the fall and the spring there were IEP meetings for every identified child. There were other semi-regular responsibilities which teachers volunteered for: grade representatives meeting with the principal, the long-range planning committee which was overseeing the needs assessment and evaluation of the school, coordination of school-wide activities, service projects, and celebrations, meetings of professional organizations such as the reading council and PDK and leadership roles within those organizations, planning for and working with a plethora of community and university volunteers and visitors, PTA, school calendar committee, field trip planning, sponsoring student groups such as Safety Patrol, student council, school store and their activities, sister school meetings, and county issue meetings such as discipline task forces.

There were the responsibilities that had to do with giving individual attention and direct instruction to and ensuring the success of children with special needs, and these were the ones the teachers identified as being the most demanding and the ones they needed the most support around. Throughout our conversations and dialogues, teachers identified and elaborated on the moral responsibilities associated with being the teacher of children identified with special needs. It was their responsibility to make sure that a child seen as having significant differences became a part of the classroom community and they felt responsible for the learning and growth of children perceived as needing a lot of individualized attention and instruction. Tied to those responsibilities were two other obligations: they had to take the initiative and the time to get help from others so that they could enact their responsibilities, and they had to keep trying in the face of difficult, trying, discouraging times that chipped away at their self-confidence and that made them feel unsure about themselves as teachers.

Mechanisms of Support

Throughout our dialogues and our individual interviews, teachers mentioned the primary mechanisms of support which were so important to them and which had been put in place when they first started with inclusion. A number of early supports that the teachers described as necessary all fit into the category of “help” for the teacher when they were not sure how to proceed or if what they had planned and talked about fell on its face. Arlene shared her reaction to a panel discussion of support that she had been a part of for a graduate class in special education at Polytech:

I mean I learned to holler, “Help!” When something didn’t work, I went and got the inclusion specialist, I went and got the principal and said, “Hey, this is not working.” That’s why I felt really bad last night when someone made a comment, “I don’t have somebody supporting me.” I thought of all the instances I’ve had where I’ve felt like there’s been more than enough support for me, that help, lots of help came my way. It must be just devastating for a teacher not to feel that support.

Because people from this school had presented at numerous conferences and published articles and chapters on making inclusion work, they had a significant oral history and written record of these mechanisms of support. The two primary ones that the teachers identified as most significant were inclusion support meetings and hands-on assistance from special education staff.

Inclusion Support Meetings

County special education administration had tried to anticipate the supports that classroom teachers would say they needed and the objections from teachers that including children with special needs would be too demanding. I learned from my interviews with Colleen

and Drew about what they had tried to put in place to support the general educator when they were first implementing full inclusion. The intention was to provide all the necessary supports on behalf of the child through an inclusion team.

When they first began inclusion at the school they were at previously, they formed a school-wide inclusion committee. This group was not only responsible for planning how inclusive education would unfold at their school, but for problem-solving and actively discussing how they were doing with inclusion. The inclusion committee supported the smaller instructional teams that revolved around the inclusion of specific children - the special educator, the classroom teacher, and the instructional aide. The committee gathered at least monthly but more often in the first year or two especially if someone was really in crisis. A more informal inclusion “support group” was set up as well.

Juanita talked about the value of those meetings:

One thing that was really good for me was the inclusion meetings. What we used to do is, we met once a month, and you could come about a problem that you had with a child, and we'd sit around and discuss it and give information, give suggestions or, "Yeah, when he was in my room last year, we did duh-ta-duh-ta-duh-ta-duh." That was precious, because there was all this knowledge. Or someone would ask, "Juanita, had you thought about this?" And we did this for everybody. You were also able to tell, "Man, you wouldn't believe this, he wrote a sentence in class today!" So you were able to get help in the areas that you needed, but you were also able to brag and be happy about some things, too.

The faculty has since said that we've outgrown that and we now do that a little on our grade levels instead of doing it as a whole school. And now we have the GIRDL meetings, which are interesting, too. They're once a month, but we have people come in, and then we talk about two issues. You can still bring an issue up for 20 minutes worth of discussion, but it's not everybody sharing like it used to be.

Colleen Christopher had initiated this new mechanism of support this year. GIRDL stood for Getting Into Really Discussing Learning. Attendance was voluntary. The acronym was a play on words, and GIRDL was billed as “for support.” Several staff members identified this as a crucial collaboration mechanism in response to the school-wide needs assessment that had been completed that winter. The teachers who participated in the inquiry with me acknowledged this present mechanism as a source of potential support, but every one of them had a bit of wistfulness in their voice when they talked about the old support group mechanism being gone.

Hands-on Assistance From Special Education Staff

As valued as the planning committee and support group were, the teachers said that, in looking back, the actual physical support of the instructional aide, the special educator, and the inclusion specialist were key supports for them as teachers.

The instructional aide “took care of” the included child. They provided the bulk of one-on-one behavioral and academic support and individualized instruction for that student. Arlene expressed just how crucial that extra set of hands was:

I've never felt like I had more than I could handle with an included child because of that aide...

The special educator basically “took care of everything else” so that the child with significant special needs would be as little trouble to the general classroom teacher as possible.

They planned all individualized instruction and provided all modifications for students with IEP's. They took care of all the special education paperwork and put in motion and coordinated any regulatory procedures that had to be completed for identified children.

Juanita talked about the value of that support:

No, I didn't have to write the IEP, no, I didn't have to make all the adaptations. Yes, I interacted with the child, yes, I worked with the child, but I worked with the child as a child in my classroom. I didn't have all this other stuff that comes along with children with special needs to do. Somebody else did that.

The inclusion specialist suggested and modeled techniques and strategies for both the instructional aide and the classroom teacher. She initiated and facilitated the peer planning sessions and the inclusion committee and support group meetings.

You know when Prudence would come in the room and have these peer planning sessions, she would always tell me, "Well, Arlene, you can go get a cup of coffee or take a break." But boy, I wanted to stay in there, because it was just a great experience to watch her work the class, and get them to come up with some ways to help Bart. She would say to the kids, "Some days you don't want to be pestered. You know, you come in, you just want to be left alone. Well, that's generally how Bart feels every day. Being autistic, you're kind of within yourself. So you really have to kind of stand back and approach him very gently and very carefully, you know ... If you want to read to him, say something to the aide first, 'I'd like to read with Bart, is this a good day to read to him?' and don't overwhelm him."

Bart had a lot of body language that we had to learn to read, and you have to be taught by somebody who really knows Bart. Bart can't tell you because he can't talk. So we basically needed someone to help us learn from the things that we could learn from, read the things about him that we could understand, and help us to understand the things that we couldn't.

Relationships of Support

Imbedded within these institutionalized structures were relationships with people. The teachers mentioned by name and told stories about those who had been instrumental in helping them learn how to be a teacher of children with significant learning differences and who had provided much needed personal support and encouragement. Their identification of these relationships as supports led them to an important conclusion: They weren't on their own in this.

The teachers could not just sit back and expect that these relationships of support would be delivered to them. Classroom teachers had to garner these supports, in essence to reap what had been sowed:

Mondays after school is basically our time that we know, "Man, if something's not going well, I'm going to seek out Colleen and get some help in some way." I think the biggest thing is that you have to commit yourself to making some time to do it. And, in the long run it pays off. But I know that some teachers don't take the initiative to get that help.

Relationships with Parents

Jean-Marie told several stories which illustrated her reliance on parent support. In addition, during her initial interview, when I asked about supports that had been important to her, she said:

And parents, anytime that you can use your parents, I've found over the years, you're more successful because they kind of know what you're doing, they know your beliefs, they know that you really want that child to be successful

Angela also felt that:

Parent support helps make it work...Jason's mother was telling me this the other day - her comment was that 'Some people think that my son is my, he is, for me, life's misfortune. But for me, he is life's biggest joy.' Now Jason is her only child. And you know, for her, he is wonderful. And he is! And parents can help you see that.

Arlene said that there was a lot to be learned about a child and their needs and behaviors from their parents:

You know, you just have to be open to new things and try different things, and seek out people who can help you. I wasn't really using Bart's parents last year enough, and then I think in November something happened, and I just happened to call his mom one night and say, "You know, this happened in class today, I was just bewildered, I didn't know what to do." And she said, "Oh, at home we do this" and I thought, "This is what I need to do, I need to write to her." So this is when we started that parent-and-school communication log where we wrote "This happened in school today," and she'd write back, "Well, this is what we talked about last night at home, this is how we addressed it at home, and Bart helped us to know that he was feeling this way when that happened." So it's communication and a lot of people working for the same end, you know, a lot of different minds coming in, and people that are willing to say, "Hey, what can I do to make it work?"

Relationships with the Principal

The literature says time and again that supportive school leadership is crucial to the success of inclusive education efforts, and throughout teachers' talk and interviews the role that Drew, their principal, played in their lives and what they've been able to accomplish with inclusion was mentioned again and again. The relationships he had with each of these teachers were characterized by fidelity, his caring for them as persons, and his moral perception and support of their capacities. This support created the kind of environment that provided space and recognition for actualizing one's best potential as a teacher. This support also created an environment that fostered professional development, one that was flexible, supportive of growth, and encouraging of risk-taking. The teachers credited the Drew, their principal, as "that someone who stands behind us, to remind us of our value system" and who "gives you that space to grow" and made "it safe to take risks."

Jean-Marie and the others still glowed about it:

Drew was so good at providing the support we all needed. I don't know of any other principal in the system who could have created this school and instill in us what he did. He is the reason that we are what we are.

During my interview with Drew, I asked him about the supports that he tried to make sure were in place as part of his role in inclusive education. Drew said first was his very strong belief that:

The teachers are the ones who should be making the decision about what goes on in the classroom...there's not a teacher in this building that I question whether they would make the right decision for kids.

Something that Angela said in her initial interview demonstrated that teachers were cognizant of this belief in them as support:

I think that one of the best things that Drew did with giving us an inclusion classroom is, they never said, "this is how you have to do it." They just kind of placed the kids and they let it evolve naturally. At least, for me it was good. I didn't want someone coming in to tell me what to do. Sure, I made mistakes but you learn pretty quickly, you know, what to do, what not to do.

Drew said the second most important thing he did was to "to be here if they need to come and talk, and to check in on them." But he had good personal knowledge of the range of supports the teachers said they needed from him, and that he tried to provide:

...My staff were interviewed by an educational researcher from another university and this is what teachers said they needed - they needed me to be active in the inclusion committee meeting, to attend and talk with them about their problems and needs, and to follow through with whatever suggestions were made about what I could do to help them. They needed practical things like my trying to get the right substitute in so if they have a difficult child and their aide is going to be out, there is someone there who can deal with the kids.

One thing I remember several of them saying was important was taking the time to write a note to say "Thanks for I know it's been a difficult day," or "I know you've had a challenging week or two. Hang in there and I'm supporting you," that kind of thing...I think the personal support needs to be there first and then the technical stuff.

Relationships with Special Education Staff

The special educators who had been resource room teachers and other specialists such as the speech/language pathologist were rarely talked about as people who had significantly contributed to the teachers' development, even when I asked the teachers direct questions in their interviews about who were the people they had learned from. It was not that the classroom teacher did not value the support of the special educator, rather that that the classroom teacher viewed the special educator as the one who took care of all that special education stuff that was basically extraneous to what went on in the general education classroom. The special educator's skills in adapting instruction and materials were seen as an important mechanism of support, but the relationship was not one that was valued, although it had potential for becoming so with the new grade-level model. Sometimes the special educator was even talked about as someone to *contend* with or to have to work around.

However, two individuals, highly skilled and trained in the inclusion of children with disabilities, Prudence and Colleen, were frequently mentioned as having been very instrumental in the teachers' growth and important sources of personal support. Jean-Marie talked at length how Prudence, as inclusion specialist, had helped her get through that first year with Sandy, and how her support of her as a teacher was so necessary.

We met often, we talked daily, we threw lesson plans out on the table and I said, "During this period of time I want to do language arts, I want to teach a third-grade novel, Sandy

can't read a third grade novel, what can we do?' Well, from her suggestions we made a booklet with the key ideas and people from the novel and had the kids draw the pictures, we had the kids put the novel on tape. So, I needed those ideas because I had not really done that before. A lot of it is common sense, but some of it is also being able to articulate it just the way you want it, you know, the way it should be. You think, I know it can work, but I need some help with this... I can't do it by myself.

Arlene also articulated how important it was to her as a teacher to have this on-going communication and "checking in":

Our team met every week. And I'm not saying we sat down and worked for an hour, but every Tuesday after school we met, and even if it was only for Prudence to ask, "Everything going well?" You know, "Any complaints? Anything we need to work on?" And then once a month we sat down and you know, actually planned and addressed the problems. And she came in once a month and talked to the students in my classroom, "How are things going? What things are going well? What areas do we need to work on?" And I just felt a constant source of support.

The teachers also talked about instructional aides that they had grown close to and learned from. Arlene shared how this worked:

When I had Stevie, I had a morning aide and an afternoon aide. I was really pleased when I was given the opportunity to sit in on the interviews. Because you want to get someone that you connect to, and I've been very fortunate. Both those years, the aides that I worked with were just my kind of person. I felt very good with them, we worked at our relationship. And we worked at our teaching approaches together. And I think that that's really important. You really have to be good communicators and that takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of energy as well. And you have to be willing to take that on.

Working Through And Learning From New Roles And Relationships

Eight years into implementing inclusion, support was a word still used constantly in the teachers' talk about their work as inclusive educators, and the need for support perhaps as great as ever. There was a cultural emphasis on creating networks of support, and in their talk, it was evident that people were very personally invested in doing what was needed to maintain and improve those relationships. Arlene said:

I think when a group of people work hard together, it's not hard work . . . you know, we all do our share, and so it makes the load a little lighter. I have always enjoyed my colleagues, but I do think with inclusion it takes a great deal of teamwork, and a great deal of sitting down and sharing your beliefs and coming to some common ground. . . . We do peer planning with the students; maybe teachers need to do peer planning, too. We need to sit down and get it all down on paper and talk out our feelings so that there aren't any miscommunications or misunderstandings.

Although the teachers' emphasis was on the support that they needed and received to help them successfully include and meet the needs of identified children, they also recognized and responded to the concept of support as a two-way street. As Juanita put it, "We all work here to help one another." Even the special educators viewed the support they received from people in this setting as crucial for their development. Susan shared with the group that the personal support and the friendships she had developed with other teachers gave her renewed enthusiasm

for her job. And although this focus on the teachers' need for support might seem self-centered to some, it was seen as having a positive impact on children in the long run. As Juanita said, "In the end, when we're doing better, so are the kids."

Though the emphasis still tended to revolve around the supports that were needed around the "included" child and other children in the class with significant learning differences, the focus was beginning to shift. Arlene had been giving considerable thought to the next step:

You know, we do so much to make sure that the students' needs are met. We have meetings- IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, we meet together as a team - and the purpose is, "How can we help this child more, or how do we have to adapt for him." But very seldom do we sit down and say, "How can we help each other? How can we really get to know our colleagues?"

With the new model of delivering special education services, they were moving toward thinking of the team as a grade level team instead of a team supporting individual children with special needs, and making use of all their resources in support of the inclusive education program for all the children with special needs and non-identified struggling learners in that grade. Fourth grade was really struggling with the transition. The principal, Drew, the consulting teacher, Colleen, the special educator, Jerri, and Arlene all acknowledged that at various times in my one-on-one conversations with them. So even though the new grade level model had as its goal a better way of providing supports for children, during the year of this study it was placing considerable demands on teachers for more time for communication and planning and problem-solving, for shaking up their old patterns they had become comfortable with, and requiring growth and a new openness on everyone's part.

When Arlene came back from a day of working with outside consultants, John and Connie O'Brien, to evaluate how they were doing with this new grade level model, she talked with me at length about what she had learned from that session:

Right now our grade level is hurting, we don't spend enough time together, and we're not communicating and cooperating the way we need to be...During thirty minutes together, you cannot get enough accomplished. We need to have two kinds of team meetings - one for paperwork and scheduling and all that stuff, and then another team meeting to focus on teaching strategies, and what's working and what's not. And everyone needs to be there. We just haven't taken the time to look at the whole picture. At the workshop, I could sit down and focus on - Now where is it that I need help, and why do I need help at those times, and who could help me during those times?

Things were working a little more smoothly in fifth grade, but Juanita felt:

We've got a long ways to go with teaming in fifth grade. Basically, our teaming is, we get together, we talk, we try to do the same kind of things, but some folks still kind of do their own thing. But I think that it's worked well with Susan this year. We've got some improvements to make. We had hoped to be more flexible with her times, and we have been able to be flexible to a point, but then there are other things that are driving her time that we can't be flexible with. Jean-Marie and I meet with Susan on Friday mornings, and that's neat, but she has separate meetings with Dan and separate meetings with Holly... But working with Susan, it's good, and it's a good start.

Trying on new roles and patterns of interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms had brought to consciousness large issues of ownership regarding the children and the classroom. So the lesson in this for the teachers was that they would have to work through and learn from the conflicts and difficulties that arose if they were going to continue to feel successful and good about themselves as teachers in inclusive education.

Issues Around Ownership

The issue of “learning to let other adults in my classroom” was a theme that appeared throughout the teachers’ interviews and in our dialogues. It revealed a large issue of ownership and power which was causing considerable conflict. The general educator thought of the classroom as *hers* and the children as *hers*. In talking about the changes they had to make to become inclusive educators, they had to become willing to share their space which as Jean-Marie said “had been my kingdom.”

Angela candidly admitted:

We’ve hit this, this year. Sometimes the other adults in your room like to tell you what to teach and how to teach it, and to let go of some of that control, and to allow them to be a part of things, I think that’s been a learning experience for all of us.

During the period of this inquiry, it took awhile for all the teachers to feel comfortable enough to talk about this issue openly. Some of it came out in their final individual interviews. In our final discussion with just the teachers, they talked in the group for the first time about this ownership problem. Angela described how threatening it could be when other adults were watching you teach:

Especially with the instructional aides who sometimes don’t hesitate to interrupt the lesson if they think something is not right. You know it puts you in a situation of intimidation. You get this intimidating feeling, even though you know, you’re thinking, “I studied this and I do know it.” I know I would write words on the board and think, “I hope I spelled that correctly.” And sometimes I would hear “Oh, you misspelled that word.” I would just get up and erase it real quick and sit back down and say, “Well, thank you.” There have been some hard times. And that’s something we don’t always think about, learning to include the other people in your room and use them effectively.

This prompted Jerri, the special educator, to bring the issue out in the open:

*I have mixed feelings about this. I’ve had to learn to keep my mouth shut in the classroom. It should work because there’s two people and they know what’s going on, and sometimes you should be able to add things. But I’ve gotten feedback that I’m jumping the gun or it throws somebody off. I think that’s just part of the eagerness of being a teacher and teaching stuff, don’t you? So I have had to learn how to focus on what the kids really need at the time when **you** are teaching. Because when we come in to your room and even though we say it’s inclusion and we say that there’s one person on each grade level and we say that there’s five teachers instead of four, it’s still **your** room. I’d like in some ways to work on that, and I’m not sure exactly how. It’s just a language thing that you do when you express yourself. So there’s that certain level where you have to say “let her go with it,” you know, and you do what you have to do for these kids, but I kind of fight with that all the time because I like to teach too.*

But Jerri's perspective was not the only way to look at what was emerging from new patterns of interaction in the classroom. Susan countered Jerri's view of the teachers and the ownership issue:

*On the other hand, I think with the model we're looking at, we're looking at shared ownership of the kids, and when I go into the classroom, I'm **not** always thinking, "Okay, this is what I need to do for these kids who have IEP's." Hopefully, if we've planned well ahead of time about the lesson, then we're both meeting these kid's needs ...and other kid's needs.*

Because this was such a hot issue and hard to talk about, I decided it would help to have an additional perspective. I interviewed Colleen Christopher, who shared her position on this conflict area as one of the people who had helped set up the program:

*In a sense we created the issue, that we are having to deal with now, when we set inclusion up in the county. The message we gave to the regular teachers was, "You just teach the way you've always taught, you just do what you've always done," you know. "Let us just come in, and quietly, behind the scenes, work this out." And it's the way we got in the door. The special educator did everything for that child who was being included and did everything for that teacher. So part of it was just human dynamics. There was still **this** person has the classroom, and the special ed teacher still has a separate office. That created a little bridge to cross, and collaboration really had to evolve over time, with the relationship. And what we found out, is that the people who clicked, if they were allowed to stay together, evolved like Chris Walter-Thomas says, from parallel, to cooperative, to collaborative teaching, and you could really see that happen. So there's the relationships part to be worked through.*

But then the other thing that's embedded in that, is the issue of respect. Part of what any special ed teacher who's been coming in the back door knows, is that you make them value what you do. And you take responsibility for doing that. You come in, and your mindset is that I will prove to them, I will show them what I can do. And it's like this trial by fire thing that you have to go through. Where problems can arise is if the special education teacher has not, for whatever reason, been able to establish that mutual respect, and demonstrate that they have something to offer, that they are more than a pair of hands. Then they stay in the subservient position, you know, regular ed teacher is in charge, special ed teacher will make you happy. That's the dynamic. So what you hear classroom teachers still saying is, "I want you to do this and this and this and this... This is what it takes to make me happy... You need to do this." But as mutual respect grows, you have less of that. And then you have other people who are just going to be threatened, and who are going to need to stay in charge.

And I don't know really have an answer to that. But I do know that you have to have a positive relationship, and you have to get to the point where you can be honest with each other with your feelings.

Arlene talked about how the old way of setting up and delivering supports to children with special needs in the general education classroom was now posing a barrier to her as a teacher and to functioning as an entire grade level team:

When we started inclusion, Prudence always promised the classroom teacher that we would have an aide, yeah, “You’re going to have Bart, but you’re going to have an aide for him.” And we developed a feeling of control, of ownership of that person. Now we’ve realized that isn’t healthy. We need to say, “If you need that aide, they’ll be here when you need them, but then they’re going to another place when they’re needed” ...So we need to take time to reflect on our schedule, our day, who we work with, what’s best for us, and do with us what we do with students, and say “Look, we’re going to adapt to the teacher now.”

Another related issue reared its head as well. It can be viewed as a dilemma but a good one for it arises as a result of inclusive education having worked the way we hoped it would, and the classroom teacher feeling both comfortable and capable working with children previously seen as the domain of special education. The teacher now took ownership for that child, and was seeing that child as one of the students in *her* classroom, something that’s always been cited as a goal for “included” children.. But it created conflict with the special educator whose own experience and education has led her to think of labeled kids as *my* kids, whose own professional image arises out of being seen as that child’s teacher. Jerri made it very clear in her individual interview and in our final dialogue that she was beginning to struggle with not having that identity. But she was able to also acknowledge the positive nature of this conflict:

You are seeing ownership of the kids, with them seeing them in the classroom, versus we used to see them all day long... With these kids being included in the classroom for the majority of the day, and then not going out to special teachers, whatever, those teachers come to know the kids, and come to see how close they can come to doing things the other kids are doing... And so, with that familiarity comes a lot of, I think...self-assuredness in what they can rightfully expect from the kids. I think that’s the big thing for teachers. If they feel that they can’t provide adequately for the kids, they say, “You do it”.... But a lot of teachers here have strong ownership of these kids, and that works in a real positive way for the kids most of the time.

Issues Around Roles in Co-teaching

The model they were working to put in place certainly seemed instrumental in generating some of the new people-to-people conflicts. But there were glimmers that it was also resulting in new and positive role-blending and role-sharing activities. Teachers gave examples of the disappearing boundaries between the role of general educator and the role of special educator in the classroom. And in fact, Arlene said that Drew had told them that the ideal situation would be for people to walk in and see several adults interacting with children and not know who the classroom teacher was.

This give and take in roles that the adults in the classroom assumed and the confusion it created for visitors with more traditional images of general educator and special educator and elementary classroom was discussed on a number of occasions in our interviews and dialogues. Juanita shared this story:

Another thing I like about this school too is people come up to you and say, “Do you have any kids with IEP’s?”... I mean, if someone is coming to observe or something, they can’t always tell, and that’s good. Another time, a mom came up and said “Now, are you

his special ed teacher?” and I said “No, I’m his regular ed teacher.” But I thought that was a compliment because she couldn’t tell who was who.

Angela also made this observation about the increased role-sharing between the classroom teacher, the special educator, and the instructional aide:

We’re getting to the place though where it’s kind of funny when someone new comes into your classroom and they go, “Are you the teacher in this class?”

Sometimes this role-blending and role-sharing created confusion for the students in the classrooms as well. I shared this observation within one of our group dialogues:

In this kind of setting you don’t necessarily know who is who. I’m not going to tell you whose class this was in, but in one of my early observations I got into a conversation with one of the kids who got sent over to share something with me. I decided to ask him who some of the various adults were in the room because I myself was having trouble knowing who everyone was. I asked the child, “Who’s this?” and he said, “Well, that’s our teacher.” Then I pointed to the student teacher and asked, “Who’s that person?” and he responded, “Hmm, she might be a student teacher or something like that.” Then I said, “Okay, who’s that person?” “Well, she might be a student teacher, too.” he said. Well, that person was the special educator.

For other students, there seemed to be the understanding that one person was the classroom teacher and everyone else was there to help. Sometimes students even called out when any other adult, even the special educator, came in the classroom door, “Are you my helper today?”

But Susan told a story that illustrated children’s clear awareness of who their teacher was: *Terry was not paying attention. Amy was reading a story and having a discussion, a very good discussion, about the Arctic, and Terry had removed himself from the group and was sitting at the table cutting out a kleenex box, staring at his book bag, with his back turned toward the group. I went over and said “Terry, I don’t believe this lesson is over. There’s no reason you can’t listen to this story and take part in this discussion.” And I said, “It’s just the same as if Mrs. Matthews were up there giving a lesson.” And he goes, “But she ain’t Mrs. Matthews.”*

Summary

The teachers had learned to rely on a variety of support relationships and mechanisms to grow as educators and cope with the demands of being a teacher in an inclusive classroom setting. They were also in the midst of developing new patterns of interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms, and there were a number of conflicts and difficulties arising from this process. However, teachers were using this as a learning experience as they seemed to do with every bump in the road they had encountered on the journey toward becoming inclusive educators.

You have to go through those rocky times or you’re never gonna get to where you need to be.

In Arlene’s account of she and Jerri working through the ownership issue arising out of co-teaching, we find evidence of new lessons learned and yet to be learned:

We’ve come up with this way of doing things. One day Jerri does a spelling strategy and then the next day I’ll teach another strategy. We found out that when the kids were trying to answer to both of us, it brought some confusion, a chaoticness to the

classroom. So it has helped for one teacher to be the instructor and kind of be in charge of the lesson and the other one to be the roamer, to go around and make sure everybody's got what they need on their desk, and just quietly be the person that helps maneuver the classroom. We found that this works better than both of us standing up there, trying to direct the lesson and both of us going around and trying to help... We've learned that our differences are good, and that we both bring good things to our teaching.

Narrative Interface Six ↗ Poetry of Transformation

What Comes From Our Meetings Is This

*I think I've always felt that when we come together as a group,
good things come from it,
and we don't do it enough.*

*And last week,
when we went to that workshop with Drew,
we really felt good about what the people said about our program here
and the kind of school that we have
but
what comes from our meetings is this...
We are all still trying to get a grip on what we are doing
and we're all still trying to learn to do it better,
still learning even to do it,
and to be effective.*

*I think if we don't take the time to reflect
and talk about it,
we tend to get frustrated or overwhelmed,
but
when we come together
we see the whole picture.
Sort of gives us a little boost.*

*I mean, I felt great when I left that workshop
like maybe we really do know what we're doing,
but
there are times when I do feel frustrated and overwhelmed.*

*I think when we come together as a group
and talk about it,
it sort of makes those times less
magnified.*

*The old school used to be
stay in your own room,
and teach your own way,
and not have other people come in and
show you the way.
No working together,
no trying to cooperate.*

I think now that's changing.

*I think we're trying
to make it work.*

-Arlene Daniels

New Territory

*We had reached a certain comfort level.
But this,
this is somewhat new territory.
We're doing a lot of different things,
and we want a certain outcome.
We have an image of the way we think this should turn out,
the way it should work.
And sometimes we don't get it, that outcome we had envisioned.
So therefore we say it didn't work out well,
Even though it may be fine,
but it's not what we expected.
It didn't go where we thought it should go,
It didn't follow that path,
It may have veered off a couple of times.*

*I think of Susan and I,
and we're in there teaching away.
And then I'll go over to her and I'm like,
I had to explain this five times.
Please...
do you know of another way to explain this?
and I feel like I'm a failure
because I can't reach these one or two kids
because I don't know what else to say,
so then it's like,
The ball's in your court...
Do something.*

-Juanita Russell

You Learn As You Teach

*I think sometimes you have to live it to learn it.
And that's with anything.
I've learned that
you have to walk a mile in those shoes.*

*I have the advantages of working in an inclusive school,
of supportive colleagues, supportive husband, supportive friends.
My situation would be far different
without those advantages.*

*Over 12 years of teaching
you learn a lot.
I'm not some great teacher.
I've had twelve years to learn.*

*You learn as you teach.
You learn every year.
You learn that you have to be flexible.
And you learn that if your lesson fails, it's okay.*

*You go home
and you re-think it,
and you come back the next day
and re-do it.*

*I've had the advantage of an environment that says
it's okay sometimes to fail as a teacher.
Because your failures
teach you how to be successful.*

-Angela Mays

It's Been a lot of Different Pieces

If I had to put my finger on it?

*You remember those kids who walked in
and you knew they were going to be difficult to include.
You think about what you did to make that child successful.
You think about all of the interactions that you had with your support people.*

*You learn very quickly that it's not a one-person show.
You learn very quickly that it's going to take a whole team.
You learn very quickly that you have to get to know the parents.
You learn very quickly that it takes the whole class' involvement.*

If I had to put my finger on it?

*I think it's been a lot of different pieces...
And it's evolved over time,
It didn't just happen.
And we've had to learn some things the hard way.*

*You learn that you can't do it by yourself.
You learn that you have to have that support.
You learn that you have to have time to talk.
You know, without that support and experience,
there are things I would have never tried.*

If I had to put my finger on it.

-Jean-Marie Matthews

Chapter Six: ✎ Constructing Understandings

“Stories are powerful research tools. They provide us with a picture of real people in real situations, struggling with real problems... They invite us to speculate on what might be changed and with what effect. And of course, they remind us of our persistent fallibility...” (Noddings & Witherell, 1991, p. 280)

The teachers came into this inquiry knowing that I wanted to learn how they had come to feel comfortable and capable with children with special needs in their classrooms. They also knew that I wanted to apply what I learned from them to my work in teacher preparation: helping prospective elementary educators come to feel comfortable and capable with children with special needs and preparing them for the inclusive educational settings that will be a part of their future. It was my research question that we began with, but the teachers entered into the inquiry to become part of a “community of study” (Schultz, 1997). We explored the question together through our group dialogues and within the interviews or structured “conversations” that I had with individual teachers. The dialogue and the stories functioned as powerful tools of inquiry (Clark, et al., 1996; Noddings & Witherell, 1991). Although this was not “truly collaborative inquiry” in which teachers had an active role in all phases of the research, there was a mutuality in that the teachers and I constructed understandings together of how they had come to feel comfortable and capable as teachers of children with disabilities and significant learning differences who were a part of their classrooms.

In this chapter, I will tackle two main tasks of analyses. In part one, I will explore how the teachers constructed understandings of themselves in the context of their particular inclusive educational setting. In part two, I will share how I constructed understandings of teaching and teachers within the larger educational landscape of inclusive education.

How the Teachers Constructed Understandings of Themselves

These were very empowered, committed educators, and they had come to view themselves as “a different breed.” This had not always been so. The teachers shared how inclusion initially made them lose confidence in themselves as teachers. They had fears about children with disabilities and considerable doubts and apprehension about their ability to meet their needs in the elementary classroom setting. Learning to become teachers of inclusive classrooms was hard work and often emotionally difficult, and they required recognition for their efforts and a range of supports to enable them to feel successful.

Because they knew my research question, they often volunteered their insights into the process of constructing understandings about themselves as teachers of children with special needs in inclusive educational environment. But the how became most apparent as we talked and as we shared classroom experiences together. I gained understandings about the teachers through the eyes of the people around them as well - the special educators they worked with and others in the school setting whom they identified as people who provided support, and their student teachers.

Before I could analyze *how* these educators constructed understandings of themselves as teachers within the context of inclusive education, at Wilbur Avenue Elementary, I needed to first identify what those understandings were. My analysis of what they had come to know across eight years of teaching in an inclusive education setting allowed me to distill this to three

essential understandings, and in the last three chapters we looked at those in some detail. To summarize: (1) In order to move past their fear of disabilities and their negative perception of students with disabilities, the teachers had to learn to see children with disabilities in new ways, to identify what it was about their differences that mattered, and to respond to those children as students and as valued members of their classrooms; (2) In order to move past feeling inadequate in meeting students' needs and get past their fears of not being competent or successful as teachers of children with special needs, they had to figure out how "to make it work," to learn how to negotiate those learning differences that mattered the most, and (3) In order to keep from being overwhelmed by their role as teacher of children with significant learning differences and deal constructively with the additional demands inclusion placed on them as teachers, they needed to garner support for themselves through a variety of formal and informal relationships and school structures. But they also had to work through and learn from the conflicts and difficulties that arose from trying on new roles and patterns of interaction with others in response to the inclusion of children with identified special needs in their classrooms.

The teachers identified two primary ways that they had come to these understandings: learning by doing and learning by talking. They also saw learning as an evolutionary process and used the construct of evolution to frame their new understandings.

The Role of Experience: Learning by Doing

...experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed ...

(Eisner, 1993, p. 5)

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) consider experience to be the starting point for inquiry with teachers (p. 414). The teachers that I worked with at Wilbur Avenue considered experience to be instrumental in their learning and cited it as the most powerful tool in their professional development. All four teachers had taken graduate courses and worked on advanced degrees in education, but they talked at length about the value of experience in teaching them, especially things having to do with inclusive education that they had not done before. Angela told me:

It's a combination of a lot of things, but in the hierarchy, the highest thing there is, is just the experience. The only way you're ever going to really learn is to jump in and do it.

Arlene talked a lot about this in her initial interview and throughout our dialogues:

I think you just need to be constantly looking and accepting new ideas and taking some risks...I think just being able to change and grow, and to be accepting of that growth, you have to believe that change is good...Every year I say, "What am I going to do, what am I going to take on this year that's a little bit different? What's going to be my risk this year?" I try to do that with one unit each year. Last year it was weather, and I just went around to all the different grade levels and got some things from them, and basically just tried to learn all I could. Trying something new isn't easy but you learn by doing. It takes perseverance to get to the place you want to be.

Jean-Marie tied her growth directly to her experiences with particular children:

I've been very fortunate, and I know lots of people have not been as fortunate as me, to have worked with the people that I've worked with over the years, and to have the kids that I've had. I mean, you know, the Danny's of the world and the Sandy's of the world... people who don't teach people like that just aren't lucky. Because they make you think as a teacher. They make you realize what you're capable of doing and what they're capable

of doing. You realize that the old way we used to do things isn't the way to do it now, you know, and we need to keep growing.

In some ways this idea of learning by doing as an activity separate from learning by talking is an artificial distinction. Learning by doing encompasses experience and talk, for just doing something does not generate meaning. We must construct and reconstruct experience to learn from it (Ellis & Flaherty, 1992). In education, we consider narrative a valid and essential means of constructing understanding from experience (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan, & Kennard, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

The Role of Narrative: Learning by Talking

The use of narratives to study and learn about teachers and teaching has become quite prevalent (c.f. Beattie, 1995; Britzman, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kinnard, 1993; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Fenstermacher, 1997; Hoel, 1997; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995; McEwan & Egan, 1995; McIntyre, 1997; Schultz, 1997; Trimmer, 1997; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). In Appendix C, the reader will find a more in-depth rationale for my use of narrative as a tool to explore teachers' understanding of their practice.

Narrative has been shown to function in a variety of ways for teachers (McEwan, 1997). There is a substantial body of literature that provides credence for the theory that pedagogical content knowledge is expressed through teacher narrative (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Gudmundsdottir, 1995; McEwan, 1997). Beattie (1995) asserted that "it is narrative alone which interprets a wide range of affective, historical, and empirical data, and finds the kind of multi-leveled meaning which truly helps us understand classroom practice" (p. 61). Through listening to other teachers' stories and telling our own, we learn to "make sense of our teaching practices as expressions of our personal practical knowledge;" that is, what we have come to know through experience that has become a part of who we are and how we engage in practice in our classrooms (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993, p. 1).

The following list outlines a few additional functions of narratives in education.

1. They serve as "organizational sagas." Taken collectively, they provide a rich understanding of a particular school and why teachers make commitments to settings and people (Coffey & Atkinson, 1995, p. 62).
2. They reflect the cultural context of teachers' work (p. 63).
3. They document success.
4. They tie the past to the present (p. 68).
5. They provide a vision of the possible.

The Function of Teacher Narratives at Wilbur Avenue

The teachers talked at length about the value of talk and how it functioned for them. Talk was a means of making their way through uncharted waters for they were doing many things for the first time. Talk was a way of getting a better grasp on uncertainty, and they talked their way through what was unknown. Talking was a form of inquiry; they used talk to problem-solve and problem-pose. Talk was a way of building community, and through talk they provided personal support and encouragement. Talk acknowledged their struggles and celebrated their successes. And always, always, there was laughter. Even when they voiced anger and frustration, laughter, and finding the humor in their situation, was a part of their talk.

Sanders (1997) listed the functions of story, and I saw them at work in the narratives and stories the teachers told as we talked individually, in meetings, and in our group discussions.

1. Stories created community. They linked teller to listeners, and listeners to one another...
2. Stories helped them to see through the eyes of other people. (Sanders said that, “the most foremost gift from stories is ‘experience of other...’”)
3. Stories showed them the consequences of our actions. (“To act responsibly, we must be able to foresee where our actions might lead; and stories train our sight...”)
4. Stories educated their desires and gave them images of what is truly worth seeking and worth doing...
5. Stories ... helped them to dwell in place and time. (“Narrative orients us in both kinds of time, public and private, by linking before and after within the lives of characters and communities...Stories teach us that every gesture, every act, every choice we make sends ripples of influence into the future...”)
6. Stories helped them deal with struggle and loss and difficult times. (Stories often show “the weak triumphing over the strong, love winning out over hatred, laughter defying misery...they give us hopefulness.”)
7. Stories taught them how to be teachers in inclusive classrooms...(“They hold a living reservoir of human possibilities, telling us what has worked before, what has failed, and where meaning and purpose and joy might be found.”) (Sanders, 1997, p. 54-56)

I have tried to allow the reader to hear for themselves how these functions were enacted by including numerous examples of teacher stories and narratives in the interfaces and the excerpts of teacher talk laced throughout the narrative that represents this inquiry. Arlene herself elaborated on the functions their talk served in one of our dialogues where we were discussing mechanism of support:

Once a week we sit down and talk. Even if we don't do any planning at all, I feel that camaraderie. I feel that somebody else is in the same situation that I am, we're going through the same stresses, the same responsibilities, and that's a comfort. I've talked to other teachers in other schools who don't share the problems they're experiencing in their classroom, and so those problems become gigantic.

In fact, the word talk was the most frequently used action word in the interviews and dialogues. The teachers I worked with at Wilbur Avenue used a variety of narrative forms to tell their own stories, to talk about and describe the children with disabilities they are teaching and have known, and to illustrate how their own lives and practice have intertwined with these stories. It was a school culture that was very narrative oriented, and they used it consciously as an important means of professional development. They studied books and developed texts of their own to document, evaluate and plan their practice and their goals. They referred to these books and texts in their talk. Their stories and the stories of children they have worked with have been captured through a variety of public discourses including film, video documentaries and shorts used for public education and in teacher and parent workshops, selected video footage shown on television news, in litigation sessions in the courts, and newspaper and magazine articles.

When the teachers used the word talk they were actually referring to one of three narrative forms: informal talk, structured dialogue, and stories.

Informal talk

Teachers' informal talk or conversation has been recognized as an important form of narrative for teachers (Emery, 1996; Florio-Ruane, 1991; McEwan & Egan, 1995). Yinger (1990) asked us to consider the role of "the conversation of practice" in encouraging reflection and teacher learning. He defined it this way:

...the conversation of practice ...involves an entering into and living with a context and its participants. As such conversation is not only a means of interaction and a way of thinking but also a type of relationship with one's surroundings... (p. 82)

At Wilbur Avenue, I saw and participated in a number of opportunities for informal talk or conversations of practice: the lunchroom, grade level planning meetings, in classrooms while children were engaged in activities, support group meetings for teachers, problem-solving meetings focused on children. Relationships were nurtured and strengthened by informal talk and conversation. Informal talk also gave the teachers numerous opportunities to develop their ideas about teaching and learning. McEwan and Egan (1995) asserted that teacher informal talk has been wrongly characterized as "idle chatter," and recommended that we consider it as "a vitally important stage in developing our understanding of topics that are new to us. It allows us to put ideas into our own words (p. xi)."

Researchers working with teachers have demonstrated that conversation can also be an important tool for working through and learning from the issues and problems that confront educators in their daily practice, and problem-solving seemed to be a frequent function of conversations of practice that were shared with me and that I took part in:

The power and energy gained from the rich exchange of experiences increases teachers' knowledge, affirms their learnings and beliefs, internalizes the special vocabulary of teaching, and frees teachers from the academic isolation of the classroom. These dialogues are not mindless chatter about teaching, nor are they merely occasions to vent frustrations. Rather, they are an important arena for teachers to activate their unstated theories of teaching, their beliefs, and their practices. These teacher-to-teacher conversations or practice-centered discourses thus become an avenue for exploring critical issues in teachers' lives (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 153).

Belenky et al. (1986) called this kind of conversation "really talking." Real talk "reaches deep into the experience of each participant" and creates a setting which supports and nurtures emerging ideas (p. 144). Davis and Sumara (1997) talked about the importance of viewing conversation as a collective activity that in its unfolding both opens up and leads its participants. In its unfolding, it also opens up possibilities for new understandings that may not have existed when the conversation began (p. 110). I saw evidence of this throughout my conversations with the teachers. The teachers and student teachers even told me on several occasion that our talks made them think deeply about things they hadn't considered before.

Structured dialogue

Constructing understanding through dialogue is based on recognition of dialogue as a dialectical process - “only through true dialogue... can a person be changed or change another.” (Brody, Witherell, Donald & Lundblad, 1991, p. 263)

Dialogue has been cited as instrumental in working through a number of the moral and pedagogical issues that teachers face in their work in classrooms. Critical researchers have studied its usefulness in crossing borders of culturally constructed difference and the negotiation of classroom practice (Delgado-Gaitan, 1997; Greene, 1994; John-Steiner, Weber, & Minnis, 1998.) I saw evidence of this as teachers described the way they engaged in dialogue within the mechanisms of support structured by the administration. The evolution of the teachers’ beliefs and practice seemed to have been conceptualized and kept in motion through these various mechanisms for dialogue.

It is through dialogue ...that we not only develop shared meanings and knowledge that exceed what each of us separately knows but also come to a better understanding of what our disagreements are. Thus, it is through dialogue that the value of alternative perspectives - to promote critical reflection and evolution in our own perspectives and practices - can be fully realized. (Clark, Herter and Moss, 1998, 787-788)

Pugach (1995) has said that in order for inclusive education to move into the next generation and really have an impact on the ways schools are structured, special educators and general educators need to be talking together and engaged in dialogue about the nature of learners. She saw dialogue as an essential means of constructing new knowledge about inclusive practice and of developing new ways of seeing and building on capacity in students formerly identified in terms of their deficits. This document is literally peppered with evidence of this at Wilbur Avenue Elementary School. The forums for open dialogue that I learned of or observed included grade level meetings, team meetings, KITE meetings, GIRDL meetings, inclusion meetings (in the past), case consultation meetings, book groups, and issues study groups.

The teachers’ dialogue also engendered a collective knowing about inclusive education as it was operating and developing in the specific context of Wilbur Avenue Elementary, as they understood it to be operating and developing in other model settings, and in other schools in the county and the state.

Truth is not born nor is it to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born *between people* collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interactions. (Bahktin, 1984, cited in Hoel, 1997, pp. 9-10)

Through our dialogue, I was given a window onto this process of collective knowing and gained an important understanding about what I thought was the “truth about inclusive education” from these teachers and their context. It is not to be found in “objective” accounts of the process which are packaged for publication nor in the research design and results of single or multiple researchers acting to verify a particular pre-determined truth. If we ascribe to the Bahktin’s notion of truth, then we can see that understandings about inclusive education are generated between people who are working together to learn more about the process of including children of all abilities in the general education classroom, who are inquiring together in a purposeful way, and who are generating new understandings through a dynamic process of

dialogue and shared experience. This was an on-going process at Wilbur Avenue, and one that I built on for my inquiry.

I also built on Wasser & Bresler's (1996) construct of dialogue as a collective interpretive process and a tool for collaborative inquiry. They proposed that in the interpretive zone of collaborative inquiry, individuals bring together what they know and believe, and their experiences and stories, to create new co-constructed understandings about that which they are inquiring into together. Clark, Moss, et al. (1996) demonstrated that dialogue was the "centerpiece" for mutual professional development and change in their collaborative inquiry involving teachers and researchers (p. 196).

The women who served as participants in the research were very aware of who I was and why I was there. They surely had their own agenda about what responses they wanted to give me and why. It is not unrealistic to think that often they carefully framed their responses based on a dialogue in their heads with me; they themselves constructed what they thought I wanted to hear. There were several examples of this in individual interviews and in spontaneous conversations. One teacher said on several occasions, "I told you this because I knew it would help you understand what is really happening with this child, with this teacher. This is the stuff you came here for, right?" Another time a teacher said "I thought about you all weekend. I knew you would want to hear this and what my reactions were."

This inquiry, however, seemed to bring a *new* element of dialogue that made conscious the process of examining themselves. This was in contrast to the majority of the teachers' school-constructed dialogue, which revolved around children's needs, curriculum planning, and school functions.

Bringing my research questions to the fore and creating dialogue around them - "How are you coming to know kids with disabilities in new ways? How are you coming to know yourselves as teachers in new ways? What contributes to your feeling more comfortable and competent in working with children who are seen as having special education needs?" - seemed to establish a set for reflection.

Jean-Marie talked about the value of our monthly dialogues in our wrap-up lunch and discussion:

You have to take the time to do this. And without you setting the format for us, we wouldn't have gotten together to talk about some issues we talked about. So I do think it allowed us to do that [look at our selves]. I found the interview, the first interview that you did, very difficult. You asked us to think back to what experiences have you had to make you a teacher of kids with disabilities. I mean, it was like... I don't know that! I've just done all this stuff, it all blends in for me. For me, it's been all together.

Juanita offered another perspective on the value of the inquiry-constructed dialogue. At the end of her final interview, when I asked if there was anything else she wanted to add, Juanita said, "It has been good to look at ourselves with you. We don't always do that." Then she began to tell me about this woman preacher she had watched on television the night before who had talked about the importance of having a mirror to examine yourself in. Juanita likened this process of shared inquiry through dialogue to that. Other researchers have used the metaphor of mirror to explain personal and community transformation through dialogue (Krieger, 1983).

We can use narrative as both a mirror - when we learn something about ourselves by transforming daily experience into something profound - and as a window - when we use

it to examine the beliefs, behaviors, and insights of fellow teachers, past, present, and future. (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 7)

Stories

Of all the narrative forms, story may be the one that is emphasized the most in narrative inquiry with teachers. The stories told by the teachers in this inquiry did two very important things - they invited resonance and they served as touchstones - and in these narrative, collective ways constructed understandings about what it meant to be a classroom teacher in inclusive education.

Telling and constructing stories invites resonance. Each of us has stories within stories, and the telling of one story triggers other stories.

Resonance is “a way of seeing one experience in terms of another...Resonance permits teachers to engage in various ways with what they know tacitly and to move that knowledge, so to speak, without having to make it explicit.” (Conle, 1996, p. 299)

Throughout the individual interviews and dialogues, I saw resonance operate within and across individuals much as it had through Conle’s study of preservice teachers (1996). “...Even one word or one sentence in a story [evoked] a response story ...because of an underlying image or scene....One narrative element in the trigger story [became] the source of another story” (p. 305). The idea that children were very accepting of their peers with disabilities was an example of an image or element that triggered other stories. The emotion in the teachers’ stories also served as triggers and enabled us to connect us with each other’s experiences or make connections across our own experiences. So for example, one story of frustration or of risk-taking led to another.

The process of resonance and how it helped us to come to new understandings about teaching children with significant differences and in classrooms where those differences had to be negotiated operated much in the way Conle described it:

When a story reverberates within us and calls forth another in an echo-like fashion, we pull that remembered story out of a previous context and place it into a new one. The key educational issue in this coming together of stories has to do with the connecting of experiential knowledge contents... (p. 301)

Telling and constructing stories creates touchstones. Before I explain how certain stories of the teachers served as touchstones, I want to give the reader some background on the meaning of the word touchstone and how it has been used as a metaphor. Webster’s Dictionary (1991) defines *touchstone* as a test or criterion by which to try a thing’s qualities. The synonym is *standard*, which in turn is defined as a figure adopted as an emblem or a rule for measuring quality. A touchstone was also a stone, flint-like, used to test the purity of gold or silver. Touchstone also denotes the means of determining what a thing *should* be.

I especially liked this definition of touchstone that I found in a book of meditations for men.

...Touchstones once were used to test the purity of gold and silver. Struck against high-grade metal, they would show a distinctive mark. The word *touchstone* evokes spiritual images of touching, making contact, having a solid base, and being a tangible reminder of truth... (from the introduction of Touchstones, 1986)

All of the teachers talked about personally significant experiences with children that had shaped both their beliefs and their practice. They carried these stories with them. These stories seemed to be touchstones against which they measured themselves as teachers. As they were told and retold, these stories also became the school community's touchstones. Stories can serve as touchstones when we return to them again and again to renew our sense of purpose, for inspiration, for learning from the past that we can take with us into the present and the future. For the teachers in this study, it was the stories of children that served as touchstones, that best represented what they had learned about children with disabilities, and what it meant to be a teacher in an inclusive educational environment. Community stories of children from the past, Sandy and Stevie and Bart, and nuggets from those stories, were replayed numerous times throughout our interviews and dialogues. As an example, Arlene told a story about Stevie in one of our dialogues and then made this connection:

I mean watching Stevie go to 5th grade and do so well in Juanita's class, it was just such a wonderful reward for me because I thought, "We really accomplished a lot. It was hard but look where we got." I felt the same with Sandy.

These stories were not just stories of success. There was face validity to these stories. Much meaning was captured in them, for they often conveyed the very things the teachers still found challenging. The teachers' touchstone stories also seemed to convey "I am feeling very challenged now, but I can go back and strike that story against of my touchstone stories from the past, and be reminded of my own tenacity in the face of challenge and of the light at the end of the tunnel and the fact that I have made a real difference in children's lives." Sometimes the story served as a reminder of their inner strength. And it appeared that both the telling of the story and the memories of the people who provided support at the time served to bolster and support them even now. These touchstone stories served as frames through which teachers viewed themselves and their practice - they captured their successes, growth, and challenges as teachers on the frontier of inclusion.

Learning As Evolution

Teachers did not see themselves as in the same place as when they started inclusion. During their initial interviews, I asked the teachers how capable they felt at this point as elementary teachers who had experience with children identified as disabled as part of their classrooms. Angela responded:

It's become a way of life. I'm not intimidated by inclusion anymore. That's what makes me feel okay as a teacher. I know there's things to be done, but I also know how far we've come.

The teachers talked about having evolved into the teachers they were now, and experience and talk were acknowledged as important ingredients in the process. They also saw the nature of their knowledge and their practice as evolving over time. The process of evolution was triggered by relearning, and having to come to new and renewed understandings each year as new challenges and new children presented themselves. They used this frame of evolution to make sense of their growth in the face of "still trying to get a grip" on what they were doing as teachers in an inclusive educational setting that was also evolving.

When we examine the meanings of the word evolution, we get a sense of how the teachers viewed their growth and the process of coming to know themselves as teachers. We

also gain a sense of how versatile this frame is for understanding how we should view the process of constructing understandings of teaching in inclusive education (Tomlinson, Callahan, Tomchin, Eiss, Imbeau & Landrum, 1997). Synonyms found in the Thesaurus for WordPerfect 95 and explored using Webster's dictionary (1991) were: developing (as in something whose form is not yet in its final stage), emerging (as in a butterfly from its chrysalis), maturing (growing in experience and knowledge), and unfolding (as in a hand painted oriental fan; the beauty of the image doesn't become apparent until its fully unfolded, its function as a cooling device not fully actualized until it's opened.) Webster's defined evolving as a progression of interrelated phenomenon that exhibits a direction of change.

Juanita's words pull this together nicely for us:

It's living it, doing it, been there, done that. We can do it. There are days that are very frustrating. There were times when I didn't have a clue in the world what I was doing. But I tried, if it worked, I tried again. If it didn't work, then I'd try something else. I talked to Drew, I talked to a parent, I talked to whoever to try to understand. I just think it's like this evolution. You know, you start off and you have one kid. The first year I had Greg and he was emotionally disturbed. Then the next year, I think I had somebody else who had another label, and so then you had to relearn what you were doing and then, you know, the year I had Sandy, she was totally different. We've learned how to deal with each child. And that only comes from being with the child and observing the child and learning the child. So, through that I've evolved into this person, this teacher that I am now. I don't think that I could have taken a class, I don't think that somebody could have told me. You know, I think I had to live it. And that's what I've done.

Constructing Understandings Of Teaching And Teachers Within The Larger Educational Landscape Of Inclusive Education

Just as "truths" about inclusive education are context-specific and collectively constructed, understandings about teaching in an inclusive educational setting are not something that can be distilled as an objectified entity independent of the community that created them (Sfard, 1997). The combination of people and structures and history and ways of doing and talking about teaching and learning was unique to Wilbur Avenue Elementary School, and the validity of sweeping generalizations for other teachers and other schools about what practices worked might be questionable. But I would like to discuss what I learned with and from the teachers at Wilbur Avenue Elementary School within the larger context of inclusive education

The teachers placed what they had learned and how they learned in a context as well; they saw it as a process of evolution. This assessment of their growth as teachers as being "like this evolution" provides a frame for viewing how they believed they changed. I hesitate to even bring the notion of change into the discussion because of the cautions against research that claims to document change as progress. Popkewitz (1997) suggested we view change "not as progressive, but as consisting of ruptures and breaks" (p. 26). How we have come to where we are at the present time is "not one continuous story but is produced through multiple trajectories that involve breaks and ruptures as well as continuities with previous patterns of thought" (p. 27).

I gave considerable thought to these two frames as I tried to place what I had learned from these teachers within the context of inclusive education, and I had to stay mindful that inclusive education is just a small part of the educational landscape. I gave a lot of thought to the imagery contained within these frames: emerging, unfolding, forking, breaking, rupturing. Many months later of reading and writing and making intertextual connections, I came up with the

following conceptual frame, one which I hope is complex enough capture the meaning of this inquiry and sufficient enough to contextualize the findings.

Inclusive Educational Settings As Liminal Zones

What if we conceptualized inclusive educational settings as liminal zones within the shifting educational landscape? I began tinkering with an earlier and less refined version of this question for the paper I wrote for my qualifying exam. Allow me to elaborate on the theory of liminal zones within cultural landscapes that was proposed by Zukin (1991) and that I used as a foundation for my own theorizing.

A Theory of Liminal Zones

Zukin (1991) describes a cultural landscape as “an ensemble of material and social practices and their symbolic representation” (p. 16). Her work suggests that our current conception of such landscapes is unrealistically static, and the same is true of our “snapshot” approaches to studying cultural landscapes. Zukin proposed that we can better study a landscape if we see it as evolving, and understand it as always in the process of transformation. She postulated that changes within the landscape are the product of a simultaneous process of destruction and creation: the tearing away of old formations and structures, the reshaping of the terrain, and the building of new structures. The landscape is also composed of many socio-cultural-historical layers, and at any point in time in the process of transformation, there is a process of shifting and upheaval in which certain layers are obliterated, others are newly exposed, and some are buried with the potential to re-emerge later.

There are spaces or zones within the landscape where the shifting is most intense. Zukin (1991) calls these “zones of liminality” or “liminal spaces.” Liminal spaces within a cultural landscape are characterized by transition, and, in particular, the shifting and shuffling of categories and roles (Zukin). Several aspects of transformation are critical to our understanding of changes within the educational landscape: (a) Within any landscape at any point in time, both old and new will co-exist; (b) Transformation of the landscape is both a destructive and creative process; and (c) Within the shifting terrain of the liminal zone, the features of the landscape are better viewed as evolving, rather than as changed (Zukin).

Inclusive Educational Settings as Liminal Zones

Inclusive educational settings can be seen as liminal zones within the educational landscape. They are places where old and new ways of seeing, talking about, and responding to children that our culture constructs as different often exist in the same space. There is a shifting of language, practice, and patterns of interactions. There is a general feeling as well as evidence that we are in the midst of transition, and this is indicative of the transformation that is occurring. Some of the structures we have used to respond to children identified as in need of special education are being done away with, like self-contained classrooms and resource rooms, and there are people who grieve at the loss and destruction. Practices like the general educator and special educator co-teaching a group of children are arising from the rubble, and something new, we can't quite tell what yet, is in the process of being created.

Inclusion at Wilbur Avenue Elementary as a Liminal Zone

The landscape was surely shifting within the classrooms I observed. The stories that the teachers told to capture their experiences as teachers of these inclusive classrooms were full of

examples of the simultaneous existence of old and new ways of thinking and talking and doing. We heard narratives that told of transition and which illustrated the shifting and shuffling of categories and roles. The teachers themselves framed their understanding of what was occurring as a process of evolving.

Critical theorists in disability studies and inclusive education advise attending to “the ways things are named and represented, the manner in which difference is treated and the ways in which the values, significations and norms which govern life in school are negotiated and established” (Rizvi & Lingard, 1996) and I have tried to do that in the previous three chapters. But every reader who finishes those chapters will have picked up a number of contradictions as they sorted through the teachers’ words and stories and read through the vignettes in which I have tried to capture their practice. I propose that the contradictions should be viewed as evidence that this is indeed a liminal zone.

Throughout this text, I have given the reader direct access to the language that these teachers used to describe how they were viewing children with significant learning differences. When we pay attention to their language, we find it rife with contradictions; we can almost see the earth moving. The teachers were talking about such children in new and more valued ways, but at the same time they still used many labels to categorize and sort children.

Some of the emerging features of the landscape are still obscured. We were left with questions, because there were things we could not see. When the teachers grouped by differences in ability, did they mean they were attending to the children’s “*capacity* to learn?” (Rioux, 1994b) Or were they using it to distinguish how children were dealing with learning at this point in time? They were moving away from using official disability labels, some more than others, and rarely did what I have seen countless teachers do in other settings, immediately point out their “ADD kids” or their “LD” or “ED” kids.

Their way of classifying children could be seen as functional, a way of differentiating children who could deal with the sequence and scope of grade level academic content with relative ease from those who were struggling to do so. Interestingly, they tended to use the label “included child” to mean those children who were not typically engaged in the process of contending with getting through this grade level academic material, those kids who were supported by an instructional aide, who might be termed in other settings, a child with moderate/severe disabilities. There was still plenty of talk of needs, and although the teachers talked about all children having needs, the children who were given special education labels still got responded to as more needy.

There was a significant contradiction between the values that were espoused - we are all here to learn together, everyone has strengths and weaknesses, learning is best within a community, we don’t like to make kids feel different or devalued - and the actual practice of ability grouping to provide instruction in reading and mathematics.

Another contradiction was that collaborative planning and teaching and “working as a team” worked best when group participants shared the same values about children, teaching, and learning, and when they perceived themselves as having the same high level of commitment to teaching, to children, to curriculum development, and to getting along. When these things weren’t in place, collaboration was at best difficult and sometimes non-existent. People tended to do their own thing alongside each other (as Colleen noted, somewhat akin to the old developmental concept of parallel play). And even among those people who engaged in collaborative planning and teaching, there were still times when people had their own agendas and pushed them, when people argued over sometimes trivial things, when their actions provided

evidence of subtle and sometimes not so subtle power struggles, when competition between people provided the impetus, when their differences in values and beliefs came into conflict.

It was never my intent as researcher to judge, criticize, or condemn. Yet I felt this very real pressure on me from the academic community to identify the contradictions that existed in these teachers behavior. “Tell us how it really was. Take off your blinders about inclusion and this setting, Liz. Certainly you saw contradictions between the way they talked about inclusion and the way they practiced it. Surely you saw examples of children with disabilities being sometimes treated in less than model ways. No way they could always behave collaboratively in their interactions, wasn’t this so?”

Yes, I saw examples of all these things. In fact, seeing these things helped me to come to one of my key understandings and one that I suggest the field of education take a closer look at: *Even in the most model of settings, contradictions exist. We should expect them, be prepared for them, prepare prospective teachers for them, and not always expect that others will see them nor want to solve them.*

Yet I worry that the participants of the project, who read what some might consider a “negative finding,” will be upset and feel that I thought lesser of them for it. I assure them that this was not the case at all. I and others view contradictions as a part of human nature and perhaps part of a larger pattern of human existence. As such, contradictions are a part of schools and of teacher practice. Jackson (1995) called contradiction “one of the complexities inherent in understanding teachers.” And perhaps it is through the contradictions that we can best construct our own understanding of what these teachers were coming to know about themselves as teachers of inclusive classrooms.

The teachers in this project knew they were not perfect, but they had come to understand there were essential things they had to try to do as teachers for inclusive education to work. They were trying to see and respond to children with labels of disability in new ways. They were trying out a variety of instructional strategies and materials in an attempt to negotiate learning differences within the confines and constraints of the ways schools are structured. They were trying on and working their way through new roles and patterns of interaction with others in response to the way inclusion was unfolding in their classrooms. They were committed to keep trying.

Arlene asked this question of the group. “I wonder how many schools get together and talk about their philosophy? We did ... for two weeks before the doors even opened here at Wilbur Avenue Elementary. We met together at the high school and we talked about some really serious things and we talked about our beliefs in teaching. I think we really came together and some people changed their thinking during that time. I think you need to do that as a school. If you want a community, you’ve all got to pitch in.

“We’re thinking about revisiting that at the end of the school year and having a retreat just for one day,” Jean-Marie added.

Susan spoke for the first time. “I was just thinking about that sitting here. You know this time last year when I was still at the other school, I was getting to that point where I was just feeling totally burned out, and it’s like... the energy is contagious here, do you know what I mean?

This provoked laughter and affirmations from the group.

Susan went on. “I mean I’m tired. It’s just a totally different kind of tired this year and I think it’s exciting. I mean we never met like this, and I know that

this is your fault, Liz, that we're all here," which provoked more laughter from the group when she said this to me. "But it's the getting together, like when we are in our book group and talking about The Basic School. Everybody's just excited about what they're doing."

Amy offered, "Well, it's a good model. That's the feeling that I've always gotten from Wilbur compared to other schools. There's just a real commitment to the community and to the belief in everybody working together. It just seems like that is so much stronger than I've seen elsewhere and it's just emanates, you can just feel it."

Nicole looked thoughtful. "I don't know if you remember when Drew came to talk to one of my classes last year. He said, 'I had a lot of say, and if a person doesn't want, really want, to work with students with disabilities, then they're probably not going to work at Wilbur.' And I think of the impact that has had in terms of how he brought people together who were very committed. Other schools in other districts and other counties just aren't at that stage where they can bring in only the people who say 'Yes, we are all in this and this is what we want.'"

She continued. "I don't know, I'm sure it might have been different when you folks first got started, maybe there's a stage that you go through. I think some of the other school people were talking about that last night for that panel discussion I had for my class. But here, everybody has that commitment, it seems very strong."

I brought up an additional point. "But also the thing that has struck me is that you all have this commitment to continually growing as teachers. I mean you all have started this new model this year and that's been something hard, you've never done it before in this way. To me what has been especially great for the student teachers is that they've had the chance to be in a setting where they're really encouraged to learn and grow because everybody thinks that way, that that's what you do as teachers, you keep learning, you keep growing."

"And you're not afraid to try new things. That's really important," added Betty.

Implications of the Study

I will conclude this chapter and this text with a brief discussion of the possible implications of this study as they pertain to two groups of readers suggested by Lincoln (1997): (a) "Those who could benefit from [my] research" (p. 46). I believe this would be the classroom teachers who are trying to make inclusion work and the people who would support their learning and development, and (b) Those who might be "deeply concerned with the outcome of my work" (p. 46). These people might be special educators, and teacher educators in both elementary and special education.

I offer an aside to frame my discussion of the meanings and implications of the study. I have attempted to construct the text which represents this inquiry in a way that encourages significant reader interpretation and intertextual meaning-making. (The rationale and process are described fully in Appendix F). Thus, understandings generated by the study may differ from what individual readers, with their diverse range of experiences and perspectives, take away from it. As Alvermann has proposed, the meanings represented by and generated by this text are "in the process of becoming" (1996, p. 117), and there can be both value and validity in such multiple opportunities for

interpretation. I also constructed the text in a way that might allow for each reader to participate peripherally in the dialogue and narrative that occurred in this setting and that played such a significant role in the teachers' learning and development. If the text serves to encourage each reader to engage in and extend that dialogue with others, I can think of no better purpose for this study. As I move on now to discuss key implications of this study, I introduce my last intent – I hoped to create a representation of the inquiry that could attend to the “context, character, contradiction, and complexity” of teachers and teacher learning in this inclusive education setting (Carter, 1993, p. 11; also Lather, 1991). That is the challenge for researchers yet to come who would draw from this study and build on it. Transformational processes demand transformational texts, and if we are writing for audiences who need to benefit from our work, readers need as rich and full and complex a representation as we can provide them.

First and foremost this study and this text provided insight into the incredible complexity of the process of teacher learning and teacher development in inclusive educational settings. That is an understanding that will be agreed upon by all readers who come away from this text. The teachers understood this, all too well.

We learned from the teachers in this project that their understandings of themselves as teachers in inclusive education had occurred within a professional community or “community of practice” structured by the school. Their learning was situated, and revolved around problems and/or children in their classrooms. They problem-solved and brainstormed, they discussed instructional materials and strategies, they shared experiences. (Peterson, McCarthy and Elmore, 1996). These “communities of practice” supported the risk taking and struggle that came with the transformation of their practice (McLaughlin and Talbert, 1993, cited in Putnam & Borko, 2000; Peterson, McCarthy and Elmore, 1996; Wideen, Mayer-Smith, and Moon, 1998).

The teachers at Wilbur Avenue constructed their learning and growth as an evolutionary process - a series of complex interchanges and recursive reconstructions of their knowing accomplished by an endless circle of talking, reading and interacting with a range of children, parents, general education and special education colleagues and supervisors. The teachers said they found it an incredibly difficult task to separate out the separate components of their learning - they were much too intertwined, too enmeshed.

And here in lies the first key, or implied understanding generated by this inquiry. Up to now, those of us who would support teachers in inclusion classrooms have pretty much failed to understand the nature of this very complex and very difficult process. First, our response has been simplistic. And second, we have focused almost exclusively on how the general educator must change. The field's response has been to provide course work and in-service to help teachers feel more capable with students with disabilities and the idea of inclusion. Even teacher educators such as Schumm and Vaughn (1995), who have made a serious effort to transform their own practice as teacher educators and whose goal is “meaningful professional development,” put increasing teachers' planning and instructional competencies in the forefront of their work. We have a solid base of research to support what every teacher will tell you - traditional professional development models have not been particularly effective in creating more “effective” inclusive educators nor in substantially changing their practice (Schumm & Vaughn, 1995).

Another understanding implied by the experiences of the teachers in this project is that communities of practice built on situated models of learning appear to have significant promise

for teacher learning and teacher development in inclusive education. Teachers will need freedom to learn and freedom to take risks, and we have seen how such communities provide support and encouragement. We know of the richness of the dialogue and the stories which will resonate within the community. We have seen how the individual and collective strength of the group and its members creates the capacity for dealing with liminality and the way it presents itself in the form of dilemmas and contradictions and uncertainties. It holds the promise of helping teachers co-construct understandings with others of what it means to be a teacher in an evolving inclusive education setting.

We saw in this inquiry that several of the teachers had a history of changing their practice and were even in the process of doing so. I also believe that we would be better served by not thinking of practice as located within individual teachers or scholars who are seen as “experts” about practice. It is a complex process found in the interrelationship of people, context, tools, and their interactions. And the evidence of that at Wilbur was quite strong.

The final implication of this study is for those researchers who are interested in teachers’ professional development: The *process* of individuals coming to know themselves as teachers in inclusive education and the stories that represented that process were the focus of this inquiry, not “what does it take to make a difference in general education teachers’ planning and instruction for students with disabilities” (Schumm & Vaughn, p. 352). Narrative research such as that conducted by Schumm and Vaughn (1995), while well intentioned, can be seen as problematic because it situates the expertise or knowledge about “effective” practice in the university-based researcher. Some even question the way we have gone about amassing the knowledge base in special education and if there is actually a foundation of “effective” teaching strategy from special education on which to build inclusive education (Gallagher, 1998).

When we focus on the lives and lived experience of teachers and the narratives that represent those, we privilege the teachers’ perspective on their own growth and development (Alvermann, 2000).

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Appendix A Setting the Inquiry in Motion

Van Maanen (1998) reminds us that an inquiry is never really completed; rather it is “over,” stopped at a point in time determined by the researcher. It seems to me that there is that same nebulous point of reference with the beginning of most qualitative inquiries as well. Where shall I say the process of my own inquiry into how teachers come to know themselves in new ways in inclusive educational settings began? Was it when I wrote my prospectus for my committee? Was it before that, when I began my doctoral program with a set of questions I wanted to answer through course work, scholarly research and writing, and field-based inquiry? Was it long before that, when I first began to know myself as a teacher in new ways and to question the deficit-laden construct of disability as a result of my interactions with children with labels of disability?

I have written at least twice in my tenure as doctoral student about my experiences with Jarrell, a student from my first year of teaching. I use his story as an important beginning, to frame and introduce my research questions and the text that represents my doctoral inquiry. But my entry and participation in the doctoral program in curriculum and instruction at Polytech set the process of formal inquiry into motion.

Beginning Doctoral Study

I began my doctoral program at Polytech University in 1994 with fervor, ready to be back in school. I had begun doctoral study at Syracuse University in mental retardation with Doug Biklen as my advisor eleven years before, but had gotten way-laid; slowed down by a new baby on the way and a two year old, stalled by the specter and then the reality of my husband not getting tenure, completely derailed by a lightning bolt out of the blue, a promising job in human services administration which would allow me to continue my commitment to a group of parents and young people I had been working with for five years. Now after eleven years of major life events and changes and a physical move to another state, I wanted to be back on track toward my doctoral degree.

I began this second attempt at doctoral studies with a strong sense of purpose. I had talked at length with the Director of Curriculum and Instruction at Polytech and he had convinced me that the program could mesh in exciting ways with my own goals for study. I wanted to maintain my twenty year commitment to children and adults with disabilities and to making this a more inclusive and accepting and supportive world for people with significant differences, but to move it into a new direction. I renewed my long-time aspiration of becoming a teacher educator, but this time in elementary, not special, education.

Creating a Frame for my Inquiry

I came to this inquiry from two personal perspectives. First, I approached it as a person from the field of special education and community services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Both personal and professional experiences had led me to believe in inclusion as a philosophy and a foundation for my actions. My life's work with people with disabilities was characterized by a commitment to community participation and a social activist approach to change. I knew my research interests would stem from this commitment.

Second, I came to this as a doctoral student re-entering the intellectual world of the university at mid-life. I came into the program galvanized, with a pretty clear sense of direction of where I was going with this final round of formal education and what I wanted to learn. When I first began the doctoral program, I created a list of questions to guide my studies and my

research. I also shared them with some faculty members and they became the basis for dialogue. Having the questions as a frame gave them the opportunity to advise me on people and courses that might enhance my development, and gave us each the opportunity to see if our interests intersected in ways that could be mutually beneficial. The sharing of these questions and the ensuing dialogue also helped me to decide who would serve on my doctoral committee.

These initial questions were constructed from the intersection of what I had learned from reflecting on my life experiences, my own and those shared with me by others, and what I had learned from all the things I had read over the years to fuel my passion and further my professional development: textbooks, journal articles, stories, personal accounts, newsletters, etc. I thought carefully about what I wanted to know more about and what I wanted to get out of this intensive period of study. The questions I developed were as follows:

September 1994

1. *What is the impact of inclusion on teacher attitudes, instructional strategies, and curriculum design? In other words, what enables the teacher in the regular classroom to develop learning experiences which challenge and include learners of all abilities?*
 - a) *What successful instructional strategies have teachers developed and used?*
 - b) *How do they acquire these?*
 - c) *How do they recognize the need for changes in their own methodology?*
 - d) *What course work or education experiences prepared them for this task?*
 - e) *What ways do teachers use to educate themselves to fill in the gaps?*
 - f) *How do teachers successfully design/manipulate/modify the curriculum to meet students' needs?*
 - g) *What supports do they rely on to help with this process?*
 - h) *How does society's devaluing of people with disabilities appear to influence teachers' reactions to inclusion and their willingness to make changes in their classrooms?*
2. *Why do we have separate teacher education programs today?*
 - a) *What were the historical/sociological influences on the development of educational programs for children with disabilities compared/contrasted with educational programs for typical children?*
 - b) *How did separation occur and what kept it going?*
 - c) *How did the development of separate teacher education programs occur?*
 - d) *Who were the most influential people in the field who called for "inclusive" programs vs. those who called for separate programs?*
3. *Why should we develop teacher education programs that prepare people for inclusive education programs?*
 - a) *How does the development of the inclusion movement and the regular education initiative parallel the development and promotion of other related and significant educational and sociological movements and theories (e.g. valuing diversity, community regeneration?)*
 - b) *How do educators in the field answer this question?*
 - c) *What has been the rationale behind the development of recently reorganized or newly created "inclusive" teacher education programs?*

- d) *What do these "inclusive" teacher education programs look like? How has the curriculum changed? What are the salient features?*
- e) *What are the implications for traditional, two-tiered programs?*

Using this Frame to Come to New Understandings

Each semester during my first two years, I arranged and conducted an independent study or field study to gather information and lay the foundation for my research using these questions as my guide. I felt very fortunate to have this kind of freedom to design my program.

That first year as a supervisor of student teachers, I kept track in formal and informal ways of student teachers' reactions to the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general education classroom. I led a seminar session on inclusion and had student teachers write in their journals about an inclusion issue they were grappling with. I provided a simple framework for helping my student teachers' include and challenge children of differing abilities, and encouraged dialogue around this and other issues relative to inclusion.

Thus at the end of my first year of supervising, I was both disheartened and challenged when during a group feedback session to evaluate the model, the majority of student teachers said they still felt very unprepared for inclusion and felt resentful that the program wasn't geared to help them feel more confident with children with significant learning problems. I learned that these students were not even required to take one course in special education as part of their program of study. I wondered what I, personally, could have done differently.

Learning from My Early Experiences with Student Teachers

The following are assertions I made from an informal analysis of student teacher journals and my own notes on observations in the schools of student teachers and cooperating teachers.

December 1994

1. *Their language reflects stereotypes and devalued roles, and portrays negative images of students with disabilities (e.g. needy, to be pitied and cared for, menace and dread).*
2. *The traditional view of the classroom and of curriculum hinders creative approaches to inclusion. I frequently hear "Taking time away from other students is not fair."*
3. *Almost all of the student teachers gave no evidence of having learned: to use a range of resources for planning, to participate meaningfully in the IEP process, to utilize support personnel, to draw kids in from the periphery of the classroom and the learning environment, or to assume any responsibility for instructional development for children with identified special needs. [I was blown away, needless to say.]*
4. *There is a tendency to overprotect and do for "labeled" children, and to exaggerate the accomplishments of children identified as "disabled."*
5. *Teachers do not appear to have ownership of the instructional process with students identified as "inclusion" children. Typically, this seems to be because these children have an aide that works one-on-one with them. Sometimes, this dyad almost seems to be an island in the middle of the sea that is the classroom.*
6. *The role of the aide is not spelled out. Success, that is the child functioning as a member of the class, seems to be highly individualized, and depends on such factors as the personality and skills of the aide, and the other classroom staff, communication, etc. The nature of the relationship and the level of commitment of the aide to the child seem key.*
7. *Resources for teachers and for children that are available within the school setting are not used, and even when they are, the effort is rarely collaborative.*

8. *There were some activities that student teachers and teachers developed and implemented that had potential for facilitating inclusion and learning and participation by children of all abilities, but only on rare occasion were they purposefully used that way. These included: Kindergarten centers, cooperative activities, small group learning and work, project-based activities, and the use of alternative performance standards (e.g. draw me a picture in your journal about what you learned today about sheep [instead of writing sentences]).*
9. *Issue of facilitating inclusion vs. attending to the “needs of the child.”*
10. *There were a number of times when student teachers’ lack of preparation seemed startling, and evidence that they are ill-prepared literally shouted at me.*
11. *Student teachers lacked an understanding of how special and/or remedial education are supposed to work, or could work, and that the effort should be collaborative between these services and regular ed. This seemed reflective of how others in the school were approaching it as well.*
12. *Student teachers do not possess, nor have they cultivated, basic skills of “reading” behavior, especially the notion of the communicative intent of children’s behavior and how to interpret that.*

In analyzing this preliminary data, I also identified and reflected on several big frustrations for myself. I felt like I, as a supervisor of student teachers, had had little impact on students and settings. The readings and resources I had developed were not used at all. There was little evidence in journals of reflections on *how* children learn or the talents they bring with them to school. I could not see where children were given positive ways to take control of their own behavior and learning, and to exert influence in the school setting. I felt like children were given few meaningful choices and were not empowered as people nor as learners. I noted:

November 1994

Through the readings we have been doing for Dr. N on culture, it seems that resistance is an expected and universally typical response to the establishment of normative control, and attempts to authoritatively define and control the culture. This resistance, both open and covert, is a means of protecting and maintaining a sense of self. This has implications for children’s behavior in the culture of the school. Many teachers use a variety of methods to shape the class as a group, and to use discipline, coercion, and persuasion to firmly establish control. Perhaps we need to view children’s so-called behavior problems and attention deficit disorders in this light. Certainly, we need to approach prospective and practicing teachers’ resistance to inclusion with this in mind.

Intertextual Learning: Course Work, Reading and Dialogue

My course work, readings, and research involvement that first year provided exposure to social constructivist theories of learning. I began to apply these theories to the issue of disability in our society, and ruminated that the cultural construction of disability might prove to be a useful lens for my inquiry. The paper I wrote for my qualifying exam in the Spring of 1995 began to flesh this out.

Several other major activities during my second year of doctoral study expanded my understanding of social constructivist theories of learning. I was involved with three professors and another graduate student in a qualitative research project looking at how student teachers

come to know themselves as teachers, and we met weekly to hash out our understanding of how the theories seemed to be operating with our student teacher participants and with ourselves.

Another theoretical thread ran through this research, and that was the role of story in capturing what teachers and student teachers were coming to know. For me this was also an outgrowth of an earlier interest in story and writing to learn further stimulated by the literacy classes I was taking and my reading about narrative in teaching. I was involved with a “community of learners” composed of graduate students and professors and set up as a seminar for credit, and together we read Vygotsky and Wertsch and Bahktin, and tried to figure out the role of dialogue and experience. During the winter I had the good fortune to attend a Vygotsky in Education conference in Chicago, and I got to hear and interact with the people I had been reading: James Wertsch, Luis Moll, Vera John-Steiner, and Anne Haas Dyson.

An example from my research journal shows how this intertextual learning was working for me.

October 12, 1995

Driving in my car back and forth to Polytech and my schools from my home in Nearby gives me plenty of time for reflection. I don't always get it written down, but the process moves me along significantly in my thinking about literacy, research, teaching, learning, and supervision. They are all intertwined in some ways for me right now. My learning as a result of reading, writing, observing, and discussing that I do for this literacy seminar has deep connections with the reading, writing, observing and discussing that I do to support my learning about student teachers, and as part of the supervisory and research processes I am engaged in. [That didn't make as much sense as I wanted it to, so here's another stab at it.]

The reading, writing, listening, observing, and talking that I am doing for what seems like the distinct and separate tasks of class work (literacy research seminar), my graduate assistantship (supervision of student teachers), and research (a group qualitative study examining how student teachers use language to construct their learning), helps me to see the deep connections between course work, self-study, practice, and inquiry, and the ways we use reading, writing, and discourse to teach and learn (hmm, that's one mighty long sentence!)

I have been trying to pin down what have been the most important literacy activities for me as a learner in creating meaning, and what I have observed to be important literacy activities that support and even shape the learning of my students. In the car today, I had a flash, a powerful, exciting insight that just suddenly gelled: I want to explore how to use story and dialogue to help students in teacher preparation programs construct their learning, to construct new understandings, about learners with very diverse and special needs.

The following entry from my research journal was written while I was in the midst of investigating the literature for my Reading Research Seminar, and was in response to reading AERA's preamble. It is another example of intertextual meaning making. It also reflects my early consideration of dialogue and story as tools of inquiry and learning.

October 14, 1995

There is much in the literature to support the use of story in teacher education. We learn much about the construct of learner and of teacher through this literary device,

about ourselves in those roles, and about how our constructs have been shaped by our experiences with others in those roles.

*One of the difficult aspects about considering the constructs of learner and teacher in inclusive education in teacher preparation is that many of our student teachers have had few experiences with others in these roles and have no **positive** stories to counteract the hurtful stories (Blatt, 1981). These hurtful stories which perpetuate all of Wolfensberger's devalued roles of deviant persons then take precedence. I am reminded of a story about a child smearing feces that one of my student teachers told last year during my seminar class on inclusion.*

What occurs with dialogue when this is used as a frame for teacher preparation relative to inclusion? How is dialogue made different or more cohesive when we provide a frame or a direction for students' thinking and learning and telling of stories?

New Experiences that Set the Stage for my Research

During my second year, I had the good fortune to supervise three students at Wilbur Avenue School in Patton County, and especially, to work with a teacher there, Jean-Marie Matthews, who would become instrumental as a gatekeeper into that setting for my dissertation research. This was a setting known for its inclusion efforts, and for the first time since Syracuse I saw children with a wide range of abilities and disabilities learning together in the elementary classroom, and provided support by a generous complement of adults.

In response to what I felt to be a fiasco first year of supervising, during my second year I engaged in significant dialogue with my student teachers about how and what they were learning about kids and teaching in this inclusive setting. I gave feedback on how successfully they had included and challenged children with disabilities in their lessons, and we spent significant amounts of time brainstorming activities, strategies, and modifications.

Jean-Marie, her student teacher from our model, and I had a number of opportunities to talk more in general about teacher preparation and inclusion. Jean-Marie seemed very interested in my ideas for research in this area, and said she would be glad to be involved if she could. I also worked with Angela Mays who was the cooperating teacher for another one of my student teachers. Thus I had the beginnings of a relationship with these two teachers and could build on that when it came time to select teachers to work with for my inquiry.

My experiences at a middle school in a different part of Patton County, although much less positive, were also a significant source of learning and helped me to reflect on what might be needed to make inclusion efforts successful.

For my independent study that semester, I developed a preliminary set of questions for interview to learn more about how students of education come to know about disability and teaching children with disabilities. I used them to interview one of my student teachers in early winter. I then used the responses to that interview, and new thoughts I had gained from reflecting on the social constructivist theories I was reading about, to develop a revised set of questions. These were used to interview two other student teachers during the spring.

November 1995

- 1. What do you think it means to be a teacher given that you will encounter children with special needs within the regular education setting?*
- 2. What are your personal views and feelings on the inclusion of children with handicapping conditions in the regular classroom?*

3. *Have these views changed at all during the course of your teacher preparation program?*
4. *How have you come to know about children with disabilities?*
5. *How do you define “special needs?”*
6. *How did you come to this understanding? [Follow with if needed] Describe some pivotal or influential experiences/events/people/movies/books/texts/stories that have contributed to your coming to know about disability or children with special needs.*
7. *How has your experience in the schools contributed to your understanding of learners with special needs?*
8. *How has your experience in the schools contributed to your understanding of the regular classroom teacher’s role in the education of children with disabilities?*
9. *What role has student teaching played?*
10. *What role has your supervisor played, if any, in your understanding of children with special needs?*
11. *Has your view of yourself as an educator involved with children with special needs changed this semester? If yes, how and why? If no, please explain.*
12. *In what ways have you come to know about learners with special needs within specific courses you’ve taken at Polytech?*
13. *In what ways have you come to know about meeting the needs of children with disabilities as they relate to regular classroom and specific instructional content areas?*
14. *What do you feel you need to know to successfully include and challenge learners with special needs in the regular classroom? Do you feel prepared? What experiences or learning activities have been most helpful to you?*
15. *What do you think needs to be included in a program of teacher education to prepare you for this?*

After I piloted these questions, I came to several important conclusions that helped me revise the questions and move up to the next step in the research process. First, I had what would turn out to be a recurrent problem - too many questions! Second, many of these questions turned out to be leading, and I realized that they gave the participant little option for expressing an opposing point of view. A number of the questions were too general or over the heads of my novice student teacher participants who often did not seem to understand what I was asking for. On the other hand, looking back at these questions, I wish in hindsight I had kept more of them than I did. But developing these questions and using them to interview the three student teachers was an important preliminary step for me.

I remember sitting in a coffee shop waiting for my very first interviewee to arrive. I read over my questions again and again, trying to look relaxed, and rehearsing what I could say that would make her feel comfortable with me. I was exceptionally nervous, a feeling I would never have had if we were just going to have an informal conversation.

I was very serious about this research, driven to capture something important. I really thought the field of teacher education and I had much to learn and it was my responsibility to capture these “truths” and share them with the world. I was also very naïve, dumb even. I thought I knew exactly what “good” inclusion was supposed to look like. Certainly I had read enough about it, and had my Syracuse models to compare things to. But I was absolutely unable to predict the dilemmas I would encounter when engaging in research in a “model” setting, and, I

must confess, I had somewhat fixed notions about what I thought I would see there. This preconceived set of expectations had considerable influence in my design of my research.

Intensive Preparation: Summer 1996

The summer of 1996 was spent reading and writing, and working on two main tasks. The first was a rather ambitious review of three areas of literature for a paper to serve as my preliminary exam. The second task was redesigning the undergraduate exceptional learners course for Polytech, with guidance from my advisor who taught the same course at the graduate level.

The paper that I wrote for my prelim put me on the actual road to my dissertation and was a way for me to pull together the areas I had been studying and exploring across my first two years in the program.

I was still being driven by that main question that I had come into my doctoral program with:

What does it take for teachers in general education to feel comfortable and capable in dealing with learners of all abilities, and what do we know and need in teacher education to play a role in helping teachers feel this way?

However, after two years of reading and research, I had formed two tentative assumptions about why I thought teachers typically did *not* feel comfortable with children with disabilities in the general education classroom, and in fact, expressed a great deal of anxiety and even fear about including them in their classrooms. I concluded that these same assumptions were tied into why teachers viewed themselves, as did others, as incompetent or not capable of teaching children with disabilities. These assumptions were as follows:

Our ability to move forward with inclusive education is hindered by our historical construction of separate educational structures both in the schools and in teacher education.

and

Our ability to move forward is also hindered by the ways our culture constructs disability and ability, and by the pervasive and harmful images of children and adults with disabilities that are reinforced in our schooling and rehabilitation instructional and funding practices and by the popular media.

As explained above, I wrote a lengthy three-part paper from my review of the literature and this served as my preliminary exam. But I also used it to try to work through, and admittedly to find support for, my assumptions, and to develop a rationale for my inquiry. In addition I was able to use what I was learning through this research to guide my redesign of the exceptional learners class.

I explored how other teacher preparation programs were preparing teachers for inclusive educational settings. My intent was to present and critique what appeared to be current best practice in the area of teacher education for inclusive education. I especially wanted to know if and how teacher education programs were addressing issues about negative images of disability and erroneous beliefs about teaching and the nature of special education that hampered efforts to include children with disabilities in meaningful ways. My purpose was to set the stage for current issues and needs in elementary teacher education related to children with special needs. I also began to delve into the area of collaborative inquiry as a means of professional development

to see if and how this had been used within teacher education programs, and especially within those that prepare students for inclusive education.

I read two major tomes on the history of disability and special education (Sheerenberger, 1983; Winzer, 1993) and reviewed historical documents such as Vineland Training School newsletters for the first two decades of the century, early reports to Congress, selected writings of G. Stanley Hall and Henry Goddard and early special education teacher educators such as Wallin to provide a historical perspective on the division between general and special education. The following entry from my research journal captures the illumination these historical readings provided.

June 1996

*I am sitting in the basement of the library at Polytech. I haven't used a microfiche or microfilm machine in years and years, and I haven't spent much time down here either. It's kind of creepy, actually. But I am enjoying myself tremendously in spite of my discomfort and the feeling that I am somehow down in the "bowels" of this repository of knowledge. I have spent hours, more time, really, than I should have, going through these old newsletters of the Vineland Training Center. The stories of the "feble-minded" residents evoke a range of responses in me. I have a sense of the caring that comes through, and that surprises me a bit. Although through my historical research I have come to understand the purpose of such places to be the removal of the "unfit" from society and to prevent "contamination" of the "fit," the educated individuals who are writing the stories convey the attachment they have formed for certain residents. But the people are mostly portrayed as foolish children in need of supervision or like sweet little pets who have learned a new trick, and the tone of paternalism is enough to make me cringe. The cynic in me wonders **why** these stories were written and with what audiences in mind. And Burton Blatt's admonition to open our eyes to the way stories were also created to do evil and to perpetuate certain social and political agendas strikes me as particularly apropos here.*

I was struggling with how to convey my own ideas about images of disability and to pull together several areas of literature that seemed related: attitudes, beliefs, and biases. I did not have tremendous success with expressing in writing what I felt was a very important concept. It was the weakest section of my preliminary exam (and yet has continued to be an area of interest and inquiry for me beyond the dissertation). Image, it turned out, was a nebulous concept to work with, and I was having a hard time figuring out how I could work it into the design of my inquiry.

Setting the Inquiry in Motion

In June I contacted Jean-Marie Matthews, the teacher at Wilbur Avenue School who had expressed willingness to work with me on my dissertation to see if she was still interested and would help facilitate my access to others at the school. We had a long, cool lunch on a hot July day. Jean-Marie agreed to participate and gave me advice on my next steps with the principal and the school system, and I felt my first wave of exhilaration. This was the beginning!

I met with the Director of the Patton County Student Teaching Model at Polytech to ask for her support and the model's cooperation for my research. She agreed to arrange student teacher placements at Wilbur Avenue School for the Spring. I knew then that the balancing act had begun. Everything would have to work out just right, including having my paper done and

passing my Preliminary exam at the beginning of the semester, and getting to Prospectus by December. The irony was here I was planning out the details of where and when I would do my research and with whom, yet I had only a nebulous idea of the questions I wanted to investigate.

Jean-Marie paved the way for me with the principal, Andrew Peters, and later that month I sent him the following letter of intent accompanied by a statement of my beliefs and a summary of my doctoral work.

July 8, 1996

Dear Mr. Peters,

The purpose of this letter is to reintroduce myself to you and to present a proposal for working with you and your staff on a research project. You may remember me as the former Executive Director of the children's museum. Presently, I am a doctoral student in elementary education beginning my third year of full-time study at Polytech. Last year I supervised student teachers from the graduate K-8 program placed at Wilbur Avenue School, and I had the pleasure of working with Jean-Marie Matthews, Angela Mays, and Toni Camembert. I am a special educator by training and I have been involved with a number of schools and programs for infants, children, and adults with disabilities in Florida, Nashville, Syracuse, and, in a limited way, here in the valley. I have been lucky to have been connected with a number of innovative programs working to support and include individuals with disabilities in our communities and schools. These experiences have helped shape my very strong beliefs about inclusive education and the need for educational communities that welcome and nurture diversity and difference.

Through the hard work and commitment of you and your staff, Wilbur Avenue Elementary School is a place that exemplifies inclusive education in the United States today. I believe that those of us in teacher education have much to learn from you and your teachers. I have enclosed a statement of my beliefs about the need for pre-service teacher education that supports inclusive education, and which summarizes my doctoral work thus far in this area. For my dissertation, I would like to work collaboratively with several teachers who are committed to inclusive education and with student teachers from the graduate program placed with these teachers. I am seeking teachers who share an interest in learning how we come to know about disability, children with disabilities, and ourselves as teachers in new ways as a result of functioning within an inclusive educational setting, and who would be open to studying themselves and their teaching through teacher research. I am particularly interested in creating a circle of mutual study and support that sees as one of its functions the sharing of ideas about what is important for teacher education, and in applying what we've learned to enhance the teacher preparation programs at Polytech and the field of teacher education.

I am writing this letter to ask you if you would be willing to work with me, and to recommend several staff who might also be willing to work with me in this endeavor. Jean-Marie Matthews and I have already talked, and she has expressed a strong interest in this research and in working with me. I know you are very busy this summer, and in addition to all your responsibilities as principal, you yourself are also involved in doctoral study. If you can fit me into your schedule, I would like to meet sometime in July to discuss this project with you further. I will be in town the week of July 8 and most of the week of July 22.

The timing on some of this stuff is tricky. First, of course, I have to convince you that this is a worthwhile project and that even though additional time will be involved on the part of those at your school who participate, there is tremendous potential for mutual benefit. Second, if you agree to the project, I have to work with faculty at Polytech to assure that student teachers will be placed with teachers who volunteer to be involved, and that those student teachers agree to participate. Third, I will have to work like the devil to get my prospectus finished as soon as possible in September, so that I have a fully developed and agreed upon research plan for my dissertation. My guess is that if all goes well I could begin to work actively on my field-based dissertation research by October, and I expect to continue the study until early May 1997.

Thank you for taking the time to read this rather lengthy request. I look forward to hearing from you, and I am eagerly anticipating the possibility of working with you and your staff.

Attached to the letter was the following statement that I developed so that people in the school district would be able to be very clear about my values and the intent of my work.

Statement of My Beliefs and a Summary of My Doctoral Work

I firmly believe that learners of all abilities can and should be included and challenged in the general education classroom, and that as teacher educators we have a responsibility to prepare all future teachers to help make that happen. Educational research has identified a number of issues that seem related to why inclusion can be so difficult to implement, and what teachers need in terms of skills, supports, training, and attitude in order for inclusion to be successful (for example, Eichinger, Rizzo, and Sirotnik, 1991; Houck and Rodgers, 1994; Janney, Snell, Beers, and Raynes, 1995.) The key issues that I have come to believe are the most important of those to be addressed within teacher education programs are the negative and devalued images of disability that operate at both conscious and unconscious levels, and which influence future teachers' beliefs about learning, curriculum, educational settings, and teaching.

During my two years of residency in the elementary education program at Polytech, I have had many opportunities to study how regular education pre-service teachers come to know about disabilities and children with disabilities in the schools, and how they come to perceive themselves as less than capable in facilitating learning for children with special needs. My experiences supervising student teachers in K-8 classrooms in Patton County have been invaluable in helping me to learn more about what pre-service teachers might need to feel prepared and competent to include and challenge learners of all abilities in the general elementary education classroom. I am also conducting a small pilot study to expand my understanding of how pre-service teachers come to know about children with special needs which involves interviewing several of my own student teachers from the graduate model and two student teachers from the Pocahontas County undergraduate model.

Through my course work, I have had the opportunity to read extensively on the subject of inclusive education and to discover how its supporters' goals for teaching and learning are closely tied to progressive education goals and programs that exemplify social constructivist principles. I have also studied the history of the parallel development of general education and special education, and written a paper on this

historical and structural division, and the factors that have contributed to separate teacher education programs. I am currently working on a paper with Professor J that explores the social construction of disability, and a means for deconstructing our devalued images of disability, and co-constructing or imagining personally and socially meaningful possibilities for children with disabilities and for ourselves as teachers.

This summer, I am involved with Dr. Nicole B in the redesign of our undergraduate foundations course in special education, Educating Exceptional Learners. Dr. B will be teaching this course at the graduate level in the fall, and I, the undergraduate level. We have defined the purpose of this course as: to help each of us to come to know about disability in new ways, and to increase our understanding of what it means to be a person with a disability in our society, and especially in our schools, today. The major project we have designed to facilitate student learning and understanding is an Images of Disability Portfolio which will include individual and small group reactions and reflections on collected images of disability that students' encounter through the media, literature, and personal interactions.

At this time I have a bud of a plan for my dissertation research. I would like to work collaboratively with several teachers and student teachers from the graduate program who are interested in learning how they come to know about disability, children with disabilities, and themselves as teachers in new ways as a result of functioning within an inclusive educational setting and studying themselves and their teaching through teacher research. I am particularly interested in creating a circle of mutual study and support that sees as one of its functions the sharing of ideas about what is important for teacher education, and in applying what we've learned to enhance the teacher preparation programs at Polytech.

This summer I will be preparing my review of the literature to develop this plan for my dissertation research. (This will serve as my preliminary exam.) I would like to explore how other teacher preparation programs are preparing teachers for inclusive educational settings, and in particular, how they are addressing issues about images of disability and beliefs about teaching which have hampered efforts to include children with disabilities in meaningful ways. I plan on providing a historical perspective on the division between general and special education to set the stage for current issues and needs in teacher education. I would also like to delve briefly into the area of collaborative research and see if there have been other efforts to develop teacher education programs through this mechanism. In addition to reviewing the educational literature and research periodicals, this review will include directly contacting other teacher education programs and inclusion resource groups to gather materials, and present and critique what appears to be current best practice in the area of teacher education for inclusive education.

Due to each other's vacation schedules, Drew Peters and I were unable to meet until mid-August, but thankfully my presentation to him was a success. Drew called me later that day at home to say he would love to have me do this research in his school. He asked me to prepare a proposal for the Assistant Superintendent of Patton County Schools and this would then be the last hurdle to leap over in the approval process with the schools. I would still have to prepare my prospectus proposal for my committee, but the actual project for my dissertation research was now set in motion!

Appendix B ✎ Engaging in the Inquiry

Countdown: Fall 1996

September was devoted to my preliminary exam, my course work, and my teaching. This seemed like no mean feat to me, although I suppose it is a situation that most doctoral candidates find themselves in. My research professor was offering a qualitative analysis seminar for the first time, and I felt very lucky to have been in the right place at the right time to take advantage of this opportunity. The seminar's membership was a unique group comprised of seven doctoral candidates at various stages in their dissertations from planning to final analysis, and three faculty members in curriculum and instruction. Thus it turned out that three of my committee members were a part of the class. Sometimes it felt very awkward negotiating between the roles of student and fellow researcher. Other times I felt very privileged to be part of a graduate student/faculty learning community. To be truthful, most of the time I felt way in over my head.

During that fall, I developed numerous drafts of a proposal for my research prospectus and for submission to the Human Subjects Interdepartmental Review Board. The feedback from my advisor and those at the analysis seminar was invaluable in helping me to refine the questions that would guide my inquiry. I had started this refinement process after my preliminary exam by writing down every question I could think of potentially related to my overall purpose. These were my initial questions:

1. *What are some of the personal experiences of the participants in this project, both as children and as teachers, which have shaped their images of disability and their perspectives on difference?*
2. *How do prospective, novice, and experienced teachers reconstruct their images of disability and their perspectives on difference in the context of the practice of inclusion?*
3. *Have their perspectives about the ways in which we construct disability and difference changed as a result of these reconstructed personal images of disability? Have they changed for any other reasons? How?*
4. *How can we gently encourage interrogation of our personal images of disability and differences, and what happens when we do that?*
5. *Have their perspectives about school-based and societal structures for responding to people considered disabled changed as a result of these reconstructed personal images of disability? Have they changed for any other reason? How?*
6. *How do they come to know themselves as teachers in new ways as a result of their experiences with inclusive educational practice and their interactions with children considered disabled?*
7. *Are there differences between prospective, novice, and experienced teachers, and if so, what is the nature of those differences?*
8. *Do the teachers in this group believe that they have become more comfortable with their role as general educator in a classroom that includes children of all abilities? If so, how do they report that this came or comes about? What stories do they tell to convey this?*

9. *Do teachers come to perceive themselves as having or acquiring the capacity to teach learners of all perceived ability levels? If so, how do they report that this came or comes about? What stories do they tell to convey this?*
10. *Within the context of the collaborative inquiry process, what kind of field texts and analyses help us to challenge our assumptions about disability and difference?*
11. *Within the context of the collaborative inquiry process, what kind of field texts and analyses help us to challenge the image of the general educator as incapable or unwilling to meet the needs of children identified as having educational disabilities in the general education classroom?*
12. *How are new understandings socially constructed through the process of collaborative inquiry?*
13. *What happens when we ask people to critically analyze the effects of cultural messages we have received about disability and difference, and the school-based and societal structures of separateness?*
14. *What happens when a group of people attempts to interrogate their personal images of disability? What influence does the group have in “uncovering the contradictions and discrepancies” in each other’s stories of experience?*
15. *What is the language of difference employed by these teachers?*
16. *Are there/have there been changes in their language of difference and what is the nature of these changes?*
17. *How do experienced practitioners negotiate difference in the school and in the classroom?*
18. *How do novice practitioners learn to negotiate difference in the school and in the classroom?*
19. *What role does the practice of inclusion play in the negotiation or perhaps re-negotiation of difference and how does that play out in language and practice?*
20. *How do verbal practices in school-based interactions construct our conceptions of disability and ability?*
21. *How does dialogue in collaborative inquiry-based group interaction reconstruct our images/conceptions of disability and ability?*

There were some larger questions I had laid out for myself, too; questions I needed to answer before I could get a handle on the design of my research. Engaging with some of my committee members one-on-one to discuss my proposal and emerging design was both rewarding and confusing. They offered useful scholarly suggestions, but the ones they seemed to feel most strongly about, I felt expanded or moved me away from my purpose, instead of narrowing it as I knew I needed to do. Looking back though, I understand that resolving the intent of my study was a crucial step. Before moving on, I had to resolve:

- ⇒ *Is this a study of general educators and their changing or reconfigured response to difference?*
- ⇒ *Is this a study of institutional and personal classification?*
- ⇒ *Is this a study of the development of critical awareness of who we regard as different and why? And how is this accomplished through collaborative inquiry as a means of professional development?*

- ⇒ *Is this a study of how a group of educators learn to “make sense” of the constructs of disability and difference within the contexts of school and culture, and who come to know, speak about, and negotiate practice with children considered disabled in new ways?*
- ⇒ *Is this a study of the development of critical awareness of who we are as teachers and we respond to children seen as educationally disabled?*

I both sought out and welcomed the intellectual challenge of thinking through my research in this way, but felt deflated when given the feedback by seminar members and others that I had way too many questions. I confess that my natural tendencies toward defensiveness and perfectionism were skewed out of whack. After my preliminary exam I wrote that I felt like I had been pushed off the diving board and was tumbling out of control. I had cried for two hours after my orals during a “Liz-passed-her-prelims celebration” at the Cellar. Can you imagine? I was way too fragile. Working through my grief over the deaths of five individuals I was close to, including my mother, and dealing with my sister’s breast cancer, all in a less than two-year time span, had taken its emotional toll. “Think of yourself as a duck. Let this stuff roll off your back,” friends advised, “You have got to work on developing a thicker skin, Liz, if you’re going to get through this.”

But it was hard when even those closest to me misunderstood my intent (“You must have been feeling rather manic when you wrote these,” one person commented). In my heart I knew that at some point the list needed condensing and grouping, but I felt like my intent had been misconstrued, and I was disheartened by the response I got to my efforts to share with others the depth and scope of my thinking-things-through.

The recommendations to narrow the scope of what I wanted to study was good, if initially unwanted and unappreciated, advice. Doing so was hard work, harder than I imagined, but I persevered. I revised and rewrote my proposal more than five times in a less than two month period. Finally for my prospectus, I had it narrowed down to six main questions:

1. *What do teachers know and believe about ability and disability?*
2. *How do they come to know these constructs in new ways?*
3. *What do they know and believe about themselves as teachers of children with differing abilities?*
4. *How do they come to new understandings of themselves as teachers, and what are the roles of interaction, experience, and context in that process?*
5. *What influences teachers’ response to difference?*
6. *What new understandings about teaching, students, and schools are co-constructed through this study?*

Negotiating Participation in the Inquiry

Firming up who would be participating in the study was a challenge as well. In October I was back and forth several times between the coordinator of the Patton County student teaching model and the principal of Wilbur Avenue School to work through teacher recruitment and student teacher placement issues. I consulted with Jean-Marie Matthews on teachers she saw as possible for the study. I gave a presentation to the student teaching seminar as a means of soliciting volunteers, providing a brief overview of my research to the Patton County student teachers, and I don’t think I have ever been so nervous talking to a small group of students. I felt like my whole future was riding on my ability to be articulate and inspirational. Eight potentially

interested students wrote their down their names and phone numbers for me. I followed up by sending them a mini-proposal, and then calling each of them on the phone in the next few days to answer questions and assess if they were still interested in being a participant in the study.

With Jean-Marie's help, we finally identified three additional teachers who would agree to accept a student teacher from the graduate model and who had expressed a preliminary interest in being involved in the study. One of teachers had already been assigned an undergraduate student teacher. This then involved talking to that model director and gaining his support for the research, who in turn, helped me gain the interest and cooperation of the student teacher who had been assigned from the undergraduate model.

In early November, I sent recruitment letters to the four possible candidates for teacher participants.

November 8, 1996

Dear (teacher's name),

This letter and accompanying research proposal are a way for me to introduce myself to you. I would like to talk with you about the possibility of serving as a participant in my doctoral research. Before I ask you to set aside a few moments of your time to meet with me, I thought you would like the opportunity to become familiar with the purpose of my research and the questions that will guide my inquiry.

Wilbur Avenue School is known throughout the state as a school that is committed to inclusive education. In addition to your strong philosophical commitment, you as a staff have devoted considerable time, energy, and resources figuring out how to best implement inclusion. You have created a variety of educational practices that meaningfully include learners with disabilities in the general classroom setting, and support general and special education staff in their efforts to make inclusion a model that benefits all.

For the most part, teacher education has done little to respond to the increasing inclusion of children with special needs in the general education classroom and the need for general educators who feel comfortable and capable working with children with diverse abilities. The College of Education at Polytech is in the midst of planning and implementing a new five-year teacher preparation program, and the faculty has made a commitment to respond in meaningful ways to that need. I believe that those of us in teacher education have much to learn from educators such as yourself, whose experiential history with the practice of inclusive education gives you an informed and experienced perspective. How can the experiences of those teachers involved in inclusion, and the knowledge and insights they have gained as a result of their experiences, be used to inform teacher educators and to guide the practice of teacher education in preparing future educators who feel comfortable and capable as teachers of children with a wide range of differing abilities? I hope that my dissertation research will begin in some small way to address this question.

I am designing a qualitative research project that looks at how general educators learn about themselves as teachers of children with differing abilities in the context of inclusive education. I want to know more about what they are learning and whom they are learning from. I also want to understand how we talk about and negotiate difference, and respond to school-based constructions of ability and disability.

For my research, I would like to work collaboratively with a group of teachers and student teachers at Wilbur Avenue School. I am seeking prospective, novice, and

experienced educators who share an interest in learning how we come to know about ability and disability, children with disabilities, and ourselves as teachers in new ways as a result of functioning within an inclusive educational setting, and who would be open to studying themselves and their teaching through teacher research. I am particularly interested in creating a circle of mutual study and support that sees as one of its functions the sharing of ideas about what is important for teacher education, and in applying what we've learned to enhance the teacher preparation program at Polytech and to the larger field of teacher education.

I met with Drew Peters prior to the start of school and he expressed his strong interest in this research and in working with me. Jean-Marie Matthews and her student teacher for the spring have already said they would like to be involved in the project. I am in the process of developing a prospectus for my dissertation research with committee members, and hope to have my prospectus exam in early December. For your information, the members of my committee are: [members were listed]

If you think you could give me ten or fifteen minutes of your time, I would love the opportunity to talk with you further. I could drop by early Tuesday morning or any time that is convenient to you. You can call me at home this weekend or any evening (000-1089) or e-mail me (ealtieri@pt.edu) to let me know and to ask any questions.. Having worked at Wilbur Avenue School last year as a student teaching supervisor, I had the good fortune to see first hand your talents as a teacher, and your level of commitment and energy. I would be very honored if you would allow me the opportunity to learn from you this year as a participant in my doctoral research.

The next week I met with each one of the classroom teachers suggested by Jean Marie, and was relieved to obtain their enthusiastic support. I then called the student teachers on the telephone and they also agreed, even seemed eager, to participate. I felt very lucky, blessed even, to have things work out so well.

Two other potential participants stepped forward, the doctoral student mentors from the Patton County graduate model who, as part of their graduate assistantships, had supervisory duties at Wilbur Avenue. They expressed interest in doing a research practicum with me for that next semester to get credit for their participation in this project. Personally, I think their advisor and supervisor, who was also a member of my committee, had strongly suggested they do so, and had persuaded them as to the value of the experience. As it turned out, only one of these mentors, Rose Fairfax, continued in the project past the initial interview at the beginning of the semester. The second graduate student declined to participate because of the time commitment.

I really liked having Rose involved in the project. As a fellow doctoral student and novice researcher, I bounced ideas off of her, and at least in this one way, kept the other participants relatively free of my biases. We helped each other better understand research concepts and methods we had never used on our own before. More than anything, Rose helped. She served as another listener and note-taker, and transcribed one of the interview tapes. She even “substituted” for one of the teacher participants and enabled her to participate in our final lunch time dialogue.

Initially, I had not intended to interview the special educators and include them as participants in the project. At the suggestion of my advisor I sought out their participation, but this occurred after I was already present in the setting. In some ways I felt this was a bit unfair to these two women. The teachers and principal were already committed, and now I was asking them to “volunteer” as participants. They would really have looked like the bad guys if they had

declined. As it turned out, one of them was very willing to participate, and the other, in my opinion, participated because she felt like she had to.

Negotiating the Setting for the Inquiry

One of the hurdles I had to get past in getting my prospectus approved was my choice of Wilbur Avenue Elementary School as the site for my research. There was fear on the part of more than one committee member that I would get too swept up in my glowing admiration of the work they were trying to accomplish there. One member thought I needed to be in an other school as well, one with a less idealistic view of inclusion, to make comparisons and to open my eyes to how most teachers really felt about having children with disabilities dumped in their classrooms. Somehow I was able to convince them that Wilbur Avenue Elementary School was an appropriate context for looking at my particular research questions. I was very grateful that they trusted my judgment and allowed me to make this choice. But when I first began my writing in the summer after I did my research, I did a lot of thinking about the setting I chose, especially how I came to know about inclusion in Patton County and what led me to this particular school and the people I ended up working with.

A Reflection on the Context for My Inquiry

Summer 1997

The choice of setting for my study was not at all accidental or random. I purposefully chose Wilbur Avenue School in Patton County because of its commitment to inclusive education. That statement seems straightforward enough at first glance. But the capacity to make that statement must be explored for my reader. It is a statement which immediately provokes questions from others, given the still controversial nature of inclusive education in the education community and the almost automatic tendency of the academic community to question a researcher's assertions, or at the very least, to ask for substantiation.

My task then is to describe how I came to know of this "commitment," and also how I have gathered what I know about Patton County and Wilbur Avenue School and their approach to inclusive education. In some ways, you could say I have been acquiring information on this school district and its inclusion efforts for seven years even before I officially began to collect data. I have purposefully sought out information, been offered information by others, and have acquired or gained access to information in serendipitous ways. This has given me a range of perspectives on this county and its efforts to develop inclusive education.

The understanding of any educational concept or philosophy is always complex and incomplete. My own understanding of inclusive education is framed by my past experiences with children and adults with disabilities and their parents. It has been colored by my past experiences with educators who have both knowingly and unknowingly denied children with disabilities access to educational opportunity, to learning and to literacy, and to the choices and possibilities that are possible when one belongs to a community where one's capacities are valued. It has been focused by the effort and commitment of those educators and parents who have created settings and supports that exemplify the goals of inclusive education, and whom I have been privileged to know and observe and interact with.

My understanding of inclusive education has also been shaped by the hundreds of narratives I have engaged with throughout my adult lifetime: years of hearing people's stories, talking with people in shared and often intense dialogue, and reading widely in the professional literature supporting inclusive education. My inquiry is structured by this many-layered understanding.

In telling you how and what I have come to know about this school district and the school setting I did my research in, I face a peculiar dilemma. I cannot give you, the reader, the references for the many instances of public information available in the literature and the media that have been created by or written about the people and the programs that represent this school and district. To do so, would destroy their anonymity, and violate the confidentiality of the many individuals I worked with and talked with as part of this inquiry.

It would compromise the telling of the story as well, for if we are to truly understand the complexities of inclusive education then we must discuss the struggles as well as the successes of those involved. The act of describing the struggle leaves us all vulnerable: myself as the researcher who could be seen as violating the trust of her participants, the individuals who see themselves presented in a poor light, and the very field of inclusive education. To admit vulnerability leaves the premise of inclusion of children with disabilities in general education settings open to attack. My fear is that the detractors and the skeptics would see it as a chink in the armor, would use the admission of struggle as evidence that inclusion is not working for many children.

My fears are hardly unfounded. A professional narrative comes to mind as I write this: A special issue of a prestigious special education journal devoted to two researcher's longitudinal studies of the integration and re-integration of children with learning disabilities in the general education classroom, their present interpretation that these inclusion efforts do not appear to be fully meeting the needs of children with learning disabilities, and a unique opportunity for several other leading researchers in the field to discuss their sense of the implications of this study (Zigmond and Baker, 1994). I was heartened only by Marlene Pugach's response to their study, "On the Failure of Imagination in Inclusive Schooling." The understanding that I took away from interacting with these narratives, and with Pugach's in particular, was that we need to see the current state of inclusive education in real school settings as a first progressive step. We must imagine the future down the road in such settings with continued commitment to making it work and to collaboratively addressing the problems which are an inevitable outcome of implementing new practice. We must commit our own efforts to being an active part of change in those settings and not just passive observers and omnipotent judges of teachers and schools.

I believe that what these individuals I have been privileged to work with are striving to do in the name of inclusive education and on behalf of children and families should be publicly recognized; they deserve kudos for their effort and commitment. And so I will attempt to tell a story that strikes a balance, that shines light on this exemplar of inclusive education and the people who are making it happen while also illuminating the difficulties encountered along the way.

Without a doubt I see my inquiry and understanding as being narrative in nature. Certainly, there is a chronological and overlapping nature to my learning. I can see my understanding shaped by my interaction with a variety of oral and written texts. I have

many stories about Wilbur Avenue School and Patton County School District and the student teachers and classroom teachers I have interacted with that are now part of my repertoire as a teacher educator.

My first introduction to the people in this school district was viewing a documentary made about their inclusion efforts in 1990. I saw this documentary shortly after moving to this state from Syracuse (Some call this New York city the “birthplace of inclusion.” Certainly it was where my own commitment to inclusion was born), and I remember being inspired and encouraged. I recall thinking this: At least I had moved to a place where someone had heard of inclusive education and there were active efforts to develop it. I was fully aware that across the country there were and still are many school districts who had not even considered embracing inclusive education, or were even fully aware of it as an educational movement.

Even the circumstances of where I live locally play into this narrative. My next-door neighbor is a special education teacher in a Patton County high school, and I have talked with her and other special education teachers in her district that have come by her house for various occasions. These conversations gave me my first inkling of how inclusion was viewed from the “trenches” and how district wide policy was being translated into practice. My neighbor Joan views inclusion in a positive yet realistic way from a secondary perspective, and has shared with me many of her successes and challenges, her joys and her trials. I remember having a conversation with one of her visitors, a learning disabilities specialist, who saw inclusion as a threat to herself as a professional and to the children she worked with. She mourned the loss of her own classroom, her own space, and gnashed her teeth in frustration at having to “kowtow” to the “regular” educator who she saw as unable to meet the needs of “her” kids. In a less volatile, more managed way, I saw traces of these same feelings emerge with one of the special educators at Wilbur Avenue School.

My first job in the area in 1990 was as coordinator of the development of regional early intervention services. Through this position I had the opportunity to meet several people who have continued to be significant players in Patton County’s continued commitment to inclusive education. More than six years ago, I spent a morning with one of the coordinators of the inclusion effort, Colleen Christopher, and she shared with me the details of the five year plan for implementing inclusion, the current successes, and the challenges still to be overcome. In particular we talked about the difficulties they were then facing around the inclusion of a child with a severe emotional disability. There was significant media coverage around the inclusion of this child and I had read each report that tried to capture the experience from a number of individuals’ perspectives - teacher, parents, and central office spokesperson. (Later, the teacher of that child was one of my colleagues in graduate school, and I heard some about that situation from his perspective, too). My ties with Colleen were renewed during the period of this inquiry when I learned that she was now based at Wilbur Avenue School in a support role.

Other narratives that have contributed to my understanding of this county and its schools were the media reports over the years of their trials, tribulations, and successes with their schools and with particular students. Information about the district is also easily accessible through the Internet as the school system has its own web site and is part of an effort to establish a regional electronic communication network. I searched

those web sites at the beginning of my participation observation during early 1997, and have included some of the “hard data” from their web pages in the body of my paper.

My experiences as a student teaching supervisor in Patton County provided me with the opportunity to engage with a variety of intersecting narratives and to further develop my own understanding of the people and practices that supported and inhibited inclusive education in the county. In essence, this provided me with materials for lots of “stories” about inclusive education, my own and others, which I used to initiate dialogue before and during the formal period of inquiry and since then with my own teacher preparation students in a new setting. In my first year of supervision, I worked in five schools in Patton County, none of which happened to be Wilbur Avenue School. I often heard Wilbur Avenue School talked about, however, by classroom teachers, student teachers, and university faculty. My fellow student teaching supervisor was a former teacher in this district and often gave me an insider’s perspective on events with teachers and children I had observed or heard about.

A third grade teacher from Wilbur did a presentation in one of my classes at the university, and I was quite impressed by her enthusiasm, energy, and willingness to provide rich literacy experiences to all of the children in her class. This teacher, Arlene Daniel, had been in the graduate teacher preparation program just a couple of years before and still maintained many of her connections at the university. In her presentation on using workshop activities in the classroom, she made a point to talk about her student with Down syndrome (Stevie) and her efforts to help him become a reader and writer. The next year in one of my classes we read a chapter in the professor’s upcoming book about moral imagination, and indirectly I learned that the second educator cited in the text as an exemplar of the quality of moral imagination was this same teacher. I remembered Arlene when it came time to consider possibilities for participants in my study, and was thrilled to see her name on the list of cooperating teachers for the Spring.

I was familiar with the principal at Wilbur Avenue School as well. Before graduate school I had been associated with a non-profit children’s organization as a volunteer and later as executive director. The organization was dedicated to providing the community and its children with a variety of enrichment experiences in the arts, sciences, and humanities. One of our big tasks was to coordinate and help fund performing arts programs for schools in the area. Drew Peters, now the principal of Wilbur Avenue School, but then at another Patton County elementary school, was known for his support for the arts and for his collaboration with our organization. I had heard one of our volunteers, who had worked as a substitute teacher in the county and then as supervisor for another nearby teacher preparation program, say that he was the best principal she had ever worked with.

During my second year as supervisor of student teachers, three of my students were placed at Wilbur Avenue School in the fall. Many of my questions about how teachers come to feel capable and comfortable working with students of all abilities were generated while observing cooperating teachers and student teachers in this setting. My experience as a supervisor at Wilbur School also gave me the opportunity to form relationships with teachers that paved the way for my entry as a researcher.

I began to talk with Jean-Marie Matthews, one of our cooperating teachers, about how much I was learning from her and my desire to do my dissertation research in this setting. Later, she would become what ethnographers call my “key informant” and my

“gatekeeper” into the Wilbur community. My first introduction to Jean-Marie, however, had been through the documentary I spoke of earlier. She was the classroom teacher the filmmakers followed for a year, the “supporting actress” of this feature on inclusive education, and how the process played out for one child in one classroom in one school.

Perhaps I was a bit “star struck,” but after seeing for myself this teacher’s continued commitment to promoting the principles of inclusive education and to creating an inclusive community in her classroom, I knew I wanted her to be involved in some way in my doctoral research. Her story as represented in this video and the stories she told me and the stories I created for future telling as I observed her, provided the impetus for the design of this inquiry. I wanted to learn more about how she had come to be so comfortable with children with disabilities in her classroom and to appear so capable in enacting the premises of inclusive education.

Angela Mays was another cooperating teacher I worked with that semester at Wilbur School. I came to view her as a master teacher who exemplified best practice in general teaching and learning strategies. From the start her energy level and enthusiasm for teaching left me a bit breathless, and my knowledge of her professional commitment to self-development grew as the semester progressed. But I was puzzled by a repeated observation I had made in her class. She rarely engaged in instructional interactions with one of her students, Robbie, a child with multiple disabilities, who was usually accompanied by a full-time instructional aide. Usually when I was observing, this child was asleep at his desk. The lack of modeling for my student teacher became apparent when I made the observation during one of my formal observations of my student teacher’s teaching, that she, the student teacher, did not interact even once with this child during a 40-minute period. When gently confronted, my student teacher seemed genuinely surprised. She told me that she was only doing as she had observed her cooperating teacher do. She relayed that her cooperating teacher cared deeply for Robbie, but saw instruction as the aide’s responsibility. Later this student teacher developed a model lesson in mathematics that fully included this child in the activity, addressed her individual objectives, and also challenged the other learners.

Angela seemed to work hard to make sure that the needs of the students with learning disabilities in her classroom were being met, and I observed a number of lessons where the special educator was actively involved in working with groups and in direct instruction. At the end of the semester, I realized that I had perhaps only seen the tip of the iceberg and that there was a lot more I could learn from and about Angela and her approach to students with disabilities in her classroom. My questions did not lessen my admiration for Angela, and when I had the opportunity to recommend her as a cooperating teacher to the new director of the graduate student teaching model, I did so enthusiastically and without reservation. I actively sought her participation in my study because I wanted to have a range of master teachers to study in this setting: people with different opinions about how inclusion should be enacted in their classrooms and who were at different points in their development as inclusive educators.

Trying on My Researcher Hat

It was six days before my prospectus exam. I had to take a gamble and begin interviewing my participants before my committee formally approved my proposal or I would

get squeezed out by the end of the semester and would be even more behind than I considered myself to be then.

Entry from My Research Journal dated December 5, 1996

*Response to Initial Interviews with Betty and Cathy
Conducted at the Soft Sofa Coffee Shop, 3:30-5:10 p.m.*

I should have come right home and written up my impressions from these two interviews, the very first ones I have done. But when I left the coffee shop, I discovered, to my dismay, that two inches of snow had fallen in the hour since I last filled up my coffee cup and looked out the window to check the weather. The roads were hell. It took me an hour and a half to get home, and I had two slippery slides off to the edge of the roadway that shook me up a bit. Road conditions aside, the snow was quite beautiful, big flakes falling heavily and covering everything in sight.

Usually I try to engage in reflection about the day while I am traveling to and from Polytech. Today, any thoughts regarding the interviews were blotted out by the concentration necessary to make the eighteen-mile drive home. Then an argument with my husband at dinner (which started, in part, because I had gotten home late) had the effect it often does - shutting down my ability to write and focus on my work. So, it's near midnight and I am just getting a chance to write down a few of my reflections on the interviews.

I think first of all I was struck by how articulate, insightful, and capable these young women were. They seemed to have a very strong sense of self and of themselves as teachers. I could hear the influence of Polytech and sometimes even specific professors in their talk and the vocabulary they used about teaching. For example, when Betty used the term "teacher as gatekeeper" I heard echoed the exact phrase used by my office mate and fellow doctoral student, Kate Kresge, a former teacher with the Patton County schools. And sure enough, Betty talked about the influence that a particular dialogue with Kate has had on her own thinking. Kate had served as Betty's cooperating teacher for her early field experience the previous semester.

Both young women seemed very open to working with children identified as disabled by the schools, and had had a number of experiences with inclusive education. Their experiences with seeing inclusion implemented in schools had been mixed, but both related a number of interactions with children with disabilities wherein they saw their personal efforts as very successful. In addition, Betty described a field experience within a supposedly inclusive setting that still troubled her. At this early point in their teaching careers, they both seemed to have already undergone the "transformation" Giangreco described in his work with general educators.

Betty attributed her university-based understanding of children with special needs to the personal experiences that Dr. S shared with her in his exceptional learners class. She had, in essence, taken the class twice. First she had taken it for credit as a sophomore, and then she had served as his teaching assistant in her senior year. Cathy attributed her understandings to Dr. B and the readings and assignments she did for the graduate course in exceptional learners.

I was also aware of and a little bit amused by how they tiptoed around the use of words to refer to disability and children with disabilities. Cathy seemed to borrow my

interview phrase “ability and disability” and turned it into “abled and disabled.” I remember taking notice of that after she said it several times. Betty, in relating stories of working with children, seemed to make a conscious effort not to use labels at all.

I am still left wondering. What exactly shaped these young women to come to what they now believe about children considered disabled by the schools? How have they managed to acquire a conscious awareness of what labels and stereotypes can mean and do? In many ways their experiences are not that different from many of their peers, whom I am making the assumption don’t believe or respond in this way.

On the other hand, maybe public attitudes and perceptions really have changed, particularly among young people attracted to teaching. If so, this could have great implications for the transformations that may take place in our schools when much of the current teaching force turns over in the next ten years. I recently read, in Ed Researcher, I believe, that we will need 200,000 new teachers a year to meet growth in education, and in particular, to replace the thousands of teachers now in their 50’s and 60’s who will be retiring. What can we attribute, if anything, to the influence of their teacher preparation programs? Does our reflective model tend to attract people who are already reflective in nature or by training, or does the program actually help them acquire this strategy for learning? Are these two individuals (and the other two student teachers yet to be interviewed) unique as student teachers? Are they the cream of the crop, or are they typical?

I suspect that they are not typical. When I think about the exceptional child class that I am presently teaching, of the ninety students, there are only a handful who are marvelously reflective and have developed a sense of critical awareness about the world and how disability is socially constructed. I wish I could interview them, too!

I’m too tired to think much more. All of a sudden my exhaustion hit me like...boom! So I’ll try to wrap up with just a few more notes.

I am not completely happy with my interview questions. I think my follow-up questions may be too repetitive, although they probably can be considered decent enough questions. Information that addresses them comes out somewhat naturally in response to what I’ve called “conversation starters.” I still question if I talk too much. Is it okay that I use this therapeutic technique, which is to paraphrase the person or send back to them what I thought I “heard” them say? It’s almost like giving an interpretation of their response right within the context of the interview, and then asking for confirmation of that interpretation or clarification of what they really meant. This was the second time (the first time being when I was interviewing two of Dr. M.’s student teachers last year) a student has said that their interview helped them think in new ways or come to new insights about a personal experience or their teaching. I should look carefully when I transcribe this to see what prompted that.

In the School, At Last

Date: Thursday, 16 January 1997

To: [e-mail names and addresses of classroom teachers and student teachers]

From: Elizabeth Altieri <ealtieri@pt.edu>

Subject: Touching base

Dear Folks,

Well, I'm not having much luck getting to Wilbur, am I? I seem to have an uncanny knack for scheduling days to come visit you, and meet your students and start talking about how we're going to organize our getting together, on the days they've closed or delayed school for snow/ice/cold. I deeply regret that - I have been looking forward to spending time with you, and learning from you.

It's a poor substitute, but I thought we could begin our dialogue through e-mail. First of all, I would like to thank each of you for taking the time to sit down with me and talk about the personal and teaching experiences that have shaped what you believe about disability and ability and how you see yourself as a teacher. I learned a lot about what makes you the caring and insightful women and teachers that you are. I feel deeply honored that you have shared these thoughts with me. I am in the middle of transcribing these tapes. (Well, really just the beginning! I am so slow at typing!)

I hope some of our early group discussions can follow up on these individual conversations about the experiences that have been so personally significant to you. If you are interested, I would like to share my own experiences and background with you. I can think of two possible ways to do this. One, I could send you a copy of pieces I have written as a doctoral student - some reflections on what has fueled my professional passion for the inclusion of people with disabilities in our schools and communities, and personal introductions to papers. Two, one of you could interview me with the same questions I asked you, and then we could share that transcript with everyone. What would you like? Another idea? Or you may feel you know enough about me already and that you don't need to do more. It's up to you.

Here's how I suggest we proceed. I would like you to think of yourselves as collaborators in this research, and any suggestions you have or directions you think it important to pursue will be very important for us all to consider. I had hoped to do the following in January: Meet your kids, especially those who pose challenges to you as teachers and for whom collaboration with other teachers and resource people occurs; meet the other members of your grade level teams and the people that you collaborate with; sit in on some of your planning meetings and discussions to learn how you respond to children with differing abilities; meet with the student teachers and talk about how they are learning about themselves as teachers in the context of inclusion; and have our first large group dialogue. It would be great if I could do at least one or two things a week with you.

Since time is starting to close in on me here in the third week of January, you could really help by inviting me to upcoming grade level meetings, planning sessions with teachers you team with, instructional planning times between cooperating teacher and student teacher; teaching activities you have planned that you think would enable me to see the challenges some students present and how you have designed your teaching to try and meet their needs, as well as the needs of the other students in your class. I would like to get these on my calendar, if possible, for the remaining two weeks of January and early February. But I want you to know that I intend to remain as flexible as possible with my

schedule, so if something comes up at the last minute and you think it would be valuable for me to be there, call me or e-mail me, and I will try my darnedest to be there. Monday afternoons is the only block of time that I am generally not available because I teach a class at Polytech.

I would like to go ahead and schedule our first group dialogue for Thursday, Jan. 30 after school (What's good? 3:45? 4:00?) at the Soft Sofa Coffee Shop at the University Mall. I will reserve the back room for us, and coffee or tea and sweet nibbles will be my treat. I've talked with some of you already and this seemed like a workable time and date when we could meet. Let me know if this will work for you. I would also like to involve some of the people you collaborate with who might also be interested in our discussions. You can assist me by introducing me to those people you think might be interested and valuable to our dialogue. Please feel free to invite people, just me know who you talked to so I can get to know them too.

I would also like to schedule my first group conversation with the student teachers for Wednesday, January 29. Could we do this at lunchtime? Jean-Marie, Juanita, Arlene, Angela - Is this possible? Is there a little overlap time when 4th and 5th grade have lunch that you could spare Cathy, Betty, Angela, and Amy? If this is problematic, please, please say so and we can work something else out. As I've said before, I do not want this project to intrude on your daily routine.

This has turned out to be a very long e-mail. Thanks for your patience. Do you have any questions at this point or things you would like to discuss? I look forward to hearing from you. - Liz

P.S. I know that some of you do not correspond much with e-mail and therefore do not check your messages very often. If you do read this, please mention to the others who are participating that you have received it, in case they haven't checked their e-mail lately. Thanks a bunch.

Date: Friday, 17 January 1997
To: Elizabeth Altieri <ealtieri@pt.edu>
From: Arlene Daniels
Subject: Re: Touching base

Hi Liz!

I did happen to come in today and find your message. I'm sorry our scheduled time together has been canceled by the weather. It is just as well as I have been ill and at this moment have very little voice left in me! Having Betty to pinch hit has been a lifesaver!

January 28 is a work day and you may be attending the Gender Equity Session at Polytech, but if you are not, we do plan to meet with our grade levels on that day. I am not sure of the time as yet however it will be sometime between 11:00 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Betty is doing a session on wellness for us at 3:00 that day if enough teachers show an

interest. I have no problem with you meeting with Betty on Wednesday the 29th. Fourth grade goes to lunch at 12:40-1:07, and that is followed by recess from 1:07-1:45. Betty is teaching a weather lesson that afternoon but it does not need to begin until 2:15 so you could see her from 12:40-2:15. Fifth grade follows us to lunch at 1:07-1:34 or somewhere close to that.

I would welcome anything you would want to share with me about how you view inclusion or working with specialty students. Let me know when you would like to reschedule our meeting. Right now I am a tad bit frustrated dealing with a good number of L.D. students in our Language Arts class and an entire class of Math students. Jerri Nichols, our L.D. teacher and Betty and I have decided to split them up into our three reading groups and each of us adapt our novel to their needs. That seems like a lot of work, but it is better than grouping all of these students in one group where there are no role models to learn from. Planning for these children's needs takes a lot of time and collaborating! I said recently to a group of teachers, "We don't have problems, it is the problems that the students face that challenge us."

Trying to reach the needs of the students always keeps us busy! Thanks for your message, do keep in touch - Arlene

During the third week in January, I was finally able to complete a day of inquiry as I had envisioned. My research routine was to spend the entire day at the school, observing an instructional period in each of the four classrooms (and rotating each week so I could get a feel for how they taught each of the subject areas), talking with people, and in general, milling about and participating in whatever came my way. I took field notes while I observed and occasionally took a break to get caught up on my notes. Then, every time I left the setting, it was my intention to write a reaction and/or make a reflective entry in my research journal. However, an immediate reaction to a day at the school wasn't always possible. I tried to get the chance to sit down and write as soon as I could, but I needed two to three hours of time, and often I had to rush home to pick up kids or start dinner.

Here is a sample:

4 p.m., February 5
Soft Sofas Coffee Shop

*Aaaaarrgggghhh! There is absolutely **no** way to capture everything I say and do and others say and do this way. I have these incredible conversations with people, and then it takes me hours to write everything up and process it. But I have just one hour to at least document what I didn't get to write in my field notes so here's a stab at it.*

Rose and I talked to each other in Arlene and Betty's room. I learn some more about how "supervision" or mentoring, as it called in this program, occurs, or at least how Rose does it, that is.

After school, I confirm that we can meet in the library tomorrow afternoon for our group dialogue. When I come out, I see Jerri and I follow her down the hall. I stop her and make a point to follow up on my written invitation and ask her in person about our meeting tomorrow. She says "Oh, Thursdays are the days I exercise." She never says "Oh, I'd love to join you" as I naively expected she would. But when I say "Perhaps some of our discussions could be held on another day of the week more convenient to you. Would Tuesday be better?" Jerri responds "not really." She informs me that Monday is her best day and Friday she is here anyway because she works late that day, sometimes staying after 9 p.m.

I spot Drew on his way out, and ask if I can have some time to talk with him in the next couple of weeks to get some background information and some history. He says "Sure, but this week is already busy." I ask him if, in the meantime, he might look for something that has been written about the program here at Wilbur. No sooner do I get that request out, and Drew marches off towards his office, saying "I have something I can give you right now, a chapter that Colleen and Lyn and I wrote for a book put together by some state ed people. I can loan it to you." When I look it over, I realize that this will be great to have, but I do need more information on its context, date of publication, how it came about, and the title and author of the book from which this copy of the chapter came...

Today I spent a lot of time in Angela and Arlene's classrooms, and also in Jean-Marie's (but not as much). I am beginning to get a handle on how they respond to children's differing academic needs, but not yet to how they reach their conclusions on what to do and for whom. I have much less of a handle on Juanita's class. I think it is partly because I know her less, and partly because Jody is only here on Wednesday's and I try to vary the days of the week I am observing on (which means I have been in that classroom less)...

I still, in spite of making a sincere effort to adopt a critical eye, see Wilbur Avenue Elementary School as a very powerful, inclusive, happy, fun, nurturing place. I try to let people know that, too. I tell the teachers how much I enjoy being there with them. "It's my favorite part of the week," I say.

Interesting thing happened in the teachers' lunchroom today. Frank, Jason's aide, said "You all sound like you're talking Greek to me." Basically he complains, in a nice way, that he feels excluded by our conversation (like we know the secret code words and he doesn't). We had been talking about how we all know the same people. Jody then shares with Frank and the rest of the group at the lunch table how we had learned that we both knew a couple who had recently married. The thought this conversation triggered for me - there is interconnectedness, often in unexpected ways. Is this significant?...

I see how slow my progress is with getting myself invited to meetings. But I remind myself that as I am here more and more, I will find out what things I want to come to and when they are

scheduled, and will ask to be invited to attend. I felt like I was successful today getting invited to the meeting Jean-Marie, Amy, Juanita, and Colleen will be having Monday morning to brainstorm new approaches with Terry.

I recall something that happened today that Jean-Marie had explained to me. Terry left the classroom with the guidance counselor for about 10 minutes. Any student can make an appointment with her, and she makes rounds of the classrooms to facilitate that. Yesterday, Terry had asked to make an appointment with the counselor. Jean-Marie said he couldn't see her that day, but could probably tomorrow. She then asked him "Do you want to talk to me about it?" No," Terry said patiently, "I'm willing to wait a day."

Defining My Role as Researcher

As Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) described, I did have to contend with coming across as and being cast in the role of "expert." Jean-Marie seemed to set me up that way, especially for our first group dialogues when she asked me ahead of time if I would be willing to talk about myself and my experiences with kids and schools. By local reputation I was known as someone who had some expertise in the area of inclusive education. I did not seem to run into the trouble some expected; there was anxiety about whether or not I would come across as too critical. That worry seemed to reside mostly within my committee members, who know me as an outspoken and impassioned advocate. I worked with diligence to come across as someone who had a lot to learn from these teachers and student teachers, and I tried to frequently reinforce that in my conversations with individuals and in our group discussions.

Interestingly, two of the teachers did turn to me for assistance in problem solving around particular children. I saw this more as a result of the collaborative nature of our relationship, and their familiarity and comfort with me as a resource rather than as a judge. I got a lot of questions and comments which revolved around "What in the world are you writing so much for?" and I tried to allay the slight trepidation I heard behind these statements by showing/telling people what I was writing. In essence I was trying to model what I believed a university researcher should do in a truly collaborative inquiry: engage in open, honest dialogue about the process.

Engaging in Dialogue

I seemed to have the best rapport with Jean-Marie who gave me all sorts of unsolicited information. "I thought you would want to know about this," she would say. Her goal seemed to be to give me the big picture - to provide me with access to information that, in the course of my weekly visit, I might not get by just observing. Once Angela grew more familiar with me, she too would share all kinds of information, some of it quite confidential about children and parents, and later, even other staff. At my last interview with her, Arlene said something that was related to this. She said, "I was thinking about what we would talk about, and then I thought, Liz would like to hear about this." And so during my last interview with her, I pretty much let her talk and tried to ask questions to get her to elaborate. Funny, it worked just as well, maybe even better than having a list of formal questions!

I had to be in the setting to understand where were the places to hear teachers talk, "where the exchange of accounts among participants is particularly likely to take place" (Coffey & Atkinson, p.126). So I spent time in the teachers lounge when the fifth grade teachers and the fourth grade aides were having lunch. I learned that Angela and her team partner mostly ate in their classrooms, and I managed to eat lunch with them twice. I attended a fifth grade team meeting; one planning meeting each for fourth and fifth grade between special ed and general ed,

two planning sessions between cooperating teachers and student teachers, a whole-school staff meeting, and a GIRDL meeting. I also arranged group dialogues with the same purpose in mind - to facilitate an exchange of accounts.

Throughout the four months I was at Wilbur Avenue, people kept sharing pieces of information with me in one-on-one conversations that helped me see why people behaved in certain ways when we were in the group. They came over to me while I was observing and taking notes, and offered unsolicited explanations of what I was seeing.

I worked at being non-directive in my questioning. Sometimes I wanted to be, but wasn't, because I wasn't very practiced at it. I know I asked leading questions at times. I do feel like most of my questions for interviews and dialogues were pretty open-ended and did a fair job of eliciting talk. My transcripts show that participants talked at length as a result of what seemed to be simple conversation starters (and I described them to my participants as such). Other times I was deliberately directive to get people to talk about a certain issue I didn't think would come up otherwise. (Like "Will you talk about the issue of grouping kids by ability?")

After I met with the large group and after I met with just the student teachers, I always made a point to write entries in my research journal. The following is my reaction to our very first group dialogue.

February 6

*Did I say what I **needed** to say at the beginning? My comments were in response to what Jean-Marie had e-mailed me: People will want to know a bit more about you. Today, she specifically asked about my classroom experience. It seems like Jean-Marie would be the **last** one to ask this because she needed to know if I was "a member of the club," but she may be asking this for someone else. I've learned already that Jean-Marie is a conduit. I thought later, I should have mentioned my experiences as a support person at Jowonio, too.*

*The classroom teachers **definitely** dominated the conversation, and Angela was the primary contributor. It was a little awkward having Susan, the special educator from the fifth grade team, with us for the first half of the meeting, and then Jerri, the special educator from the fourth grade team, with us for the second half of the discussion. I don't think they overlapped at all. Just coincidental, I guess. Susan had to go early because of her baby, and Jerri told me later that she was getting in her exercise earlier in the afternoon, and that was very important to her. But it definitely affected the flow of things.*

What am I trying to get at here anyway? I thought it was important for me to do very little steering of the conversation, and I did keep fairly quiet. I waited for new topics and stories to arise through the process of resonance, and asked another question only when things got quiet, or I really felt I needed an explanation of something that was just said. But by the end it seemed appropriate to share an insight I had been forming while listening. I commented that they did not seem to use a child's official label at all in talking about them to others, either formally or informally. The label seems to mean very little to them, and when I asked what the child's eligibility label was, they often said they didn't really know. It struck me as odd that disability categories and their characteristics are what we focus on in the survey of exceptional child class that is often the only course in special education that general educators take as part of their teacher preparation programs, and that the content of that course has changed little in the 100 years since it was first taught.

I learned that, even in this setting and after more than six years of experience with inclusion, there were still things about including children in the general education program that classroom teachers found difficult:

- *Modulating their expectations for specific children; sometimes they're still too low, sometimes too high.*
- *Teaching some subjects, like math and reading, without resorting to ability grouping.*
- *Functioning with the actual physical presence of the special educator or instructional aide in the classroom.*
- *Coping with "difficult" or "bad" behaviors of some of the children with disabilities.*
- *Figuring out myriad ways to help a child learn something when they are just not getting it.*

We were unable to have this first meeting at the coffee shop, so we decided to hold it on neutral ground within the school - the library. I set up plenty of chairs and two sofas in a circle. I put grapes, cookies and pretzels out in baskets on a table in the center of our circle, and juices, ice, and cups.

People came in slowly. Rose was the first to arrive. Jody was second. She hadn't even been here at Wilbur today. She is still in that early phase of her student teaching when she only comes once a week, Wednesdays. Then Jean-Marie arrived, followed shortly by the other three student teachers. I had hoped we could start at 3:45, but it wasn't until a little after four that I felt like enough people were present to begin our dialogue. We finished up at 5:20, and I could see people clock-watching the last ten minutes while we tried to figure out another time when we all could meet. We decided on the first Thursday in March.

*Few people confronted each other. They tended to give supportive comments or sounds or to add on to or even interrupt the story being told. One funny little interaction had the potential for friction. Juanita was telling some story about her classroom and how visitors can't tell whose role is what. Then she said she had even been "accused" of being a special educator. Susan got somewhat huffy, and I tried to smooth it over. In hindsight this was a mistake. I probably should have asked Susan to share with us **why** she felt offended. Arlene still seemed very distracted, and less ebullient than usual. Should I say something to her? Is it any of my business?*

It was interesting that Jerri decided to join us after the meeting was more than half way over. She had come up to me towards the end of the school day, and asked, "Is everyone else going?" She begged off by saying this was her day to exercise, and she needed it for her mental health. She then just kind of bounded in well after things had started rolling, still in her sweat clothes, and made it a point to immediately enter into the conversation.

*Sometimes people said things that I then really wanted to follow up and ask, "But **why** do you feel this way? (Angela and her assertions about why they needed to group for math and reading, for example.) But we were just feeling each other out in this first discussion, and I knew I had to be patient. I'm already questioning, though, just how much we'll get out of these unless I create a meaningful format for people to respond to. The challenge is to do so without alienating them.*

I also left feeling like perhaps we need some rules for interaction for getting the most out of these sessions. Would this work? - One person makes an assertion, and I then ask them to share experiences that have led them to believe this to be true, and then have

*others go around and say what **they** think. On the other hand, would it actually be a conversation if it were that controlled?*

The following are excerpts from another reflection I wrote in my research journal *much* later as I was transcribing a dialogue with student teachers. I found it fairly easy to recall how I felt by looking at my own sketchy field notes for that day, a copy of Rose's notes which she gave to me, and by listening to the tape; I could see for myself how Ellis' theory of evocative auto-ethnography played out. The research journal entry functions as a form of intertextual meaning making – a dialogue with the transcript of the dialogue.

July 10 & 11, 1998

Rose Fairfax and I had arrived at the Soft Sofa Coffee Shop early to discuss the previous dialogue session and to plan for this one. I had been able to reserve the back room that is available for meetings, and although the door does not shut, this gave a sense of privacy. We sat at two large tables that we placed together in an attempt to facilitate close, face-to-face discussion. I had worked at trying to create a comfortable atmosphere, and provided drinks of choice and an assortment of cookies for everyone...

Listening to the audiotape of this particular session does not give me a good feeling. It feels very directive, but I engaged them in this card sort activity at Dr. N's suggestion. Now in trying to analyze it, I wish he had given me some sort of model or directions for conducting and analyzing the activity, at the very least a research example that used the process, so I could understand its origins in the literature. I'm guessing I will have to hunt this down for myself. Dr. N. did give me enough of a sketch of the activity and I have enough familiarity with psychology research that I knew how to at least start the activity.

I understood that I needed them to group the kids in multiple ways without talking with each other about what they were doing and why, and that this was to lessen the influence that they might have on each other. I observed that while they were sorting, they did not pay much attention to each other's piles of name cards, nor would it have been readily apparent what categories they were using even if they had glanced over...

*I felt kind of dumb when I was doing this. My own goal for this research was not to come across as the all-knowing researcher. I wanted to operate as a facilitator of dialogue, to appear as a prospective teacher educator "listening in," as a **learner** who was privileged to be with these student teachers and teachers as they went about the business of coming to know about children and teaching and learning through their teaching and their talk. But this particular dialogue session felt very contrived...*

I really didn't know how the coding process was actually going to work until Rose and I talked each step through and actually did the task for ourselves. When I look back now, I see that it was still pretty confusing for the students...

I've noticed on a number of occasions that Rose often turns the telling of her stories into "performances." She replicates or replays a dialogue that has occurred in the past and even adopts the tone and voice of each person speaking...

...From the hip analysis - These student teachers categorized kids in ways that made sense to them in their instructional planning - in the ways that they needed to differentiate instruction or create materials to successfully engage students as learners, or to differentiate learning environments such as grouping for activities, or to respond to

them as individuals with to enhance the student-teacher relationship, or in terms of content area, to assess both knowledge base and interest in that subject area...

Since they are learning this from the teachers, this brings up a large issue - what differences did the teachers see as important enough to attend to for instructional planning and what did they use to base decisions about children's differences on? The ability to master grade level content area knowledge still seems to be driving teachers' perceptions of students. This must be related to the pressure to meet standards that is now on teachers, and the threat of teachers' increased accountability for whether or not a certain percentage of their students pass the standards assessment battery (and all the school certification standards soon to be tied into percentage of passing scores as well)...

...This might perhaps need to be a small section in my dissertation. Can you study teachers without also studying the students in their classrooms? When you study teacher talk and practice, don't you automatically gain a wealth of information about individual students that the teacher uses (and even more significantly tells stories about) to define themselves and their practice? This stirs up questions about the whole notion of whether or not we are actually able to assure confidentiality of information about children given the nature of schools. Perhaps it is only the "official" information (like test scores) that can be kept confidential. My gut level belief is that teachers (for the very reason that it cannot be easily storied) keep "official" information confidential. It retains enough of the "mystical" (especially jargon) that teachers feel they don't really understand what such information means and is therefore not worth sharing.

I recall the discussion that Angela and I had about Benni, and how she was practically single-handedly developing a collection of adapted materials that could be used with him in the classroom. We started talking about the evaluations that had been recently conducted for his eligibility meeting. Angela said she had a copy of the reports, but confessed that she really couldn't make any sense of them or pull from them any useful information that would help her as his teacher. Then she jumped up and said "But I could show them to you and you would know what they meant." So even though the issue of confidentiality reared its ugly head and tried to get me to do otherwise, I went over the reports with Angela. I interpreted parts of the report written by Lissa Nestor, the speech pathologist at the school, that had to do with receptive and expressive language skills, and Angela was then able to turn around and use the information to make sentence strips about the Coastal Indians for Benni to work with during Social Studies work time...

This is not even related to what I was just writing, but it was triggered by the example I was telling the story of above. I want to write it down while it's hot off the cognitive press!

*Many times throughout this inquiry I asked the master teachers to think about how they have come to know what they know about children with disabilities. What seems worth reflecting on is how **I** have come to know what I know about disabilities and people with disabilities. I have written some of this in my introduction section, but it might be worth thinking through more deeply. How have my own understandings been constructed? What stories stand out in my mind from my past that serve as "touchstones"? What stories represent my new learning through this research period? Do they have to come from just this time period? What about my own story from last*

year's work here at Wilbur when I observed one of the "included" students, Stevie, working in an activity led by my student teacher? Children worked in small groups to identify the variables of the intersection in a Venn diagram and I was surprised to see that Stevie was better at it than anyone else in his group. Why does this stand out in my mind? Didn't it challenge me to reconsider my own biases about people with Down syndrome and labels of mental retardation? What do our stories reveal about what we believe about children and capacity and difference and disability and our roles as teachers related to those constructs? ...

...Just because the philosophy of inclusive education is believed in and practiced in this school, doesn't mean that kids are still not categorized and responded to differently on the basis of perceived differences in academic ability. The specific disability labels of particular children do not seem to be particularly relevant to the classroom teachers (nor are they typically part of their talk about the child). Rather kids are talked about in terms of perceived differences in their ability to progress through grade level subject material, with math and reading being the most salient. Curriculum planning revolves around these differences. But whereas in the past, low academic achievement or ability meant either exclusion or failure, now these differences are seen as part of the normal range of learning differences that a teacher must adapt to in her classroom. And these teachers take responsibility and believe that all children regardless of perceived ability levels deserve to experience academic success and to be meaningful engaged in learning activities that are part of that classroom's and that grade level's curriculum.

Participating

The following is an e-mail communication to all participants who had e-mail. (Ironically, perhaps even meaningfully, the two special educators were the only ones who were not on-line). This e-mail was created by editing and modifying the research journal entry I made the day the interaction took place. It provides evidence of the role I took as "passionate participant." The co-construction I speak of in the e-mail took place over (a) one class period when I had observed Cathy teaching Math, and Frank and Jason trying to complete the task with hard foam manipulatives; (b) one lunch time playing with the manipulatives myself and then working through the glitches in the earlier strategy with Angela, Cathy, and Toni Camembert, Angela's teaching partner; and (c) my return the next day during the same instructional period when Angela put me on the spot and I ended up teaching the strategy to the whole class.

From: Elizabeth Altieri <ealtieri@pt.edu>

To: [e-mail names and addresses of all the classroom teachers and student teachers]

Date: Sat., 1 Mar 1997

Subject: Co-constructing instructional strategies!

Hi all,

Last Thursday and Friday, Angela, Cathy, Frank (Jason's aide), Jason, Toni, and I co-constructed a strategy for using manipulatives to show how to make the smallest equivalent fraction from a larger one. The process was interesting, and it truly took all of us, thinking, proposing, trying out, hands-on maneuvering of the manipulatives, asking questions, wracking our brains, making it game-like, etc., etc., to map out the process, including the exceptions, so it could be used successfully, and so it could be written up for Jason's math process notebook and whoever might be working with him in the future. Jason himself made it into a game putting caps into boxes, and that was our first breakthrough.

We were struck by how hard this was to do for those of us who've never really done mathematics with manipulatives, and how long it took. We wanted to share the strategy with you - maybe you can use it with kids that you are working with that are also struggling with this concept. I know it made sense to me in a way that reducing fractions on paper never did. I've always known how to do math operations rotely, but never could really picture the problem.

On a personal level, it felt like I was just beginning to see how, for the purposes of my dissertation and my inquiry, teachers come to know about working with kids with disabilities in new ways, and how that shapes us as teachers. Maybe we could talk about this some time soon - I'm sure you have many similar examples you could relate.

Anyway, here's the strategy. I'm still a novice at transporting a Word Perfect document into my e-mail document, so if it reads funny, please let me know and I'll try again.

B~) Liz

Caps in Boxes

Using Two-Colored Disks to Solve Problems Which Require Finding the Smallest Equivalent Fraction

Let's start with this fraction $16/24$

1. Look at the denominator. What is the number?
2. Count out that number of disks. Make sure they are all turned to the same color. Think of them as caps!
3. Look at the numerator
4. Flop over that number of disks/caps - make that number with the reverse color
5. Now your job is to put the caps in boxes for shipping. Here are the rules:
 - *You have to put the same number of caps in each box.
 - *Only caps of the same color may go in a box.
 - *You have to use as few boxes as possible; use the smallest number of boxes.
6. One way to start this is to divide the caps into two groups by color
7. Count the number of caps of one color and then count the caps of the other color. What color group has the smallest number of caps? The largest?
8. Take the group of caps that has the smallest number of caps and put them in the box (or on the shelf) in a nice straight line.
9. Now take the caps of the other color and put them in boxes that have the same number of caps as your first box. Line them up in nice straight lines again.
10. Did this work?
 - *Are the caps in each box the same color?
 - *Are there an equal number of caps in each box?
1. If not, how many leftover caps do you have in a box? Start over and try making up boxes using that number of caps. Keep boxes of one color next to each other. [The exceptions created by this infrequent glitch is what we had to work out.]
2. Now look at how they are grouped. How many total boxes do you have? That number is the denominator in your new fraction when you try to write in numbers to express what you see in front of you. It is the old denominator in the fraction we began with reduced.
3. For the fraction we began with, $16/24$, check and make sure that there are 24 caps of one color in the three boxes.
4. Now look at the numerator in your first fraction. How many boxes have 16 caps of the same color in them? That number becomes the numerator in your new fraction.
5. Write out the whole fraction. This is the smallest equivalent fraction that the first fraction can be reduced to.
6. Use division to check your work.

Observing and Listening

I wasn't always in the thick of things, however. Sometimes, especially when others were talking, I tried to just be a good listener, especially during group dialogue, and to be a good observer of what was happening between people.

From: Elizabeth Altieri <ealtieri@pt.edu>
To: Dr. B
Date: Wed, 26 Mar 1997
Subject: Re: today's discussion at Wilbur

Dear Dr. B.

Thanks so much for coming this afternoon and joining our discussion. I think the teachers and student teachers really enjoyed having you there and having the opportunity to engage in dialogue with you and Christine S.

Christine wrote me and said she had learned lots. She, too, said something about how well I handled the group. It got me to thinking. I guess this is a side of me you've never seen. Maybe I'm different in the academic setting when I'm in my role as student or in one-on-one discussion with a colleague (like you!) As I said to you after the meeting, I have learned a lot in my doctoral program, from you especially, about trying to be a better listener and to encourage and seek out multiple perspectives. And yes, I can be dogmatic in certain situations. But I believe my ability to facilitate group interactions in the way you saw today comes from my experience as a community planner, as an advisor to parent groups, and as an administrator. I had the remarkable experience of serving as the co-chair of the Rehabilitation Cluster in Syracuse. This was a group comprised of representatives of all providers of non-residential adult services for people in the developmental disabilities and mental health systems, parents, and consumers. (That's what we thought was a good term to use at the time to refer to people who used the services!) We were advisory to the County Commissioner of Mental Health Services. During that time I had the awesome task of getting a representative committee of about twenty to develop a consensus statement on how we would define and provide supported work services in our county of more than half a million people. I think I learned an awful lot about facilitating group dialogue during those meetings!

I'm glad you got to see this side of me! Seriously, I think I've done a pretty good job working with this group. I believe we have learned to trust each other, and I have felt pleased that I am often included in brainstorming discussions about strategies for children or other kid or teacher related issues. I've tried to be quietly perceptive, and by spending as much time with these teachers as possible, I think I've gained some insight on the things they struggle with. For example, you may have noticed Jerri, the fourth grade special educator, leave the meeting rather abruptly today. Did you notice anything unusual when she left?

It happened right when Juanita was talking about her son, Reggie, coming home, and saying "I'm so lucky, Mommy, I have two teachers." Reggie was referring to Toni and Angela. Well, Jerri is the child's teacher, also, and this is quite a sore spot with her. (In her interview, which we had to do in two parts and finished just last week, she talked quite a bit about feeling like an appendage or on the outside. My hunch is that Jerri got upset and left when she heard that Reggie did not think of her as one of his teachers (and Reggie is a labeled student who is officially on Jerri's caseload). There is actually much more than that beneath the surface, too, that I have learned by people sharing "stories" with me!

So some days when I leave Wilbur my head is just whirling trying to sort everything out! Anyway, thanks for coming. And thanks too for helping with my class last night. I really appreciate it.

- Liz

March 26, 1997, Excerpt of entry from my research journal merged with section from transcription of dialogue completed 7/26/98

...
Juanita: I'm speaking as a Mom now instead of a teacher. One of the good things that I've seen this year is with Angela and Toni and the teaming that they have been doing with the curtain. [Observer's comment: she is referring to when they draw back the floor to ceiling divider. opening it up to make the two classrooms one big one.] My son came to me and said "Mom, Mrs. Mays thinks that we're all her class and Mrs. Camembert thinks we're all her class, so we've got two teachers." And I said "Aren't you so lucky to have two wonderful teachers like Mrs. Camembert and Mrs. Mays" and she said, "Sometimes they tell us to do stuff and we don't know who to take it to."

[Observer's Comment: Juanita's punch line is followed by the sound of everyone laughing. Well, almost everyone. At that point, Jerri gets up and leaves the meeting without even saying good-bye or making her excuses. Here's my hunch. Jerri has shared with me in her interview how difficult it is to have to come into another teacher's classroom and try to fit in. She had told me how much she missed having her own class. In the dialogues you hear her say "my kids." In this session, someone had just finished saying, not but a few minutes before, that they had been through some hard times, and I have learned through the things people shared with me during the study that some of the hardest times have been with Jerri. So when Juanita (who is one of the people that I know Jerri has tussled with both as a teacher and a parent) says that her child is lucky to have two teachers, she leaves Jerri out of the picture entirely. Yet Juanita's son, Reggie, who has a learning disability label is one of those children that Jerri calls "my kids." I seem to be the only one who catches on to the abruptness of Jerri's departure.]

Juanita: And I see that as a compliment to what's going on here at Wilbur. I'm very comfortable, Angela, with what you've done.

Recognizing the Dilemmas

The situation described above was definitely an example of some of the tough stuff. Things weren't working perfectly. The fourth grade team had to work through a very difficult transition to this new team model and this new way of providing special education services. From my own observations and what others said to me, part of the difficulty was due to the chemistry created by this particular combination of personalities. To protect those involved, there are things I can't say, even in this personal piece of my dissertation. But I can add that conflict has been part of the evolution of inclusive education here at Wilbur. Drew Peters told me in his interview that, even though he is aware of the difficulties, he does not directly intervene because he trusts that time and the integrity of the persons involved will insure that things get worked out between the team members themselves.

Part of what was occurring was what certain factions of the field fear is possible: that the special educator will no longer be needed. In this case, there were very strong grade-level

teachers who were used to differentiating their curriculum and making on-the-spot adaptations in their classrooms and working directly with the “inclusion kids.” None of these things seemed to have been part of this particular special educator’s practice or expectations. The general educators saw themselves as more experienced and more capable. Jerri, herself, had even admitted that she was really struggling.

I was very glad, as a researcher, to have the contrast of the fifth grade team. They too had their conflicts, particularly over what grade-level materials certain children should be reading and how reading instruction would occur. But the special educator seemed to function much more as an integral member of the team whose input and presence in the classroom was valued and welcomed.

Hanging up my Researcher Hat

The last weeks of my work at Wilbur Avenue Elementary went by in a blur. I shadowed each of the teacher/student teacher teams for an entire day. This wreaked havoc on my own schedule, but in hindsight I wish I had been able to do it more than once. It was quite an eye-opener to experience the pace and fullness of each of these teacher’s workdays.

I gathered the student teachers for a wrap-up dialogue on what they had learned here about teaching and negotiating differences in kids with disabilities. While they talked and filled their bellies with the homemade soup and bread I had prepared for them, I got an earful and learned more about the downside of the student teaching program at Polytech than I cared to hear. But by then, I had learned that sometimes you just have to listen to what people really want to tell you.

Angela had asked if the teachers could talk with me as a group (and when she said “just the teachers,” she meant the classroom teachers without the special educators.) Somehow in setting this up, one of the other teachers invited Susan, and then we realized we also needed to invite Jerri. So that ended up being a missed opportunity to learn some things that could only have been said in the smaller group.

I did individual wrap-up interviews with each of the classroom teachers and their student teachers. They occurred at a time that was so hectic for the students and myself, that it amazes me still that they were willing to oblige me. Listening to the audiotapes after the fact, there is a bleary-eyed quality to the conversations, and a few were much shorter than I had anticipated. But it was the end of the semester. They were graduating and I was moving out of my office and wrapping up my three years at Polytech.

Without much ado from anyone, I quietly hung up my researcher hat and walked out the double doors of Wilbur Avenue Elementary School. I had learned so much from everyone. I wondered what my being there had meant for them.

Appendix C ↗ Methodology

This inquiry took place at Wilbur Avenue School, an elementary school with a publicly stated commitment to inclusive education and a close working relationship with the College of Education at Polytech (as well as with the College of Education at Nearby University). Four classroom teachers, who each had more than seven years of experience with children with disabilities included in their classrooms, and a reputation for excellence in teaching and commitment to inclusion, were deliberately chosen to gain their informed and experienced perspective. Four student teachers chosen from a group of students who expressed an interest in the inquiry were placed with each of the teachers. These four pairs of cooperating teachers/student teachers, two at the fourth grade level and two at the fifth grade level, were initially who I considered to be my primary participants. The two special educators working with the grade level teams as well as myself were also part of this inner circle of inquiry. The principal and inclusion specialist, two teacher educators from the nearby university, and a doctoral student who served as mentor to the student teachers participated in one or more of the activities related to the inquiry.

The field work for the inquiry was conducted and data was collected between December 1996 and May 1997. Interactions in the school took place during the student teacher placement period in spring semester 1997.

This chapter will describe and defend the design of the inquiry. The factors influencing the design and collection of data will also be explained. In addition, this chapter will elaborate on the procedures used to analyze the data.

Design of the Inquiry

At the foundation of this qualitative inquiry is the belief that knowledge is socially constructed between people and “truth” is an interpretive construct. Thus, the design of this research is based on a social constructivist or interpretivist paradigm. The focus of data collection was on stories of experience and a variety of teacher narratives which gave insight into teacher practices and beliefs. Since this approach goes against the grain of the traditional empirical mode of research in special education, this section will include a rationale for each aspect of the design.

A Rationale for a Social Constructivist Paradigm

In the last several years scholars on the cutting edge in disability research and disability studies have begun to question the scientific knowledge base of special education, and especially “essentialist, positivist, and reductionist” approaches (Heshusius, 1996) to the study of students considered to have special needs and the effectiveness of educational strategies which address their “problems” (c.f. Gallagher, 1998; Potts, 1998; Reid & Button, 1995; Rodis, Garrod, & Boscardin, 2001).

Rather than attempting to draw upon traditional empiricism, we might instead find our rightful ancestry in the realm of the interpretive, hermeneutical framework... research based on the suggested alternative perspective offers us a more viable means to understand the complexity involved with educational contexts, individual learning processes, teaching practices, educational policies and innovations. An additional, and I might add, indispensable, benefit is that we would begin to make teacher craft knowledge

the centerpiece of our efforts to improve both practice and teacher education (Gallagher, 1998, p. 500).

This inquiry was designed to study teachers' practices in the context of inclusive education. I hoped to gain and share with others a greater understanding of how experienced and successful inclusive educators dealt with perceived differences in learning ability and academic skill level that had caused children to be seen as in need of special education services in the first place. I believed there were important lessons for those of us in teacher education as well so I also wanted to study what happened when prospective educators were placed with these teachers for their field experience.

It seemed to me that there had to be some process by which these teachers negotiated those differences. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1991) defines negotiate in this way: to "deal with (some matter or affair that requires ability for its successful handling)" and also "to handle through conference, discussion, and compromise." By saying I wanted to learn how these teachers negotiated difference, I meant that I wanted to understand how teachers actively responded to perceived differences in children in their classrooms within the confines of the educational structures that often proscribe a particular way of acting or responding. For any particular teacher, I wanted to see if and how those structures defined and even dictated their practice, if and how they manipulated those structures to their own and children's benefit, and if and how they made compromises between what would have liked to do and what they felt they had to do. I wanted to know why, when, where, and with whom that process of negotiation occurred.

A social constructivist paradigm for my inquiry would enable the development of new understandings of this complex process of negotiation from multiple viewpoints. Such a model of inquiry would be built around the assumption that "the terms by which the world are understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people" (Gergen, 1985, cited in Schwandt, 1994, p. 127).

A social constructivist approach would allow me to examine learning or coming to know as it is happening within a social group in a specific, rich context (Au, 1999; Sfard, 1998). It would also provide the opportunity to see learning as it occurs within a certain community, to see learning as participation, or as "a process of becoming part of a greater whole" (Sfard, 1998, p. 6).

Guba & Lincoln (1994) identified the following characteristics of the constructivist research paradigm: reality is constructed and serves the purpose of informing; it is local and specific to the context; determining "truth" is a transactional and subjective process, findings are "created" through the actions of the researcher and the participants, and through the research process; and methodology is hermeneutical/dialectical in nature and "aimed at the reconstruction of previously held constructions" (p. 209). The aim of such an inquiry is new understanding, and to help people become more informed and more aware. Thus it is often the paradigm of choice for people such as myself who hope their research will also serve the purposes of advocacy and social activism. The researcher is seen as a "passionate participant" rather than an objective observer (p. 210).

Social constructivism focuses on lived experiences, and how people feel and understand the world (Schwandt, 1994). Constructivism can encompass a wide range of phenomena, but for my purposes I was most interested in studying the face-to-face interactions and experiences that were reflective of these group processes.

Rationale for Studying Lived Experience

...experience is the bedrock upon which meaning is constructed ...
(Eisner, 1993, p. 5).

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) exhort us to consider experience as “the starting point and key term for all social science inquiry” (p. 414). The crux of the inquiry design issue was how to get at this process of negotiation and the experiences which represented it, and how to gain insight into what these teachers had come to know about this process and the meaning which they had constructed from those experiences.

Through the work of Carolyn Ellis and her partner and colleague Arthur Bochner who created a narrative around the very personal experience of abortion, I learned that sometimes a subject such as abortion, or in my case, inclusion, “can be so steeped in political ideology and moral indignation that its experiential side can be forgotten or neglected” (1992, p. 97). To paraphrase them, in the discourse on inclusion, personal questions about and issues related to the experience of teaching in a setting where children of all abilities are included are overshadowed by political and moral and epistemological considerations, and the lived experiences of the women and men involved in the practice of teaching in such a setting play a minor role in the debate (p. 97).

Studying lived experience is not as easy as it sounds since it is not really possible to directly experience in exactly the same way what another person is experiencing. We can only understand it through somewhat nebulous representations of their experience expressed as “talk, text, interaction, and interpretation” (Reissman, 1993, p. 8).

Rationale for Narrative Methodology

Talk and text are also known as narrative, and they are at the core of narrative inquiry. Alvermann (2000), in a chapter on narrative approaches to research, stated that what is “often referred to as the ‘new narrative research,’ focuses specifically on lives and lived experience” and emphasizes “how people understand themselves and their experiences” (p. 124).

Narrative is embedded in human action. It serves as a fundamental link between us and the world. Through a sequence of verbal or symbolic acts, and in particular talk, we relate our experiences or consequential events to others (Gudmundsdottir, 1995; McEwan & Egan, 1995; Reissman, 1993).

The meaning of the experience is the essence of what is communicated, so narrative can be seen as a way of conveying what we “know” to others. Because narrative is something that occurs between people, it is also a way to represent “cultural knowledge in action” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1995, p.117). Narrative methodology enables us to capture that knowing, and what sense people make of their experiences. But it also enables us to study experience as interaction in a specific context, and it has the potential for revealing the complexity and paradoxes of individual and shared experience (Shostak, 1989; Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995). In order for narrative inquiry to be considered of value for the field of education as a whole, researchers must make it part of their methodology to attend to “the social context in which the narrative is related, the narrator’s reason for telling it, the narrator’s narrative competence, and the nature of the audience (Gudmundsdottir, 1995, p. 25). We also must provide a clear definition of what it is we are going to gather, and how, when we say we are going to collect narrative as data, and know what function the narrative which represents our inquiry will serve.

One of the more dynamic paradigm shifts in the history of educational research has been the ‘turn to narrative’ (McEwan & Egan, 1995, p. vii). The growth of this type of research has been phenomenal in the past decade, and there are numerous examples of narrative inquiries with teachers which have been built around the importance of participants’ lived experience and which have provided the field with new knowledge of practice (c.f. Beattie, 1995; Britzman, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988; Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kinnard, 1993; Hoel, 1997; McIntyre, 1997; Schultz, 1997; Trimmer, 1997; Witherell & Noddings, 1991). Narrative also gives us a window onto the “beliefs, behaviors, and insights” of teachers (Jalongo & Isenberg, 1995, p. 7), and the “moral and affective features of teaching” (McEwan & Egan, 1995, p. xiv).

Although McEwan and Egan (1995) acknowledge that narrative opens up infinite possibilities for the study of teaching, they delineate five areas which they feel hold the greatest potential for narrative inquiry in education (p. xiii): Curriculum, teacher practices, learning in the classroom, the exploration and resolution of educational issues, and teacher development.

There is a substantial body of literature that provides credence for the theory that pedagogical content knowledge is expressed through teacher narrative (Coffey & Atkinson, p. 78-79). Beattie asserts that it is narrative alone which interprets a wide range of affective, historical, and empirical data, and finds the kind of multi-leveled meaning which truly helps us understand classroom practice” (1995, p. 61). Through listening to other teachers’ stories and telling our own, we learn to “make sense of our teaching practices as expressions of our personal practical knowledge,” or what we have come to know through experience that has become a part of who we are and how we engage in practice in our classrooms (Clandinin, Davies, Hogan & Kennard, 1993, p. 1).

Procedures for Data Collection

The preceding section provides the rationale for why narrative inquiry seemed the best choice of method for this study. To summarize, I chose it because (1) it can give voice to the multiplicity of perspectives in a particular context of practice and can be used to explore the diverse meanings which are constructed within shared narratives of experience (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997) and (2) it can “bridge the gap between the practice of teaching and the ways in which we study and describe teaching and the education of teachers” (Beattie, 1995, p. 59; also Carter, 1993; McEwan, 1996).

Narrative theory was used to guide both the development of data sources and the method I used to explore and construct meaning from the various field texts I created (Reissman, 1993.) I gathered the narratives of these teachers, student teachers, and the culture they practiced within through interviews, conversations, and observations within their classrooms. I created monthly opportunities for group dialogue, and teachers, student teachers, myself, and others openly wrestled together with my research questions (Clark, et al., 1996; Wasser & Bressler, 1996). I tried to take as broad a slice as possible and capture the personal experiences of these teachers with a number of different types of research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994): written transcriptions of the tapes of individual interviews and group dialogues; copies of textual artifacts that connected the teachers’ experiences with the context and structure of larger contexts such as the school and curriculum (Hodder, 1994); field notes taken during weekly observations in each of the four classrooms; and entries in my research journal. My emphasis was their “narratives of experience,” the stories the teachers and student teachers told which represented their practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 417).

I attended to two sets of methodological questions that Clandinin and Connelly suggested be considered when using narratives of experience as a basis for inquiry. These revolved around the research experience itself, and the texts representing those experiences.

What relationship will I have to those whose experiences I am studying?

Have we considered the “reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story?” What are the “narratives of inquiry out of which [our] particular inquiry grows and takes on meaning?” Does our relationship as researchers with our participants “change or not change their on-going conversation?” Have we considered how our personal narrative of experience is shaped by this inquiry? How will we tell the story of the experience of this research? (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994, p. 418)

What field texts will I use to represent my experience and the experience of others?

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) call data *field texts* and define them as “texts created by participants and researchers to represent aspects of field experience” (p. 419). I came away from this reading asking myself the following questions: How are the field texts shaped by the inquiry and the relationship I have with my participants? Why did I choose interviews, conversations, and field notes from among the many possible methods? I selected individual interview as a way to hear each individual’s voice, and especially to get a sense of their history. I thought interview would be a way of “getting in touch with” their past experiences with children with disabilities in the regular classroom and of gaining some insight into their personal theories of disability and ability. I was fully aware of and had been cautioned that no matter how I might try to informally structure those interviews, there was an artificiality to them, a performance aspect to my participants responding, and even more importantly, an awkward power differential.

This led me to set up the opportunity for monthly dialogue or what Clandinin & Connelly call “oral conversations” (1994). I tried to set up these sessions using the criteria for conversations which they outlined:

Conversations are marked by equality among participants and by flexibility to allow group participants to establish the form and topics important to their inquiry.

Conversation entails listening. The listener’s response may constitute a probe into experience that takes the representation of experience far beyond what is possible in an interview. Indeed, there is probing in conversation, in-depth probing, but it is done in a situation of mutual trust, listening and caring for the experience described by the other. (p. 422).

I also chose to write field notes as a way of seeing for myself and sharing in the classroom experiences. I tried to capture the sequence of teaching events and interactions I observed as well as my response to their practice. I started off trying to maintain some distance and just take notes as an observer. Part of why I did this was in response to my doctoral committee, several members of which had issued a note of caution against active participation. They felt I needed to see for myself what was “really happening” in the classroom versus what teachers said was happening. In addition they were worried that my participation might be too interventionist.

My own behavioral background formed the backdrop here too. As a special educator, I had been trained to observe sequences of antecedents, behaviors, and consequences as a way of analyzing problem behaviors and when I first began taking field notes, this way of looking at the

world of the classroom was one I thought I should do and was possible. Very quickly that changed. These classrooms were a hotbed of activity with dozens of interactions occurring between and among teacher, student teacher, special educator, and students. There was far more movement in and out of the classroom and from one activity to another than I had expected. Most significantly, I found that I often could not just play the role of observer. It felt too alienating, and on occasion it seemed to make teachers somewhat anxious. “Well, look at you, typing away. What in the world are you writing down?” one teacher commented to me. Most of all, participating seemed to enhance my relationships with the teachers, and made us feel more like partners, like colleagues. Participating reduced the power differential, and gave me a greater understanding of what I was seeing and insight into the challenges they faced.

I was also guided in my development of data collection procedures by the five kinds of representation of experience that Reissman (1993) said narrative researchers must consider:

1. Attending to experience - each individual “attends to and makes discrete certain features in the stream of consciousness”(p. 9). This is what I tried to do when I set up my procedures for observing and taking field notes. At this level, there is the active construction of reality and meaning at an individual level by selective perception and attention.
2. Telling about experience - “the performance of a personal narrative” “to present the event to others. “Meaning ...shifts in other ways because it is constructed...in a process of interaction”... and is imbued by the context of the telling (p. 11). I planned into my design a number of opportunities for such telling including individual interviews, group dialogues, and informal conversations.
3. Transcribing experience - “...is incomplete, partial, and selective” (p. 11). We have to be careful because we can change the meaning by choosing how we transcribe a portion of talk or dialogue. “By displaying text in particular ways, we provide grounds for our arguments, just like a photographer guides the viewer’s eye with lenses and by cropping images” (p. 13). As discussed later in this document, I experimented with a variety of ways of displaying spoken text to try and get around this issue.
4. Analyzing experience - The researcher’s expectations can’t help but shape what gets included and what does not get included in an analysis. It is all too easy to create a “hybrid story” that does not really ring true by editing and reshaping the interview narratives to fit into preconceived meanings (p. 13). The dialogues that were part of the design of this inquiry gave other participants the opportunity to analyze their experiences and co-construct stories.
5. Reading experience - even with our best intentions, what we have written to represent a narrative inquiry “gets into the hands of others, who [then] bring their own meanings to bear” (p. 14). Texts that represent experience are infinitely interpretable. “The point is that all texts stand on moving ground...” (p. 15).

Data was obtained from a variety of sources: public and private, oral and written, individual interview, small and large group dialogue, observation of teacher practice, and texts. This was to enable multiple perspectives on the school and school district under study as well as the individuals directly involved in the inquiry. This was also to take a number of “snapshots” of the teachers and student teachers within this educational context from a variety of angles and distances. I had to recognize, though, that “all forms of representation of experience are limited

portraits...” (Reissman, 1993, p. 15). By combining observational data (what they were doing and where they were doing it) with interview data (who was doing it and why) and with dialogue (what they thought about what they were doing and how they communicated that), I felt like I was able to get a much richer picture from a variety of perspectives. It was also a way of engaging in “crystallization,” an alternative process to triangulation (as a means of establishing validity) proposed by Richardson (1994), and one that “provides us with a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (p. 522).

Interview

I attended to the elements of unstructured interviewing outlined by Fontana and Frey (1994, p. 367): Describing how I accessed the setting; learning ahead of time as much as I could about the language and culture of the teachers, school, and district; locating a person who would serve as my primary informant; deciding how to present myself and using my gatekeeper for advice; acting and talking carefully and with empathy to gain trust and establish rapport; and making informed decisions upfront about the means I would use to collect my data, but remaining flexible to the needs and desires of my participants. I used focused interviews with individual participants as a methodological tool recommended by John-Steiner, Weber & Minnis (1998) to accompany dialogues and conversations collected as data. This allowed me to collect and create a “set of nested, interrelated representations of complex, innovative human activities” and teaching practices” (p. 777). Kvale (1996) also spoke to the goal of collecting interdependent narratives.

I interviewed all primary participants at the beginning of the project and a second time later in the spring. I interviewed the secondary participants once. The purpose of the initial interviews was to provide an historical and autobiographical overview to frame each participant’s current teaching practice, and to gain a sense of the way they personally construct ability and disability as defined by past and present learning and experience

Initial interviews also included conversation about the main research questions: How do they see themselves learning about themselves as teachers of children with differing abilities, what are they learning, what teacher and personal stories do they tell to represent this knowing and growing, and who are they learning from? (A list of initial interview questions can be found in Appendix D) Final interviews with the four general educators and four student teachers were less structured, more conversational, and were to serve the purpose of wrapping up our work together and our discussions. They included none, some, or all of the following questions:

1. What did you (your student teacher) learn that you needed to know to effectively include learners with special needs in the classroom? And how did you (and she) learn this?
2. How have you (your student teacher) obtained the support you felt you needed to effectively include learners with special needs in the classroom? Specifically, how do you think the teacher education program at Polytech supported or did not support your (your student teacher’s) coming to know children with disabilities in new ways?
3. How did you (your student teacher) learn to make decisions about grouping for instruction? Learn to use assessment to make instructional and curriculum decisions? To have appropriate expectations?
4. How did the new teaming model seem to work this year? What was your personal response to it?

5. What was your general response to some of the discussions/dialogues we've had?
Like about how to deal with differences in kid's abilities.

I strived, as much as possible, to see and conduct these as conversations as recommended by Kvale (1996), Minister (1991), and others. I felt I obtained at least several of the criteria Kvale (1996) listed as necessary to assure quality in interviewing, in particular asking the kinds of questions which facilitated long story-like responses. These interviews were audio-taped and transcribed as field texts.

Dialogue

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) provide the metaphorical image of the research process as a series of dialogues "with the data, with ideas, with informants, and with oneself." But I wanted dialogue to serve more than the role of metaphor. Given that "the social, dialogic nature of inquiry is central to ...constructivist thinking..." and reflexive elaboration is also a critical element in coming to know (Schwandt, 1994, p. 128), I built a number of opportunities for dialogue and reflection into the design of the inquiry. My rationale was provided for me by Clark, Herter and Moss (1998):

It is through dialogue ...that we not only develop shared meanings and knowledge that exceed what each of us separately knows but also come to a better understanding of what our disagreements are. Thus, it is through dialogue that the value of alternative perspectives - to promote critical reflection and evolution in our own perspectives and practices - can be fully realized (p. 787-788).

Britzman (1990) proposed that there are different positions we can assume and must assume if we are to break free of ideological barriers and actually have choice in how we come to understand and construct ourselves as teachers. To Britzman, the key is a dialogic process that gives us the freedom to imagine the possible and question the taken-for-granted assumptions of teaching and learning. For this inquiry, I built on the dialogic process already in place at Wilbur Avenue and worked to foster conversation and inquiry around how they as teachers and student teachers were coming to see themselves and their practice.

My intent had been for all participants to meet as a group once a month, January through May. Because of the business of people's schedules and the difficulty in getting 10-12 educators together at one time, we ended up meeting three, instead of four times. I also met once a month with just the students to talk about what they were learning about differing abilities and how they responded to them, and who they were learning this from. In late April, I also met with just the teachers as a group at their request. I always provided food of some kind to enhance the sense of community and caring, and to encourage conversation (Wasser & Bressler, 1996).

There was an element of postmodern in the way I tried to shape the group dialogues. One could consider this "*polyphonic* interviewing, in which the voices of the subjects are recorded with minimal influence from the researcher and are not collapsed together and reported as one, through the interpretation of the researcher. Instead, the multiple perspectives of the various subjects are reported and differences and problems encountered are discussed" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, pp. 368-369).

The purpose of these created opportunities for dialogue was to share and reflect on how we were learning and have learned in the past about ourselves as teachers through our personal experiences in inclusive educational settings where children identified as disabled have been socially and academically included in the general education classroom. Each meeting was audio-

taped. I was not able to get the tapes transcribed in the time in between our meetings, but I listened to the tapes and then shared some preliminary interpretations with the group members participating in the next discussion.

Group meetings functioned as an "interpretive zone:" that is, "a place where multiple viewpoints are held in dynamic tension" as the group grappled with coming to know disability, ability, inclusion, and teaching in new ways (Wasser & Bressler, 1996.) The dialogue was the "centerpiece of exchange" for the group or the "central shared feature of the research" (Clark, et al., 1996.)

Prior to each dialogue, I e-mailed each group member some questions to ponder as a kick-off for our discussion. These questions came out of our conversations and participation in the classroom. Sometimes we did not get past the first couple of questions! The questions I developed to use for our February dialogue with the whole group were:

1. How do you come to realize that a child's differences are posing challenges to you as a teacher?
2. What are some of the differences in children that pose challenges to you as teachers? As developing teachers?
3. What are some examples from kids in your classrooms now?
4. Can you share some stories from the past?
5. How do you respond to those differences?
6. How have you learned to respond?
7. If you differentially respond to children on the basis of ability, how do you assess and monitor your perceptions?
8. What or who plays a role in your own ability or willingness to respond?
9. Talk about the sources that helped you make sense of your experiences - used to have inclusion get-togethers (Jean-Marie, Juanita and Arlene all referred to in their interviews). Does GIRDL serve same purpose now? Is it just the latest version or is it something different?

I had also intended to get the group to generate a list of topics they were interested in discussing and critiquing, but once the dialogue began, it sort of assumed a life of its own, and was carried to the end of our time period by sheer momentum (and very little intervention from me).

The questions I developed to use for our March dialogue with the whole group were:

1. How do you make decisions about grouping?
2. How do you assess student growth and learning?
3. *How* do special ed and classroom teachers communicate and *who* communicates expectations to individual learners?
4. How and when does instruction get differentiated?
5. How are students graded? Who grades what?
6. Roles that kids play - Who gets to teach? Who gets to be the expert and when?

Our third dialogue was conducted as a focus group discussion. I invited in two teacher educators from Polytech, one in special education and one in elementary education. Our topic for discussion was "What lessons have we learned here that are important for teacher education?" My hope was to initiate a dialogue that would be maintained after the time period of the research.

Participant Observation

I gathered data for my own information about the contexts of the school that the participants perceived as representing or influencing the way they negotiate and respond to difference. The purpose of this data gathering was to help me, as a researcher, gain first-hand knowledge of some of the people, spaces, on-going activities, and singular events connected with the school which play a role in participants' understanding of disability and ability and of themselves as teachers in this inclusive educational setting.

There were two ways I gathered this data. The first was attending a variety of meeting and planning sessions, and taking notes afterwards to keep my participation as non-threatening as possible. I asked to be invited to planning, problem-solving, teaching, and evaluation activities that pertained to their roles as teachers of children with differing abilities, and that exemplified the ways they were learning to negotiate and respond to student differences. I did not get to participate in as many of these activities as I would have liked. Some of this was due to the difficulty of fitting my schedule to theirs. Some was due to the rather tumultuous relationship of the fourth grade team who weren't quite ready for outside observers. Examples of these activities included weekly grade level team meetings; informal brainstorming sessions around particular children; instructional planning meetings between cooperating and student teacher; monthly school-wide meetings on topics related to inclusion; faculty meetings; teacher-parent conferences.

The second set of data included field notes taken while observing in and outside the classrooms. I started off handwriting them, but then switched to my laptop for ease of recording and analysis. I attempted to record as much of what I was seeing and hearing as possible. I wrote down what teachers and children said and did, and used quotations or near quotations which captured the essence of what was said as much as possible. I also tried to note spatial arrangements of the school and classrooms. I drew diagrams and attempted to create a sense of the flexibility of these classrooms with rich description.

I observed for a total of 71 hours across a 12-week period of classroom observation. These 12 weeks roughly corresponded with the 12-week field experience period for graduate student teachers (the undergraduate model being slightly different.) Several observation days at the beginning of the inquiry were lost due to a very snowy January and a number of school cancellations and delays for weather.

I spent approximately 17 hours observing each teacher/student teacher pair in a variety of teaching and planning activities. Initially I observed one full day a week and spent time each observation day in each teacher's classroom. I varied the times I observed in each classroom to sample each instructional period in their schedules. This weekly period of observation for each set of participants allowed me to establish rapport with the student teachers and teachers, to get a feel for their classrooms and the children they worked with, and to establish a base of shared experience. Towards the end of the observation period, I spent a full work day with each student teacher/teacher pair. I tried to stay ever mindful of Stacey's (1991) caution that "no matter how welcome, even enjoyable the field worker's presence may appear ..., field work represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships" (p. 113).

<u>Dates and Hours of Classroom/School Observations</u>					
1/22	6.0	hrs.	2/27	2.0	hrs.
1/29	5.0	hrs.	3/5	4.0	hrs.

2/5	6.0	hrs.	3/13	8.5	hrs.
2/7	1.5	hrs.	3/19	9.0	hrs.
2/12	6.5	hrs.	3/20	8.5	hrs.
2/26	5.5	hrs.	3/27	8.5	hrs.

Public Documents and Other Textual Artifacts

Although textual artifacts were not a major source of data, I drew on a number of resources that represented the official view of the Patton County School District. I was cognizant of the advice to not rely on them uncritically as a research resource, and tried to look at them as the socially constructed products they were (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p. 168). The purpose for collecting textual data was to gain an understanding of the larger context that the teachers and school were a part of and to sample the data made available about the school district for public consumption (Hodding, 1994). No attempt was made, however, to gather an all-inclusive collection of textual data. There was considerable information available, including: newspaper articles and features in regional, state, and national papers and news services; state and federal court proceedings; TV newscasts; film documentaries; research monographs and published articles written by present and former employees of the school districts as well as research conducted by doctoral students and professors from universities across the state; proceedings and workshop materials from a number of local, state and national conferences and presentations; materials, interviews, and videos collected, developed, and loaned out by a regional technical assistance center; publicly available evaluation documents; and world wide web sites for the district, each school, and various employees.

E-mail produced another source of text for analysis. From Nov. 17, 1996 to April 25, 1997, I sent out and received a total of 85 messages related to my dissertation. E-mail seemed to help with the scheduling of meetings and provided another forum for one-on-one conversations.

Research Journal

As recommended by many (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Ely, Vinz, Downing & Anzul, 1997; Meloy, 1994), I kept a research journal in which I recorded on a regular basis my reflexive response to the research activities. I also drew parallels, made hypotheses, and elaborated on the many connections I was seeing with inquiries and research projects I was engaged in for other classes, with what I was reading, both academic and otherwise, and with past and present life experiences. Throughout my doctoral program I kept such a journal, although my faithfulness to it ebbed and flowed.

Writing allowed me to engage in an iterative process of questioning, critiquing, reflecting, making preliminary interpretations, sorting out what I was learning and what I was still confused about, and making connections. This ongoing process is much in keeping with the constructivist paradigm (Schwandt, 1994).

Sequence of Post-prospectus Research Events

There were a total of 78 separate research events or instances of data collection in a single setting. A summary of each is included in Appendix E.

Methods of Data Analysis

Experience is messy. Searching for patterns in behavior, a consistency in attitudes, the meaning of a casual conversation, is what anthropologists do, and they are nearly always

dependent on a ragtag collection of facts and fantasies of an often small sample of a population from a fragment of historical time. When human behavior is the data, a tolerance for ambiguity, multiplicity, contradiction, and instability is essential.

(Wolf, 1992, p. 129)

Searching for patterns was indeed a messy process. In summary, the field texts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994) I used for data analysis, and which were generated by my procedures for data collection, were:

1. Transcription texts (8) created from the audio-tapes of the initial and final interviews with the four teachers and the four student teachers.
2. Transcription texts (4) created from the audio-tapes of interviews with the two grade-level special educators, the principal, and the consulting special educator.
3. Transcription texts (3) created from the audio-tapes of the three dialogues with student teachers.
4. Transcription texts (3) created from the audio-taped dialogue sessions with the whole group.
5. Transcription text (1) created from the audio-taped dialogue with the teachers.
6. Field notes taken during classroom observations
7. Texts of e-mail messages sent to and received from the teachers
8. Research journal notes

Since transcribing audio-tapes was such an essential process for creating many of the field texts, I will describe the process I used to transform talk for the purposes of analysis.

The Process of Transcribing

When I first began collecting audio-tape data with the intention of transcribing them, I had absolutely no idea what a monumental task this would be. My worst problem was that I just didn't have the keyboarding skills needed to do this with any sort of efficiency whatsoever. When I realized that this was going to pose a real barrier to my progress, I did two things. I listened to the tapes and made notes, and I reached for my checkbook and sought out assistance with transcribing the individual interviews. I honestly tried to maintain confidentiality. The people who worked on the tapes for me did not know the identity or full names of the person they were listening to. Several of the tapes were transcribed by secretaries from the department of teaching and learning at my college who I knew personally and trusted, and who were experienced transcribers. My youngest son, 12 at the time, transcribed one for me. I provided summer employment for a neighborhood computer whiz heading off to college. After this process of first-draft transcription by someone other than myself, I listened to the tapes again and made handwritten corrections on the hard copies of their transcriptions.

The first summer I listened to my group dialogues and became aware that their transcription was going to be especially involved. I also realized that I was the only one who could identify the range of people speaking throughout the discussions, and therefore, I would have to transcribe these myself. I took notes on the themes and key points, and then I put them aside until I began the real hard work of "analysis" during the spring and summer of 1998. I tried a number of methods for transcribing the tapes of the dialogues, all incredibly time consuming. For the first several, I listened over and over to narrative chunks, identifying the speaker, and then capturing what they said. I pretty much tried to type verbatim what each person said capturing hesitations (mostly around vocabulary) and major interruptions and times when people

talked simultaneously. I tried to capture emphasis and tone. I did not, however, use precise formal coding since I had no intention of doing a linguistic analysis of the talk. Occasionally, when there was what I decided was irrelevant chatter, I summed up the subject, instead of writing what was said word for word.

I learned a lot from transcribing that first dialogue, and for the second dialogue, I changed my tactics. I decided to listen to the tape and just list each speaker on order of speaking and occasionally a key word or phrase to help me keep my place. This reduced the cognitive complexity of the task for me. The first time around I was able to get a sense of the general tone and direction of the conversation and figure out who was doing the talking and when. The second time around I listened and typed, listened and typed, without going back and forth in the tape. The third time around I filled in what I had failed to get the first time and the words I missed when I stopped and started the tape.

This task taught me perseverance and discipline. I wish that I had been able to keep on top of it and transcribe as the tapes were produced, as most qualitative research methods texts strongly urge. Certainly, it was my intention. But the reality of my life and my own energy level conflicted with this goal. I was constantly torn away by my other commitments as teacher, researcher (in two other projects in addition to this inquiry), mother, wife, homeowner, daughter, sister, friend, reader, and writer. It made me wonder how other researchers do it whose lives are like this pretty much all the time. I came to the realization that a lot of people do pay others to do transcription, and I began to understand why people might be deliberately vague in their research texts about how they transformed their data.

Frames for Analysis

I spent many hours searching for the best and most meaningful way to analyze and interpret the data in all its complexity. I began by creating categories around my research questions and using them to code the initial teacher interviews (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983). I even bought a variety of colored magic markers that stamped on a pattern that I used to visually code the texts! These were the question categories I used for my preliminary analysis:

1. What do teachers believe about ability and disability?
2. How do they talk about children in terms of ability and disability?
3. How does the context of the school (particularly people, curriculum, and policy) shape what they do as teachers?
4. How does what they believe about ability and disability shape what they do as teachers?
5. How do they learn to negotiate differences in children?
6. How do they come to new understandings of themselves as teachers of children with differing abilities?
7. What new understandings about teaching, kids, and schools are co-constructed through this study?
8. What is really involved from a general educators' standpoint when kids with special needs are fully included in the regular classroom?

It was my intent to use these questions to code all my field texts. For my initial round of analysis with the first teacher interviews, I looked at the following questions as well:

1. What stories/narratives of experience were contained in their interview narratives?

2. How did they construct disability/ability? What language did they use to refer to children with disabilities?
3. How did they construct themselves as teachers (disability issues aside)?

From this approach I gained a significant amount of information that would allow me to describe/represent the teachers in my text. But the process of coding quickly grew tedious, and somehow felt very artificial. In Silverman's chapter on observation (1993), he discussed the problems with using a coding scheme or "conceptual grid" for analyzing data and made the point that using such a scheme locks one into these categories and blinds us to other themes or activities which may turn out to be quite important. Silverman's suggestion was to return to your data and read or interpret it in new ways.

I gave considerable thought to how I could analyze and interpret my field texts in ways other than coding the data. I began to look at reconstructing my field texts as research texts or accounts. I was heavily influenced by the example of Clandinin and Connelly (1994):

A research account looks for the patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across individuals' personal experience...Just as the researcher's relationship to participants shaped the field text, the researcher's relationship to the inquiry and to the participants shapes the research text. It makes a difference if a researcher imagines herself or himself as having an emotional and ethical relationship to the participant and the inquiry...For instance, our collaborative relationships with teachers are carefully negotiated with an eye both to present relationships and to the ways the proposed collaboration will affect future relationships. (p. 423)

Writing became my key process for unfolding new understandings (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Reismann, 1993; Richardson, 1994). The field texts generated by the inquiry were interacted with and responded to and manipulated in an ongoing and recursive process of analysis, and a variety of interpretive narratives were created through this process. I transformed the data using expository text, summaries, personal reflections, journal entries, note cards, stories about the research, stories about myself, poetry, and imagined dialogues (Wolcott, 1994).

Over time I developed a number of frames for approaching and making sense of my data. They were: Creating stories, Interrogation, Intertextual Meaning Making, Resonance, and Ethical Considerations.

Creating Stories

It is important to think about the stories in our data as part of our analysis. Doing so “can enable us to think creatively about the sort of data we collect and how we interpret them” (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 55). I pulled out both “natural” stories, that is, those that occurred spontaneously in conversation or captured what I was observing, and solicited stories. I considered analyses in two ways: I looked at how the story was structured, and I considered the functions of the story (p. 61). Throughout the period of data collection I was reflectively aware of “stories” in the making, and listened purposefully for stories that repeated themselves or for experiences that were elaborated on in dialogues and also repeated themselves. Certainly because I was interested in the roles and functions of teacher stories and already felt that they would serve a purpose in teachers development in inclusive education much as they have in the literature regarding general teacher development and growth, I used that as one of the lenses for my observations and for framing my emerging understanding of what was happening in that setting. I made myself be open to the purposes those stories served and questioned my own and others interpretations made perhaps more palatable through stories.

Another method of analysis was to create vignettes or “composites” that captured what I had learned as a researcher (Ely, Vinz, Anzul, & Downing, 1997; Wolcott, 1994). I went about creating my stories or vignettes by reading through my field notes and writing down the teaching practices that characterized what I had observed. I also took stock of the issues of the issues and themes that had surfaced through our dialogues and the individual interviews and my initial “findings” or assertions that captured the big picture of what I had learned as a result of the inquiry. Then I created a list of those teaching practices and went back through all my field notes and my research journal entries to find the stories that captured a significant number of those practices. Then I took each story line and went back through all the data, field notes, research journal entries, transcripts of interviews and dialogues, and artifacts such as school newsletters, and assembled all the data that related to that story line. From this collection of data, and from my own evoked recollections of what occurred, I wrote my stories.

Interrogation

I attended to and reflected on the following principles in my analysis as recommended by Silverman (1993). I phrased most of these as questions and then interrogated my data across people and settings. Others were principles that I made sure I had attended to.

- How is theory building occurring?
- “Take the viewpoint of those studied.” One thing I came to realize was that there were multiple viewpoints. That was unexpected, I think. Initially I expected people to see things more eye-to-eye when it came kids with special needs and how to “include” them. And these viewpoints were the “result” of differences in experience, beliefs about kids, and personal style.
- “Show how meanings arise in the context of behavior.” This was a crux of my original intent. That was, to look at how new understandings of ability and disability were socially constructed in this inclusive educational setting.
- “Study the situated character of interaction” - this principle was crucial, for it was the interactions that I observed and we discussed that were the essence of this research.
- View the “process over time.” I saw how behaviors of teachers differed depending upon the demands placed on them by the structures of the school and by each other. I

- confined my research to the length of one placement for student teaching. An artificial constraint, but one under which we frequently operate in teacher education.
- Try on the frames of participants. I tried to see the different frames through which teachers viewed their students with special needs and the frames people used to organize their activities. What functions were served by each frame? How and why did people move between frames? How were any “out of frame” activities handled?
 - What descriptive labels do teachers use to describe or categorize children? I searched for the implications of using certain labels, and attempted to identify the range of relationships that these teachers had and the categories that they used to define or express those relationships.
 - What descriptive labels do teachers use to describe or categorize themselves or others? Of what groups are they members?
 - In analyzing descriptions of activities that teachers engaged in with specific children, is there consistency in teacher’s responses?

Interrogation specific to my analysis of interview data. We can consider an interview a display of a person’s perspective and moral form. Interviews are also called situated narratives or accounts, and they can give us insight into “the school culture that make up this person’s world and its content of moral assumptions” (Silverman, 1993). So I looked for evidence of both these things. It had been my intention to share a copy of the various transcriptions, individual and group, with each participant, and seek her feedback and interpretation. I was completely unable to keep up with the transcription process, however, so the interrogation of transcripts was done by me alone.

In analyzing the interviews, I also tried to keep in mind what Bruner said about life narratives:

I believe that the ways of telling and the ways of conceptualizing that go with them become so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself, for laying down routes into memory, for not only guiding the life narrative up to the present but for directing it into the future. I have argued that a life as led is inseparable from a life as told (1994, p. 36) [and] ... The presuppositions that we lace into the telling of our lives are deep and virtually limitless. They are in every line...and why things are included remains mostly implicit, the unspoken pact in force being that you, the [listener] will figure it out for yourself. (1990, p. 122)

Since I, as researcher, created the interview context and dialogue context, I looked for the ways in which my participants complied with or resisted the interview context (this is the traditional interactionist view of those such as Silverman or Hammersley). I looked for ways in which participants contributed to the shaping of the interview. Since I tried to create the kind of environment that helped participants see that they could contribute in their own way by their own definitions of the task at hand, I examined the data to see how successful (or not successful) I had been.

I searched for ways in which the interview served as a conversation that built our relationship, but was cognizant that for the most part, there was still a one-sidedness to it. As in a therapist-patient role, they revealed a lot about themselves, but how well did they end up knowing me? Reissman (1993) also urged researchers to consider interviews as conversations. I took into consideration that these teachers and student teachers were framing their conversations

with me because they wanted me to tell the story of how to become an inclusive teacher to the world, and because of how I framed my purpose.

I learned that my first interviews were still developed from an old positivist stance such as Silverman (1993) describes: Some uniformity of questions and the hope that I would get similar “information” from each participant for comparison purposes. I had even used my small pilot project to pre-test my questions.

I attended to the sequential nature of how participants constructed themselves, and how our relationship, trust, rapport, being taken into confidence was established over time. I analyzed the functions of these accounts. So, for example, teachers told many of their stories in ways that set themselves up as somehow different from teachers who don’t support inclusion. Sometimes they presented themselves as people who, because of their unique experiences, have come to be supporters of inclusion. I listened for the “dominant messages” of the school’s culture and the ideology present within their stories, and attempted to identify what agenda they set or reinforced (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 78).

I attended to the sequential organization of talk (overlapping talk, length of pauses, who triggers what in the conversation, turn-taking, holding the floor, who were the “continuers” of conversations besides myself). This was not difficult to do as there were several teachers who held the floor for long periods of time. Within the dialogues I considered how “actors orally ‘performed’ and what that revealed about their place at the school and the power relationships between people” (Coffey & Atkinson, p. 76). I tuned in to the “ethnopoetics” used to capture us as audience and which successfully held our attention.

Narratives can also be analyzed in terms of function. Reissman (1993) described three generally recognized by the field:

1. Ideational - “informational content about people, situations, and ideas that speakers mean their words to convey” (p. 21).
2. Textual - “the structure, how parts of a text are connected syntactically and semantically.”
3. Interpersonal - “the role relationship between speakers.”

In attending to talk, I attended to both what was said, the content, (ideational analysis) and how it was said (textual or form analysis.) I also attended to the shifting roles of speaker and listener (interpersonal analysis) (Reissman, 1993, p. 21).

Intertextual Meaning Making

The analysis strategies presented by Coffey and Atkinson (1996) provide support for the way I have gone about making sense of my inquiry. They state that “writing and representing is a vital way of thinking about one’s data” (p. 109). They make the same case for reading the literature: “An active and analysis-oriented approach to ‘the literature’ is an important part of the recurrent process of reflection and interpretation” (p. 110). We “need to read and to use ‘the literature’ in order to generate ideas and analyses.” Both kind of strategies are needed. With great dedication, I read widely from “the literature” in order to generate ideas and analyses. I found this intertextual process particularly meaningful.

Intertextual understandings were elaborated by interacting dialogically with a wide range of scholarly texts from the fields of academic disciplines of sociology, elementary education, anthropology, special education, inclusive education, English and literacy education, and feminism, and from the literature in qualitative inquiry and ethnography, narrative inquiry, educational research, and teacher education. Textual connections were also made with other cultural narratives such as poetry, teacher stories, and fiction. Themes and clusters of

understanding which emerged from this process were tried on as frames of meaning and then brought to the data again for analysis across multiple forms of texts.

Thus, my research text or analyses used an essay form that was far more “writerly” than “readerly” (Sumara, 1997). The purpose of my writing was writing to learn, writing to understand, writing to inquire, rather than creating a text that would make things easier for the reader.

Resonance

Resonance is “a way of seeing one experience in terms of another...

Resonance permits teachers to engage in various ways with what they know tacitly and to move that knowledge, so to speak, without having to make it explicit”

(Conle, 1996, p. 299).

Through her study of four preservice teachers, Conle learned that “even one word or one sentence in a story can evoke a response story in us because of an underlying image or scene...One narrative element is the trigger story becomes the source of another story” (p. 305). She also found that it was “the emotional interaction that helped us connect with another’s experiences” (p. 305). She described the process of resonance in this way:

When a story reverberates within us and calls forth another in an echo-like fashion, we pull that remembered story out of a previous context and place it into a new one. The key educational issue in this coming together of stories has to do with the connecting of experiential knowledge contents... (p. 301)

I began with this notion of resonance because it made so much sense, because I had already seen and felt this notion of resonance through my own experiences and my own way of making sense of those experiences. For me, one story always triggers another, and so I understood at an intuitive level how resonance operates. In Conle’s words - “If a story is used as a sense-making tool, it leaves us myriad occasions for resonance: Associations can be made through its images, its mood, its moral associations, and more” (p. 313).

One of the reasons why I found the frame of resonance so attractive was its importance in processing difference. Conle felt that it was important to consider resonance in settings where we encounter differences because it is here that resonance operates by helping us see elements of similarity in the differences we encounter. Resonance also helps us “link events and connect feelings over time and across different people’s experiences” It allows us to see the “metaphorical relationships among images, events, and stories” (p. 321).

Dyson & Genishi (1994) talked about a similar process. “Stories...bring new life experiences and point of view. At the same time, those very images and rhythms reverberate in the memories of [the listeners’] memories, who reconstruct the story with stuff of their own thoughts and feelings. In such ways, individual lives are woven together through the stuff of stories”(p. 5).

So I looked for evidence of resonance that occurred within the group dialogues as well as across dialogues, for stories discussed at an earlier time with new stories, from one person to another as well as within person. I also attended to paradoxical features elaborated upon by Jalongo and Isenberg (1995). The theory of resonance was imbedded in these features as well.

Historical/contemporary - Stories from the past have a message that remains current and that elicits stories from today with similar themes.

Individual/group - "Stories illuminate one person's life experience, yet in doing so, invoke stories from others and remind us of our interconnectedness."

Thinking/feeling - Story connects knowing with feeling and action and helps us to counter ingrained "purely rational views of teaching and learning."

Simplicity/complexity - "Although stories appear simple and are often taken for granted, narrative is well suited to capture the complexities of what it means to teach" (p. 6-8)

Ethical Parameters and Considerations

"Our interpretation of a text is not neutral, it is biased by our experience, by our lives and by our expectations." (Hoel, 1997, p. 14)

All along, conducting this inquiry in an ethical way was an issue of concern for me. Reading feminist inquiry helped raise the issue to consciousness for me (Goldberger, Clinchy, Belenky, & Tarule, 1987; Fonow & Cook, 1991; Gluck, 1991; Neumann, 1997). After reading a collection of essays on ethics in literacy research that one of my committee members gave me at my prospectus exam, the issue became paramount for me, and I knew it would be an especially important frame in analyzing and representing my inquiry.

An essay by Williams (1996) helped me see that there were a number of ethical dilemmas I needed to attend to as a researcher, a very novice one at that. The first was the need for maintaining anonymity while at the same time searching for a way to acknowledge the accomplishments, the success, the good practice of the teachers being studied. The second was the question of "sensitive data" that gets observed (such as poor or even hurtful practice) when reporting it would pose significant barriers to continued working and collaboration relationships with the school. The third was how to represent the beliefs and actions of those who have served as our informants or who have participated in the study so as not to embarrass or hurt. In my analysis, I had to make a number of well-considered decisions after wrestling with these dilemmas.

As I first began to examine and analyze the data, I identified the stories that seemed to capture the key events and important understandings that were emerging. I began to see another dilemma immediately. The stories that came to the fore revolved around particular children. This made sense for I believed this to be a setting where the successes and struggles of individual children truly mattered and teachers judged their own success in terms of those children. They made sense of inclusion by creating stories that captured its positive effects on children's learning and acceptance, and how that child's successes and dilemmas affected them as a teacher.

My dilemma came in trying to capture teacher's understanding of practice with student with special needs included in the classroom. The teachers told many stories about specific children, and this raised a real confidentiality issue. One, I did not have permission from any parent to be studying their child. And in truth, I wasn't studying children, I was studying their teachers and student teachers. But they were intertwined, especially when teachers defined their practice in terms of what their children were doing and learning.

Public visibility and familiarity with this school was another dilemma as well. How to maintain the anonymity of the teachers and students, and not violate confidentiality troubled me from the very beginning of data collection. And as my relationship with the teachers and student teachers grew across the four months of the study and they confided in me and shared personal

and professional insights on the experiences we were sharing, the issue became increasingly difficult.

The problem came about because in many ways this school resembles a professional development school although it is not established as such. Scores of undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff interact within this setting in any given semester - university involvement ranges from areas of academic study such as child development, education, engineering and agriculture to community service projects sponsored by such groups as the football team and sororities and fraternities. Teachers and administrators from this school have regional, state and national visibility as well: State and national conference presentations, articles written by staff in well-known journals, book chapters, a documentary aired on a major cable network with the videotape marketed and shown throughout the country, involvement in litigation carried as a major news story across the Eastern United States, and so on. Not exactly an easy community to maintain confidentiality around.

The political issues and implications of the relationships I was forming and attempting to fairly represent was something I also had to attend to.

Being interviewed, narrating one's life story and opening up one's classroom by telling stories about one's practice are challenging activities to take part in, and will be successful for both parties only if undertaken in an atmosphere of cooperation and trust. Furthermore, choosing whom to work with and how to present teachers' narratives raises the conflict between producing knowledge "about" teaching and producing knowledge "with" teachers: We know that if you want to work with people and for change, you have to begin from their strengths, from a positive point of view. The researcher has to balance the desire for inclusiveness against complex pragmatic and interpersonal considerations...In narrative work which focuses on individuals [whose voices cannot really be made anonymous], the concern for trust and fairness to the teachers with whom one works must be the first priority. (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997, p. 80)

It was impossible to work through the data without giving serious thought to these issues, and surely what I wrote and didn't write was colored by these ethical considerations. I also had to take the vulnerability of those I interviewed and observed into account for the stories they told were often most revealing when they shared very personal experiences or reflected on events that they were truly struggling with (Elbaz-Luwisch, 1997).

I had to be cognizant that "field work represents an intrusion and intervention into a system of relationships...the inequality and potential treacherousness of this relationship is inescapable." There is an "exploitative aspect" to the ethnographic research process, especially in the development of the research product, no matter how collaborative the process of coming to new understandings may have been (Stacey, 1991, p. 113-114.) Within the text which represents this inquiry, I worked hard to balance the integrity of the findings and to honor the trust these teachers accorded me. Appendix F describes how I created this text.

Appendix D ↻ Initial Interview Format and Questions

The purpose of this interview is to bring to light some of the personal experiences and school experiences that have shaped your perspectives on ability and disability. It is also an opportunity to think about how you see yourself as a teacher of children with differing abilities in a school where inclusion is practiced and supported. Please feel free to share personally significant stories and images that come to mind while you're talking, to think out loud while you're talking, to interrupt yourself or me if something comes to you that seems important.

I'd like to begin first by having you provide a brief autobiographical sketch of yourself as learner and teacher: Education, certification, years of experience with children, what you've done, where you've taught, what were some of the factors which led to your choosing teaching as a career.

I'd like to conduct the interview in this way. I will throw out several "conversation starters." I would like you to feel comfortable and relaxed, and to just talk in response to that starter question. I hope you will feel free to share with me what you honestly think and feel, and not necessarily what you think I want to hear or what might be considered politically correct views to have. I have some points that I want to make sure get covered, so I may ask additional questions or ask you to elaborate on something you've mentioned. Okay?

The ***first conversation starter*** is this: What do you know and believe about "ability" and "disability" at this point in time, and how have you come to that understanding?

Personal, family, or social experiences with the notion of disability and ability?

Personal experiences with people considered disabled or exceptional or special?

People, books, movies, TV shows, text books that you think may have contributed to your understanding of these concepts? Why?

Experiences in school growing up?

How about your teacher preparation and teacher development experiences? Course work?

Supervision? In-services? Other teachers and colleagues?

REMEMBER TO PROBE GENTLY: Tell me more. Can you tell me why you feel that way? Can you elaborate on that? What did that mean to you at the time?

How have your experiences in the schools as a student teacher/teacher contributed to your understanding of ability and disability? What role have specific children, their parents, other teachers, principals, or other professionals played?

Have your views on disability and ability changed over time? If so, what do you see as contributing to that change? If not, why do you believe they have stayed stable?

The ***second conversation starter*** is this: How do you see yourself as a teacher of children with differing abilities? And how have you come to this view of yourself?

Are you comfortable being a general elementary student teacher/teacher who has children identified as disabled as part of your classroom? Why? Why not? Have you always felt comfortable/ uncomfortable? If so, what do you see as contributing to that change? If not, why do you believe that has stayed stable?

Do you feel capable in your role as a general elementary student teacher/teacher who has children identified as disabled as part of your classroom? Why? Why not? Have you always felt that way? What do you see as contributing to that change?

Do you have a personally significant story about teaching or learning to teach that you could share that relates to what we've been talking about?

Have there been any books, movies, TV shows, text books that you think may have contributed to your understanding of yourself as teacher of children with differing abilities? What was that new understanding and how did it influence you?

Have children, parents, other teachers, principals, and other persons (like your own family members) contributed to your understanding of yourself as teacher of children with differing abilities?

If so, what did you get from them and how? How did it influence you?

How about your teacher preparation and teacher development experiences? Course work? Supervision? In-services? Other teachers and colleagues?

The *third conversation starter* is this: All schools have laws and procedural structures which dictate how we are to categorize and respond to children on the basis of their differences. What role has this played in the development of your own ideas about how we should categorize and respond to children on the basis of their differences? [differences in learning, ability, presence of handicap, cultural differences, etc.]

[Can probe to get at feelings about labeling, inclusion, entitlement programs, special education laws and procedures, gifted programs, pull-out special services, etc.]

Appendix E ↗ Sequence of Post-prospectus Research Events

- 12/5 Interview with Betty Mercedes** Conducted at Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 12/5 Interview with Cathy St. John** Conducted at Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 12/11 Interview with Jean-Marie Matthews** Conducted in the school's library early morning before school started.
- 12/12 Interview with Amy Little** Conducted at Amy's home.
- 12/13 Interview with Arlene Daniels** Conducted in her classroom early morning before school started.
- 12/16 Interview with Angela Mays** Conducted at my home in the early evening
- 12/17 Interview with Juanita Russell** Conducted after school at the Soft Sofas Coffee Shop. Juanita's son, Reggie, a fourth grader at Wilbur, was also present.
- 1/8 Interview with Rhonda Fleming, doctoral student teaching supervisor with graduate model.** Conducted at Victoria's Coffee Shop. Rhonda dropped out of study in late January due to personal time constraints and the fact that her supervision duties were at schools on the other side of the county.
- 1/15 Interview with Rose Fairfax, doctoral student teaching supervisor with graduate model.** Conducted at Soft Sofas Coffee Shop. Rose will be supporting the graduate student teachers at Wilbur and will participate in the study for credit as a "research apprenticeship."
- 1/15 Interview with Jody Jahn.** Conducted at Victoria's Coffee Shop. Rescheduled from an earlier date in December.
- 1/22 Classroom observation: Story/Language Arts/Writer's workshop.** Betty reads picture book Hally Tosis. Arlene and Betty are teaching, Jerri is supporting. Also in room is Dr. G. from Polytech working as volunteer. I mostly observe and write field notes, draw map of classroom layout, but write briefly with kids.
- 1/22 Classroom observation: Work time and snack/ Mathematics lesson on long division.** Cathy is teaching, Angela is supporting. Other adults in room are Lissa Nestor, speech pathologist, and a substitute aide for one of the students, Jason . I observe and write, draw map of classroom layout, talk with Lissa and Angela.
- 1/22 Lunch in teachers' lounge.** I talk with Betty, Susan, Jean-Marie and Drew
- 1/22 Classroom observation: Poetry Unit/Language Arts activity categorizing words.** Juanita is teaching, Susan is supporting/assessing, Jody is grading and observing. Also in room is school psychologist, who is observing and taking notes. I observe and write, draw map of classroom layout, talk to Jody and Juanita, interact briefly with kids around sorting activity.
- 1/22 Classroom observation: Language Arts lesson on the Inaugural Poet (class is viewing videotape and analyzing; one student, Terry, is listening to audiotope of a book)/ Guidance lesson.** Jean-Marie teaches, then Sarah Thompson, guidance counselor, is teaching. Jean-Marie is grading, Amy is preparing teaching materials and taking notes. Also in room is college student volunteer (or intern?) who accompanies and assists Sarah. Susan enters room very briefly to talk to Jean-Marie. I observe and write, draw map of classroom layout, talk with Jean-Marie.
- 1/29 Classroom observation: Work time and snack/Language Arts lesson on analogies (a student, Terry, is doing a separate language in back of room).** Amy is teaching, Jean-Marie is supporting. Angela comes into room very briefly to talk to Jean-Marie. Also in room is Lissa

Nestor, speech pathologist, providing individualized speech and language services to Terry. I observe and write, talk with Jean-Marie.

1/29 Classroom observation: Mathematics lesson on Roman numerals/Community service food project. Betty is teaching, then Arlene and Jerri are teaching. Arlene and Jerri confer. Also in room is administrative intern who is observing and taking notes. I observe and write, talk with several children, talk with Betty.

1/29 Dialogue with student teachers. We meet at lunch time in the work room of the school library. Teachers make it possible for us to meet for an hour. I listen and facilitate discussion which I audiotape. Rose Fairfax also participates.

1/29 Classroom observation: Poetry Unit/Writing activity. Juanita is teaching, Susan is supporting/assessing. Jody is grading and observing. I observe and write.

1/29 Classroom observation: Integrated language arts and social studies activity/Story. Angela is teaching, Cathy is not present. Volunteer (one of the student's mother reads a picture book Animalia to both classes. Angela reads part of book Felicity Learns a Lesson. I observe and write.

2/5 Classroom observation: Integrated social studies and language arts activity. Angela is teaching, Cathy is preparing for activity, observing and supporting, Angela's fellow teacher and team mate, Toni Camembert, is grading, supporting for part of activity. Also in room is Tonya Spatch, Jason's aide. Lissa Nestor begins observing and talking to Tonya during partner reading, also takes notes. I observe and write, make drawing of classroom showing what is on the walls, talk with Toni, help one set of reading partners figure out a word's meaning, talk with Angela.

2/5 Classroom observation: Review of daily work sheet/Administration of science test. Jean-Marie is teaching. Amy is working at the back of the room. Also in room is Lissa who is helping Terry take an adapted version of the test. I observe and write. Lissa confers with Jean-Marie, I talk with Amy and with Jean-Marie. Sarah, guidance counselor, comes in briefly and leaves with Terry (he had requested a session the day before).

2/5 Classroom observation: Social Studies/Writer's workshop in computer lab/planning time for Angela and Jody. Juanita is teaching. Jody is observing. I observe and write, talk with Jody, talk with Juanita.

2/5 Lunch in teachers' lounge. Discussion about schools and at-risk kids with fifth grade teachers and fourth grade instructional assistants. Talk about all our commonalties and the people we are mutually connected with.

2/5 Classroom observation: Lesson on cooperative learning (L.E.A.P.)/ Science lesson on weather and clouds/Medieval Times Unit activity. Child has role of teacher for first part of lesson, Betty is supporting. Mrs. Barry, one of the other fourth grade teachers, comes into class briefly to confer with Arlene. Betty teaching, Arlene supporting, then Arlene teaching. I observe and write.

2/6 Dialogue with whole group. We meet in library after school. In attendance -- Angela, Arlene, Cathy, Betty, Jean-Marie Ann, Amy, Juanita, Jody, Susan for first part of the meeting, Jerri for the second part of the meeting, Rose, and me. I listen and facilitate discussion which I audiotape.

2/7 Brainstorming session before school. With Jean-Marie, Juanita, and Susan to discuss students posing challenges for them at this time. Amy joins us a little later. I talk with Jean-Marie and interact with Terry afterwards.

2/10 Consultation meeting on Terry with Colleen Christopher. When I arrive at Wilbur, I find out that Colleen is sick and meeting has been cancelled. Jean-Marie and Colleen meet later in the week on their own.

2/12 Classroom observation: Opening morning activities/Mathematics lesson on reducing fractions. Jean-Marie is teaching, Susan is working with Terry and Jaime. Amy is grading and observing. I observe and write, talk with Jean-Marie, Amy, and Susan.

2/12 Planning session between Jean-Marie and Amy. Amy does most of the talking, Jean-Marie asks a lot of questions. I listen and write. When kids return to room, we continue to talk as they have snack and daily work. We observe and discuss interaction between Terry and Jaime. I interact briefly with Terry.

2/12 Classroom observation: 100th day of school categorizing activity and snack/Social studies/Writers workshop. Juanita is teaching, Jody supporting, observing, preparing teaching materials. I work briefly with child who needs help understanding the sorting and categorizing task. Susan comes in mid-social studies and works with individual kids. I observe and take notes, talk with Juanita and Jody.

2/12 Lunch in teachers' Lounge. Conversation between Juanita and Jean-Marie about "inclusion classroom" at another school in the county and contrasts with their own situation.

2/12 Classroom observation: Integrated language arts and social studies activity around Paul Revere and the beginning of the Revolutionary War. Angela is teaching, Cathy is supporting. I observe and write. I talk briefly to Jerri who comes into room to retrieve something from Angela's desk.

2/12 Classroom observation: Students groups sharing their research on weather topic/Discussion to work out last minute preparations for medieval feast/Finishing up banners, moat, and other medieval projects/Review of homework Betty and Arlene are both supporting kids/facilitating, Arlene leads discussion and review. I interact some with kids, observe and write, talk with Arlene.

2/19 Interview with Susan Lane. In school library during her planning period.

? **Jerri's Interview Part I:** In the office she shares with Susan during her planning period.

? **Jerri's Interview Part II:** In her office in the late afternoon.

2/26 Classroom observation: Lesson on understanding the demands of the Literacy Passport Test- presentation of writing samples and criteria used for evaluating performance on the activity to practice for the LPT/Writing workshop. Arlene is teaching, Betty is observing and taking notes. Dr. J., volunteer, is also in the room. Jerri enters the room and she and Arlene co-teach. I observe and take field notes with my laptop for the first time. Then all adults in room, including myself, have children read their stories to them.

2/26 Classroom observation: Snack and work time/Math lesson on equivalent fractions. Angela is assisting new child one-on-one to distribute cookies (a boy with obvious special needs) A male volunteer, college student age, is in the room. The new instructional aide, Frank comes in with Jason after Math lesson begins. Cathy is teaching math. I am observing and typing, I talk with Angela and briefly with Toni. Angela is providing support to Jason and new aide. Angela asks me to work with Jason and Frank and help figure out strategy for solving problems with manipulatives.

2/26 Lunch in teachers' lounge. Sadly, I did not write down our topic in my field notes.

2/26 Classroom observation: Science lesson on sound waves/Student teacher reads novel, "Frozen Fire." Amy is teaching, Jean-Marie is supporting Terry. I observe and type, talk with

Jean-Marie. Jody enters room briefly, talks to me. Juanita enters room briefly, talks with Jean-Marie. Jean-Marie is observing and working at computer.

2/26 Classroom observation: spelling and vocabulary lesson/working in home page groups. Juanita is teaching. Jody is in another classroom observing. I observe and type, talk with Juanita.

2/27 Classroom observation: Mathematics lesson on fractions. Cathy is teaching. Angela asks me to teach the problem set using manipulatives that I worked out (Jason's Caps in Boxes method.) I teach class for about 20 minutes with Cathy. Angela is observing. I talk and work on problems with Jason and his aide, Frank. Angela teaches the problem set using a different method.

2/27 Lunch/Planning session with Angela, Toni, and Cathy. They are talking, watching a video of a child while I sit trying to figure out glitch in our teaching method using "caps in boxes." We discuss solution.

2/27 Classroom observation: Free time. I play Twister with a group of kids. Then I work one-on-one with a girl to see if we really have solved the glitch in our method. I talk with Angela.

3/4 Dialogue with student teachers. We meet after school at the Soft Sofas Coffee Shop. Our discussion is structured and revolves around the card sort activity. I audiotape. Rose participates and takes a few notes.

3/5 Classroom observation: Mathematics lesson on fractions. Cathy is teaching. Angela is working at computer. I talk with Jason and his aide, Frank. Angela is working on creating an adapted text for the new child in her room, Bennie. I help Angela with adaptations. We have long discussion about this child, what resources Angela draws on to teach him, assessment, upcoming eligibility meeting, issue of his label, how to prepare him for trip to Williamsburg.

3/5 Lunch/Planning session with Angela, Toni, and Cathy. Toni raises some issues related to upcoming field trip. We talk about Angela's daughter starting school next year and the school district where Angela lives and my own children attend school.

3/5 Classroom observation: after lunch free time. I interact with Bennie and talk with Angela.

3/5 Classroom observation: reading with Kindergarten Buddies. Jean-Marie facilitating, Amy working on Patton County teaching application. Class joins Kindergarteners and their teacher in courtyard. I observe and type. Terry reads to me, several of the kids interact with my laptop.

3/5 Classroom observation: social studies- child reads draft of settler's position paper to class/Jeopardy game to study for upcoming test on Colonial America. Arlene is teaching, Betty is observing. I observe and type, talk with Betty. Lissa enters room briefly, talks with me about time for interview.

3/5 Classroom observation: small group planning trip for Way West activity while other children are with Juanita preparing for newscast/Playground. Jody is supporting group working on planning in classroom. I talk with Jody while we circulate around classroom. Outside I talk with Jody, Juanita, and Jean-Marie.

3/6 Dialogue with whole group. We meet after school at the Soft Sofas Coffee Shop. I listen, facilitate, and audiotape.

3/13 Spent entire day with Jean-Marie Ann and Amy.

3/18 Interview with Lissa Nestor, speech pathologist. Completed during Lissa's planning break in her speech therapy room.

- 3/19 Spent entire day with Juanita and Jody.**
- 3/19 Wilbur Staff meeting.** After school in library. I try to be as non-intrusive as possible and just listen.
- 3/20 Spent entire day with Angela and Cathy.**
- 3/21 Interview with Drew Peters, Principal of Wilbur School.** Completed when there is a break in the morning's activities in Drew's office.
- 3/24 GIRDL meeting (Getting into really discussing learning).** Facilitated by Colleen. Six Wilbur faculty members and one student teacher present. Discuss a child in Kindergarten and one in second grade. Colleen and I talk afterwards.
- 3/25 Dialogue with whole group.** We meet after school in library with Dr. Nicole B. and Dr. Christine M., teacher educators from Polytech. I listen, facilitate, and audiotape.
- 3/27 Spent entire day with Arlene and Betty.**
- 3/27 Final Dialogue with student teachers.** We meet at lunchtime in the library workroom. They respond to questions I had e-mailed them. I listen, facilitate, and audiotape. Rose is not in attendance.
- 4/2 Final dialogue with teachers.** We meet for an hour at lunchtime in the library workroom while student teachers are holding down the forts. The two general educators at each grade level and the special educators in attendance. Jean-Marie has to leave early.
- 4/3 Interview with Colleen Christopher, special education consultant and inclusion specialist for Wilbur School.** At lunchtime in room used for IEP meetings and by guidance counselor for family meetings.
- 4/7 Final Interview with Betty Mercedes.** Met in Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 4/11 Final Interview with Amy Little.** Met in Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 4/15 Final interview with Juanita Russell.** Met in Drew's vacated office during the school day while Jody was teaching.
- 4/15 Final interview: Rose Fairfax.** Met in Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 4/17 Final interview with Angela Mays.** In classroom during specials when students were gone from room.
- 4/17 Final Interview with Jean-Marie Matthews.** In her classroom after school.
- 4/24 Final interview with Arlene Daniels.** During her morning planning period in the empty classroom of another fifth grade teacher.
- 4/24 Final Interview with Cathy St. John.** Met in Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.
- 5/6 Final Interview with Jody Jahn.** Met in Soft Sofas Coffee Shop.

Appendix F ✚ Creating Alternative Representations of Meaning and Interpretation

...academic discourse
camouflages the “I” - the writer herself acting and feeling.
Such language often
speaks for silenced and marginalized voices,
even while it may advocate letting multiple voices be heard;
celebrates the usual and the typical, while ignoring the possible and exceptional;
ignores the emotional and sensuous for the cognitive and visual;
privileges
theory, concepts, and taxonomies over stories, examples, and cases;
generalizations and explanations over details and understanding;
the simple and predictable over the complex and ambiguous;
telling with authority over coping with vulnerabilities; and
arguments that produce general truth over stories that show lifelikeness.
-- (ethnopoetic formatting and italics added, Ellis, 1997, p. 116).

My discovery of narrative inquiry and the process of writing as a mode of inquiry to generate and expand meaning were important for my work to proceed. Learning about and experimenting with alternative forms of representation was a breakthrough for me too. In this chapter, I will provide insight into how I traveled new roads of meaning making through an intertextual journey, and how I came to represent that journey through alternative formats.

Intertextual Understanding and Meaning Making

Although it initially set me back considerably in terms of time, about a year into analysis I realized that it was **not** time to stop reading (as my research advisor used to say), although I needed to be gathering and making meaning from texts in ways that were different from reading the literature in a traditional approach and writing traditional academic discourse. Intertextual meaning making, a recursive process of reading, reflecting, connecting, and writing, came very naturally to me (Bloom & Egan-Robertson, 1993; Hoel, 1997).

One of the most significant pieces I read was Sumara’s article on intertextuality and the idea of text being cradled within text. Reading it evoked a powerful response in me.

Summer 1998

Sumara (1997) begins with a quote from The English Patient. The following piece which I visually and mentally spliced from that quote was “...pages from other books or writing in his own observations-so they are all cradled within the text...”

This is what I do when I approach a text and what I am attempting to do with my dissertation; that is, to show how other ideas, memories, stories, understandings, pieces of text and various quotes are all “cradled” within the text that represents my understanding of my inquiry.

A colleague gave this to me. He knew I would connect with this article somehow. I am very grateful for his insight.

Here are some of the other quotes that grabbed me, and helped me think in new directions regarding my dissertation and my dialogic way of interacting with the world. Is my research becoming a text to which I am “relationally bound?” (p. 227).

“Text functions ... as a collecting and organizing place for ongoing interpretation” (p. 227). “Within the human-text relationship, [we] develop an interpretive space for [our] ever-evolving sense of self” (p. 228). For me this means that within the human-narrative relationships that were a part of my inquiry, I developed an interpretive space for my evolving sense of self as researcher, as learner, as teacher educator. “In seeking others, we locate ourselves” (p. 229).

“...they gradually come to know one another. This is accomplished through conversation, shared responsibilities, what they say to each other about one another, and from what they do not say since silence is a form of communication” (p. 231). “We do not come to know others by watching them and making comparisons to ourselves. Rather, our sense of self evolves with our interactions with others and things during the experience of living with them” (p. 233). Both these quotes seemed to describe so well the interactions I was a part of at Wilbur Elementary as a result of my various research activities there.

“We wear our life on our sleeves” (p 234). And the irony is that for so many years we have been taught to hide all traces of our lives in the act of doing research, particularly in the texts we carefully construct along narrow scholarly parameters to represent that research. This text is like a sleeve, or even the whole garment; it displays the warp and weave, which are my life experiences, tying things together.

“Shared reading, as a situation involving interpersonal and intertextual relationality, functions as a place for such truth telling” (p. 239). In this case truth itself is defined as relational, as situational, as emerging. I want to capitalize on this notion of the importance of interpersonal and intertextual relationality. Again this characterized Wilbur Avenue School - it is a place defined by interpersonal and intertextual relationality. Certainly our dialogue sessions were both shared and intersecting narratives from which various truths or “knowings” emerged or were created because of the context, the nature of the group and individuals comprising the group, the experiential and narrative foundations, the stories created for and from our dialogue, the way certain individuals, including myself, interposed themselves and shaped the direction of the dialogue.

I had a similar “aha” response to reading Hoel’s article on Voices in the Classroom:

December 1998

The notion of intertextuality is crucial. It is the interaction of the teachers and student teachers’ responses to oral and written texts, and the dialogue that is generated in their groups is focused on their responses to those texts. That creates new meaning and new understanding. The key here is that each person’s various level of understanding, experience, and oral and writing skills complements that of the other’s in the groups. This is where we see John-Steiner’s concept of complementarity come into play. The teachers and students in the group learn with and from each other, and their understanding is greater than it would be if they approached the same subject on their own. In essence, the group creates the scaffold for their learning.

Hoel (1997) wrote, “During the research and writing process, I carried on an internal dialogue with myself, my interpretive position now being that of the researcher, and I had an internal dialogue with myself, the former teacher of the class, and with my previous students.” Hoel’s quote supported my own desire to make explicit the dialogue that I had with myself throughout the research process. I also gained from Hoel an understanding that within the dialogues I had with teachers there was dialogue at some level with the field of education and with the arguments written and oral, that have been a part of education for years about why kids with disabilities shouldn’t be in regular classrooms, and why regular teachers shouldn’t be burdened with such kids, and why teachers feel inadequate in preparing instruction at multiple levels. There was also dialogue with texts which promoted full inclusion and interpreted full inclusion to mean heterogeneous grouping at all times, and what the teachers perceived to be their peers’ reactions. Never was this more evident than in the numerous conversations about one grade level’s practice of grouping children by perceived ability/need for the purpose of math instruction.

In the words of one of the teacher participants, “we are still trying to get a grip on what we are doing.” Getting a grip on my inquiry was facilitated by (but not necessarily made easier through) this recursive, intertextual, process. In attempting to understand fully the various contexts that my stories would be cradled within and our dialogues and interviews occurred within, I actively searched for connections. To help me interpret and more faithfully represent the issues about choosing texts and level of reading difficulty and quality of literature used and thematic content, which both the fourth and fifth grade teams were struggling with, I read all the books and poetry that the children had read and the teachers had referred to, such as: Jim Ugly, Frozen Fire, Julie of the Wolves, Pinballs, Ralph E. Mouse, Shel Silverstein, Bud Robertson’s Civil War (for children), Jean Fritz, Missing May, The Trouble with Hallie Tosis, The War with Grandpa, Maniac McGee, The Great Gilly Hopkins, The Family Under the Bridge, Jacob’s Rescue: A Holocaust Story and others. A study group of teachers and principal at the school were reading The Basic School so I read that too.

When professional or academic issues were raised either through my reading or writing, especially the creation of my stories, I went to the literature and sought out the various perspectives on that subject. So for example, I read a wide variety of texts on the teaching of reading from those such as Nancy Atwell and Lucy Calkins who represented the whole language people and the literature approach to curriculum to those who represented the “new” and conservative phonemic approach and direct instruction of basic reading skills such as the Orton Society and Louisa Moats. I read widely on instructional practices and teaching strategies in inclusive educational settings, and on the development of elementary curriculum and teaching practices in science, social studies, math, and language arts. When I saw a book sitting on a teacher’s desk and in use, I asked about it and then checked it out. Susan Winebrenner’s helpful book on inclusion strategies is a text I read after Arlene Daniels told me how helpful she had found it.

When I found within a text a citation for an article or book which was critical to the development or understanding of the author’s case or theory or a theme I was pursuing, and I had not read it, I sought that text out. So for example, I read multiple works of Carolyn Ellis, Michael Connelly, Jean Clandinin, Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, Laurel Richardson, Susan Krieger, Ivor Goodson, Hunter McEwan, Patti Lather, Carol Witherell, Dianne Ferguson, Marlene Pugach, and John and Connie O’Brien. If I saw a reference repeatedly cited across authors, I

checked that out too: A Thrice-Told Tale or Tales of the Field come to mind as examples. Whenever possible, I engaged in reading and writing as inquiry to get a handle on the range of political, social, and academic contexts in which the issues around this inquiry could be situated. The theories of resonance and connected knowing became operative in a big way for me. I went back to texts I had read previously because I knew that now they would make more sense and would have connections to offer that I hadn't been able to see before, especially about the personal experience of field work: To Teach, The Taste of Ethnographic Things, Women's Words, Women's Ways of Knowing and others. And all along, as I read, I wrote and wrote.

Representating Complex Understandings through an Alternative Text

It became obvious to me that this intertextual way of meaning making was going to require a different form of representation than traditional academic discourse. I was also learning that qualitative inquiry in the post-modern world was leading many researchers to question the linear, authoritative, uni-vocal text as the only way to write-up research. Postmodern researchers needed to "generate a cogent and integrated textual performance" (McWilliam, 1997, p. 220). Through reading and writing, I became more familiar with the new ways that the field is using to represent text and re-frame narrative as non-linear and multi-vocal, with new forms of text that better capture new forms of understanding, and new ways of thinking about inquiry, authority, and knowing.

My search for new forms of representation also arose out of my concern for the ethical issues inherent in collaborative-style research with teachers and schools. I read a number of articles and books in the area of educational research which delineated the ethical dilemmas created by the very nature of collaborative relationships. Reading in the area of feminist research also helped me to understand that the male-oriented ways of writing research neither acknowledged women's varied ways of knowing, nor honored the relationship building and the value of participants' voices that occurs in ethnographic research (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Borland, 1991; Neumann, 1999). My discovery that people were experimenting with multi-layered texts excited me; the very thing I had been wrestling with was the many layers in my research and the many voices I thought needed to be heard in addition to mine.

I began to experiment with story, poetry, and realigning and juxtaposing texts to try and answer two main questions:

- ◇ How will I create a text that captures multiple voices, including my own?
- ◇ How will I shape a text that is both transformative for the reader and illustrative of the transformation occurring in this educational setting?

July 17, 1998

Reflections on format decision

A year of teaching and thinking about a hundred different things, but always at the back of my mind, my dissertation research, what it all means, and how to best represent it in a way that gels with my own style of thinking and writing, and yet that has the cohesiveness and power to persuade my doctoral committee that I have satisfactorily engaged in the kind of rigorous inquiry expected of doctoral level work.

A year of reading and writing about narrative, for a number of different purposes; writing conference proposals, presentations, and a paper for publication in the NRC yearbook, but always at the back of my mind, reading and making connections to my dissertation research to try and figure out what it all means, and how to best

represent it in a way that has meaning for various readers' styles of thinking and reading.

I think I have finally seen enough models with my recent reading and done enough thinking that I have figured out how to do this in a way that feels good, and that resolves several troubling questions I needed to deal with. The first one: I recall that towards the end of my time at Wilbur, I told Jean-Marie I was considering writing this as my story and the story of my learning. I can remember even now the puzzled look on her face. She was surprised, and also I think unhappy, with my decision, for I suspect that part of her and the other teachers' motivation in participating with me was that their story would be told. I was immediately sorry that I had shared this with her so unthinkingly (which I had done in the spirit of one struggling doctoral student to another) and regretted the self-centeredness of such a decision. I resolved to find a way to tell both their stories and my own.

The second one: How I would tell the story and whose story I would tell was an issue from the very beginning. I knew (even before finding substantiation for it in the literature) that although I wanted to reject the traditional positivist format for presenting the "results" of my inquiry, I had to have an alternative form that had meaning, that had substance too, but in an alternative way, and one that I could provide a rationale for...

The format (and procedure) I am considering is this:

I will search through interviews, dialogues, and field notes, and create stories from events that capture the essence of what these teachers do, think, and believe. Then I will use these stories on the left hand side of the page as a way to frame what I am talking about on the right hand side of the page. On the right hand side of the page, I will alternate my own learnings and understandings in italics with analysis and support from the literature. I could frame or perhaps box quotations from the teachers and student teachers. Another way to do this is to have sections of dialogue running down the left hand side of the page. This would put the teachers' voices directly in the text and let them stand on their own, although there would be related text on the right that would allow the reader to create some of their own interpretations. I could begin sections with quotes from the literature.

Of course the sequence of what I am going to write is not something I have yet resolved. I am thinking that sections will follow the themes I derive from analysis. And analysis needs, at this point, to be reading and reading and re-reading and writing from my data, and what I have written and mused about thus far. I decided a while ago to stop coding based on the preconceived categories I had before I started the research. I still may return to my questions and use them as headings, but I will decide that after I see what big stories and themes emerge from my own conversations with the texts I have gathered.

I made the conscious decision to work with an alternative format composed of *multiple* forms of representation to present the new understandings generated by the research and to address the issues raised by the very articulation of my research questions within a frame of inquiry. I was very much out on a limb with this, though. I was working on my own (without a safety net, is how I believe the metaphor goes), a little frightened that I had ventured out this far, but invigorated and exhilarated by this complex way of constructing meaning. But I was shored up by the wide support I found in the literature for moving outside of academic discourse and

using new textual forms to represent complex understandings of teachers, teaching and learning generated by the inquiry, to represent multiple voices, and to transcend ethical dilemmas (Beattie, 1995; Bloom & Munro, 1995; Carter, 1993; Greene, 1994; Eisner, 1997; Ellis, 1997; Ely, 1997; Lather, 1991; Lather, 1997; Lincoln, 1997; McCarthy & Fishman, 1996; McWilliam, 1997; Mortensen & Kirsch, 1996; Polkinghorne, 1997; Reissman, 1993; Richardson, 1994).

Using multiple forms of representation within an alternative format enabled me to illuminate the shared and intersecting narratives of the researcher, the classroom teachers and student teachers involved in the study, others who helped shape the context of inclusive education in this particular school setting, teacher educators who had an on-going relationship with these teachers and student teachers, and the various and often conflicting voices of “authority” from the fields of education and social science, without taking on the stance of researcher as all-knowing expert. I also hoped that an alternative format would give me the means by which I could transcend the ethical dilemmas of telling another’s story or speaking for others.

I was guided by the suggestions and questions that Bloom and Munro (1995) offered to narrative researchers.

[We need] to allow the complexity, ambiguity, and contradictions of lived experience to disrupt the traditional coherence of the text. Similarly, it is a process which should generate, rather than answer, questions about what it means to do interpretive work...questions such as: What does it mean to engage in interpretive work in which there are no fixed meaning claims? How do we construct our final texts in ways that resist authoritative final interpretation? What would a text look like that acknowledges and invites readers to participate in the interpretive process? How can we as authors represent the intersubjective process of our collaborative work? (p. 110)

I was also motivated to find a format which could function as a “liminal space” and provide a visual demonstration of my theory that inclusive education settings serve as zones of liminality (Zukin, 1991) where gradual destruction of the old and creation of a new educational landscape are occurring simultaneously. Brantlinger (1997) asserted that the morally grounded beliefs that sustain inclusive education are in schism with the neutral, objective “empirically” tested theories that maintain special education structures, and that we need new forms of research that better match our intents. For these reasons, I wanted to work within a format of representation that went outside of the traditional format. I wanted a format that mirrored the destruction of the old and the creation of the new.

McWilliam (1997) pointed out that in experimenting with *new* textual form, that we are trying to “*disrupt* orthodox representations of reality,” to generate a “multilayered research” that is the outcome of “post”[positivist] scholarship” and that “is a conscious and visible performance of theorising” (p. 220). Eisner (1997) helped me see that an alternative format could also be used for the purposes of creating and highlighting ambiguity, rather than the more orthodox aim of resolving those ambiguities for the reader:

...alternative forms of data representation can provide what might be called “productive ambiguity.” By productive ambiguity, I mean that the material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity. Unlike the traditional ideal of conventional research, some alternative forms of data representation result in less closure and more plausible interpretations of the meaning of the situation...The

open texture of the form increases the probability that multiple perspectives will emerge. Multiple perspectives make our engagement with the phenomena more complex. Ironically, good research often complicates our lives. (p. 8)

How does one go about creating alternative representations of data that layer multiple perspectives and have the power to transform? I gleaned a number of useful suggestions from Ellis (1997) for writing evocative texts:

1. Focus less on “trying to get all the ethnographic details *right*.”
2. *Show* interaction so that readers engage more fully in the emotional process, rather than just get told about the resolution.
3. Don’t worry too much about making generalization. Show a single instance and describe it in all its richness. Let the reader make the generalization about a kind of event that took place to showing one event in particular. The description of that one event might actually be a composite of a number of instances from your data.
4. Don’t be afraid to reconstruct conversations that you did not write down but remember as significant
5. Read and reread your text aloud until I you hear the ring of authenticity
6. Continually question the ways you have chosen to represent certain events and perspectives, and your motive for doing so.
7. Concentrate on being true to the feelings/the tone present in each situation
8. Be less concerned about getting all the “facts” in the exact order and time sequence.
9. Move away from trying to make your text “a mirror representation of chronologically ordered events” and move toward “telling a story, where the events and feelings cohered, where questions of meaning and interpretation were emphasized, and where readers could grasp the main points and feel some of what I felt.”
10. Work from an assumption of “truth.” Strive to tell a story that fuses “personal experience, research notes, and the recollections of others.”(Ellis, 1997, p. 127-128)

After reading the work of Lather and Tanaka that I found in Representation and the Text I became intrigued with the idea of creating a non-linear, polyvocal, and multilayered text (Chiseri-Strater, 1996; Lather, 1997; Lather & Smithies, 1997; Tanaka, 1997). I was impressed by the many layers and voices that could come through on just a few pages, and was driven to work with a similar format given the multitude of layers and differing of perspectives contained within my own inquiry. I developed three sets of story sequences that were tied to the curriculum and based on experiences in, conversation about, and reflection on teaching practice in this inclusive educational environment. These story sequences served as the centerpieces around which I began to represent my inquiry. I also began experimenting with the idea of intertexts between larger chunks of text; out-of-sequence narratives used as bridges or juxtapositions (Lather & Smithies, 1997; Sunstein, 1996).

As I began to read about the different forms of representation that researchers were experimenting with, I began to construct a vision of a transformative text. Elliot Eisner defined representation as “the process of transforming the contents of consciousness into public form so that they can be stabilized, inspected, edited, and shared with others... We exploit different forms of representation to construct meanings that might otherwise elude us” (1997, p. 6).

Richardson (1994) described a class of experimental genres that she called *evocative representations* and defined as the use of “literary devices to re-create lived experience and evoke emotional response.” She described a number of “evocative” forms; the following were ones I decided I felt most comfortable using in my own work: *narratives of the self* -highly

personalized stories about my own lived experience, *ethnographic fictional representations*-elements of the ethnography are drawn together to tell a “good story”, and *poetic representation* -writing up interviews as poetry to honor the speaker and engage the listener (p. 521-522).

Considering and Creating Stories

All my life I have been a voracious reader of fiction. Early on in the process of figuring out how to represent my research and my participants’ stories, I considered adopting the stylistic devices of an author like Clyde Edgerton. In The Float Plane Notebooks, for example, chapters were written in the voice of one of four main characters, and parts of the story were told as seen through each person’s eyes. I liked that approach a lot; but I ended up abandoning it for the purposes of this inquiry. Why? I didn’t really think I had gathered enough data on individuals across time to consider this format a viable and particularly accessible representation. However, the process of composing an ethnographic fiction transforms the data and rearranges and reorganizes actual events and identities into a story. The purpose of such a transformation is to give the reader a deeper understanding of individuals, organizations or events imbedded in the story (Richardson, 1994; Wolcott, 1994).

I’ve read a lot of Annie Dillard and Maya Angelou and a dozen other authors who tell personal stories in a non-fiction mode. I find myself drawn to this way of writing. But this was a dissertation, after all, and the first purpose of this text was to demonstrate my capacities as a scholar. I needed to be aware of who my readers would be.

If I did not use a fictionalized format and, instead, tried to represent my inquiry as a series of personal stories using only available data, I could see a major problem. I wondered if I had really collected the breadth of information and insight into my participants that would be necessary to do justice to their story. In spite of this, I decided that story was a format I wanted to persevere with.

From Margot Ely and her colleagues (1997) I learned of a number of story forms or narrative turns being used by qualitative researchers including anecdotes, a variety of vignettes, layered stories, and pastiche and other quiltings.

Vignettes are...narrative investigations that carry within them an interpretation of the person, experience, or the situation that the writer describes...A vignette restructures the complex dimensions of its subject for the purpose of capturing, in a brief portrayal, what has been learned over a period of time. (p. 70) ...The vignette sandwiches together the particulars of people, time, places, or events to reveal implicitly the significance of the stories told. (p. 72) ...Vignettes are portraits created through condensing and compiling. (p. 74) ...A vignette may provide a contextualized single picture, a snapshot, intended to represent an entire issue, phenomena, or case. *Snapshot vignettes* function towards the same ends as a *synechdoche*, a figurative device using a part of something to represent the whole. (p. 74)

Such vignettes are “composites” that could capture what I have learned as a researcher. The process of creating such composites may include taking the transcribed words of others and editing them and writing around them. There are a number of difficulties in attempting to represent the voices and perspectives of others, not the least of which is fidelity to the person: there is a fine line between the creation of interpretive narrative and fictionalizing. Vignettes however allow us to portray people through their “passions, desires, ideas, and actions” (p. 76). Ely confirmed my use of the impact that can be created by juxtaposing vignettes or purposefully

ordering them in a series. Placing narratives together can allow the pieces to “speak to each other.” “Often the point is so strongly made in the presentation and blending of vignettes that there is far less need for discursive text than envisioned” (p. 78).

I went about creating my stories or vignettes by reading through my field notes and writing down the teaching practices that characterized what I had observed. I also took stock of the issues and themes that had surfaced through our dialogues and my interviews and my initial “findings” or assertions that captured the big picture of what I had learned as a result of my inquiry. Then I created a list of those practices and went back through all my field notes and my research journal entries to find the stories that captured a significant number of these practices. Then I took each story line and went back through all the data, field notes, research journal entries, transcripts of interviews and dialogues, and artifacts such as school newsletters, and assembled data related to that story line. From this collection of data, I wrote my stories.

I also followed Ely’s advice on transforming the visual style of the text itself to draw attention to the different voices and/or the different functions of the layers of the text. This can be done by varying fonts, case, or type sizes, and through the use of bolded or italicized text. “Multiple font styles draw readers’ attention to complex and multiple perspectives, simplify the need for a ponderous explanation that often precedes the presentation of multiple viewpoints or levels of abstraction, and emphasize particular points for consideration. The use of...any layout techniques in general can burnish and facilitate readers’ interaction with content” (p. 94).

I brainstormed to think through all the possible stories contained within my inquiry:

- The story of how I came to do this research and the purposes of my research (locating myself personally, professionally, and politically).
- The story, as best I know it, of how inclusive education came to be practiced at Wilbur Avenue School, how it was practiced during the time I observed, and how it was *evolving*.
- What I learned as I went along: i.e. insights I gained, contradictions I encountered, basically, my on-going interpretation of events. What conclusions I came to when I decide to quit messing with the data.
- Stories of shared experience during the time I was at Wilbur as an observer.
- Stories that served as touchstones for each of the teachers, student teachers and myself.

I tried to honor a number of these stories within the multi-layered text I constructed to represent the inquiry.

...richly layered perspectives entice participation in the multiple stories within the research story. ...The layered stories, then, are one way that you might consider to offer research data in more than a neat package of findings and to fashion reports that emphasize complexity and individuality of your search toward understanding. (Ely et al., 1997, p. 95).

Considering and Creating Ways to Represent Voice

Voice was indeed a complicated issue. I needed to find my own voice as a researcher and yet I also wanted to represent the voices of all who had been involved. My dilemma then became, “How do I make the representation of my research multi-vocal?” I wanted the text that represented my inquiry to weave “a fabric of many voices” (Lather & Smithies, 1997, p. 14).

The struggle for research voice is captured by the analogy of living on a knife edge as one struggles to express one's own voice in the midst of an inquiry designed to capture the participants' experiences and represent their voices, all the while creating a research text that will speak to, and reflect upon, the audience's voices. (Connelly & Clandinin, 1994, p. 423)

I experimented with two alternative ways to represent multiple voices. The first was by reconstructing dialogue and giving the reader access to the rich interplay of the voices (Lather & Smithies, 1997). I learned that juxtaposing dialogue (although this would be contrived) "could be an illuminating way of highlighting some of the differences between ... respective experiences and outlooks" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1997, p. 124). Interestingly, Coffey and Atkinson called this "a conversation," and noted that such a textual approach could provide a "vivid sense of confrontation and contrast" (p. 125).

The second was by re-presenting the words of the teachers in a format that more closely honored how they were spoken.

When we write social science, we use our authority and our privilege to talk about the people we study. No matter how we stage the text, we - the authors - are doing the staging. As we speak about the people we study, we also speak for them. As we inscribe their lives, we bestow meaning and promulgate values. (Richardson, 1992, p. 131)

I wanted to work around this thorny issue. As Laurel Richardson noted, poetic representation can "provide a new strategy for resolving these horrid postmodern writing dilemmas" (p. 131). So, I asked myself, does a poetic form of representation make sense for what I am trying to accomplish? I began to search the literature for examples of scholars who had used poetry in their qualitative research.

The much respected and revered Eisner certainly saw its promise. "...Stories and narratives by no means exhaust the ways in which the processes of education in and out of schools can be studied or described...even poetically crafted narratives are waiting in the wings (1997, p. 8). There was poetry of transformation imbedded in the teachers voices, and I wanted a form that could capture that.

When people talk, whether as conversants, storytellers, informants, or interviewees, their speech is closer to poetry than it is to sociological prose. Writing up interviews as poems honors the speakers pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies, rhythms, and so on. Poetry may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting snippets in prose. Further, poetry's rhythms, silences, spaces, breath points, alliterations, meter, cadence, assonance, rhyme, and off-rhyme engage the listener's body, even when the mind resists and denies it....Poetry is thus a *practical* and *powerful* method for analyzing social worlds (Richardson, 1994, p. 522).

In an earlier article, Laurel Richardson (1992) described the way in which she "breached qualitative writing norms" by creating poetry from interview data. I was intrigued to see that she created a three page poem from thirty six pages of transcribed text "using *only* her [the woman interviewed] words, her tone, and her diction but relying on poetic devices such as repetition, off-rhyme, meter, and pauses to convey her narrative" (p. 126).

I read Jo Carson's poetry capturing the voices of people of Appalachia and how she had constructed it (Carson, 1989), and other researchers who were using ethnopoiesis (Richardson,

1992; Sunstein, 1996). This was my procedure for creating “found” poetry within teacher talk or using ethnopoiesis as a means of more meaningfully representing teachers’ voices. As I re-read the transcriptions, I looked for strings of extended narrative expressed by a single person that represented some of the issues we were wrestling with: grouping, support, collaboration, the personal and professional transformation people expressed as occurring. I also used memory as I read the transcripts to remember chunks of talk that had struck me with their poignancy and their passion. I then listened to large portions of the taped interview or dialogue that the chunk could be found within to make sure I was accurately representing the context within which it was said. I then listened to that excerpt over and over again, and wrote as I listened. I tried to place the text representing the person’s talk on the page as they said it, using highlighted text and italics to illustrate where the person placed emphasis in their talk, to use dashes or line breaks to indicate where they paused or stopped to catch their breath.

In the end, I only used four examples of poetry in my final text. But the process of ethnopoiesis was a significant one for enlarging my understanding of the meaning in teachers’ voices.

Intent of this Alternative Text

The polyvocal, multi-layered construction of this narrative text was a way to get at values and truths that might not be revealed otherwise: “...truths revealed from real positions in the world, through lived experience in social relationships, in the context of passionate beliefs and partisan stands” (Personal Narratives Group, 1989, p. 263). What I wanted to be primary was the teachers’ voices as they told their stories and relayed their efforts “to grapple with the world [of inclusive education] in all its confusion and complexity...” (p. 264).

My purpose was build the new understandings generated by the inquiry in layers. I arranged the text to create both connections and juxtapositions. It was my intention that the non-regular arrangement of the text have a jarring, disruptive effect on the reader. As I said earlier, I wanted the text to serve as a liminal zone, a space conveying the rupture and breaks of change and the contradictions in this inclusive education setting.

I used the storied nature of the narratives and the strong and varied voices that spoke from the text to invite resonance and create multiple possibilities for dialogue. I tried to create a representation of this inquiry that attended to “context, character, contradiction, and complexity” (Carter, 1993, p. 11). I also tried to create a dialogical space that could engender “possibilities for re-engagement, resistance, and reading ourselves into the process of educational and social change” (Burdell & Swadener, 1999, p. 26).

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EDUCATION

Ph.D.	VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY	December 2001 BLACKSBURG, VA
<i>Major:</i>	Curriculum and Instruction: Elementary Education	
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Doctoral Study	SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY	1983-1984 SYRACUSE, NY
<i>Major:</i>	Mental Retardation	
<i>Emphases:</i>	Cognitive Development, Non-traditional Assessment, Special Education	
M. S.	GEORGE PEABODY COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS	1977 NASHVILLE, TN
<i>Major:</i>	Special Education	
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B. A.	FLORIDA ATLANTIC UNIVERSITY	1975 BOCA RATON, FL
<i>Major:</i>	Exceptional Child Education	
<i>Minor:</i>	Psychology	

EXPERIENCE

Assistant Professor of Education NEFF CENTER FOR TEACHER EDUCATION, EMORY & HENRY COLLEGE	Fall 1997-Present EMORY, VA
Graduate Instructor VIRGINIA TECH., DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING	1996-1997 BLACKSBURG, VA
Student Teaching Supervisor VIRGINIA TECH., DIVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING	1994-1996 BLACKSBURG, VA
Executive Director DISCOVERYWORKS.....A CHILDREN'S MUSEUM	1992-1994 RADFORD, VA
Adjunct Faculty RADFORD UNIVERSITY, DEPT. OF SPECIAL EDUCATION	Summer 1992-Spring 1994 RADFORD, VA
Coordinator, New River Valley Early Intervention Council NEW RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES BOARD	Fall 1990-Fall 1991 RADFORD, VA
Director of Rehabilitation Services ENABLE (A COMMUNITY RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES)	1986-1990 SYRACUSE, NY
Acting Executive Director ENABLE (A COMMUNITY RESOURCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES)	Summer 1989 SYRACUSE, NY

Training Specialist Consultant BUREAU OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT, NYS OFFICE OF MENTAL RETARDATION	1986/1987 ALBANY, NY
Program Director (1st six months as Program Development Consultant) MCBRIDE CENTER, UNITED CEREBRAL PALSY OF SYRACUSE (NOW ENABLE)	1984-1986 SYRACUSE, NY
Clinical Consultant JOWONIO SCHOOL	Fall 1983-Spring 1984 SYRACUSE, NY
Caseplanner for Children with Severe Disabilities DIRECTION SERVICE, CENTER ON HUMAN POLICY, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY	1980-1983 SYRACUSE, NY
Instructor EXTENDED CAMPUS PROGRAM, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY	1981-1983 SYRACUSE, NY

PUBLICATIONS

Altieri, E. (1998). Using literacy activities to construct new understandings of disability. In T. Shanahan and F. Rodriguez-Brown (Eds.), Forty-seventh yearbook of the National Reading Conference. Chicago: National Reading Conference.

Winzer, M., Altieri, E., & Larsson, V. (2000). Portfolios as a tool for attitude change. Rural and Special Education, 19 (3/4), 72-81.

Altieri, E. (in press). Using images of disability as tools of inquiry with pre-service teacher preparation students. In L.S. Bustle (Ed.), The power of visual image: Engaging learners in critical and creative inquiry. New York: Peter Lang.

OTHER SCHOLARSHIP

Member, Editorial Review Board for the 49th Annual National Reading Conference Yearbook

Member, Editorial Review Board for the 48th Annual National Reading Conference Yearbook

Segment Contributor demonstrating story dictation and other language experience strategies. In R.E. Diss (1998). The ABC's of Tutoring: Help for reading coordinators and tutors [Video recording] Charleston, WV: Appalachian Educational Laboratory.

NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

Ethnography in Education Forum ENACTING THE THEORY OF CONNECTED INQUIRY CO-PRESENTER WITH LYNN BUSTLE AND ELAINE O'QUINN	March 2001 PHILADELPHIA
Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association ENGAGING LEARNERS IN CREATIVE AND CRITICAL INQUIRY THROUGH VISUAL IMAGE CO-PRESENTER WITH ROSARY LALIK, LYNN BUSTLE AND KIM OLIVER	April 2000 NEW ORLEANS
Southeastern Women's Study Conference WOMEN AT PLAY IN THE WORK OF ACADEMIA: A PASTICHE OF FRIENDSHIP AND RESEARCH CO-PRESENTER WITH LYNN BUSTLE AND ELAINE O'QUINN	April 2000 BOONE, NC

- Ethnography in Education Forum** **March 2000**
 THE COMPLEXITIES OF LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE DIFFERENCE: CREATING A
 NON-LINEAR, POLYVOCAL TEXT TO REPRESENT CHANGING PRACTICE IN INCLUSIVE
 EDUCATION (MY DISSERTATION RESEARCH) PHILADELPHIA
- Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association** **April 1999**
 CONNECTIVE INQUIRY: BUILDING ON THE INTERRELATIONSHIPS OF OUR LIVES
 AND SCHOLARSHIP MONTREAL
 CO-PRESENTER WITH LYNN BUSTLE
- Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association** **April 1999**
 LEARNING TO NEGOTIATE DIFFERENCE: SHARED AND INTERSECTING NARRATIVES
 OF EXPERIENCE IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MONTREAL, CANADA
- National Reading Conference** **Dec. 1997**
 USING LITERACY ACTIVITIES TO CONSTRUCT NEW UNDERSTANDINGS OF DISABILITY SCOTTSDALE, AZ
- Annual Conference of the Teacher Education Division
 of the Council for Exceptional Children** **Nov. 1997**
 UNDERSTANDING DISABILITY IN NEW WAYS: MAKING THE JOURNEY
 THROUGH PORTFOLIO'S SAVANNAH, GA
- National Conference of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps** **Nov. 1996**
 IMAGES AND IMAGINATION: A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH
 TO LEARNING ABOUT DISABILITIES AND OURSELVES AS TEACHERS NEW ORLEANS, LA
 CO-PRESENTER WITH BONNIE BILLINGSLEY
- Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association** **April 1996**
 REINVENTING TEACHER EDUCATION: AN EXAMINATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION
 OF LEARNING IN AN ELEMENTARY TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM NY
 CO-PRESENTER WITH SUSAN MURPHY, SUSAN MAGLIARO & LISA NIENKARK
- Annual Meeting of the American Association on Mental Retardation** **June 1993**
 HALF DAY PRE-CONFERENCE TRAINING WORKSHOP WASHINGTON, DC
 INCLUSION OF PEOPLE WITH MENTAL RETARDATION:
 HOW TO DO THE 'RIGHT THING'