

**CASE STUDY: WE HAVE A VOICE. EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND TYPICAL STUDENTS IN A MODEL
PRIMARY SCHOOL IN THE ST. GEORGE EAST DISTRICT.**

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I dedicate this study to my father whose lifelong dream was for his daughter to graduate from the University of the West Indies and my brother, who sustained serious injuries due to an accident just before the commencement on this study. He was also pursuing a degree but is unable to do so now. Through all the pain and sadness God has never abandoned me. I acknowledge His unmovable Grace and am thankful for His Guidance.

Abstract

This qualitative study examined the experiences of inclusion within a model school of both students with special education needs and their peers within the general education classroom. Data were collected using focus group and individual interviews. The researcher made contact three times with each of the participants. Each pupil participated in one focus group interview and one classroom observation and met once to resolve field issues. The following research question was the basis for the interview and questions: What are students' experiences of inclusion in a model school?

As researcher and observer, I used a constant comparison analysis to ensure that the themes, as they occurred in its natural setting, emerged from the data itself. Major themes that emerged are the physical, academic and social aspects of inclusion. Social justice also emerged as an entrenched belief of the students. The students also provided insight into what will make their school more inclusive.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Special education in Trinidad and Tobago emerged in the 1940's with religious and community organizations where students with special needs attended segregated institutions funded mostly by corporate Trinidad and Tobago. The prevailing perception of students with exceptionalities was based on a deficit model. In 1980, the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (GORTT) incorporated these schools under the Ministry of Education's (MOE) purview and subsequently established the Special Education Unit in 1981. The Special Education Unit evolved over the years into the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) in 1991.

A shift from a humanitarian to rights based perspective emerged as a result of the SSSD as it hinted to resource allocation and public accountability for these students. Professionals in the field of education, informed parents and non-governmental organizations played an intrinsic role in advocating for special needs education (Conrad, Paul, Bruce, Charles & Felix, 2010). Similar agitations in the United States resulted in landmark legislations for inclusive education (Paul, 2011); whereas in Trinidad and Tobago movements to protect the rights of the disabled community are plagued with political quagmires as the focus is on policy development rather than legislation (Blackman, Conrad, Brown, 2012). Conrad et al., (2010) explains that this is as a result of an entrenched elitism stemming from post-colonial power and privilege.

As a signatory to the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994) Trinidad and Tobago has adopted the Education for All which is geared towards equal opportunities. Subsequent to this, in 2000, the GORTT became a signatory to the Dakar Framework for Action and is therefore mandated to follow the global initiatives of UNESCO. After a National Consultation on Special Education (1990) a policy paper was issued four years later, the T&T National Task Force on Education, which reiterated the 1990 mission to “a socially inclusive system”. EFA goals include issues related to Early Childhood Care and Education, equitable life-skills programmes and improving the overall quality of education. Despite these actions by the MOE, inclusion is not yet realized in Trinidad and Tobago.

In 1984 the Report of a National Survey of Handicapped Children and Youth in Trinidad and Tobago identified the prevalence of disabilities to be 16.1% of children between the ages of 3 and 16 (Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education, 2007). The White Paper (1993-2003) identified the dynamic nature of the society as a major reason for providing support services for students. The figures provided from the Diagnostic and Prescriptive Services (est. 1999) showed that 785 of the 1888 students referred from the general education sector had a combination of disabilities including emotional/behavioural disorders, learning disabilities and sensory and physical impairments. The Trinidad and Tobago Census Data, 2000, identified the disabled population at 27,000 students (to age 19) and more than 5,000 youths (20-30 years old). These statistics revealed how critical it was to provide intervention services.

Trinidad and Tobago, as with other developing countries, has adopted its special education practices and ideologies from developed nations like the United States, England and Canada. The implementation of these practices however, is limited to inadequate pedagogy, experience and infrastructure “There is therefore no knowledge about the impact of the country’s educational practices on students with disabilities ... therefore continuous citation of a lack of research data when reporting national outcomes on an international scale” (Paul, 2011).

This deficiency in research is coupled with a deficiency in the educational provisions for students with special education needs (SEN). Cabinet, under the former regime, approved an Inclusive Education Policy after a national consultation in 1990 and by 2007 the Ministry of Education made plans for inclusive education (informed by the Miske-Witt report). Model schools in each district have been built in which inclusion was projected to be instituted in phases, with a proposed date of 2015 to achieve full inclusion. Since then, control of government has changed and the direction of SEN in Trinidad and Tobago is still unclear. The results from this study may serve to provide some direction for educational provisions of this population.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) identifies a “child” as a person under the age of eighteen. Culturally children’s voices have been neglected. “Children must be seen and not heard” has been an adage of childhood for many. This has begun to erode over the years as the ratification of the CRC shows; by 1999 191 countries had become signatories to

the treaty. This document espouses a philosophy of children as having a voice and the need to listen.

Article 12 reads:

1. State Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the view of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child.
2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided with the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of natural law.

Messiou (2012) states that “engaging in student voices” allows practitioners to reflect on what is being offered to children, how they feel about these offerings and how these experiences can be enhanced. As such, children can play an active role in addressing marginalization. Giving students a voice entails more than just asking students pre-set questions in a controlled environment (Fletcher, 2011). An increase in student cooperation and enjoyment, an increase in the quality of student work, improved grades and greater participation in classroom discussions are also benefits of engaging students’ voices (Messiou, 2012).

Generally, it is adults who debate and write about the rights of children, which may well signal power hierarchies which define the subordinate roles of children.

Ruddock (1996), as cited by Lloyd and Tarr in their edited work by Lewis & Lindsay (2002) posit that adults generally do not perceive the social maturity of children as they seek to resolve the demands of the social and personal aspects of their personalities. As such any research on teacher perceptions of schooling will be biased as the assumptions they make on students' experiences will all be flawed.

Background

Valley View Government Primary School is located in the St George East Educational District and has been in existence for more than twenty years. The school has a population of two hundred and eighty, with most classes having a teacher pupil ratio of 1:15. There is only one Standard One class at this school within which two out of the three students with diagnosed special needs are enrolled. The older of the two, Zahara, is diagnosed with Down Syndrome. Riza who is diagnosed with epilepsy, is on prescribed medication for seizures and only attends school for part of the day. The Student Aide does not accompany her when she leaves which means that the latter part of the day is solely dedicated to Zahara.

Down Syndrome, also called Trisomy 21, is caused by extra genetic material which results in developmental delays in both physical and cognitive development. Typically a developing foetus inherits twenty-three chromosomes from each parent, amounting to a total of forty-six. However, sometimes a child may get an extra Chromosome 21, for a total of forty-seven chromosomes and the physical features and cognitive delays associated with Down Syndrome. Physical characteristics of a child diagnosed with Down Syndrome include hypotonia or

low muscle tone which may impede feeding. Most children with Down Syndrome have mild to moderate intellectual impairment but can still learn and develop many skills. Almost half of the children with Down Syndrome have problems with hearing and vision (most commonly farsightedness and cataracts) and are born with a congenital heart defect. Other health issues include seizure disorders and obesity. Down Syndrome occurs in approximately one in every eight hundred and thirty newborns (Genetics Home Reference).

Seizures occur as a result of an enormous discharge of electrical impulses in certain brain cells. As the discharge spreads to surrounding cells it may lead to loss of consciousness, involuntary movements and abnormal sensory experiences. A person diagnosed with epilepsy has a chronic condition and suffers recurrent seizures. Approximately half of the students with seizure disorders have an intellectual disability.

During the course of this study Riza's parents changed physicians attached to her case. Her current medications were cancelled and replaced by a new prescription. Her seizures have decreased in frequency and her parents have initiated talks with the Student Support Services to increase classroom time. Riza's assessment from Student Support Services establishes her cognitive development as Pre-K.

Valley View Primary School is listed as a model school by the Ministry of Education and fulfils the criteria defined by Miske-Witt as a school within proximity to care services, a history of working successfully with exceptional children, having a population between 150-350 students with a teacher pupil ratio

of 1:25, most teachers have obtained or are obtaining a B.Ed., has a diverse student population and a history of collaboration. Such schools also have a functioning PTA and school board and are able to make physical accommodations for accessibility. The only criterion not fulfilled in the Miske-Witt for model schools is that the school is not within close proximity to a Special School. Valley View has been retrofitted with ramps to facilitate the accommodation of students with physical impairments.

Miske Witt (2007) found that in general, most schools were not barrier free; “overcrowding and limited functionality of space” would handicap teachers from effectively modifying the physical environment. Consequently, Miske Witt and Associates recommended the construction of model schools that would meet the characteristics of an inclusive physical environment: “sound, convenience (adequate storage space and ease of access), movement efficiency, flexibility and density”. This study was conducted in a model school in which the recommendations by Miske Witt and Associates for physical infrastructure were implemented.

Statement of the Problem

There is a lack of research reflecting children’s voices on inclusion. Danaher, as cited by Cook-Sather (2006), gives an apt rationale for listening to student voices when he says “Instead of treating school students as voices in the wilderness, we would far better be served if we asked the voices’ owners what they think and listen actively to the answers”. As the persons who are intrinsically

involved and impacted by educational policies, it is imperative that their perspectives are considered.

Considering student voices entails acknowledging that students have a valid and unique perspective on schooling, learning and teaching and that they should be granted opportunities to share these viewpoints with the adults concerned (Cook-Sather, 2006). Students have legitimate concerns and should be given to right to express, and receive redress, from teachers and other stakeholders. The Ministry of Education recognizes this as School Boards must have a student representative to express and interpret students' views to the Board and report decisions back to the student body. Thus student voice not only involves communicating students' issues but about empowering students to bring about positive change within their school (Robinson & Taylor, 2013). Student voice, therefore, empowers students to make decisions about their education.

Although a few studies on Special Education and Inclusion in the region have been done over the last few years, many of these studies focus on teacher and other policy holder's attitudes towards integration /inclusion in Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago (Blackman, Conrad and Brown, 2012); Trinidad (Daniel, 2011; Ribiero, 2009); Guyana (Ajodha-Andrews & Frankel, 2010) and Haiti (Dupoux, Hammond, Ingalls & Wolman, 2006). One study focused on the outcomes of students and youth with disabilities in Tobago (Paul, 2011). Locally a number of studies have been done on students' perceptions/experiences in "special" settings (Drakes, 2004; Edo, 2005; Narine, 2005), as well as regular settings (Donald-Neptune, 2012; Petit-Hunte, 2012; Alexis, 2010; Ali, 2004;

Drakes, 2004). Such studies underscore the importance of student voice as an invaluable source of information as we implement these policies. Betty Sylvester (2004) cites Cook-Sather in stating “Authorizing students’ perspectives...introduce into critical conversations the missing perspectives of those who experience daily the effects of existing educational policies in practice”.

Thus far inclusion has not become legislation in Trinidad and Tobago apart from being a signatory to UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994), but with more research and advocacy groups to agitate for inclusive practices in schools, it is imperative that those who stand to be most affected have a say. Listening to what typical students have to say about the inclusion of students with special educational needs in what has traditionally been their classroom will provide valuable insight into the impact of inclusion.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the experiences of students with and without special education needs in a model Primary School in the St George East Educational District.

The rationale for this study arises out of a need for research to build a knowledge base in a weak legislative environment such as ours (UNESCO 2009) in order to inform policy makers in the formulation of appropriate legal frameworks. This paper seeks to get an insider viewpoint from those most affected by inclusionary practices and what students believe are the necessary changes to promote inclusion.

This study seeks to compare what students with SEN and general education students think about inclusion. Research on the perceptions of inclusion exists from the perspectives of teachers and parents and students in an international context, but few studies exist on a local level. Ferreira-Riley (2012) and Sawh (2012) investigated primary school teachers' perceptions of inclusion while Mathura (2012) looked at the perceptions of secondary teachers towards inclusive education. Petit-Hunte (2012) explored a case study where a student with Emotional/Behavioral disability was included within an inclusive environment. Thomas-Gittens (2012) described the experiences of a student with SEN in a general education classroom.

It is hoped that this study will add to the body of research on Disability Studies and Inclusion as recognized by the Disability Studies Unit of the University of the West Indies which posits "Research must be conducted in order to gather critical information needed by policy makers in the region if the lives of persons with disabilities are to be changed" (Workshop Report, 2007). This researcher also hopes to spur further studies that explore what students, as stakeholders in education, have to say about inclusion.

Overarching Question

What are students' experiences of inclusion in a model school in the St George Educational District?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the experiences of students with SEN in this model inclusive setting?
2. What are the experiences of regular students in this school?
3. How do students' experiences compare/contrast?

Significance of the Study

The researcher seeks to contribute meaningfully to the conversations about inclusion by adding the students' perspectives to the existing body of research. It is hoped that the experiences and reflections of these students will be considered by the administration of the school to improve current practices.

Definition of Terms

In the field of education, the terms mainstream and integration have been replaced with the term "inclusion". Integration refers to the placement of students with special educational needs within the general classroom. "Mainstreaming" and "inclusion" however, have distinct differences. Mainstreaming refers to the selective placement of students with SEN into the general classroom where students are expected to meet the expectations of the other students. In such settings, the need for accommodations will be minimal.

Inclusion is a philosophy that all students, despite their differences, are educated in the school they would have attended if they did not have a disability. Students are educated within their community and all the necessary supports are provided within the classrooms. The National Report on the Development of Education (2004) states that inclusion "suggests" a commitment to this philosophy

especially in light of many students with SEN being enrolled in the general education system and less in the special schools.

Inclusion differs conceptually from mainstreaming and integration. Mainstreaming refers to partial and full-time programs that educate students with disabilities alongside their peers who do not have disabilities. It assumes that students with SEN have to earn the right to be educated within the general education setting. Integration refers to the placement of students with special needs into the general education classroom without the necessary supports. The student is integrated into the activities the teacher believes the student has the capacity to perform.

For the purposes of this study **inclusion** is the process by which a school attempts to respond to the differences in individuals by reconsidering its curricular offerings and supports. Thus the school will be able to facilitate all pupils from the community and reduce exclusionary practices (Messiou, 2012). We can conclude then, that inclusion is not merely a disability issue but rather an issue of the quality of education being provided in schools.

Marginalization in school contexts will be defined as those boundaries or delimitations placed on groups by society and the resulting competition, labeling and prejudice (Dickie-Clark, 1966). In other words individuals who are perceived as deviating from the 'norm' can be perceived as marginal (Messiou, 2012).

Disability/SEN can be defined along two dimensions: medical or social. In the medical model a disability is seen as a medically-diagnosed deficit that leads

to handicapping conditions. The social model looks at the attitudes and infrastructure of the environment towards the person with SEN which result in the handicapping conditions. Within the context of this paper the DFID (2000) definition which combines both models will be used. A disability is a “long term impairment leading to social and economic disadvantages, denial of rights, and limited opportunities to play an equal part in the life of the community”.

Student Voice will include all aspects of having a say including written, verbal and non-verbal communications as well as the emotional underpinnings associated with these communications.

Inclusive education: Booth, as cited by UNESCO (2003), defines inclusion as a process whereby the needs of all students are addressed in response to the diversity of learners. UNESCO (1994) continues to clarify by stating that inclusive education includes “changes in content, approaches, structures and strategies...with the conviction that it the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children”. Therefore inclusion seeks to transform education to become responsive to diversity.

Experience: Webster’s Third New International Dictionary, as cited in Schmitt 2011, defines the term experience as knowledge, skill or practice derived from direct observation of or participation in events: practical wisdom resulting from what one has encountered, undergone or lived. Experience is also defined as something personally encountered, undergone, or lived through, as an event observed or participated in. Philosophers following a phenomenological approach

define experience as “private events that occur in response to some stimulation”. John Dewey argued that experience involves more than just intellectual responses of analysing, classifying and reasoning but includes sensory responses, emotions and reactions (Schmitt, 2011).

Model School: defined by Miske-Witt as a school within proximity to a special school and health care services, a history of working successfully with exceptional children, having a population between 150-350 students with a teacher pupil ratio of 1:25, most teachers have obtained or are obtaining a B.Ed., has a diverse student population and a history of collaboration. Such schools also have a functioning PTA and school board and are able to make physical accommodations for accessibility. For the purpose of this study model school will be referred to as a school that has been built to facilitate the inclusion of students with exceptional needs.

Conceptual Framework

The major tenets of the Social Development Theory are Social Interaction, the More Knowledgeable Other and the Zone of Proximal Development. Development occur when children actively construct their attitudes, knowledge and skills as they interact with the people (family, teachers, peers and friends) and cultural artefacts (books, toys) in specific cultural practices. The More Knowledgeable Other refers to anyone within the child’s environment who has more skill or knowledge of a specific task, procedure or concept. This person can be the child’s teacher or peer. The Zone of Proximal Development is the difference between a person’s ability to complete a task independently and the

student's ability to perform a task under guidance from a more knowledgeable person.

Vygotsky acknowledged the fundamental role of culture and societal norms in the development of a child. Therefore a child's beliefs and values shape cognitive functioning.

Jost and Kay (n.d) define social justice as having three characteristics:

- Distributive- benefits and burdens of society are distributed along a preset principle
- Procedural- all procedures, laws, policies preserve the basic rights, entitlements and freedom of individuals and/or groups.
- Interactional- humans (and perhaps all forms of life) must be treated with dignity and respect by authorities and all other "social actors".

They posit that any theory of social justice must have at least one of these elements. Thus, social justice is a characteristic of the social systems and norms in place in a community. An unjust system will therefore be characterized by oppression, prejudice, discrimination and unnecessary suffering.

The problem is that many scholars disagree on each of these elements and how they should be incorporated into society. What exactly is a fair principle used to distribute wealth and troubles and by whose standards? Is it equality, equity or need? What does it mean to be treated with respect and dignity? The events preceding many of the world's civil unrests may be as a result of real or perceived

social injustice; World War 2, 1970 Black Power Movement and the 1990 Coup in Trinidad and Tobago, and the present situation in Ukraine, Gaza and Israel.

Garret (2005) endorses John Rawls “justice as fairness” as a framework for understanding the political and cooperative provisions that benefit the more and less privileged in a democratic society. Garret iterates that Rawls’ concept of social just applies to the relationships between persons within an organization and is based on the principle that all persons are free and equal. This freedom is exhibited in two moral authorities: a sense of justice and the conception of what is good.

This sense of justice is the ability to understand, apply and act publicly to endorse what is perceived by society to be fair terms of cooperation. A conception of good applies to what holds value in human life and includes personal goals as well as relationships and loyalties to groups and organizations.

Wenar (2013) highlights Rawls’ liberal beliefs that underpin his theory Firstly, that the social context a person is born into is arbitrary and thus if a citizen is born with all his faculties into an affluent, white household then that does not entitle him to special favours or discrimination from society. Secondly, that all social goods and services must be distributed equally, unless an unequal distribution will be beneficial to all members of society, especially those given the least share. Equality is the standard and any unequal sharing must improve everyone’s circumstances.

A pillar of the Social Contract theory is that a moral society is one that is governed by a set of rules that rational people accept on the premise that other people will accept these rules also. Proponents such as Hobbes and Locke believe that if we exist in a “state of nature” where there are no rules and scarcity of goods anarchy will result. Therefore, a government must be established to keep humans from harming each other and to ensure agreements and bargains are kept. Then all will benefit from social goods and services and be relatively safe from each other, since we all abide by the same rules. This “state of nature” can be compared to Rawls’ Original Position that explains how representatives are chosen to represent the citizenry by choosing just principles that will govern the social order of a fair society.

There are three fundamental characteristics of the representatives: they must have the interest of those they represent at heart, they do not know the specific demographic details about the people they represent and they are aware that persons have a conception of what is good.

Therefore social justice is a result of moral and political concepts of what is fair.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Confusion of Terms

Inclusion is a controversial topic in education in terms of definition. Inclusion, mainstreaming and integration all have different meanings but are used interchangeably to describe the placement of students with SEN in the regular curriculum. Confusion between these terms affects people's perceptions about inclusion (Waitoller & Artiles, 2013; Clampit, Holifield & Nichols, 2004; SEDL, 1995), but changes in education policy and practice facilitate more inclusive practices. Teacher's perspectives on inclusion reveal a number of factors that affect how successful the inclusive process will be. Such factors include teacher attitudes, training, resources and collaboration with special educators and the physical structure of the plant (Clampit, Holifield & Nichols 2004, Konza, 2008, Lemoy-Hunte 2012, Mathura 2012, Sawh 2012).

Inclusion differs from integration and mainstreaming of disabled students in the general curriculum in that inclusion is a commitment to educating students with disabilities in the school, classroom and community s/he would have otherwise been educated in if s/he did not have a disability. It does not require that the student keep up with the class, unlike mainstreaming, only that s/he benefits from being included in the class (Brucker 1994). Added to this confusion of terms is the concept of full inclusion, which posits that ALL students, despite the degree of disability, be included in the general classroom. Those that believe in this

philosophy suggest that the primary role of the teacher is to facilitate the social development of students with special education needs (Fuchs & Fuchs, n.d).

Attitudes are described by Chambers and Forlin (2010) as learned, evaluative responses associated with personal beliefs that, in turn influence intentions and behaviours. Attitudes are shaped by experience and implicit learning and may be reflective of one's personality (Zimbardo & Lieppe, 1991). Cognitive, affective, and pre-dispositional behaviours constitute related components of one's attitude (Johnson & Howell, 2009). Teacher attitudes have long been associated with effective inclusive practices. Blackman et al., (2012) cite Boyle, Scriven, Durning & Downes (2011), Cagran & Schmidt (2011) and Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden (2000) to support this claim. Attitude development and modification remain important areas of educational research [(Weisman & Garza (2002) as cited in Heath & Judd (n.d)]. Inclusive education then, is linked to teacher attitude and responsiveness and supported by changes at all levels-classroom, school, policy-makers and administrators, and the wider society (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

Teachers' responsiveness is associated with beliefs that all students have the right to an appropriate education with their peers; and a readiness by such teachers to assume the responsibility for this. Appropriate responsiveness might be manifested by a willingness of teachers to utilize universal design for learning principles, respect for and recognition of all learners (Blackman et al., 2012). However, a study entitled "Attitudes Toward Inclusion: Gaps between Belief and

Practice” by Evans (2010) concluded that “Severity of disability and availability of resources consistently influenced teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion. . .”

Another study done by Miske Witt & Associates (2007) on the profile of teacher competencies for inclusive classrooms in Trinidad and Tobago, found that most teachers believe that all children and youth belong and can learn, teachers believe that they have high standards and expectations for all children and youth appropriate to their needs and most teachers and principals are willing to develop an inclusive environment. However, most teachers are not grounded in research on best practices or action research on their own teaching and there are a limited number of normed and continuous assessments used.

Additionally, a great deal of research (Avramidis et al., 2000; Cavanaugh 2002; Monahan, 2004; Zascavage, 2010) highlights the importance of the availability of material and human resources, including appropriate training and technological aids. Implications for middle grades teacher education include the need for additional focus in teacher preparation classes to help teacher candidates acquire teaching skills and dispositions necessary for serving students with disabilities well. Similarly, teachers need continuing professional development to hone their skills in appropriately accommodating students with disabilities. (Kimbrough & Mellen 2012)

Previous studies of attitudes towards inclusion have yielded contradictory results. While some researchers reported uncertain and even negative attitudes towards inclusion on the part of general education teachers (Hammond & Ingalls,

2003), most reports (Avramidis et al., 2000; Cornoldi et al., 1998; D'Alonzo, Gordano, & Vanleeuwen, 1997; Daane, Beirne-Smith, & Latham, 2000; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 1996; Smith & Smith, 2000; Vidovich & Lombard, 1998) indicated positive attitudes, accompanied by a belief in the fundamental value of inclusion. However, this willingness appears to vary according to the type and severity of disability, and the resources provided to support inclusion. According to Miske Witt & Associates (2007), teacher attitudes toward inclusive education were extremely positive, but 90% of teachers reported that they had no qualifications in special needs education, 41% understand well, 45 % of the teachers only understand “somewhat” what is necessary to teach in an inclusive classroom.

A recent study conducted on the attitudes of Barbadian and Trinidadian teachers toward inclusion, posted in the *International Journal of Special Education* found that “In general, teachers’ attitudes can best be described as ambivalent which suggest that while they are not necessarily opposed to the idea of integrating students with special needs they do have real concerns about the suitability of the general education setting for meeting the educational needs of these students.” Santoli, Sachs, Romey, and McClurg (2008) conducted research among educators. . . regarding their attitudes toward inclusion. They found that despite the fact that almost all teachers interviewed (98.2%) were willing to make necessary accommodations for students with disabilities, the majority of those teachers (76.8%) felt that students with disabilities should not be educated in general classrooms no matter what the simplicity or severity of the disability. . . ”

Conversely, a study conducted on the perception of students with disabilities in middle schools found that teachers in inclusive classrooms recognized the positive social benefits for both special and general education students (Downing & Peckham-Hardin, 2007; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Matzen et al., 2010). General education teachers in the Republic of Korea were investigated regarding their participation in programs to include students with disabilities in general education settings. Previous studies have shown that even general education teachers with positive attitudes towards inclusion are reluctant in practice to have students with disabilities in their classrooms (Evans, 2010) This study examined general teachers' attitudes towards and willingness to accommodate a student with a disability. Although their general attitude towards inclusion was positive, their willingness to teach students with disabilities was not as high (31.01%).

Inclusive education programmes do not focus on the accommodation of students with disabilities into a general education setting, but are focused on the restructuring of schools to accept and provide for the needs of all students (Westling & Fox, 2004). The inclusion of students with disabilities in regular classrooms is a goal of many educators and education sectors around the world (Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2010). The same concerns and challenges are shared internationally, including skilling teachers, promoting collaboration among educational professionals, and maintaining positive attitudes towards educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

Perceived Benefits of Inclusion: Academic

Beckers & Carnes (1995) state unequivocally that inclusion benefits both the disabled and the non-disabled student academically. They base this statement on the evaluation of an inclusive program involving students with mild disabilities in a rural school in Louisiana. Mesibov & Shea (1996) found that advocates of full inclusion believe that increased teacher expectations, increased learning with the help of peers and higher self-esteem are the benefits of this model. The modifications in instruction as well as increased special education personnel in the classroom to provide small group instruction are extended to the entire classroom including non-disabled students who are at risk.

Research shows that there is little evidence to support the validity of “pullout” programmes in terms of academic performance. According to the Wisconsin Education Association Council website (weac.org), a number of reports exist that consistently report little or no gains for students placed in a segregated special education setting. The 2007 article cites Weiner (1985) that fifty studies comparing academic performance of integrated students and segregated students with mild disabilities showed a marked difference in performance in favour of the integrated students. Attendance rates of students with SEN are also improved in inclusive settings.

Beckers and Carnes (1995) note increased self-esteem in persons with disabilities are noted in an inclusive environment as a realistic view of their functioning abilities is realized in the least restrictive environment. Appropriate social and academic role models are provided for students with mild disabilities and reduced behavioural infarctions result. In inclusive classrooms there is a

decrease in repetition of curricular (as in special education classrooms) and student expectation is raised.

As disabled students work collaboratively with their non-disabled peers, their dependency on special education teachers are reduced. This philosophy of educating disabled with non-disabled students results in greater collaboration and team-work between special educators and general educators.

Perceived Benefits of Inclusion: Social

Inclusion also results in a greater level of cohesion between these populations as those with SEN are seen as valuable contributors to the community. Labeling and marginalization of the disabled community is reduced. Social competencies such as advocacy for peers and friends with disabilities are developed and encouraged in the inclusive environment as close friendships are fostered (Savich 2008). Inclusive schools are quite effective in reducing discriminatory attitudes and encouraging a high level of acceptance (Margaritoiu 2010). Students in general education learn to appreciate diversity as empathy is fostered and fear of human differences is replaced by comfort. Disabled students make more friends in the general education setting and greater communication and developmental skills are fostered.

Perceived Benefits of Inclusion: Financial

Inclusion saves time and money as time lost in relocating to a “pullout” programme can now be utilized in engaging the student and the efficient use of

classroom space and equipment. The cost of providing education in segregated programmes was found to cost twice as much as integrated programmes and students graduating from such programmes were more likely to be hired than students who were educated in segregated settings (weac.org).

Perceived Disadvantages of Inclusion:

Full inclusionists believe that there is no need for the continuum of services set forth by federal law (IDEA 2004) and therefore there will only be one placement option for students with disabilities; the general education classroom. Full inclusion may not be the least restrictive environment for students with disabilities as the reduction in intensive instruction and individualized instruction will not meet the needs of all students (Savich 2008, Mc Carty 2006).

Inclusion may also foster negative attitudes and anxieties among parents of non-disabled children and general education teachers. In a qualitative study examining teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards inclusion, it was found that teachers felt that little support from administration was provided; they lacked planning and collaboration time, as well as a lack of instructional time. The expectation and demand from administration from the general education teachers were perceived to be unrealistic given the already high teacher/student ratio and lack of teacher training or workshops (Fuchs 2010).

With inclusion, general education teachers are more responsible for the outcomes of the students with disabilities in their classrooms. Changes within the typical special education services may negatively affect teacher attitudes (Beckers

and Carnes 1995). Perceived lack of support, unequal distribution of responsibilities and power struggles between special education teachers and general education teachers about who is responsible for the disabled children in the general education classroom contributes to negative attitudes (Fuchs 2010).

Parents and teachers worry that the academic gains of non-disabled students in an inclusive setting may be compromised because of lowering of standards and behavioural distractions. They fear that academic gains will be given less priority than social skills development. Parents of disabled students worry that specialized services such as occupational therapy may not be provided to the students who need it as general educators are not trained as experts in these fields (Mc Carty 2006). A concern exists that there will be no early identification services within an inclusive setting and a lack of checks and balances to ensure the required supports are in place for students to progress (Margaritoiu 2010).

Whereas the cost of designing and constructing schools with universal design principles are not overwhelming, the initial cost of retrofitting schools with the physical structures that promotes inclusion has the potential to be.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Rationale

Lichtman (2009) posits that in contrast to positivist traditions, qualitative research is grounded in constructivism and subjectivism. “The main purpose of qualitative research is to provide in-depth description and understanding of the human experience...human phenomena, human interaction or human discourse”, she further clarifies. Qualitative researchers are therefore not interested in hypothesis testing, but in meaning and interpretation of phenomena.

In qualitative research it is up to the researcher to bring “understanding, interpretation and meaning to mere interpretation” (Lichtman, 2009). Creswell (2013) reiterates that qualitative inquiry is a justifiable method of exploration into the realms of human and social sciences.

The researcher, as the primary agent of data collection, sorts and reconstructs knowledge based on her own experiences, knowledge and background. The researcher seeks to understand phenomena as it occurs in natural settings in which the participants live and work.

Case study research is extensively used in education as it is a basic form of qualitative inquiry (Gall, Gall & Borg, 2007). Merriam (2009) defines a case study as a deep description and interpretation of a bounded system which is a single unit which can be “fenced” in by time and place (p.40). Yin (2009, 2014) iterates that a

case study investigates a phenomenon within the real-life context which it occurs. Creswell (2013) adds that this investigation is possible through multiple, detailed data collection and a comprehensive description of the case and case themes.

The researcher clarifies her research by identifying the following:

Phenomenon: Inclusion in Trinidad and Tobago

Case: Standard One : Valley View Primary School

Focus: Typical students' perspectives on inclusion

Of the three research questions posed, I chose to operationalize the following one:

What are the experiences of typical students in a model school in the St George East District?

Sample

The sampling procedure was purposive. Valley View Primary was chosen because it is a model school with an assigned Student Aide. Maximal sampling variation is a purposive sampling strategy that allows the researcher to get the views from individuals that differ on some characteristic and can be used when the researcher deliberately seeks to disprove an advancing theory (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). In this case the trait I am interested in is ability or, more specifically, disability. One class was isolated as having students who were referred for special education and who were assigned an Aide. There were two students in this class with a diagnosed disability. The Education (Additional Support for Learning, Scotland) Act (2004) highlights the need to consult not only

with typical students but with students with exceptionalities where partners become involved in the research process.

Sample Size

The class consisted of thirteen children, two of whom were diagnosed with a disability. I sought permission from all of these students' parents but was only able to obtain consent from nine students; only one of the students who were diagnosed was given permission to be interviewed.

A total of nine (9) students comprised the sample; one (1) student who was referred for special education and eight (8) typical students who were enrolled in classes with them. All nine students were enrolled at the school. The student with SEN was referred to Student Support Services and was assigned a Student Aide to help in the classroom. The eight typical students were classmates of the student with SEN. All students were granted permission from their parents/guardians to participate in the study.

The participants were divided into groups; one focus group of typical students and one individual student with SEN. Each group was interviewed using a standard set of open-ended questions (Appendix A) which were derived from the research question: What are students' experiences of inclusion in a model school in the St George Educational District?

Data Collection

For the purpose of triangulation, data was collected from multiple sources. Most of my data was generated from semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) and, to a lesser degree, observation (Appendix C). Kvale (1996) states that the aim of the qualitative research interview is to understand the participants' views from their experiences as the researcher try to discover and unveil the lived experiences. Observations were supplemented by journal entries which were composed during the research process. Data on the students' performance for the academic year was also obtained, to be supplement the data collected from the interviews.

The participants were interviewed when it was convenient for the Principal and class teacher; mostly during the lunchtime periods. Observations were noted upon entry to the school and during instructional time.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting interviews I sought permission from the Ministry of Education (Appendix D) after which I was granted permission by the Principal of the school. Parental permissions were obtained via telephone and in writing.

In any research the primary principle of *primum non nocere*; no harm to participants must be adhered to. I assured the Principal, parents and participants of confidentiality and identifiabilty. To this end, the school and the participants were given pseudonyms. A degree of autonomy was given to the interviewees as they were asked for their consent to participate and were also given the option of withdrawing from the interview at any time or refusing to answer any of the

questions during the interview without fear of repercussions. To this end, permission was sought and granted from parents, and the students themselves to conduct interviews.

Data Analysis

Yin (2009) pointed to the iterative process of qualitative data analysis. This means that the researcher must move back and forth throughout the data several times to make sure that the interpretations and conclusions align with the data. All data must be accounted for, interpretations and counter arguments are considered and the significant features of the case are highlighted.

In order to achieve this, I recorded notes soon after observations and strove to adhere closely to transcription conventions as highlighted by Cohen et al (2011). These conventions included:

1. Giving each speaker a pseudonym
2. Recording nuances in speech; pauses, silences etc
3. Recording inflections in voice; mood of the speaker, pitch, volume etc
4. Numbering of each line
5. Double spacing and wide margins to facilitate note-taking

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) outline the steps in thematizing and designing an interview study. After the “Why?”, “What?” and “How?” questions are clarified and formulated the interview protocol is designed to follow the

ethical considerations. Interviews are then conducted with a reflective viewpoint to ascertain the relationships that exist within the interview context.

Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) caution the researcher to process raw data into “text that is clear to the reader and analyst”. They outline the process of data analysis as First Cycle coding, then Second Cycle coding through which themes are generated through analytic memoing and jottings. Miles et al define codes as labels that allocate meaning to chunks of data and ascribe descriptions to information. These codes are then used to reorganize data into clusters of similar interpretations or pattern codes (Appendix E). The relationships between these themes are then used construct deep meaning that leads to development of propositions.

In analyzing the data it helped me to focus on the purpose of the study; to describe the issues that accompany inclusion from the perspective of the typical student. With this in mind, codes were generated from each data set and these were then condensed into categories or themes.

This step prompted me to ask further questions and gather more data. Time constraints restricted me from further data collection as the themes seemed to point towards interviewing other students in other classes to further glean from students’ voices what their perceptions about inclusion were.

Data analysis led to further exploration of the body of information on inclusion. Thus the literature review was completed after the themes emerged from the data.

Delimitations

The following factors served as delimitations to the study:

- The time constraints I was faced with did not allow me to provide a written document to discuss with the participants. As such, member checking was limited to short verbal discussions to verify meanings.
- Although I wanted to continue data collection by speaking to other students in the school, time restrictions and the availability of students did not allow this.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

When I walked through the gate of Valley View Primary School I was struck by the quietude of the atmosphere which contrasted with the suburban setting and the proximity of a major highway to the school. The physical plant was not particularly large but made use of the land such that there was a bounded grass-covered area in the middle that served as a playground as well as an open area adjoining each class that could be accessed through one of the two doorways in each classroom. The other doorway served as the main access to the classroom.

All the classrooms were on the ground level and ramps were present next to every staircase; next to the cafeteria as well as the Office and Staff Room. These ramps were fitted into the school to provide wheelchair access for students and/or teachers. I observed that while the doorways were wide enough for wheelchair access, the size of the classroom and the arrangement of the furniture did not cater for the wide aisles necessary for the manipulation of wheelchairs within the classroom.

The layout of the classroom and design of the desks were traditional, not with a design that will be able to accommodate a wheelchair. The classroom was not air-conditioned, and the light source came from a fluorescent fixture on the roof as well as natural lighting through the windows. Jason was the first in the class to refer to Zahara as “special”. He explained what he meant by this term “like their brain not working normally. They slow”. He was referring to Zahara

and Riza. They did not seem to think that having children with different educational needs disaffected them because “They have their own teacher “, as Megan stated and “They does get different work from us” as Simone clarified. One girl, Keesha, felt that it helped to have Zahara in her class because they “have to constantly review what was done before doing something new. This class also had Music and Physical Education (P.E.) built into the curriculum. Zahara accompanied and joined the class to these subjects but “Zahara plays pan when she wants to” Jason explains. Riza would accompany the class if the class session was in the morning.

During my classroom observations I noticed that most of the work involved individual assignments, rather than group work. Of the two students who were diagnosed with special needs, Zahara was not required to complete the same assignments as the rest of the class because she had a different curriculum with different educational goals, as recommended by the professionals within the Student Support Services Division of the Ministry of Education. The other student was included in the classroom and the curriculum and worked along with the Student Aide. She was included in the classroom for half the day, after which she was removed.

The class teacher took the lead in the delivery of curriculum while the Aide worked with the two students with special education needs. Zahara, however, walked away from her seat and did whatever she wanted to do, even if it was not pertaining to her curriculum goals.

When I walked into the classroom during lunchtime, the teacher was at her desk, and while I expected the students to be running about playing around the school, they were not. Instead all of the students were playing in the area next to the classroom. I noticed all the children playing a version of “catch” together; the boys were not playing a separate game from the girls. Zahara, a child with moderate to severe Down syndrome, was also playing with the students. Their faces were animated when I asked them what they liked most about having Zahara in their class.” We like to play with she’ was the unanimous response. Zahara felt that the best thing about school was “My friends”. I asked her to point out her friends to which she said “The whole class”. Zahara did not have friends in the other classes and neither did the other students. Their play was self contained in the area next to the classroom. Simone felt that other students did not want o play with her class while Michael said “They call us names”.

Funny enough, Michael pointed out a “special child” in an infant class. The students told me they did not play with him. “He is a first year. He is a baby”. This child was physically taller and heavier set than all the children, except for Zahara. The children felt that they should be friends with all their classmates “I am supposed to play with every child”. Michael reinforces Jason’s comment as the students remembered Kishan, a student that was removed from the school, who would use the girls’ bathroom floor to relieve himself. “But he was still we friend”.

The sadness of the children was overwhelming. Michael stated their wish in one wistful sentence: “He might come back”. Presented with the possibility of

Zahara being removed from their class they shouted out “No way! We would miss them”. Jason used the phrase “Not fair” for the second time; the first being in reference to Kishan moving to another school.

Jason repeated this phrase later on in response to the possibility that all schools were not inclusive. “The children who are different want to learn just like we”. Simone reinforced her statement “Principals should take children who are special!” Once you are five you should be able to go to any school you want”.

While students felt that all schools should include students with disabilities and that their school was the perfect example of inclusion, they had some suggestions on how to make Valley View more inclusive. Michael felt that the school needed to put a stop to bullying, Jason felt that the classrooms should be air-conditioned while Simone wanted bigger classrooms. Maegan felt that the lights could be brighter to improve visibility and Reesha felt that having more Student Aides to help the other students who are slow would make the school more inclusive.

Discussion

In Trinidad and Tobago there exist segregated, special schools. Students who are severely disabled or diagnosed with special needs are enrolled in these institutions. However, more and more students with mild disabilities are being enrolled into the general education schools. At the Caribbean Symposium on Inclusive Education in 2007, children with special needs were defined as those

whose characteristics affected their ability to learn and required “specially adapted conditions” in order to be appropriately educated.

One of the core principles espoused in the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of a Child is that of non-discrimination. The Education Policy Paper (1993-2003) underscores the philosophy that every child has the right to an education and schools are to provide for the varying abilities of its clients by making adaptations to delivery programmes.

Inclusion is multi-faceted. Wood (2006) describes inclusion as having five faces; physical, social, academic, emotional and behavioural. Students at Valley View honed into some of these aspects; physical, academic and social inclusion.

Physical Inclusion

Simone was adamant in her belief that every child, having reached the age of five, had a right to be admitted in a school whether or not they were “special”. Wood (2006) refers to the actual placement of students with special needs within a general education class and curriculum as physical inclusion. However, in order for a child to be included there must be the facilities to accommodate to their needs; physical inclusion. Physical inclusion pertains to the physical structure of the plant, not just the classroom. It includes principles borrowed from universal design; an architectural concept of designing structures within the environment that will have maximum utility by all people without the need for adaptation or specialisation. The Center for Universal Design is based on seven major principles which have become integral to successful inclusion:

- Equitable Use: design of product should be appealing and equally available to all users (ramps can be used not just by those with physical impairments but the elderly as well)
- Flexibility in Use: the device should be adaptable in terms of use, for example left- or right-handed use
- Simple and Intuitive Use: the device must be easy to use regardless of knowledge, skills or experience (curb cuts on the pavement)
- Perceptible Information: the design must communicate information effectively to the user. For example, an elevator may have Braille on the panel as well as verbal instructions (there is one such elevator fitted into a model school in the Port-of-Spain and Environs District).
- Tolerance for error: the device will curtail hazardous consequences as a result of accidental or unintentional actions
- Low Physical Effort: The device can be used comfortably with minimum fatigue.
- Size and Space for Approach and Use: All components must be within easy reach of the user and accommodate for variations in hand size and grip.

Valley View Primary School boasts of being a model school for inclusion. Evidence to this statement is the ramps that are present along the school compound that provide access to the facilities. The physical space within the classroom should allow for maximum manoeuvrability and comfort. The Student

Aide was comfortably seated and positioned in the classroom and was seated within close proximity to Riza, not Zahara.

The classroom size is small with narrow aisles that will not facilitate navigation of the room with a wheelchair. The desks are not accommodated for persons on a wheelchair or other physical impairments.

While physical inclusion is the first step to an inclusive school, it is only the initial step. It seems that as long as the physical structure is in place it is assumed that all other aspects of inclusion will occur as a natural consequence. There are other “faces” of inclusion that need to be planned for.

Academic Inclusion

Academic inclusion applies to the extent to which the student with special needs participates in the learning activities that occur in the general education classroom (Wood, 2006). Educators have taken the principles of universal design and adapted it to the curriculum. Known as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), it provides a framework for designing the curriculum so that all students, despite their ability, learn the necessary content and skills required. According to the National Center on Universal Design for Learning, the brain can be understood in terms of three networks: recognition, strategic and affective networks. The recognition network refers to what facts the brain gather and the categories these facts are arranged into. UDL posits that information must be presented in multiple ways in order to facilitate the different ways facts are gleaned and reduce barriers to learning or any mismatch that may occur between the way content is presented

and students' understanding. The same information must be presented through different modes; visual, oral, auditory or tactile. This makes information accessible not only for those with sensory disabilities but for other learners as well. Clarifying the meaning of symbols and vocabulary is an important aspect of perception.

Strategic networks refer to how students perform tasks. UDL posits that the ways students present what they know must be differentiated. In other words, worksheets or exercises in a workbook are simply not good enough. The use of drama, posters, music and song are options that teachers can explore. The use of technology can boost student output with adaptations to hardware and availability of software that makes learning interactive, but can limit some students especially students with visual impairments or dysgraphia.

The affective network pertains to how students get engaged and stay motivated. If students do not attend to relevant information, then that information has become inaccessible. In education, educators strive to grab student attention and maintain engagement. But learner diversity means that students differ significantly in what engages and motivates them, and this also changes over time. Cooperative learning groups nurture collaboration and communication, can promote autonomy and student choice and develop self-assessment among students.

Wood (2006) is a proponent of the SAAL model for inclusion which is a conceptual framework for making decisions on how to provide quality education

to students with special needs as well as other students in an inclusive setting. This model proposes that lesson plans, teaching techniques and format of content must be differentiated and must include media or technology. The SAALE model also provides the framework for identifying a mismatch between the learning environment and the student and finding and applying the required intervention. The essence of this model is the integration of curriculum and intervention.

Friend and Bursuck (2004) iterate that discussions on inclusive practices must take into consideration the effect on student achievement of both the child with special needs as well as the typical child. In a survey of Israeli and English teachers, Heiman (2004) found that 33% of the Israeli teachers felt that including students with learning disabilities might limit the benefits of inclusion. Other participants believed that students with behavioural problems may also negatively impact educational gains by typical students as instruction will be interrupted by behavioural issues.

Spencer and Duhaney (1999) cites reports from across educational districts in the United States that shows statistical evidence that students with disabilities made academic gains within inclusive settings. They also cite studies that posit that the inclusion of students with severe disabilities did not have any significant impact on the educational or on-task time, nor did it impact negatively on academic performances and behaviour.

At Valley View Primary School, clearly Zahara has a separate curriculum and expected outcomes than her classmates. Her classmates all agree that Zahara

does not impede their curriculum progress. They do not talk about her disrupting the class but refer to Rihanna, a new student, as doing so. The students talk about ignoring Rihanna's questions when they are attending to class activities, yet they ask and give each other help.

In the Miske Witt report (2008), both parents and students were afraid that inclusion will slow down the instructional pace in the classroom. Parents of students with special needs also expressed concern that the teachers in the general education settings would not be able to adequately meet the needs of their children. They also felt that the special schools had a caring and nurturing environment.

The students are happy with their performance at school saying "I get two A's and a B Miss!" and "I does get only A's!". Riza would only attend school for part of the day and also had different curriculum goals from the general class population. Interestingly enough, Zahara's curriculum goals differed from Riza's in that Riza was being taught the primary school curriculum for the Infant level while Zahara was being taught functional skills.

Valley View Primary School only has one Standard One class at present. This makes it difficult to compare the students' results with another class of same age and educational context. Another option that may have contributed to determining whether having students with special needs in the classroom impacts on the educational gains of typical students would be the National Test. This would have enabled me to make a general statement on the progress of the

students in terms of the National standards. This was the first of these tests that the students will take during the course of their tenure at the school. Regretfully, these results will not be available until after the submission of this report.

At Valley View Primary School, both Zahara and Riza were segregated from their class in terms of curriculum. Riza was more segregated than Zahara because she was removed from the class at lunchtime, after which she went home. She missed all instruction and extra-curricular activities that were scheduled in the afternoon. This may explain why the children spoke more about Zahara than Riza.

Another critical point that came across was that Zahara and Riza, and by extension the rest of the class, have only ever had one teacher; Ms. Henry. This is unusual and may signal the further exclusion of this class.

Social Inclusion

The history of special education follows a universal plot. When primary school education became compulsory, students with mild disabilities were educated along with other students because their disability was often unnoticeable (Friend & Bursuck, 2009). Children with significant disabilities had little or no opportunity for schooling and were often hidden away. Institutions were also established for the severely handicapped and mentally ill patients. It was through the effort of private, affluent and religious organizations that special schools like The Princess Elizabeth School for the physically disabled and the Wharton Patrick School for emotionally and behaviourally disturbed children were established.

It is because of this long history of segregation and separation that resulted in labelling and stigmatizing people who were different to the accepted societal norms. Proponents of inclusive education posit that there is a reduction in the stigmatization associated with disabilities in schools that implement inclusive practices (Friend and Bursuck, 2009; DuPuis et al 2007; Wood, 2006). However, this study showed that another stigma has arisen in this inclusive school; “special”. Jason referred to the children with special needs as “special” and understood that it meant that they learned differently and were slower than the average child.

Gannon & McGilloy (2009) posit that students with Down Syndrome, despite being included in the general education setting with more frequency, are susceptible to peer rejection from typical students. They assessed the attitudes of 118 typical students towards students with Down Syndrome and also investigated if exposure to pro-inclusion audio-visual material would positively impact on students’ attitudes. They found that contact with peers with Down Syndrome were not related to attitudes and there was no change in overall attitudes following the exposure to the promotional material. The researchers advocate further research into the attitudes of typical students towards their disabled peers in order to promote inclusion. The study found that attitudes towards inclusion were consistently and significantly negative.

DuPuis et al (2007) conducted a quantitative study in a United States rural high school to ascertain the benefits of inclusion to typical students as well as students with special needs. It was found that students with disabilities were

motivated and fulfilled and were successful both academically and socially. The results for the typical students were also positive. The study found that when students realized their educational setting was inclusive, their attitudes towards the classroom and their peers were not only positive but they were more tolerant of any modification to the environment that would accommodate for student differences. The typical students in this study, however, were hard pressed to identify the students with special needs in their classroom. While this is ideal and can provide anonymity and reduce stigmatization, it is not always possible. Students with physical impairments, Down Syndrome and some health impairments (for example seizure disorders) can be easily pinpointed. These students will be at risk of being given labels such as “special” or the more unkind ones like “retarded” that we are familiar with.

Anonymity for students with disabilities may undermine the whole rationale for inclusion. While students with special needs may want to learn like everybody else in their class or school without being singled out because of their disability, this cannot occur when specialized instruction and accommodations to assessment are utilized.

Miske Witt (2008) found that students in Trinidad and Tobago who supported inclusive education believed that students can learn and work together and from each other, that students can form friendships and relationships, that they will get relevant skills for the future and that inclusive education would not change the classroom too much since everybody is different and learn differently anyway.

The results of this study appear to coincide with Miske Witt's findings as student support for inclusion were mainly relational.

However, some parents of students with disabilities were fearful that their children will be ignored or ostracized from the typical students. Some of the students with disabilities also shared these fears as they were afraid of being teased and laughed at.

The students in this Standard One Class at Valley View Primary school seem to have embraced difference in terms of ability. They see Zahara as part of their class and try to incorporate her in all aspects of school life. The students frequently refer to Zahara during their interview, unlike Riza. This may be because the students do not have as strong a relationship with her as she is removed from the school at lunchtime. This means that while Zahara can freely interact with her classmates before school begins, during recess, lunchtime, and after school Riza's only interaction is limited to a ten-minute recess interval.

The child in the Infant department that was pointed out to me remains etched in my mind. Judging from my observations and the children's statements, he also seems to be segregated not only from his class, and by extension the curriculum, but from the rest of the school. The school seems to have an underlying culture where children from different levels do not "play" with each other. "We doh play with he. He in Infants! He is a baby!" This culture, which may have inadvertently become entrenched in the children because of teachers' protective instincts in light of the many instances of bullying at the school, is not

conducive to inclusion. This class does not interact with the other students on a frequent basis; as such the school populace does not interact with Zahara and Riza and may not have positive attitudes towards inclusion. What we have is an entire class, not just two students, that is segregated socially from the rest of the school.

Social Justice

Social justice is a mechanism that can prevent the elitism and egalitarianism found in all systems in society. Conrad, Brown and Crockett (2006) state that the way the Ministry of Education is organized in Trinidad and Tobago is based on a style of government that has its roots in colonialism. This means that there is an emphasis on rank, boundaries and divisions. This point was given salience as the present Minister of Education, Dr Tim Gopeesingh, inherited and propagated the reward of the top two hundred performers at the Secondary Entrance Examination. On Friday, 18th July 2014, the Honourable Minister treated the top ten SEA performers, their parents and principals to a luncheon held in their honour.

The principles of Rawls' justice as fairness are that each person has a fundamental and equal right to basic rights is comparable to what applies to all, and that social inequalities must benefit the most disadvantaged of society. It seems that the elite of the society, which achieved the top scores and will go to the top schools, and rewarded by our political representatives ignore the principles of justice as fairness.

Jason repeatedly repeated the phrase “not fair”. Simone also felt that students with disabilities should have the right to go to any school, as long as they met the age requirement. The other students expressed their hurt at one of their classmates being removed and placed in a special school, and expressed their desire to see him back at their school.

The establishment of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD) of the Ministry of Education signalled the shift of special education from humanitarian to a rights-based concept. SSSD is in charge of assessment, placement and allocation of resource personnel for students with special needs. A major challenge for SSSD is the lack of personnel to address the demands placed on it by the various educational districts. Ideally, all schools should have a team of a Special Educator, Guidance Counsellor and a Social Worker. In reality, there is one team, often incomplete, in each district. This is grossly inadequate to deal with the number of referrals for assessment. In cases where students have obtained an educational assessment and provided with a Student Aide to help them navigate the general curriculum, students can remain in the regular classroom. In many cases however, there is insufficient personnel to service these demands. Conrad et al (2010) found that educators remain sceptical that policymakers are genuinely providing all the necessary resources to facilitate inclusive practices.

Educators believe it is not a lack of finances that is a barrier but the attitudes of policymakers towards inclusion. The recommendations of Miske Witt and Associates (2008) have yet to be fully implemented; full staffing and resources at all Model schools where a Diagnostician and speech and language

therapist were also recommended. It was also recommended that each district were to be equipped with a curriculum and Inclusive Education specialist who would make regular visits to the schools to provide curriculum development and inclusion strategies.

Their recommendations also included increasing the salaries of teachers, create and enact inclusive policies, providing assistive technologies and redefining the roles of special education schools. The recommendations were to be phased into the education system over a ten year period and have yet to enter the second phase six years later.

Recommendations

The students at Valley View Primary felt that their school was the best example of an inclusive school. However they had the following suggestions on how to improve the inclusionary practices at the school:

1. The classrooms should be bigger
2. The classrooms should be air-conditioned
3. The lighting should be improved
4. There should be more support personnel in the classroom, possibly volunteers can be involved
5. Bullying should be stopped

The first three recommendations fall under physical inclusion, where the changes are to be applied to the physical plant. The fourth recommendation applies to academic inclusion and meeting the needs of each child in the general

classroom. The last recommendation can apply to both social and behavioural inclusion.

In addition I would recommend a school-wide awareness on inclusive practices and implement procedures to foster healthy social interaction between the students, no matter what class they belong to.

Further research is required into this setting to ascertain the teachers' perceptions of inclusion since this class has only ever had one teacher, Ms Henry, who is Zahara's mother. Investigations into teachers' beliefs on inclusion may illuminate this situation and help the Principal to address the concerns of all parties.

Future research can use other model schools to ascertain what obtains as inclusion and the degree of integration of students with special needs in the curriculum and other aspects school life. It may then be possible to compare the experiences of students at these different schools and a framework for best practices at these schools may be conceived.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

Rieser (2008) demonstrates that successful inclusion is possible and points to various cases within the Commonwealth. He posits that these critical elements must be in place at a national level for successful inclusion:

- Free and universal primary school education
- A flexible curriculum
- Pupil-centred pedagogy
- Flexible assessment to include all learners
- Specialist teachers
- Sufficient investment into school building and modification

At the classroom level, Rieser iterates just how critical it is for staff members to know and understand what inclusion entails. He underscores the importance of having sufficient staff, including volunteers, to provide needed support for students with special needs. The curriculum must also be responsive to student difference and assessment must be continuous and flexible.

Elements of Rieser's recommendations can be seen with the introduction of the Continuous Assessment Component (CAC), accounting for 40% of the Secondary Entrance Assessment as of 2015, and the curriculum rewrite exercise that continues for primary and secondary schools. New schools are being built with universal design specifications to promote maximum usage without the need

for any modifications; some older schools that were earmarked as model schools were retrofitted to accommodate students with physical disabilities. However, since the initial implementation of the Miske-Witte recommendations a political change in ruling party has halted all progress towards these goals. The cost of implementing inclusion may explain this apparent lack of progress towards making all schools physically inclusive. According to Rieser (2008), the cost of implementing inclusion is the biggest perceived barrier. He cautions that the benefits of inclusion to disabled and non-disabled communities as well as the economy must be carefully weighed.

As an educator I subscribe to the Ministry of Education's philosophy that every child can learn. I recognize the strides and accomplishments special education in Trinidad and Tobago has made, and subscribe to the social justice and values-oriented philosophy of inclusion. However, inclusion must result in sufficient educational gains for students with disabilities and must not impede the academic achievement of other students.

While I am an advocate for inclusion, I must iterate that in Trinidad and Tobago we lack the necessary support personnel for this to be truly effective. A survey in 1984 estimated a disabled population of 16.1% and following many policy reforms, the Student Support Services Division was established in 2004. The role of this Division was to provide Special Education, Guidance Counseling and Social Work support services to schools. Student Support Services are not as effective as it was envisioned due to lack of staffing and bureaucratic shortfalls. Lack of special educators and diagnosticians/clinicians are plaguing the pursuit of

inclusive education. There are few diagnosticians available and these services are quite expensive.

The University of Trinidad and Tobago churn out graduates every year with the Bachelor of Education degree; specialization in Special Needs Education and yet there is a shortage of special educators in the system. This is because of political bureaucracy that serves to handicap the principles of inclusion espoused in the Ministry of Education policies.

General educators feel at sea when faced with the various needs of the students in the general education environment. These teachers recognize that some students need extra support in order to make educational progress, but there is little support coming from Student Support Services, from administration or from parents. Teacher training at most of the universities provide only one course in special education; teachers feel they are neither trained for inclusion nor in adapting the curriculum. The teacher/student ratio does not support individualized instruction and the demand for academic performance from the Ministry of Education is high with little resources.

Another issue impeding the success of inclusion in our schools is the use of standardized assessments. Standardized assessments are utilized to determine students' progression from primary to secondary and from secondary to tertiary levels of education. Accommodations for these high stakes examinations usually involve granting more time and to a lesser extent readers and scribes. There must be alternatives to this type of assessment in order for inclusion to work. A

continuum of testing should be provided ranging from the regular standardized assessment to the regular assessment with approved modifications or accommodations, alternative examination with the same standards or alternative assessments with different criteria. By utilizing this continuum students with disabilities will not affect the rating of schools along the Academic Performance Index (API), which is computed based on students' performance in the National Tests in Math and Grammar in Standard 3.

The Ministry of Education also needs to embark on a Child Find initiative in order to ensure that all school-aged children with or without disabilities are enrolled in schools. Statistics show that only a small fraction of students with disabilities are receiving an education. Retrofitting of the physical plant must be embarked upon to ensure that the inclusion of disabled students is physically possible.

Collaboration with all stakeholders is instrumental to successful inclusive programmes. Parents, special educators, general educators, school administration, health care providers, therapists and social services must embark on a unified effort to meet the physical, educational and health care needs of included students.

Inclusion can work in Trinidad and Tobago but we must first identify our children that will be included and the supports they will need. Large scale collaboration between the Ministries of Education, Health, Social Development and Works and Infrastructure must be achieved. There needs to be collaboration between the Special Schools and general education schools supporting the smooth

transitioning of students and hosting workshops to scaffold teachers and parents and alleviate concerns by all stakeholders.

We must advocate for the rights of our children to be treated equally or else we will continue to have integration and NOT inclusion of students with special needs in our school systems. Parents, teachers and students need to advocate for a redistribution of access and participation in quality educational opportunities. We need to fight for student differences to be acknowledged and catered to in the society, not just the classroom. Therefore, content, classroom pedagogy, assessment, placement and services must meet the needs of all students. It is only through planning for all aspects of inclusion will this movement be successful.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Demographic/ Sociometric Questions

Age Gender No of years at school

Experience questions:

Do you think that you learn like everybody else in your class?

1. Do you see yourself as different from other students? In what way?
2. Do you think you learn the same way as the other children in your class?
3. Are there kids in your class? Tell me about that.
4. Do you have a lot of friends in the school?
5. What are some of the activities you do with your friends?
6. Tell me about a time when someone in your class had a birthday party. Who else was there? Walk me through
7. What do you think about being in the same class with students who are different from you?
8. What do you think it means to be inclusive?
9. Do you think your school is inclusive?
10. What do you think the perfect inclusive school would be like?
11. Some people would say having students with disabilities in the class has more disadvantages than advantages. What would you say to that?
12. What if today was my first day in your class, what would it be like?

APPENDIX B

6&1 If Ms Hayes and Ms Joseph decide to move Rinnell and Zahara from the class how would you feel?

Sad (Reesha)

Yeah (the other girls agree)

Angry (Jason)

Depressed (Michael)

Why? That would not be right... not fair. (Jason)

What about if Zahara goes to another class?

Sad (Simone)

Yeah (all agree)

A boy from another class collared Zahara and we got angry. (Reesha)

We all jumped on him and dragged him to the teacher. (Michael)

Comment [D31]: 6:Emotions/ Bullying

1&2 How does having Zahara and Rinnel affect how the other children treat you?

APPENDIX C

ANECDOTAL RECORDS

¹³As I drove towards the school I observed a clothing franchise next to other businesses.

About ten metres away was the exit to the highway.¹⁴Next to the school was an ECCE Centre.

Comment [D69]: Suburban setting
Comment [D70]: Makes it a model school

¹⁵What struck me was that despite the fact that the school was nestled in the suburbs, a quiet calm settled over the school.

Comment [D71]: School climate

¹⁶The school is equipped with ramps, classrooms are in standard size and easily accessed.¹⁷This

Comment [D72]: 16: Physical plant

particular classroom is oriented such that the pupils had an area at the side of the class, largely

isolated from the rest of the school that facilitates ²playing/interacting only with the pupils that

Comment [D73]: 17: Orientation of class

belong to this class. This may largely influence the social separation of this class from the rest of

the school.

Comment [D74]: 2: Relationship

²There is also the fact that Ms Henry, the class teacher, is Zahara's mother. She has taught each

class her daughter is promoted to. ⁶Other teachers have expressed their desire to not teach a class

Comment [D75]: 2: Relationship

with this child belongs to.^{2&3}This may be either due to personality differences among the

Comment [D76]: Beliefs

teachers or because the child requires a separate curriculum.

Comment [D77]: 2&3AcademicsRelationship

APPENDIX D



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL PLANNING DIVISION
CHEPSTOW HOUSE, 56 FREDERICK STREET, PORT-OF-SPAIN
TEL/FAX: 625-0806

June 26th 2014


Mrs. Sherry Bridgemohan-Akal
29 Geridot Drive
Diamond Vale
Diego Martin

Dear Mrs. Bridgemohan-Akal,

Your request to conduct your research entitled "**Experiences of Students with Special Education Needs and Regular Students in an Inclusive Setting**" has been approved.

Attached is a letter of confidentiality, which is to be completed and returned to the Educational Planning Division of the Ministry of Education by the person conducting research through the Ministry.

Yours Respectfully,

.....
Mrs. Lisa Henry-David
Director (49)
Educational Planning Division
Ministry of Education

APPENDIX E

Possible Themes: Analysis of Interview

Note: Codes in inverted commas are *in vivo* codes.

Codes	Emerging Theme
Bullying	Relational or Social
Relationship	
Peer Rejection	

Codes	Emerging Theme
Academic	Academic Inclusion/Special Schooling
Academic Support	
Academic rejection	
Separate Schooling	

Codes	Emerging Themes
“Not Fair”	Justice/What is right?
Beliefs	
Emotions	